the owner of a fortune, found great favour in the eyes of her father. He obtained easy access to the house, and he might actually have prevailed upon her to run away with him, for there was no lack of promises with him, if I had not come here. It was to save her from him that I asked her to give me her promise; for I knew that he had a wife already."

Dick started to his feet, his eyes blazing.

"The infamous hound!" he cried. "Who is he? What is his name? Only let me know what is his name, that I may kill him."

"There is no need for me to mention his name," said Mr. Long; "there is no immediate need for you to kill him or to give him a chance of killing you."

"Can you sit there before me, and tell me that 'tis not the duty of every man to do his best to rid the world of such a ruffian?" cried Dick passionately.

"I will not take it upon me to define what is the duty of a man in certain circumstances," said Mr. Long. "But I assure you that I should be sorry to go so far as to assert that the world would not be well rid of this particular ruffian; still, I know that the killing of him just now would be to overwhelm one who, we know, shrinks from even a publicity which is wholly honourable. There are doubtless many girls who retain so much of the feminine animal in their nature as causes them to delight to be made the subject of a fight between two men; that is—unhappily, it seems to me, but that may be because I do not understand all the principles of nature—an ordinary trait of the sex; but—you and I—ah, we know something of her, do we not?"

"But a fellow who set himself to bring about her ruin—— He is not still in Bath—you would not allow him to remain in Bath?"

"I have seen to that. I have reason to believe that he has fled. At any rate, he has not been seen in public since

I gave him a hint, the purport of which he could scarcely mistake. We will talk no more of him. I only referred to him as an instance of the dangers which, I perceived, surrounded Miss Linley, and which led me to make a move for her protection. I have been judged harshly. I was prepared for that. Sometimes in this matter I have felt disposed to judge myself much more harshly than any one else might feel. I wonder if you think that I was justified in asking Miss Linley to give me her promise when I saw that she was anxious to escape from a life which was killing her—when I saw that she was anxious to save her sisters from the necessity to appear in public and to sing for money—when I saw that she was set on this, and on helping all the other members of her family. Do you think that I was justified in asking her for her promise to marry me, seeing all that I tell you I saw, and knowing something of her pure and self-sacrificing nature?"

Dick was overcome by his own thoughts; but through all the discord in which they enveloped him there rang out clearly one note:

"You saved her," he said. "You saved her; that is all that I can think. Let me go away now."

He had spoken with his head bent, but his voice did not falter. And then he leapt up from his chair and turned to the door.

CHAPTER XX

"Do not go yet, my boy," said Mr. Long. It was his voice that was faltering. "Do not go until I have said all that is on my mind to say to you."

"Can I hear more, sir? Is there anything more to be said?"

"Not much, but still something."

He motioned Dick back to his chair, and, after a pause, Dick resumed his seat.

"I saved her, you said," continued Mr. Long. "It was in order to save her that I asked her for that promise. Is that as noble a motive as most men have when they ask a young woman to marry them? I think that it is, whatever any one who knows the facts of this matter as you and I know them may say. It may be said that it was despicable on my part to take advantage of the longing for freedom of this dear caged linnet of ours—that I took advantage of her inexperience of life to bind her down to a marriage that would mean to her a far worse bondage than that from which she hoped to escape."

"I am not one of those who say so, Mr. Long."

"I am certain of that. Still, she is a child, and I am an old man—— Ah, no! you need not be at the trouble to protest; I shall probably live for twenty years yet; but when she was born I was old enough to be her father. Can I expect to have the girl's love of tnat dear girl? I am not

so foolish as to entertain such a dream. I have her gratitude, her respect, her regard, everything except her love. That is impossible."

"I do not know that it is impossible, sir. She is not as other girls are."

"It is impossible, my boy; I know it. It must be impossible, because I have not asked her for her love. It is impossible for me to love her with the love of a lover—with the love that is love. I did not offer her love when I asked her for her promise."

Dick looked at the man with something akin to wonderment in his eyes.

Mr. Long rose from his chair and slowly walked to and fro some half-dozen times. Then he went to one of the windows and looked out. On the pavement a large number of notable persons were strolling. Mr. Edmund Burke was there; he had arrived in Bath the previous evening, and he was walking with Sir Joshua Reynolds and Miss Theophila Palmer.

The voices of the crowd outside only seemed to increase the silence in the room.

But still Dick did not move from his place.

Then Mr. Long walked from the window to the chair which he had occupied. He looked for a long time at Dick, as if debating with himself what to say to him. The prolonged silence was almost embarrassing to the younger man; but he felt that he was not called on to speak. And still the elder man sat with his eyes fixed on him, but with his thoughts far away, and still the faint sound of the laughter and the voices in the Street came intermittently to the room.

"I have spoken somewhat enigmatically, Mr. Sheridan," said Mr. Long after this long pause. "I shall do so no longer. I told you that it is impossible for me to offer Miss Linley the love which I know you deem impossible

that any man should withhold from her. Why? you will ask. My answer to you is that I have loved. It is difficult to make some people believe that there is no past tense to the verb 'To love'; but I do not think that I shall have such difficulty with you. The man who says, 'I have loved,' is saying, if he speak the truth, 'I love.' Mr. Sheridan, when I say to you, 'I have loved,' you know what I mean. It was close upon forty years ago that I found her; and time has dealt graciously with her; for while I have grown old, she is still young and joyous and sweet. The laugh of the girl still rings through my heart as it did forty years ago. There are no wrinkles on her fair face; there is in her expression nothing of that fear of growing old which I have seen and shuddered at in the faces of many women. Perpetual youth—perpetual youth. God's best gift to any human being—it has been bestowed upon her by the goodness of God; for those who die young have been granted the gift of perpetual youth. Our wedding-day came, and on that very day she was borne to the church in her wedding-dress, and with the wedding-flowers about her. I stood beside her, and, instead of hearing the Service for the Dead spoken as it was that day, I heard the Marriage Service that was to have been said between us. . . . Forty years ago . . . and she is still young—unchanged—untouched by the terrors of time; and I have been true to her—every day—every hour. I smile when I think of her, and I know that she is smiling in return; I am joyous at my table because I know that she is sitting opposite to me, and I can walk through the woodlands which surround my house, taking pleasure in observing all things of nature, feeling that she is by my side, sharing in my happiness. . . . My boy, you, I know, can understand how it is the truth that I have told you when I said that I could not ask our dear Betsy to love me because I could not offer her that love which is love."

"Do not tell her that—if you wish her to be happy," said Dick suddenly, almost bluntly.

Mr. Long laid his hand—it was his wounded hand—with great tenderness upon Dick's shoulder.

"You have shown me by that remark that what you seek to bring about is her happiness," said he. "That is what I aim at. Whatever becomes of us, she must be happy. Richard, take my word for it, this is the true love—the love that is immortal—the love in the image of which God created man, making him a little lower than the angels—this is the glory with which He crowns him. You, my dear boy, have taken one step toward that goal of glory if you have learned that love is spiritual and that its aim is not one's own happiness but the happiness of another. You love Betsy Linley; and it is left for you to show what this love can accomplish in yourself. Love for love's sake—let that be your motto. It will mean happiness to you, for it will mean everything that makes a man a man: the trampling down of all that is base in nature—the resisting of temptation—the facing of that stern discipline of life which alone makes life noble and worthy to be lived. And if she loves you——"

Dick started up.

"Ah, sir, for Heaven's sake do not suggest that to me now!" he cried. "Can not you know that that is the thought which I have been doing my best to suppress—to beat down—to bury out of sight——"

"There is no need for me to withhold what I have said; she may love you, and that thought should be a grateful one to you. It should nerve you, as such a thought has nerved many men, to do something worthy of her love. Richard Sheridan, you would not have her love some one who is unworthy of her love. You would not have her love a man who is wanting in any of those elements that make a man worthy to be loved. Richard Sheridan, if she loves

you 'tis for you to determine whether she loves a true man or one who is false to his manhood, which was made in the image of Godhood. This is what a woman's love should mean to a man; and this is love's reward, which comes to a man even though he may never hold in his arms the one whom he loves—the one by whom he is beloved. Dick, let this be my last word to you: whether that girl who is so dear to us comes to me or to you, if you love her truly 'twill be a source of good to you while you live, for your constant aim will be to live worthy not only of her love, but worthy to love her. That is all I have to say to you, and it is a good deal more than I have said to any man who lives. But she must be happy, Dick; that is the bond there is between you and me. We must make her happy, whether we do so by being near her or by being apart from her."

He gave his hand to Dick, and the young man took it, and then left the room without another word. He had only a vague idea of the finality, so to speak, of what Mr. Long had said; and he knew that nothing that left him with such vagueness in his mind could be final. But Mr. Long had said enough to strengthen the impression which Dick had acquired of him the previous night.

A few days before, Dick, with his knowledge of the world, would have had no hesitation in ridiculing this principle of love for love's sake which Mr. Long had impressed upon him; but now he was sensible for the first time in his life of the reality of all that Mr. Long had said on this subject. He became sensible of the spiritual element in love. Had he not just been made aware of its existence? Had he not just come from the presence of a man who had cherished a spiritual love through all the years of a long lifetime, until it had become a part of his life, influencing him in all his actions, as though it were a living thing?

As though it were a living thing? But it was surely a

living thing. This surely was the love which poets had sung of as being immortal! It was purely spiritual, and therefore immortal. It was cherished for its own sake, and the reward which it brought to one who was true to it came solely in the act of cherishing it. The consciousness of cherishing it—that was enough for such as were strong enough to cherish it for its own sake; to take it into one's life, and to guard one's life rigidly—jealously—because it is in one's life; to guard one's life for its sake as one guards the casket that contains a great treasure.

Dick felt that this was the sum of what Mr. Long had sought to impress upon him, and he also felt that this great truth had long ago been revealed to Betsy Linley. It was in the spirit of this spirit of love that she had kissed him the previous evening; and now he felt that he had no longing for any love but this. She had set his feet upon the way to this goal, and he was assured that should he falter, should he look back, she would be by his side to put a hand in his, to bid him take courage and press forward to that goal which she had pointed out to him.

He did not at that time make even an attempt to consider such questions as he would have suggested a few days before, to any one who might have come to him telling him all that Mr. Long had just said in his hearing. Mr. Long had encouraged him to love Betsy Linley—to continue loving her; and he had not shrunk from suggesting the possibility of the girl's returning his love. A few days before Dick would have been inclined to ask any one who might have come to him telling him this, if Mr. Long was encouraging another man to love the girl whom he himself meant to marry. But now this seemed to him to be a point unworthy of a thought. So deeply impressed was he by what Mr. Long had just said to him, he could not give a thought to anything less spiritual. The splendid light that came from that heaven to which his eyes had

been directed, so dazzled him with its effulgence as to make him incapable of giving any attention to matters of detail.

It never occurred to him to ask himself if it was Mr. Long's intention to marry Betsy immediately. Whatever answer might be given to such a question, it could not possibly affect the reality of the religion of love as stated by Mr. Long. Of this he was satisfied. He knew that whoever might marry Betsy Linley, his own love for her had become part of his life, and its influence upon his life was real.

He went to his home looking neither to the right hand nor the left, and when he reached his room he was conscious of very different thoughts from those which had been his a few mornings before, when he had thrown himself on his bed in a passion of tears after seeing, though but for a moment, Betsy by the side of Mr. Long in the gardens. At that time the pangs that he felt—the vexation that he felt—were due, in a large measure, to the blow which his vanity had sustained, and it was his vanity that had suggested to him, with a view of recovering its equilibrium, as it were, the advisability of his adopting the tone and playing the *rôle* of a cynical man of the world, who has seen the foolishness—the ludicrous foolishness of what is called love.

But now——

Well, now he was kneeling by his bedside.

CHAPTER XXI

Dick was greatly surprised when, on going out to take the air the next day, he was met by one of his acquaintance—a young Mr. Vere, who shook him warmly by the hand, offering him his congratulations.

"'Twas very spirited of you so to take up the quarrel of your brother, Mr. Sheridan; that is what every one in Bath is saying to-day," cried Mr. Vere. "I give you my word, sir, there is not one who ventures to assert that you were not fully justified in sending the challenge."

"'Tis most gratifying to me, I am sure, that people take so lenient a view of an affair of which I have heard nothing up to the present moment," said Dick.

"I refer to your duel, Mr. Sheridan. Surely that incident, trifling though it may be to a gentleman of your experience, has not yet escaped your memory?" said Vere.

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Vere," said Dick, "I have got a very short memory for incidents that have not taken place. Pray, what duel do you refer to, and what had I got to do with it? Pardon my curiosity, sir; 'tis rather ridiculous, I allow, but my nature is sufficiently inquiring to compel me to ask you if I was a principal in the duel or merely one of the seconds. I hope you do not consider me impertinent in putting such a question to you."

Mr. Vere stared at him for a few moments, and then laughed.

"You carry it off very well, I must confess," said he. "But there is no need for you to affect such complete ignorance. I give you my word that every one acquits you of blame in the matter—nay, I am assured that the meeting was inevitable; but I doubt not there is no one more ready than yourself to rejoice that your adversary was not severely wounded."

"'Tis a source of boundless satisfaction to me to learn so much from your lips, sir," said Dick. "And if you could see your way to add to my obligation by making me acquainted with the name of my antagonist, I would never forget your kindness."

"Upon my soul, you carry it off very well! I dare swear that Mr. Garrick, for all his reputation, could not do it much better," said Mr. Vere. "But your acting is wasted, Mr. Sheridan; I tell you that the general opinion in Bath is that your act was highly commendable. Pray, Sheridan, tell me in confidence what was the exact nature of the affront put upon your brother—apart, of course, from the question of the lady; I promise you that 'twill go no further!"

"Look you here, Mr. Vere," said Dick, "I do not mind being made a fool of up to a certain point—there is no positive disgrace in being a fool in Bath, one finds oneself in such congenial company,—but I tell you, sir, I will not suffer any one to go beyond a certain distance with me, and you are going perilously close to my frontier with these compliments of yours. Come, sir, tell me plainly, what do you mean by suggesting that I have been concerned in a duel, and with whom do you suggest I have been fighting?"

"What, sir, do you mean to say that you have not just fought a duel with Mr. Long on behalf of your brother?"

"Yes, sir, I have no hesitation in affirming that I have

fought no duel with Mr. Long or with any one else, either on behalf of my brother or any one else."

"Heavens! you surprise me, sir. Why, all Bath is talking——"

"Talking nonsense—that is the mother tongue of Bath; and so far as I can gather, you do not stand in need of a course of lessons in this particular language, Mr. Vere, and so I wish you good-morning, sir."

Mr. Vere's jaw fell. His usual alertness of manner disappeared before Dick's energetic rebuff. He did not even retain sufficient presence of mind to take off his hat when Dick made such a salutation, and walked quietly on.

But when Dick had gone something less than twenty yards on his way, a sudden thought seemed to strike young Vere. Hurrying after him, he cried:

"Look here, Mr. Sheridan, if you did not fight Mr. Long, how does his arm come to be wounded,—tell me that?"

"Mr. Vere," said Dick, stopping and turning to the other,—"Mr. Vere, unless your story of Mr. Long's having sustained a wound be much more accurate than much of what you have just been telling me, it stands in great need of verification."

He walked on, leaving the young man to recover as best he could from his astonishment.

But Dick had scarcely resumed his walk before he encountered his friend Nat Halhed, who almost threw himself into Dick's arms, so great was his emotion at that moment.

"My dear Dick—my dear Dick, you are unhurt!" he cried. "Thank Heaven for that—thank Heaven! I hear on good authority that 'tis only a flesh wound, and that he will be out of the house by the end of the week. But 'twas unkind of you not to ask me to be your friend in this affair, Dick. Sure, you might have given me your confidence."

"I was afraid of that wagging tongue of yours, Nat,"

said Dick; "I was afraid that you might be the dupe of some of the scandal-mongers who have become the curse of Bath."

"Nay, Dick, this is unkind," said Nat reproachfully. "You know that I am the soul of discretion, and that nothing would tempt me to talk of any matter of the accuracy of which I was not fully assured."

"I know that you have just been repeating a story which had its origin only in the imagination of some gossip-monger," said Dick.

"What—I—I? Pray, what story do you allude to?"

"To the story of my duel. I have been concerned in no duel. But mark my words, Nat, if I hear much more about this business, I shall be engaged in several duels."

"Do you mean to deny the fact of your having had an encounter with Mr. Long two days ago—a secret encounter, because of his having accused you of the attempt to turn away from him the affections of Miss Linley?"

Dick became pale with anger.

"I tell you what it is, sir," he cried; "I have had no encounter with Mr. Long on any question; and let me add, for your benefit and the benefit of your associates, that if any one wishes to provoke me to a duel, he can accomplish his purpose best by asserting in my hearing that I am capable of making such an attempt as that which you say has been attributed to me. That is all I have to say to you, my friend Nat."

Halhed gasped, and Dick walked on.

Before many seconds had elapsed he heard Halhed's voice behind him.

"If you had no duel with Mr. Long, pray, how does he come to have that ugly wound on his wrist?" cried the young man.

"Why not ask him?" said Dick. "What am I that I should be held accountable for every scratch that one

receives at Bath? Are there not cats enough at Bath—in the Pump Room, and the Assembly Rooms, and other schools for scandal—to account for all the scratches upon a man's wrist or reputation that he may sustain in the course of the season?"

He hastened on, leaving young Halhed still gasping.

It now appeared quite clear to Dick that the gossip-mongers had somehow got to hear that Mr. Long had sustained a sword-wound on the wrist, and they were not slow to invent a story possessing at least some elements of romance to account for it. It seemed that a course of the waters had as stimulating an effect upon the imagination as it had upon a sluggish liver. Some of the visitors were such clever naturalists and had had so large an experience of fossilised deposits, that they had become adroit in the construction of a whole mammoth fabric if only a single tooth were placed at their disposal. Dick had heard of such feats being performed by persons who combined a knowledge of geology with an acquaintance with zoology, supplementing the two by as much imagination as was necessary to achieve any result at which they aimed. Learning that Mr. Long had his left arm bound up, these professors of social zoology had proved themselves fully equal to the task of accounting for his wound.

What Dick could not understand was why they should associate him with the imaginary duel. It was not until he heard his name called out by a lady in a splendidly painted chair—the chair is still in existence, though the splendidly painted occupant is no more than the dust of one of the pigments used in painting a bit of a picture of the brilliant society of a century and a half ago—and found that Mrs. Cholmondeley was looking eagerly through the window, beckoning to him with her fan, that he learned how it was that his name became mixed up with the story.

He bowed to the ground before the beautiful structure so

elaborately built up within the cramping limits of the chair; and the bearers, at a signal from the lady, came to a halt and raised the roof on its hinges.

"Oh, Mr. Sheridan," she cried, "you gave us all such a shock! But we are so glad that you are safe!"

"Safe, madam?" said he. "Heavens! what man in Bath can consider himself safe when Mrs. Cholmondeley turns her eyes upon him? Dear madam, 'tis sure ungenerous of you to jest at the expense of one of your most willing victims."

"Jest, sir? I vow 'twould have been no jest to Bath if you had been wounded instead of Mr. Long," cried Mrs. Cholmondeley. "And you kept the whole business so secret too; you did not give any of us a chance of interfering with you, you hot-headed young Achilles! Of course, you did not inflict a severe wound upon the poor gentleman! We Irish are generous by instinct. And 'twas like you to sit with him for more than an hour yesterday, and then go straight home, never leaving the house all the night, though you must have known that you would have been well received at the Rooms had you put in an appearance there. But you ever showed good taste, sir—that is another Irish trait."

"Madam," said he, "I cannot doubt that the infatuation which, alas! I have never been able to conceal for the beautiful Mrs. Cholmondeley has gained for me a reputation for taste; I trust, madam, that I did not altogether forfeit it by omitting to visit the Rooms last night, where, I hear, she was as usual the cynosure of the most brilliant circle."

"A truce to compliments, Mr. Sheridan," said she. "Young men shaped after Apollo have no need for them. Compliments are the makeshifts of the elderly to call away attention from their spindleshanks. Confidences, and not compliments, are what we old women look for from such as

you; so prithee, Dick, tell me all about the matter—'twill go no further, I promise you."

"At no more adorable shrine need I ever hope to confess my virtues, madam," said he; "but in this matter——"

"Oh, sir, the man who has only virtues to confess soon ceases to interest a confidante," said she. "But it may be that you consider fighting a duel to be praiseworthy?"

"Let any one cast an aspersion upon Mrs. Colmondeley in my presence, and I shall prove that a duel is one of the cardinal virtues, madam," said Dick.

"'Twas not about me you fought Mr. Long at dawn yesterday," she cried.

"Madam, you may venture on that statement, being aware that Mr. Long is alive to-day," said Dick.

"I perceive that you and he have entered into a compact to keep the affair a secret," said she. "Well, though I think that you might make an exception of me, I cannot but acknowledge that you have good taste on your side."

"I have the mirror of good taste at my side when Mrs. Cholmondeley honours me by stopping her chair while I am in the act of passing her," said Dick.

"Oh, sir, you are monstrous civil. But if you think that you can keep the details of your duel secret at Bath, you compliment yourself rather than your acquaintance in this town."

"Faith, Mrs. Cholmondeley, my acquaintance seem to know a good deal more about this duel than I do," said Dick.

"You will make me lose patience with you," said she. "But I will be content if you give me your word that you will not tell Mrs. Thrale or Mrs. Crewe what has occurred. You will promise me, Dick? I should die of chagrin if either of that gossiping pair were to come to me with a circumstantial account of the duel."

"I can give you that promise with all my heart," said he. "But if you assume that my reticence will prevent either of the ladies from being able to give a circumstantial account of this incident, about which every one seems to be talking, you will show that you know a good deal less about them than you should."

"You are quite right; they are the grossest of the scandal-mongers—ay, and the least scrupulous," she cried. "Why, it was only last night that one of them—I shall leave you to guess which—asserted that she had the evidence of her own eyes to prove to her that it was the younger of the Sheridan sons, and not the elder, who was in love with Miss Linley, although the other talked most of his passion. And by the Lord, sir, she was right, if my eyesight be worth anything."

Dick was always on the alert—as, indeed, he required to be—when engaged in conversation with Mrs. Cholmondeley and the other ladies of the set to which she belonged; but the impudence of her suggestion, made in so direct a fashion, startled him into a blush. He recovered himself in a moment, however, and before her chairmen could comply with her signal to take up the chair, he was smiling most vexatiously, while he said:

"'Twere vain, dear madam, to make an attempt to dissemble before such well-informed ladies. You are fully acquainted not only with the particulars of a duel which never took place, but also with the details of a passion which exists only in the imagination. Ah, Mrs. Cholmondeley, we men are poor creatures in the presence of a lady with much imagination and few scruples."

He bowed, with his hat in his hand.

"You do well to run away, sir," said the lady, with a malicious twinkle.

"'Tis the act of a wise man," said he. "The cat that only scratches a man's hand, one may play with, but the cat

that scratches a man's heart should be handed over to the gamekeeper to nail upon the door. I, however, prefer to run away."

He had gone backward, still bowing with profound respect, for half a dozen yards, before she had recovered from the strongest rebuff she had ever received.

Then she asked her chairmen, in a tone that had something of shrillness in it, if they intended leaving her in the road for the rest of the day.

She was very angry, not only because she was conscious of having received a rebuke which she had richly merited, but also because she had failed to find out whether or not there was any truth in the story of the duel between Mr. Long and Dick Sheridan, which had been discussed all the day in the least trustworthy of the many untrustworthy circles in Bath.

She herself had had her doubts as to the accuracy of the story. Mr. Horace Walpole had shown himself to be too greatly interested in it to allow of any reasonable person's accepting it without serious misgivings; for she knew that the leading precept in Mr. Walpole's ethics of scandal was, "Any story is good enough to hang an epigram on." But in spite of the fact that Walpole was highly circumstantial in his account of the duel, its origin, and its probable results, Mrs. Cholmondeley thought that there might be something in it. This was why she had stopped Dick so eagerly. She thought that she might trust to her own adroitness to find out from him enough to place her friends in the right or in the wrong in respect of the story; she would have liked to have it in her power to put them in the wrong, but hers was not a grasping nature: she would have been quite content to be able to put them in the right.

Well, it was very provoking to be foiled by the cleverness of that young Sheridan. He had been impudent, too, and had actually shown that he resented her cultured curiosity

on the subject of his affairs. This she felt to be insufferable on the part of young Sheridan.

Happily, however, though she had learned nothing from him—except, perhaps, that there were in existence some young men who objected to their personal affairs being made the subject of public conversation by people who knew nothing about them—she did not despair of being able to make herself interesting to her friends when describing her *rencontre* with Dick; and, setting her imagination to work, she found that she could serve up quite a palatable and dainty dish out of the story of how she had overwhelmed him with confusion. She did not at that moment remember what were the exact phrases she had employed to compass this end, but she had every confidence in the power of her imagination to suggest to her before the time for going to the Assembly Rooms the well-balanced badinage which she had used to send him flying from her in confusion.

And Dick, as he walked homeward, without feeling that he had vastly enjoyed his walk, knew perfectly well just what was in the lady's mind. He had no illusions on the subject of her scrupulousness. He was well aware that she would not hesitate to give her circle any account that suited her, respecting her meeting with him. He had an idea, however, that the members of her circle would only believe as much of her story as suited themselves. How much this was would be wholly dependent upon the piquant elements introduced into the story by Mrs. Cholmondeley. He knew enough of the world to know that people would give credence to the more malicious of her suggestions without weighing the probability of the matters on which they bore.

But what he thought about most was the reference which she had made to Betsy and himself. Up to that time it was only the most jealous of Betsy's many suitors who had looked on him as a rival. Very few persons in Bath had

discovered his secret, and it had certainly never been spoken of seriously. An exceedingly poor man has always, he knew, a better chance than the man of means of evading the vigilance of the gossip-mongers; therefore he had escaped having the compliment paid to him of being referred to as a possible suitor.

It was becoming clear to him, however, that there were some people in Bath whose experience of life had led them to believe that the lack of worldly means was not a certain deterrent to the aspirations of a young man with talent—assuming that talent means making the most of one's opportunities: a very worldly definition of talent, but not the less acceptable on that account to the fashionable people of Bath.

The reflection that his secret was no longer one annoyed him, but not greatly. His consciousness of vexation had disappeared before he turned the corner of Orange Grove into Terrace Walk.

And then he entered his house and almost walked into the arms of Mrs. Abington, who was waiting for him on the first lobby.

"Oh, Dick, Dick! safe—safe! Thank Heaven!" she cried, putting out both her hands to him and catching him by the arms.

Her form of greeting him had about it more than the suggestion of a clasp.

CHAPTER XXII

He was not angry—what was there to be angry about? The greeting of a beautiful woman (with the suggestion of a clasp) when one expects to meet only a sister may contain the elements of surprise, but rarely those of vexation.

Dick was surprised—in fact, he was slightly alarmed, but he retained his self-possession.

"Safe?" he cried. "Why should not I be safe, unless"—he recollected that not half an hour before he had been greeted by a lady with the same word, and he had replied to it with great glibness: could he do better than repeat himself? He thought not—unless—— "Ah, madam, what man is safe when such beauty ——"

"Do not talk to me in that way. Is this a time for compliments—empty—obvious—odious?" she cried, loosing his arms with such suddenness as almost to suggest flinging them from her.

Before she went in a whirl into the room beyond the lobby, he had seen that her face—it had come very close to his own at one moment—was white.

He followed her slowly into the room.

"Forgive me, madam," he said. "Pray forgive me; I did not realise that you were in earnest. I cannot understand. Some one else greeted me just now with the same word—safe. Why——"

"And you made the same reply to me that you made to

her, and doubtless she was completely satisfied, and you paid me the compliment of taking it for granted that the same compliment would repay me for all that I have suffered? Dick, you are—oh, I have no words—you are—a man—I know you—I know men."

"The retort is just. I assumed, for the moment, that you were like other women. I was wrong. I see now that you were really concerned—for some reason—for my safety; Mrs. Cholmondeley was not."

"Mrs. Cholmondeley? Who is Mrs. Cholmondeley that she should have any thought for you? Curiosity—oh, yes—tattle—scandal—the material for a pretty piece of scandal, no doubt—that's how she looked at the whole affair. I know her—a woman—a very woman—I know women."

"I do not. I admit that I do not understand woman. I fancied—— But every woman is a separate woman. She has an identity that is wholly her own."

"That is the first step a man should take if he seek to understand us. But philosophy—what is philosophy at such a moment as this? I cannot take your safety philosophically, Dick—thank Heaven—thank Heaven!"

"That is wherein I differ from you. I take my safety philosophically; I bear it with equanimity. Has it been imperilled? Not that I know of."

She looked at him; a puzzled expression was on her face.

