Under the Red Dragon: A Novel

James Grant



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UNDER THE RED DRAGON.

A Novel.

By JAMES GRANT,

AUTHOR OF "THE ROMANCE OF WAR," "ONLY AN ENSIGN," ETC.

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UNDER THE RED DRAGON.

CHAPTER I.--THE INVITATION.

"And *she* is to be there--nay, is there already; so one more chance is given me to meet her. But for what?--to part again silently, and more helplessly bewitched than ever, perhaps. Ah, never will she learn to love me as I love her!" thought I, as I turned over my old friend's letter, not venturing, however, to give utterance to this aloud, as the quizzical eyes of Phil Caradoc were upon me.

"A penny for your thoughts, friend Harry?" said he, laughing; "try another cigar, and rouse yourself. What the deuce is in this letter, that it affects you so? Have you put a pot of money on the wrong horse?"

"Been jilted, had a bill returned, or what?" suggested Gwynne.

"Neither, fortunately," said I; "it is simply an invitation from Sir Madoc Lloyd, which rather perplexes me."

At this time our regiment was then in the East, awaiting with the rest of the army some movement to be made from Varna, either towards Bessarabia or the Crimea--men's minds were undecided as to which, while her Majesty's Ministers seemed to have no thought on the subject. Our depôt belonged to the provisional battalion at Winchester, where Caradoc, Gwynne, two other subalterns, and I, with some two hundred rank and file, expected ere long the fiat of the fates who reign at the Horse Guards to send us forth to win our laurels from the Russians, or, what seemed more probable, a grave where the pest was then decimating our hapless army, in the beautiful but perilous vale of Aladdyn, on the coast of Bulgaria. We had just adjourned from mess, to have a quiet cheroot and glass of brandy-and-water in my quarters, when I received from my man, Owen Evans, the letter the contents of which awakened so many new hopes and tantalising wishes in my heart, and on which so much of my fate in the future might hinge.

The bare, half-empty, or but partially-furnished single room accorded by the barrack authorities to me as a subaltern, in that huge square edifice built of old by Charles II. for a royal residence, seemed by its aspect but little calculated to flatter the brilliant hopes in question. Though ample in size, it was far from regal in its appurtenances--the barrack furniture, a camp-bed, my baggage trunks piled in one corner, swords and a gun-case in another, books, empty bottles, cigar-boxes, and a few pairs of boots ostentatiously displayed in a row by Evans, making up its entire garniture, and by very contrast in its meagreness compelling me to smile sadly at myself for the ambitious ideas the letter of my old friend had suggested; and thus, for a minute or so ignoring, or rather oblivious of, the presence of my two companions, my eye

wandered dreamily over the far-extended mass of old brick houses and the gray church towers of the city, all visible from the open window, and then steeped in the silver haze of the moonlight.

Sipping their brandy-and-water, each with a lighted cheroot between his fingers, their shell-jackets open, and their feet unceremoniously planted on a hard wooden chair, while they lounged back upon another, were Phil Caradoc and Charley Gwynne. The first a good specimen of a handsome, curly-haired, and heedless young Englishman, who shot, fished, hunted, pulled a steady oar, and could keep his wicket against any man, while shining without effort in almost every manly sport, was moreover a finished gentleman and thorough good fellow. Less fashionable in appearance and less dashing in manner, though by no means less soldier-like, Gwynne was his senior by some ten years. He was more grave and thoughtful, for he had seen more of the service and more of the world. Already a gray hair or so had begun to mingle with the blackness of his heavy moustache, and the lines of thought were traceable on his forehead and about the corners of his keen dark-gray eyes; for he was a hard-working officer, who had been promoted from the ranks when the regiment lay at Barbadoes, and was every inch a soldier. And now they sat opposite me, waiting, with a half-comical expression, for farther information as to their queries; and though we were great friends, and usually had few secrets from each other, I began to find that I had *one* now, and that a little reticence was necessary.

"You know Sir Madoc's place in North Wales?" said I.

"Of course," replied Caradoc; "there are few of ours who don't. Half the regiment have been there as visitors at one time or other."

"Well, he wishes me to get leave between returns--for even longer if I can--and run down there for a few weeks. 'Come early, if possible,' he adds; 'the girls insist on having an outdoor fête, and a lot of nice folks are coming. Winny has arranged that we shall have a regimental band--the Yeomanry one too, probably; then we are to have a Welsh harper, of

course, and an itinerant Merlin in the grotto, to tell every one's fortune, and to predict your promotion and the C.B., if the seer remains sober. While I write, little Dora is drawing up a programme of the dances, and marking off, she says, those which she means to have with *you*.'"

Here I paused; but seeing they expected to hear more, for the writer was a friend of us all, I read on coolly, and with an air of as much unconsciousness as I could assume:

"Lady Estelle Cressingham is with us--by the way, she seems to know you, and would, I think, like to see more of you. She is a very fine girl, though not pure Welsh; but that she cannot help--it is her misfortune, not her fault. We have also a fellow here, though I don't quite know how he got introduced--Hawkesby Guilfoyle, who met her abroad at Ems, or Baden-Baden, or one of those places where one meets everybody, and he seems uncommonly attentive--so much so, that I wonder her mother permits it; but he seems to have some special power or influence over the old lady, though his name is not as yet, or ever likely to be, chronicled by Burke or Debrett. In lieu of the goat which your regiment lost in Barbadoes, Winifred has a beautiful pet one, a magnificent animal, which she means to present to the Welsh Fusileers. Tell them so. And now, for yourself, I will take no refusal, and Winny and Dora will take none either; so pack your traps, and come off so soon as you can get leave. You need not, unless you choose, bring horses; we have plenty of cavalry here. Hope you will be able to stay till the 12th, and have a shot at the grouse. Meanwhile, believe me, my dear Hardinge, yours, &c., Madoc Meredyth Lloyd.'"

"Kindly written, and so like the jolly style of the old Baronet," said Gwynne. "I have ridden with him once or twice in the hunting-field--on a borrowed mount, of course," added poor Charley; who had only his pay, and, being an enthusiast in his profession, was no lounger in the service.

"But what is there in all this that perplexes you?" asked Caradoc, who, I suppose, had been attentively observing me. As he spoke, I coloured visibly, feeling the while that I did so.

"The difficulty about leave, perhaps," I stammered.

"You'll go, of course," said Caradoc. "His place--Craigaderyn Court--is one of the finest in North Wales; his daughters are indeed charming; and you are certain to meet only people of the best style there."

"Yet he seems to doubt this--what is his name?--Guilfoyle, however," said I.

"What of that? One swallow--you know the adage. I should go, if I had the invitation. His eldest daughter has, I have heard, in her own right, no end of coal-mines somewhere, and many grassy acres of dairy farms in the happy hunting-grounds of the midland counties."

"By Jove," murmured Gwynne, as he lit a fresh cigar; "she should be the girl for me."

"But I have another inducement than even the fair Winny," said I.

"Oho! Lady--"

"Sir Madoc," said I hastily, "is an old friend of my family, and having known me from infancy, he almost views me as a son. Don't mistake me," I added, reddening with positive annoyance at the hearty laugh my admission elicited; "Miss Lloyd and I are old friends too, and know each other a deuced deal too well to tempt the perils of matrimony together. We have no draughts ready for the East, nor will there be yet awhile; even our last recruits are not quite licked into shape."

"No," sighed Gwynne, who had a special charge of the said "licking into shape."

"And so, as the spring drills are over, I shall try my luck with old R----."

The person thus bluntly spoken of was the lieutenant-colonel of the depôt battalion--one who kept a pretty tight hand over us all in general, and the subalterns in particular.

"Stay," I exclaimed suddenly; "here is a postscript. 'Bring Caradoc of yours with you, and Gwynne, too, if you can. Winny has mastered the duet the former sent her, and is anxious to try it over with him."

"Caradoc will only be too happy, if the genius who presides over us in the orderly-room is propitious," said Phil, colouring and laughing.

"Thank Sir Madoc for me, old fellow," said Gwynne, half sadly. "Tell him that the Fates have made me musketry instructor, and that daily I have that

> 'Delightful task! to rear the tender thought,
> To teach the young idea how to *shoot*'--

to set up Taffy and Giles Chawbacon in the Hythe position, and drill them to fire without closing both eyes and blazing in the air."

"'In the lawn,' adds Sir Madoc, 'we are to have everything--from waltzing to croquet (which, being an old fellow, and being above insteps and all that sort of thing, I think the slowest game known), and from cliquot and sparkling hock to bottled stout and bitter beer--unlimited flirtation too, according to that wag, Dora.'"

"A tempting bill of fare, especially with two such hostesses," said Gwynne; "but for me to quit Winchester is impossible. Even the stale dodge of 'urgent private affairs' won't serve me. Such droll ideas of the service old Sir Madoc must have, to think that three of us could leave the depôt, and all at once too!"

"I shall try my luck, however."

"And I too," rejoined Caradoc. "I am entitled to leave. Price of ours will take my guards for me. Wales will be glorious in this hot month. I *did* all the dear old Principality last year--went over every foot of Snowdonia, leaving nothing undone, from singing 'Jenny Jones' to dancing a Welsh jig at a harvest-home."

"But you didn't go over Snowdonia with such a girl as Winifred Lloyd?"

"No, certainly," said he, laughing, and almost reddening again. "Nature, even in my native Wales, must be more charming under such bright auspices and happy influence. So Wales be it, if possible. London, of course, is empty just now, and all who can get out of it will be yachting at Cowes, shooting in Scotland, fishing in Norway, backing the red at Baden-Baden, climbing the Matterhorn, or, it may be, the Peter Botte; killing buffaloes in America, or voyaging up the Nile in canoes. Rotten-row will be a desert, the opera a place of silence and cobwebs; and the irresistible desire to go somewhere and be doing something, no matter what, which inspires all young Britons about this time, renders Sir Madoc's invitation most tempting and acceptable."

"Till the route comes for the East," said I.

"Potting the Ruskies, and turning my musketry theory into practice, are likely to be my chief relaxations and excitement," said Gwynne, with a good-natured laugh, as he applied his hand to the brandy bottle. "At present I have other work in hand than flirting with countesses, or visiting heiresses. But I envy you both, and heartily wish you all pleasure," he added, as he shook hands and left us early, as he had several squads to put through that most monotonous of all drill (shot drill perhaps excepted)--a course of musketry--betimes in the morning.

We knew that Gwynne, who was a tall, thin, close-flanked, and square shouldered, but soldier-like fellow, had nothing but his pay; and having a mother to support, he was fain to slave as a musketry instructor, the five shillings extra daily being a great pecuniary object to him. He was very modest withal, and feared that, nathless his red coat and stalwart figure, his chances of an heiress, even in Cottonopolis, were somewhat slender.

CHAPTER II.--THE MOTH AND THE CANDLE.

Philip Caradoc, perceiving that I was somewhat dull and disposed to indulge in reverie, soon retired also, and we separated, intending to mature our plans after morning parade next day, as I knew that secretly Caradoc was very much attached to Winifred Lloyd, though that young lady by no means reciprocated his affection. But I, seized by an irresistible impulse, could not wait for our appointed time; so, the moment he was gone, I opened my desk, wrote my application for leave, and desiring Evans to take it to the orderly-room among his first duties on the morrow, threw open a second window to admit the soft breeze of the summer night, lit another cigar, and sat down to indulge in the train of thought Sir Madoc's unexpected letter had awakened within my breast.

Yet I was not much given to reflection--far from it, perhaps; and it is lucky for soldiers that they rarely indulge much in thought, or that the system of their life is apt to preclude time or opportunity for it. I had come home on a year's sick-leave from the West Indies, where the baleful night-dews, and a fever caught in the rainy season, had nearly

finished my career while stationed at Up Park Camp; and now, through the friendly interest of Sir Madoc, I had been gazetted to the Welsh Fusileers, as I preferred the chances of the coming war and military service in any part of Europe to broiling uselessly in the land of the Maroons. Our army was in the East, I have said, encamped in the vale of Aladdyn, between Varna and the sea. There camp-fever and the terrible cholera were filling fast with graves the grassy plain and all the Valley of the Plague, as the Bulgarians so aptly named it; and though I was not sorry to escape the perils encountered where no honour could be won, I was pretty weary of the daily round at Winchester, of barrack life, of in-lying pickets, guards, parades, and drill. I had been seven years in the service, and deemed myself somewhat of a veteran, though only five-and-twenty. I was weary too of belonging to a provisional battalion, wherein, beyond the narrow circle of one's own depôt, no two men have the slightest interest in each other, or seem to care if they ever meet again, the whole organisation being temporary, and where the duties of such a battalion--it being, in effect, a strict military school for training recruits--are harassing to the newly-fledged, and a dreadful bore to the fully-initiated, soldier. So, till the time came when the order would be, "Eastward, ho!" Sir Madoc had opportunely offered me a little relaxation and escape from all this; and though he knew it not, his letter might be perhaps the means of doing much more--of opening up a path to happiness and fortune, or leaving one closed for ever behind me in sorrow, mortification, and bitterness of heart.

Good old Sir Madoc (or, as he loved to call himself, Madoc ap Meredyth Lloyd) had in his youth been an unsuccessful lover of my mother, then the pretty Mary Vassal, a belle in her second season; and now, though she had long since passed away, he had a strong regard for me. For her sake he had a deep and kindly interest in my welfare; and as he had no son (no heir to his baronetcy, with all its old traditional honours,) he quite regarded me in the light of one; and having two daughters, desired nothing more than that I should cut the service and become one in reality. So many an act of friendship and many a piece of

stamped paper he had done for me, when in the first years of my career, I got into scrapes with rogues upon the turf, at billiards, and with those curses of all barracks, the children of Judea. Had I seen where my own good fortune really lay, I should have fallen readily into the snare so temptingly baited for me, a half-pennyless sub.; for Winifred Lloyd was a girl among a thousand, so far as brilliant attractions go, and, moreover, was not indisposed to view me favourably (at least, so my vanity taught me). But this world is full of cross purposes; people are too often blind to their profit and advantage, and, as Jaques has it, "thereby hangs a tale."

All the attractions of bright-eyed Winny Lloyd, personal and pecuniary, were at that time as nothing to me. I had casually, when idling in London, been introduced to, and had met at several places, this identical Lady Cressingham, whom my friend had mentioned so incidentally and in such an offhand way in his letter; and that sentence it was which brought the blood to my temples and quickened all the pulses of my heart.

She was very beautiful--as the reader will find when we meet her by-and-by--and I had soon learned to love her, but without quite venturing to say so; to love her as much as it was possible for one without hope of ultimate success, and so circumstanced as I was--a poor gentleman, with little more in the world save my sword and epaulettes. Doubtless she had seen and read the emotion with which she had inspired me, for women have keen perceptions in such matters; and though it seems as if it was on her very smile that the mainspring of my existence turned, the whole affair might be but a source of quiet amusement, of curiosity, or gratified vanity to her. Yet, by every opportunity that the chances and artificial system of society in town afforded, I had evinced this passion, the boldness of which my secret heart confessed. Her portrait, a stately full-length, was in the Academy, and how often had I gazed at it, till in fancy the limner's work seemed to become instinct with life! Traced on the canvas by no unskilful hand, it seemed to express a somewhat haughty consciousness of her own brilliant beauty, and somehow I fancied a

deuced deal more of her own exalted *position*, as the only daughter of a deceased but wealthy peer, and as if she rather disdained alike the criticism and the admiration of the crowd of middle-class folks who thronged the Academy halls.

Visions of her--as I had seen her in the Countess's curtained box at the opera, her rare and high-class beauty enhanced by all the accessories of fashion and costume, by brilliance of light and the subtle flash of many a gem amid her hair; when galloping along the Row on her beautiful satin-skinned bay; or while driving after in the Park, with all those appliances and surroundings that wealth and rank confer--came floating before me, with the memory of words half-uttered, and glances responded to when eye met eye, and told so much more than the tongue might venture to utter. Was it mere vanity, or reality, that made me think her smile *had* brightened when she met me, or that when I rode by her side she preferred me to the many others who daily pressed forward to greet her amid that wonderful place, the Row? Her rank, and the fact that she was an heiress, had no real weight with me; nor did these fortuitous circumstances enhance her merit in my eyes, though they certainly added to the difficulty of winning her. Was it possible that the days of disinterested and romantic love, like those of chivalry, were indeed past--gone with the days when

> "It was a clerk's son, of low degree,
> Loved the king's daughter of Hongarie?"

With the love that struggled against humble fortune in my heart, I had that keenly sensitive pride which is based on proper self-respect. Hope I seemed to have none. What hope could I, Harry Hardinge, a mere subaltern, with little more than seven-and-sixpence per diem, have of obtaining such a wife as Lady Estelle Cressingham, and, more than all, of winning the good wishes of her over-awing mamma? Though "love will venture in when it daurna weel be seen," I could neither be hanged nor

reduced to the ranks for my presumption, like the luckless Captain Ogilvie; who, according to the Scottish ballad, loved the Duke of Gordon's bonnie daughter Jean. Yet defeat and rejection might cover me with certain ridicule, leaving the stings of wounded self-esteem to rankle all the deeper, by thrusting the partial disparity of our relative positions in society more unpleasantly and humiliatingly before me and the world; for there is a snobbery in rank that is only equalled by the snobbery of wealth, and here I might have both to encounter. And so, as I brooded over these things, some very levelling and rather democratic, if not entirely Communal, ideas began to occur to me. And yet, for the Countess and those who set store upon such empty facts, I could have proved my descent from Nicholas Hardinge, knight, of King's Newton, in Derbyshire; who in the time of Henry VII. held his lands by the homely and most sanitary tenure of furnishing clean straw for his Majesty's bed when he and his queen, Elizabeth of York, passed that way, together with fresh rushes from the margin of the Trent wherewith to strew the floor of the royal apartment. But this would seem as yesterday to the fair Estelle, who boasted of an ancestor, one Sir Hugh Cressingham, who, as history tells us, was defeated and *flayed* by the Scots after the battle of Stirling; while old Sir Madoc Lloyd, who doubtless traced himself up to Noah ap Lamech, would have laughed both pedigrees to scorn.

Leaving London, I had striven to stifle as simply absurd the passion that had grown within me, and had joined at Winchester in the honest and earnest hope that ere long the coming campaign would teach me to forget the fair face and witching eyes, and, more than all, the winning manner that haunted me; and now I was to be cast within their magic influence once more, and doubtless to be hopelessly lost. To have acted wisely, I should have declined the invitation and pleaded military duty; yet to see her once, to be with her once again, without that cordon of guardsmen and cavaliers who daily formed her mounted escort in Rotten-row, and with all the chances our quiet mutual residence in a sequestered country mansion, when backed by all the influence and friendship of Sir Madoc, must afford me, proved a temptation too strong

for resistance or for my philosophy; so, like the poor moth, infatuated and self-doomed, I resolved once more to rush at the light which dazzled me.

"She seems to know you, *and would like to see more of you*," ran the letter of Sir Madoc. I read that line over and over again, studying it minutely in every way. Were those dozen words simply the embodiment of his own ideas, or were they her personally expressed wish put literally into writing? Were they but the reflex of some casual remark? Even that conviction would bring me happiness. And so, after my friends left me, I sat pondering thus, blowing long rings of concentric smoke in the moonlight; and on those words of Sir Madoc raising not only a vast and aerial castle, but a "bower of bliss," as the pantomimes have it at Christmas time.

But how about this Mr. Hawkesby Guilfoyle? was my next thought. Could *his* attentions be tolerated by such a stately and watchful dowager as the Countess of Naseby? Could Sir Madoc actually hint that such as he might have a chance of success, when I had none? The idea was too ridiculous; for I had heard whispers of this man before, in London and about the clubs, where he was generally deemed to be a species of adventurer, the exact source of whose revenue no one knew. One fact was pretty certain: he was unpleasantly successful at billiards and on the turf. If he--to use his own phraseology--was daring enough to enter stakes for such a prize as Lord Cressingham's daughter, why should not I?

Thus, in reverie of a somewhat chequered kind, I lingered on, while the shadows of the cathedral, its lofty tower and choir, the spire of St. Lawrence, and many other bold features of the view began to deepen or become more uncertain on the city roofs below, and from amid which their masses stood upward in a flood of silver sheen. Ere long the full-orbed moon--that seemed to float in beauty beneath its snow-white clouds, looking calmly down on Winchester, even as she had done ages ago, ere London was a capital, and when the white city was the seat of

England's Saxon, Danish, and Norman dynasties, of Alfred's triumphs and Canute's glories--began at last to pale and wane; and the solemn silence of the morning--for dewy morning it was now--was broken only by the chime of the city bells and clocks, and by the tread of feet in the gravelled barrack-yard, as the reliefs went round, and the sentinels were changed.

The first red streak of dawn was beginning to steal across the east; the bugles were pealing reveilles, waking all the hitherto silent echoes of the square; and just about the time when worthy and unambitious Charley Gwynne would be parading his first squad for "aiming drill" at sundry bull's-eyes painted on the barrack-walls, I retired to dream over a possible future, and to hope that if the stars were propitious, at the altar of that somewhat dingy fane, St. George's, Hanover-square, I might yet become the son-in-law of the late Earl of Naseby, Baron Cressingham of Cotteswold, in the county of Northampton, and of Walcot Park in Hants, Lord-lieutenant, *custos rotulorum*, and so forth, as I had frequently and secretly read in the mess-room copy of Sir Bernard Burke's thick royal octavo; "the Englishman's Bible" according to Thackeray, and, as I greatly feared, the somewhat exclusive *libro d'oro* of Mamma Cressingham, who was apt to reverence it pretty much as the Venetian nobles did the remarkable volume of that name.

CHAPTER III--By EXPRESS.

Leave granted, our acceptance of Sir Madoc's invitation duly telegraphed--"wired," as the phrase is now--our uniforms doffed and mufti substituted, the morning of the second day ensuing saw Caradoc

and myself on the Birmingham railway *en route* for Chester; the exclusive occupants of a softly cushioned compartment, where, by the influence of a couple of florins slipped deftly and judiciously into the palm of an apparently unconscious and incorruptible official, we could lounge at our ease, and enjoy without intrusion the *Times*, *Punch*, or our own thoughts, and the inevitable cigar. Though in mufti we had uniform with us; we *believed* in it then, and in its influence; for certain German ideas of military tailoring subsequent to the Crimean war had not shorn us of our epaulettes, and otherwise reduced the character of our regimentals to something akin to the livery of a penny postman or a railway guard.

Somehow, I felt more hopeful of my prospects, when, with the bright sunshine of July around us, I found myself spinning at the rate of fifty miles per hour by the express train--the motion was almost as imperceptible as the speed was exhilarating--and swiftly passed the scenes on either side, the broad green fields of growing grain, the grassy paddocks, the village churches, the snug and picturesque homesteads of Warwick and Worcestershire. We glided past Rugby, where Caradoc had erewhile conned his tasks in that great Elizabethan pile which is built of white brick with stone angles and cornices, and where in the playing fields he had gallantly learned to keep his wicket with that skill which made him our prime regimental bat and bowler too. Coventry next, where of course we laughed as we thought of "peeping Tom" and Earl Leofric's pretty countess, when we saw its beautiful and tapering spires rise over the dark and narrow streets below. Anon, we paused amid the busy but grimy world of Birmingham, which furnishes half the world with the implements of destruction; Stafford, with its ruined castle on a well-wooded eminence; and ere long we halted in quaint old Chester by the Dee, where the stately red stone tower of the cathedral rises darkly over its picturesque thoroughfares of the middle ages. There the rail went no farther then; but a carriage sent by Sir Madoc awaited us at the station, and we had before us the prospect of a delightful drive for nearly thirty miles amid the beautiful Welsh hills ere we reached his residence.

"This whiff of the country is indeed delightful!" exclaimed Caradoc, as we bowled along on a lovely July evening, the changing shadows of the rounded hills deepening as the sun verged westward; "it makes one half inclined to cut the service, and turn farmer or cattle-breeding squire--even to chuck ambition, glory, and oneself away upon a landed heiress, if such could be found ready to hand."

"Even upon Winifred Lloyd, with her dairy-farms in the midland counties, eh?"

Phil coloured a little, but laughed good-humouredly as he replied,

"Well, I must confess that she is somewhat more than my weakness--at present."

At Aber-something we found a relay of fresh horses, sent on by Sir Madoc, awaiting us, the Welsh roads not being quite so smooth as a billiard-table; and there certain hoarse gurgling expletives, uttered by ostlers and stable-boys, might have warned us that we were in the land of Owen and Hughes, Griffiths and Davies, and all the men of the Twelve Royal Tribes, even if there had not been the green mountains towering into the blue sky, and the pretty little ivy-covered inn, at the porch of which sat a white-haired harper (on the watch for patrons and customers), performing the invariable "Jenny Jones" or *Ar-hyd-y-nos* (the live-long night), and all the while keeping a sharp Celtic eye to the expected coin.

Everything around us indicated that we were drawing nearer to the abode of Sir Madoc, and that ere long--in an hour or so, perhaps--I should again see one who, by *name* as well as circumstance, was a star that I feared and hoped would greatly influence all my future. The Eastern war, and, more than all, the novelty of any war after forty years of European peace, occupied keenly the minds of all thinking people. My regiment was already gone, and I certainly should soon have to follow it. I knew that, individually and collectively, all bound for the seat of the

coming strife had a romantic and even melancholy interest, in the hearts of women especially; and I was not without some hope that this sentiment might add to my chances of finding favour with the rather haughty Estelle Cressingham.

It was a glorious summer evening when our open barouche swept along the white dusty road that wound by the base of Mynedd Hiraethrog, that wild and bleak mountain chain which rises between the Dee and its tributaries the Elwey and the Aled. Westward in the distance towered blue Snowdon, above the white floating clouds of mist, with all its subordinate peaks. In the immediate foreground were a series of beautiful hills that were glowing, and, to the eye, apparently vibrating, under a burning sunset. The Welsh woods were in all the wealth of their thickest foliage--the umbrageous growth of centuries; and where the boughs cast their deepest shadows, the dun deer and the fleet hare lurked among the fragrant fern, and the yellow sunlight fell in golden patches on the passing runnel, that leaped flashing from rock to rock, to mingle with the Alwen, or crept slowly and stealthily under the long rank grass towards Llyn-Aled.

That other accessories might not be wanting to remind us that we were in the land of the Cymri, we passed occasionally the *Carneddau*, or heaps of stones that mark the old places of battle or burial; and perched high on the hills the *Hafodtai* or summer farms, where enormous flocks of sheep--the boasted Welsh mutton--were pasturing. Then we heard at times the melancholy sound of the horn, by which inmates summon the shepherds to their meals, and the notes of which, when waking the echoes of the silent glen, have an effect so weird and mournful.

"By Jove, but we have a change here, Phil," said I, "a striking change, indeed, from the hot and dusty gravelled yard of Winchester barracks, the awkward squads at incessant drill with dumb-bell, club, or musket; the pipeclay, the pacing-stick, and the tap of the drum!"

Through a moss-grown gateway, the design of Inigo Jones, we turned down the long straight avenue of limes that leads to Craigaderyn; a fine old mansion situated in a species of valley, its broad lawn overlooked by the identical craig from which it takes its name, "the Rock of Birds," a lofty and insulated mass, the resort of innumerable hawks, wood-pigeons, and even of hoarse-croaking cormorants from the cliffs about Orme's Head and Llandulas. On its summit are the ruins of an ancient British fort, wherein Sir Jorwerth Goch (*i. e.* Red Edward) Lloyd of Craigaderyn had exterminated a band of Rumpers and Roundheads in the last year of Charles I., using as a war-cry the old Welsh shout of "Liberty, loyalty, and the long head of hair!" On either side of the way spread the lawn, closely shorn and carefully rolled, the turf being like velvet of emerald greenness, having broad winding carriage-ways laid with gravel, the bright red of which contrasted so strongly with the verdant hue of the grass. The foliage of the timber was heavy and leafy, and there, at times, could be seen the lively squirrel leaping from branch to branch of some ancient oak, in the hollow of which lay its winter store of nuts; the rabbit bounding across the path, from root to fern tuft; and the *bela-goed*, or yellow-breasted martin (still a denizen of the old Welsh woods), with rounded ears and sharp white claws, the terror of the poultry-yard, appeared occasionally, despite the gamekeeper's gun. In one place a herd of deer were browsing near the half-leafless ruins of a mighty oak--one so old, that Owen Glendower had once reconnoitred an English force from amid its branches.

We had barely turned into the avenue, when a gentleman and two ladies, all mounted, came galloping from a side path to meet us. He and one of his companions cleared the wire fence in excellent style by a flying leap; but the other, who was less pretentiously mounted, adroitly opened the iron gate with the handle of her riding switch, and came a few paces after them to meet us. They proved to be Sir Madoc and his two daughters, Winifred and Dora.

"True in the direction of time, 'by Shrewsbury clock'!" said he, cantering up; "welcome to Craigaderyn, gentlemen! We were just looking for you."

He was a fine hale-looking man, about sixty years old, with a ruddy complexion, and a keen, clear, dark eye; his hair, once of raven blackness, was white as silver now, though very curly or wavy still; his eyebrows were bushy and yet dark as when in youth. He was a Welsh gentleman, full of many local prejudices and sympathies; a man of the old school--for such a school has existed in all ages, and still exists even in ours of rapid progress, scientific marvels, and moneymaking. His manners were easy and polished, yet without anything either of style or fashion about them; for he was simple in all his tastes and ways, and was almost as plainly attired as one of his own farmers. His figure and costume, his rubicund face, round merry eyes, and series of chins, his amplitude of paunch and stunted figure, his bottle-green coat rather short in the skirts, his deep waistcoat and low-crowned hat, were all somewhat Pickwickian in their character and *tout-ensemble*, save that in lieu of the tights and gaiters of our old friend he wore white corded breeches, and orthodox dun-coloured top-boots with silver spurs, and instead of green goggles had a gold eyeglass dangling at the end of a black-silk ribbon. Strong riding-gloves and a heavy hammer-headed whip completed his attire.

"Glad to see you, Harry, and you too, Mr. Caradoc," resumed Sir Madoc, who was fond of remembering that which Phil--more a man of the world--was apt to forget or to set little store on--that he was descended from Sir Matthew Caradoc, who in the days of Perkin Warbeck (an epoch but as yesterday in Sir Madoc's estimation) was chancellor of Glamorgan and steward of Gower and Helvie; for what true Welshman is without a pedigree? "Let me look at you again, Harry. God bless me! is it possible that you, a tall fellow with a black moustache, can

be the curly fair-haired boy I have so often carried on my back and saddle-bow, and taught to make flies of red spinner and drakes' wings, when we trouted together at Llyn Cwellyn among the hills yonder?"

"I think, papa, you would be more surprised if you found him a curly-pated boy still," said Miss Lloyd.

"And it is seven years since he joined the service; what a fine fellow he has grown!"

"Papa, you are quite making Mr. Hardinge blush!" said Dora, laughing.

"Almost at the top of the lieutenants, too; there is luck for you!" he continued.

"More luck than merit, perhaps; more the Varna fever than either, Sir Madoc," said I, as he slowly relinquished my hand, which he had held for a few seconds in his, while looking kindly and earnestly into my face.

It was well browned by the sun and sea of the Windward Isles, tolerably well whiskered and moustached too; so I fear that if the good old gentleman was seeking for some resemblance to the sweet Mary Vassal of the past times, he sought in vain. Our horses were all walking now; Sir Madoc rode on one side of the barouche, and his two daughters on the other.

"You saw my girls last season in town," said he; "but when you were last here, Winifred was in her first long frock, and Dora little more than a baby."

"But Craigaderyn is all unchanged, though *we* may be," said Winifred, whose remark had some secret point in it so far as referred to me.

"And Wales is unchanged too," added Dora; "Mr. Hardinge will find the odious hat of the women still lingers in the more savage regions; the itinerant harper and the goat too are not out of fashion; and we still wear our leek on the first of March."

"And long may all this be so!" said her father; "for since those pestilent railways have come up by Shrewsbury and Chester, with their tides of tourists, greed, dissipation, and idleness are on the increase, and all our good old Welsh customs are going to Caerphilly and the devil! Without the wants of over-civilisation we were contented; but now--*Gwell y chydig gait rad, na llawr gan avrard*," he added with something like an angry sigh, quoting a Welsh proverb to the effect that a little with a blessing is better than much with prodigality.

CHAPTER IV.--WINNY AND DORA LLOYD.

Both girls were very handsome, and for their pure and brilliant complexion were doubtless indebted to the healthful breeze that swept the green sides of the Denbigh hills, together with an occasional *soupçon* of that which comes from the waters of the Irish Sea.

It is difficult to say whether Winifred could be pronounced a brunette or a blonde, her skin was so exquisitely fair, while her splendid hair was a shade of the deepest brown, and her glorious sparkling eyes were of the darkest violet blue. Their normal expression was quiet and subdued; they only flashed up at times, and she was a girl that somehow every colour became. In pure white one might have thought her lovely, and lovelier still, perhaps, in black or blue or rose, or any other tint or

shade. Her fine lithe figure appeared to perfection in her close-fitting habit of dark-blue cloth, and the masses of her hair being tightly bound up under her hat, revealed the contour of her slender neck and delicately formed ear.

Dora was a smaller and younger edition of her sister--more girlish and more of a hoyden, with her lighter tresses, half golden in hue, floating loose over her shoulders and to beneath her waist from under a smart little hat, the feather and fashion of which imparted intense piquancy to the character of her somewhat irregular but remarkably pretty face and--we must admit it--rather *retroussé* nose.

Pride and a little reserve were rather the predominant style of the elder and dark-eyed sister; merriment, fun, and rather noisy flirtation were that of Dora, who permitted herself to laugh at times when her sister would barely have smiled, and to say things on which the other would never have ventured; but this *espièglerie* and a certain bearing of almost rantipole--if one may use such a term--were thought to become her.

Winifred rode a tall wiry nag, a hand or two higher than her father's stout active hunter; but Dora preferred to scamper about on a beautiful Welsh pony, the small head, high withers, flat legs, and round hoofs of which it no doubt inherited, as Sir Madoc would have said, from the celebrated horse Merlin.

"Hope you'll stay with us till the twelfth of next month," said he. "The grouse are looking well."

"Our time is doubtful, our short leave conditional, Sir Madoc," replied Phil Caradoc, who, however, was not looking at the Baronet, but at Winifred, in the hope that the alleged brevity of his visit might find him some tender interest in her eyes, or stir some chord by its

suggestiveness in her breast; but Winny, indifferent apparently to separation and danger so far as he was concerned, seemed intent on twirling the silky mane of her horse with the lash of her whip.

"Then, in about a fortnight after, we shall be blazing at the partridges," resumed Sir Madoc, to tempt us. "But matters are looking ill for the pheasants in October, for the gamekeeper tells me that the gapes have been prevalent among them. The poults were hatched early, and the wet weather from the mountains has made more havoc than our guns are likely to do."

"Long before that time, Sir Madoc, I hope we shall be making havoc among the Russians," replied Phil, still glancing covertly at Miss Lloyd.

"Ah, I hope not!" said she, roused apparently this time. "I look forward to this most useless war with horror and dismay. So many dear friends have gone, so many more are going, it makes one quite sad! O, I shall never forget that morning in London when the poor Guards marched!"

This was addressed, not to Phil Caradoc, but to *me*.

"We knew that we should meet you," said she, colouring, and adding a little hastily, "We asked Lady Estelle to accompany us; but--"

"She is far too--what shall I call it?--aristocratic or unimpressionable to think of going to meet any one," interrupted her sister.

"Don't say so, Dora! Yet I thought the loveliness of the evening would have tempted her. And Bob Spurrit the groom has broken a new pad expressly for her, by riding it for weeks with a skirt."

So there was no temptation but "the loveliness of the evening," thought I; while Dora said,

"But she preferred playing over to Mr. Guilfoyle that piece of German music he gave her yesterday."

All this was not encouraging. She knew that I was coming--a friend in whom she could not help having, from the past, rather more than a common interest--and yet she had declined to accompany those frank and kindly girls. Worse than all, perhaps she had at that moment this Mr. Hawkesby Guilfoyle hanging over her admiringly at the piano, while she played *his* music, presented to her doubtless with some suggestive, secret or implied, meaning in the sentiment or the title of it. Jealousy readily suggested much of this, and a great deal more. That Lady Estelle was at Craigaderyn Court had been my prevailing idea when accepting so readily my kind friend's invitation. Then I should see her in a very little time now! I had been resolved to watch well how she received me, though it would be no easy task to read the secret thoughts of one so well and so carefully trained to keep all human emotions under perfect control, outwardly at least--a "Belgravian thoroughbred," as I once heard Sir Madoc term her; but if she changed colour, however faintly, if there was the slightest perceptible tremor in her voice, or a flash of the eye, which indicated that which, under the supervision of the usually astute dowager her mother, she dared scarcely to betray--an interest in one such as me--it would prove at least that my presence was not indifferent to her. Thus much only did I hope, and of such faint hope had my heart been full until now, when I heard all this; and if I was piqued by her absence, I was still more by the cause of it; though had I reflected for a moment, I ought to have known that the very circumstances under which I had last parted from her in London, with an expected avowal all but uttered and hovering on my lips when leading her to the carriage, were sufficient to preclude a girl so proud as she from coming to meet me, even in the avenue, and when accompanied by Winifred and Dora Lloyd.

"Is Mr. Guilfoyle a musician?" I asked.

"A little," replied Dora; "plays and sings too; but I can't help laughing at him--and it is so rude."

"He says that he is a friend of yours, Harry Hardinge; is he so?' asked Sir Madoc, with his bushy brows depressed for a moment.

"Well, if losing to him once at pool mysteriously, also on a certain horse, while he scratched out of its engagements another on which I stood sure to win, make a friend, he is one. I have met him at his club, and should think that he--he--"

"Is not a good style of fellow, in fact," said Sir Madoc in a low tone, and rather bluntly.

"Perhaps so; nor one I should like to see at Craigaderyn Court." I cared not to add "especially in the society of Lady Cressingham," after whom he dangled, on the strength of some attentions or friendly services performed on the Continent.

"And so you lost money to him? We have a Welsh proverb beginning, *Dyled ar bawb*--"

"We shall have barely time to dress, dear papa," said Miss Lloyd, increasing the speed of her horse, as she seemed to dread the Welsh proclivities of her parent; "and remember that we have quite a dinner-party to-day."

"Yes," added Dora; "two country M.P.s are coming; but, O dear! they will talk nothing but blue-book with papa, or about the crops, fat pigs, and the county pack; and shake their heads about ministerial policy and our foreign prestige, whatever that may be. Then we have an Indian colonel with only half a liver, the doctor says, and two Indian judges without any at all."

"Dora!" exclaimed Miss Lloyd in a tone of expostulation. "Well, it is what the doctor said," persisted Dora; "and if he is wrong can I help it?"

"But people don't talk of such things."

"Then people shouldn't have them."

"A wild Welsh girl this," said Sir Madoc; "neither schooling in Switzerland nor London has tamed her."

"And we are to have several county gentlemen who are great in the matters of turnips, top-dressing, and Welsh mutton; four young ladies, each with a flirtation on hand; and four old ones, deep in religion and scandal, flannel and coals for the poor; so, Mr. Hardinge, you and Mr. Caradoc will be quite a double relief to us--to me, certainly."

"O, Dora, how your tongue runs on!" exclaimed Winifred.

"And then we have Lady Naseby to act as materfamilias, and play propriety for us all in black velvet and diamonds. Winny, eldest daughter of the house, is evidently unequal to the task."

"And the coming fête," said I, "is it in honour of anything in particular?"

"Yes, something very particular indeed," replied Dora.

"Of what?"

"Me."

"You!"

"My birthday--I shall be eighteen," she added, shaking back the heavy masses of her golden hair.

"And she has actually promised to have one round dance with Lord Pottersleigh," said Winny, laughing heartily.

"I did but promise out of mischief; I trust, however, the Viscount will leave off his goloshes for that day, though we are to dance on the grass, or I hope he may forget all about it. Old Potter, I call him," added the young lady in a *sotto-voce* to me, "at least, when the Cressinghams are not present."

"Why them especially?"

"Because he is such a particular friend of theirs."

This was annoyance number two; for this wealthy but senile old peer had been a perpetual adorer of Lady Estelle, favoured too, apparently, by her mother, and had been on more than one occasion a *bête noire* to me; and now I was to meet him here again!

"Papa has told you that I mean to part with my poor pet goat--Carneydd Llewellyn, so called from the mountain whence he came. He is to be sent to the regiment--in your care, too."

"Why deprive yourself of a favourite? Why deprive it of such care as yours? Among soldiers," said I, "the poor animal will sorely miss the kindness and caresses you bestow upon it."

"I shall be so pleased to think that our Welsh Fusileers, in the lands to which they are going, will have something so characteristic to remind them of home, of the wild hills of Wales, perhaps to make them think of the donor. Besides, papa says the corps has never been without this emblem of the old Principality since it was raised in the year of the Revolution."

"Most true; but how shall I--how shall *we*--ever thank you?"

I could see that her nether lip--a lovely little pouting lip it was--quivered slightly, and that her eyes were full of strange light, though bent downward on her horse's mane; and now I felt that, for reasons apparent enough, I was cold, even unkind, to this warm-hearted girl; for we had been better and dearer friends before we knew the Cressinghams. She checked her horse a little abruptly, and began to address some of the merest commonplaces to Phil Caradoc; who, with his thick brown curly hair parted in the middle, his smiling handsome face and white regular teeth, was finding great favour in the eyes of the laughing Dora. But now we were drawing near Craigaderyn Court. The

scenery was Welsh, and yet the house and all its surroundings were in character genuinely English, though to have hinted so much might have piqued Sir Madoc. The elegance and comfort of the mansion were English, and English too was the rich verdure of the velvet lawn and the stately old chase, the trees of which were ancient enough--some of them at least--to have sheltered Owen Glendower, or echoed to the bugle of Llewellyn ap Seisalt, whose tall grave-stone stands amid the battle-mounds on grassy Castell Coch.

At a carved and massive entrance-door we alighted, assisted the ladies to dismount, and then, gathering up their trains, they swept merrily up the steps and into the house, to prepare for dinner; while Sir Madoc, ere he permitted us to retire, though the first bell had been rung, led us into the hall; a low-ceiled, irregular, and oak-panelled room, decorated with deers' antlers, foxes' brushes crossed, and stuffed birds of various kinds, among others a gigantic golden eagle, shot by himself on Snowdon. This long apartment was so cool that, though the season was summer, a fire burned in the old stone fireplace; and on a thick rug before it lay a great, rough, red eyed staghound, that made one think of the faithful brach that saved Llewellyn's heir. The windows were half shaded by scarlet hangings; a hunting piece or two by Sneyders, with pictures of departed favourites, horses and dogs, indicated the tastes of the master of the house and of his ancestors; and there too was the skull of the *last* wolf killed in Wales, more than a century ago, grinning on an oak bracket. The butler, Owen Gwyllim, who occasionally officiated as a harper, especially at Yule, was speedily in attendance, and Sir Madoc insisted on our joining him in a stiff glass of brandy-and-water, "as a whet," he said; and prior to tossing off which he gave a hoarse guttural toast in Welsh, which his butler alone understood, and at which he laughed heartily, with the indulged familiarity of an old servant.

I then retired to make an unusually careful toilette; to leave nothing undone or omitted in the way of cuffs, studs, rings, and so forth, in all the minor details of masculine finery; hearing the while from a distance

the notes of a piano in another wing of the house come floating through an open window. The air was German;--could I doubt whose white fingers were gliding over the keys, and *who* might be standing by, and feeling himself, perhaps, somewhat master of the situation?

CHAPTER V.--CRAIGADERYN COURT.

Apart from Welsh fable and tradition, the lands of Craigaderyn had been in possession of Sir Madoc's family for many ages, and for more generations of the line of Lloyd; but the mansion, the Court itself, is not older than the Stuart times, and portions of it were much more recent, particularly the library, the shelves of which were replete with all that a gentleman's library should contain; the billiard-room and gun-room, where all manner of firearms, from the old long-barrelled fowling-piece of Anne's time down to Joe Manton and Colt's revolver, stood side by side on racks; the kennels, where many a puppy yelped; and the stable-court, where hoofs rang and stall-collars jangled, and where Mr. Bob Spurrit--a long-bodied, short-and-crooked legged specimen of the Welsh groom--reigned supreme, and watered and corned his nags by the notes of an ancient clock in the central tower--a clock said to have been brought as spoil from the church of Todtenhausen, by Sir Madoc's grandfather, after he led the Welsh Fusileers at the battle of Minden. Masses of that "rare old plant, the ivy green," heavy, leafy, and overlapping each other, shrouded great portions of the house. Oriels, full of small panes and quaint coats of arms, abutted here and there; while pinnacles and turrets, vanes, and groups of twisted, fluted, or garlanded stone chimney stacks, rose sharply up to break the sky-line and many a panel and scutcheon of stone were there, charged with the bend, ermine,

and pean of Lloyd--the lion rampant wreathed with oak, and armed with a sword--and the heraldic cognizance of many a successive matrimonial alliance.

Some portions of the house, where the walls were strong and the lower storey vaulted, were associated, of course, with visits from Llewellyn and Owen Glendower; and there also abode--a ghost. The park, too, was not without its old memories and traditions. Many of its trees were descendants of an ancient grove dedicated to Druidic worship; and bones frequently found there were alleged by some to be the relics of human sacrifice, by others to be those of Roman or of Saxon warriors slain by the sturdy Britons who, under Cadwallader, Llewellyn of the Torques, or some other hero of the Pendragonate, had held, in defiance of both, the *caer* or fort on the summit of Craigaderyn. But the woodlands on which Sir Madoc mostly prided himself were those of the old acorn season, when Nature planted her own wild forests, and sowed the lawn out of her own lawns, as some writer has it. They were unquestionably the most picturesque, but the trim and orderly chase was not without its beauties too, and there had many grand Eisteddfoddiau been held under the auspices of Sir Madoc, and often fifty harpers at a time had made the woods ring to "The noble Race of Shenkin," or "The March of the Men of Harlech."

The old Court and its surroundings were such as to make one agree with what Lord Lyttelton wrote of another Welsh valley, where "the mountains seemed placed to guard the charming retreat from invasions; and where, with the woman one loves, the friend of one's heart, and a good library, one might pass an age, and think it a day."

The ghost was a tall thin figure, dressed somewhat in the costume of Henry VIII.'s time; but his full-skirted doublet with large sleeves, the cap bordered with ostrich feathers, the close tight hose, and square-toed shoes, were all deep black, hence his, or *its*, aspect was sombre in the extreme, shadowy and uncertain too, as he was only visible in the twilight of eve, or the first dim and similarly uncertain light of the early

dawn; and these alleged appearances have been chiefly on St. David's day, the 1st of March, and were preceded by the sound of a harp about the place--but a harp *unseen*. He was generally supposed to leave, or be seen quitting, a portion of the house, where the old wall was shrouded with ivy, and to walk or glide swiftly and steadily, without casting either shadow or foot-mark on the grass, towards a certain ancient tree in the park, where he disappeared--faded, or melted out of sight. On the wall beneath the ivy being examined, a door--the portion of an earlier structure--was discovered to have been built up, but none knew when or why; and tradition averred that those who had seen him pass--for none dared follow--towards the old tree, could make out that his figure and face were those of a man in the prime of life, but the expression of the latter was sad, solemn, resolute, and gloomy.

The origin of the legend, as told to me by Winifred Lloyd, referred to a period rather remote in history, and was to the following effect. Some fifteen miles southward from Craigaderyn is a quaint and singular village named Dinas Mowddwy, situated very strangely on the shelf of a steep mountain overlooking the Dyfi stream--a lofty spot commanding a view of the three beautiful valleys of the Ceryst; but this place was in past times the abode and fortress of a peculiar and terrible tribe, called the Gwylliad Cochion, or Red-haired Robbers, who made all North Wales, but more particularly their own district, a by-word and reproach, from the great extent and savage nature of the outrages they committed by fire and sword; so that to this day, we are told, there may be seen, in some of the remote mountain hamlets, more especially in Cemmaes near the sea, the well-sharpened scythe-blades, which were placed in the chimney-corners overnight, to be ready for them in case of a sudden attack. They were great crossbowmen, those outlaws, and never failed in their aim; and so, like the broken clans upon the Highland border, they levied black mail on all, till the night of the 1st of March, 1534; when, during a terrific storm of thunder, lightning, and wind, Sir Jorwerth Lloyd of Craigaderyn, John Wynne ap Meredydd, and a baron named Owen, scaled the mountain at the head of their followers, fell on them

sword in hand, and after slaying a great number, hung one hundred of them in a row. One wretched mother, a red-haired Celt, begged hard and piteously to have her youngest son spared; but Sir Jorwerth was relentless, so the young robber perished with the rest. Then the woman rent her garments, and laying bare her bosom, said it had nursed other sons and daughters, who would yet wash their hands in the blood of them all. Owen was waylaid and slain by them at a place named to this day Llidiart-y-Barwn, or the Baron's Gate, and Meredydd fell soon after; but for Lloyd the woman, who was a reputed witch, had prepared another fate, as if aiming at the destruction of his soul as well as his body; for after his marriage with Gwerfyl Owen, he fell madly in love with a golden-haired girl whom he met when hunting in the forest near Craigaderyn; and as he immediately relinquished all attendance at church and all forms of prayer, and seemed to be besotted by her, the girl was averred to be an evil spirit, as she was never seen save in his company, and then only (by those who watched and lurked) "in the glimpses of the moon."

On the third St. David's eve after the slaughter at Dinas Mowddwy, he was seated with Gwerfyl in her chamber, listening to a terrific storm of wind and rain that swept through the valley, overturning the oldest trees, and shaking the walls of the ancient house, while the lightning played above the dim summits of Snowdon, and every mountain stream and *rhaidr*, or cataract, rolled in foam and flood to Llyn Alwen or the Conway.

On a tabourette near his knee she sat, lovingly clasping his hand between her own two, for he seemed restless, petulant, and gloomy, and had his cloak and cap at hand, as if about to go forth, though the weather was frightful.

"Jorwerth," said she softly, "the last time there was such a storm as this was on that terrible night--you remember?"

"When we cut off the Gwylliad Cochion--yes, root and branch, sparing, as we thought, none, while the rain ran through my armour as through a waterspout. But why speak of it, to-night especially? Yes, root and branch, even while that woman vowed vengeance," he added, grinding his teeth. "But what sound is that?"

"Music," she replied, rising and looking round with surprise; but his tremulous hand, and, more than that, the sudden pallor of his face, arrested her, while the strains of a small harp, struck wildly and plaintively, came at times between the fierce gusts of wind that shook the forest trees and the hiss of the rain on the window-panes without. Louder they seemed to come, and to be more emphatic and sharp; and, as he heard them, a violent trembling and cold perspiration came over all the form of Sir Jorwerth Lloyd.

"Heaven pity the harper who is abroad to-night!" said Gwerfyl, clasping her white hands.

"Let Hell do so, rather!" was the fierce response of her husband, as his eyes filled with a strange light.

At that moment a hand knocked on the window, and the startled wife, as she crouched by her husband's side, could see that it was small and delicate, wondrously beautiful too, and radiant with gems or glittering raindrops; and now her husband trembled more violently than ever.

Gwerfyl crossed herself, and rushed to the window.

"Strange," said she; "I can see no one."

"No one in human form, perhaps," replied her husband gloomily, as he lifted his cloak. "Look again, dear wife."

The lady did so, and fancied that close to the window-pane she could see a female face--anon she could perceive that it was small and beautiful, with hair of golden red, all wavy, and, strange to say, unwetted by the rain, and with eyes that were also of golden red, but with a devilish smile and glare, and glitter in them and over all her features, as they appeared, but to vanish, as the successive flashes of lightning passed. With terror and foreboding of evil, she turned to her startled husband. He was a pale and handsome man, with an aquiline nose, a finely-cut mouth and chin; but now his lips were firmly compressed, a flashing and fiery light seemed to sparkle in his eyes, his forehead was covered with lines, and the veins of his temples were swollen, while his black hair and moustache seemed to have actually become streaked with gray. What unknown emotion caused all this? There were power and passion in his bearing; but something strange, and dark, and demon-like was brooding in his soul. The white drops glittered on his brow as he threw his cloak about him, and *then* the notes of the harp were heard, as if struck triumphantly and joyously.

"Stay, stay! leave me not!" implored his wife on her knees, in a sudden access of terror and pity, that proved greater even than love.

"I cannot--I cannot! God pardon me and bless you, dear, dear wife, but go I must!"

("Exactly like Rudolph, as we saw him last night in the opera, breaking away from his followers when he heard the voice of Lurline singing amid the waters of the Rhine," added Winifred in a parenthesis, as she laid her hand timidly on my arm.)

She strove on her knees to place in his hand the small ivory-bound volume of prayers which ladies then carried slung by a chain at their girdle, even as a watch is now; but he thrust it aside, as if it scorched his fingers. Then he kissed her wildly, and broke away.

She sprang from the floor, but he was gone--gone swiftly into the forest; and with sorrow and prayer in her heart his wife stealthily followed him. By this time the sudden storm had as suddenly ceased; already the gusty wind had died away, and no trace of it remained, save the strewn leaves and a quivering in the dripping branches; the white clouds were sailing through the blue sky, and whiter still, in silvery sheen 'the moonlight fell aslant in patches through the branches on the glittering grass. Amid that sheen she saw the dark figure of her husband passing, gliding onward to the old oak tree, and Gwerfyl shrunk behind another, as the notes of the infernal harp--for such she judged it to be--fell upon her ear.

"You have come, my beloved," said a sweet voice; and she saw the same strangely-beautiful girl with the red-golden hair, her skin of wondrous whiteness, and eyes that glittered with devilish triumph, though to Jorwerth Du they seemed only filled with ardour and the light of passionate love, even as the beauty of her form seemed all round and white and perfect; but lo! to the eyes of his wife, who was under *no spell*, that form was fast becoming like features in a dissolving view, changed to that of extreme old age--gray hairs and wrinkles seemed to come with every respiration; for this mysterious love, who had bewitched her husband, was some evil spirit or demon of the woods.

"How long you have been!" said she reproachfully, for even the sweetness of her tone had suddenly passed away; "so long that already age seems to have come upon me."

"Pardon me; have I not sworn to love you for ever and ever, though neither of us is immortal?"

"You are ready?" said she, laying her head on his breast.

"Yes, my own wild love!"

"Then let us go."

All beauty of form had completely passed away, and now Gwerfyl saw her handsome husband in the arms of a very hag; hollow-cheeked, toothless, almost fleshless, with restless shifty eyes, and grey elf-locks like the serpents of Medusa; a hag beyond all description hideous: and her long, lean, shrivelled arms she wound lovingly and triumphantly around him. Her eyes gleamed like two live coals as he kissed her wildly and passionately from time to time, the full blaze of the moonlight streaming upon both their forms.

Gwerfyl strove to pray, to cry aloud, to move. But her tongue refused its office, and her lips were powerless; all capability of volition had left her, and she was as it were rooted to the spot. A moment more, and a dark cloud came over the moon, causing a deeper shadow under the old oak tree. Then a shriek escaped her, and when again the moon shone forth on the green grass and the gnarled tree, Gwerfyl alone was there--her husband and the hag had disappeared. Neither was ever seen more. North Wales is the most primitive portion of the country, and it is there that such fancies and memories still linger longest; and such was the little family legend told me by Winifred Lloyd. I was thinking over it now, recalling the earnest expression of her bright soft face and intelligent eyes, and the tone of her pleasantly modulated voice, when she, half laughingly and half seriously, had related it, with more point than I can give it, while we sat in a corner and somewhat apart from every one--on the first night I met the Cressinghams--in a crowded London ballroom, amid the heat, the buzz, and crush of the season--about the last place in the world to hear a story of *diablerie*; and "the old time" seemed to come again, as I descended to the drawing-room, to meet her and Lady Estelle.

CHAPTER VI.--THREE GRACES.

Already having met and been welcomed by my host and his daughters, my first glances round the room were in search of Lady Estelle and her mother. About eighteen persons were present, mostly gentlemen, and I instinctively made my way to where she I sought was seated, idling over a book of prints. Two or three gentlemen were exclusively in conversation with her; Sir Madoc, who was now in evening costume, for one.

"Come, Harry," said he, "here is a fair friend to whom I wish to present you."

"You forget, Sir Madoc, that I said we had met before; Mr. Hardinge and I are almost old friends--the friends of a season, at least," said Lady Estelle, presenting her hand to me with a bright but calm and decidedly conventional smile, and with the most perfect self-possession.

"It makes me so very happy to meet you again," said I in a low voice, the tone of which she could not mistake.

"Mamma, too, will be *so* delighted--you were quite a favourite with her."

I bowed, as if accepting for fact a sentiment of which I was extremely doubtful, and then after a little pause she added,--

"Mamma always preferred your escort, you remember."

Of that I was aware, when she wished to leave some more eligible *parti*--old Lord Pottersleigh, for instance--to take charge of her daughter.

"I am so pleased that we are to see a little more of you, ere you depart for the East; whence, I hear, you are bound," said she after a little pause.

Simple though the words, they made my heart beat happily, and I dreaded that some sharp observer might read in my eyes the expression which I knew could not be concealed from her; and now I turned to look for some assistance from Winifred Lloyd; but, though observing us, she was apparently busy with Caradoc; luckily for me, perhaps, as there was something of awkwardness in my position with her. I had flirted rather too much at one time with Winny--been almost tender--but nothing more. Now I loved Lady Estelle, and that love was indeed destitute of all ambition, though the known difficulties attendant on the winning of such a hand as hers, added zest and keenness to its course.

When I looked at Winifred and saw how fair and attractive she was, "a creature so compact and complete," as Caradoc phrased it, with such brilliance of complexion, such deep violet eyes and thick dark wavy hair; and when I thought of the girl's actual wealth, and her kind old father's great regard for me, it seemed indeed that I might do well in offering my heart where there was little doubt it would be accepted; but the more stately and statuesque beauty, the infinitely greater personal attractions of Lady Estelle dazzled me, and rendered me blind to Winny's genuine goodness of soul The latter was every way a most attractive girl Dora was quite as much so, in her own droll and jolly way; but Lady Estelle possessed that higher style of loveliness and bearing so difficult to define; and though less natural perhaps than the Lloyds, she had usually that calm, placid, and unruffled or settled expression of features so peculiar to many Englishwomen of rank and culture, yet they could light up at times; then, indeed, she became radiant; and now, in full dinner dress, she seemed to look pretty much as I had seemed to see her in that haughty full-length by the President of the R.A., with an admiring and critical crowd about it.

The three girls I have named were all handsome--each sufficiently so to have been the belle of any room; yet, though each was different in type from the other, they were all thoroughly English; perhaps Sir Madoc would have reminded me that two were Welsh. The beauty of Winifred and Dora was less regular; yet, like Lady Estelle, in their faces each feature seemed so charmingly suited to the rest, and all so perfect, that I doubt much the story that Canova had sixty models for his single Venus, or that Zeuxis of Heraclea had even five for his Helen. Lady Estelle Cressingham was tall and full in form, with a neck that rose from her white shoulders like that of some perfect Greek model; her smile, when real, was very captivating; her eyes were dark and deep, and softly lidded with long lashes; they had neither the inquiring nor soft pleading expression of Winifred's, nor the saucy drollery of Dora's, yet at times they seemed to have the power of both; for they were eloquent eyes, and, as a writer has it, "could light up her whole *personnel* as if her whole body thought." Her colour was pale, almost creamy; her features clearly cut and delicate. She had a well-curved mouth, a short upper lip and chin, that indicated what she did not quite possess--decision. Her thick hair, which in its darkness contrasted so powerfully with her paleness, came somewhat well down, in what is called "a widow's peak," on a forehead that was broad rather than low. Her taste was perfect in dress and jewelry; for though but a girl in years, she had been carefully trained, and knew nearly as much of the world--at least of *the* exclusive world in which she lived--as her cold and unimpressionable mamma, who seemed to be but a larger, fuller, older, and more stately version of herself; certainly much more of that selfish world than I, a line subaltern of seven years' foreign service, could know.

A few words more, concerning my approaching departure for the East, were all that could pass between us then; for the conversation was, of course, general, and of that enforced and heavy nature which usually precedes a dinner-party; but our memories and our thoughts were nevertheless our own still, as I could see when her glance met mine occasionally.

War was new to Britain then, and thus, even in the society at Craigaderyn Court, Caradoc and I, as officers whose regiment had already departed--more than all, as two of the Royal Welsh Fusileers--found ourselves rather objects of interest, and at a high premium.

"Ah, the dooce! Hardinge, how d'you do, how d'you do? Not off to the seat of war" (he pronounced it *waw*), "to tread the path of glory that leads to--where *does* old Gray say it leads to?" said a thin wiry-looking man of more than middle height and less than middle age, his well-saved hair carefully parted in the centre, a glass in his eye, and an easy *insouciance* that bordered on insolence in his tone and bearing, as he came bluntly forward, and interrupted me while paying the necessary court to "Mamma Cressingham," who received me with simple politeness, nothing more. I could not detect the slightest cordiality in her tone or eye. Though in the *Army List*, my name was unchronicled by Debrett, and might never be.

I bowed to the speaker, who was the identical Mr. Hawkesby Guilfoyle of whom I have already spoken, and with whom I felt nettled for presuming to place himself on such a footing of apparent familiarity with me, from the simple circumstance that I had more than once--I scarcely knew how--lost money to him.

"I am going Eastward ere long, at all events," said I; "and I cannot help thinking that some of you many idlers here could not do better than take a turn of service against the Russians too."

"It don't pay, my dear fellow; moreover, I prefer to be one of the gentlemen of England, who live at home at ease. I shall be quite satisfied with reading all about it, and rejoicing in your exploits."

I smiled and bowed, but felt that he was closely scrutinising me through his glass, which he held in its place by a muscular contraction of the left eye; and I felt moreover, instinctively and intuitively, by some magnetic influence, that this man was my enemy, and yet I had done

him no wrong. The aversion was certainly mutual. It was somewhat of the impulse that led Tom Brown of old to dislike Dr. Fell, yet, in my instance, it was not exactly without knowing "why."

I had quickly read the character of this Mr. Guilfoyle. He had cold, cunning, and shifty eyes of a greenish yellow colour. They seldom smiled, even when his mouth did, if that can be called a smile which is merely a grin from the teeth outwards. He was undoubtedly gentlemanlike in air and appearance, always correct in costume, suave to servility when it suited his purpose, but daringly insolent when he could venture to be so with impunity. He had that narrowness of mind which made him counterfeit regret for the disaster of his best friend, while secretly exulting in it, if that friend could serve his purposes no more; the praise or success of another never failed to excite either his envy or his malice; and doating on himself, he thought that all who knew him should quarrel with those against whom he conceived either spleen or enmity. A member of a good club in town, he was fashionable, moderately dissipated, and rather handsome in person. No one knew exactly from what source his income was derived; but vague hints of India stock, foreign bonds, and so forth, served to satisfy the few--and in the world of London few they were indeed--who cared a jot about the matter. Such was Mr. Hawkesby Guilfoyle, of whom the reader shall hear more in these pages.

"And so you don't approve of risking your valuable person in the service of the country?" said I, in a tone which I felt to be a sneering one.

"No; I am disposed to be rather economical of it--think myself too good-looking, perhaps, to fill a hole in a trench. Ha, ha! Moreover, what the deuce do I want with glory or honour?" said he, in a lower tone; "are not self-love or interest, rather than virtue, the true motives of most of our actions?"

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, by Jove! I do."

"A horrid idea, surely!"

"Not at all. Besides, virtues, as they are often called, are too often only vices disguised."

"The deuce!" said Caradoc, who overheard us; "I don't understand this paradox."

"Nor did I intend *you* to do so," replied the other, in a tone that, to say the least of it, was offensive, and made Phil's eyes sparkle. "But whether in pursuit of vice or virtue, it is an awkward thing when the ruling passion makes one take a wrong turn in life."

"The ruling passion?" said I, thinking of the money I had lost to him.

"Yes, whether it be ambition, avarice, wine, or love," he replied, his eyes going involuntarily towards Lady Estelle; "but at all times there is nothing like taking precious good care of number one; and so, were I a king, I should certainly reign for myself."

"And be left to yourself," said I, almost amused by this avowed cynicism and selfishness.

"Well, as Prince Esterhazy said, when he did me the honour to present me with this ring," he began, playing the while with a splendid brilliant, which sparkled on one of his fingers.

But what the Prince had said I was never fated to know; for the aphorisms of Mr. Guilfoyle were cut short by the welcome sound of the dinner-gong, and in file we proceeded through the corridor and hall to the dining-room, duly marshalled between two rows of tall liverymen in powder and plush, Sir Madoc leading the way with the Countess on his arm, her long sweeping skirt so stiff with brocade, that, as Caradoc whispered, it looked like our regimental colours.

Lady Estelle was committed to the care of a stout old gentleman, who was the exact counterpart of our host, and whose conversation, as it evidently failed to amuse, bored her. Miss Lloyd was led by Caradoc, and Dora fell to my care. Of the other ladies I took little heed; neither did I much of the sumptuous dinner, which passed away as other dinners do, through all its courses, with entrées and relays of various wines, the serving up of the latter proving in one sense a nuisance, from the absurd breaks caused thereby in the conversation. The buzz of voices was pretty loud at times, for many of the guests were country gentlemen, hale and hearty old fellows some of them, who laughed with right good will, not caring whether to do so was good *ton* or not. But while listening to the lively prattle of Dora Lloyd, I could not refrain from glancing ever and anon to where Estelle Cressingham, looking so radiant, yet withal "so delicately white" in her complexion, her slender throat and dazzling shoulders, her thick dark hair and tiny ears, at which the diamond pendants sparkled, sat listening to her elderly bore, smiling assents from time to time out of pure complaisance, and toying with her fruit knife when the dessert came, her hands and arms seeming so perfect in form and colour, and on more than one occasion--when her mamma was engrossed by courteous old Sir Madoc, who could "talk peerage," and knew the quartering of arms better than the Garter King or Rouge Dragon--giving me a bright intelligent smile, that made my heart beat happily; all the more so that I had been afflicted by some painful suspicion of coldness in her first reception of me--a coldness rather deduced from her perfect self-possession--while I had been farther annoyed to find that her somewhat questionable admirer, Guilfoyle, was seated by her side, with a lady whose presence he almost ignored in his desire to be pleasing elsewhere. Yet, had it been otherwise, if anything might console a man for fancied coldness in the woman he loved, or for a partial separation from her by a few yards of mahogany, it should be the lively rattle of a lovely girl of eighteen; but while listening and replying to Dora, my thoughts and wishes were with another.

"I told you how it would be, Mr. Hardinge," whispered Dora; "that the staple conversation of the gentlemen, if it didn't run on the county pack, would be about horses and cattle, sheep, horned and South Down; or on the British Constitution, which must be a very patched invention, to judge by all they say of it."

I confessed inwardly that much of what went on around me was so provincial and local--the bishop's visitation, the--parish poor, crops and game, grouse and turnips--and proved such boredom that, but for the smiling girl beside me, with her waggish eyes and pretty ways, and the longing and hope to have more of the society of Lady Estelle, I could have wished myself back at the mess of the depôt battalion in Winchester. Yet this restlessness was ungrateful; for Craigaderyn was as much a home to me as if I had been a son of the house, and times there were when the girls, like their father, called me simply "Harry," by my Christian name.

The long and stately dining-room, like other parts of the house, was well hung with portraits. At one end was a full-length of Sir Madoc in his scarlet coat and yellow-topped boots, seated on his favourite bay mare, "Irish Jumper," with mane and reins in hand, a brass horn slung over his shoulder, and looking every inch like what he was--the M.F.H. of the county, trotting to cover. Opposite, of course, was his lady--it might almost have passed for a likeness of Winifred--done several years ago, her dress of puce velvet cut low to show her beautiful outline, but otherwise very full indeed, as she leaned in the approved fashion against a vase full of impossible flowers beside a column and draped curtain, in what seemed a windy and draughty staircase, a view of Snowdon in the distance. "Breed and blood," as Sir Madoc used to say, "in every line of her portrait, from the bridge of her nose to the heel of her slipper;" for she was a lineal descendant of *y Marchog gwyllt o' Cae Hywel*, or "the wild Knight of Caehowel," a circumstance he valued more than all her personal merits and goodness of heart.

Some of Dora's remarks about the family portraits elicited an occasional glance of reprehension from the Dowager of Naseby, who thought such relics or evidences of descent were not to be treated lightly. On my enquiring who that lady in the very low dress with the somewhat dishevelled hair was, I had for answer, "A great favourite of Charles II., Mr. Hardinge--an ancestress of ours. Papa knows her name. There was some lively scandal about her, of course. And that is her brother beside her--he in the rose-coloured doublet and black wig. He was killed in a duel about a young lady--run clean through the heart by one of the Wynnes of Llanrhaidr, at the Ring in Hyde Park."

"When men risked their lives so, love must have been very earnest in those days," said Lady Estelle.

"And very fearful," said the gentler Winny. "It is said the lady's name was engraved on the blade of the sword that slew him."

"A duel! How delightful to be the heroine of a duel!" exclaimed the volatile Dora.

"And who is that pretty woman in the sacque and puffed cap?" asked Caradoc, pointing to a brisk-looking dame in a long stomacher. She was well rouged, rather *décolletée*, had a roguish kissing-patch in the corner of her mouth, and looked very like Dora indeed.

"Papa's grandmother, who insisted on wearing a white rose when she was presented to the Elector at St. James's," replied Dora; "and her marriage to the heir of Craigaderyn is chronicled in the fashion of the Georgian era, by gossipping Mr. Sylvanus Urban, as that of 'Mistress Betty Temple, an agreeable and modest young lady with 50,000*l.* fortune, from the eastward of Temple Bar.' I don't think people were such tuft-hunters in those days as they are now. Do *you* think so, Mr. Guilfoyle? O, I am sure, that if all we read in novels is true, there must have been more romantic marriages and much more honest love long ago than we find in society now. What do you say to this, Estelle?"

But the fair Estelle only fanned herself, and replied by a languid smile, that somehow eluded when it might have fallen on *me*. So while we lingered over the dessert (the pineapples, peaches, grapes, and so forth being all the produce of Sir Madoc's own hothouses), Dora resumed:

"And so, poor Harry Hardinge, in a few weeks more you will be far away from us, and face to face with those odious Russians--in a real battle, perhaps. It is something terrible to think of! Ah, heavens, if you should be killed!" she added, as her smile certainly passed away for a moment.

"I don't think somehow there is very much danger of that--at least I can but hope--"

"Or wounded! If you should lose a leg--two legs perhaps--"

"He could scarcely lose *more*," said Mr. Guilfoyle.

"And come home with wooden ones!" she continued, lowering her voice. "You will look so funny! O, I could never love or marry a man with wooden stumps!"

"But," said I, a little irritated that she should see anything so very amusing in this supposed contingency, "I don't mean to marry *you*."

"Of course not--I know that. It is Winny, papa thinks--or is it Estelle Cressingham you prefer?"

Lowly and whispered though the heedless girl said this, it reached the ears of Lady Estelle, and caused her to grow if possible paler, while I felt my face suffused with scarlet; but luckily all now rose from the table, as the ladies, led by Winifred, filed back alone to the drawing-room; and I felt that Dora's too palpable hints must have done much to make or mar my cause--perhaps to gain me the enmity of both her sister and the Lady Estelle.

Sir Madoc assumed his daughter's place at the head of the table, and beckoned *me* to take his chair at the foot. Owen Gwyllim replenished the various decanters and the two great silver jugs of claret and burgundy, and the flow of conversation became a little louder in tone, and of course less reserved. I listened now with less patience to all that passed around me, in my anxiety to follow the ladies to the drawing-room. Every moment spent out of *her* presence seemed doubly long and doubly lost. The chances of the coming war--*where* our troops were to land, whether at Eupatoria or Perecop, or were to await an attack where they were literally rotting in the camp upon the Bulgarian shore; their prospects of success, the proposed bombardment of Cronstadt, the bewildering orders issued to our admirals, the inane weakness and pitiful vacillation, if not worse, of Lord Aberdeen's government, our total want of all preparation in the ambulance and commissariat services, even to the lack of sufficient shot, shell, and gunpowder--were all freely descanted on, and attacked, explained, or defended according to the politics or the views of those present; and Guilfoyle--who, on the strength of having been attaché at the petty German court of Catzenelnbogen, affected a great knowledge of continental affairs--indulged in much "tall talk" on the European situation till once more the county pack and hunting became the chief topic, and then too he endeavoured, but perhaps vainly, to take the lead.

"You talk of fox-hunting, gentlemen," said he, raising his voice after a preliminary cough, "and some of the anecdotes you tell of wonderful leaps, mistakes, and runs, with the cunning displayed by reynard on various occasions, such as hiding in a pool up to the snout, feigning death--a notion old as the days of Olaus Magnus--throwing dogs off the scent by traversing a running stream, and so forth, are all remarkable enough; but give me a good buck-hunt, such as I have seen in Croatia! When travelling there among the mountains that lie between Carlstadt and the Adriatic, I had the good fortune to reside for a few weeks with my kind friend Ladislaus Count Mosvina, Grand Huntsman to the Emperor of Austria, and captain of the German Guard of Arzieres, and

who takes his title from that wine-growing district, the vintage of which is fully equal to the finest burgundy. The season was winter. The snow lay deep among the frightful valleys and precipices of the Vellibitch range, and an enormous *rehbock*, or roebuck, fully five feet in height to the shoulder, with antlers of vast size--five feet, if an inch, from tip to tip--driven from the mountains by the storm and *la bora*, the biting north-east wind, took shelter in a thicket near the house. Several shots were fired; but no one, not even *I*, could succeed in hitting him, till at last he defiantly and coolly fed among the sheep, in the yard of the Count's home farm, where, by the use of his antlers, he severely wounded and disabled all who attempted to dislodge him. At last four of the Count's farmers or foresters--some of those Croatian boors who are liable to receive twenty-five blows of a cudgel yearly if they fail to engraft at least twenty-five fruit-trees--undertook to slay or capture the intruder. But though they were powerful, hardy, and brave men, this devil of a *rehbock*, by successive blows of its antlers, fractured the skulls of two and the thigh-bones of the others, smashing them like tobacco-pipes, and made an escape to the mountains. A combined hunt was now ordered by my friend Mosvina, and all the gentlemen and officers in the *generalat* or district commanded by him set off, mounted and in pursuit. There were nearly a thousand horsemen; but the cavalry there are small and weak. *I* was perhaps the best-mounted man in the field. We pursued it for twenty-five miles, by rocky hills and almost pathless woods, by ravines and rivers. Many of our people fell. Some got staked, were pulled from their saddles by trees, or tumbled off by running foul of wild swine. Many missed their way, grew weary, got imbogged in the half-frozen marshes, and so forth, till at last only the Count and I with four dogs were on his track, and when on it, we leaped no less than four frozen cataracts, each at least a hundred feet in height--'pon honour they were. We had gone almost neck and neck for a time; but the Grand Huntsman's horse began to fail him now (for we had come over terrible ground, most of it being uphill), and ultimately it fell dead lame. Then whoop--tally-ho! I spurred onward alone. Just as the furious giant was coming to bay in a narrow gorge, and, fastening on his flanks and neck,

the maddened dogs were tearing him down, their red jaws steaming in the frosty air, the Count came up on foot, breathless and thoroughly blown, to have the honour of slaying this antlered monarch of the Dinovian Alps. But I was too quick for him. I had sprung from my horse, and with my unsheathed *hanshar* or Croatian knife had flung myself, fearlessly and regardless of all danger, upon the buck, eluding a last and desperate butt made at me with his pointed horns. Another moment saw my knife buried to the haft in his throat, and a torrent of crimson blood flowing upon the snow, then I courteously tendered my weapon by the hilt to the Count, who, in admiration of my adroitness, presented me with this ring--a very fine brilliant, you may perceive--which his grandfather had received from the Empress Maria Theresa, and the pure gold of which is native, from the sand upon the banks of the Drave."

And as he concluded his anecdote, which he related with considerable pomposity and perfect coolness, he twirled round his finger this remarkable ring, of which I was eventually to hear more from time to time.

"So, out of a thousand Croatian horsemen, *you* were the only one in at the death! It says little for their manhood," said an old fox-hunter, as he filled his glass with burgundy, and pretty palpably winked to Sir Madoc, under cover of an épergne.

"This may all be true, Harry, or not--only *entre nous*, I don't believe it is," said Phil Caradoc aside to me; "for who here knows anything of Croatia? He might as well talk to old Gwyllim the butler, or any chance medley Englishman, of the land of Memnon and the hieroglyphics. This fellow Guilfoyle beats Munchausen all to nothing; but did he not before tell something *else* about that ring?"

"I don't remember; but now, Phil, that you have seen her," said I, in a tone of tolerably-affected carelessness, "what do you think of *la belle* Cressingham?"

"She is very handsome, certainly," replied Phil, in the same undertone, and luckily looking at his glass, and not at me, "a splendid specimen of her class--a proud and by no means a bashful beauty."

"Most things in this world are prized just as they are difficult of attainment, or are scarce. I reckon beauty among these, and no woman holds it cheap," said I, not knowing exactly what to think of Caradoc's criticism. "There is Miss Lloyd, for instance--"

"Ah," said he, with honest animation, "she is a beauty too, but a gentle and retiring one--a girl that is all sweetness and genuine goodness of heart."

"With some dairy-farms in the midland counties, eh?"

"The graces of such a girl are always the most attractive. We men are so constituted that we are apt to decline admiration where it is loftily courted or seemingly expected--as I fear it is in the case of Lady Cressingham--and to bestow it on the gentle and retiring."

I felt there was much truth in my friend's remarks, and yet they piqued me so that I rather turned from him coldly for the remainder of the evening.

"Her mother is haughty, intensely ambitious, and looks forward to a title for her as high, if not higher, than that her father bore," I heard Sir Madoc say to a neighbour who had been talking on the same subject--the beauty of Lady, Estelle; "the old lady is half Irish and half Welsh."

"Rather a combustible compound, I should think," added Guilfoyle, as, after coffee and curaçoa, we all rose to join the ladies in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER VII.--PIQUE.

The moment I entered the drawing-room, where Winifred Lloyd had been doing her utmost to amuse her various guests till we came, and where undoubtedly the ladies' faces grew brighter when we appeared, I felt conscious that the remark of the hoydenish Dora had done me some little mischief. I could read this in the face of the haughty Estelle, together with her fear that *others* might have heard it; thus, instead of seating myself near her, as I wished and had fully intended, I remained rather aloof, and leaving her almost exclusively to the industrious Guilfoyle, divided my time between listening to Winifred, who, with Caradoc, proceeded to perform the duet he had sent her from the barracks, and endeavouring to make myself agreeable to the Countess--a process rather, I am sorry to say, somewhat of a task to me. Though her dark hair was considerably seamed with gray, her forehead was without a line, smooth and unwrinkled as that of a child--care, thought, reflection, or sorrow had never visited *her*. Wealth and rank, with a naturally aristocratic indolence and indifference of mind, had made the ways of life and of the world--at least, the world in which she lived--easy, soft, and pleasant, and all her years had glided brilliantly but monotonously on. She had married the late earl to please her family rather than herself, because he was undoubtedly an eligible *parti*; and she fully expected their only daughter to act exactly in the same docile manner. Her mien and air were stately, reserved, and uninviting; her eyes were cold, inquiring, and searching in expression, and I fancied that they seemed to watch and follow me, as if she really and naturally suspected me of "views," or, as she would have deemed them, *designs*.

Amid the commonplaces I was venturing to utter to this proud, cold, and decidedly unpleasant old dame, whose goodwill and favour I was sedulously anxious to gain, it was impossible for me to avoid hearing some remarks that Sir Madoc made concerning me, and to her daughter.

"I am so glad you like my young friend, Lady Estelle," said the bluff baronet, leaning over her chair, his rubicund face beaming with smiles and happiness; for he was in best of moods after a pleasant dinner, with agreeable society and plenty of good wine.

"Who told you that I did so?" asked she, looking up with fresh annoyance, yet not unmixed with drollery, in her beautiful face.

"Dora and Winny too; and I am so pleased, for he is an especial friend of ours. I love the lad for his dead mother's sake--she was an old flame of mine in my more romantic days--and doesn't he deserve it? What do you think the colonel of his old corps says of him?"

"Really, Sir Madoc, I know not--that he is quite a ladykiller, perhaps; to be such is the ambition of most young subalterns."

"Better than that. He wrote me, that young Hardinge is all that a British officer ought to be; that he has a constitution of iron--could sleep out in all weathers, in a hammock or under a tree--till the fever attacked him at least. If provisions were scanty, he'd share his last biscuit with a comrade; on the longest and hottest march he never fell out or became knocked up; and more than once he has been seen carrying a couple of muskets, the arms of those whose strength had failed them. 'I envy the Royal Welsh their acquisition, and regret that *we* have lost him'--these were the colonel's very words."

Had I fee'd or begged him to plead my cause, he could not have been more earnest or emphatic.

"For heaven's sake, Sir Madoc, do stop this overpowering eulogium," said I; "it is impossible for one not to overhear, when one's own name is mentioned. But did the colonel really say all this of me?"

"All, and more, Harry."

"It should win him a diploma of knight-bachelor," said Lady Estelle, laughing, "a C.B., perhaps a baronetcy."

"Nay," said Sir Madoc; "such rewards are reserved now for toad-eaters, opulent traders, tuft-hunters, and ministerial tools; the days when true merit was rewarded are gone, my dear Lady Estelle."

The duet over, Phil Caradoc drew near me, for evidently he was not making much progress with Miss Lloyd.

"Well, Phil," said I, in a low voice, "among those present have you seen your ideal of woman?"

"Can't say," said he, rather curtly; "but *you* have, at all events, old fellow, and I think Sir Madoc has done a good stroke of business for you by his quotation of the colonel's letter. I heard him all through our singing--the old gentleman has no idea of a *sotto voce*, and talks always as if he were in the hunting-field. By Jove, Harry, you grow quite pink!" he continued, laughing. "I see how the land lies with you; but as for '*la mère* Cressingham,' she is an exclusive of the first water, a match-maker by reputation; and I fear you have not the ghost of a chance with her."

"Hush, Caradoc," said I, glancing nervously about me "remember that we are not at Winchester, or inside the main-guard, just now. But see, Lady Estelle and that fellow Guilfoyle are about to favour us," I added, as the pale beauty spread her ample skirts over the piano-stool, with an air that, though all unstudied, seemed quite imperial, and ran her slender fingers rapidly over the white keys, preluding an air; while Guilfoyle, who had a tolerable voice and an intolerable amount of assurance, prepared to sing by fussily placing on the piano a piece of

music, on the corner of which was written in a large and bold hand, evidently his own--"To Mr. H. Guilfoyle, from H.S.H. the Princess of Catzenelnbogen."

"You must have been a special favourite with this lady," said Estelle, "as most of your German music is inscribed thus."

"Yes, we were always exchanging our pieces and songs," said he, languidly and in a low voice close to her ear, yet not so low as to be unheard by me. "I was somewhat of a favourite with her, certainly; but then the Princess was quite a privileged person."

"In what respect?"

"She could flirt farther than any one, and yet never compromise herself. However, when she bestowed this ring upon me, on the day when I saved her life, by arresting her runaway horse on the very brink of the Rhine, I must own that his Highness the Prince was the reverse of pleased, and viewed me with coldness ever after; so that ultimately I resigned my office of attaché, just about the time I had the pleasure--may I call it the joy?--of meeting you."

"O fie, Mr. Guilfoyle! were you actually flirting with her?"

"Nay, pardon me; I never flirt."

"You were in love then?"

"I was never in love till--"

A crash of notes as she resumed the air interrupted whatever he was about to say; but his eye told more than his bold tongue would perhaps have dared to utter in such a time or place; and, aware that they had met on the Continent, and had been for some time together in the seclusion of Craigaderyn, I began to fear that he must have far surpassed me in the chances of interest with her.. Moreover, Dora's foolish remark might reasonably lead her to suppose that I was already involved with

Winifred; and now, with a somewhat cloudy expression in my face (as a mirror close by informed me), and a keen sense of pique in my heart, I listened while she played the accompaniment to his pretty long German song, the burden of which seemed to be ever and always--

"Ach nein! ach nein! ich darf es nich.
Leb wohl! Leb' wohl! Leb' wohl!"

Sir Madoc, who had listened with some secret impatience to this most protracted German ditty, now begged his fair guest to favour him with something Welsh; but as she knew no airs pertaining to the locality, she resigned her place to Winifred, whom I led across the room, and by whose side I remained. After the showy performances of Lady Estelle, she was somewhat reluctant to begin: all the more so, perhaps, that her friend--with rather questionable taste, certainly--was wont, in a spirit of mischief or raillery--but one pardons so much in lovely woman, especially one of rank--to quiz Wales, its music and provincialism; just as, when in the Highlands, she had laughed at the natives, and voted "their sham chiefs and gatherings as delightfully absurd." Finding that his daughter lingered ere she began, and half suspecting the cause, Sir Madoc threatened to send for Owen Gwyllim, the butler, with his harp. Owen had frequently accompanied her with his instrument; but though that passed well enough occasionally among homely Welsh folks, it would never do when Lady Naseby and certain others were present.

"It is useless for an English girl to sing in a foreign language, or attempt to rival paid professional artists, by mourning like Mario from the turret, or bawling like Edgardo in the burying-ground, or to give us 'Stride la vampa' in a fashion that would terrify Alboni," said Sir Madoc, "or indeed to attempt any of those operatic effusions with which every hand organ has made us familiar. So come, Winny, a Welsh air, or I shall ring for Owen."

This rather blundering speech caused Lady Estelle to smile, and Guilfoyle, whose "Leb' wohl" had been something of the style objected to, coloured very perceptibly. Thus urged, Winifred played and sang with great spirit "The March of the Men of Harlech;" doubtless as much to compliment Caradoc and me as to please her father; for it was then our regimental march; and, apart from its old Welsh associations, it is one of the finest effusions of our old harpers. Sir Madoc beat time, while his eyes lit up with enthusiasm, and he patted his daughter's plump white shoulders kindly with his weather-brown but handsome hands; for the old gentleman rather despised gloves, indoors especially, as effeminate.

Winifred had striven to please rather than to excel; and though tremulous at times, her voice was most attractive.

"Thank you," said I, in a low and earnest tone; "your execution is just of that peculiar kind which leaves nothing more to be wished for, and while it lasts, Winny, inspires a sense of joy in one's heart."

"You flatter me much--far too much," replied Miss Lloyd, in a lower and still more tremulous tone, as she grew very pale; for some girls will do so, when others would flush with emotion, and it was evident that my praise gave her pleasure; she attached more to my words than they meant.

An undefinable feeling of pique now possessed me--a sensation of disappointment most difficult to describe; but it arose from a sense of doubt as to how I really stood in the estimation of the fair Estelle. Taking an opportunity, while Sir Madoc was emphatically discussing the points and pedigrees of certain horses and harriers with Guilfoyle and other male friends, while the Countess and other ladies were clustered about Winifred at the piano, and Dora and Caradoc were deep in some affair of their own, I leaned over her chair, and referring--I forget now in what terms--to the last time we met, or rather parted, I strove to effect that most difficult of all moves in the game of love--to lead back the emotions, or the past train of thought, to where they had been dropped,

or snapped by mischance, to the time when I had bid her lingeringly adieu, after duly shawling and handing her to the carriage, at the close of a late rout in Park-lane, when the birds of an early June morning were twittering in the trees of Hyde Park, when the purple shadows were lying deep about the Serpentine, when the Ring-road was a solitude, the distant Row a desert, and the yawning footmen in plush and powder, and the usually rubicund coachmen, looking weary, pale, and impatient, and when the time and place were suited neither for delay nor dalliance. Yet, as I have elsewhere said, an avowal of all she had inspired within me was trembling on my lips as I led her through the marble vestibule and down the steps, pressing her hand and arm the while against my side; but her mother's voice from the depths of the carriage (into which old Lord Pottersleigh had just handed her) arrested a speech to which she might only have responded by silence, then at least; and I had driven, *viâ* Piccadilly, to the Junior U.S., when Westminster clock was paling out like a harvest moon beyond the Green Park, cursing my diffidence, that delayed all I had to say till the carriage was announced, thereby missing the chance that never might come again. And then I had but the memory of a lovely face, framed by a carriage window, regarding me with a bright yet wistful smile, and of a soft thrilling pressure returned by an ungloved hand, that was waved to me from the same carriage as it rolled away westward. The night had fled, and there remained of it only the memory of this, and of those glances so full of tenderness, and those soft attentions or half endearments which are so charming, and so implicitly understood, as almost to render language, perhaps, un necessary.

"You remember the night we last met, and parted, in London?" I whispered.

"Morning, rather, I think it wash" said she, fanning herself; "but night or morning, it was a most delightful ball. I had not enjoyed myself anywhere so much that season, and it was a gay one."