"A young philosopher shows his wisdom only if he is a young fool," she said. "But you are not so foolish as to be a philosopher at your time of life, Dick. Equanimity—there's a word for you! But you never felt in peril. Mr. Long is an old man. Do you fancy that Betsy Linley will forgive you for fighting him?"

"Mrs. Abington," said Dick, "you have been like several other people in this town—the victim of a very foolish and malicious piece of gossip which seems to have been most persistently spread abroad. I have been concerned in no

duel, and I swear to you that for no earthly consideration—not even if my own honour were in peril—would I fight Mr. Long. I have a greater respect—a deeper affection—for Mr. Long than I have for any living man."

The lady stood before him speechless. She was breathing hard. The hand that she had laid upon the upper lace of her bodice rose and fell several times before the expression that had been on her face gave place to quite a different one. The new expression suggested something more than relief, and so did the long sigh that caused her hand to remain for some moments poised above her lace, like a white bird on the curve of a white wave.

She sighed.

Then she gave a laugh—a laugh of pleasant derision—the tolerant derision that one levels at oneself, saying, when things have turned out all right, "*What a fool I have been!*" Those were her very words.

"What a fool I have been, Dick! I was told that—— But I was a fool to believe anything that came from such a source! Did Mr. Walpole invent the whole story merely out of malice? He is quite equal to it. Or was it a woman? Most likely it came from a woman; but, lud, if you were to try to find the woman who started the lie you would be overcome, for there's not one of the whole set that wouldn't take a pleasure in't. I'm so sorry, Dick! But the story at first was that you had received an injury. What a state I was in! And then some one came with the news that 'twas your opponent who was hurt. Oh, the liars! liars all! But you are not hurt—I mean, you are in no way hurt, my Dick, by this silly story?"

"Hurt? Why, I am overwhelmed with conceit at the thought that my condition should cause so much concern to my friends," said Dick. "'Tis a great feather in my cap that I should become all in a moment, and without doing anything for it, the topic of the day in a town which is

fastidious in its choice of topics. You were talking a few nights ago of my writing a comedy. Well, here is one scene in it ready-made. Scene: A room in the house of Lady —— What shall we call her—Lady Sneerwell or the Countess of Candour? The members of the Senate of the College of Scandal have met. 'What, you have surely heard of the duel? Oh, lud! is't possible that you have not heard it? Where can your ladyship have been living? Oh, faith, 'tis but too true. They met in Kingsmead Fields by the light of a lovely moon last night, and, after a pass or two, Mr. Thompson's sword pierced the lungs of old Sir Simon, and——' 'No, no, sir, you are wrong there; 'twas with pistols they fought,' cries another gentleman, who enters hurriedly. 'Pistols, sir? Swords, as I heard it.' 'Nay, sir, you cannot believe all you hear. They fought with pistols, I give you my word. They exchanged seven shots apiece, and two of the seconds and one of the surgeons fell mortally wounded; it was the seventh broadside that struck a knot in the third lowest branch of a pollard ash at one side of the ground, and glancing off at an acute angle, passed through a thrush's nest in a Westphalian poplar containing four eggs, three of them speckled and one of them, strange to say, plain, all within six days and two hours of incubation. The bullet smashed one of them, containing a fine hen bird, to atoms, but without disturbing the mother, who continued sitting on the clutch, and, touching the third button on the left-hand side of the peach-coloured coat, made by Filby, of London, and not yet paid for, of one of the onlookers, glanced off to the right shoe-buckle of Sir Simon, and cut off the great toe of his left foot as clean as if it had been done under the surgeon's knife.' 'Nay, sir, you are sure in error. 'Twas Mr. Thompson who sustained the wound; and let me tell, sir, that 'twas his right ear that was cut off.' 'With respect, sir, 'twas the elder gentleman.' 'Nay, sir, I should know; 'twas the

younger, I assure you.' 'Sir, you take too much upon you.' 'And you, sir, are a jackanapes!' Enter Sir Simon and Mr. Thompson, arm in arm. There's the scene ready for rehearsal. Oh, I should feel extremely obliged to my kind traducers for suggesting it all to me."

Dick had bustled through the imaginary scene with the greatest vivacity; and Mrs. Abington perceived that he did it very well and that he had acquired something of the true spirit of comedy, though he exaggerated everything, after the manner of the schoolboy who takes the clown as his mentor. But after she had greeted his performance with a laugh, she pouted and protested that he had offended her. She seated herself on the sofa, and turned her head away from him with the air of the offended lady.

Dick watched her performance critically, and fully appreciated the delicacy of her comedy—all the more as he was elated with the scene which he had just invented. He hoped that he would have a chance of introducing something like it in a comedy, and he had such a chance a few years later, nor did he forget to put Mrs. Abington on in that scene.

"Why should you be offended, you beautiful creature?" he said, leaning over her from behind.

"I am offended because you are making a mock of my concern for your safety," she replied. "Oh, Dick, if you knew what I suffered, you would not make a mock of me."

"Believe me, dear lady, 'twas not my intention to say a word in that spirit," said he. "Nay, I give you my word that, however I may be disposed to regard the remarks made by Mrs. Cholmondeley and the rest of her set in respect of this ridiculous affair, I can only feel touched—yes, deeply touched and honoured—by the concern you showed on my behalf."

"No, you do not feel touched; you only think of me as a silly old woman," she cried.

"Nay, you do me a great injustice," he said. "I was affected by what you said to me on the evening of your arrival; it showed me how good and kind was your heart, and now—well, I can say with truth that my feeling has been increased by the additional evidence you have given me of your—your kind heart."

"Ah, that is just the limit of your feeling for me!" she said in a low voice—a voice that coaxed one into contradiction—while her eyes, cast downward to the point of her dainty little shoe, coerced one into contradiction.

Most men were quite content to be coaxed, but there were an obstinate few who required coercion.

But she had a point still in reserve. She knew it to be irresistible in an emergency.

Dick yielded to the coaxing of her voice.

"Nay," he said, "I have not yet expressed all that I feel of regard for you, Mrs. Abington. I shall not make the attempt to do so."

"Regard? Regard? Regard is the feeling that a miss has for her governess," said she. "You should have no special trouble expressing your regard for me, sir. 'Tis usually done through the medium of a book of poetry—schoolroom verses writ solely for the sake of the moral in the last stanza. Will you buy me such a volume, Dick?"

"Now 'tis I who have reason to complain of being mocked," said he.

She started up and stood face to face with him. It seemed to him that she was full of eagerness to say something. She had her fingers interlaced in front of her; there was a tremulous movement about her lips suggesting a flood of emotion about to be released in words.

And the flood came.

"Good-bye!" she said.

And then he understood her.

He took the hand which she had flung out to him and bowed his head down to it.

There was a silence while he laid his lips upon it. And then she gave a derisive laugh.

"You are the greatest fool I ever met in my life!" she cried. "You are a fool, Dick. Any man is a fool who kisses a woman's hand when he might kiss her lips."

"That is not as I have read the history of the world from the days of Queen Dido of Carthage down to the days of Queen Diana of Poictiers," said Dick.

"And you call yourself an Irishman!" she cried, with affected scorn.

"As seldom as possible," he said. "Only when 'tis needful for me to make an excuse for an indiscretion. I do not feel the need to call myself one to-day."

"I have always paid you the compliment of thinking of you as very human," she said.

"And now you have proved the value of your judgment," said he.

She took a step toward the door, still keeping her eyes upon his face.

"Human?" she said sadly. "Human, and yet you drive me from your presence like this? That is where you err."

"To err is human," said he.

She was back again in a flash.

"Oh, Dick, are you not a fool?" she cried. "Why will you continue troubling yourself about a girl who has passed away from you—who treated you with indifference—when there are others within reach who would make your fortune—who would spend all their time thinking—thinking—thinking how to make you happy—and who would succeed, too? Do you prefer a dream of love to the reality, Dick?"

"I do not understand you," said Dick. "Nay, do not make any further attempt to enlighten my dulness, I entreat

of you. I prefer remaining in ignorance of your meaning, because I like you so well, Mrs. Abington, and because I never mean to forget your kindness to me, and because I think the woman of impulse is the most charming of all women; I think her so charming that I hold in contempt the man who does not stand between her and her impulses."

"And I hold in contempt the man who, when a young girl has given her promise to marry another man, continues to love her and to remain in her neighbourhood instead of behaving reasonably and as ordinary self-respect should dictate. Self-respect, did I say? Let me rather say as ordinary respect for the young woman should dictate. I have a contempt for the man who fails to do the young woman the justice of giving her a chance of forgetting him, as she should when she has made up her mind to marry his rival. Richard Sheridan, if you were desirous of treating Elizabeth Linley fairly you would leave Bath to-day and not return until she has become the wife of Mr. Long and has gone with him to his home and her home. I looked on you as a man of honour, Dick—a man who liked to see fair play; but I am disappointed in you. Your brother is a truer man than you are; he had the decency to take himself off when he found that the girl had made her choice. That is all I have to say to you, Master Richard Brinsley. I have spoken in a moment of impulse, you will say, no doubt; and in that reflection you will probably find a sufficient excuse for disregarding all that I have said. Now good-bye to you, my friend. I never wish to see your face again."

She flashed through the door before he could say a word; but for that matter he had no word to say. He stood for a few moments where she had left him in the middle of the room; then he seated himself on the sofa where she had sat.

He was disturbed by what she had just said to him—

more disturbed than he was by the thought of all that she had said in the early part of their interview, though that could not be said to have a tranquillising influence upon a young man whose emotions were not always under his control.

She had told him that if he had any self-respect—if he had any regard for Betsy Linley, he would hasten away from Bath and not return until she had left it.

That would be doing only what was fair to Betsy and to the man whom she had promised to marry, Mrs. Abington had said; and Dick could not but feel that there was some show of reason in this view of a matter that concerned him deeply.

He wondered if she had not spoken wisely—if she had not given him the most sensible advice possible, and at the same time the most philosophical—the two are not always the same thing. To be sure, she had assumed that Betsy Linley loved him, and that, therefore, his presence near her could not fail to be a menace to the girl's peace of mind—could not fail to tend to make her thoughts dwell upon the past rather than to look into the future; and perhaps this was assuming too much. He did not know that Betsy had ever loved him. But still Mrs. Abington's words made their impression.

And then he began to think of the bitter words which she had spoken. The room still seemed to ring with those words which had whirled from her when she had stood with her hand on the door:

"*I never wish to see your face again!*"

Those were bitter words; and he felt that she meant them. She meant them. He could not doubt that. Yes, she meant . . .

And then the door was thrown open, and before he could raise his head, which was bent forward, his chin resting on one hand, she had flung herself on her knees before him,

"Oh, Dick—my own dear Dick, forgive me for what I have said!"
[*page* 223.

and was kissing his face, holding a hand on each of his cheeks, sobbing at the intervals.

"Oh, Dick—my own dear Dick, forgive me for what I have said—forget all that I have said! You are the only good man that I have met, Dick, and I will not go back to London without knowing that you have forgiven me. Say that you do, Dick; I am only a poor woman—it is so easy to forgive a woman, is it not, Dick?"

He kissed her on the forehead, and then on one of her cheeks, where a tear was glistening.

"You have no business with tears," said he.

But that was just where he made a mistake.

CHAPTER XXIII

YES, but had she not given him good advice?

This was the question which she had left him to think over, and it was one which excluded every other thought for some days.

She had suggested to him in her own way—he remembered the flashing of her eyes and her attitude in front of him, with a denunciatory forefinger pointed at him—that he was behaving basely by remaining in Bath after Betsy Linley had given her promise to marry Mr. Long. He should have shown his brother an example in this respect, rather than have allowed his brother to make the first move.

He thought again, as he had thought before—in the interval between Mrs. Abington's hasty exit from the room and her unexpected return to him—that the value of this counsel was wholly dependent on the assumption that Betsy loved him; and he felt that it would be a piece of presumption on his part to take so much for granted. He reflected that he had really no absolute proof that she had ever entertained a thought of him as a lover. To be sure, when they were children together they had been sweethearts; but since they had passed out of that period, neither of them had ever referred to the promises of constancy which they had exchanged. He could not deny to himself, nor did he make the attempt to do so, that his

affection for Betsy had been continuous; but this was not a point that had any bearing upon the question of whether he was doing right or wrong in remaining in Bath.

So far as he himself was concerned, he felt that, though he loved Betsy as deeply as ever, he could trust himself to be near her. His love had been chastened, purified, exalted since that evening when she had kissed him and told him what love really was. He felt that he had acquired a share of her unselfishness, a sense of the glory of self-sacrifice.

He would stay.

He would not suggest that he had a doubt as to the stability of her purpose. He would not suggest that his vanity was so great as to make it impossible for him to conceive of her not being in love with him. His flying from Bath at such a time would certainly tend to give her pain. It would be equivalent to an impudent suggestion on his part—the suggestion that his staying would be too much for her—the suggestion that his flight would be an act of mercy shown by him to her.

He would stay.

He would not assume even in confidence with himself that Betsy loved him; and as for himself, had not Mr. Long's parting words to him opened up before his eyes a new vista of the influence of love—that love which seeks not a reward—that love which is in itself the reward of loving? Mr. Long had not urged him to abandon as an idle dream the love that he had for Betsy Linley: he had rather exhorted him to continue steadfast in his love, since its influence upon him would be wholly for good.

He would stay.

And he did stay; and so did Mrs. Abington.

When she said good-bye to him, in a passion of repentant tears, he took it for granted that she would return to London probably the next day; but somehow, if that was her intention, she fell short of realising it. She appeared every day

on the Parade, and every evening either in one of the Assembly Rooms or at a concert, with Tom Linley by her side.

Dick heard of her from day to day, and at first he was surprised to learn that she was still in Bath; and then he became positively annoyed that she should give people an opportunity of smiling as they did when they talked about her and Tom Linley. The young man, who was reported to be a most diligent student, was enlarging his course of study, they said; but they rather thought that he was too ambitious. Was it not usually thought prudent for any one who aspired to a knowledge of Latin, not to begin with Catullus or Lucretius, but with a book chiefly made up of cases and declensions? The most rational progress toward Parnassus was by a *gradus*, or step, they said. But there was the earnest young student beginning his knowledge of a language, previously unknown to him, with the beautiful Mrs. Abington. Faith, 'twas like setting Sappho before a youth who had not mastered the Greek alphabet; 'twas like offering a porter-house steak to a child before it has cut its teeth, the less refined of the critics declared.

But however wise these criticisms may have been, at the end of a week Mrs. Abington lingered on in Bath and young Mr. Linley lingered by her side; and then the men of the world began to shrug their shoulders and to talk—also in metaphors—of the whims of the actress. Had Mrs. Abington's teeth become suddenly weak, they inquired, that she was compelled to take to a diet of caudle? She had mastered many a tough steak in her time, and had never been known to complain of toothache. Surely she must find caudle to be very insipid!

The ladies were the hardest on her, of course; for every morning she appeared in a new gown, and every evening in another, and they all differed the one from the other,

only as one star differs from another in glory; and it was difficult to say which was the most becoming to her, though this point was most widely discussed among the men who knew nothing whatever about the matter, and showed their ignorance by admiring a simple taffeta made for a hoop, but worn without one, quite as much as that gorgeous brocade about which foaming torrents of lace fell, called by ordinary people flounces.

The ladies sneered, for not one of these gowns could be imitated. They knew that they could not be imitated, for they had tried, worrying the life out of their maids in the fruitless attempt. They sneered. What else could they do, after they had boxed the ears of their maids in accordance with the best manners of the period before the trying days of the French Revolution? They sneered, and the more imaginative ones compared her to a confectioner's window, which is laid out with infinite pains, though it is only attractive to the immature taste of a child. That young Linley had really not got past the toffee stage, they declared; always admitting, however, that he was a pretty lad, and bemoaning his fate in being compelled to do the bidding of a lady of such experience as Mrs. Abington.

And then they called her a harpy.

But Tom Linley felt very proud to be permitted to walk by the side of so distinguished a lady; and he never seemed prouder of this privilege than when he went with her to one of the Thursday receptions given by Lady Miller at Bath-Easton, for every one of note seemed to be promenading on the lawn, and there was a flowing stream of coaches and chariots and curricles and chairs still on the road, bearing additional visitors to eat the lady's cakes and to drink her tea, before taking part in the serious business that called for their attention.

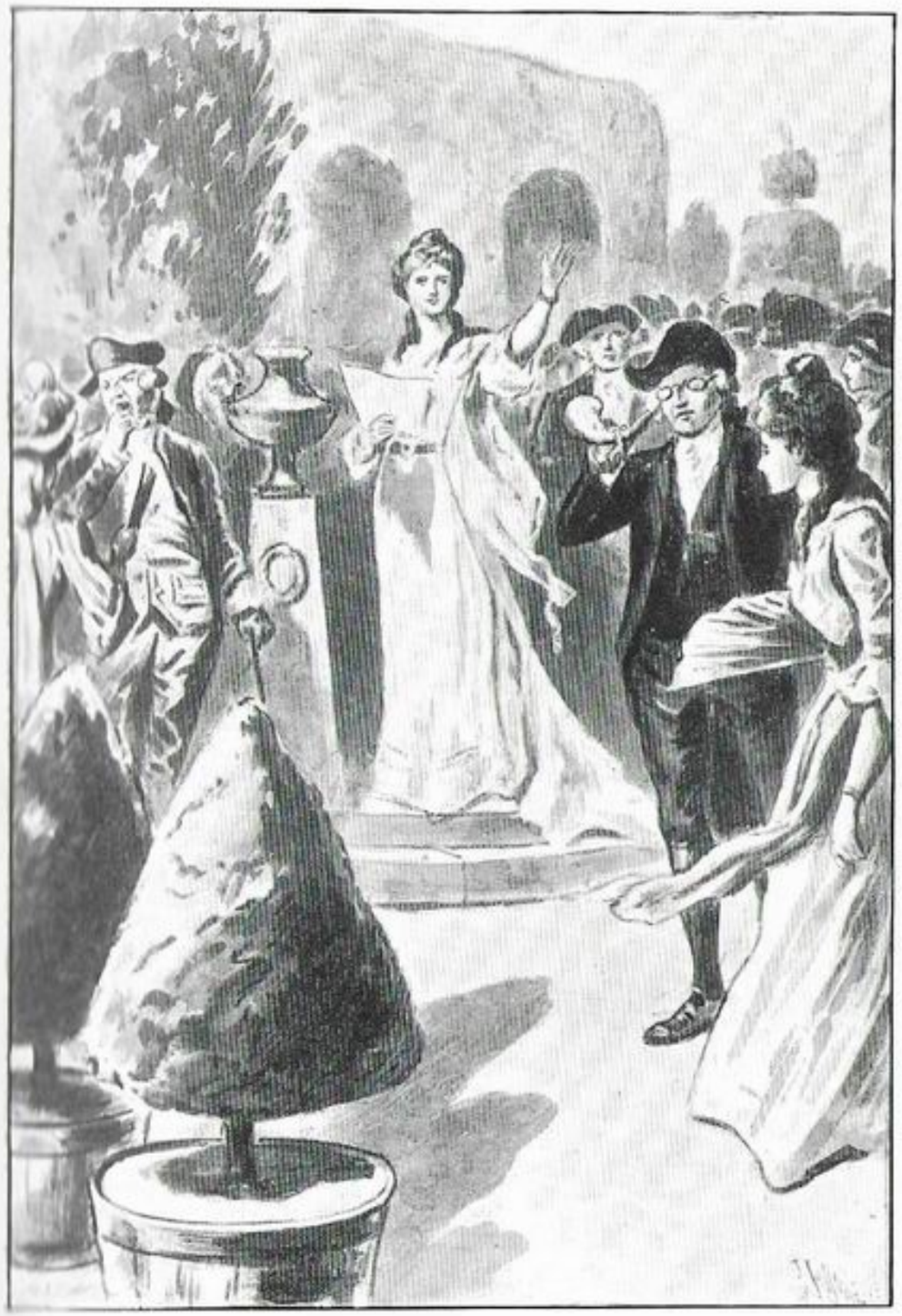
Tom had spent half the previous night in an attempt to produce a poem that might have a chance of winning the

chaplet, which was the prize for the verses pronounced the best of the day. To be able to lay the trophy at the feet of the lady in praise of whose beauty and virtue he had composed his sonnet, after the fashion of the poet Petrarch, whose works he had studied in Italy, would, he felt, be the greatest happiness he could hope for in life.

The lady whose ingenuity in devising the literary contests at Bath-Easton has caused her name to live when other names far more deserving of immortality have been forgotten, has had ample injustice done to her in every diary, and in most of the letters, of the period. Of course Walpole's faun-like humour found in Lady Miller and her entertainments a congenial topic. Whenever there was a woman to be lied about, with wit and in polished periods, Walpole was the man to undertake the business. He could make the most respectable of ladies entertaining to his correspondents, and his sneers at the good women of whose hospitality he seemed glad enough to partake, must have formed very amusing reading when they were quite fresh. Even now, though the world has become accustomed to the taste of frozen meat, his wit, when taken out of the refrigerator, does not seem altogether insipid.

He ridiculed Lady Miller, after he had been entertained by her, with exquisitely bad taste. She was vulgar, and she was forty. Chatty little Miss Burney, too, believed her to be forty also,—actually forty; so that it seemed inconceivable how, with such a charge hanging over her, Lady Miller was able to fill her house and crowd her grounds month after month with the most distinguished men and women in England.

The estimable Mrs. Delany, who fervently hoped that no friend of hers would ever be painted by so dreadful an artist as Gainsborough—a hope which, fortunately, was not realised, or the world would have lacked one of its greatest pictures—was also unable to take a charitable



TOOK FROM ITS DEPTHS THE VARIOUS MANUSCRIPTS AND READ THEM ALOUD.
[*page* 229.

view of Lady Miller's age. But still the curious entertainment took place every Thursday during the season, and was attended by every one worth talking about, and by a good many persons who were talked about without being worth it, in Bath and the region round about. Every one who was considered eligible to enter the Assembly Rooms was qualified to attend the ceremony of the urn at Bath-Easton.

This faint echo of the contests of the minnesingers originated with a Greek vase which came into the possession of Lady Miller. Having acquired this property, it seemed to have occurred to her that it would be well to put it to some practical use, so she put it to a singularly unpractical one. The vase was called an urn, and in it were deposited, on the day of the ceremony, certain rhymed couplets bearing, with varying degrees of directness, upon topics of the hour. The company having gathered round the urn, which was placed on a pedestal, Lady Miller or her husband took from its depths the various manuscripts and read them aloud. Prizes were then awarded to the poems which a committee considered best worthy of honour.

At first the entertainment was regarded with coldness: hearing copies of verses read aloud, most of them of indifferent merit, failed as an attraction; but so soon as it became known that some highly spiced personalities were embodied in no less than three of the poems taken from the urn one day, people began to perceive that the ceremony might be well worth attending, and its popularity increased to such a degree that few of the people possessing the slender qualification for visiting Bath-Easton failed to put in an appearance every Thursday.

Dick Sheridan, who went with one of his sisters, noticed Tom Linley scowling by the side of Mrs. Abington, for on the other side of the lady was Dr. Goldsmith with his friend

Lord Clare, and both were distracting her attention from what he was saying to her regarding Petrarca. She had professed an unbounded admiration for Petrarca, when his verses were quoted in the language in which they were written. But Dick saw that Tom had his revenge upon the others, for Dr. Johnson came up with Mr. Edmund Burke, and before the broadsides of such conversational frigates, what chance had a mere bumboat like Dr. Goldsmith?

In the distance Dick saw Mrs. Thrale by the side of her husband, and Dr. Burney had just joined them with Signor Piozzi—the accomplished Italian whom Mrs. Thrale had mocked with marvellous effrontery while he was playing the piano one day in Dr. Burney's house in St. Martin's Street, off Leicester Fields. Dr. Burney had gravely rebuked her for her impoliteness; but his doing so only made the little invisible imp of Fate, who had been very hilarious over the lady's mimicry, as he sat perched up on the cornice of the ceiling, almost choke himself with chuckling.

Mrs. Thrale was now very polite to Signor Piozzi, and so also was Mr. Thrale.

Then Miss Angelica Kauffmann, accompanied by Sir Joshua Reynolds and Miss Theophila Palmer, hastened to greet Garrick, who had once contributed a poem to the urn. Afterward, Mr. Richard Cumberland drew nigh, and Garrick lost no time making him contribute to the amusement of Miss Palmer.

"They tell me that Dr. Goldsmith's new play is a fine piece of work, sir," said the actor.

"Oh no, sir, no. Believe me you have been misinformed, Mr. Garrick; 'tis a wretched thing, truly," cried Cumberland, who would not admit that any one could write except himself.

"Nay, sir, I hear that it surpasses *The Good-Natured Man,* and that, you will admit, was a very fine piece of work," said Garrick.

"What! *The Good-Natured Man?* You surprise me, Mr. Garrick!" said Cumberland. "Heavens, sir, 'twas a pitiful thing. You cannot surely call to mind the scene with the bailiffs! Oh, sir, you must be joking—yes, yes; I like to take the most charitable view of everything, so I assume that you are joking."

"I know that your charitable views are your strong point, Mr. Cumberland," said Garrick; "but you should not let them bias your judgment. You should not say a word against Goldsmith, for people say that he wrote *The Good-Natured Man* after he had been a good deal in your company."

"'Tis a calumny, sir—a calumny," said Cumberland warmly. "He was never inspired by me to write *The Good-Natured Man.*"

"Well, well, how people do talk!" said Garrick. "But I am glad to have your denial on this point, though I must say that when I produced the play I never heard it asserted that you had stood for the character."

With his accustomed adroitness Garrick led Cumberland on to talk of many persons and their works, and for every person and every work he had some words of condemnation. Sir Joshua, standing by placidly with his ear-trumpet, saw that Miss Kauffmann was becoming indignant, so he led her away, leaving Garrick to amuse Miss Palmer to his heart's content.

While Dick watched the little comedy, he heard a greeting laugh behind him, and, turning, he found himself face to face with Captain Mathews, whom he had known for some time, and thoroughly disliked.

He was surprised to see the man, for he heard that he had left Bath the day after it was announced that Betsy Linley was to marry Mr. Long. He certainly had not been seen in public since that day.

"Will they come, Sheridan—will they come, do you

think?" asked Mathews, with a note of apprehension in his voice.

"I have no idea of whom you are speaking; but whoever they are, I think I may safely prophesy that they will come," said Dick.

"Thank Heaven!" said Mathews. "You must know that I mean Miss Linley and her grandfather, whom she is going to marry. But do you think that the marriage will ever come off? Oh, a pretty set of lovers that girl got around her—not a man of spirit among them all, or that old fool Long would have got six inches of cold steel through his vitals! I am the only man among them all, Sheridan—I am the only man of spirit left in Bath, as you'll see this day, whether they come or not."

"What do you mean by that threat, sir?" said Dick quickly.

The man laughed.

"I haven't said aught to wound your feelings, have I?" he said. "Oh no! I don't mean to say that you're not a fellow of spirit, Sheridan, only you never loved Miss Linley as the others pretended to do. They showed their spirit by slinking off, sir, just when they should have stayed. You didn't see me slink off, Sheridan? No, I am here, and here I mean to stay until the end of this affair has come, and it cannot be far off after to-day. I tell you, Dick Sheridan, that I am not the man to lie tamely down, as the rest of them did, and let Walter Long and Elizabeth Linley walk over my body to the church portal!"

"You are pleased to talk in the strain of a riddle, and that, Mr. Mathews, is an infernally dull strain, let me assure you," said Dick. "Come, sir, if you have anything to say, say it out plainly, like a man. But first I venture to remind you that Mr. Linley and his family have been for years my friends, and also that Mr. Long honours me by his friendship, and I promise you that anything you say of them that

verges on an affront I shall think it my duty to resent. Now, Mr. Mathews, say what you have to say."

Mathews looked at him for some time; then he laughed as he had laughed before.

"Your father is a play-actor, Mr. Sheridan," said he at last. "I have seen him in more than one piece, both in Dublin and Bristol. He is a fine actor. Well, go to him, and he will tell you that the way to make a play a success is to keep the playgoers interested in it from scene to scene, and the best way to do this is to tell them only a little of the story at one time. Now, sir, consider that this scene is the beginning of a comedy—maybe it will turn out a tragedy before we have done with it—but this is the first scene; keep your eyes and your ears open, and you will find it worth your while. By the Lord, there they come at last! Curse it! the girl is getting lovelier every day—every day! Such beauty is enough to make any man mad. Look at her, Sheridan—look at her, and tell me if there is any man living that would not run a risk of all the tortures of the lost to be near her! Dick Sheridan, I don't love her—not I, not I: I hate her! Deep down in my heart I tell you that I hate her. But there's no human being that can tell the difference between the passion of love and the passion of hate."

Dick saw that the man was not far removed from madness; but before he could give him the warning which was in his mind to bestow upon him, Mathews had turned about and hurried away to where people were grouping themselves round the urn.

Mr. Long, with Betsy Linley by his side, was replying to the greetings of some of their friends. He no longer carried his arm in a sling.

CHAPTER XXIV

Dick Sheridan looked on at the scene of bright colours before him on the lawn; the newly erected imitation Greek temple was at the farther end of one of the many vistas, and at regular intervals stood Greek pediments of carven stone surmounted by busts of Greek poets. Among the shrubberies were pedestals with grinning fauns, and an occasional nymph with flying drapery. An Artemis with her dogs stood in the attitude of pursuit between two laurels.

Dick felt strangely lonely, although he had frequently attended the ceremony of the urn. His sister had gone to discharge the imaginary duties of one of the priestesses of the urn, and was, with another girl, engaged in twisting twigs of bay into a practicable wreath, her companion showing her how it was necessary not to make the joining too rigid, so that the wreath could be easily enlarged or diminished in size to suit the circumference of the head of the victor; for it was not to be taken for granted that the bays must go to the largest brow.

For a short time he watched the weaving of the wreath, and then he looked across the lawn to where Betsy was talking to Dr. Burney, Mr. Long standing close by with Dr. Delap, who had come from Brighthelmstone to drink the waters. Mathews had disappeared as suddenly as he had come upon the scene, but Dick made up his mind to

keep a watch for his return. The threats of which he had made use in regard to Mr. Long and Betsy were vague, but their utterance by the man at that time had startled Dick. The fellow might be mad, and yet have, with all the cunning of a madman, concocted a plot that might mean disaster to Betsy; but if he were narrowly watched his scheme of revenge could doubtless be frustrated, and Dick felt that he would never forgive himself if, after being forewarned, he should let Mathews carry out his purpose, assuming that he meant mischief.

While he was watching for a possible reappearance of the man, Mr. Linley came across the lawn to him, and drew him away in the direction of the gods and goddesses of the shrubberies. Dick saw that there was an expression of anxiety on his face. His manner, too, was nervous.

"Dick, I am in great trouble," he said in a low voice. "You can guess what is its origin, I am sure?"

Dick had just seen Mr. Long and Betsy side by side. The match had not been broken off. What trouble, then, could possess the girl's father?

"Indeed, sir, you surprise me," said Dick. "I see Betsy with Mr. Long, and——"

"Oh, 'tis not about Betsy I am troubled," said Mr. Linley, "though, Heaven knows, she has given me trouble enough in the past with her whimsies about singing in public. If I had not been firm with her, Dick, she would have given up singing a year ago. No, 'tis not about her, but Tom, that I wish to speak to you. You have seen him to-day with that woman—a play-actress?"

"I have seen him, sir. My father was a play-actor," said Dick quietly.

"Surely you know what I mean, Dick! Surely you know that it is not in my thoughts to utter a word that would assume the form of a reproach upon the theatre.

No, Dick, no; that is not my intention. But you have seen them together—Tom and Mrs. Abington? I don't say a word against her, mind. She may lead a blameless life, though I have heard—— But that is not to the point."

"Mrs. Abington is a very charming lady, Mr. Linley, and as for propriety—Dr. Johnson himself has dined with her."

"Dr. Johnson—Dr. Johnson! Dr. Johnson is not to the point; he is old enough to take care of himself and to protect himself from the wiles of all the coquettes in England."

Dick laughed.

"Nature and the small-pox have given him great advantage over the majority of men, sir. They have made him practically invulnerable."

"But Nature and Italy have done just the opposite for Tom; his soul is capable of the deepest feeling, Dick, and he is open to every influence that an accomplished woman of the world has at her command. That creature—I mean that lady—Mrs. Abington—oh, she is undoubtedly a charming creature!—that's where the danger lies. You know her, Dick; tell me what it is that she means to do in regard to Tom."

"Oh, sir! she has taken a passing fancy to Tom—that's all. You know what 'tis to possess the soul of an artist, sir. So far as I can gather, that soul is full of whimsies. The only comforting thought in connection with suchlike is that none of their whims lasts long. Their inconstancy is their greatest charm. Mrs. Abington will soon have done with Tom, sir."

"Thank Heaven—thank Heaven! The sooner the better, say I. Dick, a fortnight ago Tom had no thought for anything save his violin. I felt that he was actually too deeply absorbed in it: he would scarce give himself

time to take his meals, and he was at the point of falling into a rage because I had given my consent to Betsy's retirement from the concerts. He called me a traitor—a renegade—worse than a Mohammedan—for allowing her to renounce the true faith; those were his words, Dick. And yet, now, he has done nothing but improvise, and that the most sickly stuff—lovelorn; and his poetry—he has bought a rhyming-dictionary, and has turned the half of Petrarch's poems into English."

"You take this little matter too seriously, believe me, Mr. Linley. 'Tis but a bubble of feeling, sir—an airy nothing. 'Twill float away and leave not a trace behind."

"I hope so—with all my heart I hope so. You do not think that you could do something to assist its flight, Dick?"

"Dear sir, I am convinced that any interference by me—yes, or even by you, sir—would have just the opposite effect to what we hope for in this matter."

"What, don't you think that you might bring the creat—the lady, I mean—that you might bring her to reason?"

"The soul of an artist is susceptible to many influences—love, hate, jealousy, criticism, a wet day, a gown that has been made a little tight in the bodice, a gewgaw,—all these have great weight with the soul of an artist; but reason has none. You must perceive, sir, that if every one were reasonable there would be no artists. Mrs. Abington is an artist in the comedy of love; she has curiosity, but 'tis of the butterfly order—a sip here and a sip there among the flowers. Oh, the flowers are nothing the worse for the curiosity of the butterfly. Tom will be himself again when she flies off to another part of the garden."

"I have my fears, Dick. But I don't doubt that you take the most sensible view of the matter. I believe that

he has sent in a sonnet in praise of her to the urn to-day. Petrarch is his model. If he is awarded the prize he will lay it at her feet; they do these things in Italy but here we are more prosaic. Are they beginning to read the stuff?"

"We must not lose the chance of applauding Tom's sonnet," said Dick, making a move toward the circle that was formed round the Greek urn, from which Lady Miller, not looking so ridiculous as might have been expected, in her white robes, as a priestess (the period was a masquerade in itself, and the painters made the most of it), had just taken one of the manuscripts, and was putting herself in an attitude to read.

Mr. Linley saw this; but what Dick saw was that Mathews had reappeared, and was standing on the outskirts of the circle, his eyes fixed upon Betsy, with a poisonous smile about their corners.

Dick hastened across the lawn, and was in time to hear the second line of the heroics which the lady had begun to read, not without a certain amount of stumbling over unfamiliar words and an over-emphasising of the epithets, which were numerous and safely commonplace.

"What is it that Mathews means to do?" that was the question which came to Dick when he perceived the evil smile of the man, for he saw that it was a smile anticipatory of triumph; and all the time that Lady Miller was meandering through the poem, with its allusions to the deities in the mythologies of Greece and Rome, and its rhymes of "fault" and "thought," "smile" and "toil," with an Alexandrine for the third rhyme of "isle," he was asking himself that question: "What is it that Mathews means to do?"

He looked across the listening circle, and saw that Mr. Long also had his eyes fixed upon the man, and that the same question had been suggested to him. Mr.

Long was watching and waiting. And then he glanced away from Mathews and saw Dick. He smiled and nodded pleasantly; but Dick had no difficulty in perceiving that behind these courtesies Mr. Long was ill at ease.

And then the high-priestess extracted another poem from the urn. It was written in precisely the same strain as the first; only the rhymes were more palpably false—the same greater and lesser deities talked about the condition of society at Olympus, which every one recognised by the description as Prior Park; but just as it promised to become delightfully, spitefully, personal, and therefore interesting, the poem shuffled out on the spindleshanks of a reference to the need for clean napkins for the glasses in the Pump Room.

This was very feeble, most people thought (the author was not among them), even though the Pump Room was artfully disguised under the name of the Fount of Helicon. There was a distinct impression of relief when the third poem was found to be written as a lyric with a comfortable jolt about it, to which Lady Miller, after two or three false starts, accommodated her voice. It touched with light satire upon the question of watering the roads, and as this was the topic of the hour, it was received with abundant applause, and the general idea was, that unless something extremely good awaited reading, this lyric would carry off a prize.

The fourth poem turned out to be Tom Linley's sonnet in praise of Mrs. Abington; and as every one knew Mrs. Abington, and as she herself was present, and as no one was able to identify the translation of Petrarch's beautiful sentiments, there seemed little doubt the poet's ambition would be rewarded.

Tom flushed, and was more overcome than he had ever been when playing before his largest audience. Mrs. Abington, too, gave a very pleasing representation of the

ingénue fluttered with compliments which she knows are thoroughly well deserved. She would have the people believe that she was overwhelmed—that she was not at all pleased with the publicity given to her in so unexpected a way, and the way she shook her head at Tom should have conveyed to him the fact that she considered him to be a very naughty boy—the result being that the crowd perceived that Mrs. Abington was a very modest lady, and that Garrick, who was something of a judge of such performances, was ready to affirm that Mrs. Abington had a very light touch.

Then Lady Miller, after a few complimentary remarks upon Mrs. Abington's style of dress, began to read the next poem. Having now read four copies of verses, that fulness of expression with which she had begun her labours, had disappeared from her voice, and she had read the greater part of the sonnet in a purely mechanical way. It became clear before she had got through more than five lines of the new rhymes, that she had not the slightest idea what they were about. The stanzas were quite illiterate and the merest doggerel; but, at the end of the first, glances were exchanged around the circle, for the stanza was coarse in every way, and it contained a pun upon the name Long that could only be regarded as a studied insult to the gentleman bearing that name.

But it was plain that the high-priestess had not the remotest idea that anything was particularly wrong with the poem. She looked up from the paper with the smile with which she was accustomed to punctuate the periods, and then began to read the second stanza.

She did not get further than the third line. The first two contained a very gross allusion to an old man's marrying a young woman; but the third was so coarse that even the apathetic reader was startled and made a pause, during which she scanned the remainder of the manuscript, and

in doing so her face became crimson. She handed the sheet to her husband, saying a few words to him, and then tried to gather up the threads of her smile, so to speak.

"I think that I had better go on to the next poem," she said aloud. "The writer of the last must have inadvertently sent us the wrong leaf. He must have designed it for his favourite pothouse."

This expression of opinion was received with general applause. Yet no one except Dick seemed to suspect Mathews of being the writer of the doggerel. But in the mind of Dick there was no doubt on the matter. He saw the triumphant leer on the man's face, and could scarcely restrain himself from rushing at him and at least making an attempt to knock him down. He only held himself back by the reflection that before the evening had come, Mathews would have received a challenge from him. He made up his mind to challenge him, as certain as his name was Mathews. It would be in vain for people to assure him that this was not his quarrel, but Mr. Long's; he would assert that, as the insult was directed against a lady, in the presence of his (Dick's) sister, he was quite entitled to take it on himself to punish the perpetrator.

He had glanced at Mr. Long when Lady Miller made her pause, and had seen him smiling, while he addressed some words to Betsy, evidently regarding the creases of her glove, for immediately afterwards she held out her hand to him, and he straightened the little ripples on the silk.

Dick wondered if Mr. Long had failed to catch the insulting lines of the doggerel before the high-priestess had become aware of what she had been reading. Certainly he gave no sign of having caught their import. Dick rather hoped that he had not; he had no desire

to cede to Mr. Long the part which he meant to play in this affair.

When he glanced again across the circle, he noticed that Mr. Long had disappeared. And the voice of Lady Miller, with its wrong inflections and its exaggerated emphasis on the adjectives, went on in its delivery of the even lines of the new poem, which was all about Phœbus and Phaeton, and Actæon and Apollo, and the Muses and Marsyas, though nobody seemed to care what it was about. It was very long, and it led nowhere. The circle gave it their silent inattention. Some yawned behind polite hands; one or two whispered. The last lines came upon all as a delightful surprise, for there was really no reason why it should ever end, and for that matter there was no reason why it should ever have begun.

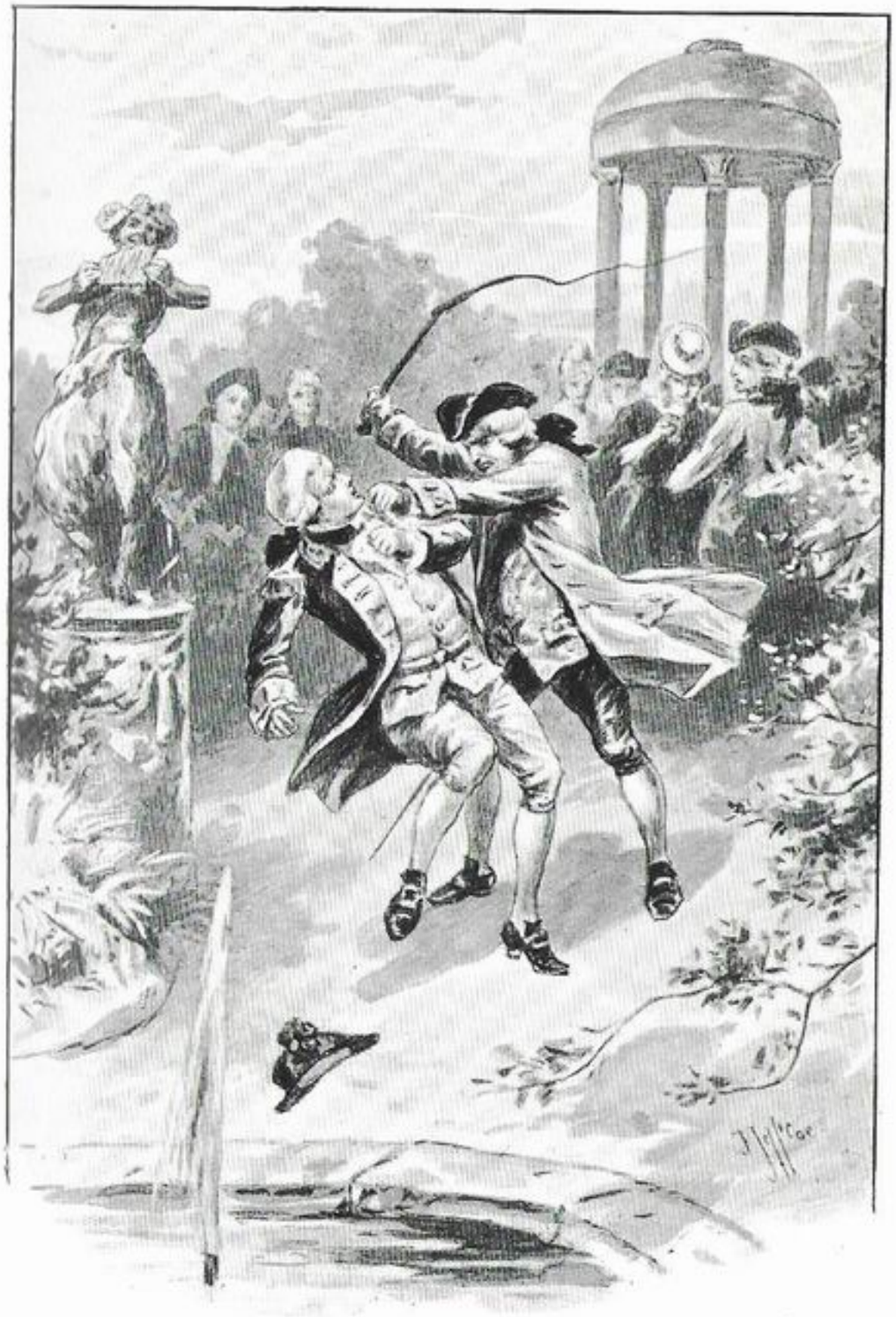
This was, happily, the last of the contents of the urn. Most of the *habitués* of Bath-Easton felt that the day had been one of mediocrity; the entertainment would have been even duller than ordinary if it had not been for that shocking thing to which no one referred. Of course Tom Linley was awarded the wreath of bays, which, with some ceremony, the high-priestess laid upon his brows, making him look quite as ridiculous as he felt.

"O lud!" whispered Mrs. Abington to Mr. Walpole, who had got beside her, "O lud! if young gentlemen will write prize poems, they have a heavy penalty to pay for it."

"Nay, my dear creature," said he, "'tis but fitting that the victim calf should be decorated for the sacrificial altar."

"I admit the calf," said she, "but whose is the altar?"

"'Tis dedicated to Hymen or Hades; it rests with you to determine which," said he, with one of his wicked leers. He was very like one of the marble satyrs, she perceived—a Marsyas without his music. She longed for an Apollo skilled in flaying.



FLOGGED THE FELLOW AS NEVER HORSE HAD BEEN FLOGGED.

[*page* 243.

The ceremony over, congratulatory smiles were sent flying around the listeners, and there was a general movement toward the house, full of spontaneity.

"Ladies and gentlemen," came a voice from one side, and the movement was arrested. People looked over their shoulders. O lud! was the dulness of the day to be increased by speeches? they enquired.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you were grossly insulted just now by a wretch who is a master of the arts of the brigand, though he meant his poisoned knife for me alone. This is the blackguard, and I treat him as such."

Before any one was aware of the fact that it was Mr. Long who was speaking, he had his hand upon the collar of Captain Mathews, and had swung him round by a certain jerk well known to wrestlers of the old school. Forcing him, staggering, backward with one hand, with a postillion's short whip, which he held in the other, he flogged the fellow as never horse had been flogged. He cut strips off his garments as neatly as if his weapon had been a pair of shears; a cut of the lash made the blood spurt from one of his calves, another took a slice off his small-clothes just above the knee—ludicrous but effective. His coat parted at the back seams in the stress of the struggle, and a few more cuts at the opening made shreds of his shirt and let free, as it seemed, all the blood in his body. There was the shriek of females, and this brought the men to their senses. They hastened to interpose. Mr. Long sent his victim staggering against two or three of them. Mathews trod on their toes, and they cursed him unaware, Mr. Long belabouring away with a deftness that lacked neither style nor finish; and all the time his knuckles were digging into Mathew's throat, until the wretch's face became purple.

Half a dozen gentlemen launched themselves upon Mr. Long. He stepped adroitly to one side, and let them have

Mathews. They fell on him in a heap, crushing out of his body whatever trifle of breath he retained.

Mr. Long politely assisted them to rise, affecting to wipe from their garments the result of their contact with the grass. He was breathing heavily, and his wig had become disordered.

He flung his whip—it was still serviceable—into a plantation, and when he found his breath he said:

"I think I should like a dish of tea."

CHAPTER XXV

"If any one says that Mr. Long was not justified in his act, I tell him he lies," remarked Dick grandly to the group who were propping up Mathews in a sitting posture on the grass.

The wretch seemed ludicrously out of place on the lawn, and the gentlemen who saw him there did not fail to perceive that the expression on the faces of the stone satyrs was for the first time appropriate. Had he been in the middle of a field of young wheat, he might have relieved a less disreputable figure from duty.

"Who is there that says Mr. Long was not justified?" cried one of the gentlemen; he was trying to remove a stain from his sleeve. "Good lud! does the lad think that county gentlemen are to learn discrimination as well as elocution from the Sheridan family?"

"The Sheridans take too much upon them," said another; he was unlucky enough to have his wig trampled on by the huge foot of a first-class county gentleman in the *melée*, and was inclined to be testy in consequence. "Be advised, Mr. Sheridan, leave these matters to your elders and betters."

Dick felt that he deserved the rebuke. His scarcely veiled threat savoured of impertinence. He lifted his hat and walked away. No one took any notice of him.

"By the Lord Harry, friend Long has a pair of arms that

a man thirty years younger might envy!" Dick heard one of the gentleman say.

"He will have a wife that a man forty years younger does envy," laughed a second.

"I heard my father talk of the great strength of Mr. Long when he was at his best," said a third. "Why, 'twas he that floored Devonshire Paul, the wrestler, early in the forties, going to Barnstaple to do it—'tis one of Sir Edmund's stories. Well, I dare swear that we haven't seen the last of this business. How is the fellow? Bind him over not to make a disturbance in the house."

Dick walked slowly to the villa. He found that the ladies who had been so overcome by the sight of Mathews' blood were being carefully attended to. Poor Tom Linley was sitting in a corner with his sister. Tom looked very sulky. He was the hero of Parnassus, and yet no one paid any attention to him. People were laughing and talking, some in a loud tone, others in a whisper, not upon the subject of the construction of the sonnet of Petrarch as distinguished from the sonnet of Shakespeare, but upon the likelihood of a duel following the exciting scene which they had witnessed. Tom sulked, and tried to avoid seeing that Mrs. Abington was the centre of a group of gentlemen of fashion, with whom she was exchanging quips, also on the subject of the horsewhipping of Mathews.

Of course there would be a duel. Mathews held the king's commission and wore the king's uniform. If he failed to send a challenge to the man who had so publicly disgraced him, he need never show his face in society again. That was the opinion which was universal among the party in Lady Miller's drawing-room, and it was only modified by the rider which some people appended to their verdict, to the effect that it was quite surprising how Mathews had ever got a footing in Bath society.

Mr. Linley, who was by the side of his daughter when

Dick entered, was looking solemn. He was greatly perturbed by what had taken place, and expressed the opinion that Mr. Long would have shown more wisdom by refraining from noticing Mathew's insult than he had displayed by avenging it, even though he had done so with remarkable success. Of course there would be a duel, he said; and Mathews was probably a first-class pistol-shot, though he had shown himself unable to contend with Mr. Long when taken by surprise.

Poor Betsy was overwhelmed by the thought of such a possibility. She appealed to Dick when he had come to her side. Was a duel inevitable? Was there no alternative? Could she do nothing to prevent such a sequel to the quarrel?

"Why should you be distressed at the possibility of a duel?" said Dick. "There is no particular reason why Mr. Long should stand up against that fellow; any gentleman who was present here to-day has a perfect right to send a challenge to Mathews."

"Oh, that is only saying that some one else may be killed—some one in addition to Mr. Long," cried Betsy. "Ah, why is it that disaster follows an acquaintance with me? Why have I been doomed to bring unhappiness upon so many people?"

Dick did not ransack his memory for an answer to her question—an answer founded upon the records of history. He did not cite any of the cases with which he was acquainted, of the unhappiness brought about by the fatal dower of beauty.

"How can you accuse yourself in such a matter as this?" he said. "If a rascal behaves with rascality, are you to blame yourself because he tries to make you the victim? I will not hear so cruel, so unjust a thing said about one who is more than blameless in this matter. Dear Betsy, I know the sensibility of your heart, and

how it causes you to shrink from much that others would give worlds to accomplish; but you must not be unjust to yourself."

This was poor pleading with the super-sensitiveness of a girl who could never be brought to look on fame as the noblest of cravings—nay, who was ready to sacrifice much in order to escape being famous.

"Bloodshed—bloodshed!" she murmured in great distress. "Oh, why did we come here to-day? If we had remained at home, all might have been well. Why cannot we go away to some place where we can live in freedom from all these disturbing influences? Ah, here comes Mr. Long. How pale he looks! Pray Heaven he has not been already hurt!"

Mr. Long, who had been repairing the slight disorderliness of his dress in one of the bedrooms, had some difficulty in reaching Betsy, where she sat remote from the crowd in the drawing-rooms. He had to wait for the compliments which his friends offered to him on all sides. Every one treated him with great respect, and many with deference. There did not seem to be any difference of opinion among Lady Miller's guests as to the propriety of his recent action; the only point which had been seriously discussed was in regard to the postillion's whip. Where had he got it? It was suggested on one side that he had brought it with him; but some who knew affirmed that the whip had been hanging in the hall, and that Mr. Long had, after the reading of the insulting doggerel, hurried up to the house and got possession of the weapon while the last poem was being lilted to the audience. At first, of course, there were some people who thought that Mr. Long had acted precipitately in assuming that Mathews had written the objectionable stanzas; but Lady Miller acknowledged immediately on entering the house that the manuscript was signed by Mathews, and thus complete unanimity

prevailed by the time Mr. Long had returned to the room.

Even on his way to Betsy he received a dozen offers from gentlemen to act for him in the event of his receiving a challenge. Betsy was somewhat cheered when she heard him say to one of them:

"You do me great honour, sir, but there will be no duel. I doubt if there will even be a challenge."

She heard that with pleasure.

Dick heard it with amazement.

Could it be possible, he asked himself, that Mr. Long fancied that Mathews, boor though he was, would be content to accept his public horsewhipping as the final incident in the squalid comedy of his suitorship for the hand of Miss Linley? If that was indeed his belief, all that Dick could say was that he took a rather extraordinary view of the matter.

But Betsy, not having any experience of questions of honour, but having faith in the word of a man whom she respected, was reassured.

"Do say that again," she cried, when Mr. Long had come to her.

"What do you command me to say again, madam?" he inquired. "Oh, a duel? Heavens, Mr. Sheridan, is't possible that you are here and have not yet convinced Miss Linley that I shall not have to fight a duel?"

"Nay, sir," said Dick, "I have done my best to impress upon her that there is no need for you to fight—that the quarrel belongs as much to any gentleman who was present as it does to you."

"You will pardon me for saying that I do not think that that suggestion would tend to place Miss Linley's mind at rest," said Mr. Long. "But now I can give you my word that there will be no duel. If any one is foolish enough to send a challenge to the rascal whom I treated to a drubbing,

he will do so without my knowledge and without my consent. Dear child, I can give you my word that there will be no duel."

"I am satisfied," she said simply, with a grateful look up to his face.

"If you are satisfied, all the world is satisfactory," said Mr. Long.

But it did not appear as if Mr. Linley was quite satisfied.

"If there be no duel, sir, all that I can say is that 'tis not your fault," he cried.

"Not my fault!—nay, just the contrary: 'tis to my credit," laughed Mr. Long.

"I mean, sir, that you did your very best to provoke a duel," said Mr. Linley with severity. Mr. Long was about to become his son-in-law, and this he considered, gave him a right to object to any incident that tended to jeopardise the connection.

"Oh, my dear sir," said Mr. Long, "can you really think that so simple an incident as horsewhipping a man in a public place could be considered by him a sufficient excuse for a challenge? Nay, sir, you will find, I am persuaded, that Captain Mathews is not inclined to take your view of this business. He will, I think, be satisfied to let bygones be bygones."

Dick was dumb. The only ground on which he thought he could reconcile Mr. Long's confident assertion of what any person with experience of the world would consider incredible, was his desire to allay Betsy's anxiety.

But Betsy's father apparently did not see so much as Dick. Though a professional musician, he was not without his experience of quarrels. He shook his head when Mr. Long had spoken with that airy confidence which he had assumed, and said:

"I would fain hope that events will justify the confidence with which you speak, sir; but to my mind it would seem as if——"

"Nay, dear sir, I will give you my assurance that I shall not be called on to fight any duel over this matter," cried Mr. Long in the tone of a man who has said the last word on a matter that has been under discussion for some time. "I admit that before I took the unusual step which I thought I was justified in adopting, I saw the risk that I was running. A man who horsewhips his fellow-guest may be made to answer to his host for so doing. I ran that risk, and I am happy to say that our host did not take too severe a view of the occurrence. That puts an end to any suspicion that one may entertain as to the likelihood of swords being crossed or pistols unloaded to the detriment of my health. Let us change the subject, if you please. It seems to me that enough attention has not been given to Tom's beautiful sonnet. Dear friend Tom, you have proved by the writing of that sonnet that you have already mastered the elements of successful authorship. If all poets would choose a popular subject for their songs, they would have no need to wear hats, for they would be perpetually crowned with bays. May I ask the favour of a copy of your sonnet, sir? I should like to have it printed to place beneath my print of Sir Joshua's picture of Mrs. Abington?"

Tom was delighted. His mortification at the neglect which he had received—was he not really the hero of the day?—vanished. His large eyes shone with pleasure as he gave his promise to supply Mr. Long with the copy which he desired.

Mr. Long, seeing that Betsy's large eyes, so wonderfully like those of her brother, were also shining with pleasure, was quite satisfied.

Unfortunately, just as Tom was beginning to explain

the difficulties in the way of any one wishing to create a sonnet which was really a sonnet, and not merely a fourteen-line poem, a number of people came up to talk to his sister and Mr. Long, thus interrupting him. But neither Betsy nor Dick failed to notice the vexed look which Mr. Long gave to the boy, by way of assuring him that his discourse on the Italian sonnet was something to be parted from only with a deep regret.

Dick, at the suggestion of Mr. Long, walked with Betsy round the gardens, Mr. Long following with Miss Sheridan.

The walk was a silent one. It did not seem as if they had any topic in common. They seemed to have nothing to talk about. But their silence was not the silence of strangers; it was that which exists only between the closest of friends. They had not had such a stroll side by side since she had given her promise to Mr. Long. But how many walks they had had together in the old days! Their thoughts flashed back to those days on the perfume of the rosebuds. They had often walked among the roses.