"Ah, you have not forgotten it, then," said I, encouraged.

"No; it stands out in my memory as one night among many happy ones. Day was almost breaking when you led me to the carriage, I remember."

"Can you remember nothing more?' I asked, earnestly.

"You shawled me most attentively--"

"And I was whispering--"

"Something foolish, no doubt; men are apt to do so at such times," she replied, while her white eyelids quivered and she looked up at me with her calm, bright smile.

"Something foolish!" thought I, reproachfully; "and then, as now, my soul seemed on my lips."

"Do you admire Mr. Guilfoyle's singing?" she asked, after a little pause, to change the subject probably.

"His voice is unquestionably good and highly cultured," said I, praising him truthfully enough to conceal the intense annoyance her unexpected question gave me; "but, by the way, Lady Estelle, how does it come to pass that he has the honour of knowing you--to be *here*, too?"

"How--why--what *do*, you mean, Mr. Hardinge?" she asked, and I could perceive that after colouring slightly she grew a trifle paler than before. "He is a visitor here, like you or myself. We met him abroad first; he was most kind to us when mamma lost all her passports at the Berlin Eisenbahnhof, and he accompanied us to the Alte Leipziger Strasse for others, and saw us safely to our carriage. Then, by the most singular chances, we met him again at the new Kursaal of Ems, at Gerolstein, when we were beginning the tour of the Eifel, and at Baden-Baden. Lastly, we met him at Llandudno, on the beach, quite casually, when driving with Sir Madoc, to whom he said that he knew you--that you were quite old friends, in fact."

"Knew me, by Jove! that is rather odd. I only lost some money to him; enough to make me wary for the future."

"Wary?" she asked, with dilated eyes.

"Yes."

"An unpleasant expression, surely. Sir Madoc, who is so hospitable, asked him here to see the lions of Craigaderyn, and has put a gun at his disposal for the twelfth."

"How kind of unthinking Sir Madoc! A most satisfactory explanation," said I, cloudily, while gnawing my moustache. Guilfoyle had too evidently followed them.

"If any explanation were necessary," was the somewhat haughty response, as the mother-of-pearl fan went faster than ever, and she looked me full in the face with her clear, dark, and penetrating eyes, to the sparkle of which the form of their lids, and their thick fringe of black lash, served to impart a softness that was indeed required. "Do you know anything of him?" she added.

"No; that is--"

"Anything against him?"

"No, Lady Estelle."

"What then?" she asked, a little petulantly.

"Simply that I, pardon me, think a good deal."

"More than you would say?"

"Perhaps."

"This is not just. Mamma is somewhat particular, as you know; and our family solicitor, Mr. Sharpus, who is his legal friend also, speaks most warmly of him. We met him in the best society--abroad, of course; but, Mr. Hardinge, your words, your manner, more than all, your tone, imply what I fear Mr. Guilfoyle would strongly resent. But please go and be attentive to mamma--you have scarcely been near her to-night," she added quickly, as a flush of anger crossed my face, and she perceived it. I bowed and obeyed, with a smile on my lips and intense annoyance in my heart. I knew that the soft eyes of Winifred Lloyd had been on us from time to time; but my little flirtation with *her* was a thing of the past now, and I was reckless of its memory. Was she so? Time will prove. I felt jealousy of Guilfoyle, pique at Lady Estelle, and rage at my own mismanagement. I had sought to resume the tenor of our thoughts and conversation on the occasion of our parting after that joyous and brilliant night in Park-lane, when my name on her engagement card had appeared thrice for that of any one else; but if I had touched her heart, even in the slightest degree, would she have become, as it seemed, almost warm in defence of this man, a waif picked up on the Continent? Yet, had she any deeper interest in him than mere acquaintanceship warranted, would she have spoken of him so openly, and so candidly, to me?

Heavens! we had actually been covertly fencing, and nearly quarrelling! Yet, if so, why should she be anxious for me to win the estimation of "mamma"? Lady Naseby had been beautiful in her time, and the utter vacuity and calm of her mind had enabled her to retain much of that beauty unimpaired; and I thought that her daughter, though with more sparkle and brilliance, would be sure to resemble her very much at the same years. She was not displeased to meet with attention, but was shrewd enough to see, and disdainful enough to resent, its being bestowed, as she suspected it was in my instance, on account of her daughter; thus I never had much success; for on the night

of that very rout in London my attentions in that quarter, and their apparent good fortune, had excited her parental indignation and aristocratic prejudices against me.

After all the visitors had withdrawn (as horses or carriages were announced in succession), save one or two fox-hunters whom Guilfoyle had lured into the billiard-room for purposes of his own, when the ladies left us at night Lady Estelle did not give me her hand. She passed me with a bow and smile only, and as she swept through the gilded folding doors of the outer drawing-room, with an arm round Dora's waist, her backward glances fell on all--but me. Why was this? Was this coldness of manner the result of Guilfoyle's influence, fear of her mamma, her alleged engagement with old Lord Pottersleigh, pique at myself caused by Dora's folly, or what? It was the old story of "trifles light as air." I felt wrathful and heavy at heart, and repented bitterly the invitation I had accepted, and the leave I had asked; for Lady Estelle seemed so totally unconcerned and indifferent to me now, considering the *empressement* with which we had parted in London.

The "family solicitor," too! He had been introduced as a mutual friend in the course of affairs--in the course of a friendship that had ripened most wonderfully. Was this Hawkesby Guilfoyle a fool, or a charlatan, or both? His various versions of the diamond ring would seem to show that he was the former. What fancy had the Countess for him, and why was he tolerated by Sir Madoc? Familiar though I was with my old friend, I felt that I could not, without a violation of good taste, ask a question about a guest, especially one introduced by the Cressinghams. His voice was soft in tone; his manner, when he chose, was suave; his laugh at all times, even when he mocked and sneered, which was not unfrequent, silvery and pleasing; yet he was evidently one who could "smile and smile and be"--I shall not exactly say what. While smoking a cigar, I pondered over these and other perplexing things in my room before retiring for the night, hearing ever and anon the click of the billiard-balls at the end of the corridor. Had I not the same chance and

right of competition as this Guilfoyle, though unknown to the "family solicitor"? How far had he succeeded in supplanting me, and perhaps others? for that there were others I knew. How far had he gone in his suit--how prospered? How was I to construe the glances I had seen exchanged, the half speech so bluntly made, and so adroitly drowned at the piano? Who was he? what was he? The attaché of the mock embassy at a petty German Court! Surely my position in society was as good, if not better defined than his; while youth, appearance, health, and strength gave me every advantage over an "old fogie" like Viscount Pottersleigh.

As if farther to inflame my pique, and confirm the chagrin and irritation that grew within me on reflection, Phil Caradoc, smoothing his moustache, came into my room, which adjoined his, to have, as he said, "a quiet weed before turning in." He looked ruffled; for he had lost money at billiards--that was evident--and to the object of my jealousy, too.

"That fellow Guilfoyle is a thorough Bohemian if ever there was one!" said he, as he viciously bit off the end of his cigar prior to lighting it, "with his inimitable tact, his steady stroke at billiards, his scientific whist, his coolness and perfect breeding: yet he is, I am certain, unless greatly mistaken, a regular free-lance, without the bravery or brilliance that appertained to the name of old--a lawless ritter of the gaming-table, and one that can't even act his part well or consistently in being so. He has been spinning another story about that ring, with which I suppose, like Claude Melnotte's, we shall hear in time his grandfather, the Doge of Venice, married the Adriatic I am certain," continued Caradoc, who was unusually ruffled, "that though a vainglorious and boasting fellow, he is half knave, half fool, and wholly adventurer!"

"This is strong language, Phil. Good heavens! do you really think so?" I asked, astonished to find him so boldly putting my own thoughts into words.

"I am all but convinced of it," said he, emphatically. "But how in such society?"

"Ah, that is the rub, and the affair of Sir Madoc, and of Lady Naseby, and of Lady Estelle, too, for she seems to take rather more than an interest in him--they have some secret understanding. . By Jove! I can't make it out at all."

Caradoc's strong convictions and unusual bluntness added fuel to my pique and chagrin, and I resolved that, come what might, I would end the matter ere long; and I thought the while of the song of Montrose--

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch,
To gain or lose it all!"

CHAPTER VIII.--SUNDAY AT CRAIGADERYN.

The following day was Sunday; and ere it closed, there occurred a little contretemps which nearly lost me all chance of putting to the issue whether I was "to gain or lose it all" with Estelle Cressingham.

I felt that it was quite possible, if I chose, to have my revenge through the sweet medium of Winifred Lloyd; yet, though Lady Estelle's somewhat pointed defence of Guilfoyle rankled in my memory, and Caradoc's hints had added fuel to the flame, I shrunk from such a double game, and hoped that the chances afforded by propinquity in general,

and the coming fête in particular, would soon enable me to come to a decision. My mind was full of vague irritation against her; yet when I rose in the morning, my one and predominant thought was that I should see her again. Carriages and horses had been ordered from the stable for our conveyance to Craigaderyn church, a three miles' drive through lovely scenery, and I resolved to accompany the sisters in the barouche, leaving whom fate directed to take charge of Lady Estelle; yet great was my contentment when she fell to the care of Sir Madoc in the family carriage. Lady Naseby did not appear, her French soubrette, Mademoiselle Babette Pompon, announcing that she was indisposed. Guilfoyle and Caradoc rode somewhat unwillingly together, and I sat opposite Winny, who insisted on driving, and was duly furnished with the smartest of parasol whips--pink, with a white fringe. Quitting the park, we skirted a broad trout stream, the steep banks of which were clad with light-green foliage, and name *Nant-y-belan*, or the "Martens' dingle." At the bottom the river foamed along over broken and abutting rocks, or flowed in dark and noiseless pools, where the brown trout lurked in the shade, and where the overarching trees and grassy knolls were reflected downward in the depth.

Hawkesby Guilfoyle sat his horse--one of Sir Madoc's hunters, fully sixteen hands high--so well, and looked so handsome and gentlemanly, his riding costume was so complete, even to his silver spurs, well-fitting buff gloves, and riding switch, that I felt regret in the conviction that some cloud hung over the fellow's antecedents, and present life too, perhaps; but with all that I could not forgive him his rivalry and, as I deemed it, presumption, with the strong belief that he was, in his secret heart; my enemy. He and Caradoc rode behind the open carriage; we led the way in the barouche; and a very merry and laughing party we were, as we swept by the base of the green hills of Mynedd Hiraethrog, and over the ancient bridge that spans Llyn Aled, to the church of Craigaderyn, where the entrance of Sir Madoc's family and their visitors caused periodically somewhat of a sensation among the more humble parishioners who were there, and were wont to regard with a species of

respectful awe the great square pew, which was lined with purple velvet, and had a carved-oak table in the centre, and over the principal seat the lion's head erased, and the shield of Lloyd per bend sinister, ermine and pean, a lion rampant, armed with a sword.

With a roof of carved oak, brought from some *other* place (the invariable account of all such roofs in Wales), and built by Jorwerth ap Davydd Lloyd, in 1320, the church was a picturesque old place, where many generations of the Craigaderyn family had worshipped long before and since the Reformation, and whose bones, lapped in lead, and even in coffins of stone, lay in the burial vaults below. The oaken pews were high and deep, and were covered with dates, coats-of-arms, and quaint monograms. In some places the white slabs indicated where lay the remains of those who died but yesterday. Elsewhere, with helmet, spurs, and gloves of steel hung above their stony effigies, and covered by cobwebs and dust, lay the men of ages past and gone, their brasses and pedestal tombs bearing, in some instances, how stoutly and valiantly they had fought against the Spaniard, the Frenchman, and the Scot. One, Sir Madoc ap Meredyth Lloyd, whose sword hung immediately over my head, had wielded it, as his brass recorded, "contra Scotos apud Flodden et Musselboro;" and now the spiders were busy spinning their cobwebs over the rusted helmet through which this old Welsh knight had seen King James's host defile by the silver Till, and that of his fated granddaughter by the banks of the beautiful Esk. In other places I saw the more humble, but curious Welsh mode of commemorating the dead, by hanging up a coffin-plate, inscribed with their names, in the pews where they were wont to sit. Coats-of-arms met the eye on all sides--solid evidences of birth and family, which more than once evoked a covert sneer from Guilfoyle, who to his other bad qualities added the pride and the envy of such things, that seem inseparable from the character of the parvenu. There were two services in Craigaderyn church each Sunday, one in Welsh, the other in English. Sir Madoc usually attended the former; but in courtesy to Lady Estelle, he had come to the latter to-day.

Over all the details of the village fane my eyes wandered from time to time, always to rest on the face of Estelle Cressingham or of Winifred Lloyd, who was beside me, and who on this day, as I had accompanied her, seemed to feel that she had me all to herself. We read off the same book, as we had done years before in the same pew and place; ever and anon our gloved fingers touched; I felt her silk dress rustling against me; her long lashes and snowy lids, with the soft pale beauty of her downcast face, and her sweetly curved mouth, were all most pleasing and attractive; but the *sense* of Estelle's presence rendered me invulnerable to all but her; and my eyes could not but roam to where she stood or knelt by the side of burly Sir Madoc, her fine face downcast too in the soft light that stole between the deep mullions and twisted tracery of an ancient stained-glass window, her noble and equally pure profile half seen and half hidden by a short veil of black lace; her rounded chin and lips rich in colour, and beautiful in character as those of one of Greuze's loveliest masterpieces. There, too, were the rich brightness of her hair, and the proud grace that pervaded all her actions, and even her stillness.

Thus, even when I did not look towards her, but in Winifred's face, or on the book we mutually held, and mechanically affected to read, a perception, a dreamy sense of Estelle's presence was about me, and I could not help reverting to our past season in London, and all that has been described by a writer as those "first sweet hours of communion, when strangers glide into friends; that hour which, either in friendship or in love, is as the bloom to the fruit, as the daybreak to the day, indefinable, magical, and fleeting;" the hours which saw me presented as a friend, and left me a lover. The day was intensely hot, and inside the old church, though some of the arched recesses and ancient tombs looked cool enough, there was a blaze of sunshine, that fell in hazy flakes or streams of coloured light athwart the bowed heads of the congregation. With heat and languor, there was also the buzz of insect life; and amid the monotonous tones of the preacher I loved to fancy him reading the marriage service for us--that is, for Estelle and myself--fancied it as an enthusiastic school-girl might have done; and yet how

was it that, amid these conceits, the face and form of Winifred Lloyd, with her pretty hand in the tight straw-coloured kid glove, that touched mine, filled up the eye of the mind? Was I dreaming, or only about to sleep, like so many of the congregation--those toilers afield, those hardy hewers of wood and drawers of water, whose strong sinews, when unbraced, induced them to slumber now--the men especially, as the study of each other's toilets served to keep the female portion fully awake. When the clergyman prayed for the success of our arms in the strife that was to come, Winifred's dark eyes looked into mine for a moment, quick as light, and I saw her bosom swell; and when he prayed, "Give peace in our time, O Lord," her voice became earnest and tremulous in responding; and I could have sworn that I saw a tear oozing, but arrested, on the thick black eyelash of this impulsive Welsh girl, whom this part of the service, by its association and the time, seemed to move; but Lady Estelle was wholly intent on having one of her gloves buttoned by Guilfoyle, whose attendance she doubtless preferred to that of old Sir Madoc.

"Look!" said Winifred Lloyd, in an excited whisper, as she lightly touched my hand.

I followed the direction of her eye, and saw, seated at the end of the central aisle, modestly and humbly, among the free places reserved for the poor, a young woman, whose appearance was singularly interesting. Poorly, or rather plainly, attired in faded black, her face was remarkably handsome; and her whole air was perfectly ladylike. She was as pale as death, with a wild wan look in all her features; disease, or sorrow, or penury--perhaps all these together--had marked her as their own; her eyes, of clear, bright, and most expressive gray, were haggard and hollow, with dark circles under them. Black kid gloves showed her pretensions to neatness and gentility; but as they were frayed and worn, she strove to conceal her hands nervously under her gathered shawl.

"She is looking at you, Winifred," said Dora.

"No--at Estelle."

"At us all, I think," resumed Dora, in the same whispered tone; "and she has done so for some time past. Heavens! she seems quite like a spectre."

"Poor creature!" said Winifred; "we must inquire about her."

"Do you know her, Mr. Hardinge?" asked Dora.

"Nay, not I; it is Mr. Guilfoyle she is looking at," said I.

Guilfoyle, having achieved the somewhat protracted operation of buttoning Lady Estelle's lavender kid glove, now stuck his glass in his eye, and turned leisurely and languidly in the direction that attracted us all, just as the service was closing; but the pale woman quickly drew down her veil, and quitted the church abruptly, ere he could see her, as I thought; and this circumstance, though I took no heed of it then, I remembered in the time to come.

Winifred frankly took my arm as we left the church.

"You promised to come with me after luncheon and see the goat I have for the regiment," said she.

"Did I?--ah, yes--shall be most happy, I'm sure," said I, shamefully oblivious of the promise in question, as we proceeded towards the carriages, the people making way for us on all sides, the women curtseying and the men uncovering to Sir Madoc, who was a universal favourite, especially with the maternal portion of the parish, as he was very fond of children and flattered himself not a little on his power of getting on with them, being wont to stop mothers on the road or in the village street, and make knowing remarks on the beauty, the complexions, or the curly heads of their offspring while he was never without a handful of copper or loose silver for general distribution; and now it excited some surprise and even secret disdain in Guilfoyle--a little

petulance in Lady Estelle too--to find him shaking hands and speaking in gutteral Welsh with some of the men cottagers, or peasant-women with jackets and tall odd hats. But one anecdote will suffice to show the character of Sir Madoc.

In the very summer of my visit, it had occurred that he had to serve on a jury when a property of some three thousand pounds or so was at issue; and when the jury retired, he found that they were determined to decide in such manner as he did not deem equitable, and which in the end would inevitably ruin an honest farmer named Evan Rhuddlan, father of a sergeant in my company of Welsh Fusileers, who dwelt at a place called Craig Eryri, or "the Rock of Eagles." Finding that they were resolute, he submitted, or affected to acquiesce in their decision; but on announcing it to the court he handed the losing party a cheque on Coutts and Co. for the whole sum in litigation, and became more than ever the idol of the country people.

"Romantic old place--casques, cobwebs, and all that sort of thing," said Guilfoyle, as he handed Lady Estelle into the carriage, and took the bridle of his horse from Bob Spurrit, the groom; "I thought Burke had written the epitaph of chivalry and all belonging to it."

"Yes, but romance still exists, Mr. Guilfoyle," said Winifred, whose face was bright with smiles.

"And love too, eh, Estelle?" added Dora, laughing.

"Even in the region of Mayfair, you think?" said she.

"Yes; and wherever there is beauty, that is rarest," said I.

But she only replied by one of her calm smiles; for she had a reticence of manner which there seemed to be no means of moving.

"Talking of love and romance, I should like to know more of that pale woman we saw in church to-day," said Dora.

"Why so?" asked Guilfoyle, curtly.

"Because I saw she must have some terrible story to tell.--What was the text, Mr. Caradoc?" she asked, as we departed homewards.

"Haven't the ghost of an idea," replied Phil.

"O fie!--or the subject?"

"No," said Caradoc, reddening a little; for he had been intent during the whole service on Winifred Lloyd.

"It was all about Jacob's ladder, of which we have had a most inaccurate notion hitherto," said Dora, as we drove down the long lime avenue, to find that, as the day was so sultry, luncheon had been laid for us by Owen Gwyllim under the grand old trees in the lawn, about thirty yards from the entrance-hall, under the very oak where the spectre of Sir Jorwerth Du was alleged to vanish, the oak of Owen Glendower; and where that doughty Cymbrian had perhaps sought to summon spirits from the vasty deep, we found spirits of another kind--brandy and seltzer, clicquot and sparkling moselle cooling in silver ice-pails on the greensward; and there too, awaiting us, sat Lady Naseby, smiling and fanning herself under the umbrageous shadows of the chase.

Over her stately head was pinned a fall of rich Maltese lace, that hung in lappets on each side--a kind of demi-toilette that well became her lingering beauty and matronly appearance.

In a mother-of-pearl basket by her side, and placed on the luncheon-table, lay Tiny, her shock, a diminutive cur, white as snow, spotless as Mademoiselle Babette with perfumed soap could make it, its long woolly hair dangling over its pink eyes, giving it, as Sir Madoc said, "a most pitiable appearance;" for with all his love of dogs, he disliked such pampered, waddling, and wheezing pets as this, and thought manhood

never looked so utterly contemptible as when a tall "Jeames" in livery, with whiskers and calves, cane and nosegay, had the custody of such a quadruped, while his lady shopped in Regent-street or Piccadilly.

CHAPTER IX.-THE INITIALS.

While we were at luncheon, and the swollen champagne-corks were flying upward into the green foliage overhead, and while Owen Gwyllim was supplying us with iced claret-cup from a great silver tankard presented to Sir Madoc's uncle by his regiment, the Ancient Britons, after the Irish rebellion of 1798, and with which he, Sir Madoc, had been wont to dispense swig or "brown Betty" on St. David's day, when at Cambridge--Dora, with her hair flying loose, her eyes sparkling, and her face radiant with excitement and merriment came tripping down the perron from the entrance hall, and across the lawn towards us, with the contents of the household post-bag. She seemed to have letters for every one, save me--letters which she dropped and picked up as she came along. There was quite a pile of notes for herself, on the subject of her approaching fête; and how busy her pretty little hands immediately became!

After the usual muttered apologies, all began to read.

There was a letter for Guilfoyle, on reading which he grew very white, exhibited great trepidation, and thrust it into his coat-pocket.

"What is up, sir?" asked Sir Madoc, pausing with a slice of cold fowl on his fork; "nothing unpleasant, I hope?'

"Sold on a bay mare--that is all," he replied, with an affected laugh, as if to dismiss the subject.

"How?" asked Sir Madoc, whom a "horsey" topic immediately interested.

"Like many other handicap 'pots' this season, my nag came in worse than second."

"A case of jockeying?"

"Pure and simple."

"When?"

"O, ah--York races."

"Why, man alive, they don't come off for a month yet!" responded Sir Madoc, somewhat dryly; but perceiving that his guest was awkwardly placed, he changed the subject by saying, "But your letter, Lady Estelle, gives you pleasure, I am glad to see."

"It is from Lord Pottersleigh. He arrives here to-morrow and hopes his rooms have a southern exposure."

"The fête-day--of course. His comforts shall be fully attended to."

"Why did he write to *her* about this, and not to Sir Madoc or Miss Lloyd?" thought I.

"He is such an old friend," remarked Lady Estelle, as if she divined my mental query.

"Yes, rather too old for my taste," said the somewhat mischievous Dora. "He wears goloshes in damp weather, his hat down on the nape of his neck; is in an agony of mind about exposures, draughts, and currents of air; makes his horse shy every time he attempts to mount, and they go round in circles, eyeing each other suspiciously till a groom comes; and

when he does achieve his saddle, he drops his whip or his gloves, or twists his stirrup-leather. And yet it is this old fogie whose drag at Epsom or the Derby makes the greatest show, has the finest display of lovely faces, fans, bonnets, and parasols--a moving Swan and Edgar, with a luncheon spread that Fortnum and Mason might envy, and champagne flowing as if from a fountain; but withal, he is so tiresome!"

"Dora, you quite forget yourself," said Winifred, while I could have kissed her for this sketch of my rival, at which Sir Madoc, and even Estelle Cressingham, laughed; but Lady Naseby said, with some asperity of tone,

"Lord Pottersleigh is one of our richest peers, Miss Dora, and his creation dates from Henry VIII."

"And he is to dance with me," said the heedless girl, still laughing. "O, won't I astonish his nerves if we waltz!"

"Your cousin Naseby is to visit us, Estelle, at Walcot Park, so soon as we return, if he can," said the Countess, turning from Dora with a very dubious expression of eye, and closing a letter she had received; "his love-affair with that odious Irish girl is quite off, thank heaven!"

"How?--love of change, or change of love?"

"Neither."

"What then, mamma?"

"The Irish girl actually had a mind of her own, and preferred some one else even to a peer, an English peer!"

"I drain this clicquot to the young lady's happiness," said Sir Madoc.

"But all this is nothing to me, mamma," said Lady Estelle, coldly.

But I could see at a glance, that if it was unimportant to *her*, it was not so to her mother, his aunt, who would rather have had the young earl for her son-in-law than the old viscount, even though the patent of the latter had been expede by the royal Bluebeard, most probably for services that pertained more to knavery than knighthood.

"Well, Caradoc," said I, "is your despatch from the regiment?"

"Yes; from Price of ours. Nothing but rumours of drafts going eastward to make up the death-losses at Varna, and he fears our leave may be cancelled. 'Deuced awkward if we go soon,' he adds, 'as I have a most successful *affaire du c[oe]ur* on hand just now.'"

"When is he ever without one?" said I; and we both laughed.

Winifred's eyes were on me, and Caradoc's were on her, while I was sedulously attending to Lady Estelle. As for Guilfoyle, since the advent of his letter he had become quite silent. We were at the old game of cross-purposes; for it seems to be in love, as with everything else in life, that the obstacles in the way, and the difficulty of attainment, always enhance the value of the object to be won. Yet in the instance of Lady Estelle I was not so foolish as poor Price of ours, the butt of the mess, who always fell in love with the wrong person--to whom the pale widow, inconsolable in her first crape; the blooming bride, in her clouds of tulle and white lace; the girl just engaged, and who consequently saw but one man in the world, and that man her own *fiancé*; or any pretty girl whom he met just when the route came and the mess-plate was packed prior to marching--became invested with remarkable charms, and a sudden interest that made his susceptible heart feel sad and tender.

The ladies' letters opened up quite a budget of town news and gossip. To Sir Madoc, a genuine country gentleman, full only of field-sports, the prospects of the turnip crop and the grouse season, the county-pack and so forth, a conversation that now rose, chiefly on the coming fête on dresses, music, routs and Rotten-row, kettledrums and drawing-rooms,

and the town in general, proved somewhat of a bore. He fidgeted, and ultimately left for the stables, where he and Bob Spurrit had to hold a grave consultation on certain equine ailments. The ladies also rose to leave us; but Caradoc, Guilfoyle, and I lingered under the cool shadow of the oaks, and lit our cigars. With his silver case for holding the last-named luxuries, Guilfoyle unconsciously pulled forth a letter, which fell on the grass at my feet. Picking it up, I restored it to him; but brief though the action, I could not help perceiving it to be the letter he had just received, that it was addressed in a woman's hand, and had on the envelope, in coloured letters, the name "Georgette."

"Thanks," said he, with sudden irritation of manner, as he thrust it into a breast-pocket this time; "a narrow squeak that!" he added, slangily, with a half-muttered malediction.

I felt certain that there was a mystery in all this; that he feared something unpleasant might have been revealed, had that identical letter fallen into *other* hands, or under more prying eyes; and I remembered those trivial circumstances at a future, and to me rather harassing, time. I must own that this man was to me a puzzle. With all his disposition to boast, he never spoke of relations or of family; yet he seemed in perfectly easy circumstances; his own valet, groom, and horses were at Craigaderyn; he could bear himself well and with perfect ease in the best society; and it was evident that, wherever they came from, he was at present a man of pretty ample means. He possessed, moreover, a keen perception for appreciating individuals and events at their actual value; his manners were, *when he chose*, polished, his coolness imperturbable, and his *insouciance* sometimes amusing. For the present, it had left him.

"Beautiful brilliant that of yours, Mr. Guilfoyle," said Caradoc, to fish for another legend of the ring; but in vain, for Guilfoyle was no longer quite himself, though he had policy enough to feed the snarling cur Tiny in her basket, with choice morsels of cold fowl, as Lady Naseby's soubrette, Mademoiselle Babette, was waiting to carry it away. Since the remarks or *contretemps* concerning the York races he had been as mute

as a fish; and now, when he did begin to speak in the absence of Sir Madoc, I could perceive that gratitude for kindness did not form an ingredient in the strange compound of which his character was made up. Perhaps secret irritation at Sir Madoc's queries about the letter which so evidently disturbed his usual equanimity might have been the real spirit that moved him now to sneer at the old baronet's Welsh foibles, and particularly his weakness on the subject of pedigrees.

"You are to stay here for the 1st, I believe?" said I.

"Yes; but, the dooce! for what? Such a labour to march through miles of beans and growing crop, to knock over a few partridges and rabbits" (partwidges and wabbits, he called them), "which you can pay another to do much better for you."

"Sturdy Sir Madoc would hear this with incredulous astonishment," said I.

"Very probably. Kind fellow old Taffy, though," said he, while smoking leisurely, and lounging back in an easy garden-chair; "has a long pedigree, of course, as we may always remember by the coats-of-arms stuck up all over the house. 'County people' in the days of Howel Dha; 'county ditto' in the days of Queen Victoria, and likely to remain so till the next flood forms a second great epoch in the family history. Very funny, is it not? He reminds me of what we read of Mathew Bramble in *Humphry Clinker*--a gentleman of great worth and property, descended in a straight line by the female side from Llewellyn, Prince of Wales."

I was full of indignation on hearing my old friend spoken of thus, if not under his own roof, under his ancient ancestral oaks; but Philip Caradoc, more Celtic and fiery by nature, anticipated me by saying sharply, "Bad taste this, surely in you, Mr. Guilfoyle, to sneer thus at our hospitable entertainer; and believe me, sir, that no one treats lightly the pedigree of another who--who--"

"Ah, well--who what?"

"Possesses one himself," added Phil, looking him steadily in the face.

"Bah! I suppose every one has had a grandfather."

"Even you, Mr. Guilfoyle?" continued Caradoc, whose cheek began to flush; but the other replied calmly, and not without point,

"There is a writer who says, that to pride oneself on the nobility of one's ancestors is like looking among the roots for the fruit that should be found on the branches."

Finding that the conversation was taking a decidedly unpleasant turn, and that, though his tone was quiet and his manner suave, a glassy glare shone in the greenish-gray eyes of Guilfoyle, I said, with an assumed laugh,

"We must not forget the inborn ideas and the national sentiments of the Welsh--call them provincialisms if you will. But remember that there are eight hundred thousand people inspired by a nationality so strong, that they will speak only the language of the Cymri; and it is among those chiefly that our regiment has ever been recruited. But if the foibles--I cannot deem them folly--of Sir Madoc are distasteful to you, the charms of the scenery around us and those of our lady friends cannot but be pleasing."

"Granted," said he, coldly; "all are beautiful, even to Miss Dora, who looks so innocent."

"Who *is* so innocent by nature, Mr. Guilfoyle," said I, in a tone of undisguised sternness.

"Then it is a pity she permits herself to say--sharp things."

"With so much unintentional point, perhaps?"

"Sir!"

"Truth, then--which you will," said I, as we simultaneously rose to leave luncheon-table.

And now, oddly enough, followed by Winifred, Dora herself came again tripping down the broad steps of the perron towards us, exclaiming,

"Is not papa with you?--the tiresome old dear, he will be among the harriers or the stables of course!"

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"Only think, Mr. Hardinge, that poor woman we saw at church this morning, looking so pretty, so pale, and interesting, was found among the tombstones by Farmer Rhuddlan, quite in a helpless faint, after we drove away--so the housekeeper tells me; so we must find her out and succour her if possible."

"But who is she?" asked Caradoc.

"No one knows; she refused obstinately to give her name or tell her story ere she went away; but at her neck hangs a gold locket, with a crest, the date, 1st of September, on one side, and H. G. beautifully enamelled on the other. How odd--your initials, Mr. Guilfoyle!"

"You are perhaps not aware that my name is Henry Hawkesby Guilfoyle," said he, with ill-concealed anger, while he played nervously with his diamond ring.

"How intensely odd!" resumed his beautiful but unwitting tormentor; "H. H. G. were the three letters on the locket!"

"Did no one open it?" he asked.

"No; it was firmly closed."

"By a secret spring, no doubt."

Guilfoyle looked ghastly for a moment, or it might have been the effect of the sunlight flashing on his face through the waving foliage of the trees overhead; but he said laughingly,

"A droll coincidence, which under some circumstances, might be very romantic, but fortunately in the present has no point whatever. If my initials hung at your neck instead of hers, how happy I should be, Miss Dora!"

And turning the matter thus, by a somewhat clumsy compliment or bit of flattery, he ended an unpleasant conversation by entering the house with her and Caradoc.

Winifred remained irresolutely behind them.

"We were to visit my future comrade," said I.

"Come, then," said she, with a beautiful smile, and a soft blush of innocent pleasure.

CHAPTER X.--A PERILOUS RAMBLE.

Winifred Lloyd was, as Caradoc had said, a very complete and perfect creature. The very way her gloves fitted, the handsome form of her feet, the softness of her dark eyes, the tender curve of her lips, and, more than all, her winning manner--the inspiration of an innocent and guileless heart--made her a most desirable companion at all times; but with me, at present, poor Winifred was only the means to an end; and perhaps she secretly felt this, as she lingered pensively for a moment by

the marble fountain that stood before Craigaderyn Court, and played with her white fingers in the water, causing the gold and silver fish to dart madly to and fro. Above its basin a group of green bronze tritons were spouting, great Nile lilies floated on its surface, and over all was the crest of the Lloyds, also in bronze, a lion's head, gorged, with a wreath of oak. The notes of a harp came softly towards us through the trees as we walked onward, for old Owen Gwyllim the butler was playing in that most unromantic place his pantry, and the air was the inevitable "Jenny Jones."

From the lawn I led her by walks and ways forgotten since my boyhood, and since I had gone the same route with her birdnesting and nutting in those glorious Welsh woods, by hedgerows that were matted and interwoven with thorny brambles and bright wild-flowers, past laden orchards and picturesque farms, nooks that were leafy and green, and little tarns of gleaming water, that reflected the smiling summer sky; past meadows, where the sleek brown, or black, or brindled cattle were chewing the cud and ruminating knee-deep among the fragrant pasture; and dreamily I walked by her side, touching her hand from time to time, or taking it fairly in mine as of old, and occasionally enforcing what I said by a pressure of her soft arm within mine, while I talked to her, saying heaven knows what, but most ungratefully wishing all the time that she were Estelle Cressingham. All was soft and peaceful around us. The woods of Craigaderyn, glowing in the heat of the August afternoon, were hushed and still, all save the hum of insects, or if they stirred it was when the soft west wind seemed to pass through them with a languid sigh; and so some of the influences of a past time and a boyish love came over me; a time long before I had met the dazzling Estelle--a time when to me there had seemed to be but one girl in the world, and she was Winifred Lloyd--ere I joined the --th in the West Indies, or the Welsh Fusileers, and knew what the world was. I dreaded being betrayed into some tenderness as a treason to Lady Estelle; and fortunately we were not without some interruptions in our walk of a mile or so to visit her horned pet, whom she had sent forth for a last run on his native hills.

We visited Yr Ogof (or the cave) where one of her cavalier ancestors had hidden after the battle of Llandegai, in the Vale of the Ogwen, during the wars of Cromwell, and now, by local superstition, deemed an abode of the knockers, those supernatural guardians of the mines, to whom are known all the metallic riches of the mountains; hideous pigmy gnomes, who, though they can never be seen, are frequently heard beating, blasting, and boring with their little hammers, and singing in a language known to themselves only. Then we tarried by the heaped-up cairn that marked some long-forgotten strife; and then by the Maen Hir, a long boulder, under which some fabled giant lay; and next a great rocking stone, amid a field of beans, which we found Farmer Rhuddlan--a sturdy specimen of a Welsh Celt, high cheek-boned and sharp-eyed--contemplating with great satisfaction. High above the sea of green stalks towered that wizard altar, where whilom an archdruid had sat, and offered up the blood of his fellow-men to gods whose names and rites are alike buried in oblivion; but Strabo tells us that it was from the flowing blood of the victim that the Druidesses--virgins supposed to be endowed with the gift of prophecy--divined the events of the future; and this old stone, now deemed but a barrier to the plough, had witnessed those terrible observances.

Poised one block upon the other, resting on the space a sparrow alone might occupy, and having stood balanced thus mysteriously for uncounted ages, lay the rocking stone. The farmer applied his strong hand to the spheroidal mass, and after one or two impulses it swayed most perceptibly. Then begging me not to forget his son, who was with our Fusileers far away at Varna, he respectfully uncovered his old white head, and left us to continue his tour of the crops, but not without bestowing upon us a peculiar and knowing smile, that made the blood mantle in the peachlike cheeks of Winifred.

"How strange are the reflections these solemn old relics excite!" said she, somewhat hastily; "if, indeed, one may pretend to value or to think of such things in these days of ours, when picturesque superstition is

dying and poetry is long since dead."

"Poetry dead?"

"I think it died with Byron."

"Poetry can never die while beauty exists," said I, smiling rather pointedly in her face.

My mind being so filled with Estelle and her fancied image, caused me to be unusually soft and tender to Winifred. I seemed to be mingling one woman's presence with that of another. I regarded Winifred as the dearest of friends; but I loved Estelle with a passion that was full of enthusiasm and admiration.

"No two men have the same idea of beauty," said Winifred, after a pause.

"True, nor any two nations; it exists chiefly, perhaps, in the mind of the lover."

"Yet love has nothing exactly to do with it."

"Prove this," said I, laughing, as I caught her hand in mine.

"Easily. Ask a Chinese his idea of loveliness, and he will tell you, a woman with her eyebrows plucked out, the lids painted, her teeth blackened, and her feet shapeless; and what does the cynical Voltaire say?--'Ask a toad what is beauty, the supremely beautiful, and he will answer you, it is his female, with two round eyes projecting out of its little head, a broad flat neck, a yellow breast, and dark-brown back.' Even red hair is thought lovely by some; and did not Duke Philip the Good institute the order of the Golden Fleece of Burgundy in honour of a damsel whose hair was as yellow as saffron; and now, Harry Hardinge, what is *your* idea?"

"Can you ask me?" I exclaimed, with something of ardour, for she looked so laughingly bright and intelligent as she spoke; then divining that I was thinking of another, not of her, "for there is a thread in our thoughts even as there is a pulse in our hearts, and he who can hold the one knows how to think, and he who can move the other knows how to feel," she said, with a point scarcely meant.

"The eye may be pleased, the vanity flattered, and ambition excited by a woman of beauty, especially if she is one of rank; yet the heart may be won by one her inferior. Talking of beauty, Lady Naseby has striven hard to get the young earl, her nephew, to marry our friend, Lady Estelle."

"Would she have him?" I asked, while my cheek grew hot.

"I cannot say--but he declined," replied Winifred, pressing a wild rose to her nostrils.

"Declined--impossible!"

"Why impossible? But in her fiery pride Estelle will never, never forgive him; though he was already engaged to one whom he, then at least, loved well."

"Ah--the Irish girl, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Winifred, with a short little sigh, as she looked down.

"Such a girl as Estelle Cressingham must always find admirers."

"Hundreds; but as the estates, like the title, have passed to the next male heir, and Lady Naseby has only a life-rent of the jointure house in Hants--Walcot Park, a lovely place--she is anxious that her daughter should make a most suitable marriage."

"Which means lots of tin, I suppose?" said I, sourly.

"Exactly," responded Winifred, determined, perhaps, if I had the bad taste to speak so much of Estelle, to say unpleasant things; "and the favoured *parti* at present is Viscount Pottersleigh, who comes here to-morrow, as his letter informed her."

"Old Pottersleigh is sixty if he is a day!" said I, emphatically.

"What has age to do with the matter in view? Money and position are preferable to all fancies of the heart, I fear."

"Nay, nay, Winifred, you belie yourself and Lady Estelle too; love is before everything!"

She laughed at my energy, while I began to feel that, next to making love, there is nothing so pleasant or so suggestive as talking of it to a pretty girl; and I beg to assure you, that it was somewhat perilous work with one like Winifred Lloyd; a girl who had the sweetest voice, the most brilliant complexion, and the softest eyes perhaps in all North Wales. She now drew her hand away; till then I had half forgot it was *her* hand I had been holding.

"Remember that oft-quoted line in the song of Montrose," said she, pretty pointedly.

"Which? for I haven't an idea."

"'Love *one*--and love no more.'"

"The great marquis was wrong," said I; "at least, if, according to a more obscure authority in such matters, Price of ours, one may love many times and always truly."

"Indeed!" Her lip curled as she spoke.

"Yes; for may not the same charms, traits, manner, and beauty which lure us to love once, lure us to love again?"

Winifred actually sighed, with something very like irritation, as she said, "I think all this the most abominable sophistry, Mr. Hardinge, and I feel a hatred for 'Price of ours,' whoever he may be."

"Mister! Why I was Harry a moment ago."

"Well, here is the abode of Cameydd Llewellyn; and you must tell me what you think of your future Welsh comrade; his beard may be to the regimental pattern, though decidedly his horns and moustaches are not."

As she said this, again laughingly, we found ourselves close to a little hut that abutted on a thatched cottage and cow-house, in a most secluded place, a little glen or dell, over which the trees were arching, and so forming a vista, through which we saw Craigaderyn Court, as if in a frame of foliage. She opened a little wicket, and at the sound of her voice the goat came forth, dancing on his hind legs--a trick she had taught him--or playfully butting her skirts with his horns, regarding me somewhat dubiously and suspiciously the while with his great hazel eyes. He was truly a splendid specimen of the old Carnarvonshire breed of goats, which once ran wild over the mountains there, and were either hunted by dogs or shot with the bullet so lately as Pennant's time. His hair, which was longer than is usual with those of England, led me to fancy there was a Cashmerian cross in his blood; his black horns were two feet three inches long, and more than two feet from one sharp tip to the other. He was as white as the new-fallen snow, with a black streak down the back, and his beard was as venerable in proportion and volume as it was silky in texture.

"He is indeed a beautiful creature--a noble fellow!" I exclaimed, with genuine admiration.

"And just four years old. I obtained him when quite a kid."

"I am so loth that the Fusileers should deprive you of him."

"Talk not of that; but when you see my goat, my old pet Carneydd Llewellyn, marching proudly at their head, and decked with chaplets on St. David's day, when you are far, far away from us, you will--" she paused.

"What, Winifred?"

"Think sometimes of Craigaderyn--of to-day--and of me, perhaps," she added, with a laugh that sounded strangely unlike one.

"Do I require aught to make me think of you?" said I, patting kindly the plump, ungloved hand with which she was caressing the goat's head, and which in whiteness rivalled the hue of his glossy coat; and thereon I saw a Conway pearl, in a ring I had given her long ago, when she was quite a little girl.

"I hope not--and papa--I hope not."

The bright beaming face was upturned to me, and, as the deuce would have it, I kissed her: the impulse was irresistible.

She trembled then, withdrew a pace or two, grew very pale, and her eyes filled with tears.

"You should not have done that, Harry--I mean, Mr. Hardinge."

There was something wild and pitiful in her face.

"Tears?" said I, not knowing very well what to say; for "people often *do* say very little, when they mean a great deal."

"My old favourite will know the black ladders of Carneydd Llewellyn no more," said she, stooping over the goat caressingly to hide her confusion.

"But, Winifred--Miss Lloyd--why tears?"

"Can you ask me?" said she, her eyes flashing through them.

"Why, what a fuss you make! I have often done so--when a boy!"

"But you are no longer a boy; nor am I a girl, Mr. Hardinge."

"Do please call me Harry, like Sir Madoc," I entreated. "Not now--after this; and here comes Lady Estelle."

"Estelle!"

At that moment, not far from us, we saw Lady Naseby, driven in a pony-phaeton by Caradoc, and Lady Estelle with Guilfoyle a little way behind them, on horseback, and unaccompanied by any groom, coming sweeping at a trot down the wooded glen.

Such is the amusing inconsistency of the human heart--the male human heart, perhaps my lady readers will say--that though I had been more than flirting with Winifred Lloyd--on the eve of becoming too tender, perhaps--I felt a pang of jealousy on seeing that Guilfoyle was Lady Estelle's sole companion, for Dora was doubtless immersed in the details of her forthcoming fête.

Had she seen us?

Had she detected in the distance that little salute? If so, in the silly, kindly, half-flirting, and half-affectionate impulse which led me to kiss my beautiful companion and playfellow of the past years--the mere impulse of a moment--if mistaken, I might have ruined myself with her--perhaps with both.

"A lovely animal'! I hope you are gratified, Mr. Hardinge?" said Lady Estelle, with--but perhaps it was fancy--a curl on her red lip, as she reined-in her spirited horse sharply with one firm hand, and caressed his arching neck gracefully with the other, while he rose on his hind legs, and her veil flew aside.

Already dread of the future had chased away my first emotion of pique, nor was it possible to be long angry with Estelle; for with men and women alike, her beauty made her irresistible. Some enemies among the latter she undoubtedly had; they might condemn the regularity of her features as too classically severe, or have said that at times the flash of her dark eyes was proud or defiant; but the smile that played about her lip was so soft and winning that its influence was felt by all. Her perfect ease of manner seemed cold--very cold, indeed, when compared to the thoughts that burned in my own breast at that moment--dread that I might have been trifling with Winifred Lloyd, for whom I cherished a sincere and tender friendship; intense annoyance lest my friend Caradoc, who really loved her, might resent the affair; and, more than all, that she for whom I would freely have perilled limb and life might also resent, or mistake, the situation entirely. And in this vague mood of mind I returned with the little party to the house, where the bell had rung for tea, before dinner, which was always served at eight o'clock. As we quitted the goat, its keeper, an old peasant dame, wearing a man's hat and coat, with a striped petticoat and large spotted handkerchief, looked affectionately after Miss Lloyd, and uttered an exclamation in Welsh, which Caradoc translated to me as being,

"God bless her! May feet so light and pretty never carry a heavy heart!"

CHAPTER XI.--THE FÊTE CHAMPETRE.

How wild and inconceivable, abrupt, yet quite practicable, were the brilliant visions I drew, the projects I formed! Mentally I sprang over all barriers, cleared at a flying leap every obstacle. In fancy I achieved all my desires. I was the husband of Estelle; the chosen son-in-law of her mother--the man of all men to whom she would have entrusted the future happiness of her only daughter. The good old lady had sacrificed pride, ambition, and all to love. Time, life-usage, all became subservient to me when in these victorious moods. I had distanced all rivals--she was mine; I hers. I had cut the service, bidden farewell to the Royal Welsh; she, for a time at least, to London, the court, the Row, "society," the world itself for me; and were rusticating hand-in-hand, amid the woods of Walcot Park, or somewhere else, of which I had a very vague idea. But from these daydreams I had to rouse myself to the knowledge that, so far from being accepted, I had not yet ventured to propose; that I had more than one formidable rival; that other obstacles were to be overcome; and that Lady Naseby was as cold and proud and unapproachable as ever.

The day of Dora's fête proved a lovely one. The merry little creature--for she was much less in stature than her elder sister--with her bright blue eyes and wealth of golden hair, was full of smiles, pleasure, and impatience; and was as radiant with gems, the gifts of friends, as a young bride. I welcomed the day with vague hopes that grew into confidence, though I could scarcely foresee how it was to close for me, or all that was to happen. Though Caradoc and I had come from Winchester ostensibly to attend this fête, I must glance briefly at many of the details of it, and confine myself almost to the *dramatis personæ*. Suffice it to say that there was a militia band on one of the flower-terraces; there was a pretty dark-eyed Welsh gipsy, with black, dishevelled hair, who told fortunes, and picked up, but omitted to restore, certain stray spoons and forks; there was an itinerant Welsh harper, whom the staghound Brach, the same stately animal which I had seen on the rug before the hall-fire, inspired by that animosity which all dogs seem to have for mendicants, assailed about the calf of the leg, for which he seemed to have a particular fancy. So Sir Madoc had to plaster the bite with a fifty-pound

note. Then there was a prophetic hermit, in a moss-covered grotto, cloaked like a gray friar, and bearded like the pard; a wizard yclept Merlin, who, having imbibed too much brandy, made a great muddle of the predictions and couplets so carefully entrusted to him for judicious utterance; and who assigned the initials of Lady Estelle Cressingham to the portly old vicar, as those of his future spouse, and those of his lady, a stout matron with eight bantlings, to me, and so on.

The company poured in fast; and after being duly received by Sir Madoc and Miss Lloyd in the great drawing-room, literally crowded all the beautiful grounds, the band in white uniform on the terrace being a rival attraction to the great refreshment tent or marquee--a stately polychromed edifice, with gilt bells hanging from each point of the vandyked edging--wherein a standing luncheon was arranged, under the care of Owen Gwyllim; and over all floated a great banner, ermine and pean, with the lion rampant of the Lloyds. A ball was to follow in the evening. The floor of the old dining-hall had been waxed till it shone like glass for the dancers. Its walls were hung with evergreens and coloured lamps, and a select few were invited; but Fate ordained that neither Lady Estelle nor I were to figure in this, the closing portion of the festivities. A number of beautiful girls in charming toilettes were present. People of the best style, too, mingled with humble middle-class country folks--tenants and so forth. There were some officers from the detachments quartered in Chester, and several little half-known parsons, in Noah's-ark coats, who came sidling in, and intrenched themselves beside huge mammas in quiet corners, to discuss parish matters and general philanthropy through the medium of iced claret-cup and sparkling moselle. And there were present, too, as Guilfoyle phrased it, "some of those d--d fellows who write and paint, by Jove!"

On this day Guilfoyle, though he had carefully attired himself in correct morning costume, seemed rather preoccupied and irritable. The presence of Pottersleigh and so many others placed his society somewhat at a discount; and, glass in eye, he seemed to watch the arrival of the

lady guests, especially any who were darkly attired, with a nervous anxiety, which, somehow, I mentally connected with the pale woman in church, and Dora's story of the initials. There was undoubtedly some mystery about him. Viewed from the perron of the house, the scene was certainly a gay one--the greenness of the closely-mown lawn, dotted by the bright costumes of the ladies, and a few scarlet coats (among them Caradoc's and mine); the brilliance and the perfume of flowers were there; the buzz of happy voices, the soft laughter of well-bred women, and the strains of the band, as they ebbed and flowed on the gentle breeze of the sunny noon. Every way it was most enjoyable. Here on one side spread an English chase, with oaks as old, perhaps, as the days when "Beddgelert heard the bugle sound," leafy, crisp, and massive, their shadows casting a tint that was almost blue on the soft greensward, with the sea rippling and sparkling about a mile distant, where a portion of the chase ended at the edge of some lofty cliffs. On the other side rose the Welsh mountains, with all their gray rocks, huge boulders, and foaming waterfalls--mountains from where there seemed in fancy to come the scent of wild flowers, of gorse, and blackberries, to dispel the fashionable languor of the promenaders on the lawn. The leaves, the flowers, the trees of the chase, the ladies' dresses, and the quaint façade of the old Tudor mansion were all warm with sunshine.

Old Morgan Roots the gardener, to his great disgust, had been compelled to rifle the treasures of his hothouses, and to strip his shelves of the most wonderful exotics, to furnish bouquets for the ladies; for Morgan was proud of his floral effects, and when displaying his slippings from Kew and all the best gardens in England, tulips from Holland and the Cape, peonies from Persia, rhododendrons from Asia, azaleas from America, wax-like magnolias, and so forth, he was wont to exult over his rival, the vicar's Scotch gardener, whom he stigmatised as "a sassenach;" and not the least of his efforts were some superb roses, named the "Dora," in honour of the fair-haired heroine of the day. And Caradoc--who was a good judge of everything, from cutlets and clicquot to horses and harness, and had a special eye for ankles, insteps, and eyelashes,

style, and colour, &c.--declared the fête to be quite a success. As I looked around me, I could not but feel how England is pre-eminently, beyond all others, the land of fair women and of beauty. Lady Estelle, with her pale complexion and thick dark hair, her dress of light-blue silk, over which she wore a white transparent tunique, her tiny bonnet of white lace, her gloves and parasol of the palest silver-gray, seemed a very perfect specimen of her class; but until Lord Pottersleigh appeared, which was long after dancing had begun on the sward (by country visitors chiefly), she sat by the side of mamma, and declined all offers from partners. The Viscount--my principal *bête noire*--had arrived over-night in his own carriage from Chester, but did not appear at breakfast next morning, nor until fully midday, as he had to pass--so Dora whispered to me--several hours in an arm-chair, with his gouty feet enveloped in flannel, while he regaled himself by sipping colchicum and warm wine-whey, though he alleged that his lameness was caused by a kick from his horse; and now, when with hobbling steps he came to where Lady Naseby and her stately daughter were seated, he did not seem--his coronet and Order of the Garter excepted--a rival to be much dreaded by a smart Welsh Fusileer of five and twenty.

Fully in his sixtieth year, and considerably wasted--more, perhaps, by early dissipation than by time--the Viscount was a pale, thin, and feeble-looking man, hollow-chested and slightly bent, with an unsteadiness of gait, an occasional querulousness of manner and restlessness of eye, as if nervous of the approach of many of those among whom he now found himself, and whom he viewed as "bumpkins in a state of rude health." Guilfoyle, of whom he evidently had misgivings, he regarded with a cold and aristocratic stare, after carefully adjusting a gold eyeglass on his thin, aquiline nose, and yet they had been twice introduced elsewhere. His features were good. In youth he had been deemed a handsome man; but now his brilliant teeth were of Paris, and what remained of his hair was carefully dyed a clear dark brown, that consorted but ill with the wrinkled aspect of his face, and the withered appearance of his thin white hands, when he ungloved, which was

seldom. His whole air and style were so different from those, of hearty and jolly Sir Madoc, whose years were the same, and who was looking so bland, so bald, and shiny in face and brow, so full and round in waistcoat, with one of the finest camellias in his button-hole, "just like Morgan Roots the gardener going to church on Sunday," as Dora had it, while he watched the dancers, and clapped his hands to the music.

"Ha, Pottersleigh," said he, "you and I have done with this sort of thing now; but I have seen the day, when I was young, less fleshy, and didn't ride with a crupper, I could whirl in the waltz like a spinning jenny."

To this awkward speech the Viscount, who affected juvenility, responded by a cold smile; and as he approached and was welcomed by Lady Naseby and her daughter, the latter glanced at me, and I could detect an undefinable expression, that savoured of amusement, or disdain, or annoyance, or all together, ending with a haughty smile, hovering on her dark and ever-sparkling eyes; for she knew by past experience, that from thenceforward, with an air of proprietary that was very provoking, he would be certain to hover constantly beside her; and now, after paying the usual compliments to the two ladies, his lordship condescended to honour me with a glance and a smile, but not with his hand.

"Ah, how do you do, Mr. Hardinge--or shall I have the pleasure of saying Captain Hardinge?" said he.

"Fortune has not so far favoured me--I am only a sub still."

"So was Wellington in his time," said Sir Madoc, tapping me on the shoulder.

"Ah, but you'll soon be off to the East now, I suppose." (His eyes expressed the words, "I hope.") "We shall soon come to blows with those Russian fellows, and then promotions will come thick and fast. I have it

as a certainty from Aberdeen himself, that a landing somewhere on the enemy's coast cannot be much longer delayed now."

"And with one-half our army dead, and the other half worn out by camp-fever, cholera, and sufferings at Varna, we shall take the field with winter before us--a Russian winter, too!" said Sir Madoc, who was a bitter opponent of the ministry.

Ere Pottersleigh could reply, to avert any discussion of politics, the Countess spoke.

"I trust," said she, "that the paragraph in the *Court Journal* and other papers, which stated that your title is about to be made an earldom, is something more than mere rumour?"

"Much more, I have the pleasure to inform you," mumbled this hereditary legislator. "I have already received official notice of the honour intended me by her Majesty. I supported the Aberdeen ministry so vigorously throughout this Russian affair, clearing them, so far as in me lay, from the allegations of vacillation, that in gratitude they were bound to recognise my services."

He played with his eyeglass, and glanced at Estelle. She seemed to be looking intently at the shifting crowd; yet she heard him, for a slight colour crossed her cheek.

"So Potter is to be an earl," thought I; "and she perhaps is contrasting *his* promotion with that which I have to hope for."

Even this brief conversation by its import made me fear that my dreams might never come to pass--that my longings were too impossible for fulfilment. I envied Caradoc, who, having no distinction of rank to contend with in his love affair, seemed, to be getting on very well with Winifred Lloyd, who, to his great delight, had made him her *aide-de-camp*, and useful friend during the day.

"Our troops will find it tough work encountering the Russians, I expect," said Lord Pottersleigh; "for although the rank and file are utter barbarians, Mr. Hardinge, many of their officers are men of high culture, and all regard the Czar as a demigod, and Russia as holy."

"I met some of them when I was in the north of Europe," said Guilfoyle--who, being rather ignored by Pottersleigh, felt ruffled, if not secretly enraged and disposed to contradict him; "and though I think all foreigners usually absurd--"

"Ah, that is a thoroughly English and somewhat provincial idea," said his lordship, quietly interrupting him; "but I have read of an old Carib who said, 'The only obstinate savages I have met are the English; they adopt none of our customs.'"

"To adopt their *dress* might have been difficult in those days; but all foreigners, and especially Russians, are somewhat strange, my lord, when judged by an English standard. I can relate a curious instance of attempted peculation in a Russian official, such as would never occur with one occupying a corresponding position here. When *attaché* at the court of Catzenelnbogen, I once visited a wealthy Russian landowner, a Count Tolstoff, who lived near Riga, at a time when he was about to receive the sum of eighty thousand silver roubles from the imperial treasury, for hemp, timber, and other produce of his estate, sold for the use of the navy. Ivan Nicolaevitch, the Pulkovnich commanding the marine infantry stationed in the fortress of Dunamunde, was to pay this money; but that official informed Tolstoff verbally--he was too wary to commit anything to paper--that unless six thousand of the roubles were left in his hands, the whole might be lost by the way, as my friend's residence was in a solitary place, and the neighbourhood abounded with lawless characters.

"On Tolstoff threatening to complain to the Emperor, the Pulkovnich most unwillingly handed over the entire sum, which was delivered in great state by a praperchich, or ensign, and six soldiers; and there we

thought the matter would end. But that very night, as we sat at supper, smoking our meerschaums to digest a repast of mutton with mushrooms, *compote* of almonds and stuffed carrots--carrots scooped out like pop-guns, and loaded with mincemeat--the dining-room was softly entered by six men dressed like Russian peasants, with canvas craftans and rope girdles, bark shoes and long beards, their faces covered with crape. They threatened me with instant death by the pistol if I dared to stir; and pinioning my friend to a chair, placed the barrel of another to his head, and demanded the treasure, or to be told where it was.

"Tolstoff, who was a very cool fellow, gave me a peculiar smile, and told me in French to open the lower drawer of his escritoire, and give them every kopec I found there.

"On obtaining permission from the leader, I crossed the room, and found in the drawer indicated no money, but a brace of revolver pistols. With these, which luckily were loaded and capped, I shot down two of the intruders, and the rest fled. On tearing the masks from the fallen men, we discovered them to be--whom think you? The Pulkovnich Nicholaevitch and the praperchich of the escort! There was an awful row about the affair, as you may imagine; but in a burst of gratitude my friend gave me this valuable ring, a diamond one, which I have worn ever since."

"God bless my soul, what a terrible story!" exclaimed Pottersleigh, regarding the ring with interest; for Guilfoyle usually selected a new audience for each of these anecdotes, by which he hoped to create an interest in himself; and certainly he seemed to do so for a time in the mind of the somewhat simple old lord, who now entered into conversation with him on the political situation, actually took his arm, and they proceeded slowly across the lawn together. I was sorry Caradoc had not overheard the new version of the ring, and wondered how many stories concerning it the proprietor had told to others, or whether he had merely a stock on hand, for chance narration. Was it vanity, art, or

weakness of intellect that prompted him? Yet I have known a Scotch captain of the line, a very shrewd fellow, who was wont to tell similar stories of a ring, and, oddly enough, over and over again to the *same* audience at the mess-table.

Being rid of both now, I resolved to lose no time in taking advantage of the situation. Sir Madoc and "mamma" were in the refreshment tent, where I hoped they were enjoying themselves; Dora was busy with a young sub from Chester--little Tom Clavell of the 19th--who evidently thought her fête was "awfully jolly;" Caradoc had secured Winifred for one dance--she could spare him but one--and his usual soldierly swing was now reduced to suit her measure, as they whirled amid the throng on the smoothly-shorn turf.

CHAPTER XII.--ON THE CLIFFS.

Lady Estelle received me with a welcome smile, for at that time all around her were strangers; and I hoped--nay, felt almost certain--that pleasure to see me inspired it, for on my approach she immediately rose from her seat, joined me, and as if by tacit and silent consent, we walked onward together. Pottersleigh's presence at Craigaderyn Court, and the rumours it revived; something cool and patronising in his manner towards me, for he had not forgotten *that* night in Park-lane; Lady Naseby's influence against me; the chances that some sudden military or political contingency might cut short my leave of absence; the certainty that ere long I should have to "go where glory waited" me, and perhaps something less pleasant in the shape of mutilation--the wooden leg which Dora referred to--a coffinless grave in a ghastly battle trench--all

rendered my anxiety to come to an understanding with Lady Estelle irrepressible. My secret was already known to Phil Caradoc, fully occupied though he was with his own passion for Winifred Lloyd; and I felt piqued by the idea of being less successful than I honestly hoped he was, for Phil was the king of good fellows, and one of my best friends.

"You have seemed very *triste* to-day--looking quite as if you lived in some thoughtful world of your own," said Lady Estelle, when she left her seat; "neither laughing nor dancing, scarcely even conversing, and certainly not with me. Why is this?"

"You have declined all dancing, hence the music has lost its zest for me."

"It is not brilliant; besides, it is somewhat of a maypole or harvest-home accomplishment, dancing on the grass; pretty laborious too! And then, as Welsh airs predominate, one could scarcely waltz to the Noble Race of Shenkin."

"You reserve yourself for the evening, probably?"

"Exactly. I infinitely prefer a well-waxed floor to a lawn, however well mown and rolled. But concerning your--what shall I term it--sadness!"

"Why ask me when you may divine the cause, though I dare not explain--here at least?"

After a little pause she disengaged two flowers from her bouquet, and presenting them to me with an arch and enchanting smile--for when beyond her mother's ken, she could at times be perfectly natural--she said,

"At this floral *fête champêtre*, I cannot permit you to be the only undecorated man."

"Being in uniform, I never thought of such an ornament."

"Wear these, then," said she, placing them in a button-hole.

"As your gift and for your sake?"

"If you choose, do so."

"Ah, who would not but choose?" said I, rendered quite bright and gay even by such a trifle as this. "But Lady Estelle, do you know what these are emblematic of?"

"In the language of the flowers, do you mean?"

"Of course; what else could he mean?" said a merry voice; and the bright face of Dora, nestled amid her golden hair, appeared, as she joined us, flushed with her dancing, and her breast palpitating with pleasure, at a time when I most cordially wished her elsewhere. "Yes," she continued, "there is a pansy; that's for thought, as Ophelia says--and a rosebud; that is for affection."

"But I don't believe in such symbolism, Dora; do you. Mr. Hardinge?"

"At this moment I do, from my soul."

She laughed, or affected to laugh, at my earnestness; but it was not displeasing to her, and we walked slowly on. Among the multitude of strangers--to us they were so, at least--to isolate ourselves was comparatively easy now. Besides, it is extremely probable that under the eyes of so many girls she had been rather bored by the senile assiduity of her old admirer; so, avoiding the throng around the dancers, the band, and the luncheon marquee, we walked along the terraces towards the chase, accompanied by Dora, who opened a wicket in a hedge, and led us by a narrow path suddenly to the cliffs that overhung the sea. Here we were quite isolated. Even the music of the band failed to reach us; we heard only the monotonous chafing of the waves below, and the sad cry of an occasional sea-bird, as it swooped up or down from its eyrie. The

change from the glitter and brilliance of the crowded lawn to this utter solitude was as sudden as it was pleasing. In the distance towered up Great Orme's Head, seven hundred and fifty feet in height; its enormous masses of limestone rock abutting against the foam, and the ruins of Pen-y-Dinas cutting the sky-line. The vast expanse of the Irish Sea rolled away to the north-westward, dotted by many a distant sail; and some eighty feet below us the surf was rolling white against the rocky base of the headland on which we stood.

"We are just over the Bôd Mynach, or 'monk's dwelling,'" said Dora. "Have you not yet seen it, Estelle?"

"No; I am not curious in such matters."

"It is deemed one of the most interesting things in North Wales, quite as much so as St. Tudno's Cradle, or the rocking-stone on yonder promontory. Papa is intensely vain of being its proprietor. Gruffyd ap Madoc hid here, when he fled from the Welsh after his desertion of Henry III.; so it was not made yesterday. Let us go down and rest ourselves in it."

"Down the cliffs?' exclaimed Lady Estelle, with astonishment.

"Yes--why not? There is an excellent path, with steps hewn in the rock. Harry Hardinge knows the way, I am sure."

"As a boy I have gone there often, in search of puffins' nests; but remember that Lady Estelle--"

"Is not a Welsh girl of course," said Dora.

"Nor a goat, like Carneydd Llewellyn," added her friend. "But with Mr. Hardinge's hand to assist you," urged Dora. "Well, let us make the essay at once, nor lose time, ere we be missed," said the other, her mind no doubt reverting to mamma and Lord Pottersleigh.

I began to descend the path first, accepting with pleasure the office of leading Lady Estelle, who for greater security drew off a glove and placed her hand in mine, firmly and reliantly, though the path, a ladder of steps cut in the living rock, almost overhung the sea, and the descent was not without its perils. The headland was cleft in two by some throe of nature, and down this chasm poured a little stream, at the mouth of which, as in a diminutive bay, a gaily-painted pleasure-boat of Sir Madoc's, named the "Winifred," was moored, and it seemed to be dancing on the waves almost beneath us.

We had barely proceeded some twenty feet down the cliff when Dora, instead of following us, exclaimed that she had dropped a bracelet on the path near the wicket, but we were to go on, and she would soon rejoin us. As she said this she disappeared, and we were thus left alone. To linger where we stood, almost in mid-air, was not pleasant; to return to the edge of the cliff and await her there, seemed a useless task. Why should we not continue to descend, as she must soon overtake us? I could read in the proud face of Lady Estelle, as we paused on that ladder of rock, with her soft and beautiful hand in mine, that she felt in a little dilemma. So did I, but my heart beat happily; to have her so entirely to myself, even for ten minutes, was a source of joy.

While lingering thus, I gradually led our conversation up to the point I wished, by talking of my too probable speedy departure for another land; of the happy days like the present, which I should never forget; of herself. My lips trembled as my heart seemed to rise to them; and forgetting the perilous place in which we stood, and remembering only that her hand was clasped in mine, I began to look into her face with an expression of love and tenderness which she could not mistake; for her gaze soon became averted, her bosom heaved, and her colour came and went; and so, as the minutes fled, we were all unaware that Dora had not yet returned; that the sultry afternoon had begun to darken as heavy dun clouds rolled up from the seaward, and the air become filled with electricity; and that a sound alleged to be distant thunder had been

heard at Craigaderyn Court, causing some of the guests to prepare, for departure, despite Sir Madoc's assurances that no rain would fall, as the glass had been rising.

Dora was long in returning; so long that, instead of waiting or retracing our steps, proceeding hand in hand, and more than once Lady Estelle having to lean on my shoulder for support, we continued to descend the path in the face of the cliff--a path that ultimately led us into a terrible catastrophe.

CHAPTER XIII.--A PROPOSAL.

A long time elapsed and we did not return, but amid the bustle that reigned in and around Craigaderyn Court, our absence was not observed so soon as it might otherwise have been, the attention of the many guests being fully occupied by each other. The proposal of Dora's health devolved upon Lord Pottersleigh as the senior bachelor present, and it was drunk amid such cheers as country gentlemen alone can give. Then Sir Madoc, who had a horror of after-dinner speeches in general, replied tersely and forcibly enough, because the words of thanks and praise for his youngest girl came straight from his affectionate heart; but his white handkerchief was freely applied to the nervous task of polishing his forehead, which gave him a sense of relief; for the worthy old gentleman was no orator, and closed his response by drinking to the health of all present in Welsh.

"Our good friend's ideas are somewhat antiquated," said Pottersleigh to Guilfoyle, who now stuck to him pretty closely; "but he is a thorough gentleman of an old school that is passing away."

His lordship, however, looked the older man of the two.

"Antiquated! By Jove, I should think so," responded the other, who instinctively disliked his host; "ideas old as the days when people made war without powder and shot, went to sea without compasses, and pegged their clothes for lack of buttons; but he is an hospitable old file, and his wine--this Château d'Yquem, for instance, is excellent."

Pottersleigh gave the speaker a quiet stare, and then, as if disliking this style of comment, turned to Lady Naseby for the remainder of the repast.

The overcasting of the day and a threatening of rain had put an end to much of the dancing on the flower-terrace, and of the promenading in the garden and grounds. The proposal of Dora's health had been deemed the close of the fête; the servants had begun to prepare for the ball, and many of the guests, whose invitation did not include that portion of the festivities--for the grounds of course, would hold more than the hall--were beginning to depart, while a few still lingered in the conservatories, the library, or the picture gallery; thus, though Caradoc was looking through them for me, with a shrewd idea that I was with Lady Estelle, he could not for the life of him imagine *where*; besides, Phil was anxious to make the most of his time with Miss Lloyd.

The breaking of the guests into groups caused our absence to be long unnoticed, especially while carriages, gigs, drags, wagonnettes, and saddle-horses were brought in succession to the door; cloaks and shawls put on, ladies handed in, and the stream of vehicles went pouring down the long lime avenue and out of the park.

"You have danced but once to-day with Mr. Caradoc, he has told me," said Dora in a low voice, as she passed her sister.

"I had so many to dance with--so many to introduce; and then, think of the evening before us."

"He loves you quite passionately, I think, Winny dear; more than words can tell."

"So it would seem," replied Winifred, smiling over her fan. "Why--how?"

"He has never spoken to me on the subject."

"He will do so before this evening is over, or I am no true prophetess," said Dora, as she threw back the bright masses of her hair.

"That I don't believe."

"Why?"

"Because he wears at his neck a gold locket, the contents of which no one has seen; and Mr. Guilfoyle assures me that it holds the likeness of a lady."

"Well time will prove," replied Dora, as she was again led away by her new admirer, the little sub from Chester; but her prediction came true.

Winifred felt instinctively that she was the chief attraction to Caradoc, and was exciting in his breast emotions to which she could not respond. Again and again when asking her to dance, she had urged in reply, that he would please her more by dancing with others, as there were present plenty of country girls to whom a red coat was quite a magnet; so poor Caradoc found plenty of work cut out for him. Pressed at last by him, Winifred said, while fanning herself,

"Do excuse me; to-night I shall reward you fully; but meanwhile we may take a little promenade. I think all who are to remain must know each other pretty well now;" and taking his arm they passed from the

great marquee along the now deserted terrace, to find that the sky was so overcast and the wind so high, that they turned into an alley of the conservatory, where she expected to find some of their friends, but it was empty; and as Caradoc's face, and the tremulous inflections of his voice, while he was uttering mere commonplaces about the sudden change of the weather, the beauty of the flowers, the elegance of the conservatory, and so forth, told her what was passing in his mind, she became perplexed annoyed with herself, and said hurriedly,

"Let us seek Lady Naseby; I fear that we are quite neglecting her--and she is somewhat particular."

"One moment, Miss Lloyd, ere we go; I have so longed for an opportunity to speak with you--alone, I mean--for a moment--even for a moment," said he.

Winifred Lloyd knew what was coming; there was a nervous quivering of her upper lip, which was a short one, and showed a small portion of her white teeth, usually imparting an expression of innocence to her face, while its normal one was softness combined with great sweetness. Caradoc had now possessed himself of her right hand, thus without breaking away from him, and making thereby a species of "scene" between them, an episode to be avoided, she could not withdraw, but stood looking shyly and blushingly half into his handsome face, while he spoke to her with low and broken but earnest utterances.

"I have decoyed you hither," said he, "and you will surely pardon me for doing so, when you think how brief is my time now, here, in this happy home of yours--even in England itself; and when I tell you how anxious I have been to--to address you--"

"Mr. Caradoc," interrupted the girl, now blushing furiously behind her fan, "your moments will soon become minutes!"

"Would that the minutes might become hours, and the hours, days and years, could I but spend them with you! Listen to me, Miss Lloyd--"

"Not at present--do, pray, excuse me--I wish to speak with Dora."

But instead of having her hand released, it was now pressed by Caradoc between both of his.

"I will not detain you very long," said he, sadly, almost reproachfully; "you know that I love you; every time my eyes have met yours, every time I have spoken, my voice must have told you that I do dearly, and if the fondest emotions of my heart--"

"A soldier's heart, of which little scraps and shreds have been left in every garrison town?"

"Do not laugh at my honest earnestness!" urged Caradoc, with a deep sigh.

"Pardon me, I do not laugh; O think not that I could be guilty of such a thing!" replied Winifred, colouring deeper than ever.

Beautiful though she was, and well dowered too, this was the first proposal or declaration that had been made to her. The speaker was eminently handsome, his voice and eyes were full of passion and earnestness, and she could not hear him without a thrill of pleasure and esteem.

"I know that I am not worthy of you, perhaps; but--"

"I thank you, dear Mr. Caradoc, but--but--more is impossible."

"Impossible--why?"

She grew quite pale now, but he still retained her hand; and her change of colour was, perhaps, unseen by him, for there was little light in the conservatory, the evening clouds being dark and dense without.

"Miss Lloyd--Winifred--dearest Winifred--I love you, love you with all my heart and soul!"

"Do not say so, I implore you!" said she in an agitated voice, and turning away her head.

"Do you mean to infer that you are already engaged?"

"No."

"Or that you love another?"

"That is not a fair question," she replied, with a little hauteur of manner.

"It is, circumstanced as I am, and after the avowal I have made."

"Well, I do--not."

"And yet you cannot love me? Alas, I am most unfortunate!"

"Let this end, dear Mr. Caradoc," said Winifred, almost sobbing, and deeply repenting that she had taken his arm for a little promenade that was to end in a proposal. Phil, being in full uniform, played with, or swung somewhat nervously, the tassels of his crimson sash, a favourite resort of young officers when in any dubiety or dilemma. After a little pause--

"May I speak to Sir Madoc on the subject?" he asked.

"No."

"Perhaps my friend Harry Hardinge might advise--"

"Nay, for Heaven's sake don't confer with him on the matter at all!"

"Why?" said he, startled by her earnestness.

"Would you make love to me through *him*--through another?"

"You entirely mistake my meaning."

"What *do* you mean?"

"Simply what I have said; that I love you, esteem and admire you; that you are, indeed, most dear to me, and that if I had the approval--"

"Of the lady whose likeness is in your locket; so treasured that a secret spring secures it!" said she, suddenly remembering Dora's words as a means of escape.

"Yes, especially with her approval. I should then be happy, indeed. I know not how you came to know of it; but shall I show you the likeness?"

"If you choose," said Winifred, thinking in her heart, "Poor fellow, it must be his mother's miniature;" but when Phil touched a spring and the locket flew open she beheld a beautiful coloured photo of *herself*.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "how came you by this?"

"Hardinge had two in the barracks, and I begged one from him."

"Hardinge--Harry Hardinge! That was most unfair of him," said she, her agitation increasing; "he is one of our oldest friends."

"May I be permitted to keep it?"

"O, no; not there--not there, in a locket at your neck."

"Be it so; your slightest wish is law to me; but be assured, Miss Lloyd, the heart near which it lies was never offered to woman before."

"I can well believe you; but--hush, here are people coming!"

Sir Madoc and Lady Naseby entered the conservatory somewhat hurriedly, followed by two or three of the guests.

"Lady Estelle! Is Lady Estelle here?" they asked, simultaneously.

"No," replied Caradoc.

"Nor Harry Hardinge?"

"We are quite alone, papa," said Winifred, in a voice the agitation of which, at another time, must have been apparent to all; for no woman can hear a declaration of love or receive a proposal quite unconcerned, especially from a handsome young fellow who was so earnest as Philip Caradoc; around whom the coming departure for the seat of war shed a halo of melancholy interest, and who, by the artless production of the locket, proved that he had loved her for some time past, and secretly too.

"What the deuce is the meaning of this?" exclaimed Sir Madoc, with an expression of comicality, annoyance, and alarm mingling in his face; "the servants can nowhere find her!"

"Find who?" asked Lord Pottersleigh, opening his snuffbox as he shambled forward.

"Why, Lady Estelle."

His lordship took a pinch, paused for the refreshing titillation of a sneeze, and then said,

"Indeed--surprising--very!"

"And Hardinge is missing, too, you say?" said Phil. "How odd!"

"Odd! egad, I think it *is* odd; they have not been seen by any one for more than two hours, and a regular storm has come on!"

Phil and Miss Lloyd had been too much occupied, or they must have remarked the bellowing of the wind without and the sudden darkening of the atmosphere.

"O papa, papa!" exclaimed Dora, now rushing in from the lawn, "something dreadful must have happened. I left them on the verge of the cliffs; returning to look for the bracelet you gave me, I met my partner,

Mr. Clavell of the 19th; we began dancing again, and I forgot all about them."

"On the cliffs!" exclaimed several voices, reprehensibly and fearfully.

"Yes," continued Dora, beginning to weep; "I took them through the park wicket, and suggested a visit to the Bôd Mynach."

"Suggested this to Estelle! She is not, as we are, used to such paths and places, and you tell us of it only now!" exclaimed Winifred, with an expression of reproach and anguish sparkling in her eyes.

"My God, an accident must have occurred! The wind--weather--compose yourself, Lady Naseby; Gwyllim, ring the house-bell, and summon every one," cried Sir Madoc; "not a moment is to be lost."

"O, what is all this you tell me now, Dora?" exclaimed Winifred, as she started from the conservatory, with her lips parted, her dark eyes dilated, and her hair put back by both her trembling hands.

Poor Phil Caradoc and his proposal were alike forgotten now; and he began to fear that, like Hugh Price of ours, in making love he had made some confounded mistake.

Querulous, and useless so far as searching or assisting went, Lord Pottersleigh nevertheless saw the necessity of affecting to do something, as a man, as a gentleman, and a very particular friend of the Naseby family. Accoutred in warm mufflings by his valet, with a mackintosh, goloshes, and umbrella, he left the house half an hour after every one else, and pottered about the lawn, exclaiming from time to time,

"Such weather! such a sky! ugh, ugh! what the devil can have happened?" till a violent fit of coughing, caused by the keen breeze from the sea, and certain monitory twinges of gout, compelled him to return to his room, and wait the event there, making wry faces and sipping his colchicum, while sturdy old Sir Madoc conducted the search on

horseback, galloping knee-deep among fern, searching the vistas of the park, and sending deer, rabbits, and hares scampering in every direction before him. Above the bellowing of the stormy wind, that swept the freshly torn leaves like rain against the walls and mullioned windows of the old house, or down those long umbrageous vistas where ere long the autumn spoil would be lying thick, rose and fell the clangour of the house-bell. Servants, grooms, gamekeepers, and gardeners were despatched to search, chiefly in the wild vicinity of the now empty Bôd Mynach; but no trace could be found of Lady Estelle or her squire, save a white-laced handkerchief, which, while a low cry of terror escaped her, Lady Naseby recognised as belonging to her daughter. On it were a coronet and the initials of her name.

It had been found by Phil Caradoc with the aid of a lantern, when searching along the weedy rocks between the silent cavern and the seething sea, which was now black with the gathered darkness and a mist from the west.

There was no ball at Craigaderyn Court that night.

CHAPTER XIV.--THE UNFORESEEN.

In this world, events unthought of and unforeseen are always happening; so, as I have hinted, did it prove with me, on the epoch of Dora's birthday fête. It was not without considerable difficulty and care on my side, trepidation and much of annoyance at Dora on that of Lady Estelle, mingled with a display of courage which sprang from her pride, that I conducted her by the hand down the old and time-worn flight of

narrow steps--which had been hewn, ages ago, by some old Celtic hermit in the face of the cliff--till at last we stood on the little plateau that lies between the mouth of his abode and the sea, which was chafing and surging there in green waves, that the wind was cresting with snowy foam.

On our right the headland receded away into a wooded dell, that formed part of Craigaderyn Park. There a little *rhaidr* or cascade came plashing down a fissure in the limestone rocks, and fell into a pool, where a pointed pleasure-boat, named the Winifred, was moored. On our left the headland, that towered some eighty feet above us, formed part of the bluffs or sea-wall that stretched away to the eastward, and, sheer as a rampart, met the waves of the wide Irish Sea. Before us opened the arched entrance of the monk's abode--a little cavern or cell, that had been hollowed by no mortal hand. Its echoes are alleged to be wonderful; and it has been of old used as a hiding-place in times of war and trouble, and by smugglers for storing goods, where the knights of Craigaderyn could find them without paying to the king's revenue. It has evidently been what its name imports--the chapel and abode of some forgotten recluse. A seat of stones goes round the interior, save at the entrance. A stone pillar or altar had stood in its centre. A font or stone basin is there, and from it there flows a spring of clear water, with which the follower of St. David was wont to baptise the little savages of Britannia Secunda; and where now, in a more pleasant and prosaic age, it has supplied the tea and coffee kettles of many a joyous party, who came hither boating or fishing from Craigaderyn Court; and above that stone basin the hermit's hand has carved the somewhat unpronounceable Welsh legend:

"Heb Dduw, heb ddim."[1]

"A wonderful old place! But I have seen caverns enough elsewhere, and this does not interest me. I am no archæologist," said Lady Estelle--"besides, where is Dora?" she added, looking somewhat blankly up the ladder of steps in the cliff, by which we were to return: and she speedily became much less alive to the beauty of the scenery than to a sense of danger and awkwardness in her position.

There was no appearance of Dora Lloyd, and we heard no sound in that secluded place, save the chafing of the surf, the equally monotonous pouring of the waterfall, and the voices of sea-birds as they skimmed about us.

I thought that Lady Estelle leant upon my arm a little heavier than usual, and remembered that, when I took her hand in mine to guide her down, she left it there firmly and confidingly.

"May I show you the grotto?" said I; and my heart beat tumultuously while I looked in her face, the rare beauty of which was now greatly enhanced by a flush, consequent on our descent and the sea-breeze.

"O no, no, thanks very much; but let us return to the park ere we be missed. Give me your hand, Mr. Hardinge. If we came down so quickly, surely we may as quickly ascend again."

"Shall I go first?"

"Please, do. The caves of Fingal, or Elephanta and Ellora to boot, were not worth this danger."

"I have come here many a time for a few sea-birds' eggs," said I, laughing, to reassure her.

But the ascent proved somehow beyond her power. The wind had risen fast, and was sweeping round the headland now, blowing her dress about her ankles, and impeding her motions. She had only ascended a little way when giddiness or terror came over her. She lost all presence of

mind, and began to descend again. Thrice, with my assistance, she essayed to climb the winding steps that led to the summit, and then desisted. She was in tears at last. As all confidence had deserted her, I proposed to bind her eyes with a handkerchief; but she declined. I also offered, if she would permit me to leave her for a few minutes, to reach the summit and bring assistance; but she was too terrified to remain alone on the plateau of rock, between the cell and the water.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, when, like myself, perhaps she thought of Lady Naseby, "what shall I do? And all this has been brought about by the heedless suggestions of Dora Lloyd--by her folly and impulsiveness! Will she never return to advise us?"

Nearly half-an-hour had elapsed, and a dread that she, that I--that both of us--must now be missed, and the cause of surmise, roused an anger and pride in her breast, that kindled her eye and affected her manner, thus effectually crushing any attempt to intrude my own secret thoughts upon her.

"What *are* we to do, Mr. Hardinge? Here we cannot stay; I dare not climb; not a boat is to be seen; the sun has almost set, and see, how dense a mist is coming on!"

I confess that I had not observed this before, so much had I been occupied by her own presence, by her beauty, and by entreating that she would "screw her courage to the sticking-point," and ascend where I had seen the two pretty Lloyds trip from step to step in their mere girlhood, to the horror, certainly, of their French governess; but knowing that a fog from the sea was rolling landward in dense masses, and that the evening would be a stormy one, I felt intense anxiety for Lady Estelle, and certainly left nothing unsaid to reassure her, firmly yet delicately--for good breeding becomes a second nature, and is not forgotten even in times of dire emergency; then how much less so when we love, and love as I did Estelle Cressingham?--but all my arguments were in vain. There

was in her dark eyes a wild and startled brilliance, a hectic spot on each pale cheek. Her innate pride remained, but her courage was gone. She trembled, and her breath came short and quick as she said,

"Who would have dreamt that I--*I* should have acted thus? More heedlessly even than Dora, for she is a Welsh girl, and, like a goat, is used to such places. And now there is no aid--not even the smallest boat in sight!"

"Of what have I been thinking!" I exclaimed. "The pleasure-boat which belongs to the grotto is moored yonder in the creek, where some visitor, who preferred the short cut up the cliff, has evidently left it. If you will permit me to place you in it, I can row across the mouth of the waterfall to the other side, where a Chinese bridge will enable us at once to reach the lawn."

"Why did you not think of this before?" she asked, with something of angry reproach almost flashing in her eyes.

"Will you make the attempt?"

"Of course. O, would that you had thought of it before!"

"Come, then, though the wind has risen certainly; and among so many guests, our absence may have been unnoticed yet."

I reached the boat--a gaudily-painted shallop, seated for four oars. There were but two, however; these were enough; but as ill-luck would have it, she was moored to a ring-bolt in the rocks by a padlock and chain, which I had neither the strength nor the means of breaking. This was a fresh source of delay, and Lady Estelle's whole frame seemed to quiver and vibrate with impatience, while every moment she raised her eyes to the cliff, by which she expected succour or searchers to come. What the deuce was she--were *we*--to say to all this? With a girl possessed of more nerve and firmness of mind this matter could never have taken such a turn, and the delay had never occurred. This *malheur*

or mishap--this variation from the strict rules laid down by such matrons as the Countess of Naseby--looked so like a scheme, that I felt we were in a thorough scrape, and knew there was not a moment to be lost in making our appearance at the Court. By a stone I smashed the padlock, and casting loose the boat, brought it to where Lady Estelle stood, beating the rock impatiently with her foot; and, handing her on board, seated her in the stern-sheets, but with some difficulty, as the west wind was rolling the waves with no small fury now past the headland, in which the black Bôd Mynach gaped.

"Pull with all your strength, Mr. Hardinge. Dear Mr. Hardinge, let us only be back in time, and I shall ever thank you!" she exclaimed.

"All that man can do I shall," was my enthusiastic reply.

I could pull a good stroke-oar, and had done so steadily in many a regimental and college boat-race and regatta; but now there ensued what I never could have calculated upon. Excited by the desire of pleasing Lady Estelle by landing her on the opposite side of the tiny bay with all speed--desirous, when seated opposite to her, face to face, of appearing to some advantage by an exhibition of strength and skill--at each successive stroke, as I shot the light boat seaward, I almost lifted it out of the water. I had to clear a rock, over which the water was foaming and gleaming in green and gold amid the sinking sunshine, ere I headed her due westward, and in doing so I cleared also the headland, which rose like a tower of rock from the sea, crowned by a clump of old elms, wherein some rooks had taken up their quarters in times long past.

"O, Mr. Hardinge," said Lady Estelle, while grasping the gunwale with both hands, and looking up, "how had I ever the courage to come down such a place? It looks fearful from this!"

Ere I could reply, the oar in my right hand broke in the iron rowlock with a crash. The wood had been faulty. By this mishap I lost my balance, and was nearly thrown into the sea, as the boat careered over on

a wave. Thus the *other* was torn from my grasp, and swept far beyond my reach. I was powerless now--powerless to aid either her or myself. The tide was ebbing fast. The strong west wind, and the current running eastward, influenced by the flow of the Clwyde, and even of the Dee, ten miles distant, swept the now useless boat past the abutting headland, and along the front of those cliffs which rise like a wall of rock from the sea, and where, as the mist gathered round us, our fate would be unseen, whether we were dashed against the iron shore or swept out into the ocean.

The red sunset was fading fast on distant Orme's Head, where myriads of sea-birds are ever revolving, like gnats in the light amid its grand and inaccessible crags. It was dying, too, though tipping them with flame, on Snowdon's peaks, the eyrie of the golden eagle and the peregrine falcon, and on the smaller range of Carneydd Llewellyn. Purple darkness was gathering in the grassy vales between, and blue and denser grew those shadows as the cold gray mist came on, and the sombre glow of a stormy sunset passed away. Soon the haze of the twilight blurred, softened, and blended land and sea to the eastward. The sharp edge of the new moon was rising from a dark and trembling horizon, whence the mist was coming faster and more fast, and the evening star, pale Hesperus, shone like a tiny lamp amid the opal tints of a sky that was turning fast to dun and darkness. The rolling mist soon hid the star and the land, too, and I only knew that we were drifting helplessly away.

CHAPTER XV.--WHAT THE MOON SAW.