It was Dick who broke the silence.

"I do not think that a better man lives than Mr. Long," said he.

She sighed.

He glanced down at her in surprise. He was almost irritated by her sigh.

She did not speak.

"I do not believe that a better man lives in the world," he said with emphasis. "Surely you do not think that he is to blame for what took place here to-day, Betsy?"

"Oh, no, no! he behaved like—like a man," she replied at once. "And he has given us his assurance that there will be no duel," she added joyfully.

"Yes, he has given us that assurance," said Dick. "But

even if there were to be a duel, I have no doubt that he would show himself to be as brave a man."

"But there will be no duel—he said so," she cried. "And to think of that foolish rumour that went round the town, that you and he had fought! I never believed it for a moment. It was senseless—cruel! The gossips circulated the report simply because it was known that you had been with him for more than an hour on the day after you had saved him from his assailants."

Dick was once again surprised.

"How could you know that I had been with him on that night?" he inquired.

"I know it—alas! I know it," she cried. "He is so good—so—generous—so noble! Oh, I must love him—I must! Sometimes I really think that I do love him. . . . And you saved his life, Dick. It would be the basest ingratitude on my part if I did not love him after that. . . . And the way he talks of your courage!—he told me how bravely you pursued the wretches who had waylaid him. He is full of your praises, Dick. Oh, I must love him! He is the worthiest man in the world to be loved. And I believe that I do love him. I sometimes believe that I do."

"My poor Betsy," he said, "I might give you counsel on this matter if it would be of any value to you. Alas! dear, I know that nothing that I could say to you would avail against the promptings of your own true heart. It was you who first taught me the lesson which I think I have since learned more fully—the lesson of the meaning of love. Who am I that I should offer any counsel to such as you? I can only tell you that I feel that Mr. Long is the best worthy of your love of all the men in the world. But you yourself know that already."

"I do—indeed, I do know it," she cried eagerly. "And that is why I say that I am sure, sometimes, that I do love him. I must—I must—only——Oh, Dick, I am very unhappy!"

"My poor Betsy! my poor Betsy!"

That was all he could say.

CHAPTER XXVI

SEVERAL versions of the story of the exciting occurrence at the Parnassus of Bath-Easton were in circulation during the next few days. The fact that over fifty persons had witnessed the whole affair was only a guarantee that there would be at least forty-nine different versions of it. The consequence was that before two days had passed, people in Bath were quarrelling over such details as whether Captain Mathews had or had not made an attack upon Mr. Long with his cane, or if it was really true that Miss Linley had been walking with Captain Mathews, thereby arousing the jealousy of Mr. Long, and causing him to assault the other. Before the second day had gone by, there was, of course, a report that a duel had taken place, and the result was, according to the various reports:

(1) Captain Mathews had run Mr. Long through the body with a sword.
(2) Captain Mathews had shot Mr. Long with a pistol.
(3) Mr. Long had run Captain Mathews through the body with a sword.
(4) Mr. Long had shot Captain Mathews with a pistol.
(5) Mr. Long was dead.
(6) Captain Mathews was dead.
(7) Both Mr. Long and Captain Mathews were dead.
(8) Neither of them had received a scratch.

(9) There had been no fight, as Mr. Long had offered a handsome apology for his conduct, and had agreed to pay Mathews a thousand pounds by way of compensation.

These were only a few of the items of the Pump Room gossip, and every item found its adherents.

The lampooners took their choice. It was immaterial to them whether Mathews killed Long or Long killed Mathews; they treated the matter with the cynicism of Iago in regard to the killing of Cassio. They found that there was a good deal to be said in favour of every rumour, and they said it through the medium of some very wretched verses.

Mr. Long seemed to be the only man in Bath who remained unaffected in any way by the occurrence at Bath-Easton, about which, and its sequel, every one was talking. He refused to be drawn into the controversy as to whether he had attacked Mathews or been attacked by Mathews, and he declined to take sides in the question of the identity of the one who had been killed in the duel, though it might have been fancied that this was a question which would have a certain amount of interest for him. He refused to alter his mode of life in any degree. He appeared in public places no less frequently, but no more frequently, than before, and those people who had heard him affirm that there would be no duel, began, when the third day had passed, to think that there was some element in the quarrel with which they were unacquainted.

Dick Sheridan was greatly amazed, but extremely well pleased, when he heard from Mr. Long's own lips that he had not received a communication on behalf of the man whom he had horsewhipped. It was when he was sitting at supper within his own house, with Dick sitting opposite to him, on the fourth day after the incident, that he so informed Dick.

"I did not speak without a full knowledge of my man, when I affirmed that there would be no duel," said Mr. Long. "I was not so sure in regard to the challenge; but you see there is to be no challenge."

It so happened, however, that before they had risen from the table, a gentleman arrived at the house on behalf of Captain Mathews, bearing a challenge, and requesting to be put in communication with Mr. Long's friend.

The gentleman's name was Major O'Teague. He was an Irishman, who lived for two months out of the year at Bath, and the remaining ten months no one knew where —perhaps in Ireland. No one knew in what regiment he served, and no one cared to know. He himself was not communicative on the matter, and he did not affect any particular uniform. He had, however, been known to talk of his father's fighting in the Irish Brigade at Fontenoy, and that led some people to believe that he had won his rank in the same service.

When questioned on this point, he had replied that he always stood by the side of Freedom and the Fair. The consensus of opinion was that this sentiment did not materially assist one to identify the corps or the country in which he had won distinction. He was, however, known to be a good swordsman, and he always paid something on account to his landlady, so Bath ceased to take an interest in his military career. That he was carefully studied by young Mr. Sheridan there can be but little doubt, though it was Mrs. Cholmondeley who pretended to forget his name upon one occasion, and alluded to him as Major O'Trigger, an accident which young Mr. Sheridan never forgot.

He was excessively polite—"No man is so polite unless he means mischief," was the thought which came to Dick when Major O'Teague was announced.

He addressed himself to Mr. Long, having declined, with a longing eye and a reluctant voice, a glass of sherry.

"Sir," he said, "I come on a delicate mission"—he pronounced the adjective "dilicate," for even the stress of Fontenoy and a course of Bath waters failed to reduce the heritage of the Irish Brigade—and gave a polite glance in the direction of Dick.

"Mr. Richard Brinsley Sheridan is my friend, sir," said Mr. Long. "He is in my confidence, so that it is unnecessary for him to retire."

"Very well, sir," said the visitor. "I doubt not that Mr. Sheridan is a man of honour: his name, anyway, is illustrious" (pronounced "illusthrious") in the roll of fame of Irishmen. I mind that my father, the colonel, said that Owen Roe O'Neil Sheridan was a lieutenant in Clare's regiment, and a very divil at that."

"I have no doubt that Mr. Richard Brinsley Sheridan is duly proud of having at least one name in common with the lieutenant, sir," said Mr. Long.

"And he would have every right, sir, let me tell you," said Major O'Teague warmly. "My father knew that the boast of the Sheridans was that before the trouble came upon them in Ireland there never had been a wine-glass inside their castle."

"A family of water-drinkers, sir?" suggested Mr. Long.

"Nothing of the sort, sir; they drank their liquor out of tumblers," cried Major O'Teague. "Did y' ever hear tell"—the Major had elapsed into the French idiom—"did y' ever hear tell of the answer that Brian Oge O'Brian Sheridan made to the English officer that called at the castle when the colonel's horse had been stolen, Mr. Sheridan?"

"Sir," said Dick with dignity, "these are family affairs, and I should be reluctant to obtrude them on the attention

of Mr. Long at this time—though, of course, if you came to talk to him on this topic——"

"I ask your pardon, sir," said Major O'Teague fiercely. "I come on business, not pleasure. Mr. Long, sir, I have been entrusted by my friend, Captain Mathews, with a communication which I have no doubt that, as a man of honour, you have been anticipating since that unfortunate little affair at Bath-Easton."

With a low bow he handed Mr. Long a folded-up letter.

Mr. Long turned it over in his hands without opening it. A puzzled expression was on his face. "I expected no communication from Mr. Mathews, sir," said he. "Pray, Major O'Teague, are you certain that the missive has not been wrongly directed to me?"

"What, sir," cried Major O'Teague, "do you tell me that after what happened, after whaling another gentleman within an inch of his life, and in the middle of the best company in Bath, you don't expect to hear from him?"

"Is it possible that Mr. Mathews considers himself insulted, sir?" asked Mr. Long.

The Irishman's jaw fell. He was stupefied. His lips moved, but it was a long time before a word came.

"An insult—an ins—— Hivins above us, sir, where is it that y' have lived at all?" he managed to say at last. "An insult—an ins—— Oh, the humour of it! Flaying a man alive with a postillion's whip; not even a coachman's whip,—there's some dignity in a coachman's whip,—but a common postillion's! sir, the degradation of the act passes language, so it does. 'Tis an insult that can only be washed out by blood—blood, sir—a river of blood! A river? A sea of blood, sir—an ocean of blood! Egad, sir, 'tis a doubtful question, that it is, if all great Neptune's ocean—— Ye've seen Mrs. Yates as Lady Macbeth, I doubt not, Mr. Sheridan? A fine actress, sir, and an accomplished lady——"

"I have never had that privilege, sir," said Dick. "You were making a remark about great Neptune's ocean."

"And I'll make it again, by your leave, sir. I say that 'tis a nice question if the wounds inflicted upon a gentleman's honour by the free use of a low postillion's whip can be cauterised by all great Neptune's ocean."

"'Tis a nice question, I doubt not, sir," said Dick.

"That's the conclusion my friend the captain and me came to before we had more than talked the business half over, and so we determined that it must be nipped in the bud," said Major O'Teague, with the fluency of a practised rhetorician.

Meantime Mr. Long had opened the letter. The seal was about the size of a crown piece, and the breaking of it was quite apocalyptic.

"'Tis true, Major O'Teague," said he mournfully. "Your friend has been pleased to take offence at what was, after all, an unimportant incident."

"Pray, sir, may I inquire if your notion is that a gentleman should not take offence at anything less than getting his head cut off?" said Major O'Teague with great suavity. "You think that a gentleman shouldn't send a challenge unless the other gentleman has mortally wounded him?"

"I like to take a charitable view of every matter, sir; and I give you my word that I believed that Mr. Mathews had more discretion than to challenge me to—to—may I say?—to show him my hand," said Mr. Long.

"To show him your hand, sir? I protest that I don't understand you at all, Mr. Long," said Major O'Teague. "This is not a challenge to a friendly game of cards, sir, let me assure you. When you show your hand to my friend, I trust it's a couple of swords that'll be in it, or a brace of pistols, which form a very gentlemanly diversion on the green of a morning."

"Mr. Sheridan, I shall ask you to do me the honour of acting for me in this unfortunate affair," said Mr. Long.

"Sir," cried Dick, "if you will allow me to take this quarrel on myself I shall feel doubly honoured."

"'Tis reluctant I am to thrust forward my opinion uncalled for; but if my own father—rest his sowl!—was to offer to cheat me out of a fight, I'd have his life, if he was a thousand times my father," said Major O'Teague.

"This quarrel is mine, Mr. Sheridan," said Mr. Long. "You and Major O'Teague will settle the preliminaries in proper fashion. Have you ever been concerned in an affair of this sort before, Major O'Teague, may I ask?"

Major O'Teague staggered back till he was supported by the wainscot. He stared at his questioner.

"Is it Major O'Teague that y'ask the question of?" he said in a whisper that was not quite free from hoarseness. "Is it me—me—ever engaged in an affair of honour?" He took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. Then he shook his head mournfully and turned his eyes devotionally to the ceiling. "And this is fame!" he murmured. "Oh, my country! this is fame!"

"By the way, sir, what is your country?" asked Mr. Long.

"My father fought at Fontenoy, and my mother was called in her young days the Lily of the Loire, on account of her elegance and simplicity; and if that doesn't make me an Irishman in the sight of Heaven, you may call me anything you please. But I've been mistaken for an Englishman before now," he added proudly, "and I might have been one too if it hadn't been for my parentage."

"An Irish exile. The figure is a pathetic one, sir," said Mr. Long. "I have met several in France."

"France was overrun with them, sir. But 'tis not so bad now as it used to be," said Major O'Teague. "A good many of them have returned to Ireland, and in a

short time we'll hear that Ireland is overrun with her own exiles."

"We shall be compelled in that case to withdraw our sympathy from them and bestow it upon their country," said Mr. Long. "We can only sympathise with expatriated patriots who live in banishment. With exiles who refuse to die out of their own country we can have no sympathy."

"My sentiments to a hair's breadth," cried Major O'Teague. "I declare to hivins there's some Irish exiles that have never stirred out of Ireland! But they're not the worst. Ireland has harboured many snakes in her bosom from time to time, but the bitterest cup of them all has been the one that burst into flower on a foreign shore, and, having feathered its nest, crawled back to the old country to heap coals of fire upon the head of her betrayers."

"The metamorphoses of the Irish snake—which I believed did not exist—appear to have been numerous and confusing; but surely you will take a glass of wine now, major?" said Mr. Long. "Pray pass Major O'Teague the decanter, Mr. Sheridan."

Dick obeyed, and Major O'Teague's face, which one might have expected to brighten, became unusually and, as it seemed, unnecessarily solemn. He protested that he had no need for any refreshment—that so far from regarding as irksome the duty which he had just discharged, he considered it one of the greatest pleasures in life to bring a challenge to a gentleman of Mr. Long's position. He only accepted the hospitality of Mr. Long lest he should be accused of being a curmudgeon if he refused.

"Gentlemen," he cried, raising his glass, "I drink to your very good health and to our better acquaintance. I have been more or less intimately concerned in the death of fourteen gentlemen, but there's not one of them that won't say to-day, if y'ask him, that he was killed in the most gentlemanly way, and in a style suitable to his position. If you

have anything to complain of on this score, Mr. Long, my name is not O'Teague. Here's long life to you, sir."

"Without prejudice to the longevity of your friend Captain Mathews, I suppose?" said Mr. Long.

"We'll drink to him later on, sir. The night's young yet," said Major O'Teague, with a wink that had a good deal of slyness about it.

CHAPTER XXVII

MAJOR O'TEAGUE did not stay late. He apologised for hurrying away from such excellent company; but the fact was that he had, in a thoughtless hour, accepted an invitation to supper from a lady who was as beautiful as she was virtuous—perhaps even more so. He hoped that Mr. Long would pardon the precipitancy of his flight, and not attribute it to any churlishness on his part.

Mr. Long did his best to reassure him on this point,—he had already stayed for an hour, and had drunk a bottle and a half of claret and half a tumbler of brandy "to steady the wine," he declared; and indeed it seemed that the claret was a little shaky.

When they were alone Dick said:

"I was afraid, sir, that letter would come to you."

He shook his head with the air of a man who has had a varied experience of men and their ways.

"I frankly confess that I was surprised to receive it," said Mr. Long. "But I had made my calculations without allowing for such a possibility as this Major O'Teague. Mathews had some remnant of discretion, and that is why three days have passed before I receive his challenge."

"You think that Mathews would not have sent it of his own accord?" said Dick.

"I am convinced of it," replied Mr. Long. "He knows something of what I know about him, and he has given me

the best evidence in the world of his desire to get rid of me once and for all. But he would never have sent me this challenge had it not been that that fire-eating Irish adventurer got hold of him and talked him into a fighting mood. What chance would a weak fool such as Mathews have against so belligerent a personality as O'Teague? Heavens, sir, give the man an hour with the most timorous of human beings, and I will guarantee that he will transform him into a veritable swashbuckler. Mathews is a fool, and he is probably aware of it by now—assuming that an hour and a half has elapsed since O'Teague left him."

"If he had not challenged you, he need never have shown his face in Bath again," said Dick.

"Oh, my dear Dick, you have not seen so much of Bath as I have," said Mr. Long. "Bath will stand a great deal. Has it not stood Mathews for several years?"

Dick made no reply; he was walking to and fro in the room in considerable agitation. At last he stood before Mr. Long.

"Dear sir," he cried, "why will you not consent to my taking this quarrel on myself? Why should you place your life in jeopardy for the gratification of Mathews and his associates? Think, sir, that your life is valuable; while mine—well, I can afford to risk it."

"My dear boy, you have risked your life once for me," said Mr. Long, laying a hand on Dick's shoulder. "I cannot permit you to do so a second time. But believe me, I shall run no risk in this matter. I give you my word that I shall never stand up before that fellow. Why, when his friend the major was juggling, but without the skill of a juggler, with his metaphors just now, I was thinking out three separate and distinct plans for making a duel impossible, however well-intentioned Major O'Teague may be."

"Tell me but one of them, Mr. Long," said Dick.

"Nay, my friend, I debated the question of telling you when I had worked out my plans of campaign, and I came to the conclusion that you must know nothing of—of—of what I know," said Mr. long. "You hope to write a play one of these days? Well, sir, there is no discipline equal to that of one's daily life for a man who aspires to write a comedy dealing with the follies of the time. The comedy of the duel has never been rightly dealt with. Behold your chance, sir."

Dick resumed the shaking of his head.

"Ah, sir, what I dread is the play which one means to be a comedy, but which becomes in its development a tragedy."

"True, that is always to be dreaded," said Mr. Long. "And I allow that Fate is not a consistent designer of plays. She mixes up comedy and tragedy in such a tangle that her own shears alone can restore the symmetry of the piece. When Fate puts on the mask of comedy the result is very terrible. But we shall do our best to get her to play a leading part on our side, in our company, and I promise you some diversion. Now you must act in this little play as if you were no novice on the stage, but as if, like Major O'Teague, you had played the part fourteen times. At the outstart you must get rid of your nervousness. I tell you again, the play is a comedy."

"I would not be nervous if I were playing the chief part, sir."

"What, you are still willing to play the leading character? That is quite unlike a play-actor, Mr. Sheridan. Is't not very well known that an actor would submit to anything rather than play a leading character? Has your father never told you how anxious they all are to be cast for the insignificant parts?"

Dick laughed.

"Oh, that, sir, is one of the best-known traits of the profession of acting," he said. "But I should dearly like to have a shot at Captain Mathews."

"He is a soldier, but I fear that he will not meet his death by so honourable an agent," said Mr. Long. "No, if he dies by a shot it will be fired at him by a platoon of men with muskets. Now, you will arrange with Major O'Teague as to the time and place of the meeting. I have no choice in regard to the weapons; but I wish to suggest as a suitable ground the green paddock facing the iron gate where you came to my assistance when I was attacked by the footpads."

"I do not see that the man can make any objection to so suitable a place," said Dick.

"We shall see," said Mr. Long. "At any rate, it is my whim to meet him there. You see, I was once very lucky in that neighbourhood, and I have my superstitions."

Dick went home with a heavy heart. He could not understand why Mr. Long should still persist in the belief that no duel would be fought. He seemed to have acquired the idea that Mathews was a coward because he had taken his horsewhipping so quietly; but Dick, having seen how the fellow had been overpowered at the outset by the superior strength of his opponent, knew perfectly well that he had had no choice in the matter. He had displayed weakness, but not cowardice; and Dick had felt certain that he was just the man to seek an opportunity of revenging himself with the weapons of the duellist. He had believed all along that Mathews would regard the realisation of his scheme as a matter of life or death. If it became known that he had evaded calling out the man who had so publicly insulted him, he would, of course, be compelled to leave Bath. If, however, he succeeded in killing Mr. Long—and Dick felt convinced that he would do his best to kill

him—he would be able to swagger about as the hero of the hour. That was the *rôle* which exactly suited him.

But would he have the chance of killing Mr. Long?

Before he slept, Dick had made up his mind that if Mathews killed Mr. Long, he himself would either prevent his playing the *rôle* of the hero, or give him a double chance of playing it. The moment this duel with Mr. Long was over he would send a challenge to Mathews. He felt that he would have every right to do so. The horse-whipping which Mr. Long had administered to the man was a sufficient punishment for his insult; but Dick did not forget that the placing of the ribald verses in the urn was a gross insult to every lady present on the lawn at Bath-Easton, and he had long ago made up his mind that he would accept the responsibility of avenging this special affront. All the sophistry of his chivalrous nature backed up this resolution of his, until he had no difficulty in feeling that he was the exponent of a sacred duty. Was it to be placed in the power of any rascal, he asked an imaginary objector, to insult a number of ladies in the shocking way that Mathews had done, with impunity? Was that entire company to have no redress for the gross conduct of the fellow?

Surely it was the privilege of every man with a spark of chivalry in his nature—ordinary chivalry, mind, the ordinary spirit of manhood—to do all that lay within his power to prevent a recurrence of such an outrage upon civilised society as had been perpetrated. If no other man thought fit to make a move toward so desirable an end, he, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, thanked God that he saw his way clearly in the matter; and the moment he had ceased to act for Mr. Long, he would take action on his own behalf as the representative of the ladies on whose fastidious ears the ribald lines had fallen.

He fell asleep quite easily, having made up his mind on this point.

He had an interview the next day with Major O'Teague, and found him ready to agree to any suggestion made in regard to the meeting. The only detail to which he took a momentary exception was in respect of the ground.

"Hivins, Mr. Sheridan, aren't there many nice and tidy places more adjacent than that paddock, where our friends can have an enjoyable hour?" he said. 'Faith, sir, I have always thought Bath singularly favoured by Providence in this respect. A bountiful Hivin seems to have designed it for the settlement of these little affairs. 'Tis singularly complete in this way, as you may have remarked. Egad! you could kill your man at the corner of any street. Doesn't it seem to be spurning the gifts which Providence has laid at our very feet to go two miles out into the country?"

But Mr. Sheridan had something of the sentimental Irishman in his nature also, and so he was able to acknowledge frankly that it was on the border-line of atheism for any one to assert that it was necessary to go two miles out of Bath in order to conduct friendly hostilities; still, he thought that the whim of an old gentleman should be respected.

"Mr. Long has lived in the country all his life, you see, Major O'Teague, and that is no doubt why he makes it a point of sentiment always to fight in the midst of a sylvan landscape, free from the contaminating hand of man, you understand?" said Dick.

"'Tis a beautiful thought, sir," said Major O'Teague, raising his eyes toward the ceiling. "And 'tis one that I can appreciate to the full, Mr. Sheridan. Thank Hivin, a life of pretty rough campaigning among pretty rough characters hasn't blunted my finer sensibilities. I feel that we are bound to respect the whim of your friend

just as if we were his executors. 'Twould be just the same if he had expressed a desire to be buried under a special tree—maybe one that he had climbed for chestnuts when a boy, or courted the girl of his choice under when a sthripling. He didn't say that he had a whim about being laid to rest under a special tree, sir?"

"We haven't discussed that point yet, sir," said Dick. "The fact is, I am rather a novice in this business, as you may have perceived, major."

"Don't apologise, sir; we must all make a beginning. 'Tis not your fault, I'm sure, Mr. Sheridan, that y' haven't killed your man long ago."

"You do me honour, sir," said Dick.

"Not I, sir. Can't I see with half an eye that y' have the spirit of an annihilator beating within your bosom? 'Tis only your misfortune that y' haven't been given your chance yet. But I hope that y'll mind that you must make up for lost time."

"It will be my study, sir. I intend to begin without delay by calling out your friend Captain Mathews when this little affair is over."

"Good luck to you, my boy!" cried Major O'Teague, enthusiastically flinging out his hand to Dick. "Good luck to you, sir! If you'll allow me to act for you, 'twill be the proudest day of my life."

"We shall talk the matter over when the first affair is settled. One thing at a time has always been my motto," said Dick.

"I ask your pardon, Mr. Sheridan; I was a bit premature," said Major O'Teague. "I won't inquire what your reasons are for fighting Mathews; I never preshume to pry into the motives of gentlemen for whom I act. I hold that 'twould be an insult to their intelligence to do so. Besides, if one were to inquire into the rights and wrongs of every quarrel before it takes place, all manhood would die out of

England inside a year. No, sir; after the fight is the time to inquire, just as after dinner is the time for the speeches."

But when Major O'Teague called upon Dick the same evening, as courtesy demanded, a wonderful smile came over his face while he said:

"What is there about that paddock opposite the iron gate by the Gloucester Road that makes your friend insist on it as the place of meeting?"

"I give you my word that I have no notion," replied Dick. "Why should Captain Mathews object to it?"

"That's more than I can say, sir," said O'Teague. "But, by the Lord Harry, I had a long job getting him to agree to that point. You should have seen his face when I told him that we were to meet at that same paddock. He turned as white as a sheet, and said that Mr. Long meant to insult him by making such a suggestion. 'Tis not there that I'll fight,' said he, quite livid. You'll excuse me introducing the special oaths that he made use of, Mr. Sheridan?"

"I am quite sure that their omission is more excusable than their utterance would be," said Dick. "But he consented to the ground at last?"

"Ay, at last. But between the first hint of the matter and this 'at last' a good deal of conversation occurred. 'Twas pretty near my gentleman came to having a third affair pressed on him. For some reason or other he wanted to fight nearer town. Well, to be sure, it would be more homelike. I never did believe in the suburbs myself, and, besides, 'twill be very inconvenient for the spectators. Still——"

"My dear major," cried Dick, "I trust that there will be no spectators beyond those gentlemen."

"What, sir, would you propose to exclude the public from this entertainment? I hope that is not your idea of

what is due to the intelligent curiosity of the people of Bath? Asking your pardon, Mr. Sheridan, I must say that you have no notion at all of fair play."

"You have had so much experience of these matters, Major O'Teague, I have every confidence that under your guidance we can manage this little business by ourselves, and without the need for the intrusion of all the busybodies in Bath," said Dick.

"That may be true enough, Mr. Sheridan," said Major O'Teague, "but let me remind you that the gentleman for whom I am acting got his horsewhipping in public—— Why the mischief wasn't I there to see it? I would have given a guinea for a place in the front row!"

Dick clearly perceived that the man was anxious to be the centre of a crowd of onlookers; he was treating the duel from the standpoint of a showman desirous of making plain his own ability as a stage-manager of experience, and nothing would have pleased him better than to have engaged Drury Lane for the spectacle.

For a moment or two Dick was annoyed; he was sorely tempted to say something that would have been hurtful to Major O'Teague's feelings. He restrained himself, however, and then he suddenly remembered—Major O'Teague had given him no reason to forget it—that he was talking to an Irishman. That was why he said in a confidential tone:

"I acknowledge the force of your argument, sir; but the fact is"—his voice became a whisper—"there is a lady in the case. You will agree with me in thinking that her feelings must be respected at any cost. Major O'Teague, if the lady—I refrain from mentioning her name in this connection—who has given Mr. Long her promise, were to hear of his danger, the consequences might be very serious to her. We are both Irishmen, sir."

"Sir," said Major O'Teague, "your thoughtfulness does you honour. No one ever yet made an appeal to me on behalf of a beauteous creature without success. The least wish of a lady is sacred in the eyes of Major O'Teague. If the lady wishes, we'll set our men to fight at midnight in a coal-cellar."

CHAPTER XXVIII

SOMEHOW, in spite of Major O'Teague's promise of secrecy, the rumour of the impending duel went round Bath, and Dick had to use all his adroitness in replying to those of his friends who questioned him on the subject in the course of the evening. But of course people were not nearly so certain about this encounter as they had been about the previous one—the one which did not take place. Young Mr. Sheridan's imagination was quite equal to the strain put upon it by his interrogators, and he was able to give each of them a different answer. He assured some of them that he had excellent authority for believing that there was to be a meeting between Mr. Long and Captain Mathews, and that, in order to assure complete secrecy, it was to take place in the Pump Room before the arrival of the visitors some morning—he hoped to be able to find out the exact morning. Others he informed that it had been agreed by the friends of Mr. Long and Captain Mathews that they were to fight with pistols across the Avon at the next full moon; while to such persons as wanted circumstantial news on the subject, he gave the information in an undertone in a corner, that the fight was to come off on the following Thursday, on the lawn at Bath-Easton, Captain Mathews having declared that he would not be satisfied unless the same people who had witnessed the insult that had been put upon him were

present to see him wipe it out. Dick even went the length of quoting the first two lines of a poem which he himself was composing for Lady Miller's urn, feeling convinced that the prize would be awarded to him on account of its appropriateness. He meant to leave a blank in the final line, he said, to be filled up at the last moment with the name of the survivor.

The result of this unscrupulous exercise of his imagination was to alienate from him several of his friends and to mystify the others; so that, when he drove out with Mr. Long the next morning to the paddock by the Gloucester Road, it was plain that the secret as to the place of meeting had been well kept. Whatever might be said about Major O'Teague, he had respected the plea for secrecy advanced by Dick, though Dick knew that it must have gone to his heart to be deprived of the crowd of spectators on whom he had reckoned.

Dick saw that the ground lent itself to secrecy. At one part of the paddock there was a small plantation, and this screened off the greater part of it from the road. Here the ground was flat, but only for about half an acre; beyond this space there was a gradual rise into a wooded knoll, which could also be reached by a narrow lane leading off the road. Opposite the entrance to the paddock was the iron gate, behind which Mr. Long had retreated on the night when he was attacked; and now that Dick saw the place by daylight, he noticed that the gate gave access to the weedy carriage drive of an unoccupied house.

"A capital covert for footpads," said Dick, when he stood by the side of Mr. Long beyond the plantation in the paddock. "I daresay it was just here that the fellows lay in wait for the approach of a victim."

"That was the conclusion to which I came," said Mr. Long. "And now here are we waiting for them."

"For them?" said Dick.

"Well, for Mathews and his friend," said Mr. Long with a quiet laugh.

"Worse than any footpads," growled Dick, examining the ground just beyond the belt of trees.

"I promise you that they shall have neither my money nor my life, friend Dick," said Mr. Long, looking round as if in expectation of seeing some one.

"We are before the appointed time," said Dick, framing an answer to his inquiring look.

"We shall have the longer space to admire the prospect from yon knoll," said his friend. "I am minded to have a stroll round the paddock. I promise you that I shall not disgrace you by running away."

He waved his hand to Dick, who accepted the gesture as an indication that he desired to be alone. He busied himself about the ground while Mr. Long strolled toward the hedge that ran alongside the narrow lane skirting the paddock.

Dick fancied that he understood his desire to be alone for the brief space left to him before the probable arrival of Mathews and O'Teague. Could Mr. Long doubt for a moment that Mathews would do his best to kill him? Surely not.

So, then, the next quarter of an hour would decide the question whether he was to live or die. Dick remembered what Mr. Long had told him respecting his early life—his early love—his enduring love. What had his words been at that time?

"*Those who die young have been granted the gift of perpetual youth.*"

He watched Mr. Long walking slowly and with bent head up the sloping ground by the bramble hedge. He could believe that he was communing with the one of whom he had never ceased to think as his companion—the one who

walked unseen by his side—whose gracious presence had never ceased to influence him throughout his life. And then, all at once the younger man became conscious of that invisible presence. Never before had he been aware of such an impression. It was not shadowy. It was not vague. It was not a suggestion of the imagination. It was an impression as real as that of the early morning air which exhilarated him—as vivid as that of the song of the skylark which had left its nest at the upper part of the green meadow, and was singing while it floated into the azure overhead. He felt as if he were standing beneath outspread wings, and the consciousness was infinitely gracious to him. All through the night and so far into the morning he had been in great trouble of thought. The shocking possibilities of this duel had suggested themselves to him every moment, and it was with a feeling of profound depression that he had taken the case of pistols from the carriage and entered the paddock.

But now, with the suddenness of entering a wide space of free air, out of a narrow room of suffocating vapours—with the suddenness of stepping into the sunlight out of a cell, his depression vanished. He felt safe beneath the shadow of those gracious, outstretched wings. Every suggestion that had come to him during the night, every thought of the likelihood of disaster, disappeared.

The dead are mightier than the living.

That was the thought which came to him now. He knew that the sense of perfect security of which he was now aware, could not have been imparted to him by any earthly presence; and looking across the green meadow to where Mr. Long was standing motionless, Dick knew that he also was living in this consciousness. And the cool scent of the meadow grass filled the morning air, and high overhead the wings of song spread forth by the ecstasy of the skylark winnowed the air. The feeling of exhilaration

of which Dick Sheridan was conscious, was such as he had never known before.

* * * * *

Looking up the paddock, Dick fancied that he saw a figure moving stealthily among the fringe of trees; but he was not quite certain that some one was there. A few sheep were in the meadow at the other side of the hedge, and he thought it was quite possible that one of the flock had strayed through a gap and had wandered among the trees. At any rate he failed to see again any moving object in the same direction, and he did not think it worth his while going across the ground to make further investigations. He reflected that, after all, assuming that some one was among the trees, it was out of his power to insist on the withdrawal of such a person. He felt that, if it were to turn out that the owner of the ground was there, the combatants might find themselves ordered off the ground, for assuredly they were trespassers. And then his reflections were broken by the noise of carriage wheels on the road—sounds which ceased quite suddenly just when they were being heard most distinctly. After a pause came the sound of voices and a laugh or two. In a few moments Major O'Teague, with Mathews by his side, and followed by two gentlemen—one of them was recognised by him as Mr. Ditcher, the surgeon —appeared beyond the plantation.

Dick advanced to meet the party, but Mr. Long made no move. He was still on the slope of the meadow, apparently giving a good deal of attention to the distant view of the city of Bath.

"Sir," said Major O'Teague, "we're a trifle late, and an apology is jew to you. I promise you that 'twill not occur again."

Dick had been extremely punctilious in the matter of taking off his hat to the party, and he declined to replace

it until every one was covered. He assured Major O'Teague that no apology was necessary; he did not believe that it was yet five minutes past the appointed hour. Then Major O'Teague presented the only stranger of the party—a gentleman named MacMahon—"a brother Irishman, Mr. Sheridan," he said, in discharging this act of courtesy; "a lineal descendant of the great FitzUrse who killed St. Thomas à Becket some years back; you may have heard of the occurrence. 'Tis not every day that one has a chance of killing a saint. Faith, I'm inclined to think that the practice has become obsolete owing to the want of material. Any way, Bath is not the place for any man to come to who seeks to emulate such a feat."

Mr. MacMahon said he was modest; he sought to kill neither saint nor sinner. He hoped that Mr. Sheridan would not consider him an obtruder upon the scene; if Mr. Sheridan took such a view of the case, he would, he assured him, retire without a word of complaint.

Dick acknowledged his civility, and said that no friend of Major O'Teague's would be out of place where an affair of honour was being settled.

While these courtesies were being exchanged, Mathews stood silently by, his teeth set, and his eyes fixed upon the distant figure of Mr. Long. He turned suddenly while Dick and Mr. MacMahon were bowing to each other, hat in hand.

"Is this a *fête champêtre* or the rehearsal of a comedy?" he said. "If my time is to be wasted—— Where is your man, Mr. Sheridan?—produce your man, sir, if he be not afraid to show his face."

"I trust that no suggestion will be made to that effect, sir," said Dick.

"No one will make it while I am on the ground, Mr. Sheridan," said Major O'Teague. "If anybody here sees anything inappropriate in Mr. Long spending a few

minutes in meditation, that person differs from me. Come, Mr. Sheridan, 'tis only for you and me to make any remarks. Egad, sir! I compliment your friend on his choice of the ground. It seems made for a jewel, so it does. That belt of trees shuts off the road entirely, and if we place our men on the flat, that hill behind us will give neither of them an unjew advantage. Sir, for one who is unfortunate enough to have had no experience of these affairs, you have shown an aptitude for the business that falls little short of jaynius."

He glanced at the ground and its surroundings with the easy confidence of a general, and then marching to the right and left, cocked an eye in the direction of the sun.

"There's no choice of places, that I can see; what do you say, Mr. Sheridan?" he asked.

"So far as I can judge there is no question of choice," said Dick. "That is, of course, with pistols; it would be another matter with swords."

"I agree with you, sir. Then, with your leave, we will measure the ground twenty paces from the line of trees."

A considerable space of time was occupied in these formalities, and then came the question of the weapons. This was settled without discussion—Major O'Teague proving as courteous as he had promised to be; in fact, he thought it necessary to excuse his constant agreement with Dick.

"If there was anything to disagree about, you may be sure that I'd do it in the interest of Mr. Mathews, sir," he said; "but I give you my word that there's nothing to allow any side the smallest advantage. And now, sir, though it seems a pity to disturb the meditations of your friend, I am afraid that the time has come for you to take that step. I hope to Hivins that he won't think it in bad taste. But you're spared the trouble: he is coming to us."

Mr. Long was walking quickly down the meadow, and when still a few paces away, he raised his hat to Major O'Teague, but ignored Mathews, who was standing some yards off.

"Major O'Teague," he said, "I have to inform you that I have been giving the question of the projected duel my earnest thought, and the conclusion that I have come to is that I am not called on to fight Mr. Mathews."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE words, spoken deliberately, but without any particular emphasis, startled Dick quite as much as they did Major O'Teague.

"You're a coward, sir, and I will force you to fight me!" shouted Mathews.

Dick took a couple of steps to the side of Mr. Long, and at the same instant O'Teague took three to the side of Mathews.

"Hold your tongue, sir; leave me to manage this affair," said Major O'Teague to his principal.

He took a step nearer Mr. Long.

"I'm afraid, sir," he said in a frigid tone and with a distinctly English accent, which sounded very much more formal than the soft Irish slur which came so easily to him —"I'm afraid that there's some misunderstanding between us; but a little explanation will, I daresay, tend to smooth away matters, and lead to such an amicable settlement that the fight will take place as originally intended. Pray, sir, state your reasons for saying that you're not called on to consummate the jewel. Come, sir, your reasons."

"My reasons? This is one of them," said Mr. Long, pointing toward the bramble hedge beside the lane.

So intent had every one been over the technicalities of the duel, none had noticed a little figure standing there waiting for a signal—the figure of a little boy. When

Mr. Long raised his arm and pointed toward him, he began to run to the group, and now all eyes were turned upon him. He was a pretty child of perhaps eight or nine years of age, and while he ran he kept calling out:

"Daddy, daddy, I'se come, I'se come!"

No one in the group moved, and the little boy ran toward Mathews with outstretched arms. He had almost reached him before Mathews had recovered from the astonishment that had left his face pale. He stepped back, saying:

"Take the brat away! What demon brought him hither? Take him away, I say, before I do him a hurt."

"'Tis not a demon that brings the like of that to men," said O'Teague. Then, putting out his hands to the little boy, he cried, "Come hither, my little man, and tell us what is your name."

The child stopped and gazed with wondering eyes at Major O'Teague, who was kneeling on one knee, with inviting hands stretched forth.

"Mammy said for I to run to daddy," lisped the little fellow, and he looked round, putting a tiny thumb in his mouth.

"Take the brat away, or I shall do it a hurt," shouted Mathews.

The child shrank back, and a frightened look came to his face.

"I'se good to-day, pappy," he said. "I'se very good. I'se did what mammy told. She said, 'Go to pappy,' and I'se goed."

Mathews, his hands clenched, took a step in the direction of Mr. Long, and Dick took a step in the direction of Mathews.

"Coward!" said the last named. "Coward! this is how you would shirk the fight that you owe me. You have brought them here."

"Yes, I brought them here—all your family," said

Mr. Long. "And—yes, I own to being a coward; I own that I shrink from standing up with a deadly weapon in my hand before the husband of an estimable lady and the father of an innocent child. Captain Mathews, you are aware of the fact that I am acquainted with some compromising incidents in your past life. I do not wish you ill, sir. I implore of you to be advised in time. Return to your home, and make an honest attempt to redeem the past."

"I will—I will—when I have seen you lying dead at my feet," said Mathews. Then, turning to the others of the party, he cried: "Gentlemen, are we here to be made fools of? Let the affair proceed, or let Mr. Long and his friend make up their minds to be branded in public as cowards and poltroons."

"Major O'Teague," said Dick, "you cannot possibly have known that Captain Mathews, while professing honourable intentions in regard to a lady in Bath, was all the time a married man?"

"I acknowledge that that is the truth, Mr. Sheridan," said Major O'Teague; "but you'll pardon me if I say that I can't for the life of me see what that disclosure has to do with the matter before us."

"What, sir, you don't think that a gentleman should be exempted from fighting with so unscrupulous an adventurer as, on your own admission, Captain Mathews has proved to be?" said Dick.

"Upon my soul, I don't, Mr. Sheridan," said O'Teague. "On the contrary, sir, it appears to me that a man who behaved so dishonourably as my friend Captain Mathews has done, makes a most suitable antagonist for a gentleman of honour like Mr. Long or yourself, sir."

Mr. MacMahon, the stranger who had come to witness the fight, had taken the little boy by the hand, and was leading him up the meadow away from the men; and every

now and again the child looked over his shoulder with big, puzzled eyes. He was asking a perpetual question.

"Sir," said Dick, with great promptitude when O'Teague had spoken—"Sir, I give you my word that I have no objection to fight Captain Mathews myself."

"No," cried Mr. Long. "No laws of honour demand that a gentleman shall stand up before a felon."

"True, sir," said Major O'Teague; "but you see, nothing that Captain Mathews has yet done can be construed as an act of felony."

"Indeed, sir, Captain Mathews and I know better than that," said Mr. Long.

"'Tis a lie—I swear that 'tis a foul lie!" shouted Mathews. "I admit that years ago—— But there were no proofs that the girl did not die by her own hands. She did it to be revenged upon me. Have you proofs? If you have, pray produce them."

"I have proof enough to send you to the hangman," said Mr. Long.

"Sir," said Major O'Teague, "I did not come hither to listen to such recrimination. You must be aware, Mr. Long, that you have seriously compromised your position as a man of honour by making a vague charge against your opponent a pretext for backing out of a fight with him. If a man was a fool years ago—well, which of us hasn't been a fool at some time of our life?"

"Sir," said Mr. Long, "I do not need to be instructed on points of honour by you or any one else. I did not refer to your friend's felony of four years ago, but to a much more recent act of his."

"Let us have your proofs, sir, or, by Hivins, my felonious friend will have my assistance in branding you as a coward!" cried Major O'Teague.

Mr. Long was holding between his finger and thumb a small piece of lace before the man had done speaking.

"This is my proof," he said.

Major O'Teague stared at him and then at Dick Sheridan. He saw that Dick was as much puzzled as himself.

"In the name of all that's sensible——" he began.

"The fellow is a fool," cried Mathews. "Ay, a fool as well as a coward."

"In the name of all that's sensible, Mr. Long, tell us what it is you mean at all," said O'Teague. "What in the name of all the Hivins do you mean by showing us that rag?"

"This piece of lace is a souvenir that your friend left with me of our last encounter. Look at the torn ruffle of his right sleeve, sir. I think you will find that the rent needs for its repair this piece of lace which I hold in my hand."

"Sir, I heard of no encounter," said Major O'Teague.

"Then you would do well to get your friend to acquaint you with some of its details," said Mr. Long.

Major O'Teague, mystified to a point of distraction, turned to Mathews; but he failed to catch his eye, the fact being that Mathews was gazing at Mr. Long as a man gazes at another who has just amazed him by a sudden revelation.

"Am I asleep or awake—that's what I want to know?" cried Major O'Teague. "And I want to know it badly too, for what's the drift of all these hints and all this aimless talk baffles me. Look you here, Mr. Long, you tell me you crossed swords with Captain Mathews quite lately; well, sir, if that is the truth, will you tell me why you should object to fight with him now?"

"Sir," said Mr. Long, "Mr. Mathews was in the disguise of a footpad on that road between those trees and the iron gate opposite, and I fought for my life against him and his two confederates."

Major O'Teague did not allow any one to see how startled

he was. He stroked his chin and pursed out his lips. There was a long pause before he said:

"And that is the evidence you bring forward of a very remarkable affair, sir—that scrap of rag?"

"Psha! sir, I have as much evidence of that remarkable affair as would suffice to hang the dean and chapter of a cathedral!" said Mr. Long.

"Pray give us an example of it, sir," said the major. "Juries in this country don't hang even dogs, to say nothing of deans, on the evidence of a scrap of rag."

"That's it," said Mathews; his voice was a trifle husky—he had not had much practice in speaking for some minutes. "That's it!—Major O'Teague, you are my friend: I ask no better friend. Let the fellow produce his evidence."

"I will," said Mr. Long.

He took a few steps toward the trees around the knoll where Dick had fancied he saw some figures moving. He raised a finger, and at this signal two men clad in homespun hastened down the meadow.

Mathews' jaw fell.

"One of these men was Mathews' confederate, the other is an honester man; he is the shepherd who lay concealed among the brambles yonder when Mathews and his bravos waited for me in this very place. He saw the fight, but having no weapon, he was wise enough to refrain from interfering in what did not concern him. He was fortunate enough, however, to pick up the shoe which came off Mathews' foot in his hasty flight from my friend, Mr. Sheridan, so that——"

A shout of warning came from Major O'Teague's friend, MacMahon, and the next second a sword went flashing through the air a dozen yards away, and Dick Sheridan, breathing hard, stood with his own sword in his hand. He had been just in time to disarm Mathews, who had drawn his sword and rushed with it upon Mr. Long.

And while every one stood aghast for the moment, there came forth from the plantation of trees a well-dressed lady, leading by the hand the little boy who had been on the scene before. She walked slowly across the meadow to the group, and every one looked at her.

The sword that had been jerked out of Mathews' hand remained nodding, like a reed before the wind, with its hilt in the air, for the point had penetrated the soft turf an inch or two, at such an acute angle as made the steel top-heavy at the hilt.

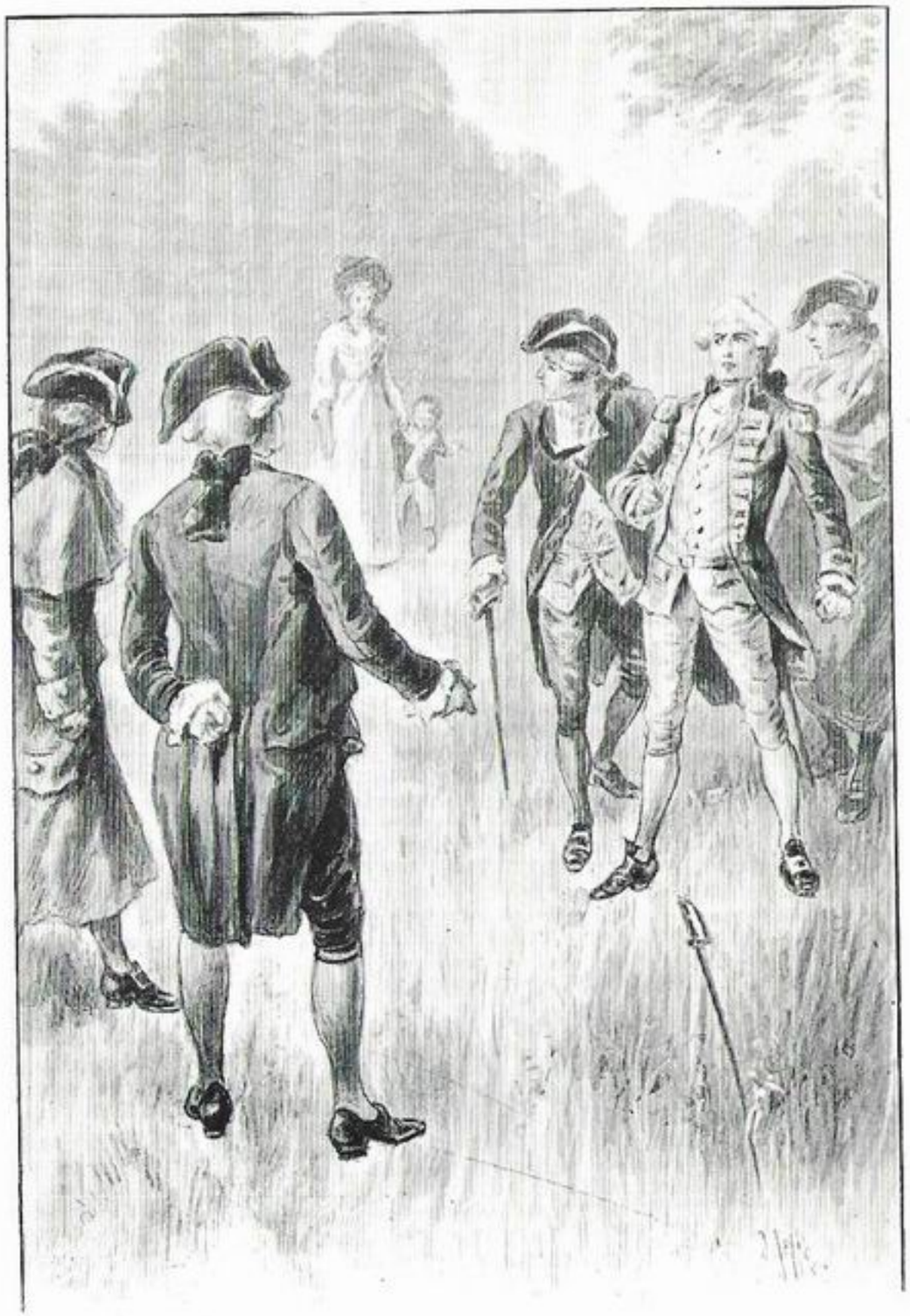
No one had the presence of mind to call Mathews an assassin, but all removed their hats at the approach of the lady.

She was smiling.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," she said, responding to their respectful salutations. "I perceive that my dear husband has been at his tricks again. He has been passing himself off at Bath as a gay bachelor, I hear, and the people were fools enough to be taken in by him; and all the time he was writing to me such loving letters, and sending them to the North to be posted. He made out that he was recruiting in Kendal, the sly rogue!"

She gave a laugh, pointing an upbraiding finger at Mathews. Clearly she was not greatly put out by anything that had yet come under her notice,—she seemed more inclined to regard the escapade of which her husband was guilty, in the light of a piece of pleasantry, to be referred to with smiles; but the only one of the party who responded to her in a like spirit was Major O'Teague.

"O madam!" he cried, "he is indeed a sad dog—quite inexcusable, madam—oh, altogether inexcusable! For I vow that, however leniently disposed his friends may have been in regard to his freak before they had seen the lady whom he forsook, they cannot condone his offence now that they have been so happy as to make her acquaintance.



A WELL-DRESSED LADY . . . WALKED SLOWLY ACROSS THE MEADOW TO THE GROUP. [*page* 288.

Madam, the man that could leave you for—for—the frivolities of Bath deserves no sympathy."

"Sir, you are, I protest, vastly polite," said Mrs. Mathews; "but I am sure you will not be hard upon poor Captain Mathews' frailties. 'Tis his misfortune to be over-susceptible to the charms of new faces. Who can blame him when the trait was born with him? After all, constancy is an acquired virtue."

"True, madam, quite true," said Major O'Teague. "But, Mrs. Mathews, I beg of you to permit me to say that if a gentleman who is fortunate enough to be married to so charming a lady as yourself does not acquire constancy, we may well distrust your theory."

"I vow, sir, you overwhelm a simple country-bred woman with your flattery," said she. "But I see that Mr. Long and his friends are feeling bored by our philosophy. Still, I should like to ask Mr. Long if his experience can suggest better advice to a woman married to so erratic a gentleman as Captain Mathews than to make the best of a bad bargain? Lud, sir, to spend my days weeping on a bed because of my husband's peccadilloes would only be to make myself miserable, without improving him. After all, he doesn't annoy me much. I have a fortune of my own and two sweet children, and he is a good deal from home, so that I have much to be thankful for. Come along, captain: you see that no one here wishes to fight with you. Perhaps at home you will have a better chance. A husband, if he keeps his eyes open, can always find some one at home to quarrel with. At the worst, there are always servants to be sworn at. 'Tis a great ease to a man's mind to know that he can always curse a groom or a wife or a dog without being called to account. Come along, captain; you have still got your grooms and your wife left to you. You know as well as I do that if you succeeded in captivating a young beauty at Bath—though I haven't seen much of

this beauty—you would swear at her within the month as heartily as you do at me."

Mathews looked quite ready to swear at her at that moment. He restrained himself, however, and, after only a short pause, went hastily to where his sword was still swaying on its point. He drew it out of the wound it had made in the earth, and rammed it back into its sheath. Then he took the shortest route to the gate; only when he was passing the line of trees in the plantation did he turn and glance back at the group whom he had left. The expression upon his face was one of disappointed malice; no trace of repentance was to be seen there.

With a laugh, his wife followed him, the golden-haired little boy running by her side. She cast an apologetic glance at the gentlemen, and they all made profound bows.

"Major O'Teague, I ask your pardon, sir, for having caused you to come here on a business which I knew must prove fruitless," said Mr. Long.

"Sir," said Major O'Teague, "I think that if there's to be an apology it should come from me. But I give you my word of honour, sir, I had no idea that the fellow was such a rascal: he has only been acquainted with me for three days. I guessed that he was bad enough. But think of that last *coup* of his, sir—trying to run you through the body while you were speaking! By my soul, Mr. Long, 'tis something of a pity that he was obstructed in time, for 'twould be a pleasure to all of us to see him hanged for such an act."

"I fear that I could not have shared that pleasure," said Mr. Long.

"And pray why not, sir, when you would know that the fellow was the greatest rascal unhung?" cried Major O'Teague.

"Perhaps I am too tender-hearted, sir," said Mr. Long,

"but truth compels me to assure you that I could not bear to see a man hanged merely for killing me."

"Faith, and you are mighty compassionate, sir," said Major O'Teague. "I give you my word that there's no sight I would enjoy so much as the hanging of the man that had killed me by a mortal wound when my attention was diverted elsewhere."

CHAPTER XXX

DICK SHERIDAN believed that his ingenuity would be taxed to the uttermost to invent plausible answers to satisfy the curiosity of the many people who would be questioning him on the subject of Mr. Long's meeting with Captain Mathews. When he had to make up so many replies to the questions put to him regarding the duels that had never been contemplated, what would he not have to do in respect of this meeting, which had actually taken place, though without an exchange of shots? His reasoning on this basis showed that he had but an imperfect acquaintance with the methods of the good people of Bath. He should have known that, having had two duels to talk about within the previous fortnight, and having, moreover, found out that neither of these encounters had taken place, they would lose all interest in duels real or imaginary. But that was just the view the people of Bath took of the incident. If any tale of the interrupted encounter—surely a most piquant topic!—reached the ears of the gossips of the Pump Room and the Parade, they were reticent on the subject. Not one question was put to Dick respecting Mr. Long and Captain Mathews, the fact being that all Bath was talking about quite another matter—namely, the infatuation of Mrs. Abington.

What a freak it was to be sure! There was the most charming actress of the day (her day had lasted a pretty

long while), at whose feet had sat in vain some of the most distinguished men then living, infatuated with that young Linley, neglecting her engagements at Mr. Colman's theatre, laughing at Mr. Cumberland, who had one of his most lugubrious comedies ready for her to breathe into it the spirit of life, and all on account of a youth who was certainly (they said) utterly incapable of appreciating her varied charms.

Mr. Colman had posted down from London to reason with her: in spite of his experience, he was still of the impression that a woman in love would listen to reason—and that woman an actress too! He made a step forward (he thought) in his knowledge of women and actresses, when he had had a talk with Mrs. Abington.

And Mr. Cumberland—— But then, Mr. Cumberland knew nothing whatever about the nature of men and women; he had taken the pains to prove this by the production of a dozen comedies—so that when he tried to wheedle her by obvious flatteries, she laughed in his face, and that annoyed Mr. Cumberland greatly; for he thought that laughter was always out of place except during the performance of one of his comedies, though people said that that was the only time when laughter was impossible.

Poor Tom Linley (the men who envied him alluded to him as poor Tom Linley) was having the finishing touch put to his education, all sensible people agreed. The wits said that he would learn more of what music meant by listening to Mrs. Abington's voice, than he would by studying all the masters of harmony, from Palestrina to Handel.

Of course the scandal-mongers made a scandal out of this latest whim of Mrs. Abington, but the lovely lady was so well accustomed to be the centre of a cocoon of scandal (she had a good deal of the nature of the butterfly about her), she did not mind. She only wondered what Dick

Sheridan thought of Tom Linley's being the hero of so fascinating a scandal. She wondered how long it would be before Dick Sheridan would become jealous of the position to which his friend had been advanced. She judged of Dick Sheridan from her previous knowledge of him; but as the days went on, she began to feel that a change had come over him.

And then Mrs. Abington became a little reckless; for whenever she and Tom Linley were in the same room as Dick, her laugh was a little louder than usual and a good deal less melodious; and the way she allowed her eyes to rest on Tom's face when she knew that Dick was looking, was rather too pictorial for everyday life, some people thought, and these were the people who said, "Poor Tom Linley!"

But there came a day when Tom Linley was announced to play at a concert. He was to take the violin part in a concerto, and to play in two duets with the harpsichord; but these selections had to be omitted from the programme, the fact being that Master Tom had that day gone a-driving into the country with Mrs. Abington.

It was a very pretty scene in high comedy, that in which the actress got the promise of the youth who had buried his heart in his violin, to fling his music-book to the unmelodious winds in order to take up the Book of Life and turn over its glowing pages with her. She had told him that she wished to take a drive into the country the next day, and had expressed the hope that he would act as her protector.

Of course he replied that it would be to him a trip to the Delectable Mountains to be by her side, or something to that effect; but he pointed playfully (now and again Tom could become playful, though never in the artless spirit of Mrs. Abington) at the bill of the concert in which his name figured.

What had the fact of his name being on the bill to do

with the question of his coming with her? she inquired in a sweetly simple way, with artless open eyes.

"Good heavens, sweet lady, surely you must see that I cannot be at the concert and in your carriage at the same time?" he cried.