The absence of the boat from its mooring-place was soon observed, and surmises were rife that we must infallibly have gone seaward. But why? It seemed unaccountable--and at such a time, too! The idea that Lady Estelle's heart should fail her in attempting to return by the cliff never occurred to any save Winifred, who knew more of her friend's temperament than the rest, and for a time, with others, the ardent and courageous girl searched the shore, and several boats were put forth into the mist; but in vain, and ere long the strength and violence of the wind drove even Sir Madoc and all his startled guests to the shelter of the house. Muffled in silk cloaks and warm shawls or otter-skin jackets, the ladies had lingered long on the terraces, on the lawn and avenues, while the lights of the searchers were visible, and while their hallooing could be heard at times from the rocks and ravines, where they swung their lanterns as signals, in hopes that the lost ones might see them.

Lord Pottersleigh snuffed and ejaculated from time to time, and ere long had betaken himself to his room. Caradoc, Guilfoyle--who seemed considerably bewildered by the affair--young Clavel of the 19th, and other gentlemen, with Gwyllim the butler, Morgan Roots the gardener, Bob Spurrit, and the whole male staff of the household, manfully continued their search by the shore. There the scene was wild and impressive. Before the violence of the bellowing wind, the mist was giving place to the pall-like masses of dark clouds, which rolled swiftly past the pale face of the new moon, imparting a weird-like aspect to the rocky coast, against which the sea was foaming in white and hurrying waves, while the sea-birds, scared alike by the shouts and the light of the searchers, quite as much as by the storm, screamed and wheeled in wild flights about their eyries. Moments there were when Caradoc thought the search was prosecuted in the wrong direction, and that, as there had probably been an elopement, this prowling along the seashore was absurd.

"Can it be," said he, inaudibly, "that the little boy who cried for the moon has made off with it bodily? If so, this will be rather a 'swell' affair for the mess of the Royal Welsh."

Slowly passed the time, and more anxious than all the rest--Lady Naseby of course excepted--the soft-hearted Winifred was full of dismay that any catastrophe should occur to two guests at Craigaderyn, and she listened like a startled fawn to every passing sound.

Dora, as deeming herself the authoress of the whole calamity, was completely crushed, and sat on a low stool with her head bowed on Lady Naseby's knee, sobbing bitterly ever and anon, when the storm-gusts howled among the trees of the chase, shook the oriels of the old mansion, and made the ivy leaves patter on the panes, or shuddering as she heard the knell-like ding-dong of the house-bell occasionally. The masses of her golden hair had been dishevelled by the wind without; but she forgot all about that, as well as about her two solemn engagements made with Tom Clavell for the morrow; one, the mild excitement of fishing for sticklebacks in the horse-pond, and the other, a gallop to the Marine Parade of Llandudno, attended by old Bob Spurrit; for the little sub of the 1st York North Riding was, *pro tem*., the bondsman of a girl who was at once charming and childish, petulant and more than pretty. Heavily and anxiously were passed the minutes, the quarters, and the hours. Messenger after messenger to the searchers by the shore went forth and returned. Their tidings were all the same; nothing had been seen or heard of the boat, of Lady Estelle, or of her companion. Nine o'clock was struck by the great old clock in the stable court, and then every one instinctively looked at his or her watch. Half-past nine, ten, and even midnight struck, without tidings of the lost. By that time the mist had cleared away, the tide had turned, and the west wind was rolling the incoming sea with mightier fury on the rock-bound shore.

The first hours of the morning passed without intelligence, and alarm, dismay, and grief reigned supreme among the pallid group at Craigaderyn Court. All could but hope that with the coming day a

revelation might come for weal or woe; and as if to involve the disappearance of the missing ones in greater mystery, if it did not point to a terrible conclusion, the lost pleasure-boat was discovered by a coastguardsman, high and dry, and bottom up, on a strip of sandy beach, some miles from Craigaderyn; but of its supposed occupants not a trace could be found, save a lace cuff, recognised as Lady Estelle's, wedged or washed into the framework of the little craft, thus linking her fate with it. Ours was, indeed, a perilous situation. We were helplessly adrift on a stormy sea, off a rock-bound coast, in a tiny boat, liable to swamping at any moment, without oars or covering, the wind rising fast, while the darkness and the mist were coming down together. I had no words to express my anxiety for what one so delicately nurtured as Estelle might suffer. My annoyance at the surmises and wonder naturally excited by our protracted absence; quizzical, it might be equivocal, inferences drawn from it--I thought nothing of these. I was beyond all such minor considerations, and felt only solicitude for her safety and a terror of what her fate might be. All other ideas, even love itself--though that very solicitude was born of love--were merged for the time in the tenderest anxiety. If her situation with me was perilous, what had it been if with Lord Pottersleigh? But had she been with him, no such event as a descent to that unlucky pleasure grotto could have been thought of. Though pale and terrified, not a tear escaped her now; but her white and beautiful face was turned, with a haggard aspect, to mine. A life-buoy happened to be in the boat, and without a word I tied it to her securely.

"Is there not one for you?" she asked, piteously, laying a hand on mine.

"Think not of me, Lady Estelle; if you are saved, what care I for myself?"

"You swim, then?"

"A little, a very little; scarcely at all."

"You are generous and noble, Mr. Hardinge! O, if kind God permits me to reach the land safely, I shall never be guilty of an act of folly like this again. Mamma says--poor mamma!--that it is birth, or blood, which carries people through great emergencies; but who could have foreseen such a calamitous contretemps as this? And who could have been a greater coward than I? I should have made a steady attempt at yonder pitiful cliff; to fail was most childish, and I have involved you in this most fatal peril."

She sobbed as she spoke, and her eyes were full of light; but her lips were compressed, and all her soft and aristocratic loveliness seemed for a time to grow different in expression; to gather sternness, as a courage now possessed her, of which she had seemed deficient before, or it might be an obstinacy born of despair; for the light boat was swept hither and thither helplessly, by stem and stern alternately, on each successive wave; tossed upward on the crest of one watery ridge, or sunk downward between two that heaved up on each side as if to engulf us; while the spoondrift, salt and bitter, torn from their tops, flew over us, as she clung with one hand to the gunwale of the tiny craft, and with the other to me.

That we were not being drifted landward was evident, for we could no longer hear the voices of the sea-birds among the rocks; and to be drifted seaward by ebb tide or current was only another phase of peril. The voice of Lady Estelle came in painful gasps as she said,

"O, Mr. Hardinge, Mr. Hardinge, we shall perish most miserably; we shall certainly be drowned! Mamma, my poor mamma, I shall never see her more!"

Though striving to reassure her I was, for a time, completely bewildered by anxiety for what she must suffer by a terror of the sudden fate that might come upon her; and I was haunted by morbid visions of her, the brilliant Estelle, a drowned and sodden corpse, the sport of the waves--of myself I never thought--tossing unburied in the deep, or, it

might be, cast mutilated on the shore; and she looked so beautiful and helpless as she clung to me now, clasping my right arm with all her energy, her head half reclined upon my shoulder, and the passing spray mingling with her tears upon her cheek. "The drowning man is said to be confronted by a ghostly panorama of his whole life." It may be so generally; but then I had only the horror of losing Estelle, whom I loved so tenderly. We were now together and alone, so completely, suddenly, and terribly alone, it might be for life or for death--the former short indeed, and the latter swift and sudden, if the boat upset, or we were washed out of it into the sea; and yet in that time of peril she possessed more than ever for me that wondrous and undefinable charm and allurement which every man finds in the woman he loves, and in her only.

"God spare us and help us!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Hardinge, I am filled with unutterable fear;" and then she added, unconsciously quoting some poet, "I find the thought of death, to one near death, most dreadful!"

"With you, Estelle, love might make it indeed a joy to die!" I exclaimed, with a gush of enthusiasm and tenderness that, but for the terrible situation, had been melodramatic.

"I did not think that you loved me so," said she, after a little pause; and my arm now encircled her waist, while something of an invocation to heaven rose to my lips, and I repeated,

"Not think that I loved you! Do not be coquettishly unwilling to admit what you must know, that since that last happy night in London you have never been absent from my thoughts; and here, Estelle, dear, dear Estelle, when menaced by a grave amid these waters, I tell you that I loved you from the first moment that I knew you! Death stares us in the face, but tell me truly that you--that you--"

"Love you in return? I do, indeed, dear Harry!" she sobbed, and then her beloved face, chilled and damp with tears and spray, came close to mine.

"God bless you, O my darling, for this avowal!" said I in a thick voice, and even the terrors of our position could not damp the glow of my joy.

In all my waking dreams of her had Estelle seemed beautiful; but never so much so as now, when I seemed on the eve of losing her for ever, and my own life, too; when each successive wave that rolled in inky blackness towards us might tear her from my clasp! How easily under some circumstances do we learn the language of passion! and now, while clasping her fast with one arm, as with both of hers she clung to me, I pressed her to my breast, and told her again and again how fondly I loved her, while--as it were in a dream, a portion of a nightmare--our boat, now filling fast with water, was tossed madly to and fro. And like a dream, too, it seemed, the fact that I had her all to myself--for life or death, as it were--this brilliant creature so loved by many, so prized by all, and hitherto apparently so unattainable; she who, by a look, a glance, a smile, by a flirt of her fan, by the dropping of a glove, or the gift of a flower, selected with point from her bouquet, had held my soul in thrall by all the delicious trifles that make up the sum and glory of love to the lover who is young. And where were we now? Alone on the dark, and ere long it was the midnight, sea! Alone, and with me; I who had so long eyed her lovingly and longingly, even as Schön Rohtrant, the German king's daughter, was gazed at and loved by the handsome page, who dared not to touch or kiss her till he gathered courage one day, as the ballad tells us, when they were under a shady old oak.

"If God spares us to see her," said Lady Estelle, "what will mamma think of this terrible *fiasco* of ours?"

While Estelle loved me, I felt that I did not care very much for the dowager's views of the matter, especially at that precise moment. When on *terra firma* there would be sufficient time to consider them.

"And you are mine, darling?" said I, tenderly.

"I am yours, Harry, and yours only."

"Never shall I weary of hearing this admission; but the rumour of an engagement to Lord Pottersleigh?'

"Absurd! It has grown out of his dangling after me and mamma's wish, as I won't have my cousin Naseby."

"And you do not hold yourself engaged--"

"Save to you, Harry, and you alone."

And as her head again sank upon my shoulder, her pride and my doubts fled together; but now a half-stifled shriek escaped her, as the frail boat was nearly overturned by a larger wave than usual, which struck it on the counter. We were drenched and chilled, so ours was, indeed, love-making under difficulties; and the time, even with her reclining in my arms, passed slowly. How many a prayer and invocation, all too deep for utterance, rose to my lips for her! The hours drew on. Would day never dawn? With all the sweet but now terrible companionship of love--for it was love combined with gloomy danger--this was our utmost craving.

The new moon, as she rose pale and sharp, like a silver sickle, from the Irish Sea, when the fog began to disperse, tipped for a little time with light the wave-tops as they rose or sank around us; but clouds soon enveloped her again; and when the tide turned, the sea ran inward, and broke wildly on the tremendous headlands of the coast. That our boat was not swamped seemed miraculous; but it was very buoyant, being entirely lined with cork, and had air-tight compartments under the seats. A gray streak at the far horizon had spread across a gap of pale green, announcing that the short August night was past, and rapidly it broadened and brightened into day, while crimson and gold began to tip the wave-tops with a fiery hue, the whole ocean seeming to be mottled,

as it were; and I could see the coast-line, as we were not quite a mile from it. In the distance were plainly visible the little town of Abergele, and those hills where Castell Cawr and the Cefn Ogo are, tinged with pink, as they rose above the white vapour that rolled along the shore.

The more distant mountain ranges seemed blue and purple against a sky where clouds of pearly-pink were floating. Estelle was exhausted now. Her pallor added to my misery. So many hours of pitiless exposure had proved too much for her strength, and with her eyes closed she lay helpless in my arms, while wave after wave was now impelling us shoreward, and, most happily it would seem, towards a point where the rocks opened and the water shoaled. One enormous breaker, white-crested and overarching, came rolling upon us. A gasp, a mutual cry to heaven, half-stifled by the bitter spray, and then the mighty volume of it engulfed us and our boat. We had a momentary sense of darkness and blindness, a sound as of booming thunder mingled with the clangour of bells in our ears, and something of the feeling of being swept by an express train through a tunnel filled with water, for we were fairly under the latter; but I clung to the boat with one hand and arm, while the other went round Estelle with a death-like embrace, that prevented her from being swept or torn from me.

For some moments I knew not whether we were on the land or in the sea; but, though stunned by the shock, I acted mechanically. Then I remember becoming conscious of rising through the pale-green water, of inhaling a long breath, a gasping respiration, and of seeing the sunshine on the waves. Another shock came, and we were flung on the flat or sloping beach, to be there left by the receding sea. Instead of in that place, had we been dashed against the impending rocks elsewhere, all had then been over with us. I still felt that my right arm was clasped around Estelle; but she was motionless, breathless, and still; and though a terror that she was dead oppressed me, a torpor that I could not resist spread over all my faculties, and I sank into a state of perfect unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XVI.--THE SECRET ENGAGEMENT.

In making a circuit of his farm on the morning after the storm, Farmer Rhuddlan, while traversing a field that was bounded by a strip of the sea shore, on which the ebbing surf still rolled heavily, was very much scared to find lying there, and to all appearance but recently cast up from the ocean, among starfish, weed, and wreck, an officer in full dress, and a lady (in what had been an elegant demi-toilette of blue silk and fine lace), fair and most delicately white, but drenched, sodden, and to all appearance, as he thought, "dearanwyl--drowned"--as she was quite motionless, with her beautiful dark hair all dishevelled and matted among the sand.

He knew me--in fact, he had known me since boyhood, having caught me many a time in his orchard at Craig Eryri--and thought he recognized the lady. Moreover, he had heard of the search overnight, and lost no time in spurring his fat little cob in quest of succour. Some wondering rustics promptly came from a neighbouring barnyard, and by the time they arrived, Estelle and I had recovered consciousness, and struggled into a sitting position on some stones close by, whence we were beginning to look about us.

A benumbed sensation and total lack of power in my right arm warned me that an accident had occurred, and I endeavoured to conceal the circumstance from Estelle, but in vain; for when murmuring some thanks to God for our preservation, she suddenly lifted her face from my breast, and exclaimed, "You cannot move this arm! You have been hurt, darling! Tell me about it--speak!"

"I think it is broken, Estelle," said I, with a smile; for while I felt something almost of pleasure in the conviction that I had undergone this in saving her, thereby giving me a greater title to her interest and sympathy, I could not forget my short leave from Winchester, the war at hand, the regiment already abroad, and the active duties that were expected of me.

"Broken?" she repeated, in a faint voice.

"My sword-arm--on the eve of marching for foreign service. Awkward, isn't it?"

"Awkward! O Harry, it is horrible! And all this has occurred through me and my childish folly!"

"One arm is at your service, dearest, still," said I, while placing it round her, and assisting her to rise, as the kind old farmer returned with his people, joyful to find that we were living, after all, and that by assisting us he might in some degree repay Sir Madoc Lloyd a portion of that debt of gratitude which he owed to him.

After despatching a mounted messenger to Craigaderyn with tidings of our safety, he had us at once conveyed to his farm-house at Craig Eryri, where dry clothing was given us, and a doctor summoned to attend me.

"You knew that we were missing--lost?" said I.

"Too well, sir," replied the farmer, as he produced a brandy-bottle from an ancient oak cupboard. "With all my lads I assisted in the search," he continued in Welsh, as he could scarcely speak a word of English. "A gentleman came here over night with a groom, both mounted, to spread the news of you and a lady having been lost somewhere below the Bôd Mynach."

"A gentleman mounted--Mr. Caradoc, perhaps?"

"Caradoc is one of ourselves," said the farmer, his keen eyes twinkling; "this one was a Sassenach--he Sir Madoc gave that lovely ring to, with a diamond as big as a horse-bean, for winning a race at Chester."

"O, Mr. Guilfoyle."

"Yes, sir, that is his name, I believe," replied Rhuddlan; and despite the gnawing agony of my arm I laughed outright, for the quondam German *attaché* would seem to have actually found time to relate something new about his brilliant to the simple old farmer, and while the fate of Lady Estelle was yet a mystery. As for *mine*, I shrewdly suspected he cared little about that.

Attired by the farmer's wife in the best clothing with which she could provide her, Lady Estelle, pale, wan, and exhausted, was seated near a fire to restore warmth to her chilled frame, while I retired with the medical man, who found my unlucky arm broken above the elbow; fortunately, the fracture was simple, and in no way a compound one. The bones were speedily set, splinted, and bandaged; and clad in a suit provided for me by Farmer Rhuddlan--to wit, a pair of corduroy knee-breeches, a deeply-flapped double-breasted waistcoat, which, from its pattern, seemed to have been cut from a chintz bedcover, so gorgeous were the roses and tulips it displayed, a large loose coat of coarse gray Welsh frieze, with horn buttons larger than crown pieces, each garment "a world too wide"--I presented a figure so absurd and novel that Estelle, in spite of all the misery and danger we had undergone, laughed merrily as she held out to me in welcome a hand of marvellous form and whiteness, the hand that was to be mine in the time to come; and I seated myself by her side, while the farmer and his wife bustled about, preparing for the certain arrival of Sir Madoc and others from the Court.

"How odd it seems!" said Estelle, in a low voice, and after a long pause, as she lay back in the farmer's black-leather elbow chair, where his wife had kindly placed and pillowed her; and while she spoke, her

eyes were half closed and her lips were wreathed with smiles; "engaged to be married--and to you, Harry! I can scarcely' realise it. Is this the end of all our ballroom flirtations, our Park drives, and gallops in the Row?"

"Nay, not the end of any; but a continuance of them all, I hope."

"Scarcely; people don't flirt after marriage--together, at least. But it will be the end of all mamma's grand schemes for me. She always hoped I should twine strawberry leaves with my marriage wreath. Heavens, how nearly I was having a wreath of seaweed!" she added, with a shudder and a little gasping laugh as I kissed her hand. "O, my poor Harry, with an arm broken, and by my means I shall never forgive myself--never!"

"Better an arm than if my heart had been broken by your means, Estelle," said I, in a low voice. After a little she said calmly and in an earnest tone, while her colour came and went more than once,

"We must be *secret*, secret as we are sincere; and yet such a system is repugnant to me, and to my pride of heart."

"Secret, Estelle!" (How delicious to call her simply Estelle!) "Why?"

"It is most necessary--yet awhile, at least."

"Your mamma's objections?"

"More than that."

"What--more?"

"By papa's will mamma has entire control over all her fortune and mine, too, and should I marry without her full approbation and consent, she may bequeath both if she pleases to my cousin Naseby, leaving but a pittance to me."

"But what will not one undergo for love?" said I, gazing tenderly into her eyes.

She smiled sadly, but made no response; perhaps she thought of what love might have of luxury on a subaltern's pay and his "expectations."

"Fear not, Estelle," said I, "for your sake our engagement shall be a secret one."

All my doubts and fears had already given place to the confidence of avowed and reciprocated affection, and in the security of that I was blindly happy. How my heart had been wont to throb when I used mentally to imagine the last interview I should have with her ere going forth to the East, with the story of my love untold; leaving her in ignorance, or partially so, of the sweet but subtle link that bound my existence to hers! *Now*, the love was told; the link had become a tie, and pain of the anticipated parting became all the more keen apparently, and I prospectively reckoned one by one the weeks, the days, yea, almost the hours I might yet spend in the society of Estelle. I was not much given to daydreams or illusions, but, I asked of myself, was not all this most strange if I was not dreaming now? Could it be that, within a few hours--a time so short--Estelle and I had braved such peril together, and that I had achieved her plight, her troth; the promise of her hand; the acknowledgment of her love, and that all was fulfilled; the coveted and dearest object of my secret thoughts and tenderest wishes!

Whether our engagement were secret or not mattered little to me now. Assured of her regard, I felt in her presence and society all that calm delight and sense of repose which were so pleasing after my late tumult of anxiety, pique, jealousy, and uncertainty. By chance or some intuition the farmer and his wife left us for a time alone, while waiting the arrival of our friends; and never while life lasts shall I forget the joy of that calm morning spent alone with Estelle in Rhuddlan's quaint little drawing-room, the windows of which faced the green Denbigh hills, on

which the warm August sun shone cheerily; and often did the memory of it come back to me when I was far away, when I was shivering amid the misery of the half-frozen trenches before Sebastopol, or relieving the out pickets, when Inkermann lights were waxing pale and dim as dawn stole over those snow-clad wastes, where so thick lay the graves of men and horses, while the eternal boom and flash went on without ceasing from the Russian bastions and the allied batteries. I felt as if I had gained life anew, and with it Estelle Cressingham. Great, indeed, was the revulsion of feeling after such peril undergone; after a night of such horror and suffering, to sit by her side, to hang over her, inspired to the full by that emotion of tenderness and rapture which no man can feel but once in life, when the first woman he has really loved admits that he has not done so in vain. I placed on her finger--*the* engaged finger--an emerald-and-diamond ring that I valued highly, as it had once been my mother's, and in its place took one of hers, a single pearl set in blue-and-gold enamel. The once proud beauty seemed so humble, gentle, and loving now, as she reclined with her head on my shoulder, and looked at me from time to time with a sweet quiet smile in the soft depths of her dark eyes I forgot that she was an earl's daughter, with a noble dowry and an ambitious mother, and that I was but a sub of the Royal Welsh, with little more than his pay. I forgot that the route for Varna hung over my head like the sword of Damocles; that a separation, certain and inevitable, was hourly drawing closer and closer, though the accident which had occurred might protract it a little now.

Estelle Cressingham was a grand creature, certainly. She naturally seemed to adopt statuesque positions, and thus every movement, however careless and unstudied, was full of artistic grace. Even the misshapen garments of Mrs. Evan Rhuddlan could not quite disfigure her. The turn of her head was stately, and at times her glance, quick and flashing, had a pride in it that she was quite unconscious of. She was, as Caradoc had said, "decidedly a splendid woman--young lady, rather--but of the magnificent order." But there were tender and womanly touches, a gentler nature, in the character of Estelle, that lay under the artificial

strata of that cumbrous society in which she had been reared. She had many pets at home in London and at Walcot Park--birds and dogs, which she fed with her own hands, and little children, who were her pensioners; and if her nose seemed a proud one, with an aristocratic curve of nostril, her short upper lip would quiver occasionally when she heard a tale of sorrow or cruelty. And now, from our mutual daydream, we were roused by the sound of wheels, of hoofs, and several voices, as some of our friends from the Court arrived.

CHAPTER XVII.--WHAT FOLLOWED IT.

To expatiate upon the joy of all when we found ourselves safe in Craigaderyn Court again were a needless task. Lady Estelle was conveyed at once to her own room, and placed in charge of Mademoiselle Pompon. For two entire days I saw nothing of her, and could but hover on the terrace which her windows overlooked, in the hope of seeing her; but the same doctor who came daily to dress my arm had to attend her, as she was weak, feverish, and rather hysterical after all she had undergone; while I, with my broken limb, found myself somewhat of a hero in our little circle.

"This adventure of yours will make the Bôd Mynach the eighth wonder of Wales, if it gets into print," said Sir Madoc.

This chance was Lady Naseby's fear. She was "full of annoyance and perplexity," as she said, "lest some of those busybodies who write for the ephemeral columns of the daily press should hear of the affair, and

ventilate it in some manner that was garbled, sensational, and, what was worse than either, unpunishable."

She thanked me with great courtesy, but without cordiality, for having saved her daughter's life at the expense of a broken limb, as it was by sheer strength that I prevented Estelle being torn from the boat and me. Her ladyship, however, soon dismissed the subject, and now Tiny, the snappish white shock, which for some hours had been forgotten and shamefully neglected, came in for as many caresses as her daughter, if not more.

Anxious, for many obvious reasons, to gain the esteem of this cold and unapproachable dowager--even to love her, for her daughter's sake, most unlovable though she was--I was ever assiduous in my attentions; and these seemed to excite quietly the ridicule of Winifred Lloyd, while Dora said that she believed Lady Estelle must have quarrelled with me, and that I had transferred my affections to her mamma.

But little Dora saw and knew more than I supposed. On the second day after the affair, when she came with her light tripping step down the perron of the mansion, and joined me on the terrace, where I was idling with a cigar, I said,

"By the bye, why *did* you leave us, Dora, in that remarkable manner, and not return?"

"Mr. Clavell overtook me, and insisted upon my keeping an engagement to him. Moreover," she added, waggishly, "under my music-master I have learned that many a delightful duet becomes most discordant when attempted as a trio."

"And for that reason you left us?"

"Precisely," replied the lively girl, as she removed her hat, and permitted the wealth of her golden hair to float out on the wind. "Save for your poor arm being broken, and the terrible risks you ran, I might

laugh at the whole affair; for it was quite romantic--like something out of a play or novel; but it quite put an end to the ball."

"And now that Tom Clavell has gone back to his depôt at Chester, you can scarcely forgive me?"

"I saw that you were dying to be alone with Lady Estelle," she retorted, "and *now* don't you thank me?"

I certainly felt a gratitude I did not express, but doubted whether her elder sister would have approved of Dora's complicity in the matter; and affecting to misunderstand her I said,

"Why thank you now?"

"Because," said Dora, looking at me, with her blue eyes half closed, "if on the top of a mountain an acquaintance ripens fast, good heavens, how must it have been with you two at the bottom of the sea!"

And she laughed merrily at her own conceit, while swinging her hat to and fro by its ribbons. Lord Pottersleigh shook his head as if he disliked the whole affair, and nervously scanned the daily papers with spectacles on his thin aquiline nose, in expectation of seeing some absurd, perhaps impertinent, paragraph about it; and such was the old man's aristocratic vanity, that I verily believe, had he seen such, he would there and then have relinquished all his expectations--for he undoubtedly had them--of making Estelle Lady Pottersleigh, and the partner of his higher honours that were to come.

"Lady Naseby owes you a debt of gratitude, Mr. Hardinge, for saving the life of her daughter--and I, too," he added, "owe you an everlasting debt of gratitude."

"You, my lord?" said I, turning round in the library, where we happened to be alone.

"Yes; for in saving her you saved one in whom I have the deepest interest. So, my dear Mr. Hardinge," he continued, pompously, looking up from the *Times*, "if I can do aught for you at the Horse Guards, command me, my young friend, command me."

"Thanks, my lord," said I, curtly; for his tone of patronage, and the cause thereof, were distasteful to me.

"You have of course heard the rumour of--of an engagement?"

"With Lady Estelle Cressingham?"

"Exactly," said he, laughing till he brought on a fit of coughing--"exactly--ha, ha--ugh, ugh! How the deuce these things ooze out at clubs and in society, I cannot conceive; for even the world of London seems like a village in that way. Ah, nowhere out of our aristocracy could a man find such a wife as Lady Estelle!"

"I quite agree with you; but there is a point beyond that."

"Indeed! what may that be?"

"To get her!" said I, defiantly, enraged by the old man's cool presumption.

Was this reference to "a rumour" merely his senile vanity, or had Estelle ignored something that really existed?

Caradoc's congratulations, though I carefully kept my own counsel, were as warm in reality as those of Guilfoyle were in pretence.

"Wish you every joy," said the latter, in a low tone, as we met in the billiard-room, where he was practising strokes with Sir Madoc.

"I don't quite understand."

"You hold the winning-cards now, I think," said he, with a cold glare in his eye.

"Sir?"

"I congratulate you on escaping so many perils with the Lady Estelle, and being thereby a winner."

I had just left Pottersleigh, and was not disposed to endure much from Guilfoyle.

"The winner of what?" I asked.

"The future esteem of the Countess," he sneered.

"Perhaps she will present me with a diamond ring on the head of it," said I, turning on my heel, while Sir Madoc laughed at the hit; but whatever he felt, Guilfoyle cloaked it pretty well by laughing, and, as a Parthian shot, quoting, with some point, and with unruffled exterior, a line or two from the fourth book of the *Æneid*, concerning the storm which drew Dido and her hero into the cave.

The bearing of Winifred Lloyd now became somewhat of a riddle to me; and on the morning of the third day, when we all met at the breakfast table (which was littered by cards and notes of congratulation), and when Lady Estelle appeared, looking so pale and beautiful, declining Mademoiselle Babette's cosmetics and pearl-powder alike, in the loveliest morning-dress that Swan and Edgar could produce, I was conscious that she watched us with an interest that seemed wistful, tearful, and earnest. Whether I had a tell-tale face, I know not. Nothing, however, could be gathered from that of Estelle, or her mode of greeting me and inquiring about the progress of my broken arm towards recovery. My ring was on her finger; but as she wore several, it passed unnoticed, and even Dora's quick eye failed to detect it.

Winifred had become very taciturn; and when I asked her to drive with me in the open carriage--as for a time I could not ride--she declined rather curtly, and with something of petulance, even disdain, in her tone. She never had the usual inquiries made by others concerning my

fracture, nor joined with Dora in the playful rivalry of the ladies cutting for me, if no servant was near; for at table I was of course helpless. She smiled seldom, but laughed frequently; and yet it struck me there was something unwonted in the ring of her laughter, as if it came not from her heart. The girl had a secret sorrow evidently. Was Master Phil Caradoc at the bottom of this? If not, who then? I watched her from time to time, and observed that once, when our eyes met, she seemed confused, and coloured perceptibly.

"Surely," thought I, "she is not resenting my half-flirtation with her the other day, when we visited her pet goat!"

She was restless, absent, listlessly indifferent, and occasionally preoccupied in manner; and in vain did I say to her more than once,

"Miss Lloyd--Winifred--what troubles you? what has vexed you?"

"Nothing troubles me, Mr. Hardinge."

"*Mr.?*"

"Well, then, Harry--and nothing vexes me. What leads you to think so?"

Her full-fringed dark eyes looked clearly into mine; they seemed moist, yet defiant, and she tossed her pretty little head wilfully and petulantly. I felt that I had in some way displeased her; but dared not press the matter, for, with all her softness of heart, she had a little Welsh temper of her own.

Phil Caradoc gave me his entire confidence, especially after dinner, when men become full of talk, and inspired by bland and generous impulses. He related, without reserve, the whole episode that occurred in the conservatory; and I felt some compunction or annoyance that circumstances prevented me from having the same frankness with him, for none would have rejoiced in my success more warmly than he.

"For the life of me, Harry, I can't make out what Miss Lloyd means," said Phil, in a low voice, as he made his Cliquot effervesce, by stirring it with a macaroon; "she was ready enough to love me as a friend, and all that sort of thing."

"You have asked her, then?"

"Pointedly--hardly know what I said, though--one feels so deuced queer when making love--in earnest, I mean."

"A man can do no more than ask."

"Except asking again; but tell me, old fellow, have I a chance?"

"How should I know, Phil? But I think that the pattern sub of the Royal Welsh Fusileers, made up, like Don Juan,

> "'By love, by youth, and by an army tailor,'

should have a particularly good chance."

"*You* can afford to laugh at me, Harry."

"Far from it, Phil; I haven't such a thought, believe me."

"Seeing how friendly you are with these girls--with her especially--I thought you might know this. Is any other fellow spooney upon Miss Lloyd?"

"A good many may well be; she is lovely."

"Well, does any one stand in her good graces?"

"Can't say, indeed, Caradoc," said I, as my thoughts reverted to that episode at the goat's-house, and others not dissimilar, with some emotions of compunction, as I looked into Phil's honest brown eyes.

He fancied that Winifred avoided him. In that idea he erred. She admired and loved him as a friend--a gentleman who had done her great honour; but she never thought of analysing his emotions farther than to wish him well, and to wish him away from Craigaderyn, after that scene in the conservatory; and remembering it in all its points, she was careful not to trust herself alone with him, lest the subject might be renewed; and yet she found the necessity of approaching it one day, when a sudden recollection struck her, as they were riding home together, and had cantered a little way in advance of their party.

"Now that I think of it, Mr. Caradoc," said she, "you must give me that likeness which you wear. I really cannot permit you to keep it, even in jest."

"Jest!" repeated Phil, sadly and reproachfully; "do you think so meanly of me as to imagine that I would jest with you or with it?"

"But I can see no reason why you should retain it."

"Perhaps there is none--and yet, there is. It is the face of one I shall never, never forget; and it is a memento of happy days spent with you--a memento that other eyes than mine shall never look upon."

"Do not speak thus, Mr. Caradoc, I implore you!" said Winifred, looking down on her horse's mane.

"You will permit me to keep it?"

"For a time," said she, trying to smile, but her lips quivered, "Thank you, dear Winifred."

"If shown to none."

"'While I live none shall see; and if I die in action--as many shall surely do, and why not I as well as happier fellows?--it will be heard of no more?"

Caradoc's voice became quite tremulous, either because of Miss Lloyd's obduracy, or that he felt, as many people do, rather pathetic at the thought of his own demise. He had already possessed himself of her whip-hand, when her horse began to rear, and in a minute more they were in the lime avenue; and this proved the last opportunity he had of reasoning with her on the subject that was nearest his heart. He now wished that he had never met Winifred Lloyd, or that, having met, and learned to love her--oddly enough, when his passion was not returned--he could be what her *ideal* was. "In what," thought he, "am I wanting? Am I too rough, too soldierly, too blunt, unwinning, or what?" It was none of these; for Caradoc was a well-mannered, courteous, gentle, and pleasing young fellow, and by women unanimously deemed handsome and *distingué*. All that day he was unusually cast down and taciturn, though he strove to take an interest in the conversation around him.

"By Jove, Hardinge," said he, "I wish you had never brought me here, to renew the hopes I had begun to entertain in London."

"Don't lose heart yet, Phil," said I.

"But I have to leave for the seat of war--leave her to the chance of being loved by others, without even a promise--"

"To what troubles we are exposed in life!" said I, sententiously, and feeling perhaps selfishly secure in my own affair.

"Greater troubles perhaps in death," added Phil, gloomily, as he gnawed his moustache. "I sometimes wonder whether man was made for the world, or the world was made for man."

"In what respect," said I, surprised by the train of thought so unusual in him.

"Look at the newly-born infant, and you will find it difficult to determine. 'He begins his life,' as Pliny says, 'in punishment, and only for being born.'"

"Come Phil," said I, "don't get into the blues; and as for Pliny, I left him with Euclid, Straith's *Fortification*, and gunnery, at Sandhurst."

The morning mail brought letters from the depôt-adjutant to Phil and me. Their official aspect, as Owen Gwyllim laid them on the breakfast table, attracted the attention of all. The eyes of Winifred were on me, and mine turned instinctively and sadly to Lady Estelle, who grew ashy pale, but seemed intent on some letters of her own. The adjutant's epistles were brief. Caradoc was requested to join at once, his short leave being cancelled, as he had to go with a draft of eighty rank-and-file for the East. My leave was, extended for a fortnight, in consequence of a medical certificate received concerning the accident that had befallen me.

So that night saw poor good-hearted Phil depart; and the memory of his thick brown hair and handsome brown moustache, his clear hazel eyes and honest English face dwelt not in the thoughts of her with whom he had left his heart behind.

He had the regimental goat in his custody; and when Winifred caressed and kissed her pet, ere it was lifted into the vehicle that was to convey it to Chester, Phil eyed her wistfully; and I knew that he would have given the best of his heart's blood to have felt but one of those kisses on his nut-brown cheek!

CHAPTER XVIII.--GUILFOYLE.

My Lord Pottersleigh and the adventurer Hawkesby Guilfoyle--for an artful, presumptuous, and very singular adventurer he eventually proved to be--could not detect that there was a secret understanding, and still less that there was any engagement, between Lady Estelle and me; yet both were sharp enough to fancy that there was something wrong so far as they were concerned--something understood by us which to them was incomprehensible; and the latter now referred in vain to Baden, Berlin, Catzenelnbogen, and other places where they had met so pleasantly on the Continent. Engaged solemnly and tenderly to Estelle, I had yet the absurd annoyance of beholding Pottersleigh, who was assured of her mother's countenance and favour (though he would have been a more seemly suitor for herself), and whose years and position gave him perfect confidence, hovering or shambling perpetually about her, absorbing her time if not her attention, mumbling his overstrained compliments into her unwilling ear, touching her hand or tapered arm, and even patting her lovely white shoulders from time to time with his withered paws, and every way giving himself such fatherly and lover-like airs of proprietary oddly mingled that I could with pleasure have punched his aristocratic old head. We frequently laughed at all this even when he was present; for by a glance rather than a word, Estelle could convey to me all she thought and felt. There was something delightful in this secret understanding, this secret community of thought and interest, with one so young and beautiful--more than all, when blended with it was the charm of the most perfect success in a first affair of love; and I thought myself one of the happiest fellows in the world.

Superb as her toilettes were at all times, she seemed to make little Babette Pompon take extra pains with them now, and I felt delighted accordingly, for such infinite care seemed to express a desire to please me. Our next departure from the Court was Mr. Hawkesby Guilfoyle, whom Sir Madoc and all his visitors had begun to view with a coolness and disfavour of which the party in question found it convenient to seem quite oblivious; but it reached its culminating point through a very small matter. One day after luncheon we had gone so far as Penmaen Mawr.

The four ladies were in the open carriage; I occupied the rumble; Sir Madoc, Lord Pottersleigh, and Guilfoyle were mounted, and we were all enjoying to the fullest extent that glorious combination of marine and mountain scenery peculiar to the Welsh coast; the air was full of ozone and the sky was full of sunshine. We were all happy, and even Winifred seemed in unusually high spirits; as for Dora, she was never otherwise. The well-hung carriage rolled pleasantly along, between the beautiful green hills, past quiet villages and ancient churches, vast yawning slate quarries, green mounds and gray stones that marked where battles had been, with occasional glimpses of the Irish Sea, that stretched away to the dim horizon like a sheet of glittering glass. Estelle, by arrangement, sat with her back to the horses, so that she and I could freely converse with our eyes, from time to time, under the shade of her skilfully-managed parasol.

Sir Madoc on this day was peculiarly enthusiastic, and having mounted what the girls called his "Welsh hobby," was disposed to give it full rein. We halted in a little sequestered glen, a lovely spot embosomed among trees, on the southern slope of the hill. The horses were unbitted; Owen Gwyllim had put the champagne' bottles to cool in a runnel, where their long gilded necks and swollen corks stood invitingly up amid the rich green grass that almost hid the murmuring water. We had come by Caerhun, through an old and little-frequented road, where Sir Madoc insisted on pointing out to us all the many erect old battle-stones by the wayside; for his mind was now full of quaint stories, and the memory of heroes with barbarous names. Thus when Owen uncorked the Cliquot, he drank more than one guttural Welsh toast, and told us how, often in his boyhood, the road had been obstructed for weeks by masses of rock that fell thundering from the mountain above; and in his love of the olden time or detestation of change, I believe he would have preferred such barriers to progress still, rather than have seen the lines of road and rail that now sweep between the mountain and the sea on the way to Holyhead.

"It was in this dell or *glyn*," said Sir Madoc, as he seated his sturdy figure on the grass, though the ladies did not leave the carriage, "that Llewellyn ap Jorwerth took prisoner the luckless William de Breas, whom he hanged at Aber, in the time of Henry III."

"Why did he hang him?" asked Guilfoyle, holding his glass for Owen to refill it.

"Because he was a handsome fellow, and found too much favour in the eyes of his princess, whom he dragged to the window that she might see his body hanging lifeless on the gibbet."

"Deuced hard lines," said Guilfoyle, laughing. "I thought he might have been hung because he hadn't a pedigree, or some other enormity in Welsh eyes." As Sir Madoc looked at the speaker his eyes sparkled, for the remark was a singularly gratuitous one.

"You English," said he, "laugh at what you are pleased to consider our little weakness in that respect; and yet the best names in the peerage are apt to be deduced from some corporal or sergeant of William's Norman rabble."

"Heavens, papa! when I change my name of Lloyd, I hope it won't be for that of Mrs. John Smith or Robinson?" said Dora, merrily, as she heard that Sir Madoc's tone was sharp.

"Well, but you must admit that these fortuitous circumstances are deemed of small account now; for as Dick Cypher sings,

"'A peer and a 'prentice now dress much the same, And you can't tell the difference excepting by name.'"

"I don't know who your friend Dick Cypher may be," replied Sir Madoc, quietly, though evidently greatly ruffled, "but Burke and Debrett record as ancient, names we deem but those of yesterday, and when

compared with ours are as the stunted gorsebush to pine or oak--yes, sir! or as the donkey that crops thistles by the wayside when compared to the Arab horse!"

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Pottersleigh, letting his hat sink farther on the nape of his neck, as he placed his gold glasses on his long thin nose and gazed at Sir Madoc, who tossed an empty bottle into the runnel, and continued:--"In Wales we have the lines of Kynaston, who descend from Rhodric Mawr, King of all Wales, and the daughter and coheir of the Bloody Wolf; the Mostyns, from the Lord of Abergeleu who founded the eighth noble tribe; the Vaughans, who come from that King Rhodric who married the daughter of Meuric ap Dyfnwall ap Arthur ap Sitsylt, though that was only in the year 800; and we have the Lloyds----"

"O, papa," exclaimed Winifred, seeing that Estelle was laughing heartily, "we cannot listen to more; and I am sure that your muster-roll of terrible names must have quite convinced Mr. Guilfoyle of his error."

"If it ever existed--I did but jest," said he, bowing and smiling as he turned to her.

Sir Madoc's gust of patriotic ire passed away at the sound of his daughter's voice; but from that moment his manner to Guilfoyle underwent a marked change, for he had already more than once contrived to wound him on this his most tender point. So the usually suave and kind old man became very cool to him as they rode homeward; and early that evening Guilfoyle retired to his room, alleging that he had to write letters.

After dinner, as we idled for a little time in the smoking-room prior to joining the ladies, Lord Pottersleigh led the conversation gradually back to our evening excursion, and with some hesitation began to speak of Guilfoyle.

"You will pardon me, my dear Sir Madoc, for venturing to speak slightingly of any friend of yours; but----"

"Mr. Guilfoyle is no friend of mine," said the other, hastily; "he dropped among us from the clouds, as it were. When with Lady Naseby I met him on the beach at Llandudno. He had done her some service on the Continent, at Catzeneln--what's-its-name?--I invited him on the strength of their past acquaintance--that's all."

"Then, briefly, get rid of him if you can."

"What do *you* say, Harry?"

"I say with Lord Pottersleigh."

Sir Madoc fidgeted, for his Welsh ideas of hospitality were somewhat shocked by the idea of "getting rid" of a guest.

"I assure you, Sir Madoc," resumed the peer, "that he is quite out of his place amongst us, quite; and despite his usually assumed suavity--for it is assumed--he lacks intensely *l'odeur de la bonne société*, though he affects it; and I overheard two of your late guests making some very dubious remarks concerning him."

"The deuce you did!" exclaimed Sir Madoc, tossing away his half-smoked cigar.

"They spoke quite audibly, as if they cared not who might hear them."

"Who were they?"

"Officers of the 19th, from Chester. 'Guilfoyle!' I heard that fast boy Clavell exclaim, as if with surprise, to another; 'is that fellow, who--' 'The very same.' 'Then how comes he to be a guest here?' 'Just what I was asking of myself, as he is tabooed everywhere. You know they say--' '*They*--who?' 'O, that ubiquitous and irresponsible party so difficult to

grapple with--that though he was attaché at some German place, he has been in several conspiracies to pigeon young muffs just come of age. There was particularly one poor fellow of ours whom he rooked at Hamburg of every sixpence, and who was afterwards found drowned in the Alster. And lately I have heard that he was proprietor, or part proprietor, of a gaming-hell in Berlin.' 'By Jove!' exclaimed little Clavell, but can all this be proved?' 'No.' 'Why?' 'He lays his plans too deeply and surely.' Then they walked towards the marquee, and I thought I had hear, enough--quite," added his lordship, snuffing.

Long before Pottersleigh was done, Sir Madoc had blushed purple with stifled rage and mortification. He said,

"My lord, you should have mentioned all this instantly."

"Truth is, I knew not how to approach the subject."

"And I have introduced this fellow to my daughters, to my friends, and to Craigaderyn! D--n me, I shall choke!" he exclaimed, as he started from his chair. "He is deep as Llyn Tegid! I have already lost considerable sums to him at billiards, and I always thought his success at cards miraculous. But an end shall be put to this instantly!--Owen! Owen Gwyllim!"

He kicked a spittoon to the other end of the room, rang the bell furiously for the butler, and dashed off a note to Mr. Guilfoyle. It was sufficiently curt and pointed. He expressed "regret that a gun would not be at his service on the coming 1st of September; but that the carriage would await his orders, for Chester or elsewhere."

Guilfoyle had doubtless been accustomed to meet with affronts such as this. Desiring his baggage to be sent after him, he departed that night with his two horses, his groom (and diamond ring); but, prior to doing so, he had the effrontery to leave P.P.C. cards for Lady Naseby and Estelle, saying that "he should not forget their kind invitation to Walcot Park;" and rode off, scheming vengeance on me, to whom he evidently

attributed the whole matter, as he informed Owen Gwyllim that he "would yet repay me, through his solicitor, perhaps, for the interest I had taken in his affairs."

This threw a temporary cloud over our little party, and good Sir Madoc felt a kind of sorrow for Guilfoyle as he surmised how little money he might have in his purse, forgetting that he was proprietor of a pair of horses. To prevent her *amour propre* being wounded, we most unfortunately did not reveal this man's real character to Lady Naseby; thus, to Sir Madoc's hot temper was attributed his sudden departure.

Though Lady Estelle was excessively provoked that, through her and her mother, whom his service on the Continent had prejudiced in his favour, and through his alleged acquaintance with me, he had become Sir Madoc's guest, in a day or two the whole *contretemps* was forgotten; but I was fated not to have seen or heard the last of Mr. Hawkesby Guilfoyle.

CHAPTER XIX.--TWO LOVES FOR ONE HEART.

By the peculiarity of our position kept much apart, or seldom finding opportunities, even in a house like Craigaderyn Court, for being alone, as it was perpetually thronged by visitors, we had to content ourselves with the joy of stolen glances that lit up the eye with an expression we alone could read, or that was understood by ourselves only; by tender touches of the hand that thrilled to the heart; and by inflections of the voice, which, do as we might, would at times become soft and tremulous. Our life was now full of petty stratagems and pretty lover-like enigmas,

especially when in the presence of Lady Naseby; and now I also became afraid of Winifred Lloyd, who, unoccupied, so far as I could see, by any love-affair of her own, was almost certain, I thought, to see through mine. "There is no conquest without the affections," said Ninon de l'Enclos; "and what mole is so blind as a woman in love?" Yet Estelle was careful to a degree in her bearing, and never permitted her fondness of me to lull her into a sense of security from observation. I learned, however, from my ally Dora, that Lady Naseby was so provoked by what Estelle not inaptly termed our "late *fiasco*," that, save for the weight such a proceeding might have given it, they and the Viscount, too, would have quitted Craigaderyn Court, So they remained; but, thought I, what right had *he* to be concerned in the matter? And unless I greatly erred, I felt certain that the Countess cared not how soon I received my marching orders for that fatal shore where so many of us were to leave our bones.

Yet many a stolen kiss and snatched caress or pressure of the hand, many a whispered assurance of love, made Estelle and me supremely happy, while the few days that remained of my leave glided quickly--ah, too quickly!--past; and all desire for "glory" apart, I was not sorry when I saw that my fractured arm would prevent my being sent with the next draft, and cause my retention for a little time longer in England. "They who love must drink deeply of the cup of trembling," says some one; "for at times there will arise in their hearts a nameless terror, a sickening anxiety for the future, whose brightness all depends upon this one cherished treasure, which often proves a foreboding of some real anguish looming in the distant hours."

As yet no forebodings came to mar my happiness; it was without alloy, save the prospect of a certain and, as we trusted to Providence, a temporary separation; yet it was well that I saw not the future, or what those distant hours had in store for me.

"Estelle," said I, one day when a happy chance threw us together for a few minutes in an arbour of the garden, where we sometimes met at a certain hour, and separated after by different paths, like a pair of

conspirators, "when shall a period be put to all this mystery--this painful, though joyous, false position in which we find ourselves?"

"We can but wait and hope, Harry--wait and hope!" said she, while her head drooped on my shoulder, and my arm went round her.

"Wait and hope, dearest, for what? My promotion?"

"That would bring the end no nearer," said she, with a sad, sickly smile.

"No, certainly; even to be colonel of the Royal Welsh instead of a mere sub would not enhance my value much in Lady Naseby's estimation," said I, with some bitterness. "For what then, darling?"

"Some change in mamma's views regarding me."

"She will never change!"

"You know, Harry, that were you rich, I might marry you now--yes, and go to Turkey with you, too!" said she, with a brightness in her eyes.

"Would to Heaven, then, that I were rich! But being poor--"

"It is impossible."

And we both sighed heavily.

"I am under orders for the East, and *must* take my turn of duty there, risking all the chances of war, ere I can think of home or marriage, Estelle; but when we part, if I am not to write to you, how shall I ever know that you think of me? how hear of your health and welfare? that you remain true to me--"

"O, doubt not that!"

"Nor do I; but it would be so sweet to see your writing, and imagine your voice reiterating the troth you plighted to me in that terrible time."

"I shall write to you, dear, dear Harry, for I can do that freely and openly; but of you, alas! alas! I can only hear through our friends at the Court here, for you can neither write to me in London nor at Walcot Park."

"May I not ask Miss Lloyd to receive enclosures for you? I shall be writing to her, and we are such old friends that she would think nothing of it."

"Too old friends, I fear," said she, with a half-smiling but pointed glance; "but for Heaven's sake think not of that. She would never consent, nor should I wish her to do so. I can of course receive what letters I choose; but servants will pry, and consider what certain coats of arms, monograms, and postal marks mean; so my Crimean correspondent would be shrewdly suspected, and myself subjected to much annoyance by mamma and her views."

"Her *views!* This is the second time you have referred to them," said I, anxiously; "and they are--"

"That I should marry my cousin Naseby, whom I always disliked," said Estelle, in a sad and sweetly modulated voice; "or Lord Pottersleigh, whose wealth and influence are so great that a short time must see him created an earl; but he has no chance *now*, dear Harry!"

Long, lovingly, and tenderly she gazed into my eyes, and her glance and her manner seemed so truthful and genuine that I felt all the rapture of trusting her fearlessly, and that neither time nor distance would alter or lessen her regard for me; and a thousand times in "the distant hours" that came did I live over and over again that scene in the arbour, when the warm flush of the August evening was lying deep on the Welsh woods and mountains, when all the mullioned windows of the quaint old mansion were glittering in light, and the soft coo of the wild pigeons was

heard as they winged their way to the summit of Craigaderyn, which is usually alive with them, and there the fierce hawk and the ravenous cormorant know well when to find their prey.

The time for my departure drew near; and already but a day remained to me. Caradoc and Charley Gwynne had already sailed in a troopship for Varna, from which the entire army was about to embark for a landing on the Russian coast, and ill or well, my presence with the regimental depôt was imperative. My bullock trunks had been packed by Owen Gwyllim, and the carriage was ordered to convey me next evening, after an early dinner. The latter passed slowly and heavily enough, and afterwards, instead of remaining all together, as might have been expected, circumstances separated us for an hour or so. Lady Naseby was indisposed; so was Lord Pottersleigh, whom his old enemy had confined by the feet to this rooms, yet he hoped to be in service order, to enact the sportsman on the coming 1st of September, a period to which he looked forward with disgust and horror, as involving an enormous amount of useless fatigue, with the chances of shooting himself or some one else. Sir Madoc had certain country business to attend; and on the three young ladies retiring to the drawing-room, I was left to think over my approaching departure through the medium of burgundy and a cigar.

My sword arm was nearly well now; but still I should have made but a poor affair of it, if compelled to resort to inside and outside cuts, to point and parry, with a burly Muscovite. To know that I had but a few hours left me now, and not to spend them with Estelle Cressingham, seemed intolerable! Before me, from the window, spread the far extent of grassy chase steeped in the evening sunshine; above the green woods were the peaks of Snowdon and Carneydd Llewellyn, dim and blue in the distance; and while gazing at them wistfully, I reflected on all I should have to see and undergo, to hope and fear and suffer--the miles I should have to traverse by sea and land--ere I again heard, if ever, the pleasant

rustle of the leaves in these old woods, the voice of the wild pigeon or the croak of the rooks among the old Tudor gables and chimneys of Craigaderyn. And then again I thought of Estelle.

"I *must* see her, and alone, too, at all risks; perhaps dear little Dora will assist me," I muttered, and went towards the drawing-room, which was now considerably involved in shadow, being on the western side of the Court; and I felt with the tender Rosalind, when her lover said, "For these two hours, Rosalind, I will leave thee," "Alas, dear love, I cannot lack thee two hours."

I entered the room and found only Winifred Lloyd. She was seated in the deep bay of a very picturesque old oriel window, which seemed to frame her as if in a picture. Her chin was resting in the hollow of her left hand, and she was gazing outward dreamily on vacancy, or along the flower-terraces of the house; but she looked hastily round, and held out a hand to me as I approached.

I caressed the pretty hand, and then dropped it; and not knowing very well what to say, leaned over the back of her chair.

"I suppose," she began, "you are thinking--thinking--"

"How far more pleasing to the eye are a pair of fair white shoulders to the same amount of silk or satin," said I smilingly, as I patted her neck with my glove.

She shrugged the white shoulders in question, and said petulantly, with half averted face,

"Is it possible that your departure has no place in your thoughts?"

"Alas, yes! for do I not leave Craigaderyn by sunset? and its golden farewell rays are lingering on blue Snowdon even now," said I, with a forced smile; for though I had come in quest of Estelle, something--I know not what--drew me to Winifred just then.

Her eyebrows were very black, but slightly arched, and they almost met over her nose; and I gazed into the orbs below them, so dark, so clear, and beautiful--eyes that could neither conceal the emotions of her heart, nor the pleasure or sorrow she felt; and I thought how easily a man might be lured to forget the world for her, as friendship between the sexes--especially in youth--is perilous; and some such thought, perhaps, occurred to her, for she turned her face abruptly from me.

"You are surely not angry with me?" said I, bending nearer her ear.

"Angry--I with you?"

"Yes."

"Why should I be so?" she asked, looking down upon her folded hands that trembled in her lap--for she was evidently repressing some emotion; thinking, perhaps, of poor Phil Caradoc, who was then ploughing the waters of the Mediterranean with Carneydd Llewellyn to console him.

"You should not have come here," said she, after a pause.

"Not into the drawing-room?"

"Unless to meet Estelle Cressingham."

"Do not say this," said I, nervously and imploringly, in a low voice; "what is Estelle to me?"

"Indeed!" said the little scornful lip. "Her mamma summoned her, but she may be here shortly."

Doubtless Lady Naseby had some dread of the leave-taking.

"I shall be so glad to see her once again ere I go."

"Of course."

"I hope that you and she will often think and speak of me when I am gone."

"You are a delightful egotist, Harry Hardinge; but I trust our memories may be reciprocal."

"We have ever been such friends, and must be, you know, Winifred."

"Yes, Harry; why should we *not* be friends?" she asked, with a dash of passionate earnestness in her tone, while she gazed at me with a curious expression in her large, soft, and long-lashed eyes.

"Have you any message for--for----"

"Whom?" she asked, sharply.

"Philip Caradoc."

"None."

"None!"

"Save kindest regards and warmest wishes. What is Mr. Caradoc to me?" Then she gave a little shiver, as she added, "Our conversation is taking a very strange tone."

"I cannot conceive in how I have annoyed you," said I, with something of sorrow and wonder in my heart.

"Perhaps; but you have not annoyed me, though you are not quite what you used to be; and none are so blind as those who will not see."

"I am quite perplexed. I think we know each other pretty well, Winifred?" said I, very softly.

"I know you certainly," was the dubious response.

"Well--and I you?" said I, laughing.

"Scarcely. Woman, you should be aware, is a privileged enigma."

"Well, I was about to say that, whatever happens, we must ever be dear friends, and think of each other kindly and tenderly, for the pleasant times that are past and gone."

"What can happen to make us otherwise?" she asked, in a strange voice.

"I--may be killed," said I, not knowing very well what to say or suggest; "so, while there is a chance of such a contingency, let us part kindly; not so coldly as this, dear Winifred; and kiss me ere I go."

Her lips, warm and tremulous, touched mine for an instant; but her eyes were sad and wild, and her poor little face grew ashy white as she hastened away, leaving me with Estelle, who was approaching through the long and shaded room; and when with her, Winifred Lloyd and the momentary emotion that had sprung up--emotion that I cared not and dared not *then* to analyse--were utterly forgotten.

Our interview was a very silent one. We had barely time for a few words, and heavy on my heart as lead weighed the conviction that I had to part from her--my love so recently won, so firmly promised and affianced. I knew that the days of my sojourn at Winchester must be few now; and with the chances of war before me, and temptations and aristocratic ambition left behind with her, how dubious and how remote were the chances of our meeting again!

Moments there were when I felt blindly desperate, and with my arms round Estelle.

When returning, would she still love me, as Desdemona loved her Moor, for the dangers I had dared? The days of chivalry and romance have gone; but the "old, old story" yet remains to us, fresh as when first

told in Eden.

"For life or death, for good or for evil, for weal or woe, darling Estelle, I leave my heart in your keeping!" said I, in a low passionate whisper; "in twelve months, perhaps, I may claim you as my wife."

"L'homme propose, et Dieu dispose," said she, quietly and tenderly. "I yet hope to see you, were it but for a day, at Walcot Park, ere you sail."

"Bless you for the hope your words give me!" said I, as Owen Gwyllim came to announce that the carriage was at the door, and to give me Lady Naseby's and Lord Pottersleigh's cards and farewell wishes. And from that moment all the rest of my leave-taking seemed purely mechanical; and not only Sir Madoc, his two daughters, and Estelle, were on the terrace of the mansion to bid me adieu, but all the hearty, hot-tempered, high-cheekboned old Welsh domestics, most of whom had known me since boyhood, were also there.

The impulsive Dora brought me my courier-bag, a flask filled with brandy, and dainty sandwiches cut and prepared by Winifred's own kind little hands (for in doing this for me she would trust neither the butler nor Mrs. Gwenny Davis the housekeeper), and then she held up her bright face to be kissed; but inspired by I know not what emotion of doubt or dread, I only touched with my lips the hands of Lady Estelle and Miss Lloyd. Both girls stood a little apart from each other, pale as death, tremulous with suppressed emotion, and with their lashes matted and their eyes filled with tears, that pride and the presence of others restrained from falling. They were calm externally, but their hearts were full of secret thoughts, to which I was long in getting the clue. In the eyes of Estelle there was that glance or expression of loving intensity which most men have seen *once*--it may be twice--in a woman's eye, and have never, never forgotten.

Sir Madoc's brown manly hand shook mine heartily, and he clapped me on the back.

"I hope to see you yet ere you leave England, my boy, and such hopes always take the sting from an adieu," said he, with a voice that quivered nevertheless. "Sorry you can't stay for the 1st of September--the partridges will be in splendid order; but there is shooting enough of another kind in the preserves you are going to."

"And may never come back from," was the comforting addendum of old Mrs. Davis, as she applied her black-silk apron to her eyes.

"Ah, Harry," said Sir Madoc, "you gave a smile so like your mother just now! She was handsome; but you will be never like her, were you as beautiful as Absalom."

"It is well that poor mamma can't hear all this," said Dora, laughing through her tears.

"Your dear mamma, my girl, was very fond of her and of him, too," said honest Sir Madoc; and then he whispered, "If ever you want cash, Harry, don't forget me, and Coutts and Co.--the dingy den in the Strand. Farewell--anwylbach!--good-bye!"

A few minutes more and all the tableau on the steps had passed away. I was bowling along the tall lime avenue and down the steep mountain road, up which Phil Caradoc and I had travelled but a few weeks before. How much had passed since *then!* and how much was inevitably to pass ere I should again see these familiar scenes! What had I said, or left unsaid? What had I done, what had passed, or how was it, that as the train sped with me beyond brave old Chester, on and on, on and on, monotonously clanking, grinding, jarring, and occasionally shrieking, while intrenched among railway rugs, with a choice cigar between my teeth, and while I was verging into that pleasant frame of mind when soft and happy visions are born of the half-drowsy brain, lulled as it were by rapidity of motion and the sameness of recurring sounds--how was it, I say, that the strange, unfathomable expression I had seen in the soft pleading eyes of dear Winifred--distance was already

making her "dear"--mingled in my memory with the smileless, grave, and tender farewell glance of my pale Estelle; and that the sweet innocent kiss of the former was remembered with sadness and delight?

I strove to analyse my ideas, and then thrust them from me, as I lowered the carriage window and looked forth upon the flying landscape and the starry night, and muttered,

"Poor Winny--God bless her! But *two loves for one heart* will never, never do. I have been at Craigaderyn too long!"

And I pictured to myself the drawing-room there: Estelle, perhaps, at the piano to conceal her emotions; or listening, it might be, to the twaddle of old Pottersleigh. Winny gazing out upon the starlit terrace, trying to realise the prospect--as women proposed to will do--if she had married Phil Caradoc; or thinking of--heaven knows what! And old Sir Madoc in his arm-chair, and dreaming, while Dora nestled by his side, of the old times, and the boy--to wit, myself--he loved so well.

CHAPTER XX.-FEARS.

Caradoc and many other good fellows were gone eastward, and save Hugh Price and a newly-fledged ensign, I was the only officer with the depôt, and being senior had the command. The former had always some affair of the heart on the tapis; the latter was a mere boy, fresh from Harrow, so neither was companion for me. Back once more to the prosaic life of heavy drill and much useless duty in Winchester barracks,

the picturesque and joyous past at Craigaderyn--after I had written a letter to Sir Madoc full of remembrances to the ladies-- seemed somewhat like a dream.

My engagement with Estelle--our rides, drives, and rambles by the wild green hills of Mynedd Hiraethrog; in the chase and long lime avenue; our chance meetings in the garden arbour; by the fountain, where the lilies floated and the gold fish shot to and fro; over all, that wild boat adventure, by which our lives were to be knit up as one in the future--seemed too like a dream, of which her ring on my finger alone remained to convince me of the reality, as no letters could pass between us--at least none from me to her. Thus I grew fond of courting solitude after the duties of the day were over, and I could fling sword, sash, and belt aside; and usually I quitted early the jollity of the battalion mess, that I might indulge in visions and conjure up bright fancies amid the gray smoke wreaths of a quiet cigar, in that humble bachelor's quarter already described; while the moonlight silvered the spires and red-tiled roofs of Winchester, and when all became still in the crowded barrack, after the tattoo-drums had beaten, and the notes of the last bugle had warned--like the Norman curfew of old--the extinction of all lights and fires.

I had seen many a drama and read many a romance; but now I seemed to be personally the hero of either one or other. Engaged to the daughter of an earl; but in *secret*, and unknown to all! And how or when was that engagement to end--to be brought to a successful issue? On these points my ideas were painfully vague and full of anxiety. Were we yet to meet--were it but for an hour--ere war separated us more completely, by sea as well as land? Returning, it might be mutilated and disfigured, should I still find her loving, tender, and true? and if I fell in action, how long might I hope to be remembered ere Estelle--But I could not with patience contemplate the chances of another replacing or supplanting me. Occasionally, as if to kill time, I was seized by fits of unwonted zeal, and found plenty of work to do, apart from parades,

guards, sword-exercise, and revolver-pistol practice--for hourly recruits, many of whom could not speak a word of English, were coming in to replace those that had sailed with Phil Caradoc; and it is one of the essential parts of the duty of the officer commanding a regimental depôt to see after the arms, accoutrements, and clothing of his men; and also, that so far as drill goes, they are made perfect soldiers. Few or none of these recruits were natives of the counties outside Offa's Dyke; but when the news of the Alma came, and all England thrilled with the story of the uphill charge of the Royal Welsh, more than one London paper enviously spread the rumour, that our regiment was Cambrian only in name; till it was flatly contradicted by the colonel--but the story nearly gave hot peppery Sir Madoc a fit of apoplexy.

Besides other duties there was no small number of books--goodly sized folios--of which I had the supervision, ten at least exactly similar to those which are kept at headquarters; and all these tasks were varied by an occasional ball or rout such as a cathedral and garrison town can furnish; or a court-martial, or one of inquiry, concerning Mrs. Private Jones resenting--*vi et armis*--that the canteen-keeper should cut her bacon and tobacco, butter and bread, with the same knife; or to give some Giles Chawbacon fifty lashes about daybreak for a violation of the Red-book, in a hollow square, where men's teeth chattered in the chilly air, or they yawned behind their glazed stocks and shivered with disgust, at a punishment for which the army was indebted to William of Orange, and which is now happily a thing of the past. So the month of August drew to a close, and a box of partridges duly came from Sir Madoc--the spoil of his gun on the slopes of Mynedd Hiraethrog, perhaps; with a letter which acquainted me that Lady Naseby and her daughter had been for fully a fortnight at Walcot Park in Hampshire, but that he supposed I was probably aware of the circumstance, and that Pottersleigh was with them.

Fully a fortnight, and neither letter nor card of invitation, though they knew that I was in Winchester! How or why was this? A chill came over me, though I certainly had no fear of the Viscount's influence; but then I reflected that Estelle could not, and that Lady Naseby would not, invite me--each for reasons of her own. What, then, remained for me to do, but wait the event with patience, or endeavour to seek her out, by throwing myself in her way? I writhed at the idea of a fortnight having escaped us, while the coming of the fatal route for the East hung over me. There was something revolting and humiliating to my spirit in acting the part of a prowler about Walcot Park; but who is a more humble slave than a lover? The declaration of war had animated the services, both by sea and land, with a new or revived interest for all, with women especially. Thus our parades, reviews, and even our marches of exercise were frequently witnessed by all the beauty and fashion of the city and county; and among them I always looked in vain for the carriage and liveries of the Countess. Was Estelle ill, or was their absence from these spectacles part of a system to be pursued by the former?

Walcot Park was, I knew, only a few miles from the barracks on the Whitchurch-road. I had spent many an hour riding there merely to see the place which was associated with Estelle, when she had been absent from it in London or elsewhere; and now I had doubly an attraction to make me turn my horse's head in that direction, after Sir Madoc's letter came; so the second day saw me take the way northward from the old cathedral city, in mufti, to elude observation. The evening was a lovely one, and those swelling hills and fertile valleys, wide expanses of woodland already becoming crisp by the heat of the past summer, with clumps of birch and elder, the wild ash and the oak, which make up the staple features of Hampshire scenery, were in all their autumnal beauty and repose. The tinkling of the waggoner's bells on the dusty highway, was still heard, though the shrill whistle of the locomotive seemed to hint that, like the old stage-coachman, he should ere long find his occupation gone; and mellowed on the soft and ambient air there came the merry evening chimes from more than one quaint, village-church--

the broad square Norman tower of which stood--the landmark of its district--in outline distinct and dark against the golden flush of the western sky. Dusk was almost closing when I crossed that noted trouting-stream, the Teste; and passed through Whitchurch.

As I trotted leisurely along the single street of which the little market borough is chiefly composed, at the door of a small inn I perceived a stable-boy holding by their bridles a black horse and a roan mare. The form of the latter seemed familiar to me. I could not mistake the height of forehead, the depth of chest, and roundness of barrel, or a peculiar white spot on the off-shoulder, and in the former recognised the roadster which Guilfoyle had brought with him to Craigaderyn. On seeing that I drew my reins and looked rather scrutinisingly at the animal, the groom, stable helper, or whatever he was, touched his cap, on which I inquired,

"Whose nag is this, my man?"

"Can't say as I knows, sir; but the gentleman, with another, is inside the bar, having a drop of summut," was the answer.

"Does he reside hereabout?"

"At Walcot Park he do."

"Walcot Park!"

"My Lady Naseby's place; he's been there for a couple of days at least, with Mr. Sharpus, my lady's lawyer from London."

I rode on and spurred my horse to a maddening pace for some distance, and then permitting the reins to drop on his neck, gave way to the tide of perplexing, harassing, and exasperating thoughts that flowed upon me. I remembered that we had arranged at Craigaderyn not to inform Lady Naseby of the real character of her chosen continental acquaintance, a foolish and fatal mistake, as the fellow would seem to have had sufficient presumption to present himself at Walcot Park, and

there remain until exposed and expelled. But how came it to pass that such as he was patronised and fostered, as it were, by "the family solicitor," and patented by being his companion? Surely a legal man, however great a rascal professionally and personally, was too wary to adopt openly a blackleg as his friend and protégé!

I felt that Lady Naseby should instantly be warned of Guilfoyle's real character; but by whom was this to be done? Tied up by my secret arrangements with Estelle, I could neither write nor call uninvited; but why had she not, as she had promised, written to me, or given me some sign of her being so near Winchester as Walcot Park? When I recalled her apparent preference for this man, when Caradoc and I first went to Wales, their frequent recurrence to past companionship abroad, their duets together, and so forth, her angry defence of him to myself, together with an interest he had acquired in the eyes of her usually unapproachable mother, something of my old emotions of pique and doubt, and a jealousy for which I blushed, began to mingle with my perplexity and mortification, and the fear that *he* could have any influence on her destiny or mine!

I recalled all the conversation overheard by Pottersleigh, and greater grew my astonishment and indignation. I felt it imperative that something should be done instantly, and resolved to telegraph or write to Sir Madoc, requesting him to procure the dismission of this intruder from Walcot Park as promptly as he had despatched him from Craigaderyn. From a part of the road where it wound over an upland slope I could see the Jointure House which formed the residence of Lady Naseby and of that Estelle who was a law, a light, a guiding star to me, and towards whom every thought and aspiration turned. Walcot Park was a spacious domain, and studded by clumps of stately old trees, which had been planted after the Revolution of 1688 by a peer of the Naseby family, who was one of the first to desert his hereditary king at Rochester. The mansion itself dated from the same stormy period, and was built entirely of red brick with white stone corners and cornices. Its

peristyle of six Ionic columns glistened white in the moonlight, and was distinctly visible from where I sat on horseback. The shadow of the square façade of the entire edifice fell purple and dark far across the park. There were lights in several of the windows, and I knew that my Estelle must be in one of those rooms--but which?

At that moment all my soul yearned for her; could I but for an instant have seen her, or heard her voice! She dwelt there, visible to and approachable by others, and yet I dared not visit her. The fact of her presence there seemed to pervade and charm all the place, and with a sad, loving, and yet exasperated interest, I continued to survey it. I was hovering there, but aimlessly, and without any defined purpose, other than the vague chance of seeing or being near her. Walcot I knew was her favourite place, and there she kept all her pets, for she had many: a parrot sent from the Cape by the captain of a frigate to whom she had spoken but once at a ball; a spaniel from Malta, the gift of some forgotten rifleman; a noble staghound, given by a Highland officer who had danced with her once--once only--and never forgot it; a squirrel, the gift of Sir Madoc; and an old horse or two, her father's favourite hacks, turned loose in the park as perpetual pensioners.

Could she really have loved me as she said she did, if she was already behaving so coldly to me now? No letter or note, no invitation--she had surely influence enough with her mother to have procured me that!--no notice taken of my vicinity, of my presence with the depôt again! What shadow was this that seemed already to be falling on our sunny love? Whence the doubt that had sprung up within me, and the coldness that seemed between us? Full of these thoughts, I was gazing wistfully at the house, when I perceived the dark figures of two horsemen riding leisurely along the winding approach that led to the white peristyle, and felt certain that they were Guilfoyle and his legal friend Mr. Sharpus (of Sharpus and Juggles) mounted on the identical nags I had seen at the inn-door; and inspired by emotions of a very mingled character, I galloped back to the barracks, never drawing my bridle for the entire

twelve miles of the way, until I threw it to my man Evans; and hurrying to my room, wrote instantly a most pressing letter to Sir Madoc, informing him of what I had seen and heard. I was not without thoughts of communicating with Lord Pottersleigh; but, for obvious reasons, shrunk from *his* intervention in the Cressingham family circle.

I knew that it would be delivered at Craigaderyn on the morrow, and deemed that now twenty-four hours must be the utmost limit of Mr. Hawkesby Guilfoyle's sojourn in his present quarters, and in a sphere which he insulted by his presence; but three, four, even five days passed, and no reply came from Sir Madoc, who was then, though I knew it not, shooting with some friends in South Wales, and did not receive my epistle until it was somewhat late for him to act on it. During these intervening days I was in a species of fever. One Sunday I incidentally heard, at mess, that Lady Naseby's party, now a pretty numerous one, had been at service in the cathedral, and to hear the bishop preach. She had come in state, in the carriage, attended by several gentlemen on horseback, and two tall fellows in livery, one carrying her prayer-books, the other a long cane and huge nosegay; and there I might have met them all face to face, and seen Estelle once more, had my evil destiny not assigned to me the command of the main guard, and thus detained me in barracks; but Price of ours--susceptible as the Tupman of *Pickwick*--had seen her, and came to mess raving about her beauty.

Every hour I could spare from duty was spent in hovering, like a spectre or a spy--an unquiet spirit certainly--in the vicinity of Walcot Park, till the lodge-keepers, who had been wont to touch their hats civilly at first, began ere long to view me with mistrust; and my horse knew every crook and turn of the Whitchurch-road quite as well as the way to his own stable. On the evening of the fifth day after I had written to Sir Madoc--a pleasant evening in the first days of September--I was again riding leisurely among the deep green lanes that border on Walcot Park, and which lay between dark green hedgerows then studded by scarlet dogberries, and the overarching branches of apple, pear, and damson

trees, my heart, as usual, full of vague doubts, decided longings, and most undecided intentions, when I began slowly to walk my horse up a long, steep, and picturesque road, the vista of which was closed by an old village church, in the low and moss-grown wall surrounding which was a green wicket. It was on just such an evening as the last I have described, when the farewell gleam of the sun shone level along the fields, when the many-coloured foliage rustled in the gentle wind, and the voices of the blackbird, the thrush, and the lark came sweetly at times from the darkening copsewood, and when, as Clare writes in his rhyming calendar,

"The wagons haste the corn to load,
And hurry down the dusty road;
The driving boy with eager eye
Watches the church clock, passing by--
Whose gilt hands glitter in the sun--
To see how far the hours have run;
Right happy in the breathless day,
To see time wearing fast away."

Nearly covered with ivy, the square tower of the little church--a fane old as the days when the Saxons bent their bows in vain at Hastings; yea, old as the time of St. Ethelwold (the famous architect and Bishop of Winchester)--peeped up amid the rich autumnal foliage that almost hid it from the view. At the wicket, some hundred yards from me, in the twilight--for though the sun had not set, the density of the copsewood about the place rendered the light rather dim and obscure--were a lady and gentleman, the latter mounted, and the former on foot. At first they seemed to be in close and earnest conversation; then the lady gesticulated earnestly, raising her hands and face to him imploringly; but twice he thrust her back, almost violently, with the handle of his whip. This was a strange and unpleasant episode to encounter. I knew not whether to advance or retire. I feared to intrude on what I supposed was something more than a lovers' quarrel, or, from the man's utter

indifference, was perhaps a matrimonial squabble; and I was equally loth to retire, and leave a woman--a lady evidently--to the violence or passion of this person, upon whose love or mercy--it might be both--by her gestures and even the distant tones of her voice, she was so evidently throwing herself in vain.

I checked my horse's pace, and, amid the thick rank grass of the narrow lane, his footsteps were unheeded by the two actors in this scene; moreover, without backing him well into one of the thick hedges, I could not have turned to retrace my way.

Her hands were clasped now; she had dropped her parasol, and her face, a very white one, was upturned pleadingly to his; but to whatever she said, this horseman, whose back was to me, replied scornfully and derisively by a low mocking laugh, which somehow I seemed to have heard before, but when, or where, I quite failed to remember. Anon she drew something from her bosom, and, kissing it, held it towards him, as if seeking to influence him, by an appeal through it to some past time of love, or truth, or happiness, or all together. Whatever it was she thus displayed, he snatched it roughly, even fiercely, from her with a curse, and, again thrusting her violently from him--so violently, that I believe he must have used his foot and the off-stirrup iron---she fell heavily against the low wall, which, at the same moment, he cleared by a flying leap, and then disappeared in the network of lanes, orchards, and hedgerows that lie about the churchyard. A low wail escaped her; and when I came cantering up, and dismounted, she was lying on the path beside the churchyard wicket in tears and despair. Her appearance was perfectly ladylike, and most prepossessing; yet I knew not very clearly what to say or how to interfere in the matter, though manhood and courtesy rendered some action imperatively necessary.

"I trust you are not hurt," said I, taking her hand and assisting her to rise.

"Thank you, sir--not bodily hurt," she replied, in a low and broken voice, while scarcely venturing to look at me, and pressing her left hand upon her heart, as if to restrain emotion, or as if she felt a pain there.

"Did that person rob you?" asked I.

"O no, no, sir," she answered, hurriedly.

"But he seemed to snatch or wrench something from you?"

"Yes," said she, with hesitation.

"By violence, too?"

She did not reply, but covered her face with her handkerchief, and bit it, apparently in efforts to control her sobs.

"Can I assist you--be of service to you in any way?" I urged, in a pleading tone; for her whole air and appearance interested me.

"No, sir; none can assist me now."

"None?"

"Save God, and even He seems to abandon me."

"What is the meaning of this despair?" I asked, after a pause. "It is a lovers' quarrel, I presume; and if so--"

"O no, sir; he is no lover of mine--now, at least."

"He--who?"

"The gentleman who has just left me," said she, evasively. "But permit me to pass you, sir; I must return to Whitchurch."

I bowed, and led my horse aside, that she might pass down the lane.

"I thank you, sir, for your kindness," said she, bowing, as I lifted my hat; and then she seemed to totter away weakly and feebly, supporting or guiding herself, as if blind, by the rude low wall; and I could perceive that her left hand, which was now ungloved, was small, delicate, and of exceeding beauty in form. Her manner and air were hurried; her voice and eyes were agitated; she seemed a ladylike little creature, but plainly and darkly attired in a kind of second mourning. Her figure, if *petite*, was very graceful and girlish, too, though she was nearer thirty, perhaps, than twenty. Her face was delicate in feature, and charmingly soft and feminine in expression. Her eyes were of that clear dark gray which seems almost black at night, and their lashes were long and tremulous, lending a chastened or Madonna tone to her face, which, when taken together with her sadness of manner and a certain languor that seemed to be the result of ill-health, proved very prepossessing. With all this there was something, I thought, of the widow in her aspect and dress; but this was merely fancy.

Ere I remounted, and while observing her, I perceived that she tottered, as if overcome by weakness, emotion, or both. She sank against the churchyard wall, and nearly fell; on this, I again approached, and said with all softness and respect:

"Pardon me, and do not deem me, though a stranger, intrusive; you are ill and weary, and unable to walk alone. Permit me to offer my arm, for a little way at least, down this steep and rugged road."

"Thanks," she replied; "you are very kind, sir; once at the foot of this lane, I shall easily make my way alone. I am not afraid of strangers," she added, with a strange smile; "I have been much cast among them of late."

"You reside at Whitchurch?" said I, as we proceeded slowly together, occasionally treading the fallen apples under foot among the long grass.

"Yes."

"It is, then, your home?"

"I have no other--at present," said she, in a choking voice, and scarcely making an effort to restrain her tears, while I detected on a finger of the ungloved hand, the beauty of which I so much admired, a plain gold hoop--the marriage ring. So she was a wife; and the unseemly quarrel I had seen must have been a matrimonial one. Thus I became more assured in my manner.

"I am almost a stranger here," said I, "as I belong to the garrison at Winchester."

"You are an officer?"

"Yes, madam, of the Royal Welsh Fusileers."

She simply bowed, but did not respond to my information by saying *who* she was.

"Though a soldier, sir," said she, after a pause, "I dare say you will be aware that the hardest battles of this world are *not* fought in the field."

"Where then?"

"Where we might least look for struggles of the soul: in many a well-ordered drawing-room; in many a poor garret; in many a lovely bower and sunny garden, or in a green and shady lane like this; fought in secrecy and the silence of the heart, and in tears that are hot and salt as blood!"

She *is* very pretty, thought I; but I hope she won't become melodramatic, hysterical, or anything of that sort!

"Darkness will be set in ere you can reach Whitchurch, at our present rate of progression," said I; "and your--your--" (I was about to say husband) "relations or friends will be anxious about you."

"Alas, no, sir! I have no one to miss or to regret me," she replied, mournfully; "but I must not intrude selfishly my sorrows on a stranger."

"There is no appearance of the--the person who annoyed you returning," said I, looking backward up the long narrow lane we were descending.

"Little chance is there of that," said she, bitterly; "*he* will return no more."

"You are certain of that?"

"Too fatally certain!"

"You have quarrelled, then?"

"No; it is worse than a quarrel," said she, with her pale lips quivering.

"He is an enemy?"

"My enemy?--my tempter--my evil spirit--he is my husband!"

"Pardon me; I did not mean to be curious, when I have no right to be so; but here is the highway; I too am going towards Whitchurch--my way to the barracks lies in that direction; and I shall have much pleasure in escorting you to your home, if you will permit me," said I, seized by an impulse of gallantry, humanity, or both, which I ere long had cause to repent.

"Sir, I thank you, and shall detain you no longer," she replied, hurriedly; "I am something of a wanderer now, and my rooms are at the ivy-clad inn by the roadside."

This was the place where I had seen Guilfoyle's roan mare, an evening or so past.

We had now reached the end of the narrow and secluded lane, a famous one in that locality as the trysting-place of lovers, and were standing irresolutely near the main road that leads to Whitchurch and Winchester, when a large and handsome carriage, drawn by a pair of spanking dark gray horses, approached us rapidly.

Throwing my nag's bridle over my left arm, I was in the act of offering my right hand to this mysterious lady in farewell, when her eyes caught sight of the carriage; a half-stifled sob escaped her; she reeled again, and would have fallen, had I not thrown my arm round her, and by its firm support upheld her. At that moment the carriage bowled past. The face of a lady was at the open window, looking out upon us with wonder and interest, as she saw a lady and gentleman to all appearance embracing, or at least on very good terms with each other, at the corner of a shady lane, a little way off the Queen's highway; and something like an exclamation of dismay escaped me on recognising the colourless haughty face, the dark eyes, the black hair, and bonnet of that orange tint so becoming to one of her complexion--she of whom my whole soul was full, Lady Estelle Cressingham!

CHAPTER XXI .-GEORGETTE FRANKLIN.

Had Estelle recognised me? If so, what might she--nay, what must she--think, and how misconstrue the whole situation? Should I ride after the carriage, or write at all risks, and explain the matter, or commit the event to fate? That might be perilous. She may not have recognised me, I thought: the twilight, the shade, the place might have concealed my

identity; but if not, they were all the more against me. I was now in greater and more horrible perplexity than ever, and I wished the unhappy little woman, the cause of all, in a very warm climate indeed.

Thus, while longing with all the energies of my life to see Estelle, to be seen by her *there*, at a time so liable to misconception if left unexplained, might be death to my dearest hopes, and destruction to the success I had achieved.

"Why were you so agitated by the sight of Lady Naseby's carriage?" I asked, with an annoyance of tone that I cared not to conceal.

"Giddiness, perhaps; but was I agitated?"

"Of course you were--nearly fell; would have fallen flat, indeed, but for me."

"I thank you, sir," was the gentle reply; for my asperity of manner was either unnoticed or unheeded by her; "but you seemed scarcely less so."

"I, madam!--why the deuce should I have been agitated?"

"Unless I greatly err, you were, and are so still."

"Indeed!"

"Do you know the ladies?"

"Were there two?" asked I, with increased annoyance.

"The Countess and her daughter."

"I saw but one."

"And--O, pardon my curiosity, dear sir--you know them?"

"Intimately;--and what then?" I asked, with growing irritation.

"Intimately!" she repeated, with surprise.

"There is nothing very singular in that, I suppose?"

"And, sir, you visit them?"

"I have not as yet, but hope to do soon. We were all together in the same house in North Wales."

"Ah! at Craigaderyn Court?"

"Yes; Sir Madoc Lloyd's. Do you know Sir Madoc?"

"I have not that pleasure."

"Who, then, that you are acquainted with knows him?"

"My husband."

"Your husband!" said I, glancing at the plain hoop on the delicate little hand, which she was now gloving nervously.

"He was there with you; must have been conversing with you often. I saw you all at church together one Sunday afternoon, and frequently on the terraces and on the lawn; while!"--she covered her face with her hands--"while I loitered and lurked like an outcast!"

"Your husband, madam?" I queried again.

"Mr. Hawkesby Guilfoyle."

Whew! Here was a discovery: it quite took my breath away, and I looked with deeper interest on the sweet and pale and patient little face.

I now remembered the letter I had picked up and returned to him; his confusion about it, and the horse he alleged to have lost by at a race that had not come off; his irritation, the postal marks, and the name of *Georgette*.

After such a termination to his visit to Craigaderyn, I could fancy that his situation as a guest or visitor at Walcot Park, even after he found the ladies there were ignorant of the nature of Sir Madoc's curt note to him, must be far from enviable, for such as he must live in hourly dread of insult, slight, or exposure; but how was I now situated with regard to her I loved?

Deemed, perhaps, guilty in her eyes, and without a crime; and if aware of the situation, the malevolent Guilfoyle would be sure to avail himself of it to the fullest extent.

"Lady Estelle is very lovely, as I could see," said my companion.

"Very; but you saw her--when?"

"In Craigaderyn church, most fully and favourably."

And now I recalled the pale-faced little woman in black, who had been pointed out to me by Winifred Lloyd, and who had been found in a swoon among the gravestones by old Farmer Rhuddlan.

In all this there was some mystery, which I felt curious enough to probe, as Guilfoyle had never by word or hint at any time given those among whom he moved reason to believe he was aught else than a bachelor, and a very eligible one, too; for if my once rival, as I believed him to be, was not a creditable, he was certainly a plausible, one; and here lay with me the means of an *exposé* beyond even that which had taken place at Craigaderyn Court.

"You are his wife, madam, and yet--does he, for purposes of his own, disavow you?" said I, after a pause, not knowing very well how to put my leading question.

"It is so, sir--for infamous purposes of his own."

"But you have him in your power; you have all the air of a lady of birth and education--why not come forward and assert your position?"

The woman's soft gray eyes were usually filled by an expression of great and deep sadness; but there were times when, as she spoke, they flashed with fire, and there were others, when her whole face seemed to glitter with "the white light of passion" as she thought of her wrongs. Restraining her emotion, she replied,

"To assert my claims; that is exactly what I cannot do--now at least."

"Why?"

"Because he has destroyed all the proofs that existed of our unhappy and most miserable marriage."

"Destroyed them! how?"

"Very simply, by putting them in the fire before my face."

"But a record--a register--must exist somewhere."

"We were married at sea, and the ship, in the chaplain's books of which the marriage I have no doubt was recorded, perished. Proofs I have none. But tell me, sir, is it true, that--that he is to be married to the daughter of Lady Naseby?"

"To Estelle Cressingham?" I exclaimed, while much of amusement mingled with the angry scorn of my manner.

"Yes," she replied, eagerly.

"No, certainly not; what on earth can have put such an idea into your head, my good woman?"

My hauteur of tone passed unheeded, as she replied:

"I saw her portrait in the Royal Academy, and heard a gentleman who stood near me say to another, that it was so rumoured; that he--Mr. Guilfoyle--had come with her from the Continent, and that he was going after her down to North Wales. He had said so at the club."

I almost ground my teeth on hearing this. That his contemptible name should have been linked with hers by empty gossips in public places like the Royal Academy and "his club," where none dared think of mine, was intolerable.

"I followed him to Wales," she continued. "I saw nothing at Craigaderyn church, or elsewhere, on her part to justify the story; when I met my husband on the lawn at the *fête*--for I was there, though uninvited--he laughed bitterly at the rumour, and said she was contracted to Lord Pottersleigh, who, as I might perceive, was ever by her side. He then gave me money, which I flung on the earth; ordered me on peril of my life to leave the place, lest he might give notice to the police that I had no right to be there. But though I have long since ceased to love, I cannot help hovering near him, and from Wales I followed him here; for I know that now he is at Walcot Park."

"I can assure you, for your ease, that the Lady Estelle is engaged, but to a very different person from old Lord Pottersleigh," said I, twirling the ends of my moustache with undisguised satisfaction, if not with a little superciliousness; "your husband, however, seems a man of means, Mrs. Guilfoyle."

She gave me a bitter smile, as she replied, "Yes, at times; and drawn from various resources. He laughs to scorn now my marriage ring; and yet he wears the diamond one which I gave him in the days when we were engaged lovers, and which had once been my dear father's."

The diamond which *she* gave him! Here, then, was another, and the most probable version of the history of that remarkable brilliant.

"Of what was it that he deprived you by force, before his horse leaped the wall?"

"A locket which I wore at my neck, suspended by a ribbon," said she, as her tears began to fall again.

"He has the family solicitor with him at Walcot Park, I understand," said I.

"They are visiting there together. Mr. Sharpus came on business, and my husband accompanied him."

"Why not appeal to this legal man?