"Did I assert that you could?" she asked. "All I did was to ask you to be my protector to-morrow. I did not say a word about your going to the concert. What is the concert to me—to you or me, Tom?"

"Nothing—oh, nothing!" he cried, and she allowed him to kiss her hand. "'Tis nothing. Have not I proved it by refraining from attending a single practice of the instruments, thereby making my father furious?"

"Then if the concert be nothing to you, am I something less than nothing?" she cried.

"Ah, you are everything—everything, only——Heavens, if I were to absent myself my prospects would be ruined!"

"Ah, 'tis the old story!" sighed the lady,—there was more indignation in her sigh than Mr. Burke could incorporate in one of his speeches on the Marriage Act,—"the old story: a man's ambition against a woman's affection! Go to your concert, sir, but never let me see your face again."

"Dear child!" he cried,—he sometimes called her "dear child," because she was not (he thought) more than two years older than himself,—"cannot you see that when my name is printed——"

"Do you presume to instruct me on these points, sir?" she cried. "Does not all the world know that my name is down in every playbill that Mr. Colman prints, as a member of his company? and yet—— But you have taught me my duty. I shall go back to London to-morrow. I thank you, sir, for having given me a lesson. O man, man! always cruel!—always ready to slight the poor, trustful creature who gives up all for your sake."

She dissolved into tears, and he was kneeling by her side, trying to catch the hand which she withheld from him, and all the time swearing that she was everything to him—his life, his soul, his hope, his future. . . .

* * * * *

And so the pieces in which Tom Linley was to take part at the concert were omitted from the performance, and the manager assured Mr. Linley that his son's career, so far as Bath was concerned, was at an end.

Mr. Linley that evening—at one moment weeping in the arms of his daughter, at another pacing the room declaring passionately that Tom need never again look near his house, that he would turn him out neck and crop into the street—said some severely accurate things about Mrs. Abington and the stage generally, and the Linley household was in a condition bordering on distraction.

But Mrs. Abington, sitting in an attitude of inimitable grace upon her little gilded sofa, passing her fingers through Tom's curls as he sat on a stool at her feet, was in no way disturbed by the condition of things in Pierrepont Street, the fact being that she was just at that moment thinking more of Mrs. Abington than of any one else in the world. She knew that the next day every one in Bath would be talking about the completeness of her conquest of the ardent young musical genius who, it was well known, held the theory that there was nothing in the world worth living for save only music. She wondered what Dick Sheridan would think now. And she was quite right so far as her speculations in regard to Bath were concerned. Every one was talking of how she had been the ruin of Tom Linley, and most of the men who talked of it, envied Tom most heartily; all the women who talked of it, envied Mrs. Abington her taste in dress.

And as for Dick Sheridan—well, Dick was for quite an

hour of that morning doing his best to comfort Betsy Linley in the grief that had overwhelmed her family. She had written to Dick to come to her, and he had obeyed. He found her alone, and, though not in tears, very close to the weeping point. He saw, when he had looked into her face, that she had not slept all night for weeping. She never looked lovelier than when bearing the signs of recent tears.

"O Dick, Dick, is not this dreadful?" she cried. "You have heard of it—of course you have heard of it? All Bath is talking of it to-day."

Dick acknowledged that he had heard of Tom's disappointing the audience at the concert-room the previous day, and of the roars of laughter that had greeted the manager's announcement that Mr. Tom Linley had unfortunately contracted a severe indisposition which would, the doctors declared, prevent his appearing that day. He had not heard, however, that the manager, smarting from the ridicule of the audience, had told Mr. Linley that his son was to consider his career as a musician closed, so far as Bath was concerned.

"But 'tis so indeed; father told us so," said Betsy. "Oh, poor father! what he has been called on by Heaven to suffer! How dismal his early life was! But he freed himself by his own genius from that life and its associations, and then, just when happiness seemed at the point of coming to him, he finds that he has instructed me in vain,—that was a great blow to him, Dick—oh, what a disappointment! But what was it compared to this? O Dick, Dick, something must be done to save Tom!"

"She will soon tire of his society," said Dick. "She is not a woman of sentiment: when she finds that the topic of her conquest of Tom has ceased to be talked about, she will release him."

"That is what you said to me long ago, and yet he is

not released, and people are talking more than ever," she cried.

"We must have patience, Betsy."

"What! do you suggest that we should do nothing—absolutely nothing? O Dick, I looked for better advice from you! What comfort is it to the friends of a prisoner immured in a dungeon to tell them that if they have patience his prison bars will rust away and he will then be free?"

"Do you fancy that my going to Mrs. Abington to plead for him will have any effect upon her? Do you really believe that all the eloquence of man has any influence upon a woman with a whim?"

"Ah, she will listen to you—you will be able to persuade her. She cares for you, Dick—I know that."

He looked at her wonderingly. How was it possible, he asked himself, that she had found out Mrs. Abington's secret? He himself had not found it out of his own accord, and he was a man. (He ventured to assume that such secrets were more likely to be guessed by a man than by a woman.)

"She likes me—yes, I suppose—in a way," he said. "But I am not sure that this fact would make her the more ready to abandon a whim of the moment. On the contrary——"

"Ah, Dick, will you not help us?" she cried. "Surely if she cares about you——"

"Dear Betsy, I think we should do well to avoid giving any consideration to that particular point," said Dick hastily. "I will go to Mrs. Abington and make an appeal to her, but 'twill not be on the ground that she cares for me; in fact, I do not at this moment know on what ground I can appeal to her."

"But you will go? Ah, I knew that we could depend on you to do your best for us, Dick," said she, and there

passed over her face a glimpse of gladness—a flash of sunshine making more transparent the azure of her eyes. "You are the one whom I can always trust, dear Dick, because I know that you can always trust yourself."

"I have learned that from you, my Betsy; I can stand face to face with you, and yet—I can trust myself."

"Ah, do not say that you learned it from me," she cried. She had turned away from him suddenly and was looking pensively at the hand which she had rested on the back of a chair. "If you could know what is in my heart, Dick, you would not talk about learning anything from me—alas—! alas!"

"You can trust your heart," he said—"you can trust your heart, for it is true."

"Oh, do not talk in that way—for Heaven's sake, do not talk in that way!" she cried. "My heart—true?—ah, I fancied that I could trust myself—I fancied that I was strong, that I could do all that I had set myself to do, but—ah, Dick, my heart, my poor heart! It is not strong, it is not true, and the worst of it is that I—I myself—I cannot be true to my heart, and I am too weak to be true to my resolution."

She was walking to and fro nervously, and now she threw herself into a chair and put her hands up to her face.

He looked at her without moving, though it was in his heart to kneel before her and, taking her hands in his own, pour out the tale of his love to her. His heart whispered to him that she would at that moment give him kiss for kiss. A month ago no power would have restrained him from kneeling to her; but now he was under the control of another power and a stronger than that which set his heart beating as it was beating. He felt the controlling influence; but—well, he thought it would not be wise to look at her any longer.

He turned away from where she was sitting; his hands

were behind him and his fingers locked together. He stood looking out of the window, but seeing nothing. The room was very silent. He thought he heard a movement behind him. He thought he heard her footfalls approaching him, he thought he heard a sigh close to him —a sigh with the inflection of a sob; but still he did not move—his fingers tightened about each other. He would not turn round. His heart beat more wildly, and the rhythm of its beats made up a siren-song hard to be resisted.

But there was another power upholding him in the struggle to which he had nerved himself, and he knew that that power was love. He felt that it was his love for her that saved him—that saved her. He did not turn round.

And then there came dead silence.

He knew that she had gone.

In another moment he was kneeling beside the chair in which she had sat, kissing the place where her hand had rested. It was still warm from her touch, and he kissed it again and again, crying in a voice tremulous not with passion, but with love:

"My beloved! my beloved! You have been true—true to true love—true to the truest love!"

CHAPTER XXXI

With what story was he to go to her? What excuse was he to make for interfering between her and the carrying out of her whims? How was he to tell her that she was no longer to make a fool of the youth whom she had taken a fancy to fool?

He found no answer to any of these questions which he asked himself. But when he went on to ask himself if she would not have a right to accuse him of impudence and presumption were he to go to her for the purpose of remonstrating with her, he had no difficulty in finding an answer.

He had never set about any business for which he had less aptitude than this. He was sufficiently a man of the world to know that he was the last person who should go to Mrs. Abington to remonstrate with her. The man who interposes in a quarrel between a man and a wife is accounted a fool; but a man who interposes between an actress and her lover is much worse—he is a busybody, and he usually comes off as badly as does an arbitrator, who reconciles two of his friends in order to become the enemy of both.

Dick felt that not only would his mission be fruitless, he would be regarded by both the actress and the lover with righteous rage. And then he was a little afraid of Mrs. Abington. She had availed herself to the uttermost of her

opportunities of studying men, and she had, he believed, acquired a knowledge of how to treat individual cases without risk to herself, that was little short of marvellous. A woman possessing such powers was one whom every sensible man feared; the others fell in love with her. And he had promised to go to her upon a mission that would have been odious to him if it had not been suggested by Betsy Linley.

He could not explain to Betsy that there are certain lessons in life that must be learned by all men who wish to be men, and that these lessons cannot be learned from the study of books, but only by experience, and that her brother was learning his lesson at the sacrifice only of a few weeks of his time (he did not believe that at the best —or was it the worst?—Mrs. Abington's caprice would last longer than a week or two), at a period of his life that could by no means be called critical. Betsy would not have understood, and he was glad at the thought that she would not have understood.

When he had given himself up to thinking with what wisdom on his lips he should go to Mrs. Abington, he did what a wise man would do—that is, a moderately wise man; an entirely wise man would have stayed at home—he went to her without a portfolio. He had no idea what he would say to her; he had no policy to carry out. In dealing with a capricious woman, so much depends on her caprice. About Mrs. Abington nothing was steadfast except her capriciousness; and Dick felt that, in going to her, his success would be dependent on his treatment of her caprice of the moment.

He thought that the hour of his visit to her should be immediately following the departure of Tom Linley from her presence. He took it for ganted that Tom would be paying her his usual afternoon visit, and he was not astray. Passing her lodgings, he heard the long and melancholy

wail of a violin in which a young man has hidden his heart, turning the instrument into an oubliette with air-holes, so that the moaning and the wailing of the immured can be heard at some distance. On and on went the moan of the imprisoned heart, until Dick felt that the lady was paying a high price for her caprice, if she was compelled to listen daily to such melodies.

No, this particular whim of hers could not possibly last longer than a few more weeks, he thought, as he strolled by and waited for Tom to leave the house. Tom stayed a long time; but Dick reflected that the longer he stayed the better chance there would be of Mrs. Abington's listening to reason. After the dolorous complaint of the catgut, even reason, though usually unpalatable, would sound grateful to her ears.

In course of time Tom went away; Dick saw him go with his fiddle tucked under his arm in its baize cover. A rapt look was on his face. He had a double inspiration: he was a musical genius, and he was in love for the first time.

"Surely you have the kindest heart of any woman in the whole world!" cried Dick, when he had kissed her hand.

"Yes," she said, "I believe that I have—at times; but how have you found me out? I fancied that I had done my best to conceal that fact from you."

"Enough that I have found it out," said he.

"'Tis not enough, sir," she cried. "What! do you make an accusation against a poor woman and then refuse to say on what grounds it is made?"

"'Tis a fault that carries its own punishment, madam," said he, "so I will reproach you no further. Faith, there are few ladies nowadays who lay themselves open to such a charge."

"All the greater reason why I should know your reasons for making me an exception," said she.

He laughed, saying:

"Well, if you must know, I passed by this house a quarter of an hour ago."

"That is evidence of your lack of a kind heart, Dick, not of my possession of such a disqualification for success in the world," said she.

"True; but I heard the wail of the catgut, and yet when I saw Tom Linley just now his face wore a look of triumph, and so far as I could see, his fiddle was intact."

"Psha! Dick, you should not cultivate that roundabout mode of speech unless you mean to be taken for a poet. I was not thinking of Tom Linley—'tis minutes since he was here. No, I had a fancy that you called me kind-hearted because I did not reproach you for failing to visit me once, though I have now been here several weeks."

"I was wrong—very wrong. But, you see, with Tom Linley——"

"Ah, poor Tom! Yes, he has certainly been here more than once. I have really become quite fond of Tom. He is such a nice boy—surely the handsomest boy that—that——"

"That was ever made a fool of," suggested Tom, when the lady paused.

"Well, we shall say that ever made a fool of himself—that frees every one else from responsibility," laughed the lady. "Dick, the man who is wise enough to make a fool of himself every now and again is indeed the wise man. But Tom is a mighty pretty fellow. He is coming up to London, too."

Dick's face became grave. He shook his head.

"That is past a jest," said he.

"Past a jest? Pray, who was talking of jesting?" she asked quite gravely.

"Would you not regard his going to London in the light of a jest?" he asked.

"Not I, sir!" she cried. "On the contrary, I have done my best to dissuade him from such a project, knowing as I do, how serious a thing it would be for him. But you boys are all equally self-willed, Dick; I can do nothing with any of you. I am as the potter's clay in your hands."

"How does Tom Linley mean to live when he goes to London?" he asked, after a pause.

"Lud, sir! how should I know?" she cried very prettily, holding up her hands.

"You do not mean to take him up to London with you to starve?" he said.

"And this is the man who swore just now that I had the kindest heart among living women!" she cried. "Mr. Sheridan, did you come hither to-day solely to talk about Tom Linley?"

"Yes," he said, "solely to talk about Tom Linley. My dear creature, I shall have to throw myself on the kindness of your heart before I have done, for I want to tell you the truth."

"You had much better refrain, sir, from venturing into such an unexplored region," said she. "I have noticed that when people threaten you with telling the truth they invariably become rude."

"It will not be rudeness on my part to suggest to you that it is not quite fair for you to stake counters in a game where the other player stakes gold."

"In other words?—pray let me have the interpretation of this fable."

"In other words, Tom Linley has staked his heart against—against——"

"Against what, sir? Against mine, do you say?—against my heart—my kind heart? And you hold that

my heart is a counter—something spurious—something base?"

"Nay, madam, I was not so foolish as to fancy for a moment that your heart had any connection with this game. But that is where you do not play fair. You know that poor Tom Linley's heart is laid at your feet, and yet——"

"And yet? Pray continue your criticism of the game, sir—I vow 'tis vastly diverting. And yet—— Well, sir?"

"And yet—well, surely with your many conquests, Mrs. Abington, you cannot set any store upon the devotion of Tom Linley!"

"Why should not I?" she cried. "Why should not I do so, if it so please me? He is, I repeat, a delightful boy, and why I should not value his devotion simply because I have had conquests and he has had none—that is your argument, I think—I cannot at this moment perceive."

"If you had any real affection for him you would not seek to spoil his career at the outset. The manager of the concerts told his father that Tom need never hope to get a hearing in Bath so long as he lives. You took him out driving with you when he should have been playing at the concert. Ah, my dear madam, one who is so strong as you are should be merciful."

"You come here to tell me that, do you? O Dick, you have, after all, no true sense of comedy, though I fancied that none could surpass you in that respect. Is't possible that you fail to see how ludicrous is your appearance here to-day pleading to me for—for—what? You have not yet told me what 'tis that you plead for."

"I plead with you to send Tom Linley back to the career which will surely be his if you set him free. Dear madam, you can have no idea in what anxiety his family are about him just now."

"They have been reading the parable of the one ewe lamb. They ask if Mrs. Abington has not at her feet flocks and herds which she devours at her leisure and when she has an appetite, and demand to know why she should want their one ewe lamb. They have not the wit to perceive that one may tire of beef and mutton, and so ask lamb by way of change. They are not good housekeepers. Besides, now that I come to think on't, they have more than one ewe lamb: are they not at the point of sacrificing one of them—the flower of the flock?"

"Leaving parables out of the question, dear madam, let me ask you if you do not think that it would be to the advantage of Tom Linley to remain under the influence of his home for some years, free from the distractions of the town? I have heard that he promises to become a very great musician; but if——"

"You have some skill as a pleader, Dick. But I am thinking at this moment what it is you hope to gain by bringing me to a sense of my own iniquity in listening for an hour or two every day to the fiddling of a youth who is fresh and natural and a genius to boot."

"What do I hope to gain?"

"Yes. I take it for granted that the eldest sister of the genius implored of you to come to me: you would not be such a fool as to come of your own accord. You know too much of the nature of women, Dick, to believe that one would relinquish even the youngest and most innocent of her adorers just when she had the satisfaction of learning that she was looked on as dangerous—so few women attain the distinction of being thought dangerous, though most of them aim at it."

Dick laughed approvingly; he felt that it would never do for him to neglect any of the conciliatory arts of the pleader.

"Tom is, as you say, young and innocent, Mrs. Abington," he said indulgently. "That is why I offer to you the parable of the fisherman. A good fisherman—one who fishes for sport and not for the fish-kettle—never fails to take the hook out of the jaws of a young and innocent fish, and to send it back to its sorrowing relations."

"Faith, 'tis a pretty parable, Dick," said she. "But how if your fisherman has been angling all the day for a fish on which he has set his heart? Failing to catch it, is he to be greatly blamed if he retain the little one which he has hooked, and try to make the most of it, dangling it at the end of the line before the onlookers?"

"Nay. When he has in his basket all the fish that swim in the river—when he——"

"Dick Sheridan," whispered the actress, going close to him and putting her face closer still,—"Dick Sheridan, I will let Tom Linley go down the stream if you will take his place."

He started back and felt himself flushing all over—the woman had revealed herself; and she too was flushing through the force of her revelation.

They stood there looking at each other, separated by only a few feet. Some moments had passed before he said:

"Ah, you were born a coquette! Dangerous—you were born dangerous, you beautiful creature! You would lure me on to make a fool of myself. Nay, seriously, my dear madam——"

He did not act the part very well; she could have given him a lesson as to the exact inflection of the phrases. But just then she was not inclined to be a severe critic.

"Dick," she whispered, with tremulous tenderness, "is it so hard for you to love me—to love me a little—not as I love you, Dick—I don't expect so much as that—you are only a man, but still——"

"Stop! for Heaven's sake, stop! Ah, you do not know what you say—you do not know what you ask!" he said.

"Alas! I know it but too well," she said, her voice broken by sobs. "Dick, dear Dick, I can be a good woman for your sake. I know that I am older than you by some years—oh, what do the years matter when the heart has not grown old? Dick, there is not a grey hair in my heart. I have been vain, I know; I have loved seeing men make fools of themselves, but none of them all has ever made a fool of me. No, don't tell me that I am making a fool of myself before you now! I am not—I am not!"

"No—no, that is not what is in my heart," said he gently. The thought that was in his heart at that moment was that though he had gone to her to plead, it was she who was doing all the pleading with him.

"Am I unwomanly? Ah, my fault has been that I am too womanly."

"I do not know what it is that you suggest," he said slowly.

"Ah, Dick, do not overwhelm me with scorn. Say a word to me—speak words to me, not icicles, that cut me as icicles cut one."

"I am thinking," he said. "You give me so much to think about. My first thought is that you are a free woman. You can marry whomsoever you will?"

"I am free," she said. "I can marry—one—one."

"You would not be afraid to marry that one?" said he.

"Afraid! Ah, my only fear would be that I could not do enough to make him happy."

"Would you be afraid to marry me?" he said in a low voice.

"Ah, Dick, only for the reason that I have said!" she cried.

"You need not be afraid on that account. I shall be happy—I shall be happy. Dear madam, I kiss your hand."

"O Dick, my own dear Dick! I shall make you happy—not so happy as you have made me, but still—— No, no, Dick, not my hand, my cheeks—my lips—all are yours, Dick, and you are mine—mine—at last—at last!"

CHAPTER XXXII

It was on the evening of the next day that Tom Linley entered the house at Pierrepont Street, and ran upstairs and flung himself into the music-room, where his father was giving Polly and Maria a lesson on a part song. They had gone over the lines:

"Sigh no more, ladies:
Men were deceivers ever,
One foot on sea and one on land,
To one thing constant never."

"'Deceivers ever—deceivers ever,'" came Maria's pretty treble.

"'Sigh no more—sigh no more,'" whispered Polly in simple harmony, and then their voices joined with Betsy's in the half-mocking bourdon—

"With a hey nonny, nonny—"

when Tom entered and threw himself on the sofa. The singers ceased their song and stared at him. He held his violin laid across his knees, and then a sudden horror came over the girls, paralysing them where they stood, for they saw that the violin was broken. Its long neck was severed close to the body of the instrument, and hung down, suspended by the strings, from his knees. It was as if they were looking at a strangled infant—the droop of the severed neck had about it all the limpness of death.

It was ludicrously ghastly, and Tom was gazing at the wreck with unspeculative eyes.

"Heavens above us! What has happened?" cried Mr. Linley.

"I broke it—God forgive me—I broke it in my anger!" sobbed Tom. "What does it matter?" he cried, recovering himself. "'Tis not alone the fiddle that is broken; my heart is broken, and I shall never touch the instrument again!"

He flung it away from him, but Betsy saw that he took good care that it should alight on the cushion of the sofa. The moan that came from the headless trunk striking the soft place was distractingly human. Maria had lately been reading of a decapitated prince whose head, after the operation, had rolled off the sawdust, so that all could see the disdainful expression on the face; and here was the decapitated violin moaning.

She shuddered.

"It can be mended," said Mr. Linley, examining the wreck.

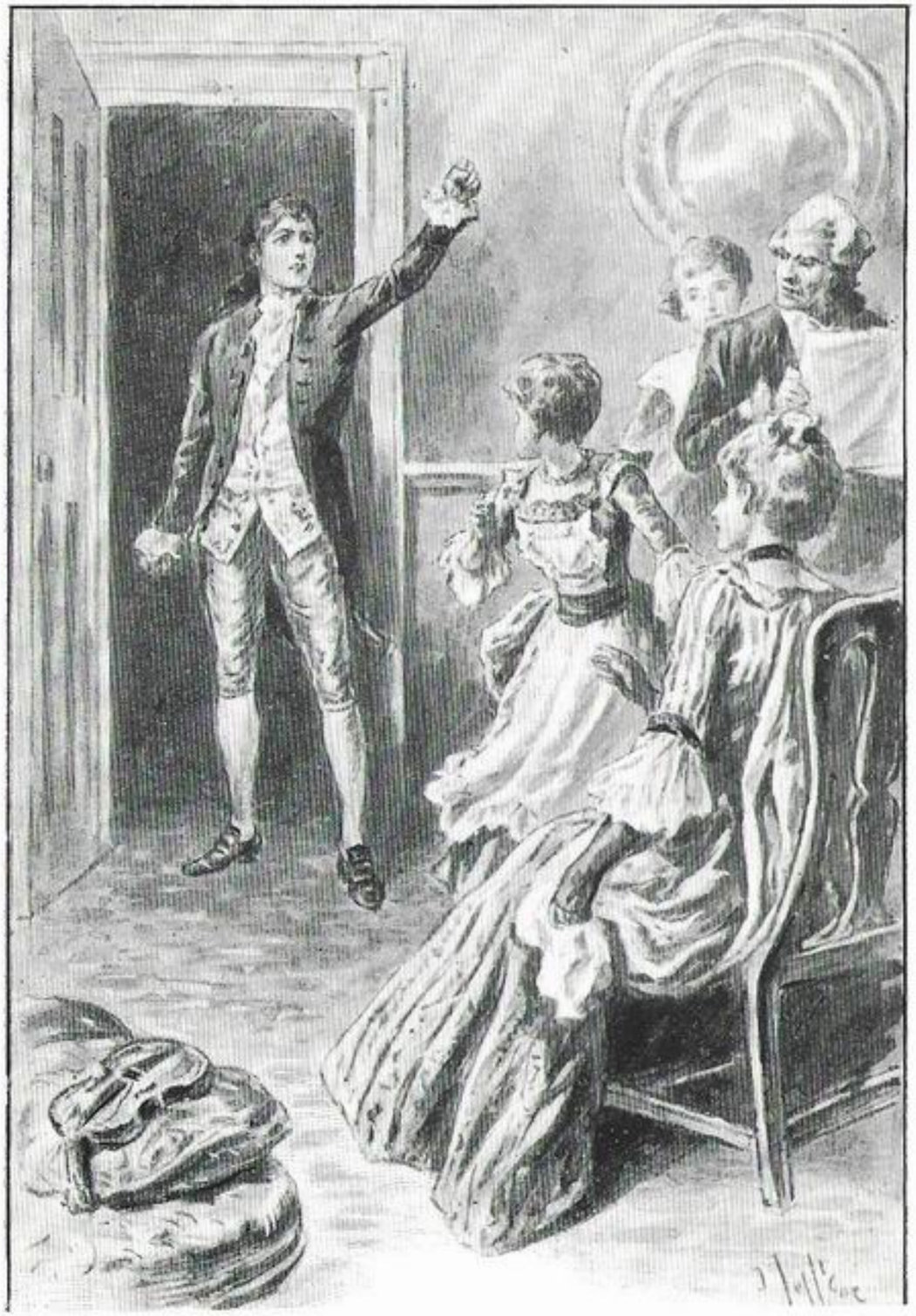
"I shall never play again," moaned Tom. "My heart is broken."

"Thank Heaven!" murmured his father.

Betsy went to her brother's side, and put an arm about his neck.

"You have come back to us, dear Tom," she said; "and you will never go away from us again. We all here love you, Tom. Ah, you know that nothing can change our love for you."

"Delilah—Delilah—traitress!" murmured Tom. "O Betsy, there has been no deception like mine since the days of Delilah! She told me plainly that she was tired of me—that she had never thought of me except as a nice boy—she actually called me a pretty boy! And my playing—she said that it was dreary—it gave her the vapours; she asked me to play a jig—an Irish jig, too—Irish! I told



"Curse Dick Sheridan! he has done it all!" [page 313.

her that sooner than see my instrument desecrated I would break it across my knee. 'Virginius, the Roman father!' she cried, pointing a finger at me. I always thought her fingers shapely; but I saw then that they were not fingers, but talons—talons! . . . and I broke my violin before her, and yet she laughed. . . . O Delilah—Delilah! . . . But I shall set the scene to music that shall wring her heart, if she have one. I see clearly how it can be dealt with by a small orchestra. Handel fell lamentably short of the truth when he wrote the music to Delilah. I have the prelude in my mind. This is how it will go."

He mechanically stretched across the sofa for the violin. Crash went the pegs, drooping with the neck by the catgut strings, against the hollow body of the instrument. He started up as if he had become aware of the disaster for the first time. For some moments he stood handling the wreck, and then he laid it down very gently on the sofa. He went with the bowed head of a father in the death-chamber of his child, to the door; but when he had opened it, and was in the act of departing, he turned and stood up straight like a man; his hands were clenched, his eyes were blazing, while he cried:

"Curse Dick Sheridan! he has done it all. Curse him! Curse him!"

He banged the door behind him, leaving the girls white and awed. They had never before witnessed a really tragic scene ending up with a curse, and they felt that it was very awful.

"Yes," said Mr. Linley quietly, "we can all join in his prayer and say, 'Bless Dick Sheridan! Bless Dick Sheridan!'—that will be poor Tom's prayer in another month—perhaps another week."

"Oh, no, no! not another week," said Betsy. "I should be sorry to think that Tom could be himself within a week. Tom has too deep feeling for that."

"Let us return to our lesson," said her father. "Dwell lightly on 'deceivers ever,' Maria; and I think, Betsy, you might give full value to the minim rest before 'Sigh no more,' after the 'hey nonny!' I think I see the delicate humour of the composer's treatment of the song better now than I did ten minutes ago."

But the girls were too unnerved to be able to return to their lesson just then. They remonstrated with their father.

"Well, perhaps one lesson in the day is enough," said he, "and Tom has just had his."

* * * * *

It was altogether very amusing and quite infamous, Bath said. Heavens! the way in which that woman pursued her course, being on with a new love quite two days before she was off with the old, was absolutely shameless.

"A female comet with an ardent train—no fixed star in the firmament," said Mr. Walpole, when it was found that Mrs. Abington had discarded Tom Linley and had taken on Dick Sheridan. It was found that she had done so within an hour of Tom's dismissal.

"The comet has in all ages been looked on as a portent of disaster," said George Selwyn. "I wonder what does this particular heavenly body portend?"

"I am no astrologer, but I dare swear that Mr. Cumberland's new comedy will be damned," said Walpole.

"My dear Horry, the obvious needs no portent! 'Twould be a ridiculous waste of fuel to send a comet flaring through the sky merely to let the world know that Sir Joshua's macaw will lose his tail-feathers in the moulting season," said Selwyn. "Mrs. Abington has not come to Bath for a whole month solely to give Nan Cattley a chance of making the damning of Cumberland's play a certainty."

"Nay, but her acting might save it if she were to return to town," said Walpole.

"Then it must be our duty to keep her here," said Selwyn.