"I have done so many times."

"And he--"

"Fears Mr. Guilfoyle and dare not move in the matter, or affects to disbelieve me."

"What power has this--your husband, over him?"

"God alone knows--I do not," she replied, clasping her hands; "but Mr. Sharpus quails like a criminal under the eye of Hawkesby Guilfoyle, who seems also to possess some strange power over Lady Naseby, I think."

Could such really be? It seemed impossible; everything appeared to forbid it; and yet I was not insensible to a conviction that the dowager countess was rather pleased with, than influenced by, him. Could he have acted in secret the part of lover to *her*, and so flattered her weakness by adulation? Old women and old men, too, are at times absurd enough for anything; and now the words of Caradoc, on the night he lost money to Guilfoyle at billiards, recurred to me, when in his blunt way he averred they had all some secret understanding, adding, "By Jove! I can't make it out at all." My mind was a kind of chaos as I walked onward with my new friend, and leading my horse by the bridle we entered Whitchurch together. In the dusk I left her at the inn door, promising to visit her on the morrow, and consult with her on the means for farther exposing her husband; for although her story--for all I knew to the contrary--might be an entire fabrication, I was not then in a mood

of mind to view it as such. As I bade her adieu, a dog-cart, driven by a servant,--whose livery was familiar to me, passed quickly. Two women were in it, one of whom mentioned my name. I looked up and recognised Mademoiselle Babette Pompon, Lady Naseby's soubrette, who had evidently been shopping; and a natural dread that she, out of a love of gossip, or the malevolence peculiar to her class, might mention having seen me at the inn porch with a fair friend, was now added to the annoyance caused by the episode at the lane end--an episode to which the said parting would seem but an addendum or sequel; and I galloped home to my quarters in a frame of thought far from enviable, and one which neither brandy nor seltzer at the mess-house could allay.

CHAPTER XXII.--GEORGETTE FRANKLIN'S STORY.

Next day I heard the stranger's story, and it was a sad one. Georgette Franklin--for such was her unmarried name--was the last surviving child of George Franklin, a decayed gentleman, who dwelt in Salop, near the Welsh border--we need not precisely say where, but within view of the green hills of Denbigh; for the swelling undulations of the beautiful Clwydian range formed the background to the prospect from the windows of that quaint old house which was nearly all that survived of his hereditary patrimony. Stoke Franklin--so named as it occupied the site of a timber dwelling of the Saxon times, coeval perhaps with Offa's Dyke--was still surrounded by a defensive ditch or moat, where now no water lay, but where, in the season, the primroses grew in golden sheets on the emerald turf. It was an isolated edifice, built of dark-red brick, with stone corners, stone mullions to its quaint old sunken windows, and ogee pediments or gables above them, also of stone. From

foundation to chimneys it was quaint in style, ancient in date, and picturesque in aspect. Long lines of elms, and in some places pollard willows, marked the boundaries of what had been the demesne of the Franklins; but piecemeal it had passed away to more careful neighbours, and now little remained to George Franklin but the ground whereon the old mansion-house stood, and that sombre green patch in God's-acre, the neighbouring churchyard, where his wife and their four children lay, near the ancient yew, the greenery of which had decorated the altar in the yule feasts of centuries ago, and whose sturdy branches had furnished bow-staves for the archers who shot under his ancestors at Bosworth, at Shrewsbury, and Flodden Field.

George Franklin was not a misanthrope; far from it; but he lived very much alone in the old house. His oaken library, so solemnly tranquil, with its heavy dark draperies and book-hidden walls, when the evening sun stole through the deep mullions of the lozenged and painted windows, was his favourite resort. And a cozy room it proved in winter, when the adjacent meres were frozen, and the scalp of Moel Fammau was powdered with snow. There he was wont to sit, with Georgette by his knee, he reading and she working; a bright-faced, brown-haired, and lively girl, whose golden canaries and green love-birds hung in every window; for the house was quite alive with her feathered pets, and was as full of sound as an aviary with their voices in summer. One warm evening in autumn, when Georgette was verging on her eighteenth year, she and her father were seated near the house-door, under a shady chestnut-tree. The sunshine lay bright on the greensward, and on the wilderness of flowers and shrubs that grew close to the massive red walls of the old mansion. Mr. Franklin was idly lingering over a book and sipping a glass of some dark and full-bodied old port--almost the last bottle that remained in his now but ill-replenished cellar. And a very perfect picture the old man made. His thin but stately figure; his features so patrician in profile; his dress somewhat old in fashion; his hands, though faded, so shapely, with a diamond ring on one finger, *the* diamond ring of which we have heard so much lately; and the handsome

girl who hovered about him, attending to his little wants, varying her kind offices with playful caresses, while her white neck and her golden-brown hair glittered in the sunshine--all this seemed to harmonise well with the old house that formed the background to the picture. The evening was quiet and still. The voices of Georgette's birds, her caged canaries and piping bullfinches, came through the open windows; but there were no other sounds, save once or twice when the notes of a distant hunting-horn, prolonged and sad, came on the passing wind, and then the old man would raise his head, and his clear eye would sparkle,

ıs he thought of the days that had long since gone by,
When his spirit was bold and his courage was high;"

and when he, too, had followed that sound, and ridden across the stiffest country, neck and neck with the best horsemen in Salop and Cheshire.

Suddenly there came a shout, and a huntsman in red, minus his black velvet cap, was seen to clear a beech-hedge on the border of the lawn; and ere an exclamation of annoyance or indignation could escape old George Franklin, that his privacy should be invaded, even by a sportsman, in this unwonted manner, a cry of terror escaped Georgette; for it was evident that the gentleman's horse had become quite unmanageable, as the bridle-rein had given way; and after its terrible leap, it came tearing at a mad pace straight towards the house, and dashing itself head foremost against a tree, hurled the rider senseless on the ground. He rolled to the very feet of Georgette and her father, both of whom were full of pity and compassion, the former all the more so that the stranger was undoubtedly a handsome man, and barely yet in the prime of life. Aid was promptly summoned, and the village doctor, anxious to serve, for a time at least, one whom he deemed a wealthy patient, earnestly seconded, and even enforced, the suggestion of the hospitable George Franklin, that the sufferer, whose head was contused, and whose shoulder-blade had narrowly escaped fracture, should neither be removed nor disturbed. Hence he was at once assigned a room in the old mansion, with Georgette's old Welsh nurse, now the housekeeper, to

attend him. He was a man, however, of a strong constitution, "one of those fellows who are hard to kill," as he phrased it; thus, on the third morning after the accident, he was well enough to make his way to the breakfast room.

Georgette, attired in a most becoming muslin dress, and looking fresh, rosy, and innocent, as a young girl can only look who has left her couch after a healthy slumber to greet the sunny morning, was standing on a chair in an oriel, attending to the wants of one of her feathered pets; suddenly the chair slipped, and she was about to fall, when a strong arm, in the sleeve of a scarlet hunting-coat, encircled and supported her. This little *contretemps* made both parties at once at home, and on easy terms.

"Mr. Guilfoyle!" exclaimed the girl, for it was he.

"Miss Franklin, I presume?"

"Are you well already?" she asked.

"Nearly so," said he, smilingly, as he took in all the girl's beauty at a glance, together with the pleasant view beyond the antique oriel, where the morning sun came down on the shining leaves, covering all the dewy ground, as it were, with drops of golden light; and the quaint old house, he thought, seemed such a pleasant home.

"How happy papa will be!" said the young lady, colouring slightly under his somewhat critical gray--or rather green--eye. "I should have nursed you myself, instead of old nurse Wynne," she added, archly.

"In that case I should have been in no hurry to announce my convalescence," said he, rather pointedly; "may I ask your name--the first one, I mean? Somehow, I fancy that I can judge of character by the name."

"Georgette Franklin."

"Georgette!"

"I am called after papa."

"A charming name!" he exclaimed, but in a low tone.

Naturally frank and honest, purely innocent, and assured of her own position, and of that of her father--for though poor now, he was one of England's old untitled aristocracy--the girl felt neither awkwardness nor shyness with her new friend, who, though polished in manner, easy, and not ungraceful, was a thorough man of the world, and selfishly ready to take advantage of every place and person who came in his way; and a very simple one, indeed, was the kind old gentleman who now came to welcome his visitor, to express fears that he had left his couch too soon; and critically and keenly this hawk, who was now in the dove's nest, eyed him, and saw, by the thinness of his hair, his spare figure and wrinkled face, "delicately lined by such characters as a silver *stylus* might produce upon a waxen tablet," that his years could not be many now; yet his keen gray eyes were full of bright intelligence still, and were shaded by lashes as long and silky as those of his daughter.

Hunting and breakfast were discussed together. Mr. Guilfoyle seemed, or affected to be, an enthusiast in old English sports, professing that he loved them for themselves and from their associations; and quite won George Franklin's heart by stigmatising the "iron horse" of civilisation, which was now bearing all before it; and his host seemed to grow young again, as he recurred to the field exploits of his earlier years, over the same ground which Mr. Guilfoyle--who had been on a visit to the house of some friend twenty miles distant--had hunted so recently: round beautiful Ellesmere, by Halston and Hordley, by the flat fields of Creamore, by the base of wooded Hawkstone, where he had made many a terrible flying leap, and away by Acton Reynald; all this ground had Guilfoyle gone over but lately, and, as the event proved, almost fatally for his own bones, and more fatally for his future peace of mind, as he pretty plainly indicated to Miss Franklin on every available opportunity, in the softest and most well-chosen language. Though able to leave his room, he was neither permitted to leave the house nor attempt to

mount; so he wrote to his friend, had some of his wardrobe sent over to Stoke Franklin, and, encouraged by the hearty hospitality of its owner, took up his quarters there for an indefinite period; at least, until his hunting friend should depart for Madeira, whither he had promised to accompany him; for Mr. Hawkesby Guilfoyle seemed somewhat of a cosmopolitan, and rather peripatetic in his habits. He had been over one half the world, according to his own accounts, and fully intended to go over the other; so he proved a very agreeable companion to the hitherto lonely father and daughter in that secluded mansion in Salop. Merciful it is, indeed, that none of us can lift the veil that hides the future; thus little could George Franklin foresee the influence this man was to exert over the fate of his daughter and himself, when he listened to his plausible anecdotes, or sat alone and happy in his shady old library, communing pleasantly with his ancient favourites--with Geoffrey Chaucer, the knightly pages of Froissart, Dame Juliana Berners on hunting and hawking, and works, rare as manuscripts, that came from the antique press of Caxton and De Worde. Mr. Guilfoyle found himself in very pleasant quarters, indeed. It was ever his principle to improve the occasion or the shining hour. Georgette was highly accomplished, and knew more than one language; so did he; so week after week stole pleasantly away.

By them the touching airs of Wales, the merry *chansons* of Wronger, were played and sung together; and she it was, and no Princess of Catzenelnbogen, who taught him that wild German farewell, with its burden of "Leb'wohl! Leb'wohl!" we had heard at Craigaderyn Court. Even Petrarch was not omitted by them; for he knew, or pretended to know, a smattering of Italian, and translated the tenderest speeches of Laura's lover with a *point* that caused the young girl's heart to vibrate with new and strange emotions. And now, ever and anon, there was a heightened flush on her soft cheek, a bright sparkle in her dark gray eye, a lightness in all her motions; she had moments of merry laughter, alternated by others of dreamy sadness--that yet was not all sadness--which showed that Georgette was in love.

And Guilfoyle, in his own fashion, loved her, too; but he had learned that of all George Franklin's once noble estate, the house alone remained, and that at his death even it must inevitably go to the spoiler; so, though to love Georgette was very pleasant and sweet, matrimony with her was not to be thought of. Money was the god of Guilfoyle's idolatry, and he thought of the wonder of his "fast" friends when they asked, "What did he get with his wife?" and how they should laugh if they heard he had married for love. Yet Georgette had become besotted--there is no other word for it, save infatuated--by him; by one who had made flippant love with strange facility to many. By degrees he artfully strove to warp or poison the girl's mind; but finding that instinctively her innocence took the alarm after a time, though she long misunderstood him, he quite as artfully changed his tactics, and spoke sorrowfully of his imperative and approaching departure for Madeira, of the agony such a separation would cause him; "it might be for years, and it might be for ever," and so forth, while, reclining in tears on his breast, the girl heard him. Taking the right time, when she was thoroughly subdued or softened by love, and fear lest she should lose him, he prayed her to elope or consent to a private marriage--he was not without hopes that his hunting friend might officiate as parson. This, he urged, would keep them true to each other until his return and their final reunion; but to this measure she would not consent.

"Come with me, then, to Madeira; we shall be back in a month, at latest."

"But think of dear papa--my poor old papa," replied Georgette, piteously; "worn as he is with years and infirmity, I cannot leave him even for so short a time; for who will soothe his pillow when I am gone?"

"Old moth--Mrs. Wynne can do all that; at least, until we return," said he, almost impatiently.

"But must you really go to Madeira?" pleaded the gentle voice.

"I must, indeed: business of the first importance compels me; in fact, my funds are there," he added, with charming candour, as his hunting friend had promised to frank him to Funchal and back again to London. "We shall be gone but a short time, and when we return this dear old house shall be brighter than ever, and together we shall enliven his old age. We shall kneel at his feet, darling Georgie, and implore--"

"Why not kneel *now*," urged Georgette, "and beg his consent and blessing?"

"Nay, that would be inopportune, absurd, melodramatic, and all that sort of thing. Returning, we shall be linked in the fondest affection; returning, he will be unable to resist our united supplications. Come, darling, come with me. Let us despise the silly rules of society, and the cold conventionalities of this heartless world! Let us live but for each other, Georgie; and O, how happy we shall be, when we have passed, through the medium of romance, into the prose of wedded life; though that life, my darling, shall not be altogether without romance to us!"

Overcome by the intensity of her affection for this man, her first and only lover, the poor girl never analysed the inflated sophistries he poured into her too willing ear, but sank, half fainting with delight, upon his shoulder. Guilfoyle clasped her fondly in his arms; he covered her brow, her eyes--and handsome eyes they were--her lips, and braided hair, with kisses, and in his forcible but somewhat fatuous language, poured forth his raptures, his love, and his vows of attachment.

Suddenly a terror came over her, and starting from his arm, she half repulsed him, with a sudden and sorrowful expression of alarm in her eye.

"Leave me, Hawkesby," said she, "leave me, I implore you; I cannot desert papa, now especially, when most he needs my aid. O, I feel faint, very faint and ill! I doubt not your love, O, doubt not mine; but--but--'

"I must and do doubt it," said he, sadly and gloomily. "But enough of this; to-morrow I sail from Liverpool, and *then* all shall be at an end."

"O God, how lonely I shall be!" wailed the girl; "I would, dear Hawkesby, that you had never come here."

"Or had broken my neck when my horse cleared yonder hedge," said he, as his arm again went round her, and the strong deep love with which he had so artfully succeeded in inspiring her, triumphed over every sentiment of filial regard, of reason, and humanity. She forgot the old parent who doted on her; the stately old ancestral home, that was incrusted with the heraldic honours of the past; she forgot her position in the world, and fled with the *parvenu* Guilfoyle.

That night the swift express from Shrewsbury to Birkenhead, as it swept through the beautiful scenery by Chirk and Oswestry, while the wooded Wrekin sank flat and far behind, bore her irrevocably from her home; but her father's pale, white, and wondering face was ever and always upbraidingly before her. As Guilfoyle had foreseen, no proper marriage could be celebrated at Liverpool ere the ship sailed from the Mersey. He hurried her on board, and his hunting friend--a dissipated man of the world, ordered to Madeira for the benefit of his health--received the pale, shrinking, and already conscience-stricken girl in the noisy cabin of the great steamer with a critical eye and remarkably knowing smile, while his manner, that for the time was veiled by well-bred courtesy, might have taught the poor dove that she was in the snares of an unscrupulous fowler.

But ere the great ship had made the half of her voyage--about six days--in her sickness of body and soul, the girl had made a friend and confidant of the captain, a jolly and good-hearted man, who had girls of his own at home; and he, summoning a clergyman who chanced to be on board, under some very decided threats compelled Guilfoyle to perform the part he had promised; so he and Georgette were duly wedded in the cabin, while, under sail and steam, the vessel cleft the blue waves of the

western ocean, and her ensign was displayed in honour of the event. But there the pleasure and the honour ended, too; and Guilfoyle soon showed himself in his true colours, as a selfish and infamous *roué*.

"Alas!" said she, weeping, "he no longer called me the pet names I loved so well; or made a fuss with me, and caressed me, as he was wont to do among the pleasant woods of Stoke Franklin. I felt that, though he was my husband, he was a lover no longer! We had not been a fortnight at Madeira when we heard that the vessel, on board of which we were married, had perished at sea with all on board, including her temporary chaplain. Then it was that Mr. Guilfoyle tore from me the sole evidence of that solemn ceremony given to me by the clergyman, and cast it in the flames before my face, declaring that then he was free! Of our past love I had no relic but a gold locket containing his likeness and bearing a date, the 1st of September, the day on which we were married, with our initials, H. H. and G., and even that he rent from me yesterday. Alas for the treachery of which some human hearts are capable! We were *one* no longer now, as the old song has it:

"'That time!--'tis now "long, long ago!"
Its hopes and joys all passed away!
On life's calm tide three bubbles glow;
And pleasure, youth, and love are they,
Hope paints them bright as bright can be,
Or did, when he and I were *we!*'

As a finishing stroke to his cruelty and perfidy, he suddenly quitted Madeira, after some gambling transaction which brought the alcalde of Funchal and other authorities upon him. He effected his escape disguised as a vendor of sombreros and canary birds, and got clear off, leaving a note by the tenor of which he bequeathed me to his friend, with whom he left me at a solitary *quinta* among the mountains."

Though dissipated and "fast" by nature and habit, the latter was at heart an English gentleman; and pitying the forlorn girl abandoned in a foreign colony under circumstances so terrible, he sent her home; and one day, some six months after her flight, saw her once more standing irresolutely at the closed gate of the old manor-house of Stoke Franklin.

The latter was empty now; the windows were closed, the bird-cages hung there no more; the golden and purple crocuses she had planted were peeping up from the fragrant earth, untended now; the pathways were already covered with grass and mosses; untrimmed ivy nearly hid the now unopened door; the old vanes creaked mournfully in the wind; and save the drowsy hum of the bees, all spoke to her hopeless, despairing, and remorseful heart of the silence and desolation that follow death. The odour of last year's dead leaves was heavy on the air. After a time she learned how rapidly her father had changed in aspect, and how he had sunk after her disappearance--her desertion of him; and how there came a time when the fine old gentleman, whose thin figure half stooping, with his head bent forward musingly, his scant white hair floating over the collar of his somewhat faded coat, his kindly but wrinkled face, his tasselled cane trailing behind him from his folded hands, whilom so familiar in the green lanes about Stoke Franklin, and who was always welcomed by the children that gambolled on the village green or around the old stone cross, and the decayed wooden stocks that stood thereby, appeared no more. A sudden illness carried him off, or he passed away in his sleep, none knew precisely which; and then another mound under the old yew-tree was all that remained to mark where the last of the Franklins, the last of an old, old Saxon line, was laid.

I promised to assist her if I could, though without the advice of a legal friend I knew not very clearly what to do; besides, knowing what lawyers usually are, I had never included one in the circle even of my acquaintances. Estelle's long silence, and the late episode in the lane, chiefly occupied my thoughts while riding back to the barracks, where somewhat of a shock awaited me.

CHAPTER XXIII.--TURNING THE TABLES.

Though the dower-house of Walcot Park dated from the days of Dutch William, when taste was declining fast in England, internally it had all the comforts of modern life, and its large double drawing-room was replete with every elegance that art could furnish or luxury require--gilt china, and buhl cabinets, and console mirrors which reproduced again and again, in far and shadowy perspectives, the winged lions of St. Mark in *verde antique*; Laocoon and his sons writhing in the coils of the serpents; Majolica vases, where tritons, nymphs, and dolphins were entwined; Titian's cavaliers sallow and sombre in ruffs and half-armour, with pointed moustachios and imperious eyes; or red-haired Venetian dames with long stomachers, long fingers, and Bologna spaniels; or Rubens' blowsy belles, all flesh and bone, with sturdy limbs, and ruddy cheeks and elbows; but the mirrors reflected more about the very time that I was lingering at Whitchurch; to wit, a group, a trio composed of Lady Naseby, her daughter, and Mr. Guilfoyle; and within that room, so elegant and luxurious, was being fought by Estelle, silently and bitterly, one of those struggles of the heart, or battles of life, which, as poor Georgette Franklin said truly, were harder than those which were fought in the field by armed men. Guilfoyle was smiling, and looking very bland and pleased, indeed, to all appearance; Lady Naseby's usually calm and unimpressionable face, so handsome and noble in its contour, wore an expression of profound disdain and contempt; while that of Lady Estelle was as pale as marble. She seemed to be icy cold; her pink nostrils were

dilated, her lips and eyelids were quivering; but with hands folded before her, lest she should clench them and betray herself, she listened to what passed between her mother and their visitor.

"It was, as you say, a strange scene, of course, Mr. Guilfoyle, the woman fainting--"

"Reclining."

"Well, yes, reclining in the arms of Mr. Hardinge in that lonely lane," said the Countess; "but we need refer to it no more. He must be a very reckless person, as Pompon saw him take leave of this creature with great tenderness, she says, at the door of that obscure inn at Whitchurch; so that explains all."

"Not quite," replied Guilfoyle.

"Perhaps not; but then it is no affair of ours, at all events, I must own that I always wondered what the Lloyds--Sir Madoc especially--saw in that young man, a mere subaltern of the line!"

"Precisely my view of the matter, Lady Naseby."

"Besides, your little baronet people are great sticklers for rank and dignity, and often affect a greater exclusiveness than those who rank above them."

"But as for this unfortunate woman," resumed Guilfoyle, who was loth to quit the subject.

"We have heard of her in our neighbourhood before," said Lady Naseby; "at least, Pompon has. She is good to all, especially the poor."

"Ah, doesn't care to hide her candle under a bushel, eh?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Guilfoyle?"

"Simply that vanity is often mistaken for generosity, profusion for benevolence."

"You are somewhat of a cynic, I know."

"Nay, pardon me, I hope not."

"She is too poorly clad in general, Pompon says, to be able to indulge in profusion," continued Lady Naseby, while Lady Estelle glanced at the speakers alternately, in silence and with apparent calmness.

But Guilfoyle, who read her eyes and heart, and knew her secret thoughts, gloated on the pain she was enduring.

"No doubt the unfortunate creature is much to be pitied," said he; "but when a woman has lost respect for herself, she cannot expect much of it from others. The poor little soiled love-bird has probably left some pretty semi-detached villa at Chertsey or St. John's Wood to follow its faithless redcoat to Hampshire, and hence the touching tableau in the lane," he added, with his mocking and strangely unreal laugh.

"Mr. Guilfoyle!" said the Countess, in a tone of expostulation, while her daughter darted a glance of inexpressible scorn at him. But he continued coolly, "Well, perhaps I should not speak so slightingly of her, after what she has given herself out to be."

"And what is that?" asked Lady Naseby.

"Only--his wife."

"His wife!" exclaimed Estelle, starting in spite of herself. "Yes, Lady Estelle; but it may not be, nay, I hope is not, the case."

"You should rather hope that it is so."

"But we all know what military men are--never particular to a shade; and though excuses must be made for the temptations that surround them, and also for youth, I approve of the continental system, which generally excludes subaltern officers from society."

"Wife!" repeated Estelle; "O, it cannot be!"

"What is it to *you*--to us?" asked mamma, with a slight asperity of tone.

"Well, wife or not, she certainly wears a wedding-ring, and he has been more than once to visit her in that inn at Whitchurch. Of one visit our mutual friend Mr. Sharpus is cognisant. If you doubt this, ask him, and he will not contradict *me*."

"I have not said that I doubt you, Mr. Guilfoyle," said Estelle, with intense hauteur, while for a moment--but a moment only--her eyes flashed, her breast heaved, her hands were clenched, a burning colour suffused her face, and her feet were firmly planted on the carpet; yet she asked quietly, "Why do we hear this scandalous story at all? What is it to mamma--what to me?"

"More, perhaps, than you care to admit," said he, in a low voice, as the Countess rose to place Tiny in his mother-of-pearl basket.

Guilfoyle at Craigaderyn had acted as eavesdropper, and on more than one occasion had watched and followed, overseen and overheard us, and knew perfectly all about our secret engagement, her mother's views and opposition to any alliance save a noble or at least a moneyed one; and of all the stories he had the unblushing effrontery to tell, the present was perhaps the most daring. He had contrived, during the short visit he had paid to Walcot Park, under the wing of Mr. Sharpus, to let Estelle know by covert hints and remarks all he knew, and all he might yet disclose to her mother, to the young Earl of Naseby, to Lord Pottersleigh, Sir Madoc, and others; and feeling herself in his power, with all her lofty spirit the poor girl cowered before him, and he felt this

instinctively, as he turned his green eyes exultingly upon her. But for a delicate, proud, and sensitive girl to have the secrets of her heart laid bare, and at the mercy of a man like this, was beyond all measure exasperating. And this strange narrative of his, coming after what she had seen, and all that Pompon with French exaggeration had related, crushed her completely for the time.

"I have another little item to add to our Hardinge romance," said he, with his strange, hard, dry, crackling laugh, and a smile of positive delight in his shifty green eyes, while he toyed with the long ears of Tiny the shock, which had resumed its place in Lady Naseby's lap. "You remember the locket with the initials 'H. H. G.' and the date 1st September which Miss Dora Lloyd mentioned when we were at Craigaderyn?"

"I have some recollection of it," replied Lady Naseby, languidly.

"Curiously enough, as I rode past the spot where you saw that touching and interesting interview--the lane, I mean--I perceived something glittering among the grass. Dismounting, I picked up that identical locket, which doubtless the lady had dropped, thus losing it within a few days of its bestowal, if we are to judge by the date."

"And you have it?"

"Here."

Opening his leather portemonnaie, he drew from it a gold locket, to which a black-velvet ribbon was attached, and said with the utmost deliberation, "The initials represent those of Henry Hardinge and his inamorata, and behold!"

Pressing a spring, the secret of which he knew very well, the locket flew open, and within it were seen the photograph of the pale woman whom they saw in Craigaderyn church, and opposite to it one of *me*,

inserted by himself, pilfered from the album of Winifred Lloyd, as we afterwards ascertained.

"Aha! the moral Mr. Henry Hardinge with his *petite femme entretenue*, as the French so happily term it."

Lady Estelle was quite calm now in her demeanour, and she surveyed the locket with a contemptuous smile; but her face was as white as marble. She felt conscious that it was so, and hence sat with her back to the nearest window, lest her mother should perceive that she was affected.

Guilfoyle, smilingly, stood by her, stroking his dyed moustache.

"This must be restored to its owner," said he.

"Permit me to do so," said Lady Estelle.

"You, Estelle--you!" exclaimed her usually placid mother, becoming almost excited now; "why should you touch the wretched creature's ornament?"

"As an act of charity it should be restored to her, or to *him*," she added, through her clenched teeth; and taking the locket, she left the room for her own, ere her mother could reply; and there she gave way to a paroxysm of tears, that sprang from sorrow, rage, and shame that she had for a moment permitted herself to have been deluded by me, and thus be placed in the power of Guilfoyle. Her lips, usually of a rosy tint, were colourless now; her upper one quivered from time to time, as she shuddered with emotions she strove in vain to repress; and her proud hot blood flowed furiously under her transparent skin, as she threw open her desk, and sought to apply herself to the task of writing me that which was to be her first, her last, and only letter. For her heart swelled with thoughts of love and disappointment, pride, reproach, disdain, and hate,

as she spoiled and tore up sheet after sheet of note-paper in her confusion and perplexity, and at last relinquished the idea of writing at all.

Thus, while I was scheming how to expose Mr. Hawkesby Guilfoyle, and have him cast forth from that circle in which he was an intruder, he turned the tables with a vengeance, and provided me with a wife to boot. But finding, or suspecting, that he was beginning to be viewed with doubt, that very day, after having done all possible mischief, he quitted Walcot Park with Lady Naseby's solicitor, who, strange to say, seemed to be his most particular friend. He had made no impression favourable to himself on the heart of Estelle; but he hoped that he had succeeded in ruining me, as I could neither write nor clear myself of an allegation of which I was then, of course, ignorant. She was unjust to me; but she certainly--whatever came to pass in the gloomy and stormy future--loved me *then*.

CHAPTER XXIV.--BITTER THOUGHTS.

As yet I knew nothing of all that has been detailed in the foregoing chapter, consequently the entire measure of my vengeance against Guilfoyle was not quite full. I had, however, a revival of my old doubts, anxiety, and perplexity, in not hearing from Walcot Park in some fashion, by an invitation, or otherwise privately from Estelle herself, as, by our prearrangement, there was nothing to prevent her writing to me; and to these were added now a dread of what they had seen on that unlucky evening, and the reasonable misconstructions to which the

scene was liable. More than one of my mess-room friends had received cards of invitation from Lady Naseby; why then was I, whom she had met so recently, apparently forgotten?

After the relation of her story, I left Mrs. Guilfoyle in such a state of mental prostration and distress, that I was not without well-founded fears that she might commit some rash act, perhaps suicide, to add to the vile complication of our affairs. Next day I was detailed for guard, and could not leave the barracks, either to consult with my new unhappy acquaintance, or for my accustomed canter in the vicinity of Walcot Park. A presentiment that something unpleasant would happen ere long hung over me, and a day and a night of irritation and hot impatience had to be endured, varied only by the exceedingly monotonous duties that usually occupy the attention of the officer who commands a guard, such as explaining all the standing orders to the soldiers composing it, inspecting the reliefs going out to their posts and those returning from them, and going the round of those posts by night; but on this occasion, the routine was varied by a fire near Winchester, so we were kept under arms for some hours in a torrent of rain, with the gates barricaded, till the barrack engines returned. On the following morning, just when dismissing my old guard after being relieved by the new one, I perceived a servant in the well-known Naseby livery--light-blue and silver--ride out of the barracks; and with a fluttering in my heart, that was born of hope and apprehension, I hastened to my room.

"Packet for you, sir," said my man Evans, "just left by a flunkey in red breeches."

"You mean a servant of Lady Naseby's."

"I mean, sir," persisted Evans, "a flunky who eyed me very superciliously, and seemed to think a private soldier as low and pitiful as himself," added the Welshman, whom the pompous bearing of the knight of the shoulder-knot had ruffled.

"You were not rude to him, I hope."

"O no, sir. I only said that, though the Queen didn't like bad bargains, I'd give him a shilling in her name to play the triangles."

"That will do; you may go," said I, taking from his hand a small packet sealed in pink paper, and addressed to me by Lady Estelle; and my heart beat more painfully than ever with hope and fear as I tore it open.

A locket dropped out--*the* locket just described--in which I was bewildered to find a likeness of myself, and with it the ring I had placed on the hand of Estelle in Rhuddlan's cottage--the emerald encircled by diamonds--on the morning after our escape from a terrible fate! I have said that a shock awaited me at the barrack; but that the locket should come to me, accompanied by Estelle's ring, so astonished and perplexed me, that some time elapsed before I perceived there was a little note in the box which contained them.

It ran thus:

"Lady E. Cressingham begs that Mr. Hardinge will return the accompanying locket and ring to the lady to whom they properly belong--she whom he meets in the lane near Walcot Park, and whom he should lose no time in presenting to the world in her own character. Farther communications are unnecessary, as Mr. Guilfoyle has explained all, and Lady E. Cressingham leaves to-day for London."

The handwriting was very tremulous, as if she had written when under no ordinary excitement; and now, as the use to which the two episodes, at the lane and the inn-door, had been put by the artful Guilfoyle became plain to me, I was filled by a dangerous fury at the false position in which they placed me with her I loved and with whom I had been so successful. For a minute the room seemed to swim round me, each corner in pursuit of the other. We had both been wronged--myself chiefly; and though I knew that Guilfoyle had been at work, I could not

precisely know how; but I thought the Spartan was right when, on being asked if his sword was sharp, he replied, "Yes, sharper even than calumny!" This wretched fellow had daringly calumniated me, and to clear that calumny, to have an instant interview with Estelle, became the immediate and burning desire of my heart. I rushed to my desk, and opened it with such impulsive fury that I severely injured my arm, so recently broken--broken in her service--and as yet but scarcely well. I spread paper before me, but my fingers were powerless; if able to hold the pen, I was now unable to write, and the whole limb was alternately benumbed and full of acute agony; and though Hugh Price of ours was a very good fellow, I had no friend--at least, none like Phil Caradoc--in the dépôt battalion in whom I could confide or with whom consult, in this emergency.

I despatched Evans for the senior surgeon, who alleged that the original setting, dressing, and so forth of my fractured limb had been most unsatisfactory; that if I was not careful, inflammation might set in, and if so, that instant amputation alone could save my life. Being almost in a fever, he placed me on the sick-list, with orders not to leave my room for some days, and reduced me to claret-and-water.

"A pleasant predicament this!" thought I, grinding my teeth.

Estelle, through whom all this came to pass, lost to me, apparently through no fault of my own, and I unable to communicate with her or explain anything; for now she was in London, where I feared she might, in pique or rage, take Pottersleigh, Naseby, or even, for all I knew, accept Guilfoyle, a terrible compromise of her name. But she had plenty of other admirers, and disappointed women marry every day in disgust of some one. Next I thought of the regiment abroad wondering "when that fellow Hardinge would join"--promotion, honour, profession, and love in the balance against health, and all likely to be lost!

"Rest, rest," said the battalion Sangrado, whom my condition rather perplexed; "don't worry yourself about anything. Rest, mental and bodily, alone can cure you."

"It is a fine thing to talk," I muttered, while tossing on my pillow; for I was confined to bed in my dull little room, and for three days was left entirely to my own corroding thoughts.

I had but one crumb of comfort, one lingering hope. She had not asked me to return *her* ring, nor did I mean to do so, if possible. Once again my arm was slung in a black-silk scarf, which Estelle had insisted on making for me at Craigaderyn. Alas! would the joys of that time ever return to us again? I sent Evans, in uniform and not in my livery, to Whitchurch with the locket, after extracting my likeness therefrom; but he returned with it, saying that the lady had left the inn for London, having no doubt followed her husband. I knew not exactly of what I was accused--a *liaison* of some kind apparently, of which the strongest proofs had been put before the Cressinghams. If, when able, I wrote to explain that the two meetings with Mrs. Guilfoyle were quite fortuitous, would Estelle believe me? Without inquiry or explanation, she had coldly and abruptly cast me off; and it was terrible that one I loved so well should think evil or with scorn of me. What would honest old Sir Madoc's view of the matter be, and what the kind and noble-hearted Winifred's, who loved me as a sister, if they heard of this story, whatever it was?

Vengeance--swift, sudden, and sure--was what I panted for; and moments there were when I writhed under the laws that prevented me from discovering and beating to a jelly this fellow Guilfoyle, or even shooting him down like a mad dog, though I would gladly have risked my own life to punish him in the mode that was no longer approved of now in England; and I pictured to myself views of having him over in France, in the Bois de Boulogne, or on the level sands of Dunkirk, the spire of St. Eloi in the distance, the gray sky above us, the sea for a background, no sound in our ears but its chafing on the long strip of

beach, and his villainous face covered by my levelled pistol at ten paces, or less--yea, even after I had let him have the first shot, by tossing or otherwise. And as these fierce thoughts burned within me, all the deeper and fiercer that they were futile and found no utterance, I glanced longingly at my sword, which hung on the wall, or handled my pistols with grim anticipative joy; and reflected on how many there are in this world who, in the wild sense of justice, or the longing for a just revenge on felons whom the laws protect, fear the police while they have no fear of God, even in this boasted age of civilisation; and I remembered a terrible *duel à la mort* in which I had once borne a part in Germany.

A July evening was closing in Altona, when I found myself in the garden of Rainville's Hotel, which overlooks the Elbe. The windows of the house, an edifice of quaint aspect, occupied successively in years past by General Dumourier and gossiping old Bourienne, were open, and lights and music, the din of many voices--Germans are always loud and noisy--and the odour of many cigars and meerschaums, came forth, to mingle with the fragrance of the summer flowers that decked the tea-garden, the trees of which were hung with garlands of coloured lanterns. A golden haze from the quarter where the sun had set enveloped all the lazy Elbe, and strings of orange-tinted lights showed here and there the gas-lamps of Hamburg reflected in its bosom.

In dark outline against that western flush were seen the masts and hulls of the countless vessels that covered the basin of the river and the Brandenburger Hafen. Waiters were hurrying about with coffee, ices, and confectionery, lager-beer in tankards, and cognac in crystal cruets; pretty Vierlander girls, in their grotesque costume, the bodice a mass of golden embroidery, were tripping about coyly, offering their bouquets for sale; and to the music of a fine German band, the dancing had begun on a prepared platform. There were mingling lovely Jewesses of half-Teutonic blood, covered with jewels; spruce clerks from the Admiralit-strasse, and stout citizens from the Neuer-wall; officers and soldiers

from the Prussian garrison; girls of good style from the fashionable streets about the Alsterdamm, and others that were questionable from the quarter about the Grosse Theater Strasse.

I was seated in an arbour with a young Russian officer named Paulovitch Count Volhonski, who was travelling like myself, and whom I had met at the table-d'hôte of the Rolandsburg, in the Breitestrasse. As an Englishman, apt at all times to undervalue the Russian character, I was agreeably surprised to find that this young captain of the Imperial Guard could speak several European, and at least two of the dead, languages with equal facility. He was a good musician, sang well, and was moreover remarkably handsome, though his keen dark eyes and strongly marked brows, with a most decided aquiline nose, required all the softness that a mouth well curved and as delicately cut as that of a woman could be, to relieve them, and something of pride and hauteur, if not of sternness, that formed the normal expression of his face. His complexion was remarkably pure and clear, his hair was dark and shorn very short, and he had a handsome moustache, well pointed up. We had frequented several places of amusement together, and had agreed to travel in company so far as Berlin, and this was to be our last night in Altona. The waiter had barely placed our wine upon the table and poured it out, when there entered our arbour, and seated himself uninvited beside us, a great burly German officer in undress uniform, and who in a stentorian voice ordered a bottle of lager-beer, and lighting his huge meerschaum without a word or glance of courtesy or apology, surveyed us boldly with a cool defiant stare. This was so offensive, that Volhonski's usually pale face flushed crimson, and we instinctively looked at each other inquiringly.

The German next lay back in his seat, coughed loudly, expectorated in all directions in that abominable manner peculiar to his country, placed his heavy military boots with a thundering crash upon two vacant chairs, drank his beer, and threw down the metal flagon roughly on the table, eyeing us from time to time with a sneering glance that was alike

insulting and unwarrantable. But this man, whom we afterwards learned to be a noted bully and duellist, Captain Ludwig Schwartz, of the Prussian 95th or Thuringians, evidently wished to provoke a quarrel with either or both of us, as some Prussian officers and Hamburg girls, who were watching his proceedings from an alley of the garden, seemed to think, and to enjoy the situation. But for their presence and mocking bearing, Volhonski and I would probably, for the sake of peace, have retired and gone elsewhere; however, their laughter and remarks rendered the intrusive insolence of their friend the more intolerable. It chanced that a little puff of wind blew the ashes of Volhonski's cigar all over the face and big brown beard of the German, who, while eyeing him fiercely, slowly extricated the pipe from his heavy dense moustache, and striking his clenched hand on the table so as to make everything thereon dance, he said, imperiously, "The Herr Graf will apologise?"

"For what?" asked Volhonski, haughtily.

"For what!--der Teufel!--do you ask for what?"

"Ja, Herr Captain."

"For permitting those cigar ashes to go over all my person."

"In the first place, your precious person had no right to be there; in the second, appeal to the wind, and fight with it."

"I shall not fight with *it!*" thundered the German; "and I demand an instant apology."

"Absurd!" replied Volhonski, coolly; "I have no apology to make, fellow. Apologise to another I might; but certainly not to such as you."

"You dare to jest--to--to--to trifle with me?" spluttered the German, gasping and swelling with rage.

"I never jest or trifle with strangers; do you wish to quarrel?"

"No, Herr Graf," sneered the German; "do you?"

"Then how am I to construe your conduct and words?"

"As you please. But know this, Herr Graf: that though I ever avoid quarrelling, I instantly crush or repel the slightest appearance of insult, and you have *insulted* me."

"Ja, ja!" muttered the German officers, in blue surtouts and brass shoulder-scales, who now crowded about us.

Volhonski smiled disdainfully, and drew from his pocket a richly-inlaid card-case; then taking from it an enamelled card, with a bow that was marked and formal, yet haughty, he presented it to Captain Ludwig Schwartz, who deliberately tore it in two, and said, in a low fierce voice,

"Bah! I challenge you, Schelm, to meet me with pistols, or hand to hand without masks, and without seconds, if you choose."

"Agreed," replied Volhonski, now pale with passion, knowing well that after such a defiance as that, and before such company, it would be a duel without cessation, a combat *à la mort*. "Where?" he asked, briefly.

"The Heiligengeist Feld."

"When?"

"To-morrow at daybreak"

"Agreed; till then adieu, Herr Captain;" and touching their caps to each other in salute, they separated.

Next morning, when the dense mists, as yet unexhaled by the sun, lay heavy and frouzy about the margin of the Elbe, and were curling up from the deep moats and wooded ramparts of the Holstein Thor of Hamburg, we met on the plain which lies between that city and Altona; it is open, grassy, interspersed with trees, and is named the Field of the

Holy Ghost. A sequestered place was chosen; Volhonski was attended by me, Captain Schwartz by another captain of his regiment; but several of his brother officers were present as spectators, and all these wore the tight blue surtout, buttoned to the throat, with the shoulder-scales, adopted by the Prussians before Waterloo; and they wore through their left skirt a sword of the same straight and spring shell-hilted fashion, used in the British service at Fontenoy and Culloden, and retained by the Prussians still. The morning was chill, and above the gray wreaths of mists enveloping the plain rose, on one side, the red brick towers and green coppered spires of St. Michael, St. Nicolai, and other churches. Opposite were the pointed roofs of Altona, and many a tall poplar tree. Volhonski, being brave, polite, and scrupulous in all his transactions, was naturally exasperated on finding himself in this dangerous and unsought-for predicament, after being so grossly and unwarrantably insulted on the preceding night. He was pale, but assumed a smiling expression, as if he thought it as good a joke as any one else to be paraded thus at daybreak, when we quitted our hackney droski at the corner of the great cemetery and traversed the field, luckily reaching the appointed spot the same moment as our antagonists.

We gravely saluted each other. While I was examining and preparing the pistols, Volhonski gave me a sealed letter, saying, quite calmly, "I have but one relation in the world--my little sister Valérie, now at St. Petersburg. See," he added, giving me the miniature of a beautiful young girl, golden-haired and dark-eyed; "if I am butchered by this beer-bloated Teuton, you will write to her, enclosing this miniature, my letter, and all my rings."

I pressed his hand in silence, and handed our pistols for inspection to the other second, a captain, named Leopold Döpke, of the Thuringian Infantry.

"Now, Herr Graf, we fight till one, at least, is killed," said Schwartz, grimly.

Volhonski bowed in assent.

"Be quick, gentlemen," said the German officers; "already the rising sun is gilding the vane of St. Michael's."

Volhonski glanced at it earnestly, and his fine dark eyes clouded for a moment. Perhaps he was thinking of his sister, or of how and where he might be lying when the sun's rays were lower down that lofty brick spire, which is a hundred feet higher than the cross of St. Paul's in London. In the German fashion a circle was drawn upon the greensward, on which the diamond dew of a lovely summer morning glittered. Volhonski and Schwartz were placed within that circle, from which they were not permitted to retire; neither were they to fire until the signal was given.

"Mein Herren," said Captain Döpke, who seemed to think no more of the affair than if it had been a pigeon match, "when I give the signal by throwing up my glove and uttering the word you may fire at discretion, or as soon as you have your aim, and at what distance you please; but it must be *within* the circumference of this ring. The first who steps beyond it falls by my hand, as a violation of the laws of the duel."

"Be quick," growled Schwartz; "for the night watch in St. Michael's tower have telescopes, and the Burgher Guard are already under arms at the Holstein Thor."

Twelve paces apart within that deadly ring stood Volhonski and Schwartz, facing each other. The former wore a black surtout buttoned up to the throat; the latter his uniform and spike helmet. He untied and cast aside his silver gorget, lest it might afford a mark for his adversary's pistol. His face was flushed with cruelty, triumph, and the lust of blood, that came from past successful duels. Volhonski looked calm; but his eyes and heart were glowing with hatred and a longing for a just revenge.

"*Fire!*" cried Captain Döpke, as if commanding a platoon, and tossing up his pipe-clayed glove.

Both pistols exploded at the same instant, and Schwartz uttered a cruel and insulting laugh as Volhonski wheeled round and staggered wildly; his left arm was broken by a ball.

"Fresh pistols!" cried Schwartz.

"Is not this enough for honour?" said I, starting forward. "No--stand back!" exclaimed Captain Döpke.

"Ach Gott! Herr Englander, your turn will come next," thundered Schwartz, as we gave them other pistols and proceeded deliberately to reload the first brace, yet warm after being discharged.

No word of command was expected now; both duellists aimed steadily. Schwartz fired first and a terrible curse, hoarse and guttural, escaped him, as his ball whistled harmlessly past the left ear of Volhonski, whose face was now ghastly with pain, rage, and hatred. Drawing nearer and nearer, till the muzzle of his pistol was barely two feet from the forehead of Schwartz, he gave a grim and terrible smile for a moment. We were rooted to the spot; no one stirred; no one spoke, or seemed to breathe; and just as a cold perspiration flowed in beadlike drops over the face of the merciless Schwartz; it seemed to vanish with his spike helmet in smoke, as Volhonski fired and--blew his brains out! We sprang into the droski, and I felt as if a terrible crime had been committed when we drove at full speed across the neutral ground, called the Hamburgerburg, which lies between the city and the river gate of Altona, along a street of low taverns and dancing-rooms; and there, when past the sentinels in Danish uniform, the Lion of Denmark and the red-striped sentry boxes indicated that we were safe within the frontier of Holstein. So intense were our feelings *then*, that the few short fleeting moments crowded into that short compass of time seemed as an age, so full were they of fierce, exciting, and revolting thoughts; but these were past and gone; and *now*, as I recalled this merciless episode, times there

were when I felt in my heart that I could freely risk my life in the same fashion to kill Guilfoyle, even as Volhonski killed the remorseless German bully Schwartz.

CHAPTER XXV.--SURPRISES.

Supposing her to have left Walcot Park, as her letter informed me, I rode in that direction no more; and though I knew the family address in London, I could neither write in exculpation of myself nor procure leave to follow her. All furloughs were now forbidden or withdrawn, as the new detachments for the East expected hourly the order to depart. Thus I passed my days pretty much as one may do those which precede or follow a funeral. I performed all my military duties, went to mess, rose and retired to bed, mechanically, my mind occupied by one thought--the anxious longing to do something by which to clear myself and regain Estelle; and feeling in Winchester Barracks somewhat as Ixion might have felt on his fabled wheel, or the son of Clymene on his rock; and so I writhed under the false position in which another's art and malice had placed me; writhed aimlessly and fruitlessly, save that, although tied up by my promise of secrecy to Estelle, I had written a full and candid detail of the whole affair to Sir Madoc, and entreated his good offices for me. Vainly did Price, little Tom Clavell (the 19th depôt had come in), Raymond Mostyn of the Rifles, and other friends say, when noticing my preoccupation, "Come, old fellow, rouse yourself; don't mope. Are you game for pool to-day?"

"Pool with a recently-broken arm!" I would reply.

"True--I forgot. Well, let us take Mostyn's drag to Southampton to-morrow--it is Sunday, no drill going--cross to the Isle of Wight, dine at the hotel, and with our field-glasses--the binoculars--see the girls bathing at Freshwater."

"I don't approve of gentlemen overlooking ladies bathing."

"What the deuce do you approve of?"

"Being let alone, Price; as the girls say to you, I suspect."

"Not always--not always, old fellow," replied Hugh, with a very self-satisfied smile, as he caressed and curled his fair moustache.

"Nor the married ones either," added Mostyn, a tall showy officer in a braided green patrol jacket; "for when you were in North Wales, Hardinge, our friend Price got into a precious mess with a selfish old sposo, who thought he should keep his pretty wife all to himself, or at least from flirting with a redcoat."

"Perhaps he was less irritated by the rifle green."

"Come with me into the city," urged Clavell; "the Dean's lady gives a kettledrum before mess, and I can take a friend."

"Parish scandal, cathedral-town gossip, coffee, ices, and Italian confectionery. Thanks, Tom, no."

"I have met some very pretty girls there," retorted Clavell, "and it is great fun to lean over their chairs and see them look up at one over their fans shyly, half-laughing at, and half-approving of, the balderdash poured into their ears."

"A sensible way of winning favour and spending time."

"I vote for the Isle of Wight," continued Clavell; "I saw la belle Cressingham taking a header there the other day in splendid style. Only fancy that high-born creature taking a regular header!"

"*Who* did you say?" said I, turning so suddenly that little Tom was startled, and let the glass drop from his eye.

"Lady Estelle Cressingham; you remember her of course. She had on a most becoming bathing-costume; I could make that out with my glass from the cliffs."

"Clavell, she is in London," said I, coldly; "and moreover is unlikely to indulge in headers, as she can't swim."

"I know better, excuse me," said Mostyn, who, I knew, had dined but lately at Walcot Park; "she told me that she had been recently bathing, and had studied at the Ecole de Natation on the Quai d'Orsay in Paris."

"It is more than she ever told me," thought I, as my mind reverted to our terrible adventure. I became silent and perplexed, and covertly looked with rather sad envy on the handsome and unthinking Mostyn, who had enjoyed the pleasure of seeing and talking to Estelle since I had done so.

"It is difficult," says David Hume, "for a man to speak long of himself without vanity; therefore I will be *short;*" and having much to narrate, I feel compelled to follow the example of the Scottish historian, for events now came thick and fast.

I had barely got rid of my well-meaning comrades, and was relapsing into gloomy reverie in my little room, when I heard voices, and heavy footsteps ascending the wooden stair that led thereto. Some one was laughing, and talking to Evans in Welsh; till the latter threw open the door, and, with a military salute, ushered in Sir Madoc Lloyd, looking

just as I had seen him last, save that the moors had embrowned him, in his riding-coat, white-corded breeches, and yellow-topped boots, and whip in hand, for his horse was in the barrack yard.

"Welcome, Sir Madoc.--That will do, Evans; be at hand when I ring.--So kind of you, this; so like you!" I exclaimed.

"Not at all, not at all, Harry. So these are your quarters? Plain and undecorated, certainly; boots, bottles, boxes, a coal-scuttle--her Majesty's property by the look of it--a sword and camp-bed; humble splendour for the suitor of an earl's daughter, and the rival of a rich viscount. Ah, you sly dog, you devilish sly dog!" he added, as he seated himself on the edge of the table, winked portentously, and poked me under the small ribs with the shank of his hunting-whip, "I suspected that something of this kind would follow that aquatic excursion of yours; and Winifred says she always knew of it."

"Winifred--Miss Lloyd!" said I, nervously.

"Why didn't you speak to *me*, and consult with me, about the matter when at Craigaderyn? I am certain that I should have made all square with the Countess. Egad, Harry, I will back you to any amount, for the sake of those that are dead and gone," he added, shaking my hand warmly, while his eyes glistened under the shaggy dark brows that in hue contrasted so strongly with the whiteness of his silky hair.

"You got my letter, Sir Madoc?"

"Yes, and I am here in consequence. It cut short my shooting, though."

"I am so sorry--"

"Tush; no apologies. The season opened gloriously; but I missed you sorely, Harry, when tramping alone over turnip fields, through miles of beans and yellow stubble, though I had some jolly days of it down in

South Wales. Lady Naseby--

"She knows nothing of the secret engagement?" said I, hurriedly and anxiously.

"Nothing as yet."

"As yet! Must she be told?"

"Of course; but I shall make all that right, by-and-by. She believes now in the real character of her attaché, Mr. Guilfoyle, who intruded himself among us, and who has disappeared. Your perfect innocence has been proved alike to her and her daughter, and now you may win at a canter. The photo of you in the locket was abstracted from Winifred's album, and has *her* name written on the back of it. You are to ride over with me to Walcot Park, where I have left Winifred, as she refused flatly to come to Winchester--why, I know not. She will afford you an opportunity of slipping the ring again on your fair one's finger, and doing anything else that may suggest itself at such a time--you comprehend, eh? Winny bluntly asked Lady Naseby's permission to invite you, as you were so soon to leave England."

"The dear girl! God bless her!"

"So say I. Lady Naseby said at first that though you had been maligned, there had also been a *contretemps* of which even her French maid was cognisant; that she hated all *contretemps* and so forth; but Winny--you know how sweet the girl is, and how irresistible--carried her point, so you spend this evening there. Tell Evans to have your nag ready within the hour. That fellow is not forgetting his mother-tongue among the Sassenachs. He comes from our namesake's place, *Dolwrheiddiog*, 'the meadow of the salmon.' I know it well."

"If I could but meet Guilfoyle--" I was beginning.

"Forget him. I cannot comprehend how he found such favour in the sight of Lady Naseby; but when I called him a thoroughbred rascal, she quietly fanned herself, and fondling her beastly little cur said, 'My dear Sir Madoc, this teaches us how careful we ought to be in choosing our acquaintance, and how little we really know as to the true character, the inner life and habits of our nearest friends. But our mutual legal adviser Mr. Sharpus always spoke of Mr. Guilfoyle as a man of the greatest probity, and of excellent means.' 'Probably,' said I; 'but I never liked that fellow Sharpus; he always looked like a man who has done something of which he is ashamed, and that is not the usual expression of a legal face.'"

So poor Winifred Lloyd had been my chief good angel; yet *she* was the last whom I should have chosen as ambassadress in a love affair of mine. She was a volunteer in the matter, and a most friendly one to boot. Were this a novel, and not "an owre true tale," I think I should have loved Winny; for "how comes it," asks a writer, "that the heroes of novels seem to have in general a bad taste by their choice of wives? The unsuccessful lady is the one we should have preferred. Rebecca is infinitely more calculated to interest than Rowena."

My heart was brimming with joy, and with gratitude to Sir Madoc and his elder daughter; the cloud that overhung me had been exhaled in sunshine, and all again was happiness. I was about to pour forth my thanks to my good old friend, whose beaming and rubicund face was as bright as it could be with pleasure, when there came a sharp single knock on the door of my room.

"Come in!" said I, mechanically.

My visitor was the sergeant-major of the dépôt battalion, a tall thin old fellow who had burned powder at Burmah and Cabul, and who instantly raised his hand to his forage-cap, saying,

"Beg pardon, sir; the adjutant's compliments--the route has just come for your draft of the Royal Welsh, and all the others, for the East."

"Is this certain!" asked Sir Madoc, hurriedly.

"Quite, sir; it will be in orders this evening. They all embark to-morrow at midday."

"Where?" asked I.

"At Southampton, as usual. The first bugle will sound after *réveil* to-morrow."

The door closed on my formal visitor, who left me a little bewildered by this sudden sequel to the visit of Sir Madoc, who wrung my hand warmly and said,

"Heaven bless and protect you, Harry! I feel for you like a son of my own going forth in this most useless war. And so we are actually to lose you, and so soon, too!"

"But only for a little time, I hope, Sir Madoc," said I, cheerfully, thinking more of my early meeting with Estelle than the long separation the morrow must inevitably bring about. I ordered Evans to pack up and prepare everything, to leave my P.P.C. cards with a few persons I named; and avoiding Price, Clavell, Mostyn, and others, rode with Sir Madoc towards Walcot Park, as my mind somehow foreboded, amid all my joy and excitement, for what I feared would be the *last* time.

CHAPTER XXVI.--WITHOUT PURCHASE.

Close to, and yet quietly secluded from, the mighty tide of busy humanity that daily surges to and fro between the Bank and the Mansion House, all up Cheapside and Cornhill, in a small dark court off the latter, was the office of Messrs. Sharpus and Juggles, solicitors. The brick edifice towered to the height of many stories; a score of names appeared on each side of the doorway in large letters; and many long dark passages and intricate stairs led to the two dingy rooms where those human spiders sat and spun the webs and meshes of the law. Their dens had a damp and mouldy odour; no ray from heaven ever fell into them, but a cold gray reflected light came from the white encaustic tiles, with which the opposite wall of the court was faced for that purpose; and of that borrowed light even the lower room, where their half-starved clerks worked into the still hours of the night--a veritable cave of Trophonius, if one might judge by their sad, seedy, and dejected appearance--was deprived from its situation; and in all these courts and chambers gas was burned daily in those terrible seasons when the London fogs assume somewhat the solidity and hue of pea-soup. Mr. Sharpus sat in his private room, surrounded by boxes of wood or japanned tin and ticketed dockets of papers, that were mouldy and dirty--as their contents too probably were--while fly-blown prospectuses, plans, and advertisements of lands, houses, and messuages for sale, and so forth, covered the discoloured walls.

Juggles, his partner, was a suave, slimy, and meekly-mannered man, "with the eye of a serpent and the voice of a dove;" but our present business is with the former, who was a thin round-shouldered individual, with a cold keen face, an impending forehead, sunken dark gray eyes, the expression of which varied between cunning and solemnity, pride, vulgar assurance, and occasionally restlessness. Shrewd of head and stony of heart, he was not quite the kind of man at whose mercy one would wish to be. He had a hard-worked and sometimes worried aspect; but now an abject white fear, with an unmistakably hunted expression, came over his face, when one of the

clerks from the lower den ushered in, without much ceremony, Mr. Guilfoyle, who had in his hand a sporting paper, which he was reading as he entered.

"*You* here again?" exclaimed Sharpus, laying down his pen, and carefully closing the door.

"Yes, by Jove, again!" replied Guilfoyle, with barely a nod, and seating himself with his hat on.

"So soon!" groaned Sharpus; and reseating himself, he eyed, with an expression of haggard hate, Guilfoyle, who continued to read from the paper hurriedly, excitedly, and half aloud, some report of a steeplechase.

"The Devil--threw his rider--remounted; at the next fence Raglan took the lead, followed by Fairy and Beauty, and Beau, the Devil lying next; last fence but one taken by the quintette almost simultaneously, when Raglan, Beauty, and Beau came away together, the first-named winning a very fine race by half a length--Beauty being third, and close upon Beau, but Fairy was nowhere. D--nation! there is a pot of money gone, or not won, which amounts to the same thing in the end!" and crushing up the paper, he threw it on the writing-table of Sharpus.

"Wanting more money?" said the latter, in a hollow voice.

"Precisely so; out at the elbows--in low water--phrase it as you will. I have sold even my horse at last," replied the other, folding his arms, and regarding the lawyer mockingly.

"And the ring given you by--by the King of Bavaria?" said Sharpus, with a sickly smile.

"I retain but a paste imitation of that remarkable brilliant; and that I may present you as a mark of my regard and esteem."

"I thought you had made something by a mercantile transaction, as you phrased it, when last on the Continent?"

"So I did; 'the mercantile transaction' being nothing less than breaking the bank at Homburg, by steadily and successfully backing the red, and sending home all those who came for wool most decidedly *shorn*."

"You should have saved some of those ill-gotten gains for future contingencies," said Sharpus.

"How much easier it is to advise and to speculate than to act with care and decision!" sneered Guilfoyle.

"I pity your poor wife," said the lawyer, sincerely enough.

"She has no documentary proof that she is such," replied Guilfoyle, angrily. "Pshaw! what is pity? an emotion that is often at war with reason and with sense, too; for a handsome face or a well-turned ankle may make us pity the most undeserving object."

The lawyer sighed, and at that moment sincerely pitied himself; for it had chanced that, in earlier years, an intimacy with Guilfoyle led to the latter discovering that which gave him such absolute power as to reduce him--Sharpus--to be his very slave. This was nothing less than the *forgery* of a bill in the name of Guilfoyle; who, before relinquishing the privilege of prosecution, on retiring the document, had obtained a complete holograph confession of the act, which he now retained as a wrench for money, and held over the head of Sharpus, thereby compelling him to act as he pleased. After a minute's silence, during which the two men had been surveying each other, the one with hate and fear, the other with malignant triumph, Guilfoyle said, "I did Lady Naseby, as you know, a service at Berlin, when at very low water; being seen with her won me credit, which I failed not to turn to advantage. I followed her and her daughter through all Germany--at Ems, Gerolstein, Baden, and then to Wales, where I was in clover at Craigaderyn. I was a fool to fly my hawks at game so high as the peerage; and I feel sure it was that beast of a fellow Hardinge, of the Royal Welsh, who blew the gaff

upon me, and prevented me from entering stakes, as I intended to do, for one of the daughters of that horse-and-cow-breeding old Welsh baronet; and they are, bar one, the handsomest girls in England."

"And that one?"

"Is Lady Estelle Cressingham."

Even the ghastly lawyer smiled at his profound assurance.

"Have you no remorse when you think of Miss Franklin?"

"No more than you have, when you have sucked a client dry, and leave him to die in the streets," replied Guilfoyle, with his strange dry mocking laugh; "remorse is the word for a fool--the unpunished crime, I have read somewhere, is never regretted. Men mourn the consequences, but never the sin or a crime itself. As for Hardinge, d--n him!" he added, grinding his teeth; "I thought to put a spoke in his wheel, by passing off Georgette as his wife, but Taffy came to his aid, and the true story was told; and yet, do you know, there were times when I played my cards exceedingly well with the Cressinghams. Besides, you always represented me to be a man of fortune."

"I have invariably done so," groaned Sharpus.

"And have stumped out pretty well to maintain the story, while hinting of--"

"Coal-mines in Labuan, shares in others in Mexico, and all manner of things, to account for the sums wrung from me--from my wife and children. But, God help me, I can do no more!"

"Bah! what do they or you want with that villa at Hampstead? But you are a good fellow, Sharpus; and, thanks to your assistance, I worked the oracle pretty well at Walcot Park for Mr. Henry Hardinge."

"Against him, you mean?"

"Of course; but, unluckily, our story wouldn't stand testing."

"Could you expect it to do so?"

"But I put a hitch in his gallop there, anyhow. By Jove, I was a great fool not to make love to the old woman, instead of her daughter."

"Meaning Lady Naseby?" said Sharpus, with surprise.

"So Burke and Debrett name her. She is just at that age--twice her daughter's--when the soft sex become remarkably soft indeed, and apt to make fools of themselves."

"She would indeed have been one had she listened to you."

"Thanks, old tape-and-parchment; I did not come here for a character, but to show you the state of my cash-book."

Again the lawyer groaned, and Guilfoyle laughed louder than ever. Delight to have a lawyer under his heel rendered him merciless; but even a worm will turn, so Sharpus said sternly, "How have you lived since the last remittance--extortion?"

"Call it as you will," replied the other, putting his glass in his eye, and smilingly switching his leg with his cane; "I have lived as most men do who live by their wits, and the follies, or it may be the *crimes*--O, you wince!--of others; meeting debts and emergencies as they come, content with the peace or action of the present, and never regretting the past, or fearing the future! With the help of an ace, king, and queen, when my betting-book or a stroke of billiards failed me, and with your great kindness, my dear old Sharpus, I have, till now, always kept my funds far above zero."

"Your life is a great sham--a very labyrinth of deceit!" exclaimed the lawyer, furiously.

"And yours, friend Sharpus?"

"Is spent in slaving for my family, and endeavouring to atone for, or to buy the concealment of, one great error--the error that made you--ay, men such as you--my master!"

Guilfoyle laughed heartily, and said,

"I require 600*l.* instantly!"

"Not a penny--not another penny!"

"We shall see. Sharpus, though a bad lot, I know that you are not the utter rogue that most of your profession are--"

"Leave my office, scoundrel, or I shall kill you!" said Sharpus, in a low voice of concentrated passion, as he became deadly pale, and a dangerous white gleam came into his stealthy restless eyes, which seemed to search in vain for a weapon.

"If I leave your office it will be for the purpose of laying before the nearest police-magistrate a certain document you may remember to have written; and I am so loth to kill the goose that lays my golden eggs," continued the other, in his quiet mocking tone. "But remember, Mr. Sharpus," he added, in a lofty and bullying manner, as he grasped the shoulder of the listener, "that the forgery of a document is not deemed an error in legal practice here, as in Spain or Scotland, but a *crime* meriting penal servitude; and shall I tell you what that means--you, who have now wealth, ease, position, a handsome wife, and several children? You will be torn from all these for ever, as a felon!"

Drops of perspiration poured over the poor wretch's temples as his tormentor continued: "Think of being in Millbank, beside the muggy Thames, and the years that would find you there, a bondsman and a slave, who for the least misconduct would be lashed like a faulty hound, and ironed in a blackhole. Hard work, aggravated by the consciousness

of infamy; clad in the gray livery of disgrace; your name effaced from the Law List, and for it substituted the letter or number on your prison garb!"

"For God's sake, hush!" implored the wretched lawyer, in terror, lest the speaker's voice might reach the room of Juggles, or the ears of the clerks below; "hush, and I shall do all you wish."

"Come--that is acting like a reasonable being."

"Will 200*l.* do you--this time?"

"Two hundred devils! I want 600*l.* at least."

"I shall be ruined with my partner; he must know ere long where all these moneys have gone."

"That is nothing to me; tell him if you dare."

Sharpus burst into tears, and said, piteously,

"At present I can give but 200*l.*--the rest shall follow."

"Well, you can do something else for me, and I may trouble you no more."

"How?" asked Sharpus, eagerly and incredulously, with a dreary and bewildered air.

"Get me some employment, where there is little to do; I hate brain-work."

"Employment!--where? with whom?"

"Civil or military, I care not which."

"Military! impossible--too old. Stay, I have it!" exclaimed the lawyer; "you have been in the Militia, I know."

"Three months in the Royal Diddlesex."

"What say you to an appointment in Lord Aberdeen's new Land Transport Corps? It will be easily got--a handsome uniform and great *éclat*, though the officers are nearly all taken from the ranks. The duties are simple enough--conveyance of baggage, and carrying off the wounded *after* an action."

"Not to bury the dead?--ugly work that."

"No, no."

"By Jove, I'll go!" he exclaimed, as Sharpus filled up the cheque.

Sharpus strove in vain to conceal his delight.

"I have of course done a few things which would hardly bear the 'light of the world's bull's-eye' turned upon them, but the Horse Guards know nothing of them. You have noble and powerful clients, and can do this easily for me. Bravo!" And they actually shook hands over the matter, as if over a bargain.

Sharpus lost no time in using the necessary influence, and--though not exactly a cadet after Mr. Cardwell's heart--this commission was decidedly one without purchase; and on the strength of having been once in the boasted constitutional force, "Henry Hawkesby Guilfoyle, gent., *late* Lieutenant, Diddlesex Militia," appeared in the *Gazette* ere long, as one of twenty-four comets of the long-since disbanded Land Transport Corps, for service in the Crimea.

CHAPTER XXVII.--RECONCILIATION.

As Sir Madoc and I proceeded along the to me well-known Whitchurch road, I asked myself mentally, could it really be that I was again looking with farewell eyes on all this fair English scenery, and perhaps for the last time; for our departure to the seat of war, where we were to be face to face and foot to foot with an enemy, was very different from other voyages to a peaceful British colony? Now, varied by autumnal tints, brown, golden, or orange, I saw the long and shady lane where Estelle had last seen me, and near it the low churchyard wall, where our evil genius had rent away the locket from his wife. Sir Madoc's eyes were turned chiefly to the tawny stubble-fields, and he sighed with regret, as he saw the brown coveys of partridges whirring up, that he had not his patent breech-loader in lieu of a hunting-whip.

"Estelle--Estelle!" thought I. "How many temptations in mighty London, and in the country, too--in Brighton, that other London by the sea, and wherever she may go--will beset one so noble and so beautiful--allurements that may teach her to forget and banish from her memory the poor Fusileer subaltern, to whom she seems as the centre of the universe!"

The evening was a lovely one, and the scenery was beautiful. Chestnuts and oaks were, at every turn of the way we rode, forming natural arches and avenues, beyond which were pleasant glimpses of quaint cottages, whose walls and roofs were nearly hidden by masses of roses and honeysuckle; short square village spires and ivy-covered parsonages; widespreading pastures, where the sleepy cattle browsed amid purple clover and golden cowslips, with the glory of the ruddy sunset falling aslant upon them, while the ambient air was full of earthy and leafy fragrance; for many fallen leaves, the earliest spoil of autumn, lay with bursting cones in cool and sunless dells, or by the wayside, where the fern and foxglove mingled under the old thick hedgerows. And

so I was looking, as I have said, on all this peaceful scene, perhaps for the *last* time; yet there was no sadness in my heart, for the revulsion or change of feeling, from the gloom and tumultuous anxiety of many, many days past, and even of that morning, was great indeed to me, especially when we cantered through the handsome iron gates of Walcot Park, the once suspicious keeper of which gave me an unmistakable glance of recognition. I felt like one in a dream as I threw my reins to a servant, and was led upstairs by Sir Madoc.

"Where is Lady Estelle?" he asked of another valet, to whom I gave my sword in the hall.

"In the front drawing-room."

"Alone?"

"I think so, sir."

"All right, Harry!"

But he suddenly affected to remember that he had something to say to his own groom, and as he turned back, I was ushered into the long and stately apartment. I had a dreamy sense of being amid many buhl tables and glass shades, much drapery, and several mirrors that reproduced everything, amid which I saw Estelle advancing cordially to meet me. She had a bright smile in her face, and held out both her hands; but I could scarcely speak.

"Estelle," I whispered, "joy--joy! It is indeed joy, to see you once again!"

"Then you quite forgive me, dearest Harry?"

"Forgive you? O Estelle!" I exclaimed, in a low and passionate voice, as she turned up her adorable face to meet mine half-way.

I knew from past experience that caresses from her meant much more than they did from most women; for Estelle, though proud and reticent, and apparently cold and calm, was reluctant to give and to accept them; so now I felt all the truth and sincerity of this reunion. "A lovers' quarrel is but love renewed;" we, however, had not quarrelled, but been cruelly wrenched asunder by the art and cunning of another.

"Are you on duty, Mr. Hardinge?" said a voice; and from a window where she had been sitting, quite unseen and unnoticed by me, Winny Lloyd came forth, looking, as I thought, a little paler and sadder than when I had seen her last at Craigaderyn Court.

"What makes you think I am on duty, dear Miss Lloyd?--or rather let me say, my dear, dear good friend and guardian angel Winifred, to whose intercession I owe all the happiness of a time like this," said I, pressing her hand caressingly between both of mine.

"Because you are in undress uniform, of course," said she, almost petulantly.

"I can wear no other costume now; we bid good-bye to mufti, the sable livery of civilisation, to-morrow."

"How?"

"We march at daybreak."

"For the East?"

"Yes; for the East, at last."

"So soon?" exclaimed both girls at once.

"The order came within an hour or little more, when Sir Madoc was with me."

The eyes of the girls were full of sudden tears, and they gazed on me with an honest emotion of tenderness and real interest, that, considering the rare beauty and high position of both, were alike flattering and bewildering; and I felt that this was one of those moments when, to be a soldier or a sailor on the eve of departure to the seat of war, was indeed worth something.

And Winifred, the impulsive Welsh fairy, so fresh-hearted, so simple in her motives, and sweet in her disposition, uttered something very like a little sob in her slender white throat, adding apologetically to Estelle, "We have been such old friends, Harry Hardinge and I."

"You never wrote to me, Estelle," said I, softly, yet reproachfully.

"I dared not; you remember our arrangement," she replied, with hesitation.

"Nor was I invited here, like Mostyn, Clavell, and others; thus I had no opportunity of--"

"I had no control, darling Harry, over mamma's dinner-list: I could but suggest to mamma; and then there was that terrible story. But here comes mamma!"

And turning, I found myself face to face with the tall, handsome, and stately Countess of Naseby, whom--nathless her chilling manner and lofty presence--I hoped yet to hail as a very creditable mother-in-law.

I was on the eve of departure, to go where glory waited me. I might cross her exclusive path no more; so my Lady Naseby seemed quite disposed to bury the hatchet, and received me with that which was--for her--unusual kindness, and an *enmpressement* which made the eyes of her daughter to sparkle with pleasure. A late dinner made a sad hole in the time I had hoped to spend with Estelle; yet I had the pleasure of sitting beside her--a pleasure that was clouded by the conviction that my presence would soon be imperatively requisite at the barracks, where so

much was to be done ere morning, and that I should be compelled to abridge even this, my farewell visit, to pleasant Walcot Park, and all who were there. Fortunately, Lady Naseby went quietly to sleep in her boudoir after dinner, with Tiny on her lap; Sir Madoc obligingly went into the library to write; and Winifred suggested a turn in the conservatory, where for a little time she adroitly left Estelle and me together.

There is no utility in dwelling on how we sealed our reconciliation and renewed our troth, when once more I placed my ring upon her finger; or in rehearsing the soft and tender words--perhaps (O heaven!) the "twaddle"--we spoke for an indescribable few minutes, and how each said to the other that our apparent separation had been as a living death. But now all that misery was over; we loved each other more than ever, and the grave alone could part us finally; words, the prompting of the heart, came readily, till our emotions became too deep, and she agreed that I should write to her boldly, "as ere long mamma, through good Sir Madoc, must know all." And so we leaned against a great flower-stand, almost hidden by gorgeous azaleas, our hands tightly clasped in each other, eyes looking fondly into eyes, and feeling that the depth of our tenderness formed for us one of those few-and-far-between portions of existence when time seems to stand still, when silence is made eloquent by the beatings of the heart, when we almost forget we are mortal, and feel as if earth had become heaven. From this species of happy trance we were roughly roused by the crash of a great majolica vase containing a giant cactus, and a voice exclaiming querulously,

"God bless my soul!--Pardon me; I did not know any one was here."

"The devil you didn't!" was my blunt rejoinder.

And there, with gold glasses on his long aristocratic nose, and in his richly-tasselled *robe de chamber* and embroidered slippers, stood my Lord Pottersleigh, whom I knew not to be at Walcot Park, as he had been nursing his gout upstairs; and now I wished his lordship in a hotter

climate than the quarters of the 2nd West India for his unwelcome interruption. Of what he had seen or what he thought I cared not a rush, so far as *he* was concerned; and a few minutes later saw me, after a hurried farewell to all, with the pleasure of remembered kisses on my lips, and my heart full of mingled joy and sadness, triumph and prayerful hope for the perilous future, flying at full gallop back to Winchester.

CHAPTER XXVIII.--ON BOARD THE URGENT.

"Weather bit your chain, and cast loose the topsails!" cried a hoarse voice, rousing me from a reverie into which I had fallen--one of those waking-dreams in which I am so apt to indulge.

By this time the quarter-boats had been hoisted in, and the anchor got up "reluctant from its oozy cave"--no slight matter in the great troopship Urgent--when there was a stiff breeze even under the lee of the Isle of Wight; and as her head pitched into the sea, the water rushed through the hawse-holes, and the chain cables surged in such a fashion as almost to start the windlass-barrel when it revolved beneath the strength of many sturdy arms, and tough, though bending, handspikes. Leaning over the taffrail, and looking at the dim outline of the coast of Hampshire from St. Helen's Roads, to which two tugs had brought us from the great tidal dock at Southampton to a temporary anchorage, and seeing Portsmouth, with its spires and shipping steeped in a golden evening haze, I recalled the events of the past bustling day--could it be that only *a day* had passed?--since "the first bugle sounded after *réveil*," and all our detachments, five in number, destined for the army of the

East had paraded amid the gray light of dawn, in the barrack-square at Winchester, in heavy marching order, with packs, blankets, and kettles, and marched thence, their caps and muskets decked with laurel-leaves, the drums and fifes playing many a patriotic air, accompanied by the cheers of our comrades, and the tears of the girls who were left behind us--the girls "who doat upon the military."

Yet so had we marched--the drafts of the Scots Royals and Kentish Buffs, the two oldest regiments in the world, leading the way; then came those of the 7th Fusileers, my own of the Royal Welsh, the 46th, and the wild boys of the 88th bringing up the rear--to the railway station, when they were packed in carriages, eight file to each compartment--packed like sheep for the slaughter, yet all were singing merrily, their spirits high though their purses were empty, the last of their "clearings" having gone in the grog-shop and canteen over night; and there by that railway platform many saw the last they were to see, in this life, at least, of those they loved best on earth--the wife of her husband, the parent of the child--separated all, with the sound of the fatal drum in their ears, and the sadness of remembered kisses on their lips, or tear-wetted cheeks, till, with a shriek and a snort, the iron horse swept them away on his rapid journey. I caught the enthusiasm of the brave fellows around me. It was impossible not to do so; and yet, amid it all, there was the recollection of a woman's face, so pale and beautiful, as I had seen it last (when bidding a brief and formal farewell at the drawing-room door of Walcot Park), with her mouth half open, her sorrowful eyes full of earnestness, and the tender under lip clenched by the teeth above it, as if to restrain emotion and repress tears--the face of Estelle Cressingham.

My heart and thoughts were with her, while mechanically I had, as in duty bound, to see to the most prosaic wants of my detachment, consisting of one officer (Hugh Price), two sergeants, and forty rank and file of the Royal Welsh. To the latter were issued their coarse canvas fatigue-frocks. I had to see their muskets racked, their berths allotted, the messes and watches formed, the ammunition secured, and fifty other

things required by her Majesty's regulations. All baggage not required for the voyage was sent below; and we heartily quizzed poor Price, whose bullock trunks were alleged to contain only cambric handkerchiefs, odd tiny kids, variously-tinted locks of hair, and faded ribbons. But strict orders were issued concerning smoking, as we had gunpowder in the lower hold; and a number of four-wheeled hospital-waggons for the Land Transport Corps, grimly suggestive, as each vehicle was divided into four compartments, fitted to receive four killed or wounded men, on commodious stretchers, with under-carriages, canopies, and medicine-chests.

Some of my brother officers were glad enough, glory apart, to be leaving Jews and lawyers, "shent. per shent." and legal roguery, behind them. One of the former tribe, having followed Raymond Mostyn concerning a bill discounted at only sixty per cent., came alongside, insisting that the balance should be taken half in cash, and half in a "warranted Correggio," with some villainous wine for the voyage, and some jewelry "for the girls at Malta;" but he was swamped in his boat under the counter, when the first mate unceremoniously cast loose the painter, and sent old Moses--"Mammon incarnate"--to leeward, shrieking and cursing in rage and terror. So my short reverie was completely broken now, as the great ship, with her deck crowded by soldiers in forage-caps and gray greatcoats, swayed round, and our skipper, an old man-o'-war lieutenant, from the poop continued his orders with that promptitude and tone of authority which are best learned under the long pennant.

"Make sail on her, my lads, with a will!" he cried. And the watch rushed to the coils at the belaying-pins, aided by the soldiers told off for deck duty. "Cast loose the topsails! hoist away, and sheet home!"

"Bear a hand, forecastle, there! cat and fish the anchor!" added the first mate; and in a few minutes, with a heavy head sea--the same sea where, by that shore now lessening in the distance, Danish Canute taught his servile Saxon courtiers the lesson of humility--we bore past

Sandown Bay, with its old square fort of bluff King Harry's day upon its level beach: and Portsmouth's spires and Selsey Point sunk fast upon our lee, while our bugles were announcing sunset. And then something of sadness and silence seemed to steal over the once noisy groups, as they gathered by the starboard side, when we cleared the Isle of Wight. When the yards were squared, more sail was made on the Urgent; and before the north wind we stood down the Channel, and ere the same bugles sounded again, for all save the deck-watches to turn-in below, we were standing well over to the coast of France. The white cliffs had melted into the world of waters, and we had bidden a long good-night to dear old England. The twinkling light on St. Catharine's Point lingered long at the horizon, and was watched by many an eye, as Mostyn, Clavell, and I, with others, cigar in mouth, walked to and fro on the poop, surmising what awaited us in the land for which we were bound.

As yet the land forces of the Allies had not come to blows with the Russians; but the imperial fort and mole at Odessa (works constructed at vast cost and care by Catharine and Alexander) had been destroyed, and all their ships of war lying there had been burnt or sunk by the Anglo-French fleet. The Russians had taken and burned our war-steamer the Tiger, and cruelly bombarded Sinope. The Turks had driven them across the Danube, and defeated them at Giurgevo, but had lost a subsequent battle in Armenia. Napier had bombarded and destroyed the forts upon the Aland Isles in the Baltic; and we on board the Urgent, with many other successive drafts departing eastward, from every British port south of Aberdeen, were full of ardour and of hope to be in time to share in the landing that was to be made at *last* upon the coast of the enemy, though no one knew *where*.

CHAPTER XXIX.--"ICH DIEN."

And now, while the stately troopship Urgent is passing under the guns of old Gib, and ploughing the waters of the Mediterranean, I may explain that which may have been a puzzle to the non-military reader--the meaning of "the Red Dragon." In the breasts of all who serve or have served in the army there exists an *esprit de corps*, a filial attachment, to all that belongs to their regiment, to its past history, its conduct in peace and war, its badges won in battle--those honours which are the heraldry of the service, and connected with the glory of the empire--in its officers and soldiers of all ranks. This sentiment is more peculiar to some regiments, perhaps, than others, especially those which, like the Scottish and Irish, have distinct nationalities to represent and uphold; but to none is it more applicable than the old Fusileers, whose motto is at the head of this chapter. By *esprit de corps* the good and brave are excited to fresh feats of valour, and the evil-disposed are frequently deterred from risking disgrace by a secret consciousness of the duty it inculcates, and what is required of them by their comrades; for, like a Highland clan, a regiment has its own peculiar annals and traditions. It is a community, a family, a brotherhood, and should be the soldier's happy though movable home, while a regiment great in history "bears so far a resemblance to the immortal gods as to be old in power and glory, yet to have always the freshness of youth."

So it is and has been with mine, which was first embodied at Ludlow, in Shropshire, in 1689, from thirteen companies of soldiers, raised specially in Wales, under Lord Herbert, of Cherbury, whose cousin, Colonel Charles Herbert, M.P. for Montgomery, was killed, at the head of the Fusileers, in his buff coat and cuirass, at the battle of Aughrim, after having led them through a bog up to the waist belt, under a terrible fire from the Irish. His successor, the valiant Toby Purcell, who had been major of the regiment, greatly distinguished himself at the battle of the

Boyne, and the huge spurs, worn by him on that memorable occasion, are *still* preserved in the corps, being always in possession of the senior major for the time being.

To attempt a memoir of the regiment would be to compile a history of all the wars of Britain since the Revolution. Suffice it to say, that on every field, in the wars of the Spanish Succession, those of Flanders (where "our army swore so terribly"), at Minden, in America, Egypt, and the ever-glorious Peninsula, the Welsh Fusileers have been in the van of honour, and, like their Scottish comrades, might well term themselves "second to none."

Among the last shots fired *after* Waterloo were those discharged by the Fusileers, when, on the 24th of June, six days subsequent to the battle, they entered Cambrai by the old breach near the Port du Paris. As it is common for corps from mountainous districts to have some pet animal--as the Highlanders often have a stag--as a fond symbol to remind them of home and country, the regiment has the privilege of passing in review preceded by a goat with gilded horns, adorned with ringlets of flowers, and a plate inscribed with its badge.

No record is preserved of the actual loss of the regiment at Bunker's Hill, though the assertion of Cooper, the American novelist, that on that bloody day "the Welsh Fusileers had not a man left to saddle their goat," which went into action with them, would seem to be corroborated by the fact that only *five* grenadiers escaped; while Mrs. Adams, in a letter to her husband, the future President of the United States, says of that battle, "our enemies were cut down like grass; *and but one officer of all the Welsh Fusileers remains to tell his story*." When old Billy, the favourite goat of the 23rd, departed this life in peace in the Caribbean Isles, whence he had accompanied the regiment from Canada in 1844, her Majesty the Queen, on learning that he was greatly lamented by the soldiers, sent to them, from Windsor Park, a magnificent pair of the pure Cashmerian breed, which had been presented to her by the Shah of Persia. On every 1st of March, on the anniversary of their tutelary

patron--St. David--the officers give a splendid entertainment; and when the cloth is removed, and the leek duly eaten, the first toast is a bumper to the health of the Prince of Wales; the memory of old Toby Purcell is not forgotten, and, as the order has it, the band plays "'The noble Race of Shenkin,' while a drum-boy mounted on the goat, which is richly caparisoned for the occasion, is led thrice round the table by the drum-major."

At Boston, in 1775, a goat somewhat resented this exhibition, by breaking away from the mess-room, and rushing into the barracks with all his trappings on. There are few battlefields honourable to Britain where the Welsh Fusileers have not left their bones. The colours which wave over their ranks show a goodly list of hard-won honours--"bloody and hard-won honours," says a writer. "Arthur himself, Cadwallader, Glendower, and many an ancient Cambrian chief, might in ghostly form--if ghosts can grudge--envy their bold descendants the fame of these modern exploits, and confess that the lance and the corselet, the falchion and the mace, have done no greater deeds than those of the firelock and the buff-belt, the bayonet and sixty rounds of ball-cartridge." On their colours are the two badges of Edward the Black Prince--the Rising Sun and the Red Dragon; "a dragon addorsed gules, passant, on a mountain vert," as the heralds have it. This was the ancient symbol of the Cambrian Principality, with the significant motto, *Ich dien*, "I serve." And now, at the very time the Urgent was entering the Mediterranean, the regiment was on its way, with others, to win fresh laurels by the shores of the Black Sea; and with his horns gaily gilded, and a handsome, regimental, silver plate clasped on his forehead, Cameydd Llewellyn, whilom the caressed pet of the gentle Winny Lloyd, was landing with them at Kalamita Bay, and the hordes of Menschikoff were pouring forward from Sebastopol.[2]

CHAPTER XXX.--NEWS OF BATTLE.

We came in sight of Malta at daybreak on the 28th of September, and about noon dropped our anchor in the Marsamuscetta, or quarantine harbour, where all ships under the rank of a frigate must go. This celebrated isle, the master-key of the Mediterranean, the link that connects us with Egypt and India, was a new scene to me. Mostyn and some others on board the Urgent had been quartered there before, and while I was surveying the vast strength of its batteries of white sandstone, with those apparently countless cannon, that peer through the deep embrasures, or frown *en barbette* over the sea; the quaint appearance of those streets of stairs, which Byron anathematised; the singular architecture of the houses, so Moorish in style and aspect, with heavy, overhanging balconies and flat roofs all connected, so that the dwellers therein can make a common promenade of them; the groups of picturesque, half-nude, and tawny Maltese; the monks and clerical students in rusty black cloaks and triangular hats; the Greek sailors, in short jackets and baggy blue breeches; the numbers of scarlet uniforms, and those of the Chasseurs de Vincennes (for two French three-deckers full of the latter had just come in); the naked boys who dived for halfpence in the harbour, and jabbered a dialect that was more Arabic than Italian--while surveying all this from the poop, through my field-glass, Mostyn was pointing out to me the great cathedral of St. John, some of the auberges of the knights, and anticipating the pleasure of a fruit lunch in the Strada Reale, a drive to Monte Benjemma, a dinner at Morell's, in the Strada Forni, a cigar on the ramparts, and then dropping into the opera-house, which was built by the Grand-master Manoel Vilhena, and where the best singers from La Scala may be heard in the season; and Price of ours was already soft and poetical in the ideas of

faldettas of lace, black eyes, short skirts, and taper ankles, and anticipating or suggesting various soft things. While the soldiers clustered in the waist, as thick as bees, the officers were all busy with their lorgnettes on the poop, or in preparation for a run ashore, when the bells of Valetta began to ring a merry peal, the ships in the harbour to show all their colours, and a gun flashed redly from the massive granite ramparts of St. Elmo, a place of enormous strength, having in its lower bastions a sunk barrack, capable of holding two thousand infantry.

"Another gun!" exclaimed little Tom Clavell, as a second cannon sent its peal over the flat roofs, and another; "a salute, by Jove! What is up--is this an anniversary?"

It was *no* anniversary, however, and on the troopship coming to anchor in the crowded and busy harbour, and the quarantine boat coming on board, we soon learned what was "up;" the news spread like lightning through the vessel, from lip to lip and ear to ear; the hum grew into a roar, and ended in the soldiers and sailors giving three hearty cheers, to which many responded from other ships, and from the shore; while the bands of the Chasseurs de Vincennes, on board the three-deckers, struck up the "Marseillaise."

News had just come in that four days ago a battle had been fought by Lord Raglan and Marshal St. Arnaud at a place called the Alma in Crim Tartary; that the allied troops after terrible slaughter were victorious, and the Russians were in full retreat. That evening a few of us dined at the mess of the Buffs, a battalion of which was quartered in the castle of St. Elmo. The officers occupied one of the knights' palaces--the Auberge de Bavière--near that bastion where the Scottish hero of Alexandria is lying in the grave that so becomes his fate and character. This auberge is a handsome building overlooking the blue sea, which almost washes its walls; and there we heard the first hasty details of that glorious battle, the story of which filled our hearts with regret and envy that we had not borne a share in it, and which formed a source of terrible anxiety to the poor wives of many officers who had left them behind at Malta, and who

could only see the fatal lists after their transmission to London. We heard the brief story of that tremendous uphill charge made by the Light Division--the Welsh Fusileers, the 19th, 33rd, 88th, and other regiments--supported by the Guards and Highlanders; that the 33rd alone had *nineteen* reliefs shot under their two colours, which were perforated by sixty-five bullet-holes. We heard how Colonel Chesters of ours, and eight of his officers, fell dead at the same moment, and that Charley Gwynne, Phil Caradoc, and many more were wounded.

"On, on, my gallant 23rd!" were the last words of Chesters, as he fell from his horse.

We heard how two of our boy ensigns, Buller and little Anstruther of Balcaskie, were shot dead with the colours in their hands; how Connelly, Wynne, young Radcliffe, and many more, all fell sword in hand; how the regiment had fought like tigers, and that Sir George Brown, after his horse was shot under him, led them on foot, with his hat in his hand, crying, "Hurrah for the Royal Welsh! Come on, my boys!"

And on they went, till Private Evans planted the Red Dragon on the great redoubt, where nine hundred men were lying dead. The heights were taken by a rush, and the first gun captured from the Russians was by Major Bell of ours, who brought it out of the field. A passionate glow of triumph and exultation filled my heart; I felt proud of our army, but of my regiment in particular, for the brave fellows of the Buffs were loud in their commendations of the 23rd; proud that I wore the same uniform and the same badges in which so many had perished with honour. None but a soldier, perhaps, can feel or understand all this, or that *esprit de corps* already referred to, and which sums up love of country, kindred, pride of self and profession, in one. But anon came the chilling and mortifying thought that I enjoyed only reflected honours. Why was I now seated amid the splendour and luxury of a mess in the Auberge de Bavière? Why was I not yonder, where so many had won glory or a grave? How provoking was the chance, the mere chain of military contingencies, by which I had lost all participation in that great battle,

the first fought in Europe since Waterloo--this Alma, that was now in all men's mouths, and in the heart of many a wife and mother, fought and won while we had been sailing on the sea, and while the unconscious folks at home throughout the British Isles were going about their peaceful avocations; when thousands of men and women, parents and wives, whose tenderest thoughts were with our gallant little host, were ignorant that those they loved best on earth perhaps were already cold, mutilated, and buried in hasty graves beneath its surface, in a place before unheard of, or by them unknown.

So great was the slaughter in my own regiment, that though I was only a lieutenant, there seemed to be every prospect of my winning ere long the huge spurs won by Toby Purcell at the Boyne Water; but my turn of sharp service was coming; for, though I could not foresee it all then, Inkermann was yet to be fought, the Quarries to be contested, the Mamelon and Redan to be stormed, and Sebastopol itself had yet to fall. Had I shared in that battle by the Alma, I might have perished, and been lost to Estelle for ever; leaving her, perhaps, to be wooed and won by another, when I was dead and forgotten like the last year's snow. This reflection cooled my ardour a little; for love made me selfish, or disposed to be more economical of my person, after my enthusiasm and the fumes of the Buffs' champagne passed away; and now from Malta I wrote the first letter I had ever addressed to her, full of what the reader may imagine, and sent with it a suite of those delicate and beautiful gold filigree ornaments, for the manufacture of which the Maltese jewellers are so famed; and when I sealed my packet at the Clarendon in the Strada San Paola, I sighed while reflecting that I could receive no answer to it, with assurances of her love and sorrow, until after I had been face to face with those same Muscovites whom my comrades had hurled from the heights of the Alma.

Three days after this intelligence arrived we quitted Malta, and had a fair and rapid run for the Dardanelles. The first morning found us, with many a consort full of troops, skirting, under easy sail, the barren-

looking isle of Cerigo--of old, the fabled abode of the goddess of love, now the Botany Bay of the Ionians; its picturesque old town and fort encircled by a chain of bare, brown, and rugged mountains, whose peaks the rising sun was tipping with fire. As if to remind us that we were near the land of Minerva, and of the curious Ascalaphus,

"Begat in Stygian shades
On Orphnè, famed among Avernal maids,"

many little dusky owls perched on the yards and booms, where they permitted themselves to be caught. Ere long the Isthmus of Corinth came in sight--that long tract of rock connecting the bleak-looking Morea with the Grecian continent, and uniting two chains of lofty mountains, the classical names of which recalled the days of our school-boy tasks; thence on to Candia, the hills of which rose so pale and white from the deep indigo blue of the sea, that they seemed as if sheeted with the snow of an early winter; but when we drew nearer the shore, the land-wind wafted towards us the aromatic odour that arises from the rank luxuriance of the vast quantity of flowers and shrubs which there grow wild, and form food for the wild goats and hares.

Every hour produced some new, or rather ancient, object of interest as we ploughed the classic waters of the Ægean Sea, and no man among us, who had read and knew the past glories, traditions, and poetry of the shores we looked on, could hear uttered without deep interest the names of those isles and bays--that on yonder plain, as we skirted the mainland of Asia, stood the Troy of Priam; that yonder hill towering in the background, a purple cone against a golden sky, was Mount Ida capped with snow, Scamander flowing at its foot; Ida, where Paris, the princely shepherd, adjudged the prize of beauty to Venus, and whence the assembled gods beheld the Trojan strife; for every rock and peak we looked on was full of the memories of ancient days, and of that "bright land of battle and of song," which Byron loved with all a poet's

enthusiasm. Dusk was closing as we entered the Hellespont; the castles of Europe and Asia were, however, distinctly visible, and we could see the red lights that shone in the Turkish fort, and the windmills whirling on the Sigean promontory, as we glided, with squared yards, before a fair and steady breeze, into those famous straits which Mohammed IV. fortified to secure his city and fleets against the fiery energy of the Venetians; and now, as I do not mean "to talk guide-book," our next chapter will find us in the land of strife and toil, of battle and the pest; in that Crim Tartary which, to so many among us, was to prove the land of death and doom.

CHAPTER XXXI.-UNDER CANVAS.

The 4th of October found me with my regiment (my detachment "handed over," and responsibility, so far as it was concerned, past) before Sebastopol, which our army had now environed, on *one* side at least. And now I was face to face with the Russians at last, and war had become a terrible reality. Tents had been landed, and all the troops were fairly under canvas. Our camp was strengthened by a chain of intrenchments dug all round it, and connected with those of the French, which extended to the sea on their left, while our right lay towards the valley of Inkermann, at the entrance of which, on a chalky cliff, 190 feet high at its greatest elevation, rose the city of Sebastopol, with all its lofty white mansions, that ran in parallel streets up the steep acclivity. In memory I can see it now, as I used to see it then, from the trenches, the advanced rifle-pits, or through the triangular door of my tent, with all its green-domed churches, its great round frowning batteries, forts Alexander and Constantine and others, perforated for cannon, tier above

tier; and far inland apparently, for a distance after even the suburbs had ceased, were seen the tall slender masts of the numerous shipping that had taken shelter in the far recesses of the harbour, nearly to the mouth of the Tchernaya, from our fleets (which now commanded all the Black Sea). And a pretty sight they formed in a sunny day, when all their white canvas was hanging idly on the yards to dry.

Nearer the mouth of the great harbour were the enormous dark hulls of the line-of-battle ships--the Three Godheads of 120 guns, the Silistria of 84, the Paris and Constantine, 120 each, and other vessels of that splendid fleet which was soon after sunk to bar our entrance. Daily the Russians threw shot and shell at us, while we worked hard to get under cover. The sound of those missiles was strange and exciting at first to the ears of the uninitiated; but after a time the terrible novelty of it passed away, or was heard with indifference; and with indifference, too, even those who had not been at Alma learned to look on the killed and wounded, who were daily and nightly borne from the trenches to the rear, the latter to be under the care of the toil-worn surgeons, and the former to lie for a time in the dead-tents. The siege-train was long in arriving. "War tries the strength of the military framework," says Napier. "It is in peace the framework itself must be formed, otherwise barbarians would be the leading soldiers of the world. *A perfect army can only be made by civil institutions*." Yet with us such was the state of the "framework," by the results of a beggarly system of political economy, that when war was declared--a war after forty years of peace--our arsenals had not a sufficient quantity of shells for the first battering-train, and the fuses issued had been in store rotting and decaying since the days of Toulouse and Waterloo. This was but one among the many instances of gross mismanagement which characterised many arrangements of the expedition. And taking advantage of the delays, nightly the Russians, with marvellous rapidity, were throwing up additional batteries of enormous strength, mounted with cannon taken from the six line-of-battle ships which, by a desperate resolve of Prince Menschikoff's, were ultimately sunk across the harbour-mouth, where

we could see the sea-birds, scared by the adverse cannonade, perching at times on their masts and royal-yards, which long remained visible above the water. Occasionally our war-steamers came near, and then their crews amused themselves by throwing shells into the town. Far up the inlet lay a Russian man-of-war, with a cannon ingeniously slung in her rigging. The shot from this, as they could slue it in any direction, greatly annoyed our sappers, and killed many of them, before one well-directed ball silenced it for ever.

Two thousand seamen with their officers, forming the Naval Brigade of gallant memory, were landed from our fleet, bringing with them a magnificent battering-train of ship-guns of the largest calibre; and these hardy and active fellows lent most efficient aid in dragging their ordnance and the stores over the rough and hilly ground that lies between Balaclava and the city. They were all in exuberant spirits at the prospect of a protracted "spree" ashore; for as such they viewed the circumstance of their forming a part of the combined forces destined to take Sebastopol, and they amused and astonished the redcoats by their freaks and pranks under fire, and their ready alacrity, jollity, and muscular strength. Guns of enormous weight and long range were fast being brought into position; the trenches were "pushed" with vigour; and now the work of a regular siege--the consecutive history of which forms no part of my narrative--was begun in stern earnest when the batteries opened on the 16th October. Our armies were placed in a semicircle, commanding the southern side of this great fortified city and arsenal of the Black Sea. They were in full possession of the heights which overlook it, and were most favourably posted for the usual operations of a siege, which would never have been necessary had it been entered after Alma was won. A deep and beautiful ravine, intersecting the elevated ground, extended from the harbour of the doomed city to Balaclava, dividing the area of the allied camp into two portions. The French, I have said, were on the left, and we held the right.

On the very day our batteries opened, I received the notification of my appointment to a company. This rapid promotion was consequent to the sad casualties of the Alma; and two days after, when the trench-guards were relieved, and I came off duty before daybreak, I crept back to my tent cold, miserable, and weary, to find my man Evans--brother of the gallant private of the same name who planted the Red Dragon on the great redoubt--busy preparing a breakfast for *three*, with the information that Caradoc and Gwynne, who had been on board the Hydaspes, an hospital ship for officers, had rejoined the night before, and had added their repast to mine for the sake of society. But food and other condiments were already scarce in the camp, and tidings that they had come from Balaclava with their haversacks *full*, caused more than one hungry fellow to visit my humble abode, the canvas walls of which flapped drearily in the wind, that came sweeping up the valley of Inkermann. Without undressing, as the morning was almost in, I threw myself upon my camp-bed, which served me in lieu of a sofa, and strove, with the aid of a plaid, a railway-rug, and blanket, to get some warmth into my limbs, after the chill of a night spent in the damp trenches; while Evans, poor fellow, was doing his best to boil our green and ill-ground coffee in a camp-kettle on a fire made of half-dried drift-wood, outside my tent, which was pitched in a line with thousands of others, on the slope of the hill that overlooked the valley where the Tchernaya flows. Though the season was considerably advanced now, the days were hot, but the nights were correspondingly chill; and at times a white dense fog came rolling up from the Euxine, rendering still greater the discomfort of a bell-tent, as it penetrated every crevice, and rendered everything therein--one's bedding and wearing apparel, even that which was packed in overlands and bullock-trunks--damp, while sugar, salt, and bread became quite moist. Luckily, somehow it did not seem to affect our ammunition. Then there came high winds, which blew every night, whistling over the hill-tops, singing amongst the tent-ropes, and bellowing down the valley of Inkermann.

These blasts sometimes cast the tent-ropes loose by uprooting the pegs, causing fears lest the pole--whereon hung the revolvers, swords, pans, and kettles of the occupants--might snap, and compel them, when hoping to enjoy a comfortable night's rest off duty, to come forth shivering from bed to grope for the loosened pegs amid the muddy soil or wet grass, and by the aid of a stone or a stray shot--if the mallet was not forthcoming--to secure them once more. This might be varied by a shower of rain, which sputtered in your face as you lay abed, till the canvas became thoroughly wetted, and so tightened. Anon it might shrink; then the ropes would strain, and unless you were in time to relax them, down might come the whole domicile in a wet mass on those who were within it. Now and then a random shot fired from Sebastopol, or the whistling shell, with a sound like t'wit-t'wit-t'wit, describing a fiery arc as it soared athwart the midnight sky on its errand of destruction, varied the silence and darkness of the hour. The clink of shovels and pickaxes came ever and anon from the trenches, where the miners and working-parties were pushing their sap towards the city. The sentinels walked their weary round, or stood still, each on his post shivering, it might be, in the passing blast, but looking fixedly and steadily towards the enemy. The rest slept soundly after their day of toil and danger, watching, starvation, and misery; forgetful of the Russian watchfires that burned in the distance, heedless of the perils of the coming day, and of *where* the coming night might find them. And so the night would pass, till the morning bugle sounded; then the stir and bustle began, and there was no longer rest for any, from the general of the day down to the goat of the Welsh Fusileers; the cooking, and cleaning of arms, parade of reliefs for outpost and the trenches, proceeded; but these without sound of trumpet or drum, as men detailed for such duties do everything silently; neither do their sentries take any complimentary notice of officers passing near their posts. Ere long a thousand white puffs, spirting up from the broken ground between us and the city, would indicate the rifle-pits, where the skirmishers lay *en perdue*, taking quiet pot-shots at each other from behind stones, caper-bushes, sand-bags,

and sap-rollers; and shimmering through haze and smoke--the blue smoke of the "villainous saltpetre"--rose the city itself, with its green spires and domes, white mansions, and bristling batteries.

And so I saw it through the tent-door as the morning drew on, and the golden sunshine began to stream down the long valley of Inkermann, "the city of caverns;" while our foragers were on the alert, and Turkish horses laden with hay, and strings of low four-wheeled arabas, driven by Tartars in fur skull-caps, brown jackets, and loose white trousers, would vary the many costumes of the camp. And the morning sunshine fell on other things which were less lively,--the long mounds of fresh earth where the dead lay, many of them covered with white lime dust to insure speedy decay. And then began that daily cannonade against the city--the cannonade that was to last till we *alone* expended more than one hundred thousand barrels of gunpowder, and heaven alone knows how many tons of shot and shell.

Often I lay in that tent, with the roar of the guns in my ears, pondering over the comfort of stone walls, of English sea-coal fires, and oftener still of her who was so far away, she so nobly born and rich, surrounded, as I knew she must always be, by all that wealth and luxury, rank and station could confer; and I thought longingly, "O for aunt Margaret's mirror, or Surrey's magic glass, or for the far-seeing telescope of the nursery tale, that I might see her once again!" Estelle's promises of writing to me had not been fulfilled as yet, or her answers to my loving and earnest letters from Malta and the Crimea had miscarried.

"Welcome, Caradoc! welcome, Gwynne!" cried I, springing off the camp-bed as my two friends entered the tent, of which I was the sole occupant, as my lieutenant was on board the Hydaspes ill with fever, and my ensign, a poor boy fresh from Westminster school, was under one of the horrid mounds in the shot-strewn valley.

"Harry, old fellow, how are you?--how goes it? Missed the Alma, eh?" said they cheerfully, as we warmly shook hands.

"All the better, perhaps," said Mostyn, who now joined us, while Price and Clavell soon after dropped in also; so two had to sit on the camp-bed, while the rest squatted on chests or buckets, and as for a table, we never missed it.

"And you were hit, Caradoc?"

"In the calf of the left leg, Harry, prodded by the rusty bayonet of a fellow who lay wounded on the ground, and who continued to fire *after* us when we had left him in the rear, till one of ours gave him the *coup de grâce* with the butt-end of his musket. Would you believe it?--the goat went up hill with us, and I couldn't, even while the bullets fell like hail about us, resist caressing it, for the sake of the donor."

"Poor Winny Lloyd!"

"Why poor?" asked Phil.

"Well, pretty, then. I saw her just before I left Southampton."

"This goat seems to be the peculiar care of Caradoc," said Gwynne; "he rivals its keeper, little Dicky Roll the drummer, in his anxiety to procure leaves, and buds of spurge, birch, and bird-cherry for it."

Phil Caradoc laughed, and muttered something about being "fond of animals;" but a soft expression was in his handsome brown eyes, and I knew he was thinking of sweet Winifred Lloyd, of his bootless suit, and the pleasant woods of Craigaderyn.

"And you, Charley, were hit, too? Saw your name in the *Gazette*," said I.

"A ball right through the left fore-arm, clean as a whistle; but it is almost well."

"And now to breakfast. Look sharp, Evans, there's a good fellow! A morning walk from Balaclava to the front gives one an appetite," said I.

"Yes, that one may not often have, like us, the wherewith to satisfy. An appetite is the most troublesome thing one can have in the vicinity of Sebastopol," replied Phil.

A strange-looking group we were when contrasted with our appearance when last we met.

Probably not one of us had enjoyed the luxury of a complete wash for a week, and the use of the razor having long been relinquished, our beards rivalled that of Carneydd Llewellyn in size, if not in hue. The scarlet uniforms, with lace and wings[3] of gold, in which we had landed, we had marched and fought and slept in for weeks, were purple, covered with discolorations, and patched with any stuff that came to hand. Our trousers had turned from Oxford gray to something of a red hue, with Crimean mud. Each of us had a revolver in his sash (which we then wore round the waist), and a canvas haversack or well-worn courier-bag slung over his shoulder, to contain whatever he might pick up, beg, borrow, or buy (some were less particular) in the shape of biscuits, eggs, fowls, or potatoes. Caradoc carried a dead duck by the legs as he entered, and Charley Gwynne had a loaf of Russian bread hung by a cord over his left shoulder, like a pilgrim at La Scala Santa; while Price had actually secured a lump of cheese from the wife of a Tartar, a fair one, with whom the universal lover had found favour when foraging in the lovely Baidar Valley. We were already too miserable to laugh at each other's appearance, and our tatters had ceased to be a matter of novelty. If such was the condition of our officers, that of the privates was fully worse; and thanks to our wretched commissariat and ambulance arrangements, the splendid *physique* of our men had begun to disappear; but their pluck was undying as ever.

On this morning we six were to have a breakfast such as rarely fell to our lot in the Crimea; for Evans, my Welsh factotum and *fidus Achates*, was a clever fellow, and speedily had prepared for us, at a fire improvised under the shelter of a rock, a large kettle of steaming coffee, which, sans milk, we drank from tin canteens, tumblers, or anything

suitable, and Gwynne's loaf was shared fraternally among us, together with a brace of fowls found by him in a Tartar cottage. "Lineal descendants of the cock that crew to Mahomet, no doubt," said he; "and now, thanks to Evans, there they are, brown, savoury, appetising, gizzard under one wing, liver under the other--done to a turn, and on an old ramrod."

And while discussing them, the events of the siege were also discussed, as coolly as we were wont to do the most ordinary field man[oe]uvres at home.

"The deuce!" said I, "how the breeze comes under the wall of this wretched tent!"

"Don't abuse the tent, Harry," said Caradoc; "I am thankful to find myself in one, after being on board the Hydaspes. It must be a veritable luxury to be able to sleep, even on a camp-bed and alone, after being in a hospital, with one sufferer on your right, another on your left, dead or dying, groaning and in agony. May God kindly keep us all from the 'bloody hospital of Scutari,' after all I have heard of it!"

"You were with us last night in the trenches, Mostyn?" said I.

"Yes, putting Gwynne's Hythe theories into practice from a rifle pit. I am certain that I potted at least three of the Ruskies as coolly as ever I did grouse in Scotland. All squeamishness has left me now, though I could not help shuddering when first I saw a man's heels in the air, after firing at him. You will never guess what happened on our left. A stout vivandière of the 3rd Zouaves, while in the act of giving me a *petit verre* from her little keg, was taken--"

"By the enemy?" exclaimed Price.

"Not at all--with the pains of maternity; and actually while the shot and shell were flying over our heads."

"And what were the trench casualties?" asked Gwynne.

"About a hundred and twenty of all ranks, killed, wounded, and missing. A piece more of the fowl--thanks."

"A guardsman was killed last night, I have heard," said Hugh Price.

"Yes; poor Evelyn of the Coldstreams; he was first blinded by dust and earth blown into his eyes by the ricochetting of a 36-pound shot, and as he was groping about in an exposed place between the gabions, he fell close by me."

"Wounded?"

"Mortally--hit in the head; he' was just able to whisper some woman's name, and then expired. He purchased all his steps up to the majority, so there's a pot of money gone. I think I could enjoy a quiet weed now; but, Clavell, there was surely an awful shindy in your quarter last night?"

"Yes," replied Tom, who, since he had been under fire, seemed to have grown an inch taller; "a sortie."

"A sortie?" said two or three, laughing.

"Well, something deuced like it," said Tom, testily, as he stroked the place where his moustache was to be. "I was asleep between the gabions about twelve at night, when all at once a terrible uproar awoke me. 'Stand to your arms, men, stand to your arms!' cried our adjutant; 'the Russians are scouring the trenches!' I sprang up, and tumbled against a bulky brute in a spike-helmet and long coat, with a smoking revolver in his hand, just as a sergeant of ours shot him. It was all confusion--I can tell you nothing about it; but we will see it all in the *Times* by and by. 'Sound for the reserves!' cried one. 'By God, they have taken the second parallel!' cried another. 'Fire!' 'Don't fire yet!' But our recruits began to

blaze away at random. The Russians, however, fell back; it might have been only a reconnoitring party; but, anyhow, they have levanted with the major of the 93rd Highlanders."

"The deuce they have!" we exclaimed. And this episode of the major's capture was to have more interest for me than I could then foresee.

"These cigars, five in number," continued Tom, "were given to me by a poor dying Zouave, who had lost his way and fallen among us. I gave him a mouthful of brandy from my canteen, after which he said, Take these, monsieur l'officier; they are all I have in the world now, and, as you smoke them, think of poor Paul Ferrière of the 3rd Zouaves, once a jolly student of the Ecole de Médecine, dying now, like a beggar's dog!' he added, bitterly. 'Nay,' said I, 'like a brave soldier.' 'Monsieur is right,' said he, with a smile. Our surgeons could do nothing for him, and so he expired quite easily, while watching his own blood gradually filling up a hole in the earth near him!"

"Well, the Crimea, bad as it is," said Caradoc, as he prepared and lit one of the Frenchman's cigars, "is better than serving in India, I think; 'that union of well-born paupers,' as some fellow has it, 'a penal servitude for those convicted of being younger sons.'"

"By Jove, I can't agree with you," said Mostyn, who had served in India, and was also a younger son; "but glory is a fine thing, no doubt."

"Glory be hanged!" said Gwynne, testily; "a little bit of it goes a long way with me."

"See, there go some of the Naval Brigade to have a little ball practice with a big Lancaster!" cried Tom Clavell, starting to the tent-door.

"Getting another gun into position apparently," added Raymond Mostyn.

As they spoke, a party of seamen, whiskered and bronzed, armed with cutlasses and pistols, their officers with swords drawn, swept past the tent-door at a swinging trot, all singing cheerily a forecastle song, of which the monotonous burden seemed to be,

"O that I had her, *O* that I had her,
Seated on my knee!
O that I had her, *O* that I had her,
A black girl though she be!"

tallying on the while to the drag-ropes of a great Lancaster gun, which they trundled up the slope, crushing stones, caper-bushes, and everything under its enormous grinding wheels, till they got it into position; and a loud ringing cheer, accompanied by a deep and sullen boom, ere long announced that they had slued it round and sent one more globe of iron to add to the hundreds that were daily hurled against Sebastopol. On this occasion the fire of this especial Lancaster gun was ordered to be directed against a bastion on the extreme left of the city, where the officer in command, a man of remarkable bravery, who had led several sorties against us, seemed to work his cannon and direct their fire with uncommon skill; and it was hoped that we should ere long dismount or disable them, and if possible breach the place.

CHAPTER XXXII.--IN THE TRENCHES.

It was while the infantry and Naval Brigade were still before Sebastopol, toiling, trenching, and pounding with cannon and mortar at all its southern side, we had our ardour fired, our enthusiasm kindled, and our sorrow keenly excited by the tidings of that glorious but terrible death ride, the charge of the six hundred cavalry at Balaclava; and of how only one hundred and fifty came alive out of that mouth of fire, the valley where rained "the red artillery"--the 13th Hussars were said to have brought only twelve men out of the action, and the 17th Lancers twenty--and how nobly they were avenged by our "heavies" under the gallant Scarlett; and of the stern stand made against six thousand Russian horse by the "thin red line" of the Sutherland Highlanders.

On the day these tidings were circulated in the trenches by many who had witnessed the events, we seemed to redouble our energies, and shot and shell were poured with greater fury than ever on the city, while sharper, nearer, and more deadly were the contests of man and man in the rifle-pits between it and the trenches. Then followed the sortie made by Menschikoff, supposing that most of the allied forces had been drawn towards Balaclava--a movement met by the infantry and artillery of the second division under Sir De Lacy Evans, and repulsed with a slaughter which naturally added to the hatred on both sides; and innumerable were the stories told, and authenticated, of the Russians murdering our helpless wounded in cold blood. On the night of the 2nd November I was again in the trenches opposite to the eastern flank of Sebastopol, the whole regiment being on duty covering the batteries and working-parties.

The day passed as usual in exciting and desultory firing, the Russians and our fellows watching each other like lynxes, and never missing an opportunity for taking a quiet shot at each other. A strong battalion of the former was in our front, lurking among some mounds and thick *abattis*, formed of trees felled and pegged to the earth with their branches towards us; and above the barrier and the broken ground that lay between it and the advanced trench-ground, strewed with fragments

of rusty iron nails, broken bottles, and the other amiable contents of exploded bombs, torn, rent, upheaved, or sunk into deep holes by the explosion of mines and countermines, shells and rockets, we could see their bearded visages, their flat caps and tall figures, cross-belted and clad in long gray shapeless coats, as from time to time they yelled and started up to take aim at some unwary Welsh Fusileer, heedless that from some *other* point some comrade's bullet avenged him, or anticipated his fate. To attempt a description of the trenches to a non-military reader, in what Byron terms "engineering slang," would be useless, perhaps; suffice it to say that we were pretty secure from round shot, but never from shells, the trenches or zigzags being dug fairly parallel to the opposing batteries, with a thick bank of earth towards Sebastopol, a banquette for our men to mount on when firing became necessary.

Near us was a battery manned by our Royal Artillery--the guns being run through rude portholes made in the earthen bank, with the addition of sand-bags, baskets, and stuffed gabions, to protect the gunners. All was in splendid order there: the breeching-guns ever ready for action; the sponges, rammers, and handspikes lying beside the wheels; the shot piled close by as tidily as if in Woolwich-yard; the carbines of the men placed in racks against the gabions; the officers laughing over an old *Punch*, or making sketches, varied by caricatures of the Russians, their men sitting close by in their greatcoats, smoking and singing while awaiting orders, and listening with perfect indifference to the casual dropping fire maintained by us against the enemy in the abbatis or pits along our front, though almost every shot was the knell of a human existence.

Death and danger were now strangely familiar to us all, and we cared as little for the *whish* of a round bullet or the sharp *ping* of the Minie, while it cut the air, as for the deep hoarse booming of the breaching-guns; it was the cry of "bomb!" from the look out men, that usually made us start, and sprawl on our faces, or scamper away, for shelter, to crouch

with our heads stooped in our favourite or fancied places of security among the gabions, till a soaring monster, with death and mutilation in its womb, with its hoarse puffing that rose to a whistle, concussed all the air by the crash of its explosion.

Our men were all in their greatcoats, with their white belts outside; and, save when a section or so started angrily to arms, as those fellows in the abattis became more annoying, they sat quietly on the ground or against the wall of the trench, smoking, chatting with perfect equanimity, and occasionally taking a sip of rum or raki from their canteens; for, after weeks and months of this kind of duty, especially after the severity of the Crimean war set in, our older soldiers seemed utterly indifferent as to whether they lived or died.

All of them, even such boys as Tom Clavell, had been front to front with death, again and again. Among ourselves, even, there was an incessant scramble for food; hence in the expression of their faces and eyes there was something hard, set, fierce, and undefinable--half-wolfish at times, devil-may-care always; for in a few weeks after the landing at Eupatoria, they had seen more and lived longer than one can do in years upon years of a life of peace.

"What do you see, Hugh, that you look so earnestly to the front?" I asked of Price, who was lying on his breast with a rifle close beside him, and his field-glass, to which his eyes were applied, wedged in a cranny between two sand-bags.

"A Russian devil has made a bolt out of the abattis into yonder hole made by a shell."

"And what of that?"

"I am waiting to pot him, as he can't stay there long," replied Price, usually the best of good-natured fellows, but now looking with a tiger-like stare through the same lorgnette which he had used on many a day at the Derby, and many a night at the opera; "there he comes," he added.

In a moment the Minie rifle, already sighted, was firmly at the shoulder of Price, who fired; a mass like a gray bundle, with hands and arms outspread, rolled over and over again on the ground, and then lay still; at *another* time it might have seemed most terribly still!

"Potted, by Jove!" exclaimed Hugh, as he restored the rifle to Sergeant Rhuddlan, and quietly resumed his cigar.

"A jolly good shot, sir, at four hundred yards," added the non-commissioned officer, as he proceeded to reload and cap.

At that time the life of a Russian was deemed by us of no more account than that of a hare or rabbit in the shooting season; but, if reckless of the lives of others, it must be remembered that we were equally reckless of our own; and, with all its horrors, war is not without producing some of the gentler emotions. Thus, even on those weary, exciting, and perilous days and nights in the trenches, under the influence of *camaraderie*, of general danger, and the most common chance of a sudden and terrible death, men grew communicative, and while interchanging their canteens and tobacco-pouches they were apt to speak of friends and relations that were far away: the old mother, whose nightly prayers went up for the absent; the ailing sister, who had died since war had been declared; the absent wife, left on the shore at Southampton with a begging-pass to her own parish; the little baby that had been born since the transport sailed; the old fireside, where their place remained vacant, their figure but a shadowy remembrance; the girls they had left behind them; their disappointments in life; their sorrows and joys and hopes for the future; the green lanes, the green fields, the pleasant and familiar places they never more might see: and officers and privates talked of such things in common; so true it is that

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

On the 3rd of November, Caradoc and I were sitting in a sheltered corner, between the gabions, chatting on some of the themes I have enumerated, when a little commotion was observable among our men, and we saw the adjutant and the major--the worthy holder of Toby Purcell's spurs, he who had carried off the first gun at Alma, B-- of ours, and who, since Colonel Chesters was killed, had commanded the regiment--coming directly towards us.

"What the deuce is up?" said I.

"Their faces look important," added Caradoc.

"Sorry to disturb you; not that there is much pleasure here, certainly," said the major, smiling; "but the adjutant tells me that you, Hardinge, are the first officer for duty."

"We are all on duty," replied I, laughing; "if we are not, I don't know what duty is. Well, major, what is to be done?"

"You are to convey a message from Lord Raglan into Sebastopol."

"To Sebastopol?"

"Yes, to that pleasant city by the sea," said the adjutant.

"To Prince Menschikoff?"

"No," replied the major; "to the officer commanding the nearest post."

"Under a flag of truce?"

"Of course; it would be perilous work otherwise."

"About what is the message?"

"The capture of Major MacG--, of the 93rd, who was carried off by a kind of sortie the other night, and who is supposed to have been afterwards killed in cold blood."

The seizure of the major of the Sutherland Highlanders, a brave old fellow who had on his breast medals for Candahar, Afghanistan, and Maharajapore, had created much interest in the army at this time, when we so readily believed the Russians liable to commit atrocities on wounded and prisoners.

"Lord Raglan wishes distinct information on the subject," added the adjutant, after a pause.

"All right, I am his man," said I, starting up and looking carefully to the chambers and capping of my Colt, ere I replaced it in its pouch; and knocking some dust and mud off my somewhat dilapidated regimentals, added, "now for a drummer and a flag of truce."

"You are to go to the officer in command of that bastion on the Russian left," said the major.

"To that wasp of a fellow who is so active, and whose scoundrels have killed so many of our wounded men, firing even on the burial parties?"

"The same. You must be sharp, wary, and watchful."

"His name?"

"Ah, that you may perhaps learn, not that it matters much; even Lord Raglan cannot know that; but, doubtless, it will be something like a sneeze or two, ending in 'off' or 'iski.'"

"Success, Harry!" cried Caradoc.

A few minutes after this saw me issue from the trenches of the right attack, attended by Dicky Roll, with his drum slung before him; in my right hand I carried a Cossack lance, to which a white handkerchief of

the largest dimensions was attached to attract attention, as the Russians were not particular to a shade as to what or whom they fired on, and the cruel and infamous massacre of an English boat's crew at Hango was fresh in the minds of us all; consequently I was not without feeling a certain emotion of anxiety, mingled with ardour and joy at the prospect of Estelle seeing my name in the despatches, as Dicky and I now advanced into the broken and open ground that lay between our parallel and the abattis, amid which I saw head after head appear, as the white emblem I bore announced that *pro tem*, hostilities in that quarter must cease, by the rules of war.

Dicky Roll, who, poor little fellow, had been fraternally sharing his breakfast and blanket with the goat, and did not seem happy in his mind at our increasing proximity to "them Roosian hogres," as he called them, beat a vigorous *chamade* on his drum, and I waved my impromptu banner. I was glad when a Russian drum responded, as flags of truce had been more than once fired upon, on the miserable plea that communications under them were merely designed for the purpose of gaining intelligence, of reconnoitring Sebastopol and its outposts. Hence our progress was watched with the deepest interest by the whole regiment and others, all of whom were now lining the banquette of the parallels, or clustering at the embrasures and fascines of the breaching batteries.

CHAPTER XXXIII.-THE FLAG OF TRUCE.

In the rifle-pits many of our men lay dead or dying, and a few paces beyond them brought me among Russians in the same pitiable condition. One, who had been shot through the chest, lay on his back, half in and half out of his lurking hole; his eyes were glazing, bubbles of blood and froth were oozing through his thick black moustaches, which were matted by the cartridges he had bitten. Another was shot through the lungs, and his breath seemed to come with a wheezing sound through the orifice.

There, too, lay the luckless Russian "potted" by Hugh Price. He was one of the imperial 26th, for that number was on his shoulder-straps. On his breast were several copper medals. Others who were able, taking advantage of the cessation of hostilities, were crawling away on their hands or knees towards the town or trenches, in search of water, of succour, and of some kind friend to bind their wounds; and encouraged by the lull in the firing, the little birds were twittering about those ghastly pits in search of biscuit-crumbs or other food.

The ground was studded thickly with rusty fragments of exploded shells, nails, bottles, grape and canister shot; other places were furrowed up, or almost paved with half-buried cannon-balls of every calibre; and here and there, in the crater made by a mine, lay a forgotten corpse in sodden uniform, gray faced with red; and yet singularly enough, amid these horrors, there were springing through the fertile earth many aromatic shrubs, and a vast number of the *colchicum autumnale*, a beautiful blue crocus-like flower, with which the Crimea abounds.

The Russian drum, hoarse, wooden, and ill-braced, again sounded, and mine replied; then we saw an officer coming towards us from the entanglements of the abattis, with his sword sheathed and waving a white handkerchief. He was a tall grim-looking man, of what rank I could not determine, as all the enemy's officers in the field, from the general down to the last-joined praperchick, or ensign, wore long, ungraceful greatcoats of brownish gray cloth, having simply facings and

shoulder-straps. He carried a wooden canteen and an old battered telescope, worn crosswise by two leather straps, and had several silver medals, won doubtless in battle against Schamyl in Circassia.

It is a common belief in England that every Russian gentleman speaks French; but though he may do so better than another foreigner--for he who can pronounce Muscovite "words of ten or twelve consonants apiece" may well speak anything--it is chiefly the language of the court and of diplomacy; and in this instance, when, after saluting each other profoundly, and eyeing each other with stern scrutiny, I addressed the officer in the language of our allies, he replied in German, which I knew very imperfectly.

I made him understand, however, that my message was for the officer in command of the left bastion.

He replied, that to be taken into Sebastopol, or even to be led nearer, required that the eyes of myself and the drummer should be blindfolded, to which I assented; and he proceeded carefully to muffle Dicky Roll and me in such a manner as to place us in utter darkness. He then gave me his arm, I took the drummer by the hand, and in this grotesque fashion, which excited some laughter in the trenches, the trio proceeded, stumbling and awkwardly, towards the city.

I heard the increasing buzz of many voices around us, the unbarring of a heavy wicket, the clatter of musket-butts on the pavement, and occasionally a hoarse order or word of command issued in what seemed the language of necromancy. Caissons, and wagons heavily laden, rattled along the streets; I felt that I was *inside* Sebastopol; but dared not without permission unbind my eyes, save at the risk of being run through the body by this fellow in the long coat, or made a prisoner of war, and despatched towards Perecop with my hands tied to the mane of a Cossack pony.

The sensation and the conviction were most tantalising; but I was compelled to submit, and knew that we were proceeding through the thoroughfares of that place towards which I had daily turned my field-glass with the most intense curiosity, and which we knew to be one vast garrison rather than a town, with whole streets of barracks, arsenals, and government houses.

A change of sounds and of atmosphere warned me that we were within doors. My guide withdrew the bandages, and then Dicky and I looked around us, dazzled with light, after being in darkness for nearly half an hour. I was in a large whitewashed room, plainly furnished, uncarpeted, heated by a stove of stone in one corner, with an *eikon* in another. On the table of polished deal lay some books, a copy or two of the *Invalide Russe*, the *Moskauer Zeitung*, Panaeff's *Russian Snobs*, the vernacular for that familiar word being *khlishch*. On the walls hung maps and documents--orders of the day, perhaps--in Russian.

Through the two large windows, which we were warned not to approach, I obtained a glimpse of the hill on which the residence of Prince Menschikoff was situated. On one side I saw that the streets ran in parallel lines down to the water edge; on the other to where the new naval arsenals lay, in the old Tartar town which was known by the name of Achtiare in the days of Thomas Mackenzie, the Scoto-Russian admiral who first created Sebastopol, and whose *khutor*, farm or forest for producing masts, excited so much speculation among our Highland Brigade. Everywhere I saw great cannon bristling, all painted pea-green, with a white cross on the breech.

The jingle of spurs caused me to turn, and Dicky to lift his hand to his cap in salute. We saw a tall and handsome Russian officer, of imposing appearance, enter the room. His eyes were dark, yet sharp and keen in expression; he had black strongly-marked eyebrows and an aquiline nose, with a complexion as clear as a woman's, a pretty ample beard, and close-shorn hair. He, too, wore the inevitable greatcoat; but it was open in this instance, and I could see the richly-laced green uniform

and curious flat silver epaulettes of the Vladimir Regiment, with the usual number of medals and crosses, for all the armies of Nicholas were well decorated. He bowed with great courtesy, and said in French,

"You have, I understand, a message for me from my Lord Raglan?"

I bowed.

"Before I listen to it you must have some refreshment; your drummer can wait outside."

I bowed again. A soldier-servant placed on the table decanters of Crimskoi wine, with a silver salver of biscuits and pastilla, or little cakes made of fruit and honey; and of these I was not loath to partake, while the soldier in attendance led away Dicky Roll, who eyed me wistfully, and said, as he went out,

"For God's sake don't forget me, Captain Hardinge; I don't like the look of them long-coated beggars at all."

I was somewhat of Dicky's opinion; and being anxious enough to get back to the trenches, stated briefly my message.

"You have, I fear, come on a bootless errand," replied the Russian, "as no officer of your army was, to my knowledge, either killed or taken by us on the night in question; though certainly a man may easily be hit in the dark, and crawl away to some nook or corner, and there die and lie unseen. But the Pulkovnick Ochterlony, who keeps the list of prisoners, will be the best person to afford you information on the matter. Remain with me, and assist yourself to the Crimskoi, while I despatch a message to him."

He drew a glazed card from an embossed case, and pencilling a memorandum thereon, sent his orderly with it, while we seated ourselves, entered into conversation, and pushed the decanter fraternally to and fro.

"I have just come from hearing the Bishop of Sebastopol preach in the great church to all the garrison off duty," said he, laughing; "and he has been promising us great things--honour in this world, and glory in the next--if we succeed in driving you all into the Euxine."

"There are plenty of opportunities afforded here of going to heaven."

"A good many, too, of going the other way; however, I must not tell you all, or even a part, of what the bishop said. He did all that eloquence could do to fire the religious enthusiasm--superstition, if you will--of our soldiers and his language was burning."

"Then you are on the eve of another sortie," said I, unwarily.

"I have not said so," he replied, abruptly, while his eyes gleamed, and handing me his silver cigar-case, on which was engraved a coronet, we lapsed into silence.

The sermon he referred to was that most remarkable one preached on the evening of Saturday, the 4th of November, before one of the most memorable events of the war. In that discourse, this Russian-Greek bishop, with his coronal mitre on his head, glittering with precious gems, a crozier whilom borne by St. Sergius in his hand, his silver beard floating to his girdle over magnificent vestments, stood on the altar-steps of the great church, and assured the masses of armed men who thronged it to the portal that the blessing of God was upon their forthcoming enterprise and the defence of the city; that crowns of eternal glory awaited all those martyrs who fell in battle against the heretical French and the island curs who had dared to levy war on holy Russia and their father the Emperor.

He told them that the English were monsters of cruelty, who tortured their prisoners, committing unheard-of barbarities on all who fell into their hands; that "they were bloodthirsty and abominable heretics, whose extermination was the solemn duty of all who wished to win the favour of God and of the Emperor." He farther assured them that the

British camp contained enormous treasures--the spoil of India, vessels of silver and gold, sacks and casks filled with precious stones--one-third of which was to become the property of the victors; and he conjured them, by the memory of Michael and Feodor, who sealed their belief in Christ with their blood, before the savage Batu-Khan, by the black flag unfurled by Demetri Donskoi when he marched against Mamai the Tartar, "by the forty times forty churches of Moscow the holy," and the memory of the French retreat from it, to stand firm and fail not; and a hoarse and prayerful murmur of assent responded to him.

My present host was too well-bred to tell all he had just heard, whether he believed it or not. After a pause, "If another sortie is made," said I, "the slaughter will be frightful."

"Bah!" replied he, cynically, while tipping the white ashes from his cigar, "a few thousands are not missed among the millions of Russia; I presume we only get rid of those who are unnecessary in the general scheme of creation."

"Peasants and serfs, I suppose?"

"Well, perhaps so--peasants and serfs, as you islanders suppose all our people to be."

"Nay, as you Russians deem them."

"We shall not dispute the matter, please," said he, coldly; and now, as I sat looking at him, a memory of his face and voice came over me.

"Count Volhonski!" I exclaimed, "have you quite forgotten me and the duel with the Prussian at Altona?"

He started and took his cigar from his mouth.

"The Hospodeen Hardinge!" said he, grasping my hand with honest warmth; "I must have been blind not to recognise you; but I never before saw you in your scarlet uniform."

"It is more purple than scarlet now, Count."

"Well, our own finery is not much to boast of, though we are in a city, and you are under canvas. But how does the atmosphere of Crim Tartary agree with you?" he asked, laughing.

"A little too much gunpowder in it, perhaps."

"I am sorry, indeed, to find that you and I are enemies, after those pleasant days spent in Hamburg and Altona; but when we last parted in Denmark--you remember our mutual flight across the frontier--you were but a subaltern, a praperchick, a sub-lieutenant, I think."

"I am a captain now."

"Ah--the Alma did that, I presume."

"Exactly."

"You will have plenty of promotion in your army, I expect, ere this war is ended. You shall all be promoted in heaven, I hope, ere holy Russia is vanquished."

"Well, Count, and you--"

"I am now Pulkovnick of the Vladimir Infantry."

"Did the Alma do that?"

"No; the Grand-Duchess Olga, to whom the regiment belongs, promoted me from the Guards, as a reward for restoring her glove, which she dropped one evening at a masked ball given in the hall of St. Vladimir by the Emperor; so my rank was easily won."

A knock rang on the door; spurs and a steel scabbard clattered on the floor, and then entered a stately old officer in the splendid uniform of the Infantry of the Guard, the gilded plate on his high and peculiarly-shaped cap bearing the perforation of more than one bullet, and his

breast being scarcely broad enough for all the orders that covered it. He bowed to Volhonski, and saluted me with his right hand, in which he carried a bundle of documents like lists. The Count introduced him as "the Pulkovnick Ochterlony, commanding the Ochterlony Battalion of the Imperial Guard." He was not at all like a Russian, having clear gray eyes and a straight nose, and still less like one did he seem when he addressed me in almost pure English.

"I have," said he, "gone over all the lists of officers of the Allies now prisoners in Sebastopol, or taken since the siege and sent towards Yekaterinoslav, and can find among them no such name as that of Major MacG--, of the 93rd Regiment of Scottish Highlanders. If traces of him are found, dead or alive, a message to that effect shall at once be sent to my Lord Raglan."

"I thank you, sir," said I, rising and regarding him curiously; "you speak very pure English for a Russian!"

"I am a Russian by birth and breeding only; in blood and race I am a countryman of your own."

"Indeed!" said I, coldly and haughtily, "how comes it to pass that an Englishman--"

"Excuse me, sir," said he, with a manner quite as haughty as my own, "I did not say that I was an Englishman; but as we have no time to make explanations on the subject, let us have together a glass of Crimskoi, and part, for the time, friends."

His manner was so suave, his bearing so stately, and his tone so conciliating--moreover his age seemed so great--that I clinked my glass with his, and withdrew with Volhonski, who, sooth to say, seemed exceedingly loath to part with me.

"Who the deuce is that officer?" I asked.

"I introduced him to you by name. He is the colonel of the Ochterlony Battalion of the Guard, which was raised by his father, one of the many Scottish soldiers of fortune who served the Empress Catharine; and the man is Russian to the core in all save blood, which he cannot help; but here is the gate, and you must be again blinded by Tolstoff. Adieu! May our next meeting be equally pleasant and propitious!"

As we separated, there burst from the soldiery who thronged near the gates a roar of hatred and execration, excited doubtless by the bishop's harangue; and poor Dicky Roll shrunk close to my side as we passed out. The ancient Scoto-Muscovite, I afterwards learned, was styled Ochterlony of Guynde, the soldiers of whose regiment had enjoyed from his father's time the peculiar privilege of retaining and wearing their old cap-plates, so long as a scrap of the brass remained, if they had once been perforated by a shot in action; and it is known that this identical old officer--who had some three or four nephews in the Russian Guards--had been visiting his paternal place of Guynde, in Forfarshire, but a few months before the war broke out.

In a few minutes more, Dicky Roll and I found ourselves, with our eyes unbandaged, once more in that pleasant locality midway between the abattis and the trenches, towards which we made our way in all haste, that I might report the issue of my mission concerning the Scotch major, who, as events proved, was found alive and unhurt, luckily; and the moment my white flag disappeared among the gabions--where all crowded round me for news, and where I became the hero of an hour--again the firing was resumed on both sides with all its former fury, and the old game went on--shot and shell, dust, the crash of stones and fascines, thirst, hunger, slaughter, and mutilation. That the Russians had some great essay *in petto*, the words of Volhonski left us no doubt, nor were we long kept in ignorance of what was impending over us.

CHAPTER XXXIV.--GUILFOYLE REDIVIVUS.

Quietly and before day dawned the trench-guards were relieved, and we marched wearily back towards the camp. I had dismissed my company, and was betaking me to my tent, threading my way along the streets formed by those of each regiment, when an ambulance wagon, four-wheeled and covered by a canvas hood, drew near. It was drawn by four half-starved-looking horses; the drivers were in the saddles; and an escort rode behind, muffled in their blue cloaks. It was laden, no doubt, with boots warranted not to fit, and bags of green or unripe coffee for the troops, who had no means of grinding it or of cooking it, firewood being our scarcest commodity. An officer of the Land Transport Corps, in cloak and forage-cap, was riding leisurely in rear of the whole, and as he passed I heard him singing, for his own edification, apparently: the refrain of his ditty was,

"Ach nein! ach nein! ich darf es nich.
Leb'wohl! Leb'wohl!"

"Heavens!" thought I, pausing in my progress, "can this be my quondam acquaintance, the *attaché* at the Court of Catzenelnbogen here--*here*, in the Crimea!"

"Can you direct me to the commissariat quarter of the Second Division?" asked the singer, a little pompously.

"By all the devils it is Guilfoyle!" I exclaimed.

"Oho--You are Hardinge of the 23rd--well met, Horatio!" said he, reining-in his horse, and with an air of perfect coolness.

"How came *you* to be here, sir?" I asked, sternly.

"I question your right to ask, if I do not your tone," he replied; "however, if you feel interested in my movements, I may mention that I was going to the dogs or the devil, and thought I might as well take Sebastopol on the way."

"It is not taken yet--but you, I hope, may be."

"Thanks for your good wishes," was the unabashed reply; "however, I am wide enough awake, sir; be assured that I cut my eye-teeth some years ago."

To find that such a creature as he had crept into her Majesty's service, even into such an unaristocratic force as the Land Transport Corps, and actually wore a sword and epaulettes, bewildered me, excited my indignation and disgust; and I felt degraded that by a reflected light he was sharing our dangers, our horrors, and the honours of the war. I had never seen his name in the *Gazette*, as being appointed a cornet of the Transport Corps, and the surprise I felt was mingled with profound contempt, and something of amusement, too, at his *insouciance* and cool effrontery. This made me partially forget the rage and hatred he had excited in me by the mischievous game he had played at Walcot Park, his plot to ruin me with Estelle Cressingham--a plot from which I had been so victoriously disentangled. Hence circumstance, change of position and place, induced me to talk to the fellow in a way that I should not have done at home or elsewhere.

"How came you to deprive England of the advantages of your society?" I asked, in a sneering tone, of which he was too well-bred not to be conscious; so he replied in the same manner,

"A verse of an old song may best explain it:

"A plague on ill luck, now the ready's all gone,
To the wars poor Pilgarlick must trudge;

But had I the cash to rake on as I've done,
The devil a foot I would budge!'

"And so Pilgarlick is serving his ungrateful country," he added, with the mocking laugh that I remembered of old.

"You can actually laugh at your own--"

"Don't say anything unpleasant," said he, shortening his reins; "I do so, but only as Reynard, who has lost his brush, laughs at the more clever fox who has kept his from the hounds," he added, with a glance of malevolence. "So you were not at the Alma? Doubtless it was pleasanter to break a bone quietly at home than risk all your limbs here in action."

Disdaining to notice either his sneer or the inference to be drawn from his remark, I asked, "What has become of that unhappy creature--your wife?"

"As you call her."

"Georgette Franklin--well?"

"It matters little now, and is no business of yours."

"That I know well--I only pitied her; but why do I waste words or time with such as you?"

"So you would like to know what has become of her, eh?"

"Very much."

"Well," said he, grinding his teeth with anger or hate, perhaps both, "there is a den in the Walworth-road, above a rag, bone, and old-bottle shop, the master of which was not unknown to the police, as apt to be roaming about intent to commit, as no doubt he often did, felony; for a few articles of bijouterie, such as a bunch of skeleton-keys, a crowbar, a brace of knuckle-dusters, and a 'barker,' with a piece of wax-candle, were

found upon his person, after an investigation thereof, suggestive that his habits were nocturnal, and that the propensities of his digits were knavish; and the landlord of this den gave her lodgings--and there she died, this Georgette Franklin, in whom you are so interested--died not without suspicion of suicide. Now are *you* satisfied?" he added, holding a cigar between the first and second fingers of his right hand, and gazing lazily at the smoke wreaths as they curled upward in the chill morning air.

There was something sublimely infernal--if I may be permitted the paradox--in the gusto with which the fellow told all this, and in the sneering expression of his face; and I could see his green eyes and his white teeth glisten in the light of a great rocket--some secret signal--that soared up from Fort Alexander, and broke with a thousand sparkles, curving downward through the murky morning sky.

"Pass on, sir," said I, sternly; "and the best I can wish you is that some Russian bullet may avenge her and rid the earth of you."

And with his old mocking laugh, he galloped after his wagon, as he turned back in his saddle, "Compliments to old Taffy Lloyd, when you write--may leave him my brilliant in my will if he behaves himself."

CHAPTER XXXV.--THE NIGHT BEFORE INKERMANN.

I told Phil Caradoc of the strange meeting with Mr. Hawkesby Guilfoyle, and his emotions of astonishment and disgust almost exceeded mine, though mingled with something of amusement, to think that such a personage should be with the army before Sebastopol in any

capacity; and he predicted that he must inevitably do something that would not add to the budding laurels of the Land Transport Corps, which we scarcely recognised as a fighting force, though armed, of course, for any sudden emergency. On this morning, the mail had come in from Constantinople; but there was still no letter for me--no letter from her with whom I had left my heart, and all its fondest aspirations--yea, my very soul it seemed--in England, far away.

Many mails had gone missing; and I strove to flatter and to console myself by the vague hope, that the letters of Estelle were lying perhaps in the Gulf of Salonica, or in the Greek Archipelago, rather than adopt the bitter and wounding conviction that none were written at all. I counted the days and weeks that had elapsed since our detachments sailed from Southampton; the weeks had now become months; we were in November; yet, save when once or twice I had seen her name among the fashionable intelligence in a stray newspaper, I knew and heard nothing of Estelle, of her whose existence and future I so fondly thought were for ever woven up with mine. For a time I had been weak enough to conceal from kind-hearted Phil Caradoc the fact that I had not been getting answers to my letters; and often over a quiet cigar and a bottle of Greek wine I have listened nervously to his congratulations on my success and hopes, blended with his own personal regrets that Winifred Lloyd could not love him. He had sent to her and Dora, from Malta and from Constantinople, some of those beautiful articles of bijouterie, which the shops of the former and the bazaars of the latter can so exquisitely produce to please the taste of women, and they had been accepted with "kindest thanks," a commonplace on which poor Phil seemed to base some hope of future success.

"Winifred Lloyd is very lovely," said I, as we sat in my tent that night over a bottle of Crimskoi; "sweet and pure, happy in spirit, and gentle in heart--all that a man could desire his wife and the mother of his children to be."

"But--"

"But what, Phil?" said I, curtly.

"She cannot love me, and she will never be mine," sighed Caradoc.

"Never despair of that; we have to take Sebastopol yet; and that once achieved, we shall all go merrily sailing home to England."

"That I doubt much; some of the regiments here will be taken for the Indian reliefs--our fighting here will count as service in Europe--but surely the war cannot end with the fall of Sebastopol. A war between three of the greatest countries in the world to dwindle down to the somewhat ill-conducted siege of a fortified town would be absurd."

"Ill-conducted, Phil?"

"Of course.. We leave the city open for supplies of all kinds on the Russian side, and have never, as we should have done, seized the Isthmus of Perecop, and cut off the whole Crimea from the empire."

"Errors perhaps; but by the way, Phil, have you still Miss Lloyd's miniature about you?"

"Yes."

"Do let me have a look at it. I am an old friend, you know."

"I gave her my solemn word that while I lived no man should look upon it, Harry," said Phil, whose colour deepened. "When I am carried to the dead-tent, if that day comes, or to the burial-trench, as many better fellows have been, you may keep it or send it to her, which you will, though I would rather it were buried with me."

His eyes filled with tender enthusiasm, and his voice faltered with genuine emotion as he spoke.

"Pass the bottle, Phil, and don't be romantic--one more cigar is in the box, and it is at your service," said I.

But full of his own thoughts, which were all of her, Caradoc made no immediate reply. He sat with his eyes fixed sadly on the glowing embers of my little fire; for, thanks to the ingenuity of Evans, I had actually a *fire* in my tent. He had made an excavation in the earth, with a flue constructed out of the fragments of tin ammunition boxes, and the cases which had held preserved meat. This conveyed the smoke underneath the low wall of the tent, outside of which he had erected another flue some three feet high of the same materials, to which were added a few stones and some mud. The smoke at times was scarcely endurable, and made one's eyes to water; but I was not yet "old soldier" enough to heat a cannon-ball to sleep with, so Evans' patent grate had quite a reputation in the regiment, and added greatly to the comfort, if such a term can be used, of my somewhat draughty abode.

"Deuced hard lines, this sort of thing, Harry," said Caradoc, after a pause, as, bearded and patched, unshaven and unkempt, we cowered over the fire in our cloaks and wrappers; "I mean for men accustomed to better things, especially to those of expensive tastes and extravagant habits--your guardsman and man of pleasure, the lounger about town, whose day was wont to begin about two P.M., and to end at four next morning. Yet they are plucky for all that; by Jove! there is an amount of mettle or stamina in our fellows such as those of no other nation possess, the resolution to die game any way."

I fully agreed with him; for among our officers I knew hundreds of men, like Raymond Mostyn and others I could name, who were enduring this miserable gipsy-like life, and who, when at home, had hunters and harriers in the country, a house in town, a villa at St. John's Wood or elsewhere, with a tiny brougham and tiger for some "fair one with the golden locks," a yacht at Cowes, a forest in the Highlands, a box at the Opera, a French cook, perhaps, and vines and pines and other rarities from their own forcing-pits and hothouses, and who were now thankful for a mouthful of rum and hard ship-biscuit and some half-roasted coffee boiled in a camp-kettle; and for what, or to what useful end or

purpose, was all this being endured? Perhaps the non-reception of letters from Estelle was making me cynical, and leading me to deem the great god of war but a rowdy, and the goddess his sister no better than she should be, glory a delusion and a humbug after all. But just when Phil, as the night was now far advanced, was muffling himself prior to facing the cold frosty blast that swept up the valley of Inkermann, and proceeding to his own tent, which was on the other flank of the regiment, the visage of Evans, red as a lobster with cold, while his greatcoat was whitened with hoar-frost, appeared at the piece of tied canvas, which passed muster as a door.

"Letter for you, sir--an English one."

"For me! how, at this hour?" I exclaimed, starting up.

"It came by the mail this morning, sir; but was in the bag for the 88th. The address is almost obliterated, as you see, so the 88th officers were tossing-up for it, when Mr. Mostyn--"

"Pshaw! give me the letter," said I, impatiently. "It is from Sir Madoc--*only* Sir Madoc!" I added, with unconcealed disappointment; and in proportion as my countenance lowered, Phil's brightened with interest.

I tore open what appeared to be a pretty long letter.

"It seems to have a postscript," said Phil, lingering ere he went.

"Kindest regards to Caradoc from Winny and Dora."

"Is that all?"

"All that seems to refer to you, Phil."

Phil sighed, and said,

"Well, a letter is an uncommon luxury here, so I shall not disturb you. Good night, old fellow."

"Good night; and keep clear of the tent-pegs."

Again the canvas door was tied, and I was alone; so drawing the lantern, that hung on the tent-pole, close to the empty flour-cask, which now did duty as a table, I sat down to read the characteristic epistle of my good old fatherly friend, Sir Madoc Lloyd, which was dated from Craigaderyn Court. After some rambling remarks about the war, and the mode in which he thought it should be conducted, and some smart abuse of the administration in general, and Lord Aberdeen in particular, over all of which I ran my eyes impatiently, at last they caught a name that made my heart thrill, for this was the first letter that had reached me from England.

"Lady Estelle's admirer Pottersleigh has been raised to an earldom--Heaven only knows why or for what--his own distinguished services, he says. It was all in last night's *Gazette*--that her Majesty had been pleased to direct letters patent, &c., granting the dignity of Earl of the United Kingdom, unto Viscount Pottersleigh, K.G., and the heirs male of his body (good joke that, Harry: reckoning his chickens before they are hatched), by the name and title of Aberconway, in the principality of Wales. For some weeks past he has been at Walcot Park, with the Cressinghams--seems quite to live there, in fact. He has been very assiduous in his attentions to a certain young lady there; he always flatters her quietly, and it seems to please her; a sure sign it would seem to me that she is not displeased with the flatterer. People say it is old Lady Naseby whom he affects; but I don't think so; neither does Winny. You will probably have heard much of this kind of gossip from Lady Estelle herself. She certainly got your Malta letter, and one from the camp before Sebastopol--so Winny, who is in her confidence, told me. You only can know if she replied--Winny rather thinks not; but I hope she may be faithful to you as Oriana herself.

"I heard all about poor Caradoc's affair from Dora; but Winny has refused another offer of marriage--a most eligible one, too--from Sir Watkins Vaughan; and since then he was nearly done for in another fashion: for when he and I were cub-hunting last month near Hawkstone, his horse, a hard-mouthed brute, swerved as we were crossing a fence, and rolled over him; so between her blunt refusal and his ugly spill, he is rather to be pitied. I don't understand Winny at all. I should not like my girls to throw themselves away; but hay should be made while the sun shines, and baronets are not to be found under every bush. Beauty fades; it is but a thing of a season; and the most blooming girl, in time, becomes passé and wrinkled, or it may be fat and fusby, as her grandmother was before her. And then Sir Watkins represents one of the best families in Wales, not so old as *us* certainly, but still he is descended in a direct line from Gryffyth Vychan, who was Lord of Glyndwyrdwy in Merionethshire, in Stephen's time."

(Why should Winifred Lloyd refuse and refuse again thus? As certain little passages between us in days gone by came flashing back to my memory, I felt my cheek flush by that wretched camp-fire, and then I thrust the thoughts aside as vanity.)

"Poor Winny has not been very well of late," the letter proceeded. "When she and Dora were decorating their poor mamma's grave, in the old Welsh fashion, on Palm Sunday, at Craigaderyn church, I fear she must have caught cold; it ended in a touch of fever, and I think the dear girl grew delirious, for she had a strange dream about the ghost of Jorwerth Du--you remember that absurd old story?--but the ghost was *you*, and the red-haired daughter of the Gwylliad Cochion, who spirited you away, was--whom think you?--but Lady Estelle!

"We had a jolly shooting-season at Vaughan's place in South Wales. With Don and our double-barrelled breech-loader we soon filled a spring-cart, and brought it back in state, with all the hares and the long bright tails of the pheasants hanging over it. Vaughan--who will not relinquish his hope of Winny--and a lot of other fine fellows--old friends,

some of them--are coming to have their annual Christmas shooting with me, and I have got two kegs of ammunition all ready in the gun-room. How I wish you were to be with us, Harry!

"Golden plover and teal, too, are appearing here now, and flocks of white Norwegian pigeons in Scotland; all indications that we shall have an unusually severe winter; so God help you poor fellows under canvas in the Crimea! In common with all the girls in England, Winny and Dora are busy making mufflings, knitted vests and cuffs, and so forth for the troops; and I have despatched some special hampers of good things, made up and packed by Owen Gwyllim and Gwenny Davis, the housekeeper, for our own lads of the 23rd to make merry with at Christmas, or on St. David's day."

(The warm wrappers arrived for us in summer, and as for the "special hampers," they were never heard of at all.)

And so, with many warm wishes, almost prayers, for my preservation from danger, and offers of money if I required it, the letter of my kind old friend ended; but it gave me food for much thought, and far into the hours of the chill night I sat and pondered over it. Why did Winny refuse so excellent an offer as that of Sir Watkins, whom I knew to be a wealthy and good-looking young baronet? I scarcely dared to ask myself, and so, as before, dismissed *that* subject. Why had not Estelle's answers reached me, if she had actually written then? That Lady Naseby had surreptitiously intercepted our correspondence, I could not believe, though she might forbid it. Was my Lord Pottersleigh, now Earl of Aberconway, at work; or had they, like many others, perished at sea? Heaven alone new. His flatteries "pleased her," his, the senile dotard! And he had taken up his residence at Walcot Park; his earldom, too! I was full of sadness, mortification, and bitter thoughts; thoughts too deep and fierce for utterance or description. Could it be that the earldom and wealth on one hand were proving too strong for love, with the stringent tenor of her father's will on the other?

At the opera and theatre I had seen Estelle's beautiful eyes fill with tears, as she sympathised with the maudlin love and mimic sorrow, the wrongs or mishaps, of some well-rouged gipsy in rags, some peasant in a steeple-crowned hat and red bandages, some half-naked fisherman, like Masaniello, and her bosom would heave with emotion and enthusiasm; and yet with all this natural commiseration and fellow-feeling, she, who could almost weep with the hero or heroine of the melodrama, while their situation was enhanced by the effects of the orchestra, the lime-light, and the stage-carpenter, was perhaps casting me from her heart and her memory, as coolly as if I were an old ball-dress! So I strove yet awhile to think and to hope that her letters were with the lost mails at the bottom of the Ægean or the Black Sea; but Sir Madoc's letter occasioned me grave and painful doubts; and memory went sadly back to many a little but well-remembered episode of tenderness, a word, a glance, a stolen caress, when we rode or drove by the Elwey or Llyn Aled, in the long lime avenue, in the Martens' dingle, and in the woods and gardens of pleasant Craigaderyn. The wretched light in my lantern was beginning to fail; my little fire had died quite out, and the poor sentry shivering outside had long since ceased to warm his hands at the flue. The tent was cold and chill as a tomb, and I was just about to turn in, when a sound, which a soldier never hears without starting instinctively to his weapons, struck my ear.

A drum, far on the right, was beating *the long roll!* Hundreds of others repeated that inexorable summons all over the camp, while many a bugle was blown, as the whole army stood to their arms. It was the morning of the battle of Inkermann!

CHAPTER XXXVI.--THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER.

We had all long since forgotten the discomfort of early rising. In my case I had never been to bed, so to buckle on my sword and revolver was the work of one moment; in another I was threading my way among the streets of tents, from which our men, cold, damp, pale, and worn-looking, were pouring towards their various muster-places, many of them arranging their belts as they hurried forward.

"What is the row? what is up?" were the inquiries of all.

But no one knew, and on all hands the mounted officers were riding about and crying,

"Fall in, 19th Regiment!" "Fall in, 23rd Fusileers!" and so on. "Stand to your arms; turn out the whole; uncase the colours, gentlemen!"

"It is gunpowder-plot day," cried a laughing aide-de-camp, galloping past with such speed and recklessness that he nearly rode me down.

It proved to be a sortie from Sebastopol, made chiefly by a new division of troops brought up by forced marches from Bessarabia and Wallachia, many of them in wagons, kabitkas, and conveyances of all kinds; and all these men, to the number of many thousands, left the beleaguered city inflamed by the sermon I have described, by harangues of a similar kind, by the money or martyrdom they hoped to win, and by a plentiful distribution of coarse and ardent raki; while to Osten-Sacken, Volhonski, and other officers of rank, one of the Grand Dukes held out threats of degradation and Siberia if we were not attacked and the siege raised! All our men, without breakfast or other food, got briskly under arms, by regiments, brigades, and divisions; they were in their gray greatcoats, hence some terrible mistakes occurred in the hurry and confusion; many of our officers, however, went into action in *scarlet*, with their epaulettes on--most fatally for themselves. All the bells in

Sebastopol--and some of these were magnificent in size and tone--rang a tocsin, while the troops composing the sortie, at the early hour of three A.M., stole, under cloud of darkness and a thick mist, into the ravines near the Tchernaya, to menace the British right, our weakest point; and, unknown to our out-guards, and generally unheard by them--though more than one wary old soldier asserted that he heard "something like the rumble of artillery wheels"--in the gloom and obscurity several large pieces of cannon were got into position, so as completely to command the ground occupied by us. Cautiously and noiselessly the masses of Russian infantry had stolen on, the sound of their footsteps hidden by the jangle of the bells, till they, to the number of more than 50,000 men, were on the flank as well as in front of our line; and the first indication we had of their close vicinity was when our outlying pickets, amid the dense fog of that fatal November morning, found themselves all but surrounded by this vast force, and fighting desperately!

Knapsacks were generally thrown aside, and the muskets of the pickets were in some instances so wet by overnight exposure, that they failed to explode, so others taken from the dead and wounded were substituted for them. There was firing fast and furious on every hand; the musketry flashing like red streaks through the gray gloom, towards the head of the beautiful valley of Inkermann, even before our regiment was formed and moved forward to the support of the pickets, who were retreating towards a small two-gun battery which had been erected, but afterwards abandoned during the progress of the siege. The great Russian cannon now opened like thunder from those hills which had been reached unseen by us, and then began one of the closest, because confused, most ferocious, and bloody conflicts of modern times. The Russian has certainly that peculiar quality of race, "which is superior to the common fighting courage possessed indiscriminately by all classes--the passive concentrated firmness which can take every advantage so long as a chance is left, and die without a word at last, when hope gives place to the sullen resignation of despair."

Descriptions of battles bear a strong family likeness, and the history of one can only be written, even by a participant, long after it is all over, and after notes are compared on all sides; so to the subaltern, or any one under the rank of a general, during its progress, it is all vile hurly-burly and confusion worse confounded; and never in the annals of war was this more the case than at Inkermann. Though hidden by mist at the time, the scene of this contest was both picturesque and beautiful. In the foreground, a romantic old bridge spanned the sluggish Tchernaya, which winds from the Baidar valley through the most luxurious verdure, and thence into the harbour of Sebastopol between precipitous white cliffs, which are literally honeycombed with chapels and cells: thus Inkermann is well named the "City of the Caverns." These are supposed to have been executed by Greek monks during the reigns of the emperors in the middle ages, and when the Arians were persecuted in the Chersonesus, many of them found shelter in these singular and all but inaccessible dwellings. Sarcophagi of stone, generally empty, are found in many of the cells, which are connected with each other by stairs cut in the living rock, and of these stairs and holes the skirmishers were not slow to avail themselves. Over all these caverns are the ivied ruins of an ancient fort but whether it was the Ctenos of Chersonesus Taurica, built by Diophantes to guard the Heruclean wall, or was the Theodori of the Greeks, mattered little to us then, as we moved to get under fire beneath its shadow; and now, as if to farther distract the attention of the Allies from the real point of assault--which at first seemed to indicate a movement towards Balaclava--all the batteries of the city opened a fearful cannonade, which tore to shreds the tents in the camp, and did terrible execution on every hand. Louder and louder, deeper and hoarser grew the sounds of strife; yet nothing was seen by us save the red flashes of the musketry, owing to the density of the fog, and the tall brushwood through which we had to move being in some places quite breast-high; and so we struggled forward in line, till suddenly we found the foe within pistol-shot of us, and our men falling fast on every side. Till now, to many in our ranks, who saw these long gray-coated and flat-capped or spike-helmeted masses, the enemy had been a species of myth, read of

chiefly in the newspapers; *now* they were palpable and real, and war, having ceased to be a dream, had become a terrible fact. Vague expectancy had given place to the actual excitement of the hour of battle, the hour when a man would reflect soberly if he could; but when every moment may be his last, little time or chance is given for reflection.

In this quarter were but twelve thousand British, to oppose the mighty force of Osten-Sacken. Upon his advancing masses the brave fellows of the 55th or Westmoreland Foot had kept up a brisk fire from the rude embrasures of the small redoubt, till they were almost surrounded by a force outnumbering them by forty to one, and compelled to fall back, while the batteries on the hills swept their ranks with an iron shower. But now the 41st Welsh, and 49th or Hertfordshire, came into action, with their white-and-green colours waving, and storming up the hill bore back the Russian hordes, hundreds of whom--as they were massed in oblong columns--fell beneath the fatal fire of our Minie rifles, and the desperate fury of the steady shoulder-to-shoulder bayonet charge which followed it.

On these two regiments the batteries from the distant slope dealt death and destruction; again the Russians rallied at its foot, and advanced up the corpse-strewn ground to renew an attack before which the two now decimated regiments were compelled to retire. Their number and force were as overwhelming as their courage, inflamed by raki and intense religious fervour, was undeniable; for deep in all their hearts had sunk the closing words of the bishop's prayer: "Bless and strengthen them, O Lord, and give them a manly heart against their enemies. Send them an angel of light, and to their enemies an angel of darkness and horror to scatter them, and place a stumbling-block before them to weaken their hearts, and turn their courage into flight." And for a time the Russians seemed to have it all their own way, and deemed their bishop a prophet. Our whole army was now under arms, but upon our right fell the brunt of the attack, and old Lord Raglan was soon among us, managing his field-glass and charger with one hand and a

half-empty sleeve. Under Brigadier-general Strangeways, who was soon after mortally wounded, our artillery, when the mist lifted a little, opened on the Russian batteries, and soon silenced their fire; but the 20th and 47th Lancashire, after making a gallant attempt to recapture the petty redoubt, were repulsed; but not until they had been in possession of it for a few dearly-bought minutes, during which, all wedged together in wild *mêlée*, the most hideous slaughter took place, with the bayonet and clubbed musket; and the moment they gave way, the inhuman Russians murdered all our wounded men, many of whom were found afterwards cold and stiff, with hands uplifted and horror in their faces, as if they had died in the act of supplication.

Driven from that fatal redoubt at last by the Guards under the Duke of Cambridge, it was held by a few hundred Coldstreamers against at least *six thousand* of the enemy. Thrice, with wild yells the gray-coated masses, with all their bayonets glittering, swept madly and bravely uphill, and thrice they were hurled back with defeat and slaughter. Fresh troops were now pouring from Sebastopol, flushed with fury by the scene, and in all the confidence that Russia and their cause were alike holy, that defeat was impossible, and the redoubt was surrounded.

Then back to back, pale with fury, their eyes flashing, their teeth set, fearless and resolute, their feet encumbered with the dying and the dead, fought the Coldstream Guardsmen, struggling for very life; the ground a slippery puddle with blood and brains, and again and again the clash of the bayonets was heard as the musket barrels were crossed. Their ammunition was soon expended; but clubbing their weapons they dashed at the enemy with the butt-ends; and hurling even stones at their heads, broke through the dense masses, and leaving at least one thousand Muscovites dead behind them, rejoined their comrades, whom Sir George Cathcart was leading to the advance, when a ball whistled through his heart, and he fell to rise no more.

The combat was quite unequal; our troops began slowly to retire towards their own lines, but fighting every inch of the way and pressed hard by the Russians, who bayonetted or brained by the butt-end every wounded man they found; and by eleven o'clock they were close to the tents of the Second Division.

The rain of bullets sowed thickly all the turf like a leaden shower, and shred away clouds of leaves and twigs from the gorse and other bushes; but long ere the foe had come thus far, we had our share and more in the terrible game. Exchanging fire with them at twenty yards' distance, the roar of the musketry, the shouts and cheers, the yells of defiance or agony, the explosion of shells overhead, the hoarse sound of the round shot, as they tore up the earth in deeper furrows than ever ploughshare formed, made a very hell of Inkermann, that valley of blood and suffering, of death and cruelty; but dense clouds of smoke, replacing the mist, enveloped it for a time, and veiled many of its horrors from the eye.

Bathurst and Sayer, Vane and Millet of ours were all down by this time; many of our men had also fallen; and from the death-clutch or the relaxed fingers of more than one poor ensign had the tattered colour which bore the Red Dragon been taken, by those who were fated to fall under it in turn. I could see nothing of Caradoc; but I heard that three balls had struck the revolver in his belt. Poor Hugh Price fell near me, shot through the chest, and was afterwards found, like many others, with his brains dashed out. In the third repulse of the Russians, as we rushed headlong after them with levelled bayonets, I found myself suddenly opposed by an officer of rank mounted on a gray horse, the flanks and trappings of which were splashed by blood, whether its own or that of the rider, I knew not. Furiously, by every energy, with his voice, which was loud and authoritative, and by brandishing his sword, he was endeavouring to rally his men, a mingled mass of the Vladimir Battalion and the flat-capped Kazan Light Infantry.

"Pot that fellow; down with him!" cried several voices; "maybe he's old Osten-Sacken himself."

Many shots missed him, as the men fired with fixed bayonets, when suddenly he turned his vengeance on me, and checking his horse for a second, cut at my head with his sword. Stooping, I avoided his attack, but shot his horse in the head. Heavily the animal tumbled forward, with its nose between its knees; and as the rider fell from the saddle and his cap flew off, I recognised Volhonski. A dozen of Fusileers had their bayonets at his throat, when I struck them up with my sword, and interceding, took him prisoner.

"Allow me, if taken, to preserve my sword," said he, in somewhat broken English.

"No, no; by ----, no! disarm him, Captain Hardinge," cried several of our men, who had already shot more than one Russian officer when in the act of killing the wounded.

He smiled with proud disdain, and snapping the blade across his knee, threw the fragments from him.

"Though it is a disgrace alike for Russian to retreat or yield, I yield myself to you, Captain Hardinge," said he in French, and presenting his hand; but ere I could take it, I felt a shot strike me on the back part of the head. Luckily it was a partially spent one, though I knew it not then.

A sickness, a faintness, came over me, and I had a wild and clamorous fear that all was up with me then; but I strove to ignore the emotion, to brandish my sword, to shout to my company, "Come on, men, come on!" to carry my head erect, soldierlike and proudly. Alas for human nerves and poor human nature! My voice failed me; I reeled. "Spare me, blessed God!" I prayed, then fell forward on my face, and felt the rush of our own men, as they swept forward in the charge to the front; and then darkness seemed to steal over my sight, and unconsciousness over every other sense, and I remembered no more.

So while I lay senseless there, the tide of battle turned in the valley, and re-turned again. But not till General Canrobert, with three regiments of fiery little Zouaves, five of other infantry, and a strong force of artillery, made a furious attack on the Russian flank, with all his drums beating the *pas de charge*. The issue of the battle was then no longer doubtful.

The Russians wavered and broke, and with a strange wail of despair, such as that they gave at Alma, when they feared that the angel of light had left them, they fled towards Sebastopol, trodden down like sheep by the French and British soldiers, all mingled pell-mell, in fierce and vengeful pursuit. By three in the afternoon all was over, and we had won another victory.

But our losses were terrible. Seven of our generals were killed or wounded; we had two thousand five hundred and nine officers and men killed, wounded, or missing; but more than fourteen thousand Russians lay on the ground which had been by both armies so nobly contested, and of these five thousand were killed.

CHAPTER XXXVII.--THE ANGEL OF HORROR.

When consciousness returned, I found the dull red evening sun shining down the long valley of Inkermann, and that, save moans and cries for aid and water, all seemed terribly still now.

A sense of weakness and oppression, of incapacity for action and motion, were my first sensations. I feared that other shot must have struck me after I had fallen, and that both my legs were broken. The

cause of this, after a time, became plain enough: a dead artillery horse was lying completely over my thighs, and above it and them lay the wheel of a shattered gun carriage; and weak as I was then, to attempt extrication from either unaided was hopeless. Thus I was compelled to lie helplessly amid a sickening puddle of blood, enduring a thirst that is unspeakable, but which was caused by physical causes and excitement, with the anxiety consequent on the battle. The aspect of the dead horse, which first attracted me, was horrible. A twelve-pound shot had struck him below the eyes, making a hole clean through his head; the brain had dropped out, and lay with his tongue and teeth upon the grass. The dead and wounded lay thickly around me, as indeed they did over all the field. Some of the former, though with eyes unclosed and jaws relaxed, had a placid expression in their white waxen faces. These had died of gun-shot wounds. The expressions of pain or anguish lingered longest in those who had perished by the bayonet. Over all the valley lay bodies in heaps, singly or by two and threes, with swarms of flies settling over them; shakoes, glazed helmets, bearskin-caps, bent bayonets, broken muskets, swords, hairy knapsacks, bread-bags, shreds of clothing, torn from the dead and the living by showers of grape and canister, cooking-kettles, round shot and fragments of shells, with pools of noisome blood, lay on every hand.

Truly the Angel of Horror, and of Death, too, had been there. I saw several poor fellows, British as well as Russian, expire within the first few minutes I was able to look around me. One whose breast bore several medals and orders, an officer of the Kazan Light Infantry, prayed very devoutly and crossed himself in his own blood ere he expired. Near me a corporal of my own regiment named Prouse, who had been shot through the brain, played fatuously for a time with a handful of grass, and then, lying gently back, passed away without a moan. A Zouave, a brown, brawny, and soldier-like fellow, who seemed out of his senses also, was very talkative and noisy.

"Ouf!" I heard him say; "it is as wearisome as a sermon or a funeral this! Were I a general, the capture of Sebastopol should be as easy as a game of dominoes.--Yes, Isabeau, ma belle coquette, kiss me and hold up my head. Vive la gloire! Vive l'eau de vie! A bas la mélancolie! A bas la Russe!" he added through his clenched teeth hoarsely, as he fell back. The jaw relaxed, his head turned on one side, and all was over.

Of Volhonski I could see nothing except his gray horse, which lay dead, in all its trappings, a few yards off; but I afterwards learned that he had been retaken by the Russians on their advance after the fall of poor Sir George Cathcart.

There was an acute pain in the arm that had been injured--fractured--when saving Estelle; and as a kind of stupor, filled by sad and dreamy thoughts, stole over me, they were all of her. The roar of the battle had passed away, but there was a kind of drowsy hum in my ears, and, for a time, strangely enough, I fancied myself with her in the Park or Rotten-row. I seemed to see the brilliant scene in all the glory of the season: the carriages; the horses, bay or black, with their shining skins and glittering harness; the powdered coachmen on their stately hammer-cloths; the gaily-liveried footmen; the ladies cantering past in thousands, so exquisitely dressed, so perfectly mounted, so wonderful in their loveliness--women the most beautiful in the world; and there, too, were the young girls, whose season was to come, and the ample dowagers, whose seasons were long since past, lying back among the cushions, amid ermine and fur; and with all this Estelle was laughing and cantering by my side. Then we were at the opera--another fantastic dream--the voices of Grisi and Mario were blending there, and as its music seemed to die away, once more we were at Craigaderyn, under its shady woods, with the green Welsh hills, snow-capped Snowdon and Carneydd Llewellyn, in the distance, and voices and music and laughter--some memory of Dora's fête--seemed to be about us. So while lying there, on that ghastly field of Inkermann, between sleeping and waking, I dreamed of her who was so far away--of the sweet companionship that

might never come again; of the secret tie that bound us; of the soft dark eyes that whilom had looked lovingly into mine; of the sweetly-modulated voice that was now falling merrily, perhaps, on other ears, and might fall on mine no more. And a vague sense of happiness, mingled with the pain caused by the half-spent shot and the wild confusion and suffering of the time, stole over me. Waking, these memories became

> "Sad as remembered kisses after death,
> And sweet as those by hopeless *fancy* feigned
> On lips that are for others--deep as love,
> Deep as first love, and wild with all regret,
> O death in life--the days that are no more!"

From all this I was thoroughly roused by a voice crying, "Up, up, wounded--all you who are able! Cavalry are coming this way--you will be trod to death. Arrah, get out of *that*, every man-jack of yees!"

The excited speaker was an Irish hussar, picking his way across the field at a quick trot.

It was a false alarm; but the rumble of wheels certainly came next day, and an ambulance-wagon passed slowly, picking up the wounded, who groaned or screamed as their fractured limbs were handled, and their wounds burst out afresh through the clotted blood. I waved an arm, and the scarlet sleeve attracted attention.

"There is a wounded officer--one of the 23rd Fusileers," cried a driver from his saddle.

"Where?" asked a mounted officer in the blue cloak and cap of the Land Transport Corps.

"Under that dead horse, sir."

"One of the 23rd; let us see--Hardinge, by all the devils!" said the officer, who proved to be no other than Hawkesby Guilfoyle. "So-ho--steady, steady!" he added, while secretly touching his horse with the spurs to make it rear and plunge in three several attempts to tread me under its hoofs; but the terrible aspect of the dead animal smashed by the cannon-shot so scared the one he rode, that he bore on the curb in vain.

"Coward! coward!" I exclaimed, "if God spares me you shall hear of this."

"The fellow is mad or tipsy," said he; "drive on."

"But, sir--sir!" urged the driver in perplexity.

"Villain! you are my evil fate," said I faintly.

"I tell you the fellow is mad--drive on, I command you, or by----, I'll make a prisoner of you!" thundered Guilfoyle, drawing a pistol from his holster, while his shifty green eyes grew white with suppressed passion and malice; so the ambulance-cart was driven on, and I was left to my fate.

Giddy and infuriated by pain and just indignation, I lay under my cold and ghastly load, perishing of thirst, and looking vainly about for assistance.

Scarcely were they gone, when out of the dense thick brushwood, that grew in clumps and tufts over all the valley, there stole forth two Russian soldiers, with their bayonets fixed, and their faces distorted and pale with engendered fanaticism and fury at their defeat. There was a cruel gleam in their eyes as they crept stealthily about. Either they feared to fire or their ammunition was expended, for I saw them deliberately pass their bayonets through the bodies of four or five wounded men, and pin the writhing creatures to the earth. I lay very still, expecting that my turn would soon come. The dead horse served to conceal me for a little;

but I panted rather than breathed, and my breath came in gasps as they drew near me; for on discovering that I was an officer, my gold wings and lace would be sure to kindle their spirit of acquisition. I had my revolver in my right hand, and remembered with grim joy that of its six chambers, three were yet undischarged. Just as the first Russian came straight towards me, I shot him through the head, and he fell backward like a log; the second uttered a howl, and came rushing on with his butt in the air and his bayonet pointed down. I fired both barrels. One ball took him right in the shoulder, the other in the throat, and he fell wallowing in blood, but not until he had hurled his musket at me. The barrel struck me crosswise on the head, and I again became insensible. Moonlight was stealing over the valley when consciousness returned again, and I felt more stiff and more helpless than ever. Something was stirring near me; I looked up, and uttered an exclamation on seeing our regimental goat, Carneydd Llewellyn, quietly cropping some herbage among the débris of dead bodies and weapons that lay around me. Like Caradoc, I had made somewhat a pet of it. The poor animal knew my voice, and on coming towards me, permitted me to stroke and pat it; and a strong emotion of wonder and regard filled my heart as I did so, for it was a curious coincidence that this animal, once the pet of Winifred Lloyd, should discover me there upon the field of Inkermann.

After a little I heard a voice, in English, cry, "Here is our goat at last, by the living Jingo!" and Dicky Roll, its custodian--from whose tent it had escaped, when a shot from the batteries broke the pole--came joyfully towards it.

"Roll, Dicky Roll," cried I, "for God's sake bring some of our fellows, and have me taken from here!"

"Captain Hardinge! are you wounded, sir?" asked the little drummer, stooping in commiseration over me.

"Badly, I fear, but cannot tell with certainty."

Dicky shouted in his shrill boyish voice, and in a few minutes some of our pioneers and bandsmen came that way with stretchers. I was speedily freed from my superincumbent load, and very gently and carefully borne rearward to my tent, when it was found that a couple of contusions on the head were all I had suffered, and that a little rest and quiet would soon make me fit for duty again.

"You must be more than ever careful of our goat, Dicky," said I, as the small warrior, who was not much taller than his own bearskin cap, was about to leave me (by the bye, my poor fellow Evans had been cut in two by a round shot). "But for Carneydd Llewellyn, I might have lain all night on the field."

"There is a date scratched on one of his horns, sir," said Roll; "I saw it to-day for the first time."

"A date!--what date?"

"Sunday, 21st August."

"Sunday, 21st August," I repeated; "what can that refer to?"

"I don't know, sir--*do you?*"

The drummer saluted and left the tent. I lay on my camp-bed weak and feverish, so weak, that I could almost have wept; for now came powerfully back to memory that episode, till then forgotten--the Sunday ramble I had with Winifred Lloyd when we visited the goat, by the woods of Craigaderyn, by the cavern in the glen, by the Maen Hir or the Giant's Grave, and the rocking stone, and all that passed that day, and how she wept when I kissed her. Poor Winifred! her pretty white hand must have engraved the date which the little drummer referred to--a date which was evidently dwelling more in her artless mind than in mine.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.--THE CAMP AGAIN.

After the living were mustered next morning, and burial parties detailed to inter the dead, Caradoc and one or two others dropped into my tent to share some tiffin and a cigar or two with me; for, as Digby Grand has it, "whatever people's feelings may be, they go to dine all the same."

Poor Phil looked as pale and weary, if not more so, than I did. He was on the sick-list also, and had his head tied up by a bloody bandage, necessitated by a pretty trenchant sword-cut, dealt, as we afterwards discovered on comparing notes, by Volhonski just before his recapture.

"I was first knocked over by Cathcart's riderless horse--"

"Poor old Cathcart--a Waterloo man!" said Gwynne, parenthetically. "Well, Phil?"

"It was wounded and mad with terror," continued Caradoc; "then the splinter of a shell struck me on the left leg. Still I limped to the front, keeping the men together and close to the colours, till that fellow you call Volhonski cut me across the head; even my bearskin failed to protect me from his sabre. Then, but not till *then*, when blood blinded me, I threw up the sponge and went to the rear."