"'Tis two days since she found young Sheridan attractive," said Walpole; "so that she is not the fickle creature some people have called her."

"With economy she may be faithful to Dick Sheridan till the end of the week," said Selwyn. "Can Bath furnish another swain with ruddy cheeks and a glib tongue to follow him?"

The cynical pleasantries of the Walpole circle, dealing with the case of Mrs. Abington and young Sheridan, were echoed by the inferior wits of the Pump Room—for the flare of a comet affects other systems besides the solar. Dick Sheridan was in as active attendance upon the lady as Tom Linley had been even in the early days of his attachment to her. He did not play the violin to her, and this fact, some people declared, should not be lost sight of by those who were venturing to assign a duration of just one week to this new caprice on the part of the actress. There was no predicting the length of time that she might remain faithful to a good-looking youth, provided that he refrained from playing the violin to her—her constancy might even last out the fortnight.

But these were the optimists.

Dick Sheridan knew perfectly well what the people were saying when they shrugged their shoulders and smiled significantly as he went by with Mrs. Abington; but he too shrugged his shoulders, and his smile also had a significance of its own. He went everywhere with the lady, even to her own house; but this was when she entertained some of her friends to supper.

Once when by the side of Mrs. Abington in Spring Gardens he caught sight of Betsy Linley in the distance.

She was looking toward him across the green lawn, and their eyes met. He fancied that there was something of gratitude in the smile which she sent to him—he knew that there was something of sadness in it; and then—he could not doubt that the expression on her face was one of reproach—reproach and indignation.

For a moment he omitted to reply to a casual question put to him by his gay companion, and she quickly followed the direction of his eyes. She saw Betsy and gave a laugh. She accepted the reproachful look in the girl's eyes as a tribute to her own powers. She was not astute enough to keep her satisfaction to herself.

"Lud!" she cried, "that young woman has strange notions of the duty of a censorship. She is e'en reproving you, Dick, for being in my company. That is like enough a woman to serve you for a lesson, my dear. A woman has no sense of gratitude for a favour done to her by a man whom she loves and whom she has discarded."

"Madam," said Dick, "it is not for such as we are to judge Miss Linley by our standards: we are only men and women."

"That is all, praise Heaven!" cried the actress. "I claim to be nothing more than a woman, and I don't know that one can be much better—ay, or worse, Dick. God made me a woman, and I don't believe that He will be hard on a woman for being womanly. If He had meant me to be an angel, He would have given me wings, and then I should be angelic—and to be angelic is to be insipid. But take my word for it, Miss Linley, though she judge us from the standpoint of an angel, is just as much a woman as the best of us—ay, or the worst of us. She is just as jealous of me, thank God, as I am of her at this moment; and that's the last word that you and I will have about Miss Linley."

Dick resolved that, so far as he was concerned, there

should be no need for another word on the subject of Miss Linley to pass between them; and when he came to think over the matter, he was glad that so much had already passed between them regarding Betsy. He had been warned, from what Mrs. Abington had said, that she was under no delusion respecting Betsy and himself. That same astuteness which she had shown in reading the secret of his love for Betsy, had enabled her to perceive that the fact of his having entered into an agreement with herself did not in a moment cause him to forget Betsy Linley.

And thus, day by day, he was in attendance upon Mrs. Abington, appearing by her side in all public places, and at many private suppers and card-tables, so that a good many people looked on him as an extremely fortunate young man.

As for Dick himself, he began to feel that he was indeed fortunate. Had he not been able to do a great service to the only one whom he loved, at a sacrifice of himself? He was proving his love to Betsy Linley by marrying Mrs. Abington. Yes, he felt that he was fortunate.

But all these days he failed to call upon Mr. Long. The truth was that it now and again occurred to him that Mr. Long might not understand without more explanation than he was inclined to offer, the position which he had taken up. He shrank from the duty—if he might call it a duty—of making it plain to Mr. Long that he was marrying Mrs. Abington in order that Betsy Linley might get back her brother. But there came a day when he learned that Mr. Long was waiting on him, and he found himself in the presence of that gentleman in the room in which he had received Mrs. Abington a short time before.

Mr. Long greeted him cordially.

"You will pardon my obtruding upon you at this time, Mr. Sheridan," said he; "but I must confess that I thought

it strange that we should separate good friends a fortnight ago and then remain apart. Surely our friendship promised better things than this, sir!"

Dick made up his mind to be bold. He smiled, examined the tips of his fingers, and then said:

"I assure you, sir, that I retain all the liveliest sentiments of regard for you. Dear sir, you have been kindness itself to me, and I should be most ungrateful if I were to fail in my duty to you. But the fact is, Mr. Long, that—that——Ah well, sir, you will understand my seeming neglect when I inform you that I have been successful in engaging the affections of a lady to whom I have been devoted for—for—some time. When I tell you the lady's name, sir, I know I shall be the more easily excused."

"Do not tell me that the lady's name is Mrs. Abington," said Mr. Long gravely.

"I am sorry—I mean I am glad—yes, I am glad, sir, that it is not in my power to obey you in this matter," said Dick, still smiling, but with more than a little self-consciousness. He was beginning to feel uneasy beneath the grave, searching look of his visitor. "Yes, dear sir, we are to be married very shortly, so that you will understand, I am sure, that, just now, I do not count my time my own."

"You are to marry Mrs. Abington, the actress—the actress?" said Mr. Long.

"Ah, sir, there is only one Mrs. Abington in the world, and—my father is an actor," said Dick.

"And you expect to be happy with her as your wife?" said Mr. Long.

"If I am not, sir, it will be because I am not easily made happy; 'twill not be the lady's fault."

"Then I wish you every happiness, Mr. Sheridan."

Mr. Long rose from his chair and took up his hat.

"There is a forlorn hopefulness in your tone, sir, that has a chilling effect upon me," said Dick. "May I ask why it

should appear ridiculous to expect that I should be happy—at least as happy as most wedded folks are?"

"You have disappointed me, Dick, that is all I can say to you—you have grievously disappointed me. That one who had ever loved Elizabeth Linley could bring himself to marry—— I ask your pardon, sir; I exceed my privileges as a friend. I have no right to express myself in such terms. I have the honour to wish you a very good day, sir."

"Mr. Long," said Dick, "I seek for your good opinion more than that of any man living. I pray of you to think the best of me—not the worst."

"And what is the best that you would have me think?" cried Mr. Long. "Just state with some show of reason what you wish me to think of you, and I promise that I will be influenced by what you say. You talked to me of loving Elizabeth Linley."

"Nay, sir, 'twas you who talked to me of it. 'Twas you strange to say—you, to whom Miss Linley has given her promise—'twas you who talked to me of my love for her."

"I allow it. Alas! I believed—in my ignorance of men and of their motives—in my ignorance of how men regard love—I prayed of you to allow your love for her—her love for you—to urge you to achieve something noble in life. I flattered myself that I had impressed upon you the true nature of love—the sentiment that exalts, that ennobles, that leads a man into deeds of self-sacrifice and devotion to duty; and yet—you are ready to marry Mrs. Abington."

For a moment Dick was stung with a sense of the injustice that was being done to him.

"I am ready to marry Mrs. Abington," he cried, "and you, sir, are ready to marry Elizabeth Linley."

"You fool!" said Mr. Long, "I have no hope of marrying her. I knew too well that she loved you, and—as I fancied—that you loved her, ever to think of marrying

her. My only hope was to see her happy—to look at her happiness through another man's eyes—through your eyes, Dick—your eyes. But now—alas! alas!"

He spoke rapidly, almost passionately, facing Dick. His breaking off was abrupt; it seemed as if he had a great deal more to say, but that words failed him unexpectedly. His lips were parted, his hand was upraised, but he stopped short, saying:

"Alas! Alas!"

Then he turned quickly and walked out of the room.

Dick dropped into a chair.

CHAPTER XXXIII

In no house in Bath was Dick Sheridan's conduct regarded in the same light as it was in the home of the Linleys. That was, of course, because only by the Linley family was his conduct regarded as a personal matter. His perfidy in professing a friendship for Tom, while all the time he was contriving to take poor Tom's place in the affections of Mrs. Abington, was referred to with great bitterness by Tom's mother, and by Polly and Maria in wrathful whispers. They referred to Tom daily as "poor Tom!"—sometimes "poor dear Tom!" All their sympathy went forth for Tom in these days, and every one in the household—not even excepting Mr. Linley and Betsy—felt that it was necessary to treat him with the greatest tenderness. He was the victim of an unhappy attachment to one who was unworthy of the inestimable treasure of his young affections; and, in addition, he had been the dupe of an unscrupulous man who had not hesitated to elbow him aside in order to take his place. Surely one would be quite heartless who failed to have the deepest sympathy with poor Tom, or to heap reprobation on the head of his perfidious friend!

To be sure, Tom's attachment to Mrs. Abington had been a terror to the household. The father had stormed about it, and the mother had wept over it. The father had threatened in no undertone to turn Tom out of the house,

and the mother—with the true instincts of a woman and the experience of a wife—had made her crispest *pâtés* to tempt him to stay at home. But Tom disregarded alike threats and tartlets, and his sisters had sat daily in terror of a catastrophe. But the remembrance of those awful days did not in the least tend to mitigate their abhorrence of the perfidy of Dick Sheridan. They could not contain their anger when one day they caught sight of him flaunting his success in the face of all the people of Bath while he took the air by the side of Mrs. Abington in her chariot.

Maria, with great tact, drew Tom away from the window on some pretext. Her heart was beating in the excitement of the moment. If Tom had chanced to see that sight it would, she felt, have been impossible to predict what might happen. Tom was a man of spirit—so much was certain—and he had brought home with him from Italy a stiletto with beautiful jewels and pieces of coral set in the haft. . . .

Mr. Linley only smiled when he was alone, and repeated in whispers those words, "God bless Dick Sheridan!" He felt truly grateful to Dick, but not quite so grateful as to make the attempt to force him upon the family as their benefactor; and as for his flaunting it with Mrs. Abington—well, that was Dick's own affair. He was not in the least offended at his triumph. It was better for Dick Sheridan to make a fool of himself than for Tom Linley to be made a fool of. That was what Mr. Linley thought; and he helped Tom to mend his violin. Tom was ready to begin the work just two days after his breaking of the instrument, and when the glue had properly dried—before the touch of varnish that he gave to the fractured part had ceased to perfume the room, he was improvising that "Elegy to a Dead Love" which, later on, caused some of his audience (women) at a concert to be moved to bitter tears. Love was dead, and a musical elegy

had been played over its grave, because Tom Linley had been jilted by Mrs. Abington! And when Mr. Linley declared that nothing more classical than that composition had been produced by an English musician, Tom began to recover from the effects of his wound as speedily as his violin had done. Only once did his sister Maria hear him murmur, while he breathed hard and his eyes were alight with the true fire of genius:

"A jig—an Irish jig! O heavens! an Irish jig!"

The expression on his face was one of bitterness—bitterness tempered by the thought that he had produced an immortal work: the mortality of his love had given him immortality.

But Betsy did not speak a word. Tom was too full of himself and of setting his sorrow to rhythm to notice how often during every day her eyes filled with tears. But one of her sisters who occupied the same bedroom, had awakened once in the night hearing Betsy sob on her pillow, and had asked her what was the matter—was it toothache? "Ah, the ache! the ache!" Betsy had answered. The little girl had expressed her sympathy with her sister's suffering, and had straightway fallen asleep, forgetting in the morning that she had ever been awakened.

But Mr. Long was not among those who were insensible of any change in Betsy. He did not fail to preceive that some trouble was upon her. He wondered if it was the family trouble in regard to Tom's promise that oppressed her, or was it due to something more closely affecting herself?

After Tom had renounced the enchantress, and it might have been expected that Betsy would become herself again, Mr. Long noticed that she was more tristful than ever. He made up his mind that, failing to find out by chance the cause of the change, he would ask her concerning it. For

some days, however, he had no chance of talking with her apart from the members of her family. But at the end of a week, he found her alone in the music-room. He had met Mr. Linley and his wife on their way to look at a house in the Circus, which their improving circumstances seemed to warrant their taking, and he perceived that there was a likelihood of Betsy's being at home and alone. He knew that he was fortunate when he heard the sound of her voice while he rang the bell. She was singing, and he knew that now she rarely sang unless she was alone.

She sprang from the harpsichord when he entered the room, and turned away for a suspicious moment before greeting him.

"My dear child, why should you wipe the tears from your eyes?" he said, retaining her hand. "Do you fancy that I am one of those people who think tears a sign of weakness? Nay, you should know that I regard them as an indication of strength—of womanliness, which is the strongest influence that remains with us in the world."

"Ah, no, no! with me they are a proof of weakness," she cried quickly—"weakness—weakness! Oh, I am in great trouble, Mr. Long, because I am conscious daily of doing you a great wrong. But you will bear with me—you will forgive me when I confess it to you?"

"Before you confess—before," he said. "But what can you have to confess?"

"It is terrible—terrible, for though I have given you my promise to marry you, I find that I cannot do it—I cannot do it."

She remained standing before him, but put both her hands up to her face. The movement was ineffectual; her hands failed to conceal her tears.

"Why?" he asked, after a pause.

There was another and a longer pause before she said:

"Because 'twere to do you a great wrong, sir. I believed

when I gave you my promise that I would be strong enough to keep it. But I find that I am too weak. Oh, I am miserable on account of it! 'Tis not that I have failed in my respect for you—in my regard—but I feel that 'twould be impossible. Oh, I cannot do it—I cannot marry you, Mr. Long."

"You do not love me as a girl should love her lover?" said he, and he was actually smiling.

She could not answer him. The truth seemed too cruel. She could only put her hand in his. That was her instinct. She knew that she could trust him to understand her.

"Yes, I see that you do not love me," said he; "and I too have to confess that I cannot give to you the love of a lover."

Her eyes opened wide as she looked at him; there was deep pathos in her look of innocent inquiry.

"You have found that your love is given to some one else?" he said, with great gentleness.

A flush came to her face; she turned away her head.

"And I—I too have given all my love to another," he said still more gently.

Quickly she turned to him again. She laid the hand which he was not holding on the hand that held hers.

He led her to the sofa, and she seated herself, wondering.

"My Betsy," he said, "I hoped that I would never be led to do you a wrong, and I hope that I did not wrong you when I asked you for the promise which you gave me; but at that time, and before it, all my love was given to another—another even younger than yourself."

A little coldness had come to her eyes. She drew back an inch from him. He recognised how womanly was the movement.

"You will see her—one day; but I cannot show her to you now. I can only show you her likeness."

He took out of an inner pocket a miniature enclosed in a

plain red gold case. It was attached to a black watered silk riband which he wore round his neck. He looked at the picture for a long time before handing it to her, which he did with a sigh.

She took the case in her hands, and saw that the picture was of a girl's face, lovely in its spirituality, pathetic in its innocence. The eyes were of the softest grey, and their expression had a certain indefinable sadness in it, in spite of the smile that illuminated the face.

"She is beautiful," said Betsy gently.

"Ah, she is more beautiful than that picture now," said he. "It was painted forty years ago. She is more beautiful now."

"Only an angel could be more beautiful," said Betsy.

"That is true—only an angel. She is among the angels," said he. "Dear child, it was Mr. Jackson, the organist of Exeter, who told me that when you sang your face was like the face of one who is looking at an angel. I wondered if I should think so when I saw you. I found that he spoke the truth: I have seen you when you seemed to be looking into her face. It was for her sake, my dear, that I wished to do something to help you. I hoped that this privilege might be granted to me."

"And you have helped me—no one has helped me more."

"Have I helped you to understand yourself—to understand what love means? That is sometimes the last thing that women understand."

"I think that you helped me to understand myself, and the result is, pain—self-reproach."

"There is no need for either, Betsy. There is no need for pain, even though the one whom you loved showed himself to be unworthy of you. Ah, my dear, if you mourn until you find a man worthy of your love, you will pass a melancholy lifetime. Listen to me, my sweet one, while I

SHE TOOK THE CASE IN HER HANDS.

[page 326.

tell you what was my dream. When I came here for the first time and found you in the midst of danger, surrounded by unscrupulous men—men who were as incapable of appreciating your real nature as—as—well, as incapable as was your father; when I perceived that you were like a white lily that slowly withers when brought out of the gladness of the garden to be stifled by the air of a dark room; when I perceived that, in order to avoid the shame of facing the public from the platform of a concert-room, you might be led to give your hand to some one who would lead you into misery and dishonour—then, for her sake—for the sake of the angel whom I loved in my boyhood and whom I love now in the autumn of my life—I made up my mind that I would try to help you."

"And you did—indeed, you did help me. Ah, I should have known what you meant—I might have known how good and unselfish you were. 'Tis true that sometimes I fancied—something like what you have told me now. Yes, I felt that you were too fond of me to love me. That sounds absurd, but I think you understand what I mean."

"You have put the sentiment into the best phrase: I was too fond of you to be in love with you or to look for you to love me with the love of a girl for her lover. I wondered who it was you did love in that way, and I believed that the truth was revealed to me. I saw Dick Sheridan in the same room with you, and I saw the light that came into your face."

"Alas—alas!"

"The chance that I told you of when he came to my help, enabled me to see a good deal of him, and I felt sure that it would be given to me to have my dearest wish realised—to see you happy by the side of a man who adored you and who could appreciate the beauty of your nature. Alas! I was disappointed. Instead of earning my respect by his constancy to the sentiment of love—constancy to that ideal

of love which I believed he could appreciate—he has earned my contempt."

"Ah, no—not contempt!" she cried almost piteously.

"Why not contempt?" he said. "I tell you that in giving himself to that woman—he confessed to me that he was going to marry her—he has earned my contempt and yours."

"No, 'tis not true. I love him and he loves me!" she cried. "Ah, you should spare him—you should spare him!"

"Why should I spare him? He is worthy only of contempt."

"No, no! he is to be pitied—only pitied. Do not be hard on him: he did it because he loved me."

CHAPTER XXXIV

And now the girl was sitting looking up with dry eyes to the face of the man who had sprung from her side the moment she had spoken, and was standing a yard or two away from her. She saw that, although the words which she had spoken had sent him to his feet in an instant, he now felt that he had perhaps been too hasty. She saw that there was a puzzled look on his face. She did not wait for him to put a question to her. She perceived that her explanation needed to be explained. It is unusual, she thought, for a man to ask a woman to marry him simply because he loves another woman.

"Indeed, he did it all for me," she said. "I sent for him more than a week ago to ask him to plead with Mrs. Abington to break with my brother, whose infatuation for her was ruining his career, and he promised to do this for me. The day that my brother returned I knew what Dick Sheridan had done—all for me—all for me!"

"Is it possible that you suggest that the woman stipulated with him to release your brother only if Dick Sheridan took his place?" he asked.

"I am as certain that she did so as if I had heard her making a compact with him," said Betsy. "She had an old infatuation for Dick; Mr. Garrick told my father so two days ago. Had I known that, I would not have brought

Dick here to beg of him to help us. But he came and this is the result of his coming."

"I have treated him unjustly—God forgive me!" said Mr. Long. "I went to him and—you can imagine what I said to him. But he did not say a word about—about anything that you have told me."

"No, he would not do that. He showed me, when I stood before him, how unselfish he could be. And yet once—once—ah, how long ago it seems!—I had a feeling that his whole aim in life was to excel others—to shine as a man of fashion. Like you, I did him an injustice."

"Ah, my dear, he had not then learned what 'tis to love. You it was, my Betsy, who taught him that the spirit of love—the truest love—the only love—is self-sacrifice."

"Then would to Heaven he had never learned the lesson!" cried the girl passionately. "I have ruined his life, and my life is over! But what is my life? It matters nothing about my life."

"Dear one," he said, "I cannot hear you say that. Nay, my Betsy, I shall live to look on my happiness through his eyes. The position of affairs, though desperate, is not irretrievable. You do not know the world, my child. You do not know the sordid world. Thank Heaven that I have money enough to compensate even the most avaricious of actresses for depriving her of a caprice on which she had set her heart! Betsy, all will yet come right: 'tis merely a question of money."

But her instinct was truer than all his worldly wisdom.

"Now you are doing her a great injustice," she said.

"Not I!" he cried. "Though I am pleased to think that I have never had a proof of the exact extent of the rapacity of such as she, yet——"

She laid her hand upon his arm.

"Dear friend, remember that you are speaking of one of us," she said.

"One of you!—one of——Heaven forbid! You are as far removed from her as heaven is removed from——from Bath."

"Nay, nay, she is a woman; and indeed I think that between the best of us and the worst there is no great gulf fixed. If you go to Mrs. Abington on the errand which you have in your mind, you will be putting upon her a gross affront—yes, and upon Dick Sheridan as well, and much will be lost and nothing gained."

"Then I will not speak to her of money; I will make the appeal to her generosity to set Dick free. Now, you shall not forbid me to make an appeal to her generosity; to do so would be to put an affront on her far more gross than you perceived in my first intention!"

He rose from where he was sitting on the sofa, and began pacing the room thoughtfully. After some time he stopped before her, saying in a low voice:

"Betsy, my child, I fear that I must confess that the design which I had planned out for you, for bringing about your happiness, has been frustrated. My hope was to save you from the evil fate which I feared would overtake you, and the only way that seemed to me to promise well was the one which I took. Was I wrong, dear one, to ask you to give me that promise, knowing, as I did, that it would be a crime on my part to hold you to it?"

"No, no—a thousand times no!" she cried. "You hoped to save me from all that I abhorred, and you succeeded. Indeed you were right. If you had not come to my help, who can tell what might have happened? I knew not in what direction I had a friend who would be true to me, and you know that my father favoured that man, Captain Mathews; he urged upon me to listen to him. . . . Ah, you saved me!"

"But for what—for what have you been saved?" he said.

"I have been thinking much on that point for some days," she replied. "I seem to have lived through many years of life in those singing days of mine, and now the feeling that I have is a feeling of weariness. Oh, I am tired—tired to death of the struggle—the artifices—the world! How long ago is it since I heard the boys in the choir sing those words, 'O for the wings of a dove to fly away and be at rest'? That is the anthem which my heart is singing now. 'The wings of a dove.' I want to be at rest—to take no part in the struggle going on in the world—the sordid troubles—the jealousies that make life seem so petty. Dear friend, I have my heart set upon a place of rest. Elizabeth Sheridan told me of it—a place where the peace of God dwells for evermore. It is a convent at Lille, in France, and its doors are open to those wayfarers through the world whose feet have become weary, and who seek rest. Will you lead me thither? I will trust to you to lead me. I hear the voice that calls from there in the silence that follows the ringing of the Angelus, 'Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.' You will take me thither for the sake of her whom you love—her whose face I looked upon. Oh, she—she has found rest! Would to God that I had found the same rest!"

She flung herself down on her knees at the sofa, and buried her face in her hands.

The man stood by without a word. He was too greatly overcome to be capable of speech. Only now did he perceive how she had been suffering in silence for weeks —only now, when she had broken down, unable to control herself any longer. And he had no word of comfort to say to her.

He remained by her side in silence for some minutes (she had not risen from her knees), and then left the room and the house.

He went straight in search of Dick Sheridan. He did not succeed in finding him at home. Mr. Sheridan had gone out some hours before, the maid said; and forthwith Mr. Long concluded that Dick was visiting Mrs. Abington. His judgment was not at fault. Dick had been dining with the lady; but he did not stay for more than half an hour afterwards, consequently he was met by Mr. Long at the corner of York Street.

"I have been seeking you," said Mr. Long. "I have done you a great injustice, sir, and I live only in the hope of being able to make amends for my grossness of thought. You will grant me five minutes with you in private, Mr. Sheridan?"

Dick raised his hat gravely, but without speaking, and Mr. Long walked with him back to the Sheridans' house. Dick bowed him into the hall and into the room which Mr. Sheridan the elder called his study. It was obvious that the young man wished his visitor to understand that he was being received with ceremony.

"I feel honoured by your attention, sir," he said, offering Mr. Long a chair.

"O Dick, Dick," said Mr. Long, "I fear that I have made some terrible mistakes; but I hope they may not prove irretrievable."

"So far as I am concerned, sir," said Dick, "the error into which you fell need cause you no uneasiness. Indeed, I rather regret that you have discovered your mistake as to my motives in—in the matter to which you referred. I trust that you have not come hither to re-open the subject, Mr. Long?"

"But that is just why I have come," said Mr. Long. "Dick, my boy, will you not aid me to make matters come right?"

"Is there any need for one to trouble oneself in the attempt to control the inevitable, sir?" asked Dick coldly.

"Have you any reason to complain of the direction in which matters have shaped themselves, Mr. Long? Because I can assure you that I see no particular reason for interference, so far as I am concerned. Here am I, a penniless man, a man without a profession, brought in contact accidentally with people of wealth and position. It was my father's wish that my brother and I should cut a figure in this world of fashion to which he led us; but unhappily, however meritorious may be one's ambition in this direction, it needs a fortune to achieve it and another fortune to maintain it. Now, sir, I trust that you perceive how great is the reason I have for feeling satisfied at the turn for the better which my affairs have taken. I am about to be married to a lady whose charms are acknowledged all over England, and whose ability enables her to earn such sums of money as should satisfy all but the most extravagant. Egad, sir! I do not think that many people would be disposed to call me unlucky or to suggest that my affairs stand in need of being shaped in a new direction. Now, sir, I will listen to you with deference."

Mr. Long looked at him and there was no feeling except of pity in his heart. He understood the impulse in which Dick had spoken. He could appreciate the bitterness underlying all that he had said. But it was also plain to him that Dick's pride would not allow him to sanction any scheme that might be proposed for his release.

Mr. Long stood before him as silently as he had stood over Betsy when she had been sobbing on her knees. What could he say to a man who took up such an attitude as Dick had assumed? How could he tell Dick that he was anxious to consult him in respect of the sum of money which he meant to offer Mrs. Abington for his release? Dick's pride would, Mr. Long knew, cause him

to open the door, and to show his visitor into the street whence he had come with such a suggestion.

It was plain to him that, however bitterly Dick Sheridan might feel the humiliation of his position as the penniless young man about to marry an actress who was at least ten years older than himself, and whose reputation for beauty and taste was the only one that she retained, he was too proud not to regard as a gross affront any suggestion to the effect that he was about to make himself contemptible in the eyes of honourable people.

"Dick," said he after a long pause—"Dick, it was Betsy who told me that you had done this for her sake, and I am here now to say to you that, whatever may happen, I honour you more than any man of my acquaintance. I take pride in being your friend, Mr. Sheridan, if you will allow me to think of myself as such."

"Sir," said Dick, "you do me great honour; but I cannot permit even so valued a friend as yourself to suggest that, in taking this step, I was actuated by any motive except of regard and esteem for the lady who is about to honour me with her hand. I will have you know that, Mr. Long."

Mr. Long looked at the younger man, who stood up before him dignified and self-respecting. But he did not fail to detect a shake in his voice and, when he had ceased speaking, a quivering about his lips.

"Give me your hand, Dick Sheridan," he cried. "You are a man!"

He grasped the hand that Dick offered him, and held it for a long time in his own, with his eyes fixed upon the young fellow's face. Dick's eyes were cast down. It was not until Mr. Long had released his hand that he said in a low tone:

"It was from you, sir, I learned what 'tis to be a man. God help me if I fall short of all that I should be! Now,

sir, pray leave me to myself. Ah, will you not have pity on me and leave me? Cannot you see that this moment is too much for me? Cannot you see that in your presence the struggle in which I have taken part is telling on me? Ah, go, for God's sake, go!"

His fingers were interlaced in front of him, and he was pacing the room with bowed head.

"My poor boy—my brave boy, remember that whatever may happen I am your friend," said Mr. Long, with his hand on the door.

Dick did not seem to hear him. He had thrown himself into a chair, and his back was turned to the door. He was unaware of Mr. Long's departure.

* * * * *

Mr. Long was a man of courage. On leaving Dick he made up his mind that he would pay a visit to Mrs. Abington. But his bravery had its limits; he did not pay the visit. Before he had reached the actress's lodgings he had come to the conclusion that he was upon a fool's errand. What could he say to her that would have the smallest influence upon her determination to marry Dick Sheridan? It would be much more to the point to consider what he could offer her to release Dick Sheridan, and of this fact he was well aware, consequently he addressed himself to the task of calculating his resources available for this purpose.

Money—he had said to Betsy that, in regard to such women as Mrs. Abington, such a matter as he had to discuss with her was nothing more than a question of figures. But Betsy's instinct had told her that the rapacity of Mrs. Abington was something altogether different from that with which other actresses with a liking for adventure were accredited—or discredited; and Betsy was right. Mrs. Abington had never, so far as he could remember

—and he knew a good many of the traits of the distinguished people of his time—been accused of having a mercenary tendency. On the contrary, she was known to be generous to a fault, and, unlike Mrs. Clive and Miss Bellamy, to refrain from clamouring for a higher salary and more liberal benefits. To be sure, she was the idol of the playgoers, and Mr. Colman paid her more than Mr. Garrick had ever paid a member of his company, so that she had little cause for complaint. But to have no cause for complaint and to refrain from complaining did not mean exactly the same thing in the minds of most actresses, Mr. Long knew; so that he could not but feel that Mrs. Abington's reputation for generosity was well founded. She would laugh at his offer of money, he now felt; and what else had he to offer her in exchange for Dick Sheridan?