"What news of our friends in the 19th?" I asked.

"O, the old story, many killed and wounded."

"Little Tom Clavell?"

"Untouched. Had the staff of the Queen's colours smashed in his hands by a grape shot. Tom is now a bigger man than ever," said Charley Gwynne. "By the way, he was talking of Miss Dora Lloyd last night in my bunk between the gabions, wondering what she and the girls in England think of all this sort of thing."

"Thank God, they know nothing about it!" said Caradoc, lighting a fresh cigar with a twisted cartridge paper; "the hearts of some of them would break, could they see but yonder valley."

"Poor Hugh Price!" observed Charley, with a sigh and a grimace, for he had a bayonet prod in the right arm; "he was fairly murdered in cold blood by one of those Kazan fellows--brained clean by the heel of a musket, ere our bandsmen could carry him off to the hospital tents; but I am thankful the assassin did not escape."

"How?"

"He too was finished the next moment by Evan Rhuddlan."

Other instances of assassination, especially by a Russian major, were mentioned, and execrations both loud and deep were muttered by us all at these atrocities, which ultimately caused Lord Raglan to send a firm remonstrance on the subject to Sebastopol.

"Is it true, Charley, that the Duke of Cambridge has gone on board ship, sick and exhausted?" asked I.

"I believe so."

"And that Marshal Canrobert was wounded yesterday?"

"Yes, and had his horse shot under him, too."

"The poor Coldstreamers were fearfully cut up in the redoubt!"

"I saw eight of their officers interred in one grave this morning, and three of the Grenadier Guards in another."

"Poor fellows!" sighed Caradoc; "so full of life but a few hours ago."

For a time the conversation, being of this nature, languished; it was the reverse of lively, so we smoked in silence. We were all in rather low spirits. This was simply caused by reaction after the fierce excitement of yesterday, and to regret for the friends who had fallen--the brave and true-hearted fellows we had lost for ever. Victorious though we were, we experienced but little exultation; and from my tent door, we saw the burial parties, British and French, hard at work in their shirt sleeves, interring the slain in great trenches, where they were flung over each other in rows, with all their gory clothing and accoutrements, just as they were found; and there they lay in ghastly ranks, their pallid faces turned to heaven, the hope of many a heart and household that were far away from that horrible valley; their joys, their sorrows, their histories, and their passing agonies all ended now, with no tears on their cheek save those with which the hand of God bedews the dead face of the poor soldier.

A ring or a watch, or it might be a lock of hair, taken, or perhaps hastily shorn by a friendly hand from the head of a dead officer as he was borne away to these pits--the head that some one loved so well, hanging earthward heavily and untended--shorn for a widowed wife or anxious mother, then at home in peaceful England, or some secluded Scottish glen; and there his obsequies were closed by the bearded and surpliced chaplain, who stood book in hand by the edge of the ghastly trench, burying the dead wholesale by the thousand; and amid the boom of the everlasting and unrelenting cannonade, now going on at the left attack, might be heard the solemn sentences attuned to brighter hopes elsewhere than on earth, where "Death seemed scoffed at and derided by the reckless bully Life."

"Here is an old swell, with no end of decorations," said a couple of our privates, as they trailed past the body of a Russian officer, one half of whose head had been shot away, and they threw him into a trench where the gray-coats lay in hundreds. The "old swell" proved to be the brave Pulkovnich Ochterlony of Guynde; he who had led his regiment so bravely at Bayazid on the mountain slopes of the Aghri Tagh in Armenia, when, in the preceding August, the Russians had defeated the Turks, and laid two thousand scarlet fezzes in the dust. The episode of meeting with Guilfoyle, his conduct after the action, and the character he had borne as a civilian, formed a topic of some interest for my friends, who were vehement in urging me to denounce this distinguished "cornet" of the wagon-corps to the commander-in-chief. And this I resolved to do so soon as I was sufficiently recovered to write, or to visit Lord Raglan in person.

But to take action in the matter soon proved impossible, as he was taken prisoner the next day by some Cossacks who were scouting near the Baidar Valley, and who instantly carried him off. Some there were in the camp who gave this capture the very different name of wilful desertion, from two reasons; first, he had been gambling to a wonderful extent, and with all his usual success, so that he had completely rooked many of his brother officers, nearly all of whom were deserving men from the ranks; and second, that on the day after he was taken, the Russians opened a dreadful fire of shot and shell on one of our magazines, the exact *locale* of which could only have been indicated to them by some traitor safe within their own lines; and none knew better than I the savage treachery of which he was capable.

It was now asserted that we should not assault Sebastopol until the arrival of fresh reinforcements, which were expected by the way of Constantinople in a few weeks. There were said to be fifteen thousand French, and our own 97th, or Earl of Ulster's, and 99th Lanarkshire coming from Greece, with the 28th from Malta; but that we were likely to *winter* before the besieged city was now becoming pretty evident to

the Allies, and none of us liked the prospect, the French perhaps least of all, with the freezing memories of their old Russian war and the retreat from flaming Moscow still spoken of in their ranks; and the cruel and taunting boast of the Emperor Nicholas concerning Russia's two most conquering generals--January and February.

So when the wood for the erection of huts began to arrive at Balaclava, and the winter siege became a prospect that was inevitable, I thought of having a wigwam built for myself and two other officers; and confess that as the season advanced, some such habitation would have been more acceptable than my bell-tent, which, like much more of our warlike gear, had probably lain in some of John Bull's shabby peace-at-any-price repositories since Waterloo, and was all decaying. Hence the door was always closed with difficulty, especially on cold nights, the straps being rotten and the buckles rusty. Add to this, that our camp-bedding and clothes were alike dropping to pieces--the result of constant wet and damp. Already no two soldiers in our ranks were clad alike; they looked like well-armed vagrants, and wore comically-patched clothing, with caps of all kinds, gleaned off the late field or near the burial trenches. Some of the Rifles, in lieu of dark green, were fain to wear smocks made by themselves from old blankets, and leggings made of the same material or old sacking, and many linesmen, who were less fortunate, had to content them with the rags of their uniforms. Happy indeed were the Highlanders, who had no trousers that wore out. Alas for those to whom a flower in the button-hole, kid gloves, glazed boots, and Rimmel's essences, were as the necessaries of life! But ere the wished-for materials for *my* hut arrived, circumstances I could little have foreseen found me quarters in a very different place. Every other day I was again on duty in the trenches, and without the aid of my field-glass could distinctly see the dark groups of the enemy's outposts, extending from the right up the valley of Inkermann, towards Balaclava.

The rain rendered our nights and days in the trenches simply horrible; as we had to shiver there for four-and-twenty hours, literally in mud that rose nearly to our knees, and was sometimes frozen--especially towards the darkest and earliest hours of the morning, when the cold would cause even strong and brave fellows almost to sob with weakness and debility, while we huddled together like sheep for animal warmth, listening the while, perhaps, for a sound that might indicate a Russian mine beneath us. Those who had tobacco smoked, of course, and shared it freely with less fortunate comrades, who had none; and under circumstances such as ours, great indeed was the solace of a pipe, though some found their tobacco too wet to smoke; then the Russians and the rain were cursed alike. The latter also often reduced the biscuits in our havresacks to a wet and dirty pulp; but hunger made us thankful to have it, even in that condition.

"By Jove," one would say, "how the rain comes down! Awful, isn't it?"

"Won't spoil our uniforms, Bill, anyhow."

"No, lads, they are past spoiling," said I, and often had to add, "keep your firelocks under your greatcoats, men, and look to your ammunition."

And such care was imperatively necessary, for on dark nights especially we never knew the moment when an attempt to scour the trenches might bring on another Inkermann. So we would sit cowering between the gabions, while ever and anon the fiery bombs, often shot at random, came in quick succession through the dark sky of night, making bright and glittering arcs as they sped on their message of destruction, sometimes falling short and bursting in mid-air, or on the earth and throwing up a column of dust and stones, and sometimes fairly into the trenches, scattering death and mutilation among us. Erelong, as the season drew on, we had the snow to add to our miseries, and for many an hour under the lee of a gabion I have sat, half awake and half torpid,

watching the white flakes falling, like glittering particles, athwart the slanting moonlight on the pale and upturned faces and glistening eyes of the dead, on their black and gaping wounds, and tattered uniform; for many perished nightly in the trenches, on some occasions over a hundred; and at times and places their bodies were so frozen to the earth, that to remove or tear them up was impossible, so they had to be left where they lay, or be covered up *pro tem*, with a little loose soil, broken by a sapper's pickaxe. And with the endurance of all this bodily misery, I had the additional grief that no letters ever came from Estelle for me. My dream-castle was beginning to crumble down. I began to feel vaguely that something had been taken out of my life, that life itself was less worth having now, and that the beauty of the past was fading completely away. I had but one conviction or wish--that I had never met, had never known, or had never learned to love her.

CHAPTER XXXIX.--A MAIL FROM ENGLAND.

THE dreamy conviction or thought with which the last chapter closes, proved, perhaps, but a foreshadowing of that which was looming in the future. On the day after that terrible storm of wind, rain, and hail in the Black Sea, when some five hundred seamen were drowned, and when so many vessels perished, causing an immense loss to the Allies; a terrific gale, such as our oldest naval officers had never seen; when the tents in camp were uprooted in thousands, and swept in rags before the blast; when the horses broke loose from their picketing-ropes, and forty were found dead from cold and exposure; when every imaginable article was blown hither and thither through the air; and when, without food, fire, or shelter, even the sick and wounded passed a night of privation

and misery such as no human pen can describe, and many of the Light Division were thankful to take shelter in the old caverns and cells of Inkermann--on the 15th of November, the day subsequent to this terrible destruction by land and water, there occurred an episode in my own story which shall never be forgotten by me.

Singular to say, amid all the vile hurly-burly incident to the storm, a disturbance increased by the roar of the Russian batteries, and a sortie on the French, a mail from England reached our division, and it contained one letter for me.

Prior to my opening it, as I failed to recognise the writing, Phil Caradoc (wearing a blanket in the fashion of a poncho-wrapper, a garment to which his black bearskin cap formed an odd finish) entered my tent, which had just been re-erected with great difficulty, and I saw that he had a newspaper in his hand, and very cloudy expression in his usually clear brown eyes.

"What is up, Phil?" said; "a bad report of our work laid before the public, or what?"

"Worse than that," said he, seating himself on the empty flour-cask which served me for a table. "Can you steel yourself to hear bad news?"

"From home?" I asked.

"Well, yes," said he, hesitating, and a chill came over my heart as I said involuntarily,

"Estelle?"

"Yes, about Lady Cressingham."

"What--what--don't keep me in suspense!" I exclaimed, starting up.

"She is, I fear, lost to you for ever, Hardinge."

"Ill--dead--O, Phil, don't say dead!"

"No, no."

"Thank God! What, then, is the matter?"

"She is--married, that is all."

"Married!"

"Poor Harry! I am deuced sorry for you. Look at this paper. Perhaps I shouldn't have shown it to you; but some one less a friend--Mostyn or Clavell--might have thrown it in your way. Besides, you *must* have learned the affair in time. Take courage," he added, after a pause, during which a very stunned sensation pervaded me; "be a man; she is not worth regretting."

"To whom is she married?" I asked, in a low voice.

"Pottersleigh," said he, placing in my hand the paper, which was a *Morning Post*.

I crushed it up into a ball, and then, spreading it out on the head of the inverted cask, read, while my hands trembled, and my heart grew sick with many contending emotions, a long paragraph which Phil indicated, and which ran somewhat as follows, my friend the while standing quietly by my side, manipulating a cheroot prior to lighting it with a cinder from my little fire. The piece of fashionable gossip was headed, "Marriage of the Right Hon. the Earl of Aberconway and the Lady Estelle Cressingham;" and detailed, in the usual style of such announcements, that, on a certain--I forget which day *now*--the lovely and secluded little village of Walcot, in Hampshire, presented quite a festive appearance in honour of the above-named event, the union of the young and beautiful daughter of the late Earl of Naseby to our veteran statesman; that along the route from the gates of Walcot Park to the porch of the village church were erected several arches of evergreen,

tastefully surmounted by banners and appropriate mottoes. Among the former "we observed the arms of the now united noble houses of Potter and Cressingham, and the standards of the Allies now before Sebastopol. The beautiful old church of Walcot was adorned with flowers, and crowded to excess long before the hour appointed. The lovely bride was charmingly attired in white satin, elegantly trimmed with white lace, and wore a wreath of orange blossoms on her splendid dark hair, covered with a long veil, *à la juive*. The bridesmaids, six in number, were as follows:" but I omit their names as well as the list of gifts bestowed upon the noble bride, who was given away by her cousin, the young earl. "Lord Aberconway, with his ribbon of the Garter, wore the peculiar uniform of the Pottersleigh Yeomanry."

"Rather a necessary addition," said Phil, parenthetically; "his lordship could scarcely have figured in the ribbon alone."

"--Yeomanry, of which gallant regiment he is colonel, and looked hale and well for his years. After a choice *déjeûner* provided for a distinguished circle, the newly-wedded pair left Walcot Park, amid the most joyous demonstrations, for Pottersleigh Hall, the ancestral seat of the noble Earl, to spend the honeymoon."

"A precious flourish of penny whistles!" said Phil, when I had read, deliberately folded the paper, and thrust it into the fire, to the end that I might not be troubled by the temptation to read it all over again; and then we looked at each other steadily for a minute in silence. Forsaken! I remembered my strange forebodings now, when I had ridden to Walcot Park. They were married--married, she and old Pottersleigh! My heart seemed full of tears, yet when seating myself wearily on the camp-bed, I laughed bitterly and scornfully, as I thought over the inflated newspaper paragraph, and that the *sangre azul* of the Earl of Aberconway must be thin and blue indeed, when compared with the red blood of my less noble self.

"Come, Harry, don't laugh--in that fashion at least," said Caradoc. "I've some brandy here," he added, unslinging his canteen, "I got from a confiding little vivandière of the 10th Regiment, Infanterie de Ligne. Don't mix it with the waters of Marah, the springs of bitterness, but take a good caulker neat, and keep up your heart. *Varium et mutabile semper*--you know the last word is feminine. That is it, my boy--nothing more. Even the wisest man in the world, though he dearly loved them, could never make women out; and I fear, Harry, that you and I are not even the wisest men in the Welsh Fusileers. And now as a consolation,

"'And that your sorrow may not be a dumb one,
Write odes on the inconstancy of woman.'"

"I loved that girl very truly, very honestly, and very tenderly, Phil," said I, in a low voice, and heedless of how he had been running on; "and she kissed me when I left her, as I then thought and hoped a woman only kisses *once* on earth. In my sleep I have had a foreshadowing of this. Can it be that the slumber of the body is but the waking of the soul, that such thoughts came to me of what was to be?"

"The question is too abstruse for me," said Caradoc, stroking his brown beard, which was now of considerable length and volume; "but don't worry yourself, Harry; you have but tasted, as I foresaw you would, of the hollow-heartedness, the puerile usages, the petty intrigues, and the high-born snobbery of those exclusives 'the upper ten thousand.' Don't think me republican for saying so; but 'there is one glory of the sun and another of the moon,' as some one writes; 'and there is one style of beauty among women which is angelic, and another which is *not*,' referring, I presume, to beauty of the spirit. We were both fated to be unlucky in our loves," continued Caradoc, taking a vigorous pull at the little plug-hole of his canteen, a tiny wooden barrel slung over his shoulder by a strap; "but do take courage, old fellow, and remember there are other women in the world in plenty."

"But not for me," said I, bitterly.

"Tush! think of me, of my affair--I mean my mistake with Miss Lloyd."

"But she never loved you."

"Neither did this Lady Estelle, now Countess of Aberconway" (I ground my teeth), "love you."

"She said she did; and what has it all come to? promises broken, a plight violated, a heart trod under foot."

"Come, come; don't be melodramatic--it's d--d absurd, and no use. Besides, there sounds the bugle for orders, and we shall have to relieve the trenches in an hour. So take another cigar ere you go."

"She never loved me--never! never! you are right, Phil."

"And yet I believe she did."

"Did!" said I, angrily; "what do you mean now, Caradoc? I am in no mood to study paradoxes."

"I mean that she loved you to a certain extent; but not well enough to sacrifice herself and her--"

"Don't say position--hang it!"

"No--no."

"What then?" I asked, impatiently.

"Her little luxuries, and all that she must have lost by the tenor of her father's will and her mother's bad will, or that she should have omitted to gain, had she married you, a simple captain of the 23rd Foot, instead of this old Potter--this Earl of Aberconway."

"A simple captain, indeed!"

"Pshaw, Harry, be a man, and think no more about the affair. It is as a tale that is told, a song that is sung, a bottle of tolerable wine that has become a marine."

"*L'infidelité* du *corps*, ou l'infidelité du *c[oe]ur*, I care not now which it was; but I am done with her now and for ever," I exclaimed, with a sudden gust of rage, while clasping on my sword.

"Done--so I should think, when she is married."

"But to such a contemptible dotard."

"Well, there is some revenge in that."

"And she could cast me aside like an old garment," said I, lapsing into tenderness again; "I, to whose neck she clung as she did on that evening we parted. There must have been some trickery--some treachery, of which we are the victims!"

"Don't go on in this way, like a moonstruck boy, or, by Jove, the whole regiment will find it out; so calm yourself, for we go to the front in an hour;" and wringing my hand this kind-hearted fellow, whose offhand consolation was but ill-calculated to soothe me, left for his own tent, as he had forgotten his revolver.

I was almost stupefied by the shock. Could the story be real? I looked to the little grate (poor Evans' contrivance) where the charred remains of the *Morning Post* still flickered in the wind. Was I the same man of an hour ago? "The plains of life were free to traverse," as an elegant female writer says, "but the sunshine of old lay across them no longer. There were roses, but they were scentless--fruits, but they were tasteless--wine, but it had lost its flavour. Well, every created being must come to an hour like this, when he feels there is nothing pleasant to the palate, or

grateful to the sense, agreeable to the ear, or refreshing to the heart; when man delights him not and woman still less, and when he is sick of the dream of existence."

To this state had I come, and yet I had neither seen nor heard the last of her.

"Estelle--Estelle!" I exclaimed in a low voice, and my arms went out into vacancy, to fall back on the camp-bed whereon I reclined. Abandoned for another; forgotten it might too probably--nay, must be. I stared up, and looked from the triangular door of the tent over the wilderness of zigzags, the sand-bags, and fascines of the trenches; over the gun-batteries to the white houses and green domes of Sebastopol, and all down the long valley of Inkermann, where the graves of the dead lay so thick and where the Russian pickets were quietly cooking their dinners; but I could see nothing distinctly. The whole features of the scenery seemed blurred, faint, and blended, for my head was swimming, my heart was sick, and all, all this was the doing of Estelle! Did no memory of sweet Winifred Lloyd come to me in my desolation of the heart? None! I could but think of the cold-blooded treachery of the one I had lost. My letter! I suddenly remembered it, and tore it open, thinking that the writer, whose hand, as I have said, I failed to recognise, might cast some light upon the matter; and to my increasing bewilderment, it proved to be from Winifred herself. A letter from her, and to *me*; what could it mean? But the first few words sufficed to explain.

Craigaderyn, ...

"My dear Captain Hardinge,--Papa has sprained his whip hand when hunting with Sir Watkins Vaughan, and so compels me to write for him." (Why should compulsion be necessary? thought I.) "You will, no doubt, have heard all about Lady Estelle's marriage by this time. She was engaged to Lord Pottersleigh *before* she came here, it would seem, and matters were brought to an issue soon after your transport sailed. She wished Dora and me to be among her bridesmaids, but we declined; nor

would papa have permitted us, had we desired to be present at the ceremony. She bade me say, if I wrote to you, that you must forgive her, as she is the victim of circumstances; that she shall ever esteem and love you as a brother, and so forth; but I agree with papa, who says that she is a cold-hearted jilt, undeserving of any man's love, and that he 'will never forgive her, even if he lived as long as Gwyllim ap Howel ap Jorwerth ap Tregaian,' the Old Parr of Wales.

"We are all well at Craigaderyn, and all here send you and Mr. Caradoc kindest love. We are quite alone just now, and I often idle over my music, playing 'The Men of Harlech,' and other Welsh airs to papa. More often I wander and ride about the Martens' dingle, by Carneydd Llewellyn's hut--you remember it?--by Glendower's oak, by the Elwey, Llyn Aled, and the rocking stone, and think--think very much of you and poor Mr. Caradoc, and all that might have been." (Pretty pointed this--with which--Phil or me? Could I be uncertain?) "Next to hearing from you, our greatest pleasure at Craigaderyn is to hear about you and our own Welsh Fusileers, of whose bravery at Alma we are so justly proud; so we devour the newspapers with avidity and too often with sorrow. How is my dear pet goat?"

And so, with a pretty little prayer that I might be spared, her letter ended; and hearing the voices of the adjutant and sergeant-major, I thrust it into my pocket, and set off to relieve the trenches, with less of enthusiasm and more recklessness of life than ever before possessed me, and without reflecting that I did not deserve to receive a letter so kind and prayerful as that of the dear little Welsh girl, who was so far away. It was cold that night in the trenches, nathless the Russian *fire*--yea, cold enough to freeze the marrow in one's bones; but my heart seemed colder still. In the morning, four of my company were found dead between the gabions, without a wound, and with their muskets in their hands. The poor fellows had gone to their last account--slipt away in sheer exhaustion, through lack of food, warmth, and clothing--and this was glory!

CHAPTER XL.--A PERILOUS DUTY.

I have said that, ere the regular hutting of the army for the winter siege began, quarters were found for me by fate elsewhere; a circumstance which came about in the following manner. All may have heard of the famous solitary ride of Lieutenant Maxse of the Royal Navy, to open a communication between headquarters and Balaclava; and it was my chance to have a similar solitary ride to perform, but, unfortunately, to fail in achieving the end that was in view. One afternoon, on being informed by the adjutant of ours that I was wanted at headquarters, I assumed my sword and sash--indeed, these appurtenances were rarely off us--and putting my tattered uniform in such order as the somewhat limited means of my "toilet-table" admitted, repaired at once, and not without considerable surprise, and some vague misgivings, to the house inhabited by Lord Raglan. I had there to wait for some time, as he was busy with some of the headquarter staff, and had just been holding a conference with certain French officers of rank, who were accompanied by their aides and orderlies. Among them I saw the fat and full-faced but soldier-like Marshal Pelissier, the future Duc de Malakoff, with his cavalry escort and banner; and grouped about the place, or departing therefrom, I saw Chasseurs d'Afrique in sky-blue jackets and scarlet trousers; Imperial Cuirassiers in helmets and corslets of glittering steel; French horse artillery with caps of fur and pelisses covered with red braid. There, too, were many of our own staff officers, with their plumed hats; even the Turkish cavalry escort of some pasha, stolid-looking fellows in scarlet fezzes, were there, their unslung carbines resting on the right thigh; and I saw some of our Land

Transport Corps, in red jackets braided with black, loitering about, as if some important movement was on the tapis; but whatever had been suggested, nothing was fated to come of it.

Through the buzz and Babel of several languages, I was ushered at last, by an orderly sergeant, into the little dingy room where the Commander-in-chief of our Eastern army usually held his councils or consultations, received reports, and prepared his plans. The military secretary, the chief of the staff, the adjutant-general, and some other officers, whose uniforms were all threadbare, darned, and discoloured, and whose epaulettes were tattered, frayed, and reduced almost to black wire, were seated with him at a table, which was littered with letters, reports, despatches, telegrams, and plans of Sebastopol, with the zigzags, the harbour, the valley of the Tchernaya, and of the whole Crimea. And it was not without an emotion of interest and pleasure, that I found myself before our old and amiable leader, the one-armed Lord Raglan--he whose kindly nature, charity, urbanity, and queer signature as *Fitzroy Somerset*, when military secretary, had been so long known in our army during the days of peace; and to whom the widow or the orphan of a soldier never appealed in vain.

"Glad to see you, Captain Hardinge," said he, bowing in answer to my salute; "I have a little piece of duty for you to perform, and the chief of the staff" (here he turned to the future hero of the attack on the Redan) "has kindly reminded me of how well you managed the affair of the flag of truce sent to the officer on the Russian left, concerning the major of the 93rd Highlanders."

I bowed again and waited.

"My personal aides," he continued, "are all knocked up or engaged elsewhere just now, and I have here a despatch for Marshal Canrobert, requiring an immediate answer, as there is said to be an insurrection among the Polish troops within Sebastopol, and if so, you will readily perceive the necessity for taking instant advantage of it. At this precise

time, the Marshal is at a Tartar village on the road to Kokoz." (Here his lordship pointed to a map of the Crimea.) "It lies beyond the Pass of Baidar, which you will perceive indicated there, and consequently is about thirty English miles to our rear and right. You can neither miss him nor the village, I think, by any possibility, as it is occupied by his own old corps, the 3rd Zouaves, a French line regiment, and four field guns. You will deliver to him this letter, and bring me his answer without delay."

"Unless I fail, my lord."

"As Richelieu says in the play, 'there is no such word as fail!'" he replied, smiling. "But, however, in case of danger, for there *are* Cossacks about, you must take heed to destroy the despatch."

"Very good, my lord--I shall go with pleasure."

"You have a horse, I presume?"

"I had not thought of that, my lord--a horse, no; here I can scarcely feed myself, and find no use for a horse."

"Take mine--I have a spare one," said the chief of the staff, who was then a major-general and C.B. He rang the hand-bell for the orderly sergeant, to whom he gave a message. Then I had a glass or two of sherry from a simple black bottle; Lord Raglan gave me his missive sealed, and shook my hand with that energy peculiar to the one-armed, and a few minutes more saw me mounted on a fine black horse, belonging to the chief of the staff, and departing on my lonely mission. The animal I rode--round in the barrel, high in the forehead, and deep in the chest, sound on its feet and light in hand--was a thorough English roadster--a nag more difficult to find in perfection than even the hunter or racer; but his owner was fated to see him no more.

I rode over to the lines of the regiment, to let some of our fellows--who all envied me, yet wished me well--know of the duty assigned me. What was it to me whether or not *she* saw my name in despatches, in orders, or in the death list? Whether I distinguished myself or died mattered little to me, and less now to her. It was a bitter conviction; so excitement and forgetfulness alike of the past and of the present were all I sought--all I cared for. Caradoc, however, wisely and kindly suggested some alteration or modification in my uniform, as the country through which I had to pass was certainly liable to sudden raids by scouting Cossacks. So, for my red coat and bearskin, I hastily substituted the blue undress surtout, forage cap, and gray greatcoat. I had my sword, revolver, and ammunition pouch at my waist-belt. Perceiving that I was gloomy and sullen, and somewhat low-spirited in eye and bearing, Caradoc and Charley Gwynne, who could not comprehend what had "been up" with me for some time past, and who openly assured me that they envied me this chance of "honourable mention," accompanied me a little way beyond the line of sentries on our right flank.

"Au revoir, old fellow! Keep up your heart and remember all I have said to you," were Phil's parting words, "and together we shall sing and be merry. I hope to keep the 1st of March in Sebastopol, and there to chorus our old mess room song;" and as he waved his hand to me, the light-hearted fellow sang a verse of a ditty we were wont to indulge in on St. David's-day, while Toby Purcell's spurs were laid on the table, and the band, preceded by the goat led by the drum-major with a salver of leeks, marched in procession round it:

hen pledge me a toast to the glory of Wales--
To her sons and her daughters, her hills and her vales;
Once more--here's a toast to the mighty of old--
To the fair and the gentle, the wise and the bold;
Here's a health to whoever, by land or by sea,
Has been true to the Wales of the brave and the free!"

And poor Phil Caradoc's voice, carolling this local ditty, was the last sound I heard, as I took the path that led first towards Balaclava and thence to the place of my destination, while the sun of the last day of November was shedding lurid and farewell gleams on the spires and white walls of Sebastopol. Many descriptions have rendered the name and features of Balaclava so familiar to all, with its old Genoese fort, its white Arnaout dwellings shaded by poplars and other trees, that I mean to skip farther notice of it, and also of the mud and misery of the place itself--the beautiful and landlocked harbour, once so secluded, then crowded with man-of-war boats and steam launches, and made horrible by the swollen and sweltering carcasses of hundreds of troop-horses, which our seamen and marines used as stepping-stones when leaping from boat to boat or to the shore. Some little episodes made an impression upon me, which I am unlikely to forget, after approaching Balaclava by a cleft between those rocky heights where our cavalry were encamped, and where, by ignominiously making draught-horses of their troopers for the conveyance of planks, they were busily erecting a town of huts that looked like a "backwood" hamlet. A picturesque group was formed by some of the kilted Highland Brigade, brawny and bearded men, their muscular limbs displayed by their singular costume, piling a cairn above the trench where some of their dead comrades lay, thus fulfilling one of the oldest customs of their country--in the words of Ossian, "raising the stones above the mighty, that they might speak to the little sons of future years." Elsewhere I saw two Frenchmen carrying a corpse on a stretcher, from which they coolly tilted it into a freshly dug hole, and began to cover it up, singing the while as cheerily as the grave-digger in *Hamlet*, which I deemed a striking proof of the demoralising effect of war--for their comrade was literally buried exactly as a dog would have been in England; and yet, that the last element of civilisation might not be wanting, a gang of "navvies" were laying down the sleepers for the first portion of the camp-railway, through the main street of Balaclava, the Bella-chiare of the adventurous Genoese.

Though I did not loiter there, the narrow way was so deep with mud, and so encumbered by the débris and material of war, that my progress was very slow, and darkness was closing in on land and sea when I wheeled off to the left in the direction of Kokoz, after obtaining some brandy from a vivandière of the 12th French Infantry--not the pretty girl with the semi-uniform, the saucy smile, and slender ankles, who beats the drum and pirouettes so prettily as the orthodox stage vivandière--but a stout French female party, muffled in a bloodstained Russian greatcoat, with a tawny imp squalling at her back. I passed the ground whereon the picturesque Sardinian army was afterwards to encamp, and soon entered the lovely Baidar valley. The mountains and the dense forests made me think of Wales, for on my right lay a deep ravine with rocks and water that reflected the stars; on my left were abrupt but well-wooded crags, and I could not but look first on one side, and then on the other, with some uneasiness; for Russian riflemen might be lurking among the latter, and stray Cossacks might come prowling down the former, far in rear of Canrobert's advanced post at the Tartar village. A column such as he had with him might penetrate with ease to a distance most perilous for a single horseman; and this valley, lovely though it was--the Tempe of the Crimea--I was particularly anxious to leave behind me. I have said that I felt reckless of peril, and so I did, being reckless enough and ready enough to face any danger in front; yet I disliked the idea of being quietly "potted" by some Muscovite boor lying *en perdue*, behind a bush, and then being brained or bayoneted by him afterwards; for I knew well that those who were capable of murdering our helpless wounded on the field, would have few compunctions elsewhere. Reflection now brought another idea--a very unpleasant one--to mind. Though I was in *rear* of this French advanced post, there was nothing to prevent Cossack scouts--active and ubiquitous as the Uhlans of Prussia--from deeming me a spy and treating me as such, if they found me there; for was not Major André executed most ignominiously by the Americans on that very charge, though taken in the uniform of the Cameronian regiment?

Unfortunately for me, there were and are two roads through the Baidar valley: one by the pass, of recent construction; and the other, the ancient horse-road, which is old, perhaps, as the days of the Greeks of Klimatum. A zigzag ascent, and a gallery hewn through the granite rocks for some fifty yards or so, lead to a road from whence, by its lofty position, the whole line of shore can be seen for miles, and the sea, as I saw it then, dotted by the red top-lights of our men-o'-war and transports. The other follows for some little distance, certainly, the same route nearly, but comes ere long to the Devil's Staircase, the steps of which are trunks of trees alternated by others hewn out of the solid rock; and this perilous path lies, for some part of the way at least, between dark, shadowy, and enormous masses of impending cliffs, where any number of men might be taken by surprise. And certainly I felt my heart beat faster, with the mingled emotions of fierce excitement and stern joy, as I hooked my sword-hilt close up to my waist-belt, assured myself that the caps were on my revolver, and spurred my roadster forward. Darkness was completely set in now, and before me there twinkled one solitary star at the distant end of the gloomy and rocky tunnel through which I was pursuing my solitary way.

CHAPTER XLI.--THE CARAVANSERAI.

I pursued the old road just described, urging my horse to a trot where I dare do so, but often being compelled--by the rough construction and nature of the way, and at times by my painful doubts as to whether I was pursuing the right one--to moderate his pace to a walk. Frequently, too, I had to dismount and lead him by the bridle, especially at such parts as those steps of wood and stone by the Merdven or Devil's

Staircase, when after passing through forests of beech and elm, walnut and filbert trees, I found myself on the summit of a rock, which I have since learned is two thousand feet above the Euxine, and from whence the snow-capped summits of the Caucasus can be seen when the weather is clear. Around me were the mountains of Yaila, rising in peaks and cliffs of every imaginable form, and fragments of rock like inverted stalactites started up here and there amidst the star-lighted scenery. Anon the way lay through a forest entirely of oaks, where the fallen leaves of the past year lay deep, and the heavy odour of their decay filled all the atmosphere. The country seemed very lonely; no shepherd's cot appeared in sight, and an intense conviction of utter solitude oppressed me. Frequently I reined in my horse and hearkened for a sound, but in vain. I knew a smattering of Arabic and that polyglot gibberish which we call Hindostani, but feared that neither would be of much service to me if I met a Tartar; and as for a Greek or Cossack, the revolver would be the only means of conferring with them. Once the sound of a distant bell struck my ear, announcing some service by night in a church or monastery among the hills; and soon, on my left, towered up the range of which Mangoup-Kaleh is the chief, crowned with the ruins of a deserted Karaite or Jewish tower, and which overlooks Sebastopol on one side, and Sebastopol on the other. After a time I came to a place where some buffaloes were grazing, beside a fountain that plashed from a little archway into a basin of stone. This betokened that some habitation must be in the vicinity; but that which perplexed me most, was the circumstance that there the old road was crossed by another: thus I was at a loss which to pursue. One might lead me to the shore of the Black Sea; another back towards Sebastopol, or to the Russian pickets in the valley of Inkermann; and the third, if it failed to be the way to Kokoz, might be a path to greater perils still.

While in this state of doubt, a light, hitherto unnoticed, attracted my attention. It glimmered among some trees about a mile distant on my left, and I rode warily towards it, prepared to fight or fly, as the event might require. Other lights rapidly appeared, and a few minutes more

brought me before a long rambling building of Turkish aspect, having large windows filled in with glass, a tiled roof, and broad eaves. On one side was a spacious yard enclosed by a low wall, wherein were several horses, oxen, and buffaloes tethered to the kabitkas or quaintly-constructed country carts; on the other was a kind of open shed like a penfold, where lighted lanterns were hanging and candles burning in tin sconces; and by these I could perceive a number of bearded Armenians and Tartars seated with chibouks and coffee before them, chatting gaily and laughing merrily at the somewhat broad and coarse jokes of a Stamboul Hadji, a pretended holy mendicant, whose person was as unwashed and whose attire was as meagre and tattered as that of any wandering Faquir I had ever seen in Hindostan. His beard was ample, and of wonderful blackness; his glittering eyes, set under beetling brows, were restless and cunning; his turban had once been green, the sacred colour; and he carried a staff, a wallet, a sandal-wood rosary of ninety-nine beads, and a bottle, which probably held water when nothing stronger could be procured. The Tartars, six in number, were lithe, active, and gaily-dressed fellows, with large white fur caps, short jackets of red or blue striped stuff, and loose, baggy, dark blue trousers, girt by scarlet sashes, wherein were stuck their daggers and brass-butted pistols; for, though all civilians, they were nevertheless well armed.

The Armenians seemed to be itinerant merchants, or pedlars, as their packages were close beside them; and two Tartar women--the wife and daughter probably of the keeper of the khan--who were in attendance, bringing fresh relays of coffee, cakes, and tobacco, wore each a white feredji, which permitted nothing of their form to be seen, save the sparkling dark eyes and yellow-booted feet, as it covered them so completely that each looked like nothing else than a walking and talking bundle of white linen. The whole group, as I came upon it thus suddenly, when seen by the flickering light of the candles and lanterns, had a very picturesque effect; but the idea flashed upon me, that as all these men were, too probably, subjects of the Russian empire, I ran some risk among them; and on my unexpected appearance the Tartars started,

eyed each other and me, in doubt how to act, and instinctively laid hands on their weapons, like men who were wont to use them. The Armenians changed colour and laid down their pipes, fearing that I was but the precursor of a foraging party; and even the Hadji paused in his story, and placed a hand under his short cloak, where no doubt a weapon was concealed. All seemed doubtful what to make of me. I heard "Bashi-bazouk" (Irregular) muttered, and "Frank," too. My gray greatcoat enabled me, in their unprofessional eyes, to pass for anything. If a Russian officer, they feared me; if one of the Allies, I was the friend--however unworthy an instrument--of the successor of Mahomet; one of those who had come to fight his battles against the infidels of the Russian-Greek church; so either way I was pretty secure of the Tartars' good will; and boldly riding forward, I proceeded to "air" some of the Arabic I had picked up in the East, by uttering the usual greeting; to which the keeper of the khan replied by a low salaam, bending down as if to take the dust from my right boot and carry it to his lips, while more than once he said,

"*Hosh ghieldiniz!*" (*i. e.*, Welcome!)

Then a Tartar, as a token of goodwill, took a pipe from his mouth and presented it to me, while another offered me sliced water-melon on an English delph-plate.

"*Aan coon slaheet nahss?*" (Have you any coppers?) whined the Hadji.

I gave him a five-piastre piece, on which he salaamed to the earth again and again, saying,

"*Kattel herac! kattel herac!*" (Thank you, sir.)

The meeting was a narrow escape, for I might have fallen among Russians; but fortunately not one of their nation happened at that moment to be about the place. I laid some money on the low board around which they were seated, and asked for coffee and a chibouk,

which were brought to me, when I dismounted. However, I remained near my horse, that I might vault into the saddle and be off on the shortest notice. On inquiring if I was on the right road for Kokoz, the host of the establishment shook his head, and informed me that I was several versts to the left of it. I next asked whether there were any Russian troops in the immediate neighbourhood. Still eyeing me keenly and dubiously, several of the Tartars replied in the affirmative; and the tattered Hadji, whose goodwill I had won by my peace-offering, told me that a party of Cossacks were now hovering in the Baidar Valley, the very place through which I had passed, and must have to repass, unless for safety I remained with Canrobert's flying column. But then my orders were to return with his answer, and without delay. Here was a pleasant predicament! After mature consideration I resolved to wait for daylight, when the Hadji promised to be my guide to the Tartar village, where the Franks were posted, and which he led me to understand was nearer the base of Mangoup-Kaleh than the town of Kokoz; and in the meantime, he added, he should resume a story, in the narration of which he had been interrupted by my arrival. This announcement was greeted with a hearty clapping of hands; the women came nearer; all adjusted themselves in attitudes of attention, for oral storytelling is the staple literature of the East. Thus their thoughts, suspicions, and conjectures were drawn from me; and as all seemed good-humoured, I resolved to make the best of the situation and remain passive and patient, though every moment expecting to hear the clank of hoofs or the jingle of accoutrements, and to see the glitter of Cossack lances; and while I sat there, surveying the singular group of which I formed one, the quaint aspect of the caravanserai on one side, the dark forest lands and starlit mountains on the other, my thoughts, in spite of me, reverted to the news I had so lately heard--to her I had now lost for ever, and who, in her splendid English home, was far away from all such wild scenes and stirring perils as those which surrounded me.

The story told by the Hadji referred to a piece of court scandal, which, had he related it somewhere nearer the Golden Horn, might have cost him his head; and to me it became chiefly remarkable from the circumstance that, soon after the Crimean War, a portion of it actually found its way as news from the East into the London papers; but all who heard it in the khan listened with eyes dilated and mouth agape, for it was replete with that treachery and lust of cruelty which are so peculiarly oriental. After extolling in flowing and exaggerated terms the beauty of Djemila Sultana, whom he called the third and youngest daughter of the Sultan Abdul Medjid, the Hadji told us that he had been present when she was bestowed in marriage upon Mahmoud Jel-al-adeen Pasha, to whom, notwithstanding the charms of this royal lady, the possession of her hand was anything but enviable, as oriental princesses usually treat worse than slaves their husbands, leading them most wretched lives, in consequence of their tyrannical spirit, their caprice, pride, and jealousy of other women. Now the Sultana Djemila was no exception to this somewhat general rule, and having discovered by the aid of her royal papa's chief astrologer, the Munadjim Bashee, that her husband had purchased and secluded in a pretty little kiosk near the waterside at Pera a beautiful Circassian, whom he was wont to visit during pretended absences on military duty, she found means to have the girl carried off, and ordered the Capi Aga, or chief of the White Eunuchs, an unscrupulous Greek, to decapitate her; an operation which he performed by one stroke of his sabre, for the neck of the victim was very slender, and shapely as that of a white swan. Not contented with this, she resolved still farther to be revenged upon her husband the Pasha when he returned to dinner.

Seating herself in the divan-hanee while the meal of which the Pasha was to partake alone--as women, no matter what their rank may be, never eat with men in the East--was being spread, she rose up at his entrance, and rendering the usual homage accorded by wives (much to his astonishment), she then clapped her white hands, on which the diamonds flashed, as a signal to serve up the dinner. Crushed and

abashed by a long system of domestic tyranny and despair, Mahmoud Jel-al-adeen, who feared his wife as he had never feared the Russians, against whom he had fought valiantly at Silistria, failed to perceive the malignant light that glittered in the beautiful black eyes of Djemila. But a fear of coming evil was upon him, as on that day, when he had ridden past the great Arsenal, he had seen a crow fly towards him; in the East an infallible sign of something about to befall him, as it was a crow that first informed Adam that Abel was slain.

"So I pray you, Djemila, neither to taunt nor revile me to-day," said he, "for a strange gloom is upon me."

She laughed mockingly, and Mahmoud shivered, for this laugh was often the precursor of taunts that could never be recalled or forgotten, and of having his beard rent, his turban knocked off, and his lips--the same lips at whose utterance his brigade of three thousand Mahomediyes trembled--beaten with the heel of her tiny slipper. But she began to storm as was her wont; and then, while her husband's fingers went into the pillau from time to time, there began their usual taunting discussion, with quotations from the Koran, "which, as all the world knows, or ought to know," continued the Hadji, "is the one and only book for laws, civil, moral, religious, and domestic."

"Doth not the Prophet say," she exclaimed, closing the slender tips of her henna-dyed fingers, "in the fourth chapter entitled 'Women,' and revealed at Mecca, act with equity towards them?"

"Yes; but he adds, 'If ye act not with equity towards orphans of the female sex, take in marriage such other as please you, two, three, or four; but not more."

"So--so; and your fancy was for a slave!"

"*Was?*" stammered Mahmoud; then he added, defiantly, yet tremulous with apprehension the while, "A Circassian, whose skin is as the egg of an ostrich--her hair as a shower of sunbeams."

"This to me!" she exclaimed; and starting from the divan, she smote him thrice on the mouth with the heel of her embroidered slipper.

The eyes of the Pasha flashed fire; yet remembering who she was, he sighed and restrained his futile wrath, and said,

"If you will quote the Prophet, remember that he says in chapter iv., 'Men shall have pre-eminence above women, because of those advantages wherein God hath caused one of them to excel the other.'"

Djemila laughed derisively and fanned herself.

"Who dared to tell you of this slave girl?" asked Mahmoud, glancing nervously at the pretty little slipper; "who, I demand?"

"The wire of the Infidels, that passes over men's houses, and reveals the secrets of all things therein--even those of the harem," said she, laughing, but with fierce triumph now; "yea, telling more than is known by the Munadjim Bashee himself."

The Pasha knew not what to say to this; he quaffed some sherbet to keep himself cool, and then ground his teeth, resolving, if he dared, to have all the telegraph wires in his neighbourhood cut down; indeed, about this time, such was the terror the Turks had of those mysterious speaking wires, that in Constantinople, to prevent their destruction as telltales, a few human heads were placed upon the supporting poles by order of Stamboul Effendi, or chief of the police.

"Thou shalt be stoned by order of my brother, and according to the holy law!" said Djemila, her proud lips curling and quivering.

"Woman, she is but a slave--an odalisque!"

"Whom you would marry before the kadi?"

"Yes," said Mahmoud, through his teeth, for his temper was rising fast.

"And you love her?"

"Alas, yes--God and the Prophet alone know how well!" said the Pasha, whose head drooped as he mentally compared the sweet gentleness of his Circassian girl with the fiery fury of the royal bride he had been compelled to espouse, as *a cheap reward* for his military services.

"*Chabauk!*" exclaimed Djemila. "Serve the next dish. Eat, eat, I say, and no more of this!"

The cover was removed by a trembling servant, and there lay before the Pasha Mahmoud the head of the poor Circassian girl--the masses of golden hair he had so frequently caressed, the eyes, now glazed, he had loved to look on, and the now pale lips he had kissed a thousand times in that lonely kiosk beside the sea.

"There is your dessert--*alfiert olsun!*" (May it do you good!) exclaimed Djemila, with flashing eyes and set teeth.

Mahmoud, horror-struck, had only power to exclaim, as he threw his hands and turned his eyes upward, "My love--my murdered love--*Allah bereket versin!*" (May God receive your soul!) and then fell back on his divan, and expired.

As he had prior to this drunk some sherbet, it was whispered abroad, ere long, that the poor Pasha had been poisoned; but as no examination after death took place, the high rank of his wife precluding it, it was given out that he had died of apoplexy. So he was laid in the Place of Sleep, with his turban on, his toes tied together, and his face turned towards Mecca, and there was an end of it with him; but not so with the Capi Aga, whom the Sultan, for being guilty of obeying Djemila's order to execute the odalisque, subjected to an old Turkish punishment now, and long before that day, deemed as obsolete. He was taken to the Sirdan Kapussi, or Dungeon Gate of Stamboul, close by the Fruit Market, and placed in a vaulted room, where he was stripped of all his clothes by the

Capidgi Bashi, who then brought in a large copper plate or table, supported by four pedestals of iron, and underneath which was a grate of the same metal, containing a fire of burning coals, at the sight of which a shriek of despair escaped the miserable Greek. When the plate of copper had become quite hot, the executioner took the turban-cloth of the doomed man, unwound it, and placing it round his waist, by the aid of two powerful hamals had it drawn tight, until his body was compressed into the smallest possible place. Then by one blow of his sabre he slashed the hapless wretch in *two*, and placing his upper half instantly upon the burning copper, the hissing blood was staunched thereby, and he was kept alive, but in exquisite torture, till the time for which he was ordained to endure it was fulfilled. He was then lifted off, and instantly expired.

Eagerly, with fixed eyes, half-open mouths, and in hushed silence, forgetting even to smoke, and permitting their chibouks to die out, his audience listened to this most improbable story, which the cunning Hadji related with wonderful spirit and gesticulation; and so "having supped full with horrors," at its close they showered coins--kopecs, paras, and even English pennies--upon the narrator. The whole story was a hoax, the Sultan having no such daughter as Djemila, the names of the three sultanas being quite unlike it; but that made as little difference then in Crim Tartary as it did afterwards nearer Cornhill; and Charley Gwynne and others of ours to whom I mentioned it were wont to call it "the bounce of the cold chop and the hot plate."

CHAPTER XLII.--THE TCHERNIMORSKI COSSACKS.

The night passed slowly with me in the khan. After the conclusion of the Hadji's story, the travellers who were halting there coiled themselves up to sleep, on the divan or on their carpets or felt mats; but I was too much excited, too wakeful and suspicious of the honest intentions of all about me, too anxious for dawn and the successful completion of the important duty confided to me, to attempt following their example, or even to allow that my horse should be unsaddled. I simply relaxed his girths, and remained in the travellers' common apartment, listening to every passing sound, and watching the sharp oriental features of the black-bearded and picturesque-looking sleepers by the smoky light of a solitary oil-lamp, which swung from a dormant beam that traversed the apartment. The arched rafters of the ceiling were painted in alternate stripes of white and black. There was a fireplace or open chimney, where smouldered on the hearthstone a heap of branches and dry fir-cones, the embers of which reddened and whitened in the downward puffs of wind that eddied in the vent; and round the walls were rows of shining tin plates, and under these were other rows of white cloths, like towels in shape and size, but worked and embroidered with gold thread, all made and prepared before marriage by the Tartar hostess in her bridal days. All these quaint objects appeared to recede or fade from my sight, and sleep was just beginning to overpower me, when my sleeve was twitched by the Hadji, who pointed to the snow-covered summits of the mountains then visible from the windows, and becoming tipped with red light; and stiff and weary I started up, to have my horse corned and watered for the task of that day, the close of which I could little foresee.

The wife of the Tartar placed before me, on a table only a foot high and little more than a foot square, a large tin tray, containing some hard boiled eggs, black rye bread, and a vessel filled with the sweet juice of pears. It was a strange and humble repast, but proved quite Apician to me after our mode of messing before Sebastopol. I had barely ended this simple Tartar breakfast, when the Stamboul Hadji, who was to be my guide to Canrobert's post near Kokoz, exclaimed, in a startled voice, "*Allah kerim*--look!"

I followed the direction indicated by his hand and dark, gleaming eyes, and with emotions of a very chequered kind saw, through an open window, "a clump of spears," as Scott would have called them; in short, a party of Cossacks riding slowly and leisurely down the mountain-path that led straight towards the house. In the eastern sunlight the tips of their lances shone like fiery stars; but no other appointments glittered about them; for unlike the gay light cavalry of France and Britain, their uniforms are generally of the most plain and dingy description. As yet they were about a mile distant, and if I would escape them, there was not a moment to be lost. I rushed to my horse, looked hastily but surely to bridle-bit, to saddle-girth, and stirrup-leather; and without waiting for the Hadji, who, being afoot, would only serve to retard my pace and lead to my capture, I gave some money to the Tartar hostess, and galloped away, diving deep into the forest, hoping that I had been as yet unseen, and should escape if none of the people at the caravanserai betrayed me, either under the inspiration of cowardice or malevolence. To avoid this party, who, it would appear, were coming right along the road I should pursue, I rode due eastward towards the ridge of Mount Yaila, which rose between me and the Black Sea, and which extends from Balaclava nearly to Alushta, a distance of fifty miles.

The day was clear and lovely, though cold and wintry, as the season was so far advanced, and I proceeded lightly along a narrow forest path, the purely-bred animal I rode seeming scarcely to touch, but merely to brush, the dewy grass with its small hoofs. The air was loaded by the fragrance of the firs; here and there, between the dark and bronze-looking glades, fell the golden gleams of the morning sun; and at times I had a view of the sombre sea of cones that spread over the hills in countless lines, and in places untrodden, perhaps, save by the wolf and the badger; overhead the black Egyptian vulture hovered in mid-air, the brown partridges whirred up before my horse's feet, and the hare, too, fled from its lurking-place among the long grass; but by wandering thus deviously in such a lonely place, though I might avoid those ubiquitous Cossacks, who were scattered "broadcast" over all Crim Tartary, I should

never reach Kokoz, or deliver that despatch, which, if taken by the enemy, I meant to destroy. Once or twice I came upon some Tartar huts, whose occupants seemed to be chiefly women--the men being all probably employed as military wagoners, in the forest or afield; but they drew close their yashmacs and shut their doors at my approach; so midday came on, and I was still in ignorance of the route to pursue, and in a district so primitive that, when the simple natives saw me scrape a lucifer-match to light a cigar, they were struck dumb with fear and wonder. Vague, wild, and romantic dreams and hopes came into my mind, that, if I perished and my name appeared in the *Gazette*, Estelle would weep for me; and in my absurd, most misplaced regard, and almost boyish enthusiasm, I felt that I should cheerfully have given up the life God gave me, for a tear from this false girl, could I be but certain that she would have shed it. Ay, there was the rub! Would she shed it, or the sacrifice be worth the return?

"Bah!" thought I, as I bit my lip, and uttering something like a malediction rode sullenly and madly on.

"Why cling thus to the dead past?" thought I, after a time. "Pshaw! Phil Caradoc was right in all he urged upon me. Yet that past is so sweet--it was so brilliant and tender--that memory cannot but dwell upon it with fondness and regret, with passion and bitterness."

Pausing for nearly an hour, my whole "tiffin" being a damp cheroot, I loosened my horse's girths for the time, and turned his quivering and distended nostrils to the keen winter blast that blew from the Euxine, and then I remounted. After wandering dubiously backward and forward, and seeking to guide my motions by the sun, just as I was about to penetrate into a narrow rocky defile, the outer end of which I hoped would bring me to some proper roadway or place where my route could be ascertained, the distant sound of a Cossack trumpet fairly in my front, and responded to by another apparently but some fifty yards in my rear, made me rein in my horse, while my heart beat wildly.

"Cossacks again!" I exclaimed, for I was evidently between two scouting parties, and if I escaped one, was pretty certain to be captured by the other.

Instinctively I guided my horse aside into a clump of wild pear-trees, the now leafless stems and branches of which I greatly feared would fail to conceal either it or me; but no nearer lurking place was nigh, and there I waited and watched, my spirit galled and my heart swollen with natural excitement and anxiety. Death seemed very close to me at that moment; yet I sat in my saddle, revolver in hand, the blade of my drawn sword in the same grasp with my reins, and ready for instant use, as I was resolved to sell my life dearly. Preoccupied, I had been unconscious for some time past that the cold had been increasing; that the sun, lately so brilliant, had become obscured in sombre gray clouds, and even that snow had begun to fall. Delicate and white as floating swans'-down fell the flakes over all the scenery. On my clothing and on my horse-furniture it remained white and pure; but on the roadway I had to traverse it speedily became half-frozen mud. If I escaped these scouting parties my horse-tracks might yet betray me, and I thought vainly of the foresight of Robert Bruce when he fled from London over a snow-covered country with his horse-shoes inverted. If I escaped them! I was not left long in uncertainty of my fate in that respect.

Riding in double file, and led by an officer who wore the usual long coat with silver shoulder-straps and a stiff flat forage-cap, a party of forty Cossacks issued slowly from the defile. Their leader was either a staff-officer or a member of some other force, as his uniform was quite different from theirs, which declared them to be Tchernimorski Cossacks, the tribe who inhabit the peninsula of Tamar, and all the country between the Kuban and Asof, being literally the Cossacks of the Black Sea, and natives of the district. They carried their cartridges ranged across their breast in rows of tin tubes, *à la Circassienne*, and were all bronzed, bearded, and rough-looking men, whose whole bearing spoke of Crimean and Circassian service, of hard outpost work among

the wild Caucasus, of many a bloody conflict with Schamyl--conflicts in which quarter was neither asked nor given! I had never been quite so near those wild warriors of the Russian steppes before, and have no desire ever to be so again, at least under the same dubious circumstances. They wore little squab-shaped busbies of brown fur; sheepskin shoubahs, or cloaks, over their coarse green uniforms; and had trusses of straw and bags of corn so secured over the shoulders and cruppers of their small shaggy horses, that but little more of the latter were visible than their noses and tails. They rode with their knees high and stirrup-leathers short, their lances slung behind them, and carbines rested on the right thigh. Captivity or escape, life or death, were in the balance as they slowly rode onward; but favoured by the already failing light and the falling snow, I am now inclined to think that my figure should have escaped even their keen and watchful eyes, had not evil fortune caused my horse, on discovering a mare or so among their cattle, after snuffing the air with quivering nostrils, to whinny and to neigh! At that moment we were not more than fifty yards apart.

A shout, or rather a series of wild cries, escaped the Cossacks. I pressed the spurs into the flanks of my gallant black horse, and he sprang away with a wild bound; while the bullets from nearly twenty carbines whistled past me harmlessly, thank heaven, and I rode steadily away--away. I cared not in what direction now, so that the more pressing danger was eluded, while cries and threats, and shot after shot followed me; but I had no great fear of them so long as they fired from the saddle, experience having taught me that even the best-trained cavalry are but indifferent marksmen. Before me rose the green ridge of Mount Yaila; the ground was somewhat open there, being pastoral hill-slopes gradually culminating in those peaks, from whence, in a clear day, the snow-clad summits of the Caucasus can be discerned; and to reach a ravine or cleft in the hills before me, I strained every effort of my horse, hoping, with the coming night, to escape, or find some shelter by the seashore.

The idea was vague, uncertain, and wild, I know; but I had no other alternative save to halt, wheel about, and sell my life as best I could at terrible odds; while to prevent me eluding them, the Cossacks had gradually opened out their files into a wide semicircle, lest I should seek to escape by some sudden flank movement; and all kept their horses--wiry, fiery, and active little brutes--well in hand. Their leader was better mounted and kept far in advance of them--unpleasantly close on my flanks, indeed--but still his nag was no match for the noble English horse I rode; and so as the blue shadows lengthened and deepened in the snow-coated valley, I began to breathe more freely, and to think, or hope, there was perhaps a chance for me after all. Perhaps some of the Cossacks began to think so, for they dismounted, and, while the rest kept fiercely and closely in pursuit, levelled their carbines over their saddles, over each other's shoulders, or with left elbow firmly planted on the knee, and thus took quiet and deliberate pot-shots at me; and two had effect on the hind legs of my horse, tending seriously to injure his speed and strength; and as each ball struck him he gave a snort, and shivered with pain and terror. On and on yet up the mountain valley!

An emotion of mockery, defiance, and exultation almost filled me--the exultation of the genuine English racing spirit--on finding that I was leaving the most of them behind, and was already well through the vale, or cleft, in the mountains, the slopes of which were then as easy to traverse as if coursing on the downs of Sussex; and already I could see, some three miles distant, the waters of the Euxine, and the smoke of our war-steamers cruising off Yalta and Livadia. I looked back. The Cossack leader was very close to me now, and five of his men, all riding with lance in hand, as they had probably expended their ammunition, were but a few horse-lengths behind him. I could perceive that he had also armed himself with a lance, and felt assured that in his rage at having had so long and futile a pursuit, he would certainly not receive my sword, even if I offered it, as a prisoner of war; so I resolved to shoot him as soon as he came within range of my "Colt," the six chambers of which I had been too wary to discharge as yet.

Checking my panting and bleeding horse for a second or two, to let the galloping Russian come closer, I fired at him under my bridle arm, and a mocking laugh informed me that my Parthian shot had gone wide of its mark. Not venturing to fire again, I continued to spur my black horse on still; for now the friendly twilight had descended on the mountains and the sea, whose waves at the horizon were yet reddened by the farewell rays of the winter sun as he sank beyond them. Suddenly the character of the ground seemed to change--vacancy yawned before me, and I found myself within some twenty yards of a pretty high limestone cliff that overhung the water!

The hand of fate seemed on me now, and reining round my horse, I found myself almost face to face with the leader of the Cossacks; and all that passed after this occurred in shorter time than I can take to write it. Uttering an exulting cry, he raised himself in his stirrups, and savagely launched at me with all his force the Cossack spear. I eluded it by swerving my body round; but it pierced deeply the off flank of my poor horse, and hung dangling there, with the crimson blood pouring from the wound and smoking upward from the snow. The animal was plunging wildly and madly now, yet I fired the five remaining pistol shots full at the Russian ere he could draw his sword; and one at least must have taken effect somewhere, for he fell almost beneath my horse's hoofs, and as he did so his cap flew off, and I recognised Volhonski--whom, by a singular coincidence, I thus again encountered--Count Volhonski, the Colonel of the Vladimir Infantry! At the same moment I was fiercely charged by the five advanced Cossacks, with their levelled lances, and with my horse was literally hurled over the cliffs into the sea, the waves of which I heard bellowing below me.

Within the pace of one pulsation--one respiration--as we fell whizzing through the air for some sixty feet together, I seemed to live all my past life over again; but I have no language wherewith to express the mingled bitterness and desolation that came over my soul at that time. Estelle lost to me; life, too, it seemed, going, for I must be drowned or

taken--taken but to die. The remembrance of all I had loved and of all who loved me; all that I had delighted in--the regiment, which was my pride--my friends and comrades, and all that had ever raised hope or fancy, or excited emulation--seemed lost to me, as the waves of the Black Sea closed over my head, and I went down to die, my fate unknown, and even in my grave, "unhousled, disappointed, unaneled."

Even now as I write, when the danger has long since passed away, and when the sun has shone again in all his glory on me, in my dreams I am sometimes once more the desperate and despairing fellow I was then.

CHAPTER XLIII.--WINIFRED'S SECRET.

It was Christmas-eve at Craigaderyn as well as before Sebastopol, and all over God's land of Christendom--the "Land of Cakes," perhaps, excepted, as Christmas and all such humanising holidays were banished thence as paganish, by the acts of her Parliament and her "bigots of the Iron Time," as in England by Cromwell, some eighty years later, for a time. A mantle of gleaming white covered all mighty Snowdon, the tremendous abysses of Carneydd Llewellyn, and the lesser ranges of Mynyddhiraeth. Llyn Aled and Llyn Alwen were frozen alike, and the Conway at some of its falls exhibited a beard of icicles that made all who saw them think of the friendly giant--old Father Christmas himself! Deep lay the snow in the Martens' dingle and under all the oaks of the old forest and chase; for it was one of those hearty old English yules that seem to be passing away with other things, or to exist chiefly in the fancy of artists, and which, with their concomitants of cold without and

warmth and glowing hospitality within, seemed so much in unison with an old Tudor mansion like Craigaderyn--a genuine Christmas, like one of the olden time, when the yule-log was an institution, when hands were shaken and faces brightened, kind wishes expressed, and hearts grew glad and kind. But on this particular Christmas-eve Winifred and Dora were not at the Court, but with some of their lady friends were busy putting the finishing touches to the leafy decorations of the parish church, for the great and solemn festival of the morrow, with foliage cut from the same woods and places where the Druids procured similar decorations for their temples, as it is simply a custom--an ancient usage--which has survived the shock of invading races and changing creeds.

The night was beautiful, clear, and frosty, and to those who journeyed along the hard and echoing highway the square tower of the old church, loaded alike by snow and ivy, could be seen to loom, darkly and huge, against the broad face of the moon, that seemed to hang like a silver shield or mighty lamp amid the floating clouds, and right in a cleft between the mountains. The heavens were brilliant with stars; and lines of light, varied by the tinting of heraldic blazons and quaint scriptural subjects, fell from the traceried and mullioned windows of the ancient church on the graves and headstones in the burial-place around it; while shadows flitted to and fro within--those of the merry-hearted and white-handed girls who were so cheerily at work, and whose soft voices could be heard echoing under the groined arches in those intervals when the chimes ceased in the belfry far above them. Huge icicles depended from the wyverns and dragons, through whose stony mouths the rain of fully five centuries had been disgorged by the gutters of the old church, and being coated with snow, the obelisks and other mementos of the dead had a weird and ghostlike effect in the frosty moonlight.

In the cosy porch of the church were Sir Madoc Lloyd and his hunting bachelor friend, Sir Watkins Vaughan, each solacing himself with a cigar while waiting for the ladies, to escort whom home they had driven over from the Court after dinner in Sir Watkins' bang-up dog-

cart. While smoking and chatting (about the war of course, as no one spoke of anything else then), they peeped from time to time at the picturesque vista of the church, where garlands of ivy and glistening holly, green and white, with scarlet berries, and masses of artificial flowers, were fast making gay the grim Norman arches and sturdy pillars, with their grotesque capitals and quaint details. Nor were the tombs and trophies of the Lloyds of other times forgotten; so the old baronet watched with a pleased smile the slender fingers of his young daughter as they deftly wreathed with holly and bay the rusty helmet that whilom Madoc ap Meredyth wore at Flodden and Pinkey, her blue eyes radiant the while with girlish happiness, and her hair as usual in its unmanageable masses rolling down her back, and seeming in the lights that flickered here and there like gold shaded away with auburn.

The curate, a tall, thin, and closely-shaven man, in a "Noah's-ark coat" with a ritualistic collar, stood irresolutely between the sisters, though generally preferring the graver Winifred to the somewhat hoydenish Dora, who insisted on appropriating his services in the task of weaving and tying the garlands; but he was little more than an onlooker, as the ladies seemed to have taken entire possession of the church and reduced him to a well-pleased cipher. At last Sir Watkins, a pleasant and gentlemanly young man, though somewhat of the "horsey" and fox-hunting type, who had a genuine admiration for Winifred, and had actually proposed for her hand (but, like poor Phil Caradoc, had done so in vain), seemed to think that he was letting his reverence have the ladies' society too exclusively, tossed his cigar into the snow, entered the church, and joined them; while Sir Madoc preferred to linger in the porch and think over the changes each of those successive festivals saw, and of the old friends who were no longer here to share them with him.

"Here comes Sir Watkins, to make himself useful, at last!" said Dora, clapping her hands, as she infinitely preferred the fox-hunter to the parson. "I shall insist upon him going up the long ladder, and nailing all those leaves over that arch."

But Winifred, to whom his rather clumsy attentions, however quietly offered, were a source of secret annoyance, drew nearer her female friends, four gay and handsome girls from London, who were spending Christmas at the Court (but have nothing else to do with our story), and whose eyes all brightened as the young and eligible baronet joined them. But for the charm which the presence of Winifred always had for him, and the pleasure of attending on her and the other ladies, Sir Watkins would infinitely have preferred, to a cold draughty church on Christmas night, Sir Madoc's cosy "snuggery," or the smoking-room at the Court, where they could discuss matters equine and canine, reckon again how many braces of grouse, black-cock, and ptarmigan they lad "knocked over" that day, or discuss the comparative merits of coursing in well-fenced Leicestershire, and in Sussex, where the downs are all open and free as the highway, or other kindred topics, through the medium of hot brandy-and-water.

"Now, Sir Watkins, here are my garlands and there is a ladder," said Dora.

"Any mistletoe among them, Miss Dora?" he asked, laughing.

"No; we leave the arrangement of that mysterious plant to such Druids as you; but here are some lovely holly-berries," said Dora, holding a bunch over the head of one of her companions, and kissing her with all that *empressement* peculiar to young ladies.

"By Jove," said the baronet, with a positive sigh, "I quite agree with some fellow who has written that 'two women kissing each other is a misapplication of one of God's best gifts.'"

Glancing at Winifred, who looked so handsome in her cosy sealskin jacket, with its cuffs and collar of silver-coloured grebe, the bachelor curate smiled faintly, and said, while playing nervously with his clerical billycock.

"I do not plead for aught approaching libertinism, but I do think that to kiss in friendship those we love seems a simple and innocent custom. In Scripture we have it as a form of ceremonious salutation, as we may find in the fourteenth chapter of Genesis, and in first Samuel, where the consecration of the Jewish kings to regal authority was sealed by a kiss from the officiator in the ceremony."

"And we have also in Genesis the courtship of Jacob and the 'fair damsel' Rachel," said Dora, looking up from her task with her bright face full of fun, "wherein we are told that 'Jacob kissed Rachel, and then lifted up his voice, and *wept*.' If any gentleman did so after kissing me, I am sure that I should die of laughter."

"We are having quite a dissertation on this most pleasant of civilised institutions," said Sir Watkins, merrily, as he flicked away a cobweb here and there with his silver-mounted tandem whip; "have you nothing to say on the subject, Miss Lloyd--no apt quotation?"

"None," replied Winifred, dreamily, while twirling a spray of ivy round her white and tapered fingers.

"None--after all your reading?"

"Save perhaps that a kiss one may deem valueless and but a jest may be full of tender significance to another."

"You look quite *distraite*, Winny, dear, as you make this romantic admission," said one of her friends.

"Do I--or did I?" she asked, colouring.

"Yes. Of what or of *whom* were you thinking?"

"Such a deuced odd theme you have all got upon!" said Sir Watkins, perceiving how Winifred's colour had deepened at her own thoughts.

"But how funny--how delightful!" exclaimed the girls, laughing together; while Dora added, with something like a mock sigh, as she held up a crape rose,

"When last I wore this rose in my hair, I danced with little Mr. Clavell--and he is spending his Christmas before Sebastopol! Poor dear fellow--poor Tom Clavell!"

Winifred's colour faded away, her usual calm and self-possessed look returned; and, stooping down, she bent all her energies to weave an obstinate spray of ivy round the carved base of a pillar, some yards distant from the group.

"Permit me to be your assistant, Miss Lloyd," said the baronet, in a low voice and with an earnest manner. "Miss Dora must excuse me; but I don't see the fun of craning my neck up there from the top of a twelve-foot ladder."

Winifred started a little impatiently, for as he stooped by her side, his long fair whiskers brushed her brow. "Do I annoy you?" he asked, gently.

"O no; but I feel nervous to-night, and wish our task were ended."

"It soon will be, if we work together thus. But you promised to tell me, Miss Lloyd, why your old gamekeeper would not permit me to shoot that hare in the Martens' dingle, to-day."

"Need I tell you, Sir Watkins--a Welshman?"

"You forget that my place is in South Wales, almost on the borders of Monmouthshire, and this may be a local superstition."

"It is."

"Well, I am all attention," said he, looking softly down on the girl's wonderfully thick and beautiful eyelashes.

"The story, as I heard it once from dear mamma, runs thus: Ages ago, there took shelter in our forests at Pennant Melangell, the daughter of a Celtic king, called St. Monacella, to whom a noble had proposed marriage; one whom she could not love, and could never love, but on whom her father was resolved to bestow her."

"By Jove!" commented Sir Watkins, while poor Winifred, feeling the awkwardness of saying all this to a man she had rejected, became troubled and coloured deeply; "and so, to escape her tormentors, she fled to the wilderness."

"Yes, and there she dwelt in peace for fifteen years, without seeing the face of a man, till one day Brochwel, Prince of Powis, when hunting, discovered her, and was filled with wonder to find in the depth of the wild forest a maiden of rare beauty, at prayer on her knees beside a holy well; and still greater was his wonder to find that a hare his dogs had pursued had sought refuge by her side, while they shrank cowering back with awe. Brochwel heard her story; and taking pity, gave to God and to her some land to be a sanctuary for all who fled there; she became the patron saint of hares, and for centuries the forest there teemed with them; and even at this hour our old people believe that no bullet can touch a hare, if any one cries in time, 'God and St. Monacella be with thee!'"

"A smart little nursery legend," said Sir Watkins, who perhaps knew it well, though he had listened for the pure pleasure of having her to talk to him, and him alone.

"It is one of the oldest of our Welsh superstitions," said Winifred, somewhat piqued by his tone.

"Why are you so cross with me?" he asked, while venturing just to touch her hand, as he tied a spray of ivy for her. "Cross--I, with you?"

"Reserved, then."

"I am not aware, Sir Watkins, that I am either; but please don't begin to revert to--to--"

"The subject on which we spoke so lately?"

"Yes."

"Ah, Miss Lloyd--my earnest and loving proposal to you."

"In pity say no more about it!" said Winifred, colouring again, but with intense annoyance at herself for having drawn forth the remark.

"Well, Miss Lloyd, pardon me; I am but a plain fellow in my way, and your good papa understands me better than you do."

"And likes you better," said she, smiling.

"I am sorry to be compelled to admit that such is the case; but remember the maxim of Henry IV. of France."

"Why--the roses please--what was it?"

"There are more flies caught by one spoonful of honey than by ten tuns of vinegar."

"Thanks, very much, for the maxim," replied Winifred, proudly and petulantly; "but I hope I am not quite of the nature of vinegar, and I don't wish to catch flies or anything else."

It was now Sir Watkins' turn to blush, which he did furiously, for her proud little ways perplexed him; but she added, with a laugh,

"The base of the next pillar requires our attention, and then I think the decorations are ended. Do let the cobwebs alone with your whip, and assist me, if you would please me."

"There is not in all the world a girl I would do more to please," said Sir Watkins, earnestly, his blue eyes lighting up with honest enthusiasm as he spoke in a low and earnest tone, "and I know that there is not in all England another girl like you, Winifred: you quite distance them all, and it is more than I can understand how it comes to pass that those who--who--don't love you--"

"Well, what, Sir Watkins?"

"Can love any one else!" said he, confusedly, while smoothing his fair moustache, for there was a quick flash in the black eyes of Winifred Lloyd that puzzled him. In fact, though he knew it not, or was without sufficient perception to be aware of it, this was an offhand style of love-making that was infinitely calculated to displease if not to irritate her.

"You flatter me!" said she, her short upper lip curling with an emotion of disdain she did not care at that moment to conceal.

"Does it please you?"

"No."

"I am sorry for that, as we are generally certain of the gratitude at least, if not the love, of those we flatter."

Much more of this sort of thing, almost sparring, passed between them; for Sir Watkins, piqued by her rejection of him, would not permit himself again as yet to address her in the language of genuine tenderness, and most unwisely adopted a manner that had in it a *soupçon* of banter. But Winifred Lloyd heard him as if she heard him not: the memories of past days were strong at that time in her heart, and glancing from time to time towards the old oak family pew, then half lost in obscurity and gloom, she filled it up in fancy with the figures of some who were far away--of Philip Caradoc and another; of Estelle Cressingham, who, for obvious reasons of her own, had omitted her and Dora from the Christmas circle at Pottersleigh House; and so, while Sir

Watkins continued to speak, she scarcely responded. The girl's thoughts "were with her heart, and that was far away," to where the lofty batteries of Sebastopol and the red-and-white marble cliffs of Balaclava looked down upon the Euxine, where scenes of which her gentle heart could form no conception were being enacted hourly; where human life and human agony were of no account; and where the festival of the Babe that was born at Bethlehem, as a token of salvation, peace, and goodwill unto men, was being celebrated by Lancaster guns and rifled cannon, by shot and shell and rockets, and every other device by which civilisation and skill enable men to destroy each other surely, and expeditiously.

Just as some such ideas occurred to her she saw her father, followed by old Owen Gwyllim, enter the church, and in the faces of both she read an expression of concern that startled her; and from her hands she dropped the ivy sprays and paper roses, which she was entwining together. Sir Madoc held in his hand an open newspaper, with which the old butler had just ridden over from the Court, and he silently indicated a certain paragraph to the curate, who read it and then lifted up his hands and eyes, as with sorrow and perplexity.

"What the devil is up now?" asked Sir Watkins, bluntly; "no bad news from the Crimea, I hope--eh?"

"Very--very bad news! we have lost a dear, dear friend!" replied Sir Madoc, letting his chin drop on his breast; while Sir Watkins, taking the journal from his hand, all unconscious of error or misjudgment, read aloud:

"'It is now discovered beyond all doubt, by the Chief of the Staff, that Captain Henry Hardinge, of the Royal Welsh Fusileers, whose disappearance, when on a particular duty, was involved in so much mystery, has been drowned in the Black Sea, by which casualty a most promising young officer has been lost to her Majesty's service.'"

"Drowned--Harry Hardinge drowned in the Black Sea!" exclaimed Dora, with sudden tears and horror.

"By Jove, the same poor fellow I met at your fête, I think--so sorry, I am sure!" said Sir Watkins, with well-bred regret; "and see--I have quite startled poor Miss Lloyd!"

Winifred, who for a moment seemed turned to stone, covered her face with her handkerchief, while her whole delicate form shook with the sobs she dared not utter.

Mothers, wives, and friends, the tender, the loving, and the true, had all read, until their hearts grew sick and weary, of the perils and sufferings of those who were before Sebastopol, as the horrors of the Crimean winter, adding to those which are ever attendant on war, deepened over them. And now here was one horror more--one that was quite unlooked for in its nature, but which now came home to their own hearts and circle.

"Take me away, papa--take me home!" said Winifred, in a faint voice, as she laid her face on his shoulder, for her tears were irrepressible; and the tall, slender curate in the long coat--an Oxonian, who chanted some portions of his church service, turned to the east when he prayed, had an altar whereon were sundry brazen platters, like unto barbers' basins, and tall candles, which (as yet) he dared not light, and who secretly, but hopelessly, admired Winifred in his inner heart--knew not what to think of all this sudden emotion; but he kindly caressed her passive white hands between his own, and whispered lispingly in her ear, that "the Lord loved those whom He chastened--afflictions come not out of the ground--all flesh was grass--that God is the God of the widow and fatherless--yet there were more thorns than roses in our earthly path," with various other old stereotyped crumbs of comfort.

"To the Court--home!" cried Sir Madoc; "call round the carriages to the porch, Owen, and let us begone."

A few minutes after this they had all quitted the church, and were being driven home in their close vehicle, Sir Watkins excepted, who drove in his dog-cart, sucking a cigar he had forgotten to light, and wondering what the deuced fuss was all about. Had Hardinge stood in his way? If so, by Jove, there was a chance for him yet, thought the good-natured fellow. In the dark depth of the large family carriage, as it bowled along noiselessly by a road where the white mantle of winter lay so deep by hill and wood that one might have thought the Snow-King of the Norsemen had come again, Winifred could weep freely; and as she did so, her father's arm stole instinctively and affectionately round her.

"Drowned," she whispered in his ear; "poor Harry drowned--and I loved him so!"

"It may all be some d--d mistake," sighed Sir Madoc, in sore grief and perplexity.

"But, O papa," whispered the girl, "I loved him so--loved him as Estelle Cressingham never, never did!"

"You, my darling?"

"Yes, papa."

"My poor pet! I suspected as much all along. Well, well, we are all in the hands of God. It is a black Christmas, this, for us at Craigaderyn, and I shall sorrow for him even as Llywarch Hen sorrowed of old for all the sons he lost in battle. But what a strange fatality to escape so narrowly at the Bôd Mynach, and then to be drowned in the distant East!"

And with a heart swollen alike by prayer and sorrow, the girl, whose tender and long-guarded secret had at last escaped her in the shock of grief, sat alone in her room that night, and heard the Christmas chimes ringing out clearly and merrily to all, it seemed, but for her; for those bells, those gladsome bells, which speak to every Christian heart of

bright hope here and brighter hope elsewhere, seemed to chime in vain for Winifred Lloyd; so she thought in her innocent heart, "I shall go to him yet, though he can never come back to me!"

CHAPTER XLIV.--THE CASTLE OF YALTA.

I presume that I need scarcely inform my reader that, notwithstanding the predicament in which a preceding chapter left me, and the tenor of that paragraph which caused such consternation among my warm-hearted Welsh friends at Craigaderyn, I was *not* drowned in the Black Sea, though my dip in the waters thereof was both a cold and deep one. Such fellows as I, are, perhaps, hard to kill--at least, I hope so. On rising to the surface, I found myself minus forage-cap, sword, and revolver, and also my horse, which, being sorely wounded, floated away out of the creek into which we had fallen (or been hurled by the Cossack lances), and the poor animal was helplessly drowned, without making any attempt to swim landward. This was, perhaps, fortunate for me, as the Cossacks saw it drifting in the moonlight, and continued to fire at it with their carbines, leaving me to scramble quietly ashore unnoticed and unseen.

My swimming powers are very small; thus, when just about to sink a second time, I was fortunate enough to grasp some sturdy juniper bushes, that grew among the rocks and overhung the water. Aided by these I gained footing on a ledge in safety, and remained there for a few minutes, scarcely venturing to breathe, until all sounds ceased on the cliffs above, and the flashing of the Cossacks' carbines, and their wild hurrahs died away; and the moment I was assured of silence, I

proceeded steadily, but not without great difficulty, to climb to the summit of the opposite side of the creek, my recently fractured arm feeling stiff and feeble the while, three lance-prods bleeding pretty freely, and my undress uniform wet, sodden, and becoming powdered fast by the still falling flakes of snow. Even amid all that bodily misery I thought more sorrowfully than bitterly of her I had lost.

"Estelle gone from me, a terrible death before me, either by capture or privation," thought I. "What have I done, O God, to be dealt with thus hardly?"

Even mortification that I had failed in the execution of my once coveted duty, existed no longer in my heart, at that time at least. At last I gained the summit; the uprisen moon was shining on the far-stretching Euxine, and casting a path of glittering splendour on its waters, even to the foot of the cliffs on which I stood. On the other side, to my comfort, the scouting Cossacks had entirely disappeared. That Count Volhonski, once my pleasant companion in Germany, and in whose way, coincidence and chance had so often cast me, should have fallen by my hand, was certainly a source of deep regret to me; but for a time only; a sense of my own pressing danger soon became paramount to all minor considerations. Exposure to the keen wind from the sea on ground so lofty, the night having closed in, and the snow flakes falling, all rendered shelter, warmth, and dry clothing, with dressing for the lance-thrusts, most necessary, if I would save my life; and yet in seeking to obtain these, I ran the most imminent risk of summarily losing it.

I was, I knew, far in rear of the advanced line of all the Russian posts, and was certain to fall, alive or dead, into their hands at some time or other; so drawing Lord Raglan's despatch to Marshal Canrobert from my breast-pocket--a piece of wet pulpy paper--I destroyed and cast it away; an unwise proceeding, perhaps, as it was the only credential I possessed to prove that I was not a--spy, but simply an officer on duty, who had lost his way. The cliffs of marble that bordered the shore were silent and lonely. The tall mountains of the Yaila range, their sides bristling with

sombre pines and rent by old volcanic throes into deep chasms and rugged ravines of rock, rose on my left; a little Tartar village, the feeble lights of which I could discern, nestled at their base about a mile distant. Should I endeavour to reach it, and risk or lose all at once? By this time I had struck upon a path which soon led to a roadway between vineyard walls, and ere long these were replaced by what appeared to be the trees of a park, between the branches of which the moon and the stars shone on the slanting snow-flakes and turned them to diamonds and prisms. In summer, the cypress and olive, the pomegranate and laurel trees, the quince and the Byzantine poplar, made all that road lovely. Then it was dreary enough, especially to me. Anon I came to a stately gate of elaborate cast-iron work, between two ornate pillars of the native red-and-white marble, surmounted each by some heraldic design. It stood invitingly open; the track of recent carriage-wheels lay there; and beyond the now white sheet of snow that covered a spacious park, there towered a handsome mansion, in that quaint and almost barbaric style of architecture peculiar to the châteaux of the Crimea, half Russian, half Turkish, with four domes, shaped like inverted onions, but of clearly-burnished copper, surmounting four slender tourelles, and under the broad cornices of which the pigeons--the holy birds of Muscovy--were clustered in cooing rows. In front was a pretty porch, under the open arches of which hung a large coloured lamp; while many lights, all suggestive of heat and comfort, were gleaming through the rich hangings of the windows on the snowy waste without. It was evidently the country residence of some wealthy Russian landholder, and there I felt more certain and safe in seeking shelter than among the wood-cutting boors or Tartar herdsmen of the village; yet my heart had more misgivings than hope as I approached it.

If the Russians, even in time of peace, are ever suspicious of strangers, how was I likely to be received there in time of war? Should I fall among good Samaritans, kindly perhaps; if otherwise, I might be accused of spying in an enemy's country, be hanged, shot, knouted perhaps, and sent to Siberia, for my horrible surmises were endless. But

to remain where I was would be to die; so I boldly approached, not the door, but a lower window that overlooked a balustraded terrace on which a flood of light from within was falling. Between hangings of pale blue satin laced with silver, and through the double sashes of the windows, which were ornamented with false flowers in the old Russian fashion, I perceived a handsome and lofty apartment, the furniture of which was singularly elaborate and florid. It seemed, with its drapery, sofas, fauteuils, statuettes under glass shades, and its pretty watercolours hung on the wall, to be a tiny drawing-room or ladies' boudoir; but on one side, built into the partition and forming a part thereof, were the stone ribs of a *peitchka* or Russian stove, faced with brilliantly-coloured porcelain. Through 'these ribs the light of a cheerful fire shone across the softly carpeted floor; and above the stove was an *eikon*, or Byzantine Madonna, with a bright metal halo like a gilt horseshoe round the head; a little silver lamp hung before it. From this a tiny jet of flame shot upward, while a golden tassel dangled below.

In the foreground, between the window and the glowing wall-stove at a table littered with books and needlework, were seated two ladies in easy-chairs, their feet resting on tabourettes, as they cosily read by the softened light of a great shaded lamp. One seemed young; the other somewhat portly and advanced in years; and she wore a red *sarafan*--the ancient Russian dress--a readoption about that time, when our invasion of the Crimea acted as a powerful and angry stimulant to the national enthusiasm of the whole empire; and at that precise moment, I should have preferred to find this noble matron--for such I had no doubt she was--in some dress nearer the Parisian mode. However, in my then predicament I felt more disposed to trust to the protection of women than of men, and so knocked gently, and then more loudly, on the window. Both ladies started, laid down their books, and rose. The double sashes and the false flowers placed between them rendered my figure indistinct, if not invisible. They conferred for a moment, and then, most fortunately for me, instead of summoning assistance by furiously ringing the bell, or indulging in outcries, as some ladies might have done in a

land of well-ordered police, the younger drew out a drawer, in which probably pistols lay; while the elder boldly unclasped the sashes, threw them open, and then both surveyed me with perplexity and with something of pity, too, as I was bareheaded, unarmed, deadly pale, and covered with snow that in some places was streaked with blood. The elderly lady, a keen-looking woman, evidently with a dash of the nomadic Tartar in her blood, asked me rather imperiously some questions in Russian--that language which Golovine so rightly says "is altogether inaccessible to foreigners;" but the other added, in softer French,

"Who are you, and from whence do you come?"

I replied that I was a British officer from the army before Sebastopol, wounded and unhorsed in a recent skirmish with Cossacks; that I had lost my way, and was literally perishing of cold, hunger, and loss of blood.

"How come you to be here, as you have no troops in this quarter?" asked the young lady, to my surprise and pleasure, in English, which she spoke fluently, but with a pretty foreign accent.

"I lost my way, I have said, and being pursued have ridden far in a wrong direction."

"Far, indeed, from Sebastopol at least; do you know where you are, sir?"

"No."

"This is Prince Woronzow's castle of Yalta."

"Yalta!"

"On the shore of the Black Sea," she added, smiling brightly at my surprise.

"Then I am more than thirty miles in *rear* of the Russian posts in the valley of Inkermann!"

"Yes; and as a soldier, must know that you are in great danger of the darkest suspicions if you are taken."

"I am aware of that," said I, faintly, as a giddiness came over me, and I leaned against the open sash of the window; "but I care not what happens."

The elder lady, who had a son with the army in Sebastopol, now said something energetically, and in my favour apparently, and the other added, softly and kindly, "Enter, sir, and we shall succour you."

The closed sashes excluded the icy air, I felt myself within the warm influence of the peitchka, and then the three smarting lance-wounds began to bleed afresh.

"Madame Tolstoff," said the younger lady, in French, "we must act warily here, if we would prevent this poor fellow becoming a prisoner of war, or worse. Bring here old Ivan Yourivitch the *dvornik*."

This was the butler, but it also signifies "servant."

"Can you trust him in this matter?"

"In any matter, implicitly. His wife nursed me and my brother too. There is a perilous romance in all this, and to his care I shall consign our unfortunate visitor, who does seem in a very bad way."

After a little explanation and some stringent directions, she confided me to a white-headed butler, who wore a livery that looked like semi-uniform, and he took me to his own rooms. He jabbered a great deal in Russ, of which I knew not a word, but first he gave me a large goblet of golden Crimskoi, the wine of the district. Then he exchanged all my wet and sodden clothing for a suit which he selected from among many in a large wardrobe: a caftan of dark green cloth, tied at the waist by a scarlet

sash; trousers also of dark green, with boots that came half way up the calf of the leg. Under all I wore a soft red shirt; and this attire I afterwards learned was the most thoroughly national costume in Russia, being that of the Rifle Militia of the Crown peasants--one worn by the Emperor himself on certain gala-days. This old man, Ivan Yourivitch, also dressed tenderly the three lance-prods, and though giddy and weak, I felt unusually comfortable when he led me back to the presence of the two ladies, of whose names and rank I was quite ignorant, while shrewdly suspecting that both must be noble. Their mansion was evidently one of great magnificence, and exhibited all that luxury in which the wealthier Russian nobles are wont to indulge, displaying the extravagance and splendour of petty monarchs. I saw there a broad staircase of Carrara marble, and lackeys flitting about in the powdered wigs and liveries of the old French court; apartments with tessellated floors and roofs of fretted gold; furniture in ormolu and mother-of-pearl; hangings of silk and cloth-of-gold; and in that castle of Yalta were ball, and card, and tea rooms; a library, picture-gallery, and billiard-room; and everywhere the aroma of exotic plants and perfumes; so I began to flatter myself that I was quite as lucky as the Lieutenant of H.M.S. Tiger, when *he* fell into the hands of the Russians at Odessa in the preceding May, and whose adventures made such a noise. When I rejoined the ladies, they both laughed merrily at the rapid transformation effected in my appearance; and the younger saying, "My brother's shooting-clothes suit you exactly," relinquished her book, which, with some surprise, I detected to be a Tauchnitz edition of "*Oliver Twist!*"

"In stumbling upon us here," she added, with great sweetness of manner, "how fortunate it is that you lighted first on Madame Tolstoff and myself, instead of any of our Tartar or Cossack servants!"

"Fortunate indeed! I may truly bless my stars that I have fallen into such gentle hands."

"All Russians are not the barbarians you islanders deem them; yet you deserve a heavier punishment than we shall mete out to you, for venturing hither to fight against holy Russia and our father the Czar."

"May I ask if I have the honour of addressing any of the family of Prince Woronzow!"

"O, no!" she replied. "Madame Tolstoff's son is serving in Sebastopol; my brother serves there also; and the kind Prince has merely given us the use of this mansion, as he has done the more regal one at Alupka to other ladies similarly situated; and now that you know our secret," she added, archly, "pray what is yours?"

"Secret!--I have none."

"You were not--well, reconnoitring?"

I coloured, feeling certain that she had substituted that word for one less pleasant to military ears.

"No, madam: while seeking to convey a despatch from Lord Raglan to Marshal Canrobert I lost my way, fell among Cossacks, and am here."

"When my brother arrives--we expect him ere long--we shall be compelled to confide you to his care; meantime you are safe, and here are refreshments, of which you seem sorely in need; and for greater secrecy, Ivan Yourivitch will serve you here."

"Who the deuce can this brother be of whom she talks so much, and where can she have acquired such capital English?" were my surmises as I seated myself at a side-table, and, with old Ivan standing towel in hand at my back, fell *à la Cosaque*, on the good things before me, with an appetite unimpaired by all that I had undergone. To the elder lady's horror, I omitted previously to cross myself or turn towards the *eikon*; but fragrant coffee made as only Orientals and Continentals can make it, golden honey from the hills and woods of Yaila, newly-laid eggs, salmon

fresh from the Salghir, boar's ham from the forests of Kaffa, and wine from Achmetchet, made a repast fit for the gods--then how much so for a long-famished Briton! While I partook of it the ladies conversed together in a low voice in Russian, seeming to ignore my presence; for though full of natural female curiosity and impatience to question me, they were too well-bred to trouble me just then. Those who have starved as we starved in the Crimea can alone relish and test the comforts of a good meal. You must sleep--or doze--amid the half-frozen mud and ooze of the trenches, or in a cold draughty tent, to know the actual luxury of clean sheets, a soft bed, and cosy pillows. Hence it is, that though accustomed to "rough it" in any fashion and degree, no one so keenly appreciates the warmth, the food, and the genuine comforts of home as the old campaigner, or the weather-worn seaman, who has perhaps doubled "the Horn," and known what it is to hand a half-frozen topsail in a tempestuous night, with his nails half torn out by the roots, as he lay out to windward. Yet when I found myself in quarters so comfortable, hospitable, and splendid, I could not but think regretfully of the regiment, of Phil Caradoc, of Charley Gwynne, and others who were literally starving before the enemy--starving and dying of cold and of hunger!

CHAPTER XLV.--EVIL TIDINGS.

I had now time amply to observe and to appreciate that which had impressed me powerfully at first--the wonderful beauty of the lady who protected me, and who spoke English with such marvellous fluency. If the artist's pencil sometimes fails to convey a correct idea of a woman's loveliness--more than all of her expression--a description by mere ink and type can give less than an outline. In stature she was fully five feet

seven, full-bosomed and roundly limbed, and yet seemed just past girlhood, in her twentieth or twenty-second year. Her skin was fair, dazzlingly pure as that of any Saxon girl at home; while, by strange contrast, her eyes were singularly dark, the deepest, clearest, and most melting hazel, with soft voluptuous dreamy-looking lids, and long black lashes. Her eyebrows, which were rather straight, were also dark, while the masses of her hair were as golden in hue as ever were those of Lucrezia Borgia; they grew well down upon her forehead, and in the light of the shaded lamp by which she had been reading, ripples of sheen seemed to pass over them like rays of the sun. Her features were very fine, and her ears were white and delicate as if formed of biscuit china, and from them there dangled a pair of the then fashionable Schogoleff earrings of cannon-balls of gold.

Her dress was violet-coloured silk, cut low but square at the neck, with loose open sleeves, trimmed with white lace and ruches of white satin ribbon, and its tint consorted well with the fair purity of her complexion. Every way she was brilliant and picturesque, and seemed one of those women whom a man may rapidly learn to love--yea, and to love passionately--and yet know very little about. Once in a lifetime a man may see such a face and such a figure, and never forget them. The dame, in the red sarafan, was a somewhat plain but pleasant-looking old Muscovite lady, whose angularity of feature and general outline of face reminded me of a good-humoured tom cat; and while playing idly with the leaves of her book, she regarded me with a rather dubious expression of eye; for British prisoners did not quite find themselves so much at home in Kharkoff and elsewhere, nor were they so petted and fêted, as the Russian prisoners were at Lewes, among the grassy downs of Sussex. My repast over, and the massive silver tray removed by Ivan Yourivitch, a conversation was begun by the younger lady saying, a little playfully,

"You must give me your parole of honour, that you will not attempt to leave this place in secret, or without permission."

"From you?"

"From me, yes."

"Did not duty require it of me, I might never seek the permission, but be too happy to be for ever your captive," said I, gallantly; but she only laughed like one who was quite used to that sort of thing, and held up a white hand, saying,

"Do you promise?"

"I do, on my honour. But will this pledge to a lady be deemed sufficient?"

"By whom?"

"Well, say Prince Menschikoff."

"We shall not consult him, unless we cannot help it; besides," she added, with a proud expression on her upper lip, "what is he, though Minister of Marine, Governor of Finland and Sebastopol, but the grandson of a pastry-cook!"

"Prince Gortchakoff, then?"

"They are cousins; but do not take rank even in Russia with the old families, like the Dolgourikis and others, who are nobles of the first class."

On the suggestion, apparently, of the elder lady, whom she named Madame Tolstoff, she proceeded to ask me many questions, which I cared not to answer, as they had direct reference to the strength of our forces, and the plans and projects of the Allied Generals regarding Sebastopol; and though my information was only limited to such as one of subaltern rank could possess, I knew how artfully the most important military and political secrets have been wormed from men by women, and was on my guard. Her excellent English she accounted for by telling me that in her girlhood she had an English governess. She told me, among other things, that she had gone in her carriage, with hundreds of

other ladies from Sebastopol, Simpheropol, and Bagtchi Serai (or "the Seraglio of Gardens"), to see the battle of the Alma. It began quite like a *prasnik* or holiday with them all, as they had expected, among other marvels, to see St. Sergius, whose sacred image was borne by the Kazan column, till the latter was routed by the Highland Brigade, and bundled over the hill, image and all, though Innocent, Archbishop of Odessa, in one of his sermons to the garrison of Sebastopol (published in the *Russian Messenger*) confidently predicted a fourth appearance of the patriotic saint on that occasion; but my fair informant added, that when the fighting began, she had driven away homeward in horror.

She quizzed me a little about the small dimensions of the island in which we dwelt, an island where the people elbowed each other for lack of room; she asked me if it were really true that our soldiers were sailors; and if it was also true that our Admiral in the Baltic always carried a little sword under one arm, and a great fish under the other, alluding to a popular Moscow caricature of Sir Charles Napier. It was impossible not to laugh with her, for her charming tricks of foreign manner, the arch smiles of her occasionally half-closed eyes, and her pretty ways of gesticulation with the loveliest of white hands, from which she had now drawn the gloves, were all very seductive; moreover the Russians have a natural mode of imbuing with heartiness every phrase and expression, however simple or merely polite. She always spoke of the Czar with more profound awe and respect than even Catholics do of the Pope, or Mahometans do of the Sultan; but it should be borne in mind that in Russia, as Golovine says, "next to the King of Heaven, the Czar is the object of adoration. He is, in the estimation of the Russian, the representative and the elect of God; so he is the head of his church, the source of all the beatitudes, and the first cause of all fear. His hand distributes as bounteously as his arm strikes heavily. Love, fear, and humble respect are blended in this deification of the monarch, which serves most frequently only to task the cupidity of some, and the pusillanimity of others. The Czar is the centre of all rays, the focus to which every eye is directed; he is the 'Red Sun' of the Russians, for thus

they designate him. The Czar is the father of the whole nation; no one has any relation that can be named in the same day with the Emperor; and when his interest speaks, every other voice is hushed!"

So, whenever this lady spoke of him, her eyes seemed to fill with melting light, and her cheek to suffuse with genuine enthusiasm; and as I listened to her, and looked upon her rare beauty, her singular hair, her laughing lips; and her ease of manner that declared a perfect knowledge of the world, I could not but confess that if there is no absolute cure for a heart disappointed in love, there may be found a most excellent *balm* for it. I know not now all we talked of, how much was said, and more left unsaid, for my new friend had all the airs of a coquette, and could fill up her sentences in a very eloquent fashion of her own, by a movement of the graceful hand, by the tapping of a dainty foot that would peep out ever and anon from under her violet-coloured skirt; with a blush, a smile, a drooping of the sunny brown eyes! Had the wine, the golden Crimskoi, affected me, that, while talking to the fair unknown, I seemed to tread on air; that my love for Estelle--a love thrust back upon my heart--was already--Heavens, already!--being replaced by an emotion of revenge against her, and exultation that the dazzling Russian might love me in her place? She was, indeed, gloriously beautiful; but, then, I have ever been a famous builder of castles in the air, and I was in the hands of one who felt her power and knew how to wield it. The Russian women, it has been truly written, like the gentlewomen of other European countries, who are reared in the lap of luxury, can employ and practise all the accomplishments and seductive arts that most enchant society, and employ them well! They have great vivacity of mind, much grace of manner, and possess the most subtle and exquisite taste in dress; yet the domestic virtues are but little cultivated under the double-headed Eagle, and marriages are too often mere matters of convenience; so there is little romance in the character, and often much of intrigue in the conduct of the Russian lady.

"I trust that your wounds are not painful?" said she, with tender earnestness, after a short pause, during which she perceived me to wince once or twice.

"My immersion in salt water has made them smart, perhaps; and then the blood I have lost has caused such a dimness of sight, that at times, even while speaking with you, though I hear your voice, your figure seems to melt from before me."

"I am so deeply sorry to hear this; but a night's repose, and perhaps the rest of to-morrow may, nay, I doubt not shall, cure you of this weakness."

"I thank you for your good wishes and intentions."

"In that skirmish, fought single-handed by you against our Cossacks, they thrust you into the water--actually into the sea?"

"Yes; by the mere force of their charged lances--horse and man we went over together; but not before I had shot their leader--a resolute fellow--poor Volhonski!"

At this name both ladies started and changed colour, though the younger alone understood me.

"*Whom* did you say?" she asked, in a voice of terror, while trembling violently.

"Paulovitch Count Volhonski, a name well known in the Russian army, I believe; he commanded the Vladimir regiment at the Alma and in Sebastopol."

"And he--he fell by *your* hand?"

"I regret to say that he did," I replied, slowly and perplexedly.

"You know him, and are certain of this?"

"Certain as that I now address you--most certain, to my sorrow."

"*O Gospodi pomiloui!*"[4] she exclaimed, clasping her hands together, and seeming now pale as the new-fallen snow; "my brother--my brother!"

"Your *brother?*" I exclaimed, in genuine consternation.

"Slain by you--your hand!" she wailed out, wildly and reproachfully.

"O, it cannot be."

"Speak--how?" She stamped her foot as she spoke, and no prettier foot in all Russia could have struck the carpet with a more imperial air. Her eyes were flashing now through tears; even her teeth seemed to glisten; her hands were clenched, and I felt that she regarded me, for the time, with hate and loathing.

"He fell, and his horse, too--yet, now that I think of it," I urged, "he may be untouched; and from my soul I hope that such may be the case, for personally he is my friend."

I felt deeply distressed by the turn matters had so suddenly taken; while Madame Tolstoff, to whom she now made some explanation in Russian, regarded me with fierce and undisguised hostility.

"Then there is yet hope?" she asked, piteously.

"That he may be simply wounded--yes."

"For that hope I thank you, Hospodeen: a little time shall tell us all."

"I was attacked and outnumbered; my own life was in the balance, and I knew him not, nor did he know me, until we were at close quarters, in the moment of his fall. To defend oneself is a natural impulse; and it has been truly said, that if a man armed with a red-hot poker were to

make a lunge even at the greatest philosopher, he would certainly parry it, though he were jammed between two sacks of gunpowder. Then I have the honour of addressing the Hospoza Valerie?"

"Yes," she replied, with hauteur; "but who are you, that know *my* name?"

"I am Captain Henry Hardinge, who--"

"The Hospodeen Hardinge" (Hardin*ovitch* she called it), "who so greatly befriended my dear brother in Germany, and who saved his life at Inkermann?"

"The same."

"I cannot receive you with joy; the present terrible tidings cloud all the past. Yet I have promised to protect you," she added, giving me both her hands to kiss, "and protected you shall be--even should my dead brother be borne here to-night!"

So the slender girl with the dark orbs and golden hair, she of whose miniature I had custody for a little time on that memorable and exciting morning in the Heiligengeist Feld at Hamburg, was now a lovely woman in all the budded bloom of past twenty--a fair Russian, with "more peril in her eyes than fifty of their swords!"

I felt sincere sorrow for the grief and consternation I had so evidently and so naturally excited, and I greatly feared that the hostility of the elder lady, Madame Tolstoff, might yet work me some mischief; though I knew not in what relation she could stand to Volhonski, who, at Hamburg, had distinctly said that his sister Valerie was the only one he had in the world. While I sat silently listening, and not without an emotion of guiltiness in my heart, to their sobs and exclamations of woe, uttered singly and together, the rapid clatter of hoofs, partially muffled by the snow, was heard without; bells sounded and doors were banged;

and then Ivan Yourivitch, his old wrinkled face full of excitement and importance, entered the room unsummoned. My heart for a moment stood still.

"What fresh evil tidings," thought I, "does this old Muscovite bring us now?"

CHAPTER XLVI.--DELILAH.

Even while Ivan Yourivitch was conferring with his startled mistress, I saw a tall figure in Russian uniform--the eternal long gray greatcoat--appear at the room door, and I was instinctively glancing round for some weapon wherewith to defend me, when to my astonishment Volhonski entered, somewhat splashed with mud, certainly, and powdered with snow, but whole and well, without a wound, and with a cry of joy Valerie threw herself into his arms. Wholly occupied by his beautiful sister, to whom he was tenderly attached, fully a minute elapsed before he turned to address Madame Tolstoff and then me. Was it selfishness, was it humanity, was it friendship, or what was the sentiment that inspired me, and caused so much of genuine joy to see Volhonski appear safe and untouched?--I, who from the trenches had been daily wont to watch with grim satisfaction the murderous "potting" of the Ruskies from the rifle-pits, and literal showers of legs, arms, and other fragments of poor humanity, by their appearance in the air, respond to the explosion of a well-directed shell! He now turned to me with astonishment on recognising my face in that place, and with the uniform of the Rifle Militia.

"By what strange caprice or whirligig of fortune do I find you here?" he exclaimed, as he took my hand, but certainly with a somewhat dubious expression of eye; "you have not come over to us, I hope, as some of our Poles have lately gone to you?"

"No," I replied, almost laughing at the idea. "Don't mistake me; I came here as a fugitive, glad to escape you and your confounded Cossacks; but I thank God, Volhonski, that you eluded my pistol on the cliffs yonder."

"Then it was *you*, Captain Hardinge, whom I followed so fast and so far from that khan on the Kokoz road? By St. George, my friend, but you were well mounted! In our skirmish one of your balls cut my left shoulder-strap, as you may see; the other shred away my horse's ear on the off side, making him swerve round so madly that he threw me--that was all. You, however, fell into the sea--"

"And was soaked to the skin; the reason why, 'only for this night positively,' as the play-bills have it, I appear in the uniform of the Imperial Rifle Militia, after finding my way here by the happiest chance in the world," I added, with a glance at his smiling sister. "Marshal Canrobert--"

"Has fallen back with his slender force from Kokoz. You had a despatch for him, I presume, by what fell from you at the Tartar caravanserai?"

"Precisely."

"Ah, I thought as much."

"I should not have been touring so far from our own lines else. It concerned, I believe--if I may speak of it--an *émeute* among the Poles in Sebastopol."

"A false rumour spread by some deserters; there was no such thing; and be assured that our good father, the Emperor, is too much beloved, even in Poland, to be troubled by disaffection again."

Volhonski now threw off his great coat, and appeared in the handsome full uniform of the Vladimir Infantry, on a lapel of which he wore, among other orders, the military star of St. George the Victorious, which is only bestowed by the Czar, for acts of personal bravery, like our Victoria Cross.

"How came you to know of me and of my despatch?" I inquired, while Yourivitch replaced the wine and some other refreshments on the table.

"I had Menschikoff's express orders to watch, with a sotnia of Cossacks, Canrobert's flying column on the Kokoz road; and the Tartars were prompt enough in telling me of *your* movements--at least of the appearance of an officer of the Allies, where, in sooth, he had no right to be. But, my friend, you look pale and weary."

"He has no less than three lance-wounds!" urged Valerie.

"Three!"

"In the arms and shoulder."

"This is serious; but take some more of the Crimskoi--it is harmless wine. Excuse me, Captain Hardinge, but of course you are aware how dangerous it is for you to remain long here?"

"I have no intention of remaining a moment absent from my duty, if I can help it!" said I, energetically.

"So we must get you smuggled back to your own lines somehow--unless you consent to become a prisoner of war."

"I have already given my parole of honour."

"Indeed! to whom?"

"To the Hospoza Volhonski," said I, laughing.

"More binding, perhaps, than if given to me; yet as I don't wish to avail myself of your promises to Valerie, but for the memory of past times," he added, with a pleasant smile, "to see you safe among your friends, I must contrive some plan to get you hence without delay."

"Why such inhospitable haste?" asked Valerie.

"Think of the peril to him and to us of being discovered here--and in that dress, too!"

"I fear I shall not be able to ride for days," said I, despondingly, as sensations of lassitude stole over me.

"I fear that with Valerie for your nurse, you may never return to health at all," said Volhonski, laughing, as he knew well the coquettish proclivities of his sister; "hence, to insure at least convalescence, I must commit you to the care of old Yourivitch or Madame Tolstoff."

Joy for her brother's safe return made Valerie radiant and splendidly brilliant; while some emotion of compunction for her temporary hostility to me, led her to be somewhat marked in her manner, softly suave; and this *he* observed; for, after a little time, he said, smilingly,

"You and my Valerie seem to have become quite old friends already; but remember the moth and the candle--*gardez-vous bien, mon camarade Hardinge!*"

"I don't understand you, Paulovitch," said Valerie, pouting.

"As little do I," said I, colouring, for the Colonel's speech was pointed and blunt, though his manner was scrupulously polite; but with all that, foreigners frequently say things that sound abrupt and strange to English ears.

"This stupid soldier is afraid that, if left in idleness, you will fall in love with Madame Tolstoff--or me," said Valerie; "he is thinking of the Spanish proverb, no doubt--*Puerto abierto al santo tiento*."

"I am thinking of no such thing, and did but jest, Valerie," said her brother, gravely, while he caressed her splendid hair. "Madame Tolstoff, our dear friend, is an experienced chaperone; and beside that, you are safe--set apart from the world--so far as concerns the admiration of men."

"That I never shall be, I hope!" said she, smiling and pouting again.

By Jove, can it be that she is destined for a nunnery? What the deuce can he mean by all these strange hints and out-of-place remarks? thought I, and not without secret irritation. Perhaps the keen Muscovite read something of this in my face, for he now clinked his glass against mine, and filled it with beautifully golden-coloured Château Yquem, bright, cool, and sparkling from its white crystal flask; and to this champagne soon succeeded; unwisely for me, though it was champagne in its best condition, that is, after being just six years in bottle, as Yourivitch assured us; and now our conversation became more gay and varied, and, as I thought, decidedly more pleasant. He gave me some recent news from the immediate seat of war, and from our own lines, that proved of interest to me.

The Retribution man-of-war, with the Duke of Cambridge on board, was said to have been lost, or nearly so, in the late great storm, which the Russians naturally hoped would delay the arrival of transports with reinforcements and supplies for the Allies; and he added that if the generals of the latter "had but the brains to *cut off all communication with Simpheropol, Sebastopol would surrender in three days!*" He mentioned, also, that the Greeks at Constantinople had taken heavy bets that it would not fall before Christmas, which seemed likely enough, as Christmas was close at hand now; and that there was a rumour to the effect that General Buraguay d'Hilliers--one of the veterans of the retreat

from Moscow--had landed at Eupatoria, and given battle to General Alexander Nicolaevitch von Luders, and defeated him with the 5th Infantry Corps of the Russian Army; a most improbable story, as D'Hilliers was at that moment with his army in the Aland Isles! And now Valerie, wearying of war and politics, shrugged her pretty shoulders, and gradually led us to talk on other topics. As she was well read and highly accomplished, there were many subjects on which we could converse in common, as she was wonderfully familiar with the best works of the English and French writers of the day, and knew them quite as well as those of Tourguéneff, Panaeff, Longenoff, Zernina, and others who were barely known to me by name. I was afterwards to learn, too, that she was a brilliant musician; and with all these powers of pleasing, was a Russian convent, with its oppressive atmosphere of religion and austerity, to be her doom? When I compared, mentally, the Russian with the English woman of rank--Valerie with Estelle--I could see that the latter, with less of a nervous temperament, was more quiet and unimpressionable, and with all her beauty less attractive; the former was more coquettish and seductive, more full of minute, delicate, and piquante graces--the real graces that win and enslave; more mistress of those witching trifles that at all times can inspire tenderness, provoke gallantry, and awaken love. The brilliant Valerie would have shone in a crowded *salon*, while Estelle Cressingham, with all her pale loveliness, would simply have seemed to be the cold, proud, aristocratic belle of an English drawing-room.

Valerie was fascinating--she was magnetic--I know not how to phrase it; and what now to me was Estelle--the Countess of Aberconway--that I should shrink from drawing invidious comparisons?

When I retired that night to a spacious and magnificent apartment, and to a luxurious Russian couch, the pillows of which were edged with the finest lace--ye gods! a laced pillow after mine in the camp, a tent-peg bag stuffed with dirty straw--I was soon sensible of the difference of sleeping indoors and within a house, after being under canvas and accustomed so long to my airy tent. I felt as if stifling; and to this was

added the effect of the wines, of which, incited by the hospitality of Volhonski, I had partaken too freely. I forgot all about my promises to be up betimes, even before daybreak, in the morning, and to ride with him as near to our posts as he dared venture, to leave me in a place of safety; I forgot that if I remained in secret at the castle or château of Yalta, the great danger and the grave suspicion to which I subjected him, his sister, and all there; I forgot, too, the risk I ran personally of being taken and shot as a spy, perhaps, after short inquiry, or no inquiry at all. I thought only of the brilliant creature whose voice seemed hovering in my ear, and the remembered touch of whose velvet hand seemed still to linger in mine.

The more I saw of Valerie Volhonski, the more she dazzled, charmed, and--must I admit it?--consoled me for the loss I had sustained in England far away. She seemed quite aware of the admiration her beauty excited--of the love that was inspiring me, and she seemed, I thought, in my vanity, not unwilling to return it! Why, then, should I not ask her to love me? What to us were the miserable ambitions of emperors and sultans; the intrigues and treacheries of statesmen; the wars, the battles, the difference of religion, race, and clime? And so, as the sparkling cliquot did its work, I wove the shining web of the future, and gave full reins to my heated fancy as the hours of the silent night stole on. But the morning found me ill, feverish, decidedly delirious; and Volhonski, to his great mortification, had to leave me and ride off with his Cossacks, and reach Sebastopol by making a long detour through that part of the country which we so stupidly left *open*--round by Tepekerman and Bagtchi Serai, and thence by the Belbeck into the Valley of Inkermann. I must have been in rather a helpless condition for at least two days--days wherein the short intervals of ease and sense seemed to me wearisome and perplexing indeed; while to see Madame Tolstoff and old Ivan Yourivitch gliding noiselessly about my room in fur slippers, caused me to marvel sorely whether I was dreaming or awake; whether or not I was myself, or some one else; for all about me seemed strange, unusual, and unreal.

On the morning of the third day I was greatly better, and on passing a hand over my head, found that my hair was gone--shorn to a crop of the true military Russian pattern, doubtless by a doctor's order. Then I saw Madame Tolstoff and Valerie Volhonski standing near and smiling at my perplexity.

"You miss your dark brown locks," said the latter, with one of her most seducing smiles; "forgive me; but I am the Delilah who made a Samson of you!"

CHAPTER XLVII.--VALERIE VOLHONSKI.

Though convalescent, I was still too feeble to think of saddle-work; and the Hospoza Volhonski had no means of transmitting me otherwise than mounted, or of having me--even when able to travel--guided to the British camp, without aid from her brother, of whom we had no tidings for weeks; so the time slipped away at Yalta pleasantly enough for me. To conceal me entirely from all the visitors who came there was an impossibility; thus, though dressed in plain clothes now, and generally passing for a German shut out from business at Sebastopol, I ran hourly risks of suspicion and discovery. Some of Volhonski's abrupt and ill-judged remarks, or some perhaps of mine, which had escaped me when delirious under the double effect of wound and wine, rendered Valerie a little reserved in her demeanour towards me for the first day or two after I was able to leave my room; but she was so frank in nature and so gay in spirit, that this unusual mood rapidly wore away. We had many visitors from the Valley of Inkermann and from Sebastopol itself, as the city was left unblockaded on one side; and the tidings they brought us--tidings

which we eagerly devoured--varied strangely. Once we were informed that it had been assaulted, and that all the outworks were in the hands of the Allies; next we heard that another Inkermann had been fought--that the Allies had been scattered and the siege raised; that the Austrians had entered Bulgaria; that torpedoes had blown up the sunken ships; and that the British fleet was actually in the harbour, shelling the town and burning it with rockets and red-hot shot. But all reports converged in one unvarying tale--the dreadful sufferings of our soldiers among the snow in the trenches, where young men grew gray, and gray-haired men grew white with misery. And so the Christmas passed; and when the Russian bells by hundreds rang the old year out from the spires, the forts, and the ships that lay above the booms and bridge of boats, the new year's morning saw the black cross of St. Andrew still waving defiantly on the Mamelon, and Redan, and all the forts of Sebastopol.

Once among our visitors came Prince Menschikoff himself, Valerie advised my non-appearance, much to my relief; but I heard the din of voices, the laughter, and the sound of music in the *salon* or great dining-room where a *déjeûner* was served for him and his staff, while the band of the Grand Duchess Olga's Hussars were stationed in the marble vestibule, and played the grand national anthem of Russia and Luloff's famous composition, *Borshoe zara brangie*--God save the Emperor. After the Prince's departure we had the huge mansion entirely to ourselves again, and any longings I might have to rejoin the Welsh Fusileers and share the dangers they underwent, together with my natural anxiety to hear of my friends in their ranks, I was compelled to stifle and seek to forget, when tidings came that a great body of Tchernimorski Cossacks had formed a temporary camp between Yalta and the head of the long Baidar Valley, thus, while they remained, completely cutting off all my chances of reaching either Balaclava or the Allied camp; so there was nothing for me now but to resign myself to a protracted residence in the same luxurious mansion with the brilliant Valerie (and her watchful chaperone), with the somewhat certain chance of losing my heart in the charms, of her society. Madame Tolstoff

assuredly kept guard over us with Argus eyes; but a few of the devices in the heart that laugheth at locksmiths enabled me to elude her at times; while, fortunately for me, the language we spoke was perfectly unknown to her; yet "the Tolstoff," as I used to call her, seemed, I knew not why, to exercise considerable control over Valerie. In her youth she had been carried off by Schamyl's mountaineers from a Russian outpost, and was a detained for three years in the Caucasian chief's seraglio, where, with all my heart, I wished her still. But while enjoying all the good things of this life at Yalta--grapes, melons, and pineapples from Woronzow's hothouses at Alupka, oysters from Hamburg, pickled salmon from Ladoga, sterlit from the Volga, sturgeon from the Caspian Sea, reindeer's tongue from Archangel, Crimean wines that nearly equalled champagne, imitation Sillery from the Don, Cliquot, Burgundy, and Bordeaux,--I thought often with compunction of the wretched rations and hard fare of our poor fellows who were starving in the winter camp. Volhonski was wealthy, and thus his sister and her attendants were able to command every luxury. His rank was high, for he claimed, as usual with all the Russian nobles of the first *tchinn* or class, to be descended from Ruric the Norman--Ruric of Kiev and Vladimir--who, more than a thousand years ago, founded the dynasty by which Muscovy was governed prior to the accession of the Romanoffs. All the best families in the land boast of a descent from Gedemine the Lithuanian, or from this Ruric and his followers; a weakness common also to the English aristocracy, whose genealogical craze is a real or supposed descent from those who were too probably the offscourings of Normandy. Beauty belongs peculiarly to neither race nor nation; yet somehow Valerie seemed to me, in her bearing and style, the embodiment of all that was noble and lovely; and though always graceful, her air and sometimes the carriage of her head seemed haughty--even defiant.

In the many opportunities afforded by propinquity and close residence together in the same house, and by our speaking a language which we alone understood, I know not all I said to her then, nor need I seek to remember it now; suffice it, that softly and imperceptibly the

sentiments of those who love are communicated and adopted; and so it was with me. She was catching my heart at the rebound--at the ricochet, as we might say in the trenches. I was beginning to learn that there were other women who might love me--others whom I might love, and who were not worshippers of Mammon, like--ah, well--Estelle Cressingham. If Pottersleigh died or broke his old neck in the hunting-field, where he sometimes rashly ventured, would Estelle--I thrust her image aside, and turned all my thoughts to Valerie; yet my second choice seemed, by the peculiarity of our circumstances, a more ambitious one and more hopeless of attainment than the first. Daily, however, I strove to win her heart and to inspire her with that pure passion which, as a casuist affirms, can only be felt by the pure in spirit, as all virtues are closely connected with each other, and the tenderness of the heart is one of them. Was the devil at my elbow, or my evil angel, if such things be, whispering in my ear? Or how was it, that whenever I grew tender with Valerie, the image of Estelle came revengefully, yet sadly, to memory, as of an idol shattered, but certainly not by me? Oddly enough I still wore her ring on my finger--the single pearl set in blue and gold enamel--a gift I had as yet no means of restoring, and could not give away. "Have you ever looked at a portrait till it haunted you?" asks a writer. "Have you ever seen the painted face of one, it may be, who was an utter stranger to you, yet that seemed to fill your mind with a sort of recognition that sent you out over the sea of speculation, wondering where you had seen it before, or when you would see it again? The eyes talk to you and the lips tell you a dreamy story."

Such, then, was the haunting character of the face of Valerie. Her beauty and her graces of manner filled up all my thoughts, and her strange dark eyes seemed to say that if it was impossible we had known each other in the years that were past, we might be dear enough to each other in the future; and I hoped in my heart that ours should be one; thus yielding blindly to the influence, to the charm of her presence and the whole situation. Once she was at the piano, and sang to me with wonderful grace and brilliance "The Refusal," a Russian gipsy song, in

which a young man makes many desperate professions and promises of love to a giddy young beauty, who laughs at them and rejects him, because she values nothing so much as her own liberty. When turning the leaves for her, the pearl ring of Estelle--a ring so evidently that of a lady--caught her attention, and I saw Valerie's colour heighten as she did so. I instantly drew it off; I felt no compunction in doing so then, and said, "You admire this ring, apparently?"

"Nay--do not say so, please," said she, bending over the instrument; "when a lady admires thus, it seems only another fashion of coveting."

"In this instance that were useless," said I, laughing, "as the ring is not mine to bestow; otherwise I should glory in your accepting it."

"Is it your wife's?"

"My wife's!"

"Yes. Have you one in that wretched little island of yours?" she continued, sharply.

"No," I replied, delighted by this undisguised little ebullition of jealousy.

"To whom does it belong, then?"

"The wife of another, to whom it shall be restored in England."

"This is very strange--it has, then, a history?" said she, bending her dark eyes on mine.

"Yes."

"And this history--what is it?"

"I cannot--dare not tell you."

"Indeed!" Her black lashes drooped for a moment, and she passed a white hand nervously over her golden braids. "And wherefore?"

"It would be to reveal the secrets of another."

"Another whom you love?" she asked, hurriedly, while her teeth seemed to glitter as well as her eyes, for her lips were parted.

"No, no; on my honour, no!" said I, laying my right hand on my breast, and feeling that then I spoke but the truth and without the equivocation, to which her questions were forcing me. Then Valerie seemed to blush with pleasure, and my heart beat lightly with joy. I should certainly have done something rash; but the inevitable Madame Tolstoff was in the room, embroidering a smoking cap for her son the colonel, then in command of the 26th at Sebastopol; so I was compelled to content myself by simply touching the hand of Valerie, and by caressing it tenderly, while affecting to admire a beautiful opal ring she wore, and urging her to continue her music. The whole episode partook somewhat of the nature of a scene between us, and even the usually self-possessed Valerie seemed a little confused, as she once more laid her tapered fingers on the ivory keys.

"I am very far from perfect in my music, or anything else, perhaps," she said.

"Do not say so," I whispered; "yet had you been more perfect than you are, I think no other woman in this world would have had the chance of a lover."

"How--why?"

"All men would be loving you, and you only."

"This is more like the inflated flattery of a Frenchman than the speech of a sober Briton," said Valerie, a little disdainfully.

"Does it displease you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Why?"

"People don't love when they flatter," was the pretty pointed and coquettish response, and preluded an air with a crash on the keys, thus interrupting something I was about to say--heaven only knows what--a formal declaration, I fear.

"You admired my opal. Listen to the story of its *origin*; I doubt if the story of your ring is half so pretty," said she. And then she sang in English the following song, which she had been taught by her governess, a song the author of which I have never been able to discover; but then and there, situated as I was, the English words came deliciously home to my heart, and I quote them now from memory:--

"A dew-drop came, with a spark of flame
  It had caught from the sun's last ray,
To a violet's breast, where it lay at rest,
  Till the hours brought back the day.
With a blush and a frown a rose look'd down,
  But smiled at once to view,
With its colouring warm, her own bright form
  Reflected back by the dew!
Then a stolen look the stranger took
  At the sky so soft and blue,
And a leaflet green, with its silvery sheen,
  Was seen by the idler, too.
As he thus reclined, a cold north wind
  Of a sudden blew around,
And a maiden fair, who was walking there,
  Next morning *an opal* found!"

I ventured to pat her shoulder approvingly. I glanced furtively round; the Tolstoff had gone out of the room, and somehow my arm slipped round Valerie, who looked up at me, smiling archly, yet she said, firmly,

"Pray don't."

"How much longer am I to keep this silence?" I asked.

"How--what silence?"

"To be thus in suspense, Valerie," I added, lowering my voice and bending my face towards her ear.

Her smile passed away, her white lids drooped, and perplexity and trouble stole over her eyes, as she drew her head back.

"I do not know what you mean, or whither your conversation tends," she said.

"You know that I love you!"

"No, I don't."

"You must have seen it--must have guessed it--since the happy hour in which I first saw you."

"Do not speak to me thus, I implore you," said she, colouring deeply, and covering her face with her beautiful hands.

"Why, Valerie, dearest, dearest Valerie?"

"I must not--dare not listen to you."

"Dare not?"

"I speak the truth," said she, and her breast heaved.

"Will you marry me, Valerie?"

"I cannot marry you."

"Why?"

"O heavens, don't ask me! But enough of this; and here comes Madame Tolstoff, to announce that the *samovar*--the tea-urn--is ready."

In my irritation I muttered something that she of the red *sarafan*, Madame Tolstoff, would not wish graved on her tombstone, and resumed my previous task of turning the leaves at the piano; but Valerie sang no more then, and for two entire days gave me no opportunity of learning why she had received my declaration in a manner so odd and unexpected. I could but sigh and conjecture the cause, and recall the words of her brother on the night he first met me at Yalta; and if it were the case that a convent proved the only barrier, I was not without hopes of smoothing all such scruples away.

CHAPTER XLVIII.--THE THREATS OF TOLSTOFF.

In the growth of my passion for Valerie I forgot all about the probable opposition of her brother, the Count, to my wishes. Indeed, he entered very little into my schemes of the future; for the perilous contingencies of war caused life to be held by a very slight tenure indeed; so we might never see him again, though none would deplore more than I the death of so gallant a fellow. Then, in that instance, did one so lovely as Valerie require more than ever a legitimate protector, and who could be more suitable than I? I felt convinced at that time, that those who loved Valerie once could never feel for another as they had loved her. She was so full of an individuality that was all her own. Was it the

coquetry of her manner, the strange and indescribable beauty of her dark eyes, the coils of her golden hair, the smile on her lips, or the subtle magnetism the kisses of those lips might possess, that entangled them? God knows, but I have heard that those who loved her once were never quite the same men again. If Valerie married me, with what pride and exultation should I display her beauty, if occasion served, before Estelle and her dotard Earl, as a bright being I had won from hearts that were breaking for her, and as one who was teaching me fast to forget *her*, even as she had forgotten me! A Russian wife, at that crisis of hostility and hatred, seemed a somewhat singular alliance certainly; what would the regiment say, and what would my chief friend old Sir Madoc, with all his strong national prejudices, think? I should be pretty certain to find the doors of Craigaderyn closed for long against me. These, however, were minor considerations amid my dreams; for dreams they were, and visions that might never be realised; *châteaux en Espagne* never, perhaps, to be mine!

On the morning of the third day after the musical performance recorded in the preceding chapter, Valerie met me, accompanied by Madame Tolstoff. Her face wore a bright smile, and interlacing her fingers, she raised her eyes to the *eikon* above the fireplace, and said to me, "O Hospodeen, have I not cause to thank Heaven for the news a Cossack has just brought me, in a letter from Colonel Tolstoff?"

"I hope so; but pray what is the news?" I. asked, while drawing nearer her.

"My brother Paulovitch has been taken prisoner by your people."

"Call you that good news?" I asked, with surprise.

"Yes, most happy tidings."

"How?"

"My brother will now be safe, and I hope that they will keep him so till this horrible and most unjust war is over."

"Unjust! how is it so?" I asked, laughing.

"Can it be otherwise, when it is waged against holy Russia and our good father the Czar?"

I afterwards learned that Volhonski had been taken prisoner in that affair which occurred on the night of Sunday, the 14th January, when the Russians surprised our people in the trenches, and captured one officer and sixteen men of the 68th, or Durham Light Infantry, into whose hands Volhonski fell, and was disarmed and taken at once to the rear.

"I am so happy," continued Valerie, clapping her hands like a child, "though it may be long, long ere I see him again, my dear Paulovitch! He will be taken to England, of course."

"Should you not like to join him there?" I asked, softly. "Yes, but I cannot leave Russia."

"Why?"

"Do not ask me; but we may keep *you* as a hostage for him," she added, merrily; "do you agree?"

"Can I do otherwise?" said I, tenderly and earnestly.

"Of course not, while those Cossacks are in the Baidar Valley. Poor Paulovitch! and this was his parting gift!" she continued, and drew from her bosom--and none in the world could be whiter or more lovely--a gold cross; and after kissing, she replaced it, looking at me with a bright, coquettish, and most provoking smile, as it slipped down into a receptacle so charming. "And dear Madame Tolstoff is so happy, too, for her son arrives here to-morrow; he has been severely bruised by the splinter of a shell in the Wasp Battery, and comes hither to be nursed by us."

I cannot say that I shared in "dear Madame's" joy on this occasion, and would have been better pleased had Valerie seemed to be less excited than she was. Moreover, I feared that the arrival of a Russian officer as an inmate might seriously complicate matters, and completely alter my position; and a pang seemed to enter my heart, as I already began to feel with wretchedness that Valerie might soon be lost to me. I had no time to lose if I would seek to resume the subject of conversation on that evening when Madame Tolstoff arrived just in time to interrupt us; but Valerie seemed studiously never to afford me an opportunity of being with her alone. This was most tantalising, especially now when a crisis in my affairs seemed approaching. Moreover, I had already been at Yalta longer than I could ever have anticipated. The love of the brother and sister for each other was, I knew, strong and tender; could I, therefore, but persuade her to escape--"to fly" with me, as novels have it--to our camp, now that he was a prisoner, and probably *en route* for England! A meagre choice of comforts would await her in the allied camp; but in the excess of my love, my ardour, and folly, I forgot all about that, and even about the Cossacks who occupied the Pass of the Baidar Valley.

It was not without emotions of undefined anxiety that on the following day I heard from Ivan Yourivitch that Colonel Tolstoff had arrived, and would meet me at dinner. The whole of that noon and afternoon passed, but I could nowhere see Valerie; and on entering the room when dinner was announced--a dinner *à la Russe*, the table covered with flowers fresh from the conservatory--I was sensible that she received me with an air of constraint which, in her, was very remarkable; while something akin to malicious pleasure seemed to twinkle in the little dark beadlike eyes of Madame Tolstoff as she introduced me to her son the Colonel; at least, by his reception of me I understood so much of what she said, for the old lady spoke in her native Russian. He was a tall, grim-looking man, who, after laying aside the long military *capote*, appeared in the dark green uniform of the 26th Infantry, with several silver medals dangling on his well-padded breast.

He had fierce keen eyes, that seemed to glare at times under their bristling brows; and he had an enormous sandy-coloured moustache, that appeared to retain the blue curling smoke of his *papirosse*, or to emit it grudgingly, as if it came through closely-laid thatch; a thick beard of the same hue, streaked with grizzled gray hair, concealed a massive jaw and most determined chin. He was huge, heavy-looking, and muscular; and on seeing me, held out a strong, weather-beaten hand but coldly and dryly, as he addressed me in German; and then we immediately recognised each other, for he was the officer who commanded the regiment which had occupied the abattis, and who received me when I took the flag of truce into Sebastopol. Volhonski, I have said, was a noble of the first class--that which traces nobility back for a single century; but Tolstoff was only of the second, or military class, being the son of a merchant, who after serving eight years in the ranks as a *junker*, on being made an officer becomes an hereditary noble, with the right to purchase a landed estate. Tolstoff was quite lame--temporarily, however--by the bruises his left leg had suffered from the explosion of a shell. He spoke to me in bad and broken German, though I shall render his words here in English.

"So my friend Volhonski is taken prisoner?" said I.

"Yes; less lucky than you, Herr Captain, who have to be taken yet," he replied, tossing the fag end of his paper cigar into the *peitchka*.

"It was in a sortie, I understand?"

"A little one; his party was led astray by their guide towards the trenches."

"Their guide! could one be found?"

"Yes; an officer who deserted to us."

"An officer!" said I, with astonishment.

"Yes; one who was a prime favourite with the Lord Raglan. Strange that he should desert, was it not!"

"With Lord Raglan!" I continued, more bewildered still.

"The devil! You are strangely fond of repeating my words! Anyway he wears a diamond ring that was given him by Lord Raglan for some great service he performed; but as he is to be here to-night, you shall see him yourself."

Guilfoyle! The inevitable Guilfoyle and his ring!

I could have laughed, but for rage at his cowardice, villainy, and treachery, in actually acting as guide in that affair which caused a loss in killed, wounded, and prisoners to our 68th Foot. However, thought I, through my clenched teeth, I shall see him to-night.

"Have you ever seen this officer?" I asked.

"No; but he comes to Yalta with certain reports for my signature. I doubt if Prince Woronzow, who is now Governor of Tiflis in Georgia, knows who--*all*--honour his mansion by a residence therein. You have made a longer visit among us this time than you did under the flag of truce!"

"Circumstances have forced me to do so, with what willingness you may imagine," said I, justly displeased by his tone and tenor of his speech, which seemed to class me with a rascal and a traitor like Guilfoyle. "I was most fortunate, however, in finding my way here, after escaping death, first at the hands of your Cossacks, and afterwards in the sea."

"Ah, they are troublesome fellows those Cossacks, and I fear you are not quite done with them yet."

"They, and your infantry, too, found us pretty well prepared on that misty morning at Inkermann," said I, growing more and more displeased by his tone and manner.

"Well prepared! By----, I should think so; when people come on frivolous errands with flags of truce, to see what an enemy is about behind his own lines."

I felt the blood rush to my temples, and Valerie, with a piteous expression in her soft face, said something in Russian, and with a tone of expostulation; to which the grim Pulkovnick made no response, but sat silently making such a dinner as seemed to indicate that rations had been scarce in Sebastopol, and keeping Ivan Yourivitch in constant attendance, but chiefly on himself. I could see that the man was a soldier, and nothing but a soldier, a Russian military tyrant in fact, and felt assured that the sooner I was out of Yalta, and beyond his reach--risking even the Cossacks in the Valley--the better for myself.

He was twice assisted by his amiable "mamma," to the *bativina*, i.e., soup made of roasted beef cut into small pieces, with boiled beetroot, spring onions, carraway-seeds, purée of sorrel, with chopped eggs and kvass. He was thrice helped to stuffed carrots with sauce, to roast mutton with mushrooms, and compote of almonds; and he drank great quantities of hydromel flavoured with spices, and so fermented with hops that it foamed up in the silver tankard and over his vast moustache. But in the intervals during dinner, and often speaking with his mouth very full, he related for the express behoof of his mother and Valerie, a very strange incident, which they seemed implicitly to believe, and which the latter politely translated for me. It was to the effect, that on the night Volhonski was taken prisoner, one of his officers, a man of noble rank, and major of the Vladimir Regiment, was carried into Sebastopol mortally wounded in an attempt to rescue him; and as he was dying, the host was borne to him under a canopy by Innocent, Bishop of Odessa, in person. As the procession passed a tratkir, or tea-house, some soldiers and girls were dancing there to the sound of a violin; and though they

heard the voices of the chanters, and the occasional ringing of the sanctus bell, they ceased not their amusement, neither did they kneel, so the host passed on; but like those who were enchanted by hearing the wonderful flute of the German tale, they could not cease dancing, neither could the violinist desist from playing, and for six-and-thirty hours they continued to whirl in a wild waltz--in sorrow and tears, a ghastly band--till, exhausted and worn nearly to skeletons, they sank gasping and breathless on the floor, where they were still lying, paralysed in all their limbs, and hopelessly insane!

Tolstoff seemed to hasten the ceremonies of the dinner-table to get rid of the ladies; and the moment they rose he gave his mother some *papirosses*, or cigarettes, to smoke, and then proceeded, leisurely, to roll up one for himself, after pushing across the table towards me the champagne, which he despised as very poor wine indeed.

"Hah, Yourivitch!" said he, taking up a decanter, and applying his somewhat snub nose thereto; "what is this? corn-brandy!" he added, draining a glassful; "as it is good, I must have a glass;" so he took a second of the fiery fluid. "O, now I feel another man, and being another man, require another glass;" so he took a *third*.

These additions to the hydromel did not seem to improve his temper, and assuredly I would have preferred to follow the ladies to the drawing-room, than to linger on with him

> "In after-dinner talk
> Across the walnuts and the wine,"

but that I feared to offend the man unnecessarily.

"Excuse me," said he, as he lay back in his seat, with his coat unbuttoned, and proceeded, very coolly, to pick his teeth with one of those small cross-hilted daggers, the slender blades of which are about

four inches long, and which are worn in secret by so many Russian officers, and are all of the finest steel. After a pause, during which he again dipped his long moustache in the foaming hydromel, he said,

"Though Volhonski told me about you, I scarcely expected, Herr Captain, to have found you here *still*."

"Where should I have gone--into the hands of the Cossacks, at Baidar?"

"Towards Kharkoff, at all events."

I coloured at this very pointed remark, as it was to that province in the Ukraine that the Russians had transmitted many of the prisoners taken during the war.

"Here I felt myself on a special footing."

"How, Herr Captain?"

"As the guest of the Volhonskis," said I, sternly.

"Though an enemy of Russia?"

"Politically or professionally, yes: but I have the honour to be viewed as a friend by the Count, and also by his sister."

"Ah, indeed! I have heard as much. The Hospoza Valerie is, you see, beautiful."

"Wondrously so," said I, with fervour, glad that I could cordially agree with this odious fellow in one thing at least.

"Then beware," said Tolstoff, his face darkening; "for I don't believe that much friendship can subsist between the sexes without its assuming a warmer complexion."

"Colonel Tolstoff!"

"Besides, the Hospoza Valerie is a coquette--one who would flirt with the tongs, if nothing better were at hand--so don't flatter yourself, Herr Captain."

I felt inclined to fling the decanter at his head; for in his tone of mentor he far exceeded even Volhonski.

"This is a somewhat offensive way to speak of a noble lady--the sister of your friend," said I.

"We shall dismiss that subject; and now for another," said he. "It must be pretty apparent to you, Herr Captain, that you cannot remain here, unparoled, in your present anomalous position."

"I quite agree with you, and feel it most keenly; but I gave my parole of honour to Valerie," I added, gaily and unwisely, for again the face of Tolstoff lowered.

"To let you remain or go free were treason to Russia and the Czar; you must therefore be sent as a prisoner of war to Kharkoff, and--"

"What then?"

"Be treated there according to the report I shall transmit with your escort."

"What will Volhonski say?"

"Just what he pleases; the Count is a prisoner now himself."

I read some hidden meaning in his eyes, though he sat quietly cracking walnuts and sipping his hydromel.

"An officer on duty, I fall into the hands of an enemy--" I was beginning passionately, when he interrupted me, and his eyes gleamed as he said,

"You had a despatch; I think you told Volhonski or his sister so?"

"Yes, Colonel--a despatch for Marshal Canrobert."

"Where is it?"

"I destroyed it."

"Bah!--I thought so," said he, scornfully.

"On my honour, I did so, Colonel Tolstoff!"

"Honour! ha, ha, you are a spy!"

"Rascal!" I exclaimed, feeling myself grow white with passion the while; "recall this injurious epithet, or--"

"Or what? Dare you threaten me? I can pick the ace of hearts off a card at twenty paces with a revolver, so beware; and yet I am not obliged to meet any one who is amenable to the laws of war, and is in a position so dubious as yours."

I was choking with rage; yet a conviction that he spoke with something of warrant, so far as appearances went, and of the absolute necessity for acting with policy, if I would leave myself a chance of winning Valerie and escape greater perils than any I had encountered, compelled me to assume a calmness of bearing I was far from feeling.

"Seek neither to threaten nor to trifle with me," said he, loftily and grimly; "you may certainly know the common laws of war regarding the retention of prisoners and the punishment of spies, but you know not those of Russia. If I do not treat you as one of the latter, it is because Volhonski is your friend; but I have it in my power, in treating you as one of the former, to have you transmitted farther than the Ukraine--to where you should never be heard of more. We are not particular to a shade here," he continued, with a sneering smile; "when the Emperor commanded a certain offender to be taken and punished, the minister of police could not find the right individual. What the deuce was to be done? Justice could not remain unsatisfied; so, instead, he seized a poor

German, who had just arrived and was known to none. He slit his tongue, tore out his nostrils, sent him to Siberia to hunt the ermine, and reported to the Czar that his orders had been obeyed. So don't flatter yourself that any persons in office among us would be very particular in analysing *any report* that I may transmit with you, a mere English captain!"

And rising from the table with these ominous words, he bowed to the *eikon*, crossed himself after the Greek fashion, inserted a *papirosse* into his dense moustache, and limped away, leaving me in a very unenviable frame of mind. Already I saw Valerie lost to me! I beheld myself, in fancy, marched into the interior of Russia under armed escort, maltreated and degraded, with my hands tied to the mane of a Cossack pony, or a foot chained to a six-pound shot; a secret report transmitted with me--a tissue of malevolent lies--to be acted upon by some irresponsible official with a crackjaw name; to be never more heard of, my sufferings and my ultimate fate to be--God alone knew what!

I was weak enough to feel jealous of this ungainly Tolstoff--this Muscovite Caliban--in addition to being seriously alarmed by his threats, and enraged by his tone and bearing. Had Valerie ever viewed him with favour? The idea was too absurd! If not, what right had *he* to advise me concerning her? But then she was so beautiful, one could not wonder that he--coarse though he was--might love her in secret.

Full of these and other thoughts that were vague and bitter, I quitted the table just as Yourivitch was lighting the lamps, and wandered into the long and now gloomy picture-gallery, one of the great windows of which was open. Beyond it was a terrace, whereon I saw the figure of Valerie. She was alone, and in defiance of all prudence and the warning of Tolstoff, I followed her.

CHAPTER XLIX.--BETROTHED.

She seemed absorbed in thought as I drew near her, and did not perceive my approach. She was leaning on the carved balustrade of the terrace, and gazing at the sea and the scenery that lay below it, steeped in the brilliance of a clear and frosty moonlight. The snow had entirely departed from the vicinity of Yalta, though its white mantle still covered all the peaks of the Yaila range of mountains. About a mile distant on one side lay the town, its glaring white-walled houses gleaming coldly in the moonshine. A beach was there, with most civilised-looking bathing-machines upon it; for prior to the war, Yalta had been the fashionable watering-place for the ladies of Sebastopol, Bagtcheserai, and Odessa, who were wont there to disport themselves in fantastic costumes, and take headers in the Euxinus Pontus. On the other side were lovely valleys and hills, covered with timber--pine-groves dark and huge as those that overhang the fjords of Norway.

In the distance lay the Black Sea--so called from the dark fogs that so often cover it--sleeping in silver light, its waves in shining ripples rolling far away round the points of Orianda and Maragatsch; and Valerie, absorbed in thought, and her dark eyes fixed apparently on that point where the starry horizon met the distant sea.

She wore an ample jacket or pelisse of snow-white ermine lined with rose-coloured silk, and clasped at the tender throat by a brooch which was a cluster of bright amethysts. A kind of loose silken hood, such as ladies when in full dress may wear in a carriage, was hastily thrown over the masses of her golden hair, which formed a kind of soft framework for her delicately-cut and warmly-tinted face, for the cold air had brought an unwonted colour into her usually pale complexion. Her eyes wore an

expression of languor and anxiety. Heaven knows what the girl was thinking of; but as she watched the shining sea I could see her full pink nervous lips curling and quivering, as if with the thoughts that ran through her impulsive mind. And this bright creature might be mine! I had but to ask her, perhaps, and I had not so faint a heart as to lose one so fair for the mere dread of asking her. Yet, as I drew near, the reflection flashed upon my mind that for three days at least she had purposely avoided me. Why was this? Had my love for her been too apparent to others? had I underdone or overdone anything? what had I omitted, or how committed myself?

"Valerie!" said I, softly.

She uttered a slight exclamation, as if startled, and then placing her firm, cool, and velvet-like hands confidingly in mine, glanced nervously round her, and more particularly up at the windows of the house.

"I would speak with you," said she, in a half whisper.

"And I with you, Valerie. O, how I have longed for a moment such as this, when I might again be with you alone!"

"But we must not be seen together; and I have but that moment you have so wished for to spare. Come this way--this way, quick; those cypresses in the tubs will shield us from any curious eyes that may lurk at yonder windows."

"O, Valerie!" I sighed with happiness, and as I passed a hand caressingly over her jacket of ermine I thought vengefully of Tolstoft's dark hint about hunting that small quadruped in Siberia; and then as I gazed tenderly into her dark and glittering eyes, I could perceive that their long tremulous lashes were matted.

"Tears--why tears, Valerie?"

She spoke hurriedly. "I have most earnestly to apologise to you for much that I heard the Pulkovnick say during dinner; it was indeed horrid--all!"

"Much that you have not heard was more horrid still."

"It is unbearable! His wounds or bruises must have exasperated his temper. Yet I cannot speak to him of that which I did not hear, as to do so would appear too much as if you and I had some secret confidences, and Madame Tolstoff, I fear, has hinted at something of this kind already."

"I asked you to marry me, dearest Valerie."

"Yes--vainly," said she, with a half-smile on her partly-averted face.

"Vainly--why?"

"Do not press me to say why."

"Could you love me, Valerie?"

"I might."

"Might, Valerie?" (I was never weary of repeating her sweet name; and what meant this admission, if she declined me?) "You do not doubt my love for you?" I urged.

"No, though I fear it is but a passing fancy, born of idleness and the ennui of Yalta."

"Think you, Valerie, that any man could see, and only love you thus? O no, no! But say that you will be mine--that you will come with me to England, where your brother is, or soon shall be--to England, where women are treated with a courtesy and tenderness all unknown in Russia, and where the girl a man loves is indeed as an empress to him, and has his fate in life in her own hands."

"I don't quite understand all this--nor should I listen to it," said she, looking me fully in the face, with calm confidence and something of sadness; too.

Her right hand was still clasped in mine, and as I pressed it against my heart, I placed my left arm round her waist, modestly, tenderly, and with a somewhat faltering manner; for she looked so stately, and in her white ermine seemed taller and more ample than usual, a beauty on a large scale and with "a presence." But starting back, she quickly freed herself from my half-embrace, and said, "Captain Hardinge, you forget yourself!"

"Can it be that you receive my tenderness thus?" said I, reproachfully, and feeling alike disappointed and crestfallen. "I love you most dearly, Valerie, and implore you to tell me of my future, for on your answer depends my happiness or misery."

"I hope that I am the holder of neither. I did not ask you to love me; and O, I would to Heaven that you had never come to Yalta--that we had never, never met!"

"Why--O, why?" I asked, imploringly.

"Because I am on the very eve of being *married*."

"Married!" I repeated, breathlessly; and then added passionately and hoarsely, "To whom?"

"Colonel Tolstoff, to whom I was betrothed in form by the Bishop of Odessa."

Her refusal was really a double-shotted one, and for a moment I was stupefied. Then I said, in a voice I could scarcely have recognised as my own,

"It was to this tie, and not to a convent, that Volhonski alluded, when hinting that you were set apart from the world?"

"Yes. I thank you from my soul for the love you offer me, though it fills me with distress. I pity you; but can do no more. Alas! you have been here only too long."

"Too long, indeed!" said I, sadly, while bending my lips to her hand; and then hurrying into the house by the picture-gallery, she left me--left me to my own miserable and crushing thoughts, with the additional mortification of knowing that Madame Tolstoff, watchful as a lynx, had overseen and overheard our interview from another angle of the terrace, though she could not understand its nature; but of course she suspected much, and was all aflame for the interests of her suave and amiable son.

However, this was not to be my last moment of tenderness with Valerie. But I was left little time for reflection, as events were now to succeed each other with a degree of speed and brevity equalled only by the transitions and discoveries of a drama on the stage.

CHAPTER L.--CAUGHT AT LAST.

I re-entered the château feeling sad, irresolute, and crushed in spirit. I had lost that on which I had set my heart, and at the hands of Tolstoff, my rival, I might yet lose more, if his threats meant anything--liberty, perhaps life itself.

What, then, was to be done? I was without money, without arms, or a horse. All these Valerie might procure for me; but how or where was I to address her again? After the result of our last interview she would be certain to avoid me more sedulously than ever. As I passed through the magnificent vestibule, which was hung with rose-coloured lamps, the

light of which fell softly on the green malachite pedestals and white marble Venuses, Dianas, and Psyches, which had no part of them dressed but their hair, which was done to perfection, I met Ivan Yourivitch, who made me understand that the officer whom the Pulkovnick expected with certain papers from Sebastopol had arrived, and was now in the dining-room; but the Pulkovnick had smoked himself off to sleep, and must not, under certain pains and penalties, be disturbed. Would I see him? And so, before I knew what to say, or had made up my mind whether to avoid or meet the visitor, I was ushered into the stately room, when I found myself once more face to face with Mr. Hawkesby Guilfoyle!

The ex-cornet of wagoners was clad now in the gray Russian military capote, with a sword and revolver at his girdle. His beard had grown prodigiously; but his hair--once so well cared for--was now very thin indeed, and he did not appear altogether to have thriven in the new service to which he had betaken himself. His aspect was undoubtedly haggard. Suspected by his new friends (who urged him on duties for which he had not the smallest taste), and in perpetual dread of falling into the hands of the old, by whom he would be certainly hanged or shot, his life could not be a pleasant one; so he had evidently betaken himself to drink, as his face was blotched and his eyes inflamed in an unusual degree.

He was very busy with a decanter of sparkling Crimskoi and other good things which the dvornick had placed before him, and on looking up he failed to recognise me, clad as I was in a suit of Volhonski's plain clothes, which were "a world too wide" for me; and no doubt I was the last person in the world whom he wished or expected to see in such a place and under such circumstances--being neither guest nor prisoner, and yet somewhat of both characters. He bowed politely, however, and said something in Russian, of which he had picked up a few words, and then smiled blandly.

"You smile, sir," said I, sternly; "but remember the adage, a man may smile and smile, and be----"

"Stay, sir!" he exclaimed, starting up; "this is intolerable! Who the devil are you, and what do you mean?"

"Simply that you are a villain, and of the deepest die!"

His hand went from the neck of the decanter towards his revolver; then he reseated himself, and with his old peculiar laugh said, while inserting his glass in his right eye,

"O, this beats cock-fighting! Hardinge of the Welsh Fusileers! Now, where on earth did you come from?"

"Not from the ranks of the enemy, at all events," I replied.

His whole character--the wrongs he had tried to do me and had done to many others; the artful trick he had played me at Walcot Park his pitiless cruelty to Georgette Franklin; his base conduct to me when helpless on the field of Inkermann; his guiding a sortie in the night; his entire career of unvarying cunning and treachery--caused me to regard the man with something of wonder, mingled with loathing and contempt, but contempt without anger. He was beneath that.

"So you are a prisoner of war?" said he, after a brief pause, during which he had drained a great goblet of the Crimskoi--a kind of imitation champagne.

"What I am is nothing to you--my position, mind, and character are the same."

"Perhaps so," he continued; "but I think that the most contemptible mule on earth is a fellow in whom no experience or time can effect a change of mind, or cure of those narrow opinions in which he is first brought up, as the phrase is, in that little island of ours."

"So you have quite adopted the Russian idea of Britain?" said I, with a scornful smile.

"Yes; and hope to have more scope for my talents on the Continent than I ever had there. I should not have left the army of my good friend Raglan----"

"Who presented you with that ring, eh?"

"Had there not been the prospect of a row about a rooking one night in camp, and a bill which some meddling fellow called a forgery. Bah! a bad bill may be a very useful thing at times; it is like a gun warranted to burst; but, as Lever says, you must always have it in the right man's hands, when it comes for explosion. If you are a prisoner, I am afraid that your chances of early seeing our dear mutual friends in Taffyland--by the way, how *is* old Sir Taffy?--are very slender, if once you are sent towards the Ukraine," he went on mockingly, as he lit a papirosse. "And so the fair Estelle threw you over, eh? Good joke that! Preferred old Potter's company to yours, for the term of his natural life? What a deuced sell! But what a touching picture of love they must present--quite equal to Paul and Virginia, to Pyramus and Thisbe!"

At that moment, and while indulging in a loud and mocking laugh, his countenance suddenly changed; he grew very pale, the glass fell from his pea-green eye, and the lighted papirosse from his lips; all his natural assurance and insouciance deserted him, and he looked as startled and bewildered as if a cannon-shot had just grazed his nose. I turned with surprise at this sudden change, and saw the face and figure of Colonel Tolstoff, who had limped into the room and been regarding us for half a minute unperceived. He stood behind me, grim and stern as Ajax, and was gazing at Guilfoyle with eyes that, under their bristling brows, glittered like those of a basilisk, and seemed to fascinate him.

"We have not met since that night at Dunamunde!" exclaimed Tolstoff, in a voice of concentrated fury; "but, I thank God and St. Sergius, we have met at last--yes, at last! And so you know each other--*you two?*" he added, in German, while bestowing a withering glance on me.

"Dunamunde!" said I, sternly, as the name of that place recalled something of a strange story concerning Tolstoff told by Guilfoyle to Lord Pottersleigh at Craigaderyn; "and you two would seem to have known each other and been friends of old, that is, if you are the same Count Tolstoff whom he saved from the machinations of a certain Colonel Nicolaevitch, then commanding the Marine Infantry at Riga."

"What rubbish is this you speak?" demanded the other, with angry surprise; "there never was a *Count* Tolstoff; and I am the Pulkovnick Nicolaevitch Tolstoff who commanded in Dunamunde, and was custodian of eighty thousand silver roubles, all government money. This ruffian was my friend--my chief friend then, though of the gaming table; but he joined in a plot, with others like himself, among whom was the Head of the Police, to rob me. He admitted them masked into my rooms, when they shot me down with my own pistols, and left me, with a broken thigh, bound hand and foot and cruelly gagged, while they escaped in safety across the Prussian frontier and got to Berlin, where they started a gaming-house. But he is here--here in my power at last; and sweetly and surely, I shall have such vengeance as that power gives me. Ha! look at him, the speechless coward; he has no bones in his tongue now!" he added, using a favourite Russian taunt.

"All over--run to earth, by Jove!" muttered Guilfoyle, with trembling lips, forgetting about the papers he had brought, his new character of a Russian officer, and forgetting even to deny his identity; "I have thrown the dice for the last time, and d--nation, they have turned up aces!"

Ivan Yourivitch and other Cossack servants, who had heard the loud voice of Tolstoff raised in undisguised anger, now appeared, and received some orders from him in Russian. In a moment they threw themselves upon Guilfoyle, disarmed, stripped him of his uniform, and bound him with a silken cord torn from the window-curtains. At first I was not without fears that they meant to strangle him with it, so prompt and fierce was their manner; but they merely tied his hands behind him, and thrust him into a closet, the door of which was locked, and the key given to the Pulkovnick.

The latter, without deigning to take farther notice of me, turned on his heel and limped away, muttering anathemas in Russian; and I felt very thankful that he had not made me a close prisoner also, after the humiliating fashion to which he had subjected the wretched Guilfoyle. But he was not without secret and serious ulterior views regarding me. All remained still now in the great mansion after this noisy and sudden episode; and I heard no sound save once--the clatter of a horse's hoofs, which seemed to leave the adjoining stable-yard and die away, as I thought, in the direction of the Baidar Valley, where the Cossacks lay encamped; and somehow my heart naturally connected these circumstances and foreboded coming evil, as I sat alone in the recess of a window overlooking the terrace, and the same moonlighted scenery which Valerie had viewed from it so lately.

CHAPTER LI.--FLIGHT.

I was full of gloomy, perplexing, and irritating thoughts.

"If I am to drag on my life for years perhaps as a Russian prisoner, better would it have been, O Lord, that a friendly shot had finished my career for ever. What have I now to live for?" I exclaimed, in the bitterness of my heart, as I struck my hands together.

"You speak thus--you so young?" said Valerie, reproachfully yet softly, as she suddenly laid a hand on my shoulder, while her bright eyes beamed into mine--eyes that could excite emotion by emitting it.

"Life seems so worthless."

"Why?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Can you ask me after what passed between us the other evening, and more especially on yonder terrace, less than an hour ago?"

"But why is existence worthless?"

"Because I have lost you!"

(Had I not thought the same thing about Estelle, and deemed that "he who has most of heart has most of sorrow"?)

"This is folly, dear friend," said she, looking down; "I never was yours to lose."

"But you lured me to love you, Valerie; and now--now you would cast--nay, you have cast--my poor heart back upon itself!"

"I lured you?" asked the gentle voice; "O unjust! How could I help your loving me?"

"Perhaps not; nor could I help it myself."

"Tell me truly--has this--this misplaced passion for me lured you from one who loves you well at home perhaps?"

"From no one," said I, bitterly.

"Thank Heaven for that; and we shall part as friends any way."

"As friends only?"

"Yes."

"But you will ever be more to me, Valerie."

She shook her head and smiled.

A desire for vengeance on Tolstoff, for his insulting bearing on one hand, with, the love and admiration I had of herself on the other, and the pictured triumph of taking her away from him, and by her aid and presence with me reaching our camp in safety, all prompted me to urge an elopement; nor could I also forget the coquettish admission that she "might" love me; but just as I was about to renew my suit and had taken possession of her hands, she withdrew them, and while glancing nervously about her, informed me that the Pulkovnick had sent a mounted messenger to the Baidar Valley for Cossacks, to escort me and Guilfoyle to Kharkoff in the Ukraine; and when I remembered his threats of probable ulterior measures, I felt quite certain that his report would include us *both*, and thus be framed in terms alike dangerous and injurious to me.

"What is to be done, Valerie?" I asked, in greater perplexity.

"If I cannot love, I can still serve you," said she, smiling with a brightness that was cruel; "it is but just, in gratitude for the regard you have borne me."

"That I still bear you and ever shall, beloved Valerie!" said I, with tremulous energy; "but to serve me--how?"

"You must leave this place instantly, for in less than an hour the Cossacks will be here, and Tolstoff may have you killed on the march; the escort may be but a snare."

"Then come--come with me--let us escape together!"

"Impossible--you do but waste time in speaking thus."

"Why--O why, Valerie, when you know that I love you?"

"Race, religion, ties, all forbid such a step, even were I inclined for it, which fortunately I am not," she replied, lifting for a moment, as if for coolness, the rippling masses of her golden hair from her white temples, and letting them fall again; "you might and *must* spare me more of this! Have I not told you it is useless to speak of love to me, and wrong in me to listen to you?"

"And since when have you been engaged to this" (bear, I was about to say)--"to this man Tolstoff? And by what magic or devilry has he taught you to love him?"

"In what can either concern you, at such a time as this especially, when you have not a moment to lose?" she asked, almost with irritation. "But hush--O, hush! here is some one."

At that moment Ivan Yourivitch, with excitement on his usually stolid Russian visage, entered the room almost on tiptoe, and whispered something to her in haste, while his eyes were fixed the while on me.

"Ah!--thank you, Ivan, thank you--that is well!" she said, and turning to me, she added, hurriedly and energetically, "If you would be free, and choose, it may be, between liberty or death, you have not another instant to lose! Ivan tells me that the crew of an English man-of-war boat is at this moment filling casks with water at the well of St. Basil on the beach yonder. Thrice has that ship been there for the same purpose; and I was watching for her when you came to me on the terrace, as I heard of her being off Alupka this morning."

"Your thoughts, then, were of me?" said I, tenderly.

"For you, rather; but away, and God be with you, sir!"

I lifted the window softly, and across the moonlit park that stretched away towards the seashore she pointed to where four tall cypresses rose like dark giants against the clear and starry sky, and where, at the distance of a mile or little more, the white marble dome of the well could be distinctly seen between them, its polished surface shining like a star above a sombre belt of shrubbery.

"There is the sound of hoofs! The Cossacks, your escort, are coming Away, sir; you cannot miss the well, though you may the boat!" said Valerie, with her hands clasped and her dark eyes dilated; and as she spoke the clank of galloping horses coming up the valley (and, as I fancied, the cracking of the whips carried by the Cossacks at their bridles) could be heard distinctly in the clear frosty air.

"If I had but my sword and pistols!" said I, with my teeth clenched.

"You do not require them. Farewell!

"Adieu, Valerie--adieu!"

I passionately kissed her lips and her cheek, too, ere she could prevent me, waved my hand to old Yourivitch, vaulted over the window, dropped from the balustrade of the terrace into the park, and at the risk of being seen by some of the household crossed it with all the speed I could exert in the direction that led to where I knew that the well--a structure erected by Prince Woronzow--stood on a lonely part of the shore. More than once did I look back at the lofty façade of the beautiful château, with its four towers and onion-shaped domes of shining copper, and all its stately windows that glittered in the light of a cloudless moon; and just as I drew near the belt of shrubbery, I could see the dark figures of mounted men encircling the terrace! A fugitive, in danger of losing honour and life together! Was this the end of my daydreams in Yalta? Once more I turned, and hastened to where the four cypress-trees towered skyward.

"Ahoy! who comes there?" cried a somewhat gruff voice, in English, accompanied by the sound of a slap on the butt of a musket; and then the squat sturdy figure of a seaman, posted as sentinel, appeared among the bushes, with an infantry pouch, belts, and bayonet worn above his short pea-jacket.

"A friend!" I replied, mechanically, yet not without a glow of sincere pleasure.

"Stand there, till I have a squint at you," replied Jack, cocking his musket and giving a glance at the cap; but I was too much excited to parley with him, and continued to advance, saying,

"I am an officer--Captain Hardinge, of the 23rd, a prisoner escaping from the enemy."

"All right, sir--glad to see you; heave ahead," he replied, half cocking his piece again.

"Who commands your party?"

"Lieutenant Jekyll, sir," said the seaman, saluting now, when he saw me fully in the moonlight.

"Of what ship?"

"The Southesk, sir, of twenty guns."

"Let me pass to your rear. He must instantly shove off his boat, as the Cossacks are within a mile of us--at yonder house."

In a minute more I reached the party at the well, twelve seamen and as many marines under an officer, who had a brace of pistols in his belt, and carried his sword drawn. They were in the act of carrying the last cask of water into a ship's cutter, which lay alongside a ridge of rock that ran into the sea, forming a species of natural pier or jetty, close by the white marble fountain.

I soon made myself known, and ere long found myself seated among new friends, and out on the shining water, which bubbled up at the bow and foamed under the counter as the oarsmen bent to their task, and their steadily and regularly feathered blades flashed in the silver sheen. The shore receded fast; the belt of shrubs grew lower and lower; and then the glittering domes of the distant mansion, which was ever in my mind and memory to be associated with Valerie Volhonski, rose gradually on our view, with the snow-clad range of Yaila in the background. But all were blended in haze and distance by the time we came sheering alongside H.M.S. Southesk, the water-tank of which had, fortunately for me, been empty, thus forcing her crew to have recourse to the well of St. Basil, by which circumstance I more than probably escaped the fate that ultimately overtook, but deservedly, the luckless Hawkesby Guilfoyle.

In the morning, under easy sail and half steam, the ship was off Balaclava, where I saw the old Genoese fort that commands its entrance, the white houses of the Arnaouts shaded by tall poplars, and the sea breaking in foam upon its marble bluffs; and there the captain kindly put me ashore in the first boat that left the ship.

It was not until long after the Crimean war, that by the merest chance, through an exchanged prisoner--a private of our 68th Foot--when having occasion to employ him as a commissionnaire in London, I learned what the fate of Guilfoyle was. En route to Kharkoff, he was run through the heart and killed by the lance of a Cossack of his escort, who alleged that he was attempting to escape; but my informant more shrewdly suspected that it was to obtain quiet possession of his ring--the paste diamond which had figured so often in his adventures, real and fictitious.

CHAPTER LII.--BEFORE SEBASTOPOL STILL.

On the 28th of March, I found myself once more in my old tent, and seeking hard to keep myself warm at the impromptu stove, constructed by my faithful old servant, poor Jack Evans. I was received with astonishment, and, I am pleased to say, with genuine satisfaction by the regiment, even by those who had flattered themselves that they had gained promotion by my supposed demise. I was welcomed by all, from the Lieutenant-colonel down to little Dicky Roll, the junior drummer, and for the first day my tent was besieged by old friends.

I had come back among them as from the dead; but more than one man, whose name figured in the lists as missing, turned up in a similar fashion during the war. My baggage had all been sent to Balaclava, the railway to which was now partly in operation; my letters and papers had been carefully sealed up in black wax by Philip Caradoc, and with other private and personal mementos of me, packed for transmission to Sir Madoc Lloyd, as my chief friend of whom he knew. Many came, I have said, to welcome me; but I missed many a familiar face, especially from among my own company, as the Fusileers had more than once been severely engaged in the trenches.

Caradoc had been wounded in the left hand by a rifle-ball; Charley Gywnne greeted me with his head in bandages, the result of a Cossack sabre-cut; Dynely, the adjutant, had also been wounded; so had Mostyn, of the Rifles, and Tom Clavell, of the 19th, when passing through "the Valley of Death." Sergeant Rhuddlan, of my company, had just rejoined, after having a ball in the chest (even Carneydd Llewellyn had lost a horn): all who came to see me had something to tell of dangers dared and sufferings undergone. All were in uniforms that were worn to rags; but all were hearty as crickets, though sick of the protracted siege, and longing to carry Sebastopol with the cold steel.

"How odd, my dear old fellow, that we should all think you drowned, and might have been wearing crape on our sleeves, but for the lack thereof in camp, and the fact that mourning has gone out of fashion since death is so common among us; while all the time you have been mewed up (by the Cossacks in the Baidar Valley) within some forty miles of us; and so stupidly, too!" said Caradoc, as we sat late in the night over our grog and tobacco in his hut.

"Not so stupidly, after all," I replied, while freely assisting myself to his cavendish.

"How?"

"There was *such* a girl there, Phil!" I added, with a sigh.

"Oho! where?"

"At Yalta."

"Woronzow's palace, or château?"

"Yes; but why wink so knowingly?"

"So, after all, you found there was balm in Gilead?" said he, laughing. "You must admit then, if she impressed you so much, that all your bitter regrets about a certain newspaper paragraph were a little overdone, and that I was a wise prophet? And what was this girl--Russian, Tartar, Greek, a Karaite Jewess, or what?"

"A pure Russian."

"Handsome?"

"Beyond any I have ever seen, beautiful!"

"Whew! even beyond *la belle*--"

"There, don't mention her at present, please," said I, with a little irritation, which only made him laugh the more.

"If you were love-making at Yalta, with three lance-prods in you, there was no malingering anyhow."

"I should think not."

"And so she was engaged to be married to that Russian bear, Tolstoff," he added, after I had told him the whole of my affair with Valerie.

"Yes," said I, with an unmistakable sigh.

"I think we are both destined to live and die bachelors," he resumed, in a bantering way; for though Phil had in these matters undergone, at Craigaderyn and elsewhere, "the baptism of fire" himself, he was not the less inclined to laugh at me; for of all sorrows, those of love alone excite the risible propensities.

"And so, Phil, the world's a kaleidoscope--always shifting."

"Not always *couleur de rose*, though?"

"And I am here again!"

"Thank God!" said he, as we again shook hands, "Faith, Harry, you must have as many lives as a cat, and so you may well have as many loves as Don Juan; but, *entre nous*, and excuse me, she seems to have been a bit of a flirt, your charming Valerie."

"How--why do you think so?"

"From all you have told me; moreover every woman to be attractive, should be a little so," replied Caradoc, curling his heavy brown moustache.

"I don't think she was; indeed, I am certain she was not. But if this be true, how then about Miss Lloyd; and she is attractive enough?"

At the tenor of this retort Phil's face flushed from his Crimean beard to his temples.

"There you are wrong," said he, with the slightest asperity possible; "she has not in her character a grain of coquetry, or of that which Horace calls 'the art that is not to be taught by art.' She is a pure-minded and warm-hearted English girl, and is as perfect as all those wives and daughters of England, who figure in the volumes of Mrs. Ellis; and in saying this I am genuine, for I feel that I am praising some other fellow's bride--not mine, God help me!" he added, with much of real feeling.

"You have heard nothing of the Lloyds since I left you?"

"Nothing."

"Well, take courage, Phil; we may be at Craigaderyn one day yet," said I; and he, as if ashamed of his momentary sentimental outburst, exclaimed, with a laugh,

"By Jove, now that I have heard all your amours and amourettes, they surpass even those of Hugh Price."

"Poor Hugh! his lieutenancy is filled up, I suppose?"

"Yes--as another week would have seen your company, for we could not conceive that you were a prisoner at Yalta. Awkward that would have been."

"Deucedly so."

"But now you must console yourself, old fellow, by seeing what Madame la Colonelle Tolstoff----"

"Don't call her by that name, Phil--I hate to hear it!"

"By what, then?"

"Valerie--anything but the other."

"Then what, as Mrs. Henry Hardinge, she might become, if all this author (whose book I have been reading) says of the Russian ladies be true." And drawing from his pocket a small volume, he gave me the following paragraph to read, and I own it consoled me--a *little:*--

"The domestic virtues are little known or cultivated in Russia, and marriage is a mere matter of convenience. There is little of romance in the character or conduct of the Russian lady. Intrigue and sensuality, rather than sentiment or passion, guide her in her amours, and these in after-life are followed by other inclinations. She becomes a greedy gamester, and a great *gourmande*, gross in person, masculine in views, a shrewd observer of events, an oracle at court, and a tyrant over her dependents. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule."

"Ah, Valerie would be one of these!"

"Perhaps--but as likely not," said Phil; "and on the whole, if this traveller Maxwell is right, I have reason to congratulate you on your escape. But we must turn in now, as we relieve the trenches an hour before daybreak to-morrow; and by a recent order every man, without distinction, carries one round shot to the front, so a constant supply is kept up for the batteries."

Soon after this, on the 2nd of April, a working party of ours suffered severely in the trenches, and Major Bell, who commanded, was thanked in general orders for his distinguished conduct on that occasion. As yet it seemed to me that no very apparent progress had been made with the siege. The cold was still intense. Mustard froze the moment it was made, and half-and-half grog nearly did so, too. The hospital tents and huts were filled with emaciated patients suffering under the many diseases

incident to camp life; and the terrible hospital at Scutari was so full, that though the deaths there averaged fifty daily in February, our last batch of wounded had to be kept on board-ship.

Phil and I burned charcoal in our hut, using old tin mess-kettles with holes punched in them. We, like all the officers, wore long Crimean boots; but our poor soldiers had only their wretched ankle bluchers, which afforded them no protection when the snow was heavy, or when in thaws the mud became literally knee-deep; and they suffered so much, that in more than one instance privates dropped down dead without a wound after leaving the trenches. So great were the disasters of one regiment--the 63rd, I think--that only seven privates and four officers were able to march to Balaclava on the 1st of February; by the 12th the effective strength of the brigade of Guards was returned at 350 men; and all corps--the Highland, perhaps, excepted--were in a similarly dilapidated state.

The camp was ever full of conflicting rumours concerning combined assaults, expected sorties, the probabilities of peace, or a continuance of the war; alleged treasons among certain French officers, who were at one time alleged to have given the Russians plans of their own batteries; that Menschikoff was dead from a wound, and also Yermiloff the admiral; that *General* Tolstoff was now in command of the left towards Inkermann. (If so, was Valerie now in Sebastopol? How I longed for the united attack--the storm and capture that might enable me to see her once again!) And amid all these varied rumours there came one--carried swiftly by horsemen through Bucharest and Varna--which reached us on the 7th of April, to the effect that Nicholas the mighty Czar of All the Russias, had gone to his last account; and I do not think it was a demise we mourned much. We sent intelligence of it by a flag of truce to the Russians; but they received it with scorn, as a "weak invention of the enemy."

And now the snow began to wear away; the clouds that floated over the blue Euxine and the green spires of Sebastopol became light and fleecy; the young grass began to sprout, and the wild hyacinths, the purple crocuses, and tender snowdrops, the violet and the primrose, were blooming in the Valley of Death, and on the fresh mould that marked where the graves of our comrades lay.

CHAPTER LIII.--NEWS FROM CRAIGADERYN.

It was impossible for me not to feel lingering in my heart a deep and tender interest for Valerie. She had not deceived or ill-used me; we had simply been separated by the force of circumstances; by her previous troth to Tolstoff, whom I flattered myself she could not love, even if she respected or esteemed him.

That they were married by this time I could scarcely doubt, as she had assured me that she was on "the very eve" of her nuptials (one of those "marriages of convenience," according to Caradoc's book); and if he held a command so high in Sebastopol, there was every reason to conclude she must be with him. In the event of a general assault, I was fully resolved to send my card to headquarters as a volunteer for the storming column, though I knew right well that I dare not allow myself to fall alive, into *his* hands, at all events; thus the whole situation gave me an additional and more personal interest in the fall and capture of that place than, perhaps, inspired any other man in the whole allied army. What if Tolstoff should be killed? This surmise opened up a wide field for speculation.

Any of those balls that were incessantly poured against the city might send that amiable commander to kingdom come, and if Valerie were left a widow--well, I did not somehow like to think of her as a widow, Tolstoff's especially, yet I was exasperated to think of her, so brilliant, so gentle, and so highly cultured, as the wife of one so coarse and even brutal in bearing, and if he did happen to stand in the way of a bullet, why should he not be killed as well as another; and so I reasoned, so true it is, that "with all our veneering and French polish, the tiger is only half dead in any of us."

If I were again unluckily sent with a flag of truce into Sebastopol, on any mission such as the burial of the dead and removal of the wounded, or so forth, it would, I knew, be certainly violated by Tolstoff, and myself be made prisoner for the affairs at Yalta. Then if such a duty were again offered me, on what plea could I, with honour, decline it? I could but devoutly hope that no such contingency might happen for me again.

Times there were when, brooding over the past, and recalling the strange magnetism of the smile of Valerie, and in the touch of her hand, the contour of her face, her wonderful hair, and pleading winning dark eyes, there came into my heart the tiger feeling referred to, the jealousy that makes men feel mad, wild, fit for homicide or anything; and as hourly "human lives were lavished everywhere, as the year closing whirls the scarlet leaves," I had--heroics apart--a terrible longing to have my left hand upon the throat of Tolstoff, with her Majesty's Sheffield regulation blade in the other, to help him on his way to a better world.

In these, or similar visions and surmises, I ceased to indulge when with Caradoc, as he was wont to quiz me, and say that if I got a wife out of Sebastopol, I should be the only man who gained anything by the war, and even my gain might be a loss; that, like himself, I had twice burned my fingers at the torch of Hymen, and that I should laugh at the Russian episode or loving interlude, as he called it, as there were girls in England

whose shoe-strings he was sure she was not fit to tie. Though she had rightly told me that my passion was but a passing fancy, she knew not that it was one fed by revenge and disappointment.

"Lady Estelle may perhaps have destroyed your faith in women," added Phil, "but any way she has not destroyed *mine*."

"Have you still the locket with the likeness of Winifred Lloyd?" said I.

"Yes--God bless her--she left it with me," he replied, with a kindling eye. How true Phil was to her! and yet she knew it not, and as far as we knew, recked but little of the faith he bore her.

On a Saturday night--the night of that 21st of April, on which we captured the rifle-pits--as we sat in our hut talking over the affair, weary with toil of that incessant firing to which the cannonading at Shoeburyness is a joke, Phil said,

"Let us drink 'sweethearts and wives,' as we used to do in the transport."

"Agreed," said I; and as we clinked our glasses together and exchanged glances, I knew that his thoughts went back to Craigaderyn, even as mine recurred to that moonlight night on the terrace at Yalta.

"You remained with the burial party," said he, after a pause.

"Yes, and I saw something which convinced me that the fewer tender ties we fighting men have, the better for our own peace. An officer of the 19th lay among the dead, a man past forty apparently. A paper was peeping from the breast of his coat; I pulled it out, and it proved to be a letter, received perhaps that morning--a letter from his wife, thrust hastily into his breast, as we marched to the front. A little golden curl was in it, and there was written in a child's hand, 'Cecil's love to dearest papa.' I must own that the incident, at such a time and place, affected me; so I replaced the letter in the poor fellow's breast, and we buried it

with him. So papa lies in a rifle-pit, with mamma's letter and little Cecil's lock of hair; but, after all, king Death did not get much of him--the poor man had been nearly torn to pieces by a cannon shot."

"I saw you in advance of the whole line of skirmishers to-day, Harry, far beyond the zigzags."

"I was actually at the foot of the glacis."

"The glacis--was not that madness?" exclaimed Phil.

"The truth is, I did so neither through enthusiastic courage nor in a spirit of bravado. I was only anxious to see if from behind the sap-roller that protected me, my field-glass could enable me to detect among the gray-coated figures at the embrasures, the tall person and grim visage of old Tolstoff."

"By Jove, I thought as much!"

"But I looked in vain, and retired in crab-fashion, the bullets falling in a shower about me the while."

At that moment a knock rung on the door of the hut, and Sergeant Rhuddlan, who acted as our regimental postman, handed a small packet to me.

"The second battalion of the Scots Royals, the 48th, and the 72nd Highlanders have just come in, sir, from Balaclava, and have brought a mail with them," said he, in explanation; and while he was speaking, we heard the sound of drums and bagpipes, half drowned by cheers in the dark, as those in camp welcomed the new arrivals from home, and helped to get them tented and hutted.

"From Craigaderyn!" said I, on seeing the seal--Sir Madoc's antique oval--with the lion's head *erased*, as the heralds have it.

I had written instantly to the kind old man on my return to camp, and this proved to be the answer by the first mail. On opening the packet I found a letter, and a cigar-case beautifully worked in beads of the regimental colours, red, blue, and gold, with *my* initials on one side, and those of Winifred Lloyd on the *other*. Poor Phil Caradoc looked wistfully at the work her delicate hands had so evidently wrought--so wistfully that, but for the ungallantry of the proceeding, I should have presented the case to him. However, he had the simple gratification of holding it, while I read the letter of Sir Madoc, and did so aloud, as being of equal interest to us both. It was full of such warm expressions of joy for my safety and of regard for me personally, that I own they moved me; but some passages proved a little mysterious and perplexing.

"Need I repeat to you, my dear Harry, how the receipt of your letter caused every heart in the Court to rejoice--that of Winny especially? She is more impressionable than Dora, less volatile, and I have now learned *why* the poor girl refused Sir Watkins, and, as I understand, another."

"That is me," said Phil, parenthetically.

"But of that unexpected refusal of Sir Watkins Vaughan nothing can be said here."

"What on earth can he mean!" said I, looking up; "perhaps she has some lingering compunction about you, Phil."

"If so, she might have sent the cigar-case to me--or something else; just to square matters, as it were."

Remembering my old suspicions and fears--they were fears *then*--as I drove away from Craigaderyn for Chester, I read the letter in haste, and with dread of what it might contain or reveal; as I would not for worlds have inflicted a mortification, however slight, on my dear friend Caradoc, who gnawed the ends of his moustache at the following:

"Young Sir Watkins had been most attentive to Winny during the past season in town--that gay London season, which, notwithstanding the war, was quite as brilliant as usual; when every one had come back from the Scotch moors, from Ben Nevis, Mont Blanc, the Matterhorn, and everywhere else that the roving Englishman is wont to frequent, to kill game, or time, or himself, as it sometimes happens. But Winny won't listen to him, and I think he is turning his attention to Dora, though whether or not the girl--who has another adorer, in the shape of a long-legged Plunger with parted hair and a lisp--only laughs at him, I can't make out.

"Tell Caradoc, Gwynne, and other true-hearted Cymri in the Welsh Fusileers, that when in London I attended more than one meeting, inaugurating a movement to secure for Wales judges and counsel who shall speak Welsh, and Welsh only. The meetings were failures, and the d--d Sassenachs only laughed at us; but from such injustice, *Gwared ni Argylywd daionus!*[5] say I.

"And so poor Hugh Price of yours is gone. A good-hearted fellow, who could do anything, from crossing the stiffest hunting country to making a champagne cup, singing a love song or mixing a salad--one of the old line of the Rhys of Geeler in Denbighshire. My God, how many other fine fellows lie in that hecatomb in the Valley of Inkermann! Sebastopol seems to be left quite open on one side, so that the Russians may pour in stores and fresh troops, and go and come at their pleasure? It is pleasant for tax-payers at home and the troops abroad to think that things are so arranged in Downing-street, by my Lords Aberdeen, Aberconway, and suchlike Whig incapables and incurables.

"I fear your regimental dinner would be a scanty one on St. David's-days." (On that day I had dined with Valerie, and forgot all about the yearly festival of the Fusileers!) "I thought of it and of you all--the more so, perhaps, that I had just seen the old colours of the Royal Welsh in St. Peter's Church at Carmarthen."

The old baronet, after a few Welsh words, of which I could make nothing, rambled away into such subjects as mangold-wurzels and subsoil, scab-and-foot rot, and food for pheasants, all of which I skipped; ditto about the close of the hunting-season, which he and Sir Watkins--Winny's admirer--had shared together; and how the rain had deluged Salop, throwing the scent breast-high, so that in many a run the fox and the hounds had it all to themselves, and that following them was as bad as going all round the Wrekin to Shrewsbury, mere brooks having become more than saddle-girth deep; moreover, the mischievous, execrable, and pestilent wire fences were playing the devil with the noble old sport of fox-hunting; then, with a few more expressions of regard, and a hint about Coutts & Co., if I wanted cash, his characteristic letter closed, and just when folding it, I detected Master Phil Caradoc surreptitiously placing Winny's cigar case very near his bushy moustache--about to kiss it, in fact. He grew very red, and looked a little provoked.

"So that is all Sir Madoc's news?" said he.

"All--a dear old fellow."

"To-morrow is Sunday, when we shall have the chaplain at the drum-head, and be confessing that we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and left undone those things which we ought to have done, while the whistling dicks are bursting and the shot booming, as the Ruskies seek to have a quiet shy at our hollow square, and the Naval Brigade, with their long 'Lancasters,' are making, as usual, the devil's own row against the Redan--so till then, adieu!" he added, adopting a bantering tone, as men will at times, when ashamed of having exhibited any emotion or weakness.

Not long after this, with my company, I had to escort to Balaclava, and to guard for some days, till embarked, some Russian prisoners, who had been taken by the Turks in an affair between Kamara and the Tchernaya, and who were afterwards transmitted to Lewes in Sussex;

and I had a little opportunity afforded me for studying their character and composition; and brave though these men undoubtedly were, I felt something of pity and contempt for them; nor was I mistaken, though Prince Dolgorouki maintains, in *La Vérité sur la Russie*, that a Muscovite alone can write on a Russian subject. A British soldier never forgets that he is a citizen and a free-born man; but to the Russian these terms are as untranslatable as that of *slave* into the Celtic.

In the empire, when fresh levies are wanted, the chief of each village makes a selection; the wretched serfs have then one side of the head shaved, to prevent desertion, and, farther still, are manacled and marched like felons to the headquarters of their regiment. There they are stripped, bathed--rather a necessary ceremony--and deprived of all they may possess, save the brass crosses and medals which are chained round their neck--the holy amulet of the Russian soldier, and spared to him as the only consolation of his miserable existence. He is docile, submissive, and gallant, but supple, subservient, and cunning, though his gallantry and courage are the result of dull insensibility, tinged with ferocity rather than moral force.

The recruit bemoans the loss of his beard, and carefully preserves it that it may be buried with him, as an offering to St. Nicholas, who would not admit him into heaven without it. Once enrolled--we cannot say *enlisted*--he makes a solemn vow never to desert the colours of his regiment, each of which has its own *artel* or treasury, its own chaplain, sacred banners, and relics. The pay of these warriors averages about a halfpenny English per diem. Their food is of the most wretched description, and it is known that when the troops of Suwarrow served in the memorable campaign of Italy, they devoured with keen relish the soap and candles wherever they went; but many of the Russian battalions, and even the Cossack corps, have vocal companies that sing on the march, or at a halt, where they form themselves into a circle, in the centre of which stands the principal singer or leader. And thus I heard some of these poor fellows sing, when I halted them outside

Balaclava, at a place where, as I remember, there lay a solitary grave--that probably of a Frenchman, as it was marked by a cross, had a wreath of immortelles upon it, and was inscribed--alas for the superstitions of the poor human heart!--"the last tribute of love."

The snow and the rain had frittered it nearly away.

Among my prisoners were four officers--dandies who actually wore glazed boots, and were vain of their little hands and feet. I was more than usually attentive to them for the sake of Valerie, and as they certainly seemed--whatever the rank and file might be--thorough gentlemen. One knew Volhonski, and all seemed to know Valerie, and had probably danced--perhaps flirted--with her, for they had met at balls in St. Petersburg. All knew Tolstoff, and laughed at him; but none could tell me whether or not she and that northern bear were as yet "one flesh," or married in *facie ecclesia*.

CHAPTER LIV.--THE ASSAULT.

It is the morning of Saturday, the 8th September, 1855. For a year now the allied forces have been before Sebastopol; but the flag of St. Andrew is still flying in defiance upon its forts, and on this memorable morning the columns of attack are forming for the great assault. In the preceding June, amid the din of the ceaseless cannonade, poor Lord Raglan had passed away to a quieter world; and the picturesque Sardinians, with their green uniforms, billycock hats, and Bersaglieri plumes--each private a species of *Fra Diavolo*--had come to aid us in the reduction of this place, the Gibraltar of the Euxine.

It was a cheerless morning. From the sea, a biting wind swept over the land; clouds of white dust and dusky-brown smoke, that came from more than one blazing street and burning ship--among the latter was a two-decker, fired by the French rockets--rose high above the green spires and batteries of Sebastopol, and overhung it like a sombre pall, while shorn of its rays the sun resembled a huge red globe hung in mid-air above us. Gradually it seemed to fade out altogether, and then the whole sky became of a dull, leaden, and wintry gray. By this time our epaulettes had entirely disappeared, and our uniforms were hopeless rags; in some instances eked out by plain clothes, or whatever one could pick up; and the government contractors had such vague ideas of the dimensions of the human foot, that some of the boots issued to the soldiers would not have fitted a child of ten years old, and as they dared not throw away her Majesty's property, many men went bare-footed, with their boots dangling from their knapsack or waist-belt.

"In our present toggery we may meet the Russians," said Dyneley, our adjutant; "but I should scarcely like to figure in them before the girls at Winchester, in 'the Row,' or at the windows of 'the Rag.'"

In great masses, 30,000 Frenchmen were forming to assault the Malakoff, with 5,000 Sardinians as supports.

A long line of cavalry--Hussars with their braided dolmans, Lancers with their fluttering banneroles, Dragoons with glittering helmets, and all with loaded carbine on thigh, had been, from an early hour, thrown to the front, to form a cordon of sentinels, to prevent straggling; while a similar line was formed in our rear to keep back idlers from Balaclava; yet to obtain glimpses of the impending attack, groups of red-fezzed Turks, of picturesque-looking Eupatorians, and fur-capped Tartars, began to cluster on every green knoll at a safe distance, where, in their excitement, they jabbered and gesticulated in a manner most unusual for people so generally placid and stolid.

At half-past eleven A.M. the pipes of the Highland Brigade were heard, as it marched in from Kamara, and got into position in reserve of the right attack; and the fine appearance of the men of those mountains--"the backbone of Britain," as Pope Sylvester called them of old--elicited a hearty cheer from the Royal Welsh as they defiled past, with all their black plumes and striped tartans waving in the biting wind.

During all the preceding day, the batteries had thundered in salvoes against Sebastopol; and hence vast gaps were now visible in the streets and principal edifices, most of which were half hidden in lurid sheets of fire; and by the bridge of boats that lay between the north and south side, thousands of fugitives, laden with their goods and household lares, their children, sick, and aged, had been seen to pour so long as light remained.

Until the French began to move, the eyes of all in our division were turned on our famous point of attack--the Redan; and I may inform the non-military reader, that a *redan* in field fortification means simply an indented work with lines and faces; but this one resembled an unfinished square, with two sides meeting at the salient angle in front of our parallels, *i. e.*, the trenches by which we had dug our way under cover towards it.

With a strong reinforcement, Nicholaevitch Tolstoff, now, as before stated, a general, had entered the Redan by its rear or open face; and since his advent, it had been greatly strengthened. In the walls of the parapet he had constructed little chambers roofed with sacks of earth, and these secure places rendered the defenders quite safe from falling shells. In the embrasures were excavations wherein the gunners might repose close by their guns, but ever armed and accoutred; and by a series of trenches it communicated with the great clumsy edifice known as the Malakoff Tower.

By a road to the right, the Redan also communicated with the extensive quadrangle of buildings forming the Russian barracks, one hundred yards distant; and in its fear there lay the Artillery or Dockyard Creek. The flat caps, and in other instances the round glazed helmets, of the Russians and the points of their bayonets, bristling like a hedge of steel, could be seen above the lines of its defence and at the deeply-cut embrasures, where the black cannon of enormous calibre peered grimly down upon us.

Our arrangements were very simple. At noon the French were to attack the Malakoff; and as soon as they fell to work we were to assault the Redan, and I had volunteered for the scaling-ladder party, which consisted of 320 picked men of the Kentish Buffs and 97th or Ulster Regiment.

In the trenches of our left attack could be seen the black bearskins of our Brigade of Guards, and massed in dusky column on the hill before their camp, their red now changed to a very neutral tint indeed, were the slender battalions of the Third Division, motionless and still, save when the wind rustled the tattered silk of the colours, or the sword of an officer gleamed as he dressed the ranks. A cross cannonade was maintained, as usual, between our batteries and those of the enemy. The balls were skipping about in all directions, and several "roving Englishmen," adventurous tourists, "own correspondents," and unwary amateurs, who were there, had to scuttle for their lives to some place of shelter.

As I joined the ladder party, I could not help thinking of many a past episode in my life: of Estelle, who had been false; of Valerie, who was lost to me; and of the suspicion that Winifred Lloyd loved me. Ere another hour, I might be lying dead before the Redan, and there forget them all! Our covering party consisted of 200 of the Buffs and Rifles under Captain Lewes; but alas for the weakness of our force, as compared with thousands of men to oppose. The strength of the Second

Division detailed against the Redan consisted only of 760 men of the 3rd, 41st, and 62nd regiments, with a working party of 100 from the Royal Welsh. The rest of Colonel Windham's brigade was in reserve.

Brigadier Shirley, who was to command the whole, had been ill on board-ship; but the moment the gallant fellow heard that an assault was resolved on, he hastened to join us. Prior, however, to his coming, Colonel Windham and Colonel Unett of the 29th were deciding which of them should take precedence in leading the attack. They coolly tossed up a shilling, and the latter won. Thus he had the alternative of saying whether he would go first, or follow Windham; but a glow spread over his face, and he exclaimed,

"I have made my choice, and I shall be the *first* man inside the Redan!"

However, it was doomed to be otherwise, as soon afterwards a ball from the abattis severely wounded and disabled him. When we had seen that our men had carefully loaded and capped and cast loose their cartridges, all became very still, and there was certainly more of thought than conversation among us. Many of the men in some regiments were little better than raw recruits, and were scarcely masters of their musketry drill. Disease in camp and death in action had fast thinned our ranks of the carefully-trained and well-disciplined soldiers who landed in Bulgaria; and when these--the pest and bullet--failed, the treachery of contractors, and the general mismanagement of the red-tapists, did the rest. Accustomed as we had been to the daily incidents of this protracted siege, there was a great hush over all our ranks; the hush of anticipation, and perhaps of grave reflection, came to the lightest-hearted and most heedless there.

"What is the signal for us to advance?" I inquired.

"Four rockets," replied Dyneley, our adjutant, who was on foot, with his sword drawn, and a revolver in his belt.

"There go the French to attack the tower!" cried Gwynne; and then a hum of admiration stole along our lines as we saw them, at precisely five minutes to twelve o'clock, "like a swarm of bees," issue from their trenches, the Linesmen in kepis and long blue coats, the Zouaves in turbans and baggy red breeches, under a terrible shower of cannon and musketry, fiery in their valour, quick, ardent, and eager! They swept over the little space of open ground that lay between the head of their sap, and, irresistible in their number, poured on a sea of armed men, a living tide, a human surge, section after section, and regiment after regiment, to the assault.

"O'er ditch and stream, o'er crest and wall,
They jump and swarm, they rise and fall;
With *vives* and *cris*, with cheeors and cries.
Like thunderings in autumnal skies;
Till every foot of ground is mud,
With tears and brains and bones and blood.
Yet, faith, it was a grim delight
To see the little devils fight!"

With wonderful speed and force, their thousands seemed to drift through the gaping embrasures of the tower, which appeared to swallow them up--all save the dead and dying, who covered the slope of the glacis; and in *two* minutes more the tricolor of France was waving on the summit of the Korniloff bastion!

But the work of the brave French did not end there. From twelve till seven at night, they had to meet and repulse innumerable attempts of the Russians to regain what they had lost--the great tower, which was really the key of the city; till, in weariness and despair, the latter withdrew, leaving the slopes covered with corpses that could only be reckoned by thousands. The moment the French standard fluttered out above the blue smoke and grimy dust of the tower, a vibration seemed to

pass along all our ranks. Every face lit up; every eye kindled; every man instinctively grasped more tightly the barrel of his musket, or the blade of his sword, or set his cap more firmly on his head, for the final rush.

"The tricolor is on the Malakoff! By heavens, the French are in! hurrah!" cried several officers.

"Hurrah!" responded the stormers of the Light and Second Divisions.

"There go the rockets!" cried Phil Caradoc, pointing with his sword to where the tiny jets of sparkles were seen to curve in the wind against the dull leaden sky, their explosion unheard amid the roar of musketry and of human voices in and beyond the Malakoff.

"Ladders, to the front! eight men per ladder!" said Welsford, of the 97th.

"It is our turn now, lads; forward, forward!" added some one else--Raymond Mostyn, of the Rifles, I think.

"There is a five-pound note offered to the first man inside the Redan!" exclaimed little Owen Tudor, a drummer of ours, as he slung his drum and went scouring to the front: but a bullet killed the poor boy instantly, and Welsford had his head literally blown off by a cannon ball.

In their dark green uniforms, which were patched with many a rag, a hundred men of the Rifle Brigade who carried the scaling ladders preceded us; and the moment they and we began to issue, which we did at a furious run, with bayonets fixed and rifles at the short trail, from the head of the trenches, the cannon of the Redan opened a withering fire upon us. The round shot tore up the earth beneath our feet, or swept men away by entire sections, strewing limbs and other fragments of humanity everywhere; the exploding shells also dealt death and mutilation; the grape and cannister swept past in whistling showers; and wicked little shrapnels were flying through the air like black spots

against the sky; while, with a hearty and genuine English "hurrah!" that deepened into a species of fierce roar, we swept towards the ditch which so few of us might live to recross.

Thick fall our dead on every hand, and the hoarse boom of the cannon is sounding deep amid the roar of the concentrated musketry. Crawling and limping back to the trenches for succour and shelter, the groaning or shrieking wounded are already pouring in hundreds to the rear, reeking with blood; and, within a minute, the whole slope of the Redan is covered with our redcoats--the dead or the helpless--thick as the leaves lie "when forests are rended!"

CHAPTER LV.--INSIDE THE REDAN.

One enormous cannon-shot that struck the earth and stones threw up a cloud of dust which totally blinded the brave brigadier who led us; he was thus compelled to grope his way to the rear, while his place was taken by Lieutenant-colonel W. H. Bunbury of ours--a tried soldier, who had served in the Kohat-Pass expedition five years before this, and been Napier's aide-de-camp during the wars of India. The Honourable Colonel Handcock, who led three hundred men of the 97th and of the Perthshire Volunteers, fell mortally by a ball in the head. Colonel Lysons of ours (who served in the Canadian affair of St. Denis), though wounded in the thigh and unable to stand, remained on the ground, and with brandished sword cheered on the stormers.

The actual portion of the latter followed those who bore the scaling ladders, twenty of which were apportioned to the Buffs; and no time was to be lost now, as the Russians from the Malakoff, inflamed by blood, defeat, and fury, were rushing down in hordes to aid in the defence of the Redan. In crossing the open ground between our trenches and the point of attack, some of the ladders were lost or left behind, in consequence of their bearers being shot down; yet we reached the edge of the ditch and planted several without much difficulty, till the Russians, after flocking to the traverses which enfiladed them, opened a murderous fusillade upon those who were crossing or getting into the embrasures, when we planted them on the other side; and then so many officers and men perished, that Windham and three of the former were the only leaders of parties who got in untouched.

The scene in the ditch, where the dead and the dying, the bleeding, the panting, and exhausted lay over each other three or four deep, was beyond description; and at a place called the Picket House was one solitary English lady, watching this terrible assault, breathless and pale, putting up prayers with her white lips; and her emotions at such a time may be imagined when I mention that she was the wife of an officer engaged in the assault, Colonel H----, whose body was soon after borne past her on a stretcher.

When my ladder was planted firmly, I went up with the stormers, men of all regiments mixed pell-mell, Buffs and Royal Welsh, 90th and 97th. A gun, depressed and loaded with grape, belched a volume of flame and iron past me as I sprang, sword in hand, into the embrasure, firing my revolver almost at random; and the stormers, their faces flushed with ardour and fierce excitement, cheering, stabbing with the bayonet, smashing with the butt-end, or firing wildly, swarmed in at every aperture, and bore the Russians back; but I, being suddenly wedged among a number of killed and wounded men, between the cannon and the side of the embrasure could neither advance nor retire, till dragged out by the strong hand of poor Charley Gwynne, who fell a minute after,

shot dead; and for some seconds, while in that most exposed and terrible position, I saw a dreadful scene of slaughter before me; for there were dense gray masses of the Russian infantry, their usually stolid visages inflamed by hate, ferocity, by fiery *vodka*, and religious rancour, the front ranks kneeling as if to receive cavalry, and all the rear ranks, which were three or four deep, firing over each other's heads, exactly as we are told the Scottish brigades of the "Lion of the North" did at Leipzig, to the annihilation of those of Count Tilly.

We were fairly IN this terrible Redan; but the weakness of our force was soon painfully apparent, and in short, when the enemy made a united rush at us, they drove us all into an angle of the work, and ultimately over the parapet to the outer slope, where men of the Light and Second Divisions were packed in a dense mass and firing into it, which they continued to do even till their ammunition became expended, when fresh supplies from the pouches of those in rear were handed to those in front. An hour and a half of this disastrous strife elapsed, "the Russians having cleared the Redan," to quote the trite description of Russell, "but not yet being in possession of its parapets, when they made a second charge with bayonets under a heavy fire of musketry, and throwing great quantities of large stones, grape and small round shot, drove those in front back upon the men in rear, who were thrown into the ditch. The gabions in the parapet now gave way, and rolled down with those who were upon them; and the men in rear, thinking all was lost, retired into the fifth parallel."

Many men were buried alive in the ditch by the falling earth; Dora's admirer, poor little Torn Clavell of the 19th, among others, perished thus horribly. Just as we reached our shelter, there to breathe, re-form, and await supports, I saw poor Phil Caradoc reel wildly and fall, somewhat in a heap, at the foot of the gabions. In a moment I was by his side. His sword-arm had been upraised as he was endeavouring to rally the men,

and a ball had passed--as it eventually proved--through his lungs; though a surgeon, who was seated close by with all his apparatus and instruments, assured him that it was not so.

"I know better--something tells me that it is all over with me--and that I am bleeding internally," said he, with difficulty. "Hardinge, old fellow--lift me up--gently, so--so--thank you."

I passed an arm under him, and raised his head, removing at the same time his heavy Fusileer cap. There was a gurgle in his throat, and the foam of agony came on his handsome brown moustache.

"I am going fast," said he, grasping my hand; "God bless you, Harry--see me buried alone."

"If I escape--but there is yet hope for you, Phil."

But he shook his head and said, while his eye kindled,

"If I was not exactly the first man *in*, I was not long behind Windham. I risked my life freely," he added, in a voice so low that I heard him with difficulty amid the din of the desultory fire, and the mingled roar of other sounds in and around the Malakoff; "yet I should like to have gone home and seen my dear old mother once again, in green Llangollen--and *her*--she, you know who I mean, Harry. But God has willed it all otherwise, and I suppose it is for the best. . . . Turn me on my side . . . dear fellow--so. . . . I am easier now."

As I did what he desired, his warm blood poured upon my hand, through the orifice in his poor, faded, and patched regimentals, never so much as then like "the old red coat that tells of England's glory."

"Have the Third or Fourth Division come yet? Where are the Scots Royals?" he asked, eagerly, and then, without waiting for a reply, added, very faintly, "If spared to see her--Winny Lloyd--tell her that my last

thoughts were of her--ay, as much as of my poor mother . . . and . . . that though she will get a better fellow than I----"

"That is impossible, Phil!"

"She can never get one who . . . . who loves her more. The time is near now when I shall be but a memory to her and you . . . . and to all our comrades of the old 23rd."

His lips quivered and his eyes closed, as he said, with something of his old pleasant smile,

"I am going to heaven, I hope, Harry--if I have not done much good in the world, I have not done much harm; and in heaven I'll meet with more red coats, I believe, than black ones . . . . and tell her . . . tell Winny----"

What I was to tell her I never learned; his voice died away, and he never spoke again; for just as the contest became fiercer between the French and the masses of Russians--temporarily released from the Redan or drawn from the city--his head fell over on one side, and he expired. I closed his eyes, for there was yet time to do so. Poor Phil Caradoc! I looked sadly for a minute on the pale and stiffening face of my old friend and jovial chum, and saw how fast the expression of bodily pain passed away from the whitening forehead. I could scarcely assure myself that he was indeed gone, and so suddenly; that his once merry eyes and laughing lips would open never again. Turning away, I prepared once more for the assault, and then, for the first time, I perceived Lieutenants Dyneley and Somerville of ours lying near him; the former mortally wounded and in great pain, the latter quite dead.

My soul was full of a keen longing for vengeance, to grapple with the foe once more, foot to foot and face to face. The blood was fairly up in all our hearts; for the Russians had now relined their own breastworks, where a tall officer in a gray capote made himself very conspicuous by

his example and exertions. He was at last daring enough to step over the rampart and tear down a wooden gabion, to make a kind of extempore embrasure through which an additional field-piece might be run.

"As you are so fond of pot-firing," said Colonel Windham to the soldiers, with some irritation at the temporary repulse, "why the deuce don't you shoot that Russian?"

On looking through my field-glass, to my astonishment I discovered that he was Tolstoff. Sergeant Rhuddlan of ours now levelled his rifle over the bank of earth which protected the parallel, took a steady aim, and fired. Tolstoff threw up his arms wildly, and his sword glittered as it fell from his hand. He then wheeled round, and fell heavily backward into the ditch--which was twenty feet broad and ten feet deep--dead; at least, I never saw or heard of him again.

Just as a glow of fierce exultation, pardonable enough, perhaps, at such a time (and remembering all the circumstances under which this distinguished Muscovite and I had last met and parted), thrilled through me, I experienced a terrible shock--a shock that made me reel and shudder, with a sensation as if a hot iron had pierced my left arm above the elbow. It hung powerless by my side, and then I felt my own blood trickling heavily over the points of my fingers!

"Wounded! My God, hit at last!" was my first thought; and I lost much blood before I could get any one, in that vile burly-burly, to tie my handkerchief as a temporary bandage round the limb to stanch the flow.

I was useless now, and worse than useless, as I was suffering greatly, but I could not leave the parallel for the hospital huts, and remained there nearly to dusk fell. Before that, I had seen Caradoc interred between the gabions; and there he lay in his hastily-scooped grave, uncoffined and unknelled, his heart's dearest longings unfulfilled, his brightest hopes and keenest aspirations crushed out like his young life; and the evanescent picture, the poor photo of the girl he had loved in

vain, buried with him; and when poor Phil was being covered up, I remembered his anecdote about the dead officer, and the letter that was replaced in his breast.

Well, my turn for such uncouth obsequies might come soon enough now. In the affair of the Redan, if I mistake not, 146 officers and men of ours, the Welsh Fusileers, were killed and wounded; and every other regiment suffered in the same proportion.

The attack was to be renewed at five in the morning by the Guards and Highlanders, under Lord Clyde of gallant memory, then Sir Colin Campbell; but on their approaching, it was found that the Russians had spiked their guns, and bolted by the bridge of boats, leaving Sebastopol one sheet of living fire. Fort after fort was blown into the air, each with a shock as if the solid earth were being split asunder. The sky was filled with live shells, which burst there like thousands of scarlet rockets, and thus showers of iron fell in every direction. Columns of dark smoke, that seemed to prop heaven itself, rose above the city, while its defenders in thousands, without beat of drum or sound of trumpet, poured away by the bridge of boats. When the last fugitive had passed, the chains were cut, and then the mighty pontoon, a quarter of a mile in length, swung heavily over to the north side, when we were in full possession of Sebastopol!

CHAPTER LVI.--A SUNDAY MORNING IN THE CRIMEA.

I must have dropped asleep of sheer weariness and loss of blood, when tottering to the rear; for on waking I found the moon shining, and myself lying not far from the fifth parallel, which was now occupied, like the rest of the trenches, by the kilted Highlanders, whose bare legs, and the word *Egypt* on their appointments, formed a double source of wonder to our Moslem allies, especially to the contingent that came from the Land of Bondage. These sturdy fellows were chatting, laughing, and smoking, or quietly sleeping and waiting for their turn of service against the Redan, in the dark hours of the morning.

I had lain long in a kind of dreamy agony. Like many who were in the Redan and in the ditch around it, I had murmured "water, water," often and vainly. The loss of Estelle, or of Valerie, for times there were when my mind wandered to the former *now*, the love of dear friends, the death of comrades, honour, glory, danger from pillaging Russians or Tartars, all emotions, in fact, were merged or swallowed up in the terrible agony I endured in my shattered arm, and the still more consuming craving for something wherewith to moisten my cracked lips and parched throat. Poor Phil Caradoc had perhaps endured this before me, while his heart and soul were full of Winifred Lloyd; but Phil, God rest him! was at peace now, and slept as sound in his uncouth grave as if laid under marble in Westminster Abbey.

In my uneasy slumber I had been conscious of this sensation of thirst, and had visions of champagne goblets, foaming and iced; of humble bitter beer and murmuring water; of gurgling brooks that flowed over brown pebbles, and under long-bladed grass and burdocks in leafy dingles; of Llyn Tegid, deep and blue; of the marble fountain, with the lilies and golden fish, at Craigaderyn. Then with this idea the voice of Winifred Lloyd came pleasantly to my ear; her white fingers played with the sparkling water, she raised some to my lips, but the cup fell to pieces, and starting, I awoke to find a tall Highlander, of the Black Watch,

bending over me, and on my imploring him to get me some water, he placed his wooden canteen to my lips, and I drank of the contents, weak rum-grog, greedily and thankfully.

It seemed strange to me that I should dream of Winifred, there and then; but no doubt the last words of Caradoc had led me to think of her. It is only when waking after long weariness of the body, and over-tension of the nerves, the result of such keen excitement as we had undergone since yesterday morning, that the full extremity of exhaustion and fatigue can be felt, as I felt them then. Add to these, that my shattered arm had bled profusely, and was still undressed.

Staggering up, I looked around me. The moon was shining, and flakes of her silver light streamed through the now silent embrasures of the Redan, silent save for the groans of the dying within it. There and in the ditch the dead lay thick as sheaves in a harvest-field--thick as the Greeks, at Troy, lay under the arrows of Apollo. How many a man was lying there, mutilated almost out of the semblance of humanity, whose thoughts, when the death shot struck him down, or the sharp bayonet pierced him, had flashed *home*, quicker than the electric telegraph, yea, quicker than light, to his parents' hearth, to his lonely wife, to the little cots where their children lay abed--little ones, the memory of whose waxen faces and pink hands then filled his heart with tears; how many a resolution for prayer and repentance if spared by God; how many a pious invocation; how many a fierce resolution to meet the worst, and die like a man and a soldier, had gone up from that hell upon earth, the Redan--the fatal Redan, which we should never have attacked, but should have aided the French in the capture of the Malakoff, after which it must inevitably have fallen soon, if not at once.

Many of our officers were afterwards found therein, each with a hand clutching a dead Russian's throat, or coat, or belt, their fingers stiffened in death--man grasping man in a fierce and last embrace. Among others, that stately and handsome fellow, Raymond Mostyn, of the Rifles, and an officer of the Vladimir regiment were thus locked together, the same

grape-shot having killed them both. Some of our slain soldiers were yet actually clinging to the parapet and slope of the glacis, as if still alive, thus showing the reluctance with which they had retired--the desperation with which they died. In every imaginable position of agony, of distortion, and bloody mutilation they lay, heads crushed and faces battered, eyes starting from their sockets, and swollen tongues protruding; and on that terrible scene the pale moon, "sweet regent of the sky," the innocent queen of night, as another poet calls her, looked softly down in her glory, as the same moon in England, far away, was looking on the stubble-fields whence the golden grain had been gathered, on peaceful homesteads, old church steeples and quiet cottage roofs, on the ruddy furnaces of the Black country, on peace and plenty, and where war was unknown, save by name.

She glinted on broken and abandoned weapons; she silvered the upturned faces of the dead--kissing them, as it were, for many a loving one who should see them no more; and gemming as if with diamonds the dewy grass and the autumnal wild-flowers; and there, too, amid that horrible débris, were the little birds--the goldfinch, the tit, and the sparrow--hopping and twittering about, too terrified to seek their nests, scared as they were by the uproar of the day that was past.

I felt sick at heart and crushed in spirit now. In the immediate foreground the moonlight glinted on the tossing dark plumes, the picturesque costume, and bright bayonets of the Highlanders in the trenches. In the distance was the town; its ports, arsenals, barracks, theatres, palaces, churches, and streets sheeted with roaring flames, that lighted up all the roadstead, where, one after the other, the Russian ships were disappearing beneath the waves, in that lurid glare which tipped with a fiery gleam the white walls and spiked cannon of the now abandoned forts.

I began to creep back towards the camp, in search of surgical aid, and on the way came to a place where, with their uniforms off, their shirt-sleeves rolled up, their boxes of instruments open, lint and

bandages ready, three officers of the medical staff were busy upon a group of wounded men, who sat or lay near, waiting their turn, some impatiently, some with passive endurance, but all, more or less, in pain, as their moans and sighs declared.

"Don't bother about that Zouave, Gage," I heard one Æsculapius say, as I came near, "I have overhauled him already!"

"Is his wound mortal?"

"Yes--brain lacerated. By Jove! here is an officer of the 23rd!"

"Well, he must wait a little."

So I sighed, and seated myself on a stone, and clenched my teeth to control the agony I was enduring. The men who lay about us, with pale, woe-begone visages and lack-lustre eyes, belonged chiefly to the Light Division, but among them I saw, to my surprise, a Russian hussar lying dead, with the blood dry and crusted on his pale blue and yellow-braided dolman. How he came to be *there*, I had not the curiosity to inquire. A mere bundle of gory rags, he seemed; for a cannon-shot had doubled him up, and now his Tartar horse stood over him, eyeing him wildly, and sniffing as if in wonder about his bearded face and fallen jaw.

The Zouave referred to was a noisy and loquacious fellow, notwithstanding his perilous predicament. He had strayed hither somehow from the Malakoff, and was mortally wounded, as the surgeon said, and dying. A tiny plaster image of the blessed Virgin lay before him; he was praying intently at times, but being fatuous, he wildly and oddly mingled with his orisons the name of a certain Mademoiselle Auréle, a *fleuriste*, with whom he imagined himself in the second gallery of the Théâtre Français, or supping at the Barrière de l'Etoile; anon he imagined they were on the Boulevardes, or in a café chantant; and then as his mind--or what remained of it--seemed to revert to the events of the day, he drew his "cabbage-cutter," as the French call their sword-bayonet, and brandished it, crying,

"Cut and hew, strike, mes camarades--frappez vite et frappez forte! Vive la France! Vive l'Empéreur!"

This was the last effort; a gush of fresh blood poured into his eyes, and the poor Zouave was soon cold and stiff. In a kind of stupor I sat there and watched by moon and lantern light the hasty operations: bullets probed for and snipped out by forceps, while the patients writhed and yelled; legs and arms dressed or cut off like branches lopped from a tree, and chucked into a heap for interment. I shuddered with apprehensive foreboding of what might ensue when my own turn came, and heard, as in a dream, the three surgeons talking with the most placid coolness about their little bits of practice.

"Jones, please," said one, a very young staff medico, "will you kindly take off this fellow's leg for me? I have ripped up his trousers and applied the tourniquet--he is quite ready."

"But must it come off?" asked Jones, who was patching up a bullet-hole with lint.

"Yes; gun-shot fracture of the knee-joint--patella totally gone."

"Why don't you do it yourself, my good fellow?" asked the third, who, with an ivory-handled saw between his teeth, was preparing to operate on the fore-arm of a 19th man, whose groans were terrible. "Gage, did you never amputate?"

"Never on the living subject."

"On a dead one then, surely?"

"Often--of course.'

"By Jove, you can't begin too soon--so why not now?"

"I am too nervous--do it for me."

"In one minute; but only this once, remember. Now give me your knife for the flap; and look to that officer of the Welsh Fusileers--his left arm is wounded."

So while Dr. Jones, whom the haggard eyes of the man, whose limb was doomed, watched with a terrible expression of anxiety, applied himself to the task of amputation, the younger doctor, a hand fresh from London, came to *me*.

After ripping up the sleeve of my uniform, and having a brief examination, which caused me such bitter agony that I could no longer stand, but lay on the grass, he said,

"Sorry to tell you, that yours is a compound fracture of the most serious kind."

"Is it reducible?" I asked, in a low voice.

"No; I regret to say that your arm must come off."

"My arm--must I lose it?" I asked, feeling keener anguish with the unwelcome announcement.

"Yes; and without delay," he replied, stooping towards his instrument case.

"I cannot spare it--I must have some other--excuse me, sir--some older advice," I exclaimed, passionately.

"As you please, sir," replied the staff-surgeon, coolly; "but we have no time to spare here, either for opposition or indecision."

The other two glanced at my arm, poked it, felt it as if it had been that of a lay figure in a studio, and supported the opinion of their brother of the knife. But the prospect of being mutilated, armless, for life, and all the pleasures of which such a fate must deprive me, seemed so terrible, that I resolved to seek for other advice at the hospital tents, and towards

them I took my way, enduring such pain of body and misery of mind that on reaching them I should have sunk, had brandy not been instantly given to me by an orderly. It was Sunday morning now, and the gray light of the September dawn was stealing over the waters of the Euxine, and up the valley of Inkermann. The fragrant odour of the wild thyme came pleasantly on the breeze; but now the rain was falling heavily, as it generally does after an action--firing puts down the wind, and so the rain comes; but to me then it was like the tears of heaven--"Nature's tear-drop," as Byron has it, bedewing the unburied dead. A red-faced and irritable-looking little Deputy Inspector of Hospitals, in a blue frogged surtout, received me, and from him I did not augur much. The patients were pouring in by hundreds, and the medical staff had certainly no sinecure there. After I had been stripped and put to bed, I remember this personage examining my wound and muttering,

"Bad case--very!"

"Am I in danger, doctor?" I inquired.

"Yes, of course, if it should gangrene," said he, sharply.

"I don't care much for life, but I should not like to lose my arm. Do you think that--that--"

"What?" he asked, opening his box of tools with *sangfroid*.

"I shall die of this?"

"Of a smashed bone?"

"Yes."

"Well, my dear fellow, not yet, I hope."

"Yet?" said I, doubtfully.

"Well, immediately, I mean. There is already much sign of inflammation, and consequent chance of fever. The os humerus is, as I say, smashed to pieces, and the internal and external condyles of the elbow are most seriously injured. Corporal Mulligan, a basin and sponge, and desire Dr.----" (I did not catch the name) "to step this way."

The corporal, a black-bearded Connaught Ranger, who had lost an eye at Alma, brought what the surgeon required; he then placed a handkerchief to my nostrils; there was a bubbling sensation in the brain, but momentary, as the handkerchief contained chloroform; then something peaceful, soporific, and soothing stole over me, and for a time I became oblivious of all around me.

CHAPTER LVII.--IN THE MONASTERY OF ST. GEORGE.

To be brief, when the effect of the chloroform passed away, I became sensible of a strange sensation of numbness about my left shoulder. Instinctively and shudderingly I turned my eyes towards it, and found that my left arm was--gone! Gone, and near me stood Corporal Mulligan coolly wiping the fat little surgeon's instruments for the next case. Some wine, Crimskoi, and water were given me, and then I closed my eyes and strove, but in vain, to sleep and to think calmly over my misfortune, which, for a time, induced keen misanthropy indeed.

"Armless!" thought I; "I was pretty tired of life before this, and am utterly useless now. Would that the shot had struck me in a more vital place, and finished me--polished me off at once! That old staff sawbones should have left me to my fate; should have let mortification, gangrene,

and all the rest of it, do their worst, and I might have gone quietly to sleep where so many lay, under the crocuses and caper-bushes at Sebastopol."

"After life's fitful fever" men sleep well; and so, I hoped, should I.

Such reflections were, I own, ungrateful and bitter; but suffering, disappointment, and more than all, the great loss of blood I had suffered, had sorely weakened me; and yet, on looking about me, and seeing the calamities of others, I felt that the simple loss of an arm was indeed but a minor affair.

Close by me, on the hospital pallets, I saw men expiring fast, and borne forth to the dead-pits only to make room for others; I saw the poor human frame, so delicate, so wondrous, and so divine in its organisation, cut, stabbed, bruised, crushed, and battered, in every imaginable way, and yet with life clinging to it, when life had become worthless. From wounds, and operations upon wounds, there was blood--blood everywhere; on the pallets, the straw, the earthen floor, the canvas of the tents, in buckets and basins, on sponges and towels, and on the hands of the attendants. Incessantly there were moans and cries of anguish, and, ever and anon, that terrible sound in the throat known as the death-rattle.

Sergeant Rhuddlan, Dicky Roll the drummer (the little keeper of the regimental goat), and many rank and file of the old 23rd--relics of the Redan--were there, and some lay near me. The sergeant was mortally wounded, and soon passed away; the poor boy was horribly mutilated, a grape shot having torn off his lower jaw, and he survived, to have perhaps a long life of misery and penury before him; and will it be believed that, through red-tapery and wretched Whig parsimony, two hours before the attack on the Redan, the senior surgeon in the Quarries was "run out" of lint, plasters, bandages, and every other appliance for stanching blood?

I heard some of our wounded, in their triumph at the general success of the past day, attempting feebly and in quavering tones to sing "Cheer, boys, cheer;" while others, in the bitterness of their hearts, or amid the pain they endured, were occasionally consigning the eyes, limbs, and souls of the Ruskies to a very warm place indeed. Estelle's ring, which I had still worn, was gone with my unfortunate arm, and was now the prize, no doubt, of some hospital orderly. Next day, as the wounded were pouring in as fast as the dripping stretchers and ambulances could bring them, I was sent to the monastery of St. George, which had been turned into a convalescent hospital. The removal occasioned fever, and I lay long there hovering between life and death; and I remember how, as portions of a seeming phantasmagoria, the faces of the one-eyed corporal who attended me, and of the staff doctors Gage and Jones, became drearily familiar.

This monastery is situated about five miles from Balaclava and six from Sebastopol, near Cape Fiolente, and consists of two long ranges of buildings, two stories in height, with corridors off which the cells of the religious open. The chapel, full of hospital pallets, there faces the sea, and the view in that direction is both charming and picturesque. A zigzag pathway leads down from the rocks of red marble, past beautiful terraces clothed with vines and flowering shrubs, to a tiny bay, so sheltered that there the ocean barely ripples on the snow-white sand. But then the Greek monks, in their dark-brown gowns, their hair plaited in two tails down their back, their flowing beards, with rosary and crucifix and square black cap, had given place to convalescents of all corps, Guardsmen, Riflemen, Dragoons, and Linesmen, who cooked and smoked, laughed and sang, patched their clothes and pipe-clayed their belts, where whilom mass was said and vespers chanted. Others were hopping about on crutches, or, propped by sticks, dozed dreamily in the sunshine under shelter of the wall that faced the sparkling sea--the blessed high road to old England.

My room, a monk's cell, was whitewashed, and on the walls were hung several gaudy prints of Russian saints and Madonnas with oval shining metal halos round their faces; but most of these the soldiers, with an eye to improvement in art, had garnished with short pipes, moustaches, and eyeglasses; and with scissors and paste-pot Corporal Mulligan added other decorations from the pages of *Punch*.

Sebastopol had fallen; "Redan Windham," as we named him, then a Brigadier-general, was its governor; and by the Allies the place had been plundered of all the flames had spared (not much certainly), even to the cannon and church bells; and now peace was at hand. But many a day I sighed and tossed wearily on my hard bed, and more wearily still in the long nights of winter, when the bleak wind from the Euxine howled round the monastery and the rain lashed its walls, though Corporal Mulligan would wink his solitary eye, and seek to console me by saying,

"Your honour's in luck--there is no trinch-guard to-night, thank God!"

"Nor will there ever be again for me," I would reply.

The inspector of hospitals had informed me that, so soon as I could travel, sick leave would be granted me, that I might proceed to England; but I heard him with somewhat of indifference. Would Valerie join her brother Volhonski at Lewes in Sussex, was, however, my first thought; she would be free to do as she pleased now that the odious Tolstoff--But *was* he killed by Rhuddlan's bullet, or merely wounded, with the pleasure of having Valerie, perhaps, for a nurse? He certainly seemed to fall from the parapet as if he were shot dead. Why had I not gone back and inspected the slain in the ditch of the Redan, to see if he lay there? But I had other thoughts then, and so the opportunity--even could I have availed myself of it--was gone for ever. These calculations and surmises may seem very cool now; but to us then human life, and human suffering, too, were but of small account indeed.

One evening the fat little staff surgeon came to me with a cheerful expression on his usually cross face, and two packets in his hand.

"Well, doctor," said I, with a sickly smile, but unable to lift my head; "so I didn't die, after all."

"No; close shave though. Wish you joy, Captain Hardinge."

"Joy--armless!"

"Tut; I took the two legs off a rifleman the other day close to the tibia--ticklish operation, very, but beautifully done--and he'll toddle about in a bowl or on a board, and be as jolly as a sand-boy. Suppose *your* case had been his?"

"When may I leave this?"

"Can't say yet awhile. You don't want to rejoin, I presume?"

"Would to God that I could! but the day is past now When I do leave, it will be by ship or steamer."

"Unless you prefer a balloon. Well, it was of these I came to wish you joy," said he, placing before me, and opening it (for I was unable to do so, single-handed), the packet, which contained two medals; one for the Crimea, with its somewhat unbecoming ribbon, and two clasps for "Inkermann" and "Sebastopol."

"They are deuced like labels for wine-bottles," said the little doctor; "but a fine thing for you to have, and likely to catch the eyes of the girls in England."

"And this other medal with the pink ribbon?"

"Is the Sardinian one, given by Victor Emanuel; and more welcome than these perhaps, here is a letter from home--from England--for you; which, if you wish, I shall open" (every moment I was some way thus

reminded, even kindly, of my own helplessness), "and leave you to peruse. Good evening; I've got some prime cigars at your service, if you'll send Mulligan to me."

"Thanks, doctor."

And he rolled away out of the cell, to visit some other unfortunate fellow. The medals were, of course, a source of keen satisfaction to me; but as I toyed with them and inspected them again and again, they woke an old train of thought; for there was *one*, who had no longer perhaps an interest in me (if a woman ever ceases to have an interest in the man who has loved her), and who was another's now, in whose white hands I should once with honest pride have laid them. Viewed through that medium, they seemed almost valueless for a time; though there was to come a day when I was alike vain of them--ay, and of my empty sleeve--as became one who had been at the fall of Sebastopol, the queen of the Euxine.

"I fear I am a very discontented dog," thought I, while turning to the letter, which proved to be from kind old Sir Madoc Lloyd.

For months no letters had reached me, and for the same period I had been unable to write home; so in all that time I had heard nothing from my friends in England--who were dead, who alive; who marrying, or being given in marriage. Sir Madoc's missive was full of kind thoughts and expressions, of warm wishes and offers of service, that came to me as balm, especially at such a time and in such a place. Poor Phil Caradoc, and many others, were sorrowfully and enthusiastically referred to. Sir Watkins Vaughan was still hovering about the girls, "but with remarkable indecision apparently." The tall Plunger with the parted hair had proposed to Dora, and been declined; for no very visible reason, as he was a pleasant fellow with a handsome fortune.

On an evening early in September, the very day that a telegram announcing the fall of the Redan reached Craigaderyn, they were dressing for a county ball at Chester--a long-looked-for and most brilliant affair--when their sensibility, and fear that I might have been engaged, made them relinquish all ideas of pleasure, and countermand the carriage, to the intense chagrin of Sir Watkins and also of the Plunger, who had come from town expressly to attend it. Two day afterwards the lists were published, and the account of the slaughter of our troops, and the death of so many dear friends, had made Winifred positively ill, so change of air was recommended for her, at Ventnor or some such place.

A postscript to this, in Dora's rapid hand, and written evidently surreptitiously (perhaps while Sir Madoc had left his desk for a moment), added the somewhat significant intelligence, that "Winny had wept very much indeed on reading the account of that horrible Redan" (for Phil's death, thought I; if so, she mourns him too late!) "and now declares that she will die an old maid." (It *is* so!) "When that interesting period of a lady's life begins," continued Dora, "I know not; if unmarried, before thirty, I suppose; thus I am eleven years off that awful period yet, and have a decidedly vulgar prejudice against ever permitting myself to become one. Papa writes that Sir Watkins is undecided; but I may add that I, for one, know that he is *not*. Our best love to you, dear old Harry; but O, I can't fancy you *without an arm!*"

I was in a fair way of recovery now. The state I had been in so long, within the four walls of that quaint little chamber--a state that hovered between sense and insensibility, between sleeping and waking, time and eternity--had passed away; and, after all I had undergone, it had seemed as if

> "Thrice the double twilight rose and fell,
> About a land where nothing seemed the same,
> At morn or eve, as in the days gone by."

This had all passed and gone; but I was weak as a child, and worn to a shadow; and by neglect had become invested with hirsute appendages of the most ample proportions.

And so, without the then hackneyed excuse of "urgent private affairs," on an evening in summer, when the last rays of the sun shone redly on the marble bluffs and copper-coloured rocks of Cape Khersonese--the last point of that fatal peninsula towards the distant Bosphorus--and when the hills that look down on the lovely Pass of Baidar and the grave-studded valley of Inkermann were growing dim and blue, I found myself again at sea, on board the Kangaroo--a crowded transport (or rather a floating hospital)--speeding homeward, and bidding "a long good-night to the Crimea," to the land of glory and endurance.

Sebastopol seemed a dream now, but a memory of the past; and a dream, too, seemed my new life when I lay on my couch at the open port, and saw the crested waves flying past, as we sped through them under sail and steam.

Onward, onward, three hundred miles and more across the Euxine, to where the green range of the Balkan looks down upon its waters, and where the lighthouses of Anatolia on one side, and those of Roumelia on the other, guide to the long narrow channel of Stamboul; but ere the latter was reached--and on our starboard bow we saw the white waves curling over the blue Cyanean rocks, where Jason steered the Argonauts--we had to deposit many a poor fellow in the deep; for we had four hundred convalescent and helpless men on board, and only one surgeon, with scarcely any medicines or comforts for them, as John Bull, if he likes glory, likes to obtain it *cheap*. It was another case of Whig parsimony; so every other hour an emaciated corpse, rolled in a mud-stained greatcoat or well-worn blanket, without prayer or ceremony of any kind, was quietly dropped to leeward, the 32-pound shot at its heels making a dull plunge in that huge grave, the world of water, which leaves no mark behind.

I gladly left the Kangaroo at Pera, and, establishing myself at the Hôtel d'Angleterre, wrote from thence to Sir Madoc that I should take one of the London liners at Malta for England, and to write me to the United Service Club in London; that all my plans for the future were vague and quite undecided; but I was not without hope of getting some military employment at home. The Frankish hotel was crowded by wounded officers, also *en route* for England or France, all in sorely faded uniforms, on which the new Crimean medals glittered brightly. As all the world travels nowadays, I am not going to "talk guide-book," or break into ecstasies about the glories of Stamboul as viewed from a distance, and not when floundering mid-leg deep in the mud of its picturesque but rickety old thoroughfares; yet certainly the daily scene before the hotel windows was a singular one; for there were stalwart Turkish porters, veritable sons of Anak; stagey-looking dragomen, with brass pistols and enormous sabres in wooden sheaths; the Turk of the old school in turban, beard, slippers, and flowing garments; the Turk of the new, whom he despised, close shaven, with red fez and glazed boots; water-carriers; Osmanli infantry, solemn, brutal, and sensual, jostled by rollicking British tars and merry little French Zouaves; and for a background, the city of the Sultans, with all its casements, domes, and minarets glittering in the unclouded sunshine.

Two light cavalry subs, who had ridden in the death ride at Balaclava, and bore some cuts and slashes won therein, three others of the Light Division, and myself, agreed to travel homeward together; and pleasant days we had of it while skirting the mountainous isles of Greece, Byron's

"Isles of Greece, where burning Sappho loved and sung,"

and the tints of which seemed all brown or gray as we saw them through the vapour exhaled in summer from the Ægean Sea, with their little white villages shadowed by trees, their rocks like sea-walls, crowned

here and there by the columns, solitary and desolate, of some temple devoted to the gods of other days--"a country rich in historic reminiscence, but poor as Sahara in everything else."

And so on by Malta and old Gib; and exactly fourteen days after leaving the former we were cleaving the muddy bosom of Father Thames; and that night saw me in my old room at "the Rag," with the dull roar of mighty London in my ears; and after the rapid travelling I went to sleep, as addled as a fly could be in a drum.

CHAPTER LVIII.--HOME.

The comfort and splendour of the fashionable club-house, the tall mirrors, the gilded cornices, the soft carpets, the massive furniture, the powdered and liveried waiters gliding noiselessly about, all impressed me with a high sense of the intense snugness of England and of *home*, after my airy tent, with its embankment of earth for shelter, its smoky funnel of mess-tins, and the tiny trench cut round it to carry away the rainwater. Then I was discussing a breakfast which, after my Crimean experience, seemed a feast fit for Lucullus or Apicius, and listening with something of a smile to the rather loud conversation of some members of the club--wiry old Peninsulars, Waterloo and India men, who were certain "the service was going to the devil," and who drew somewhat disparaging comparisons between the way matters had been conducted by our generals and those of the war under Sir John Moore, Lynedoch, Hill, and "the Iron Duke;" and to me it seemed that the old fellows were right, and that after forty years of peace we had learned nothing new in the art of campaigning.

"Captain Hardinge, a gentleman for you, sir," said a waiter, presenting me with a card on a silver salver; and I had barely time to look at it ere Sir Madoc Lloyd, in top-boots and corded breeches as usual--his ruddy sunburnt face, his white hair and sparkling dark eyes, in his cheery breezy way the same as ever--entered, hat and whip in hand, and welcomed me home so warmly, that for a moment he drew the eyes of all in the room upon us. He had breakfasted two hours before--country time--and had a canter round the Park. He was in town on Parliamentary business, but was starting that afternoon for Craigaderyn. I should accompany him, of course, he added, in his hearty impetuous way. Then ere I could speak,--

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Poor Harry! till I have seen you I could not realise the idea of your being mutilated thus! No more hunting, no more shooting, no more fishing----"

"And no more dancing, the ladies would add," said I, smiling.

"And no more soldiering."

"Unless the Queen kindly permits me."

"Gad! I think you have had enough of it!"

"And--and Miss Lloyd and Dora?"

"Are both well and looking beautiful. There are not many girls in Wales like my girls. A seaside trip has brought back the bloom to Winny's cheeks; and as for Dora, she never loses it."

"And why did Miss Lloyd refuse an offer so eligible as that of Sir Watkins Vaughan?" I asked, after a pause.

"Can't for the life of me say," replied Sir Madoc, rubbing his chin, and turning to the decanter as a waiter set some dry sherry and biscuits before us.

"And why would not my little friend Dora have her Guardsman?"

"Can't say that, either. Perhaps she hated a 'swell' with an affected 'yaw-haw' impediment in his speech. Girls are so odd; but mine are dear girls for all that. I'll telegraph to Owen Gwyllim to have the carriage awaiting us at Chester; and we shall leave town before luncheon-time, if you have no other plans or engagements."

"I have neither; but--but, Sir Madoc, why so soon?" I asked, as certain passages in my later visits to Craigaderyn gave me a twinge of compunction. "Now that I think of it, I had an idea of taking a run down to Lewes in Sussex," said I.

"Lewes in Sussex--a dreary place, though in a first-rate coursing country. I've ridden there with the Brighton Hunt. What would take you there--before coming to us, at least?"

I coloured a little, and said,

"I have a friend there, among the Russian prisoners."

"By Jove, I think you've had enough of those fellows! Nonsense, Harry! We shall start without delay. Why waste time and money in London?" said Sir Madoc, who never liked his plans or wishes thwarted. "I have just to give a look at a brace of hunters at Tattersall's for Vaughan, and then I am with you. Down there, with our fine mountain breezes, our six-months' Welsh mutton, and seven-years' cliquot, we'll make a man of you again. I can't get you an arm, Harry; but, by Jove, it will go hard with us if we don't get you *two* belonging to some one else!"

I laughed at this idea; and so that evening saw me again far from London, and being swept as fast as the express could speed along the North-Western line towards Chester. I had quite a load of Russian trophies--such were then in great request--for Sir Madoc: sabres, muskets, and bayonets; glazed helmets of the 26th and Vladimir Regiments, a Zouave trumpet (with a banner attached), trod flat as a

pancake under the feet of the stormers as they poured into the Malakoff. There, too, were several rusty fragments of exploded shells, hand-grenades, and the last cannon-shot fired from the Mamelon Vert. For Winifred and Dora I had mother-of-pearl trunks of rare essences and perfumes; slender gilt vials of attar of roses; daintily-embroidered Turkish slippers, with turned-up toes, and bracelets of rose-pearls from Stamboul; Maltese jewelry, lace, veils, and as many pretty things as might have stocked a little shop in the Palais Royal or the Burlington Arcade.

The month was June, and my spirits became more and more buoyant, as in the open carriage we bowled along between the green mountains and the waving woodlands. Now the mowers, scythe in hand, were bending over the fragrant and bearded grass; the ploughmen were turning up the fallow soil; the squirrels were feasting in the blossom; the sheep were being driven to fold; and the crow was flying aloft, ere he sought his nest "in the rooky wood." It was a thorough English June evening: the air pure, the sunshine bright, and casting the shadows of the mountains far across the vales and fresh green meadows; the blackbird, thrush, and linnet sang on every tree, and a glow of happiness came over me; for all around the land looked so peaceful and so lovely, the gray smoke curling up from copse and dingle to mark where stood those "free fair homes of England," of which Mrs. Hemans sang so sweetly. Sir Madoc was discoursing on the cultivation of turnips and mangold wurzels, and on the mode of extirpating annual darnel-grass, coltsfoot, wild charlock, and other mysterious plants to me unknown; and I heard him as one in a dream, when we entered the long lime avenue.

How pleasant and picturesque looked the old house of the Tudor times at the end of that long leafy vista, with all its tinted oriels, its gilded vanes, and quaint stone finials! The woodbine, clematis, and ivy, hops and honeysuckle, all blended in luxuriant masses, aspiring to peep in at the upper windows. Craigaderyn, so redolent of fruit and flowers, of

fresh sweet air, of bright green leaves, of health and every bracing element--a hearty old house, where for generations the yule log had blazed, and the holly-branch and the mistletoe hung from the old oak roof, when the snow lay deep on Carneydd Llewellyn; where the boar's head was served up in state at Christmas, and at Michaelmas the goose; where so many brides had come home happy, and so many old folks, full of years and honour, gone to the vault of the old church among the hills; where lay all the line of Lloyd, save the luckless Sir Jorwerth Du; and where--. But here my somewhat discursive reverie was interrupted by the carriage being pulled sharply up at the perron before the entrance; and Owen Gwyllim, with his wrinkled face beaming, and his white head glistening in the sunshine, hastened down to open the door, arrange the steps, and shake the only hand the Russians had left me.

"Where are the young ladies?" asked Sir Madoc, impatiently glancing up at all the windows.

"Gone for a ride so far as Llandudno, with Miss Vaughan."

"Alone?"

"No, Sir Madoc, attended by Spurrit, the groom. They were gone before your telegram arrived, but are to be back before the first bell rings for dinner."

And now, after a little attention to my toilet, I was ushered into the drawing-room, every object in which was so familiar to me; and seating myself in the corner of an oriel, I gave way to a long train of deep thought; for I was left quite alone just then, as Sir Madoc found letters of importance awaiting him; and now, induced by the heat of evening, the stillness broken only by the tinkle of a sheep-bell and the hum of the bees at the open window, and by the length and rapidity of my journey, I actually dozed quietly off to sleep.

CHAPTER LIX.--"A DREAM WHICH WAS NOT ALL A DREAM."

Brief though my nap of "forty winks," I had within it a little dream, induced, no doubt, by my return to Wales, and by my surroundings, as it was of Winifred Lloyd, of past tenderness, and our old kind, flirting, cousinly intercourse, before *others* came between us; for Winifred had ever been as a sister to me, and dearer, perhaps. Now I thought she was hanging over me with much of sorrowful yearning in her soft face, and saying,

"Papa will not be here for an hour, perhaps, and for that hour I may have him all to myself, to watch. Poor Harry, so bruised, so battered, and so ill-used by those odious wretches!"

Her lips were parted; her breath came in short gasps.

Was it imagination or reality that a kiss or a tress of her hair touched my cheek so lightly? There was certainly a tear, too!

I started and awoke fully, to see her I dreamt of standing at the side of my chair, with one hand resting on it, while her soft eyes regarded me sadly, earnestly, and--there is no use evading it--lovingly. She wore her blue riding-habit, her skirt gathered in the hand which held her switch and buff gauntlets; and though her fine hair was beautifully dressed under her riding-hat, one tress *was* loose.

"Dear Winifred, my appearance does not shock you, I hope?" said I, clasping her hand tenderly, and perhaps with some of that energy peculiar to those who have but one.

"Thank Heaven, it is no worse!" she replied; "but, poor Harry Hardinge, an arm is a serious loss."

"Yet I might have come home, like *Le Diable Boiteux*, on two wooden stumps, as Dora once half predicted; but even as it is, my round-dancing is at an end now. By the way, I have a sorrowful message for you."

"Then I don't want to hear it. But from whom?"

"One who can return no more, but one who loved you well--Phil Caradoc."

A shade of irritation crossed her face for a moment; and then, with something of sorrow, she asked,

"And this message?--poor fellow, he fell at the Redan!"

"His last thoughts and words were of you, Winny--amid the anguish of a mortal wound," said I; and then I told her the brief story of his death, and of his interment in the fifth parallel. Her eyes were very full of tears; yet none fell, and somehow my little narrative failed to excite her quite so much as I expected.

"Did you not love him?"

"No," she replied, curtly, and gathering up the skirt of her habit more tightly, as if to leave me.

"Did you never do so?"

"Why those questions?--never, save as a friend--poor dear Mr. Caradoc! But let us change the subject," she added, her short lip quivering, and her half-drooped eyelids, too.

I was silent for a minute. I knew that, with a knowledge of the secret sentiment which Winifred treasured in her heart for myself, I was wrong in pursuing thus the unwelcome theme of Caradoc's rejection; moreover,

there are few men, if any, who would not have felt immensely flattered by the preferences of a girl so bright and beautiful, so soft and artless, as Miss Lloyd; and I found myself rapidly yielding to the whole charm of the situation.

"How odd that you should have returned on my birthday!" said she, playing with her jewelled switch, and permitting me to retain her ungloved hand in mine.

"Your birthday."

"Yes; I am just twenty-three."

"The number of the old corps, Winifred--the number, see it when he may, a soldier never forgets."

"But I hope you have bidden good-bye to it for ever."

"Too probably; and you cannot know, dear Winifred, how deep is the pleasure I feel in being here again, after all I have undergone--here in pleasant Craigaderyn; and more than all with you--hearing your familiar voice, and looking into your eyes."

"Why?" she asked, looking out on the sunlit chase.

"Can you ask me why, when you know that I love you, Winny, and have always loved you?"

"As a friend, of course," said she, trembling very much; "yes--but nothing more."

"I repeat that I love you tenderly and truly; have I not ever known your worth, your goodness--"

"Is this true, Harry Hardinge?" she asked, in a low voice, as my arm encircled her, and she looked coyly but tremblingly down.

"True as that God now hears us, my darling, whom I hope yet to call my wife!"

"O, say it again and again, dear Harry," said she, in a low voice like a whisper; "I did so doubt it once--did so doubt that you would ever, ever love me, who--who--loved you so," she continued, growing very pale. "It may be unwomanly in me to say this, Harry; but I am not ashamed to own it now."

"To a poor cripple, a warlike fragment from the Crimea," said I, with a smile, as caressingly I drew her head down on my shoulder; and while I toyed with her dark-brown hair, and gazed into her tender violet-coloured eyes, I thought, "How can a man love any but a woman with eyes and hair like Winny's?"

(At that moment I quite forgot how fatuously I had worshipped the thick golden tresses, the snow-white skin, and deep black eyes of Valerie. And it was for *me* that Winny had declined poor Phil, Sir Watkins, and some one else! O, I certainly owed her some reparation!)

"Bless you, darling, for your love," said I; "and I think our marriage will make good Sir Madoc so happy."

"You were ever his favourite, Harry."

"And you have actually loved me, Winny--"

"Ever since I was quite a little girl," she replied, in a low voice, while blushing deeply now.

"Ah, how blind I have been to the best interests of my heart! I always loved you, Winifred; but I never knew how much until now."

"I am sure, Harry, that I--that I shall--"

"What, love?"

"Make you a very, very good little wife, and be so kind to you after all you have undergone."

As she said this, with something between coyness and artlessness that proved very bewitching, I pressed her close to me, and there flashed upon my memory the dream of her, as I lay wounded and athirst near the ditch of the Redan, and also the singular coincidence of her pet goat leading to my discovery when lying half buried under the dead horse and cannon-wheel on the field of Inkermann.

"Papa and Dora," said she, in a low broken voice, "on that day when my great grief came--"

"Which grief?"

"The tidings of your being drowned," she continued, weeping at the recollection, "and when I let out the long-hidden secret of my heart, told me not to weep for you, Harry; that you were far happier elsewhere than on earth; that you were in Heaven; and poor papa said over and over again the Welsh prayer which ends Gogoniant ir Tad, ac ir Mab, ac ir Yspryd Glan."

"What on earth is all that!" I asked, smiling.

"Glory to the Father, the Son, and so on. Well, Harry, it was all in vain. I felt that in losing you I had lost the desire of my eyes, the love of my girl's heart--for I always did love you, and I care not to tell you so openly again," she added, as the tender arms went round me, and the loving lips sought mine. "My crave for news from the seat of war, and the terror with which I read those horrible lists, Harry, are known to myself only; yet why should I say so? many others, whose dearest were there, must have felt and endured as I did."

"All that is over now, pet Winny."

"And you are here with us again, Harry."

"And am yours--yours only!"

"But there is the bell to dress for dinner, Harry--and here come Dora and Gwenny Vaughan," she added, giving a hasty smooth to her hair, which somehow had been a little rumpled during the preceding conversation.

The two girls came in for a minute or so, in their hats and riding habits; the last-named was a very beautiful and distinguished-looking blonde, who could talk about hunting like an old whipper-in, and who received me with kind interest, while Dora did so with her usual gushing *empressement*.

The dinner, which came subsequently in due course, was rather a tame affair to Winny and me, when contrasted with our recent interview in the drawing-room; but the tender secret we now shared, and the perfect consciousness that no obstacle existed to our marriage, made us both so radiantly happy, that Sir Madoc's rubicund face wore a comical and somewhat perplexed expression, till we had our postprandial cigar together in the conservatory. So the whole affair came about in the fashion I have narrated; yet but a day or two before, I had been affecting a desire to visit the Russian prisoners at Lewes!

At table, of course, I required much assistance, and though I urged that Owen Gwyllim or one of the footmen should attend me, there was often a friendly contention among the three girls to cut my food for me, as if I were a great baby; and like something of that kind, I was flattered, petted, and made much of; and there was something so pleasant in being thus made a fuss with, and viewed as a "Crimean hero," that I scarcely regretted the bones I had left at the Redan.

"And so, poor Harry," said Dora, after hearing the story of that affair, "you had no brave beautiful Sister of Mercy to nurse you?"

"No; I had only Corporal Mulligan, a true and brave-hearted Irishman, who lost an eye at Alma; and a kind-hearted fellow he was!"

Winifred did not talk much; but in her place as hostess seemed brilliantly happy, and quite her old self. We had all a thousand things to talk of, to tell, and to ask each other; and the fate of that strange creature Guilfoyle, or rather the mystery which then attended it, excited almost the commiseration of Sir Madoc, who, once upon a time, was on the point of horse-whipping him. On certain points connected with my residence at Yalta, I was, of course, as mute as a fish.

Of Caradoc he spoke with genuine sorrow--the more so, as he was the last of an old, old Welsh line.

"Poor fellow!" said he; "Phil was a man of whom we may say that which was averred of Colonel Mountain, of the Cameronians, 'that though he were cut into twenty pieces, yet every piece would be a gentleman!'"

Over our cigars, I told Sir Madoc all that had passed between Winifred and me, and begged his approbation; and I have no words to express how enthusiastic the large-hearted and jolly old man became; how rejoiced, and how often he shook my hand, assuring me that he had ever loved me quite as much as if I had been a son of his own; that his Winny was one of the best girls in all Wales--true as steel, and one who, when she loved, did so for ever.

"I thank Heaven," he added, "you didn't get that slippery eel, my Lady Aberconway!"

"So do I, now, Sir Madoc," was my earnest response.

But I had not yet seen quite the last of Estelle Cressingham.

Of her Winifred must, at times, have been keenly and bitterly jealous, yet she was too gentle, too ladylike and enduring, to permit such an emotion to be visible to others.

CHAPTER LX.--A HONEYMOON.

And so it came to pass, as perhaps Sir Madoc had foreseen, by the doctrine of chances, and without any romance or sensationalism, that in the bright season of summer, Winifred and I--after a short engagement, and many a delicious ramble by the Elwey and Llyn Aled, in the Martens' dingle and by the old rocking-stone--were married in Craigaderyn Church, by her secret admirer, the tall pale curate in the long, long coat, "assisted" by another (as if aid in such cases were necessary); and amid the summer sounds that came floating through the open porch and pointed windows, with the yellow flakes of hazy sunshine, when I heard the voice of the pastor uniting us, I remembered the Sunday we were all last in the same place, and the daydreams in which I had indulged during the prosy sermon, when I fancied the same solemn service being said, and when, by some magic, the image of Winifred *would* ever come in the place of another.

Sir Watkins Vaughan, a purpose-like and gentlemanly young fellow, a prime bat and bowler, a good shot and good horseman, a thorough Englishman and lover of all field sports, and who acted as my groomsman, was so intent on looking at Dora--radiant in white crape and tulle as one of her sister's bridesmaids--that he made, as he said, "a regular mull" of drawing off my glove, an office which I could not have done for myself.

At last the whole was over; the golden hoop had been slid on the slender figure of a tremulous little hand; we were made one "till death do us part;" and after the usual kisses and congratulations, came forth into

the glorious sunshine, while overhead the marriage chimes rang merrily in the old square tower which Jorwerth ap Davydd Lloyd had founded in honour of St. David five hundred years ago. Then came the cheers in the churchyard--cheers that might wake the dead below the green turf; the guttural Celtic voices of the tenants and peasantry, the general jollity, with much twangle-dangling of harps borne by certain itinerant and tipsy bards, attracted thither by the coin and the well-known Cymric proclivities of Sir Madoc; and loud on all hands were praises of the beauty of the *Briodasferch* (Welsh euphony for bride), with prayers for her future happiness, as we drove away to luncheon.

All the household held high festival. Owen Gwyllim wept in his glee, and drank our healths in mulled port with Mrs. Davis (for whom he had a tenderness) in her room; and Bob Spurrit and Morgan Roots, and all the valets and gamekeepers, did ditto with mulled ale in the "servants' 'all," while we, leaving all to feast and speechify at Craigaderyn, were speeding, as fast as four horses could take us, to hide our blushes at Brighton. . . . After the stormy life I had led how sweet and blessed were home-rest with Winifred! No tempests of thought, of pique or jealousy, of disappointment or bitterness, agitated me now. It was all like first love, and calmly as the summer gloaming among the mountains, the joyous time glided away with us. I felt how truly she had clung to me, and loved me as only those who have long been loved in secret, and whose value, to the heart at least, has been ascertained, by having been to all appearance lost in life, and lost in death, too--for had I not been so to her?--and been mourned for as only the dead, who can return no more, are mourned. Yet I had survived all the perils of war, and her arms were round me now.

How strange it seemed, that I should once have been so indifferent to all the graces of her mind and person; that I had been wont to quiz poor Caradoc about her, and had more than once actually suggested that he should "propose;" and so, when I looked into her tender and loving eyes, I recalled her words on that day when, on a time that seemed so long

ago, we had a ramble by the rocking-stone, and when she said, "the eye may be pleased, the vanity flattered, and ambition excited by a woman of beauty, especially if she is one of rank; yet the heart may be won by one her inferior." But I considered my little wife inferior to none and second to none. After all my wild work in the field and trenches, there was something wonderfully refreshing, bewitching, and attractive in having her hovering and gliding about me, and all her sweet companionship; and it was *so* delightful and novel to have those quick and white and fairy-like fingers to adjust one's necktie, to settle one's collar, and give, perhaps, just a finishing touch with a carved ivory brush to the back-parting of one's hair. It *had* seemed odd to me, at first, those bracelets, tiny rings, and hair-pins at times on my toilet table; and equally odd to her my collars, ties, studs, and razors sometimes left on hers; and we were laughing and chatting merrily of this community in matters one lovely morning at Brighton, when the sun was shining on the sea, that was dotted by a thousand pleasure-boats, and was all rippling in golden light from the snow-white cliffs of Beachy Head to Selsea Bill, and while the merry voices of children came pleasantly on the warm air from the Marine Parade, as we were seated at breakfast with the hotel windows open.

Winifred was looking as only a young bride in her first bloom can look. She was more radiant than she had ever seemed even at Craigaderyn; and through the frills of her morning dress, a marvel of white lace and millinery, her slender throat and delicate arms, without necklet or bracelet, were seen to perfection, and I thought she never seemed so charming, as she sat smiling at me over the silver urn. Thus one quite forgot the fragrant coffee, the French rolls that lay cosily hidden in the damask napkin, the dainty fresh eggs, the game-pie, the ham done up in Madeira, and as for the well-aired morning papers, they were never thought of at all. On the morning in question my valet, Lance-corporal Mulligan, entered the room with our letters on a salver. I had picked up the poor fellow by the merest chance one night at the Brighton Theatre, where he had been receiving, as a super and sham

soldier in a suit of tin armour, one shilling per night, exactly what he got from her Majesty's most liberal government for risking his life night and day as a real one; and so, minus an eye, he had betaken himself, after fighting at Alma and storming the Redan, to figuring at the Battle of Bosworth and marching to Dunsinane. So he came to me gladly, while his Biddy and a chubby Pat, born under canvas among the tents of the Connaught Rangers, were snugly located in one of the gate-lodges at Craigaderyn.

Erect as a pike he marched up to the table and laid the letters before Winny, all save one, which he handed to me. It was oblong, official, and inscribed "On her Majesty's Service," words at the sight of which his solitary eye brightened, while he regarded them with respect, as an Osmanli might the cipher of the Sultan; and then he stood at "attention," lingering by, napkin in hand, to hear what the contents were. They were, as usual in such communications from the Horse Guards, very brief, but not the less gratifying. The Military Secretary had the honour to inform me that her Majesty had been graciously pleased to signify her intention of conferring the new order of merit, entitled the Victoria Cross, on certain officers, seamen, and soldiers, for acts of bravery during the late war; that my name was on the list for it, on the recommendation of Brigadier-general Windham, as a reward for volunteering with the ladder party at the storming and capture of the Redan on the 8th September; and that my presence was required at a parade before her Majesty, on a certain day named.

"That is all, Mulligan--you may go," said I, and he wheeled about sharply, as if on a pivot, and stalked out; while Winny kissed me, ran her white fingers caressingly through my hair, her face beaming with delight.

"But, Winny, by Jove, I've done nothing to deserve this. I only tumbled into an embrasure of the Redan, to be tumbled out again," said I; "and I got jambed among the dead."

"Nothing, darling--do you call that nothing?" she exclaimed. "O, this is indeed delightful--a real decoration! How proud I am of you! and yet--and yet--I am loth to leave Brighton for town. We are so happy here; we have been so jolly, Harry."

"But, Winny, we shall return; we have 'done' the pier, the parade, and the pavilion, again and again."

"Have you wearied?"

"When with *you!*"

"And I with you, Harry! But I am so happy that I fear at times such happiness cannot last."

"Town will be a pleasant change for a time; and then the spectacle in the Park will be most brilliant, and--all the world of fashion will be there."

"And one, perhaps, whom--I don't wish to see," said she, pouting.

"One--who?"

"Lady Aberconway will be there, no doubt," she replied, with a little nervous laugh.

"What of that, in the world of London? And what now is Es--the Marchioness of Aberconway, or Aber-anything-else, to me, Winny, darling?"

"Nothing now, of course--but--but--"

"But what?"

"I cannot forget that she *has been* something to you."

"Never what you are now," said I, clasping her to my breast with one arm, and kissing her on the eyes and hair.

"You pet me too much, Harry, and I fear will quite spoil me," said she, laughing merrily again.

"Who could live with you and not pet you? Would you have me to wrap myself up in a toga, a mantle of marital dignity, and remain solemnly on a pedestal like an armless statue, for my little wife to worship? But there was something in one of your letters that made you laugh?"

"It is from Dora."

"And her news?"

"Is that she has accepted Vaughan."

"I am so glad to hear it! Then we shall have another marriage, and more feasting and harping at Craigaderyn?"

"Yes; about the middle of August, or after the grouse-shooting begins, as dear papa would date it."

CHAPTER LXI.--"FOR VALOUR."

It was in the height of the gay London season that this interesting ceremony, which formed the last scene connected with the Crimean War--the last chapter in its glorious yet melancholy history--was to be closed under the auspices of Royalty on a day in June, when the air was clear, bright, and sunny, the sky without a cloud. The place selected for the celebration, though perhaps not the most suitable in London, was appropriate enough, by its local and historical associations; and Hyde

Park seemed beautiful and stirring when viewed through the mellow haze of the midsummer morning, with its long rows of trees and far expanse of green grass, on which the masses of cavalry and infantry, chiefly of the Household Brigade, were ranged, their arms and gay appointments flashing and glittering in the sun, and the mighty assemblage of fashionables, in splendid carriages, on horseback, or on foot--such an assemblage as London alone can produce--with the bronze Achilles, the trophy of another and far more glorious war, towering over all.

There were present not less than a hundred thousand of the sight-loving Londoners, full of generous enthusiasm. A grand review formed a portion of the programme; but as such displays are all alike, I shall skip that part of the day's proceedings; though there were present the 79th Highlanders, whom I had last seen in the trenches before the Redan, preparing for the final assault at daybreak; the 19th, that with the 23rd went side by side in the uphill charge at Alma; the showy 11th Hussars in blue with scarlet pelisses, who had ridden in the terrible death ride at Balaclava; and with glittering brass helmets the gallant Enniskillens, who, with the Greys, had followed Scarlett in the task of avenging them. And there, too, commanding the whole, in his plumed bonnet and tartan trews, was old Colin Campbell, riding as quietly and as grimly, amid the youth, rank, and beauty of London, as when he brought his Highland Brigade in stately échelon of regiments along the green slopes of the Kourgané Hill, and heard the gray Kazan columns, ere they fled, send up their terrible wail to heaven, that "the angel of Death had come!" This veteran soldier, who had carried the colours of the 9th Regiment under Moore at Corunna, looked old now, worn, and service-stricken, yet he had the wars of the Indian Mutiny before him still. By his side rode the hero of Kars in artillery uniform, and that brilliant Hussar officer, the Earl of Cardigan, mounted on the same horse he had ridden at Balaclava. The royal stand, as yet empty, was elaborately decorated; gilded chairs of state were placed within it; and in front, covered with scarlet cloth, was a table whereon lay sixty-two of those black crosses,

cast from Russian cannon, rude in design, but named after her Majesty, and inscribed "For Valour"--sixty-two being the number who, on that day, were to receive them.

We, "the observed of all observers," had not as yet fallen in, so I lingered near the stand, where Winifred, Dora, and Gwenny Vaughan, and many other ladies were seated, and seeking, by the aid of parasol and fan, to shield themselves from the heat of the sun, and using their lorgnettes freely in looking for friends among the crowd, and in watching the proceedings, chatting and laughing gaily the while, with all the freedom of happy and heedless girls; for the troops were "standing at ease," and her Majesty had not yet come. Winifred was looking charming in her bridal bonnet, charming amid the loveliest women in the world--and they were there by thousands; for she had the beauty of perfect goodness, and of the purest and gentlest attributes of woman-kind; for she was an artless and generous creature, too simpleminded at times, even in this cold-blooded and well-bred age, to have the power of concealing her emotions.

I wore my old and faded red coat of the Welsh Fusileers for the *last* time; and though there was something sad in the conviction that it was so, I never felt so proud of it, or of my looped-up sleeve, as on that day in Hyde Park. I felt that my occupation was gone, and that any other was unsuited to me, for "it is the speciality of a soldier's career, that it unfits most men for any other life. They cannot throw off the old habitudes. They cannot turn from the noisy stir of war to the tame quiet of every-day life; and even when they fancy themselves wearied and worn out, and willing to retire from the service, their souls are stirred by every sound of the distant contest, as the war-steed is roused by the blast of a trumpet." Often in fancy before this, for I was ever addicted to daydreams, I had pictured some such fête, some such ceremony, some such reward, for all our army had endured in Bulgaria, and done by the shores of the Black Sea; but the reality far exceeded all I had ever imagined. In my school-days, how I had longed, with all a boy's ardour,

to fight for my country and Queen! Well, I *had* fought--not for either, certainly, but for the lazy, wretched, and contemptible Turks--and her royal hand was about to reward me, by placing an order on my breast.

The longing, the wild desire to achieve, to do something great, or grand, or dashing, had ever since those school-boy days been mine; now that mysterious "something" was achieved, and I was about to be made a V.C. before that vast multitude, and more than all, beneath the soft kind eyes of one who loved me more than all the world.

"Who the dooce is that handsome woman, on whom----" (I failed to catch the name) "of ours is so devilish spooney?" I heard one tall Plunger, in a marvellously new panoply, lisp to another, as he checked his beautiful black horse for a moment in passing.

"What! can it be possible you don't know? It is the talk of all town," replied the other, laughing, and in a low tone; "she is Lady Aberconway, old Pottersleigh's wife--a more ill-mated pair don't exist in Europe, by Jove!"

"So she has found consolation?"

"Rather."

And the two glittering warriors with black boots, shining breastplates, and fly-away whiskers, winked to each other knowingly, and separated.

I looked in the direction they had indicated. Close by me an officer of the Oxford Blues, with his horse reined in close to the stand, was engaged in a conversation, by turns gay and animated, or low and confidential, with--Estelle! She was seated near her mother, Lady Naseby, who looked as impassible and passionless as ever, with her cold and imperious dignity of face and manner, and her odious white shock, now somewhat aged and wheezy, in her lap.

"Love," it is said, "is hard as any snake to kill." Perhaps so; but I could regard her daughter now without any special throb of my pulse, or thrill in my heart.

Still I could not but confess that her high class of beauty, in style, polish, and finish, was wonderful, and when in repose, cold and aristocratic to a degree. She had achieved already that which has been justly described as "that queenly standard women so often attain after marriage, while losing none of their early charms," unless I except a little heartless flippancy of manner in the conversation, which, as I was pressed near her by the crowd, I was compelled to overhear. Her toilette was as perfect as lace, tulle, and flowers could make it. How often had I gazed tenderly and passionately on that face, so false and yet so fair, and kissed it on lips, and eyes, and cheek! and now it was turned, smilingly, laughingly, and, I am sorry to add, lovingly, to the boyish and insipid face of that long-legged, curled, and pomatumed Guardsman, who had "never set a squadron in the field," nor smelt powder elsewhere than at Wormwood Scrubs or Bushey Park.

I turned from her with something of sublime contempt, and yet, odd to say, I felt a nervous twinge, as if in the arm that was now no longer in my sleeve, when her voice reached me; but after all that had come and gone, that voice could find no echo now in my heart. Sweetly modulated it was still, but seemed to me only "low and clear as the song of a snake-charmer."

"It will be the ball of the season--you will be there, of course?" she asked.

"Only if *you* go, Lady Aberconway--not unless," replied the trooper, in a low tone; "what or who else should take me there?"

"So they have made your uncle a K.C.B."

"Yes--and somebody is going to marry him on Tuesday at eleven in Hanover-square."

"And your brother is coming up for his little exam. I have heard also."

"Yes--at Woolwich. The idea of any fellow fancying the Artillery!"

"Is he handsome--is he anything like *you?*" Then, without waiting for a reply to these important queries, she suddenly said, "Gracious, mamma, there is another poor creature without an arm!"

"Poor deyvil--so there is," drawled her male friend, and then I knew by these flattering remarks that their august regards were turned on me; but my bushy Crimean beard, my empty sleeve, and, as yet, rather pale cheek, and moreover my face being half averted, prevented Estelle from recognising me; or it might be, that I dwelt but little in her memory.

"What is that officer's regiment?" she asked, adding doubtfully, "he is an officer, isn't he--but his uniform is deplorable!"

"Twenty-third--Welsh Fusileers."

"Ah, indeed!"

I now turned fully round; for a moment our eyes met, and then I moved back to where Winifred sat. Estelle eyed me keenly enough now, and fanned herself, as I thought, with a little air of vexation, from time to time. Yet that was not flattering; for I knew that though a woman may forget, she does not like the idea of being forgotten, or that even when flirting with another, her empire over an old lover's heart is at an end.

She had deteriorated in style, and her tone of flippancy was not that of the Estelle I had once loved; and as for the boy Guardsman, with whom gossip was already linking her name, poor fool! his love for her and her extravagance soon ruined him. Bills were dishonoured thick and threefold; cent. per cent., London, and Judea between them cleaned him out. A meeting of the Guards' Club passed such resolutions that he was compelled to begin the sliding scale--from "the Guards to Line, and from

thence to the devil," as the phrase is--and to recruiting for H.M. 2nd West India Regiment in Sierra Leone, where drink and fever finished him; and he lies now by the bank of the Bunce river, as completely forgotten by Estelle as if he never had been.

"Do you see who is there, Harry?" asked Winifred, with a rather agitated voice.

"Yes; what of it, little one?"

"Only that I--hate her!"

"Why?"

"For her treatment of you."

"How odd!" said I, laughing; "had it been otherwise, Winny, we should not have had our delightful little trip to Brighton. Think of that, my British matron!"

"I am not a matron yet, but only your bride; the honeymoon is not yet over, sir."

"Thank God you are so, darling! What an escape I have had from being in old Pottersleigh's place! But there sound the trumpets, and I must fall in--fall in for the last time."

And as drum and bugle sounded on all sides, and the arms flashed in the sunshine when the order was given to "shoulder," a brightness seemed to pass over all the eyes and expectant faces in the grand stand. The Queen had come, and all that passed subsequently was like a dream to me then, and is more so now. The sixty-two officers and men who were to receive the cross (and twelve of whom belonged to the navy) were all, irrespective of rank, marshalled according to the number of their regiment under Lieutenant John Knox, of the Rifles, who, like myself, had an empty sleeve. The braided breast of his dark-green uniform seemed ablaze with medals, for he had been with the ladder

party in the attack on the Redan, where he lost an arm by a grape-shot. There were but two officers of the 23rd to win the decoration, and we were posted between two privates of the 19th, and two of the 34th; but all passed the royal stand in single file. I had never seen the Queen hitherto, and suddenly I found myself before her--a smiling-faced, graceful, though stout little lady, in a low hat, adorned with a beautiful plume, and wearing a scarlet tunic and blue skirt; and I certainly felt my heart vibrate, as with her own hands she pinned the decoration on my breast--vibrate with a flush of pride and joy only to be felt at such a time and at such a ceremony; and yet amid it all I thought of the dear little wife who, with her eyes dim with tears of happiness, was watching me. I then passed on, giving place to a lame private of the 34th Foot, the Prince Consort saluting each recipient as they passed him--many slowly, painfully, and with difficulty; for some poor maimed and haggard-faced fellows were hobbling on sticks and crutches, and some, like the gallant Sir Thomas Trowbridge, who had lost both legs, were wheeled to the very feet of the Queen in Bath-chairs. At last all was over--this closing episode of our war in the Crimea; and as we drove from the crowded park to get the train for Brighton--the honeymoon was not yet finished--I had forgotten all about Estelle and her Plunger; and I thanked God in my heart that I was not lying where so many lay in the land we had left, and for the tender and true-hearted wife He had given me, as I laughingly hung round her pretty neck the black-iron order of valour--the Victoria Cross.

Fifteen years have passed since that auspicious day. And now, as I write these closing lines, I can see, through the lozenged and mullioned windows of the library, the old woods of Craigaderyn tossing their leafy branches on the evening wind, and the sunset lingering redly on the lofty peaks of Snowdon and Carneydd Llewellyn. Old Sir Madoc--too old now to back even his most favourite hunter--is sitting yonder in the sunshine, looking dreamily down the far-stretched vista of the chase to where the bright sea is rippling in the distance.

The flowers are blooming as gaily on the terrace as they did on the day of Dora's fête, and she has long been *Aunt* Vaughan; for at Craigaderyn there are little ones now--a violet-eyed Winifred, who scampers through the park on a Welsh pony; a dark-haired Madoc, who can almost handle a gun; and a golden-curled Harry to run after the tossing leaves, to shout to the deer and hare as they lurk among the fern; to seek for birds' nests among the shrubbery; to grab at the gold fish in the fountain with his fat little fists; to clamber about Sir Madoc's chair and knees; to ride on the backs of Owen Gwyllim and old Corporal Mulligan, and in whom we see mamma's eyes, papa's expression--nods, winks, and blinks, and so forth, all so exactly reproduced and blended, that our best friends don't know which of us he most resembles; so "Time, the avenger" of all things, has brought nothing but joy and happiness to us at Craigaderyn.

FOOTNOTES:

Footnote 1: Without God, without everything.

Footnote 2: The artillery of the Prussian Guard have also had constantly a goat, its neck encircled by a beautiful collar, and one, named by the soldiers "Herr Schneider," accompanied them in every battle, from the war which broke out in 1866 till the peace in 1870. He always marched with the men of the first gun. At Köninghof, Herr Schneider was left in the rear, tied to a powder caisson; but he broke loose, came to the front at full gallop, and was recaptured under fire; the soldiers afterwards attached to his collar a copper

medal, made from a pan found among the captured cooking utensils of General Coronini. His death was formally announced by the artillery of the Guard in the Berlin *Vossische Zeitung*.

Footnote 3: Fusileer regiments did not then wear epaulettes.

Footnote 4: May God preserve us!

Footnote 5: Good Lord deliver us.

THE END.

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