He had come to the end of his resources available for negotiation with the lady when the question ceased to be one of money. He could not pretend to himself that he would have any chance of success with her were he merely to go to her with the assurance that Dick Sheridan and Betsy Linley loved each other and would be happy together if she, Mrs. Abington, were to release Dick from the promise she had obtained from him. He knew that her generosity would not be equal to such a strain as he should put upon it, were he to make such a suggestion to her. She was a woman, and he had an idea that women have a tendency to place an extravagant value upon what other women show themselves anxious to possess. The fact that Miss Linley was in love with Dick Sheridan would only cause Mrs. Abington to chuckle over the bargain she had made with Dick. It seemed clear to him that he could gain nothing beyond that chuckle by his visit to the actress. To be sure, she would take care that it was a purely artistic suggestion of something rather more than content, and

it would be made worthy of the attention of the most exalted order of critics; still, it would represent to Mr. Long (he knew) something rather more humiliating than the failure of his mission, and it was his fear of this chuckle that caused him to abandon his enterprise and to shape his steps in the direction of his own house.

He opened the door of his parlour and found himself face to face with Mrs. Abington!

CHAPTER XXXV.

His first thought was, curiously, of the story he had heard of the man who had left London to escape the plague and had found it waiting for him at Highbury. He bowed to the ground.

"Madam," he said, "I have never before been so honoured. My poor rooms—— But is this visit in accordance with the well-known discretion of Mrs. Abington?"

"'Tis a great risk I run, sir," she cried, with a delightful uplifting of two shapely arms and an expression of fear such as one assumes in order to make a child laugh,—"oh yes, a terrible risk!—but I am adventurous."

"And your example is stimulating to the timid, madam; that is why I beg of you to be seated. Pray Heaven that that fiery young Mr. Sheridan be not in the neighbourhood. Still, for five minutes of Mrs. Abington's wit a more timid man than myself would run the chance of a duel with Colonel Thornton himself."

This was scarcely the style of the conversation which he hoped to have with the lady when he had been on his way to her lodgings; but one does not adopt the same style with a person to whom one is about to make an appeal, as one adopts with a person who is about to be an appellant; and he felt sure that Mrs. Abington had come to him in this character.

"Dear sir, I protest that you overwhelm me with your compliments," she cried. "The younger generation have much to learn in courtesy from the one to which you and I belong, sir."

"Madam," he said, "you prove the contrary when you couple me with yourself. What are all the compliments which my poor ingenuity could discover compared with that 'you and I' which has just come from your lips?"

"Nay, but I can prove that we belong to the same generation, sir; for are not you marrying a lady of the same age as the gentleman who is to be my husband?" she cried, with an exquisite assumption of archness.

"Against such profundity of logic 'twere vain to contend, Mrs. Abington," he said. "I yield to it, more especially as you prove what I have spent my years trying to prove to myself. Alas, madam! is it not sad that old age should come down upon a man before he has succeeded in convincing himself that he is still young?"

"Mr. Long," said the lady, "I couple myself with you for our mutual protection."

"I acknowledge the honour, madam, but appreciate the danger," said he.

"Let me explain myself, sir."

"To explain yourself, Mrs. Abington, were to supply a key to the most charming riddle of the century. Let me paraphrase Mr. Dryden:

> 'A dame so charming that she seem'd to be
> Not one, but womankind's epitome.'"

"That is the wittiest turning of satire into comedy I have ever known," she cried. "And it makes my explanation easy. Mr. Long, I desire to be your best friend; and when a woman professes a wish to be a man's best friend, you may be sure that she wants him to stand in that relationship

to her. But you gathered, I know, that I was thinking at least as much of myself as of you when I made you that offer."

"I give you credit for thinking most of the one worthiest of your thoughts, Mrs. Abington," said he.

She took a step nearer to him.

"Mr. Long," she said in a lower tone, "these young people are very well, and they make delightful companions for us, but they cannot always be depended on."

"You mean that——"

"I mean that Dick Sheridan and Betsy Linley were once in love with each other, and that they fancy they love each other still."

"That means that they *are* to be depended on, does it not?"

"They may be depended on to lose no opportunity of making fools of themselves if we allow them, Mr. Long."

"Does that mean that they may be trusted to marry, the one you, t'other me?"

"It means that you would do well to keep an eye on Elizabeth Linley, or you will lose her, sir."

"What is this?"

"'Tis the truth, Mr. Long. Only to-day there came to my ears the whisper of preparations for an abduction having your Miss Linley for its object—the hiring of relays of horses along the London road, and so forth. My woman, an honest creature, gave me the hint; she had the news in confidence."

"And in confidence transferred it to you, no doubt."

"I am not the woman to credit every rumour that the gossips of Bath set in circulation; but this special rumour was so circumstantial that——"

"Ah, if 'twas circumstantial its falsity is assured," cried Mr. Long. "Dear madam, can you really believe that Dick Sheridan would make the attempt to run away with Miss

Linley when he is still under an engagement to marry you?"

"Psha, sir!" she cried, "I know but too well that his heart is still with Miss Linley. Would my gentleman be so ready to answer my beck and call—would he be so desperately punctilious in his discharge of all the duties of lovership in respect to me, if he were not in love with Miss Linley? Mr. Long, the husband who is punctilious in his treatment of his wife is, you may be sure, not in love with her, and the lover who—— Ah, sir! I have had my experiences, Heaven help me! and I am now in the position of the doctor who knows the condition of a patient the moment he looks into his face. Sir, I have had my finger on Dick Sheridan's pulse, so to speak, for the past week, and though he has tried hard to deceive me into the belief that he loves me, he has not succeeded. I have seen through his attentions—his constant show of devotion. O sir, I am a miserable woman! But I cannot lose him—I swear to you that I shall not lose him! And you—would you be content to lose her—to lose Elizabeth Linley?"

"I would be content to lose her if I were sure that she did not love me," said Mr. Long.

"What? what? Ah, you do not love her!" she cried contemptuously.

"I love her so well as to have implicit confidence in her," said he. "There will be no running away so far as Miss Linley is concerned—rest assured of that, my dear madam, and take my word for it, Dick Sheridan is too honourable to entertain such a design."

"Ah, honourable! what does honour mean to a man when he is in love—ay, or to a woman either?" she cried.

"You are proving one of your contentions by entertaining such suspicions," said he.

"They are well founded. Ah, when I think that he

loved her so well as to give up his life only for the sake of saving her from the pang of seeing her brother made a fool of, I have a right to my suspicions. He will never love me like that. When I think of it all, I feel tempted—sometimes; the fit soon passes away, thank Heaven!—I feel tempted to let him go to her—to let him be happy with her: she would not let you stand in the way of her own happiness, you may be sure, though she has promised to marry you."

"If you loved Dick Sheridan truly, madam, you would not stand between him and happiness," said Mr. Long.

"And if you loved Miss Linley truly, you would not stand between her and happiness," responded the actress, turning suddenly upon him with the stage instinct of making an effective retort.

"Nor shall I," he cried. "Come, Mrs. Abington, let us make a compact for their happiness. I will release Miss Linley if you will do the same for Dick Sheridan."

"No—no—no!" Her voice had almost become a shriek, and it went through the room without the interval of a second. Her head was craned forward; her hands were clenched; her eyes were half closed.

So she remained for a long time after that shriek had come from her. Then she drew a long breath. She kept her eyes fixed keenly upon his face. She went back from him slowly, step by step.

Suddenly she made a quick movement toward him with her right hand outstretched, as if about to clench a compact. But when his hand went out to hers, she snatched her own back with a cry.

"No, no, I cannot do it—I cannot do it! I cannot give him up. I have made him mine—mine he shall remain. You shall tempt me no further."

"He never was yours—he never shall be yours! You know it, woman, you know it! That is the thought which

is in your heart just now, and that is the thought which makes your life a curse to you. Never yours—never yours! By your side, but never yours—never yours!"

With a cry she covered her face with one hand, the other was on the handle of the door. She staggered out.

"Did ever man utter words of such cruelty?" said Mr. Long when he heard the hall door close. "Poor creature! poor creature! And I trod on her—I crushed her. God forgive me! God forgive me!"

* * * * *

An hour later Mrs. Abington, shining out amid her jewels as a rose is resplendent amid the diamonds of a spendthrift morning, welcomed the arrival of Dick Sheridan with smiles and a gracious white hand for him to kiss. He kissed the hand, and noticed that the lady was wearing a gown which he had never before seen—something roseate and misty—the waves of dawn, out of which the goddess Aphrodite was in the act of rising; he saw her before him, and said so; he called her the Cyprian: she had been called that so often that she understood quite well what he meant.

"You have come in good time, my dear!" she cried. "If you had not come early I would have gone to you."

"I got your note only a quarter of an hour ago," said he.

"'Twas only writ half an hour ago," she said, "and the express from Mr. Colman arrived within the hour. Dear Dick, we must fly to London post haste in the morning. They can do without me no longer. Mr. Colman implores of me to come. Ruin stares him in the face. I must have some pity for him."

"The humblest thing that crawls—even the manager of a theatre—claims one's compassion now and again," said Dick. "Will you set out in the morning?"

"At daybreak. You can pack your trunk before you sleep to-night, and the chaise will pick it up and you astride of it when we start."

"Heavens, my dear madam! I heard nothing about my departure! Mr. Colman does not venture to say that ruin stares him in the face if I remain in Bath."

"Nay, he does not go so far. 'Tis only I who claim you. I shall need your escort, Dick, and I shall make arrangements for your remaining in London—some simple arrangements, Dick."

"The simpler they are the more difficult it is for me to accept them. I do not think it would be wise for me to be your escort to London and in London, enviable though the duty would be."

She started into a sitting posture. She had been reclining on her tiny sofa.

"What is't you mean, sir?" she cried. "Surely if I find no fault with the arrangement you need not do so. Scandal? Psha! My name has been associated with more than one scandal in my time, and yet I do not think that I am greatly the worse for it to-day."

"No," he said, "but you may be to-morrow. My dear sweet creature, I perceive at once how much depends on our discretion just now; and if I were, in the absence of my father in Dublin, to desert my sisters and the household, people would call me a wretch, and they would be right, too."

"People would call you a wretch—a wretch and—a poltroon—a—a curmudgeon, and they would be right, too, were you to stay in Bath when I—I—ask your protection on my journey to London," she cried.

He was silent. He did not even shake his head. He saw her diamonds flashing ominously. Theirs was a summer lightning, denoting a storm taking place out of sight—a storm that might rise over the horizon at any

moment. He became conscious of a highly charged atmosphere. A flash or two came from her eyes.

"Why do you stand there dumb?" she said. "Do you not think me worthy of a word, Dick?"

"Dear lady, you are worthy only of words that will give you pleasure; that is why I am silent now," he said.

"You have but to say one word to give me the greatest pleasure that I look for in this world, and I know that you will say it, Dick—my Dick."

"Alas—alas!" he said.

"That is not the word, Dick; you know that that is not the word I want you to speak."

"That is the word which we should both say, my dear, if I were even to breathe the word which you ask of me. Oh, you must surely see that it would be impossible for me to forsake all that my father has entrusted me with. My sisters are young. What sort of brother should I be were I to leave them alone at a moment's notice? No, no! you will not ask me to do it; you have always shown yourself to be full of sensibility. You would hate me if I were to desert my sisters at such a time as this."

She looked at him straight in the eyes for a long time—it was a searching, suspicious gaze. Then she gave a laugh—a scornful, suspicious laugh. Her scorn was not intolerable; it was tempered by the half-amused smile that flashed about the corners of her lips.

"It must be pleasant to have so strong a sense of duty, Dick," she said,—"yes, very pleasant, when your duty and your inclination go hand in hand; nay, perhaps their relationship is closer still. Inclination puts an arm round the waist of duty, and so they go dancing down the green mead—Oberon and Titania—only without a chance quarrel. But it appears to me that if Betsy Linley were not in Bath your duty to your sisters would somewhat relax. Listen to me, Dick. You are not so near a holiday as you have been led

to believe, for, by the Lord Harry, if you refuse to come with me to London I shall remain at Bath, if only to frustrate your plans. Ay, sir, I know more about your plans than you may perhaps think."

"If you know anything of them whatsoever, your knowledge is wider than mine," said he.

"Oh, go away—take yourself off. I am beginning to tire of you, Dick Sheridan," she said, leaning back in an attitude of negligent *ennui* between the sympathetic arms of her sofa.

"I do not need to be told to go a second time, madam," said Dick.

But before he reached the door the capricious creature had sprung from her seat and flashed beside him.

"Dick, my Dick, I am a fool—oh, such a fool!" she cried. "But the truth is that I am too fond of you, my beloved boy! Now, don't go, Dick—or go if you please to go—you may do what you please; I will not think anything of it. Oh, if you could only give me a little of your love! Must she have all—all—all?"

"Do not be foolish, my dear," said he. "And you know as well as I do that 'tis foolish to be jealous. Ah, you know that I am true to you. I need not protest to you of my truth."

She looked at him steadfastly once more; and now there was no scorn in her look—only a nervous anxiety.

"I think," said she, "that you are true to me, and that you detest yourself on that account; because to be true to me involves your being false to Betsy Linley. Oh, this constancy according to compact is no virtue. Honesty is no virtue on the part of a man who is cast on a desert island. But you will come with me to-morrow, Dick—my Dick?"

"Indeed, it is impossible," he replied. "I will leave you now. Think over the matter till to-morrow, and you will agree with me, I am convinced."

With an exclamation of impatience she went back to

her sofa, wheeled it suddenly round, and then seated herself in it with her back turned to him.

He went behind her with a laugh.

"Good-bye, you beautiful, petulant, typical woman," he said. "Good-bye, I will come to you to-morrow, when I am sure you will be polite enough to turn your face to me."

She gave a pout and a shrug and picked up the newspaper which she had been pretending to read at his entrance. She pretended to read it again.

He responded with another laugh of good-humour, not of derision, and went to the door.

He shouted another "Good-bye!"

She made no answer. But when he had left the house she tore her newspaper to shreds and snowed them on the carpet at her feet. Then she put her face down to the pillow and wept, but only for a few minutes. She was on her feet again and tugging at the bell-pull.

Her maid was at her side before the bell had ceased to sound.

"Are you sure that 'twas the evening of to-day that was named for the rendezvous you told me of, Williams?" she asked.

"There is no mistake, madam," replied the woman. "If it were mere gossip, I should never have mentioned it. Lud! if one gave attention to all the gossip that one hears! But this is the truth. The chaise is to wait on the London road, and the young lady is to be brought to it in a chair at nine o'clock. 'Twill then be rather more than dusk."

"Good!" said Mrs. Abington. "You got the hint from your cousin—I think you said he was your cousin—who is confidential servant to Allen, the postmaster?"

"Yes, madam—cousin on my mother's side. My mother married for the second time into the Cookson family, and

"You will accompany me to the rendezvous on the London road to-night, Williams." [*page* 349.

they thought a good deal of themselves, through Cookson having been butler to a vicar; but they really wasn't so much after all——"

"You will accompany me to the rendezvous on the London road to-night, Williams. You will hire a fly, and when we get within sight of the coach, the fly shall turn down one of the lanes, so as to excite no suspicion. We shall get out and conceal ourselves among the bushes at the roadside until the chair with my lady is brought up. I think that we shall probably suprise them, Williams."

The maid simpered.

"And I shall wear the travelling-cloak that is quilted with the pink satin. The chaise lamps will doubtless be lighted, and I have no desire to look like a guy."

"I vow 'twill be quite an adventure, madam!" said the woman, simpering very agreeably.

"You will see that nothing miscarries, my good Williams," said the actress. "The most romantic adventures have been known to break down before now through so foolish a thing as a lame horse."

"You may trust to me, madam," said the maid.

When she was alone, Mrs. Abington stood in the centre of the room, with a smile that was not a smile on her face.

"A compact—a compact!" she muttered. "He fancied that I should be blinded by his fidelity. Oh, his fidelity was touching—ay, up to that last cheery 'good-bye' that he said at that door before going home to complete the packing of his trunk. By the lud! if 'twere not for the humiliation, I could e'en bring myself to let the pair of them run away together and make fools of themselves. But I will show them that I am not one to be hoodwinked."

* * * * *

It was barely half-past nine that night when a fly dashed up to the door of the Sheridans' house, and a lady wearing

a travelling-cloak lined with quilted pink satin sprang to the ground and battered at the door of the house. She met Dick Sheridan in the hall.

"Dick—Dick," she gasped, "a dreadful thing has happened! O Dick, he has got her in his power now —Mathews—a plot—a vile plot to abduct her! He is on his way to London with her now in a chaise with four horses."

"Woman, what do you mean? Good God! Mathews —Betsy—is it Betsy, you mean?" cried Dick.

"Yes—yes—Betsy! Oh, why do you wait here like a fool? Why are you not on your way after them? Follow them, Dick!—follow them and save her for yourself. She is yours, Dick. I never was yours! Ah, man, why do you stand there? Oh, I am dead!"

She dropped into a chair, gasping.

Dick caught her hand, and when he found that it was warm he kissed it.

She laughed, and her laugh continued long after he had rushed out of the house; it went on and on, and the two Sheridan girls stood by listening in horror to that laugh.

CHAPTER XXXVI

He rushed out of the house and up the street. He was pulling wildly at the bell-handle at Mr. Long's door in Millsom Street before five minutes had passed. He did not wait to make an inquiry of the man, but plunged into the room to the right; the door was slightly ajar, and he saw that the room was lighted.

Mr. Long was seated at the table.

"Heavens!" he cried, "what has happened?"

"Your horse—Sultan—it must be Sultan—he must be saddled—give the order—'tis life or death—nay, more—more!"

Only for a second did Mr. Long look at him. Then he was shouting to his man in the hall orders for the groom.

"Mathews has succeeded," gasped Dick. "An abduction —Mrs. Abington brought me word of it. But I shall follow them—overtake them—or I shall never return. I swear that—I swear it!"

Mr. Long's face had become white. He was supporting himself by the back of a chair. His lips moved, but the words did not come. He managed to stagger to a *garde-vin* that stood in a corner and to take out a decanter of brandy. Dick heard how the tumbler jingled against the mouth of the bottle while some of the brandy was being poured out. Mr. Long offered him a tumbler. He refused it.

"Never fear—never fear—I'll overtake them!" he cried, while he paced the room. "I knew that I was right to come to you, sir. You love her; and you—you have pistols. He escaped them once—only once."

"She heard a rumour that an abduction was to be attempted; she told me so here to-day," said Mr. Long. "She is suspicious; she fancied that you had planned it—she came to warn me. O Dick, you must be in time! By Heaven, sir, you must be in time to save her! If I were ten years younger—only ten years—but I will trust you. Here are the pistols, and you may need to reload them: you must have these bullets. Don't bring them all back, Dick; but take care of her. Aim at one of the horses. And money—you may need money for the postboys—I have never met any that were not open to bribes. Here's a purse. If fifty guineas is not enough—— By heavens, the horse is at the door! You have no sword—here is mine! God bless you, my boy—God bless you! I'll look to the girths. Sultan will do his twenty miles; but spare him on the highway. You will take the short cuts through the Hampton Fields."

All the time that Mr. Long was speaking, Dick Sheridan was pulling on a pair of riding-boots, with spurs attached, which Mr. Long's servant had brought into the room.

He examined the priming of the pistols, he pocketed the leathern wallet heavy with guineas, and buckled on the sword. Not a word did he find it necessary to utter; even when he was in the saddle and felt the strong grasp of Mr. Long's right hand, he did not find words, but he returned the grasp, and looked into Mr. Long's face. Then he gave Sultan his head, and waved his hand before turning the corner.

The street was flaring with links; chairs by the score were carrying ladies and gentlemen of fashion to their supper-parties and card-parties. The sound of post-horns was heard as the mail-coaches with their splendid teams set out on

their night journeys. It did not take Dick long to thread his way among the vehicles, reaching the first slope of the London road without having allowed his horse to break into a gallop. Sultan was quite prepared to charge the hill; he was a thoroughbred Arab, with an indomitable heart in his work. Dick held him in so long as the ground sloped up; but when the summit of the hill was gained, he sent him forward; the animal responded with a will, but Dick kept him at the trot. Not until the Hampton Fields were reached did he put the horse to the gallop. But then, leaping the ditch, he got upon the green turf, and, knowing what was expected of him, the Arab stretched himself out for a race.

The two miles of the cut across the fields was not a great journey, and after a mile's trot along the highway, up the long hill through the village of Bathford, Dick took to the fields once more. Another flying gallop—*ventre à terre*—across the Downs, brought him to the Horse Jockey Inn, and Dick thought that a bucket of water would not do Sultan any harm. But he found that he could not pull him up; the horse had his head and seemed determined to keep it. By the time, however, that the vane of Atworth church gave a feeble flash in the moonlight (the moon was in her first quarter and far down in the western sky) the Arab was ready to receive a hint, and Dick brought him to a walk.

He pulled him up at the Three Cups, and awoke the elderly ostler to get a bucket of bran and water, while he himself rubbed the animal down with a damp stable-cloth.

Had the man seen a chaise and four horses going in the direction of London within the half-hour? No, no, he had seen no "shay"; but mayhap that was by reason of having been asleep since supper-time; a tedious night with the master's heifer—mayhap the young gentleman had heard of the accident to the heifer?—having deprived him of his

accustomed slumber. The worst was over with the heifer, Heaven be praised; but still——

The veteran was still gazing at Dick's half-crown while Sultan was pounding away toward Melksham as fresh as he had been when taken out of his stable, although the nine miles of the journey already passed had occupied just fifty-five minutes.

And now that a long level of highway was in front of him, Dick had time to calculate his chances of overtaking the chaise. He did not know how great was the start which it had on him; but he did not think it likely that Mrs. Abington had taken longer than a quarter of an hour to come to him with the alarm. Ten minutes added to this brought him up to the moment when he had started in pursuit. Twenty-five minutes of a start!

He could not imagine the chaise travelling at the speed that Sultan had maintained. The hills along the road were in favour of a horseman. But then at the end of another seven or eight miles Sultan must be dead-beat, however willing he might be, whereas the chaise would be flying along with four fresh horses in front of it, for Mathews would certainly arrange to have relays of fresh horses at every stage, well knowing that only by this means could he evade the pursuit which he would assume must take place.

Dick perceived that he too must have fresh horses if he meant to overtake the chaise. But being well aware that some of the posting-inns on the London road had as many as a hundred and fifty horses in their stables at one time, he had no fear of a difficulty arising in the matter of getting remounts.

When he thought of Betsy Linley being in the power of that mad ruffian for another hour, he instinctively touched Sultan with the spur; and at the touch the good horse broke into a gallop, and it was in this gallop that he reached Seend Hill and climbed it as though it were level road.

It needed a strong pull from Dick to bring him up at the Bear Inn.

Two coaches had just arrived from London, and the passengers were getting all the attendance the place could afford.

Dick found himself standing in the yard with Sultan's saddle on the ground beside him, while the horse stood steaming in the light that came from the stable lantern. He showed a guinea to an ancient, hurrying groom, and the sight was too much for the man.

Had a chaise with four horses from Bath changed, and how long ago?

Not half an hour ago, if it was Captain Mathews' shay his honour spoke of. Oh, ay, the captain had changed, and madam would not leave the shay—half an hour ago—barely—more like twenty minutes. A fresh saddle-horse? Ah, his honour must book that at the bar. Why, the London folk would be away in a quarter of an hour—mayhap ten minutes.

Dick rushed to the bar. Twenty people were between him and the landlord, who was responding with a fussy leisure to eighteen out of the twenty.

Dick rushed back to the stable-yard and found the groom still gazing at the guinea. Dick produced a second.

"You know Mr. Long, of Rood Ashton, my man?" he said. "This is Mr. Long's horse. Look to him and put the saddle on the freshest horse in your stable. Take this guinea and don't lose a moment. Refuse it, and as surely as you stand there like a fool, I'll put a bullet through your head."

"Your honour's a gentleman," cried the ostler, making a grasp for that hand which held the guinea as a bribe, and neglecting the one that held the pistol as a menace.

"You shall have the guinea when the horse is saddled," said Dick. "Lead the way to the stable."

But the man had had a second for reflection. He felt prepared to control his impulses. He began to scratch his head with the black tip of a forefinger.

"This may cost me my place," he muttered.

"If you refuse, 'twill certainly cost you your life," said Dick, grasping his arm. "Lead me to the stable, you rascal, and that at the top of your speed. If you try to trick me, 'twill be the last mistake of your life. Pick up the saddle and earn your guinea."

The man certainly lost no time in obeying him; he shambled across the yard and through a stable door. Dick heard the sound of halter-rings and the fitful stamp of an iron hoof.

"That's Hero, the best roadster in the stable," said the man, pointing to a big roan horse. "But your honour will need to have it out with the master."

"You'll get your guinea and your master will get double the hire. Everybody knows Mr. Long," said Dick.

Being aware of the instinctive cunning of these simple country people, Dick thought it as well to give a brief examination to the animal. So far as he could tell in the glimmer of the stable lantern the horse was a good one—broad-chested and strong.

The man flung on the saddle, and Dick saw that the girths were tight; then with a friendly nod to Sultan, who stood in one of the vacant stalls, he was mounting the roan. He threw the old man his promised guinea, saying:

"If I find that you've looked well after the Arab, you shall have another guinea to-morrow."

The ostler dropped the stable lantern with a crash on the stones.

Dick was on the road once again. He knew that he had lost quite five minutes changing horses: he could only console himself by the reflection that most likely the chaise had taken ten minutes.

He found that the roan required to be ridden. He was a strong horse and had good wind, but he had not the heart of the Arab. It was clear that he did not know all that was demanded of him this night. But when Dick put him at a low hedge he did not refuse it, and on the turf of a long meadow beyond, he showed that he could gallop. For another three miles, partly on the road and partly across country, when any saving of space was possible, horse and man went until they were breasting Roundway Hill.

Dick walked the horse to the top, and then reined in to let him recover his wind before starting on the clear five miles of level road. In a few minutes he had fallen into the steady trot of the old roadster, and Dick felt sure that he could keep it up for the five miles; but at the end of the first mile he began to be aware of a certain unevenness in his trot. The horse responded to the spur, but only for a short time; then he stumbled, nearly throwing his rider on his head. There was no ignoring what had occurrred—the horse had "gone lame" and was unfit for his work; and the nearest inn where he could get a new mount was still five miles away.

What did this mean?

Nothing, except that he was beaten. The hour and a quarter that he would take going to that inn would place the chaise which he was pursuing far beyond the possibility of capture.

Dick saw it all clearly the moment that the roan halted and stretched his head forward, breathing hard. Nothing was left for him but to dismount. He was defeated, and life was worth nothing to him now. He dismounted, and examined the horse's leg. There could be no doubt about the matter now: he was badly lame.

And then Dick did the most foolish and natural thing that a man could do in such circumstances. He went mad

for a time, slashing at the weeds on the roadside with his riding-whip, cursing all the earth—the ostler who had given him the horse which went lame—the horse for going lame at the worst time—the fate which had helped him up to a certain point and then deserted him. It did him good to slash and swear for a while; and when he felt better he put his horse's bridle-rein over his arm and set out upon the journey which was inevitable in the circumstances.

He had not gone more than a hundred yards when he heard the sound of a shot in the distance; then a second —a third.

"Poachers," he thought, resuming his walk. He was within a mile or two of Roundway Park, and the estate was full of game. He thought no more about the shots until, after he had trudged on for another mile, he saw on the summit of a grassy knoll a couple of men on horseback. The moon had gone down, but the night was beautifully clear, with stars overhead.

He stopped, his first thought being that he might negotiate with one of the men for the loan of his horse. But when he saw that they were making straight for him, he pulled his pistols out of the holsters and put his horse between himself and the fence of the field beyond which was the knoll. The horsemen were highwaymen, he was convinced, and he made up his mind that they should not ride off with the remainder of his guineas, if he could prevent it. He was just in the humour for tackling a pair of rascals; but for that matter, he would not have objected to fight with the honestest men in England.

Before he had more than cocked his pistols the two fellows—he now saw that they wore masks—had leapt their horses over the fence not a dozen yards from where he was standing.

"Well met, my lord!" roared one, drawing a pistol from his holster. "Well met! I'll trouble your lordship to hand

over your purse, also your watch and any trifle of jewelry your lordship——"

"Come and take them," said Dick.

"And, by the Lord, we accept the invitation!" shouted the second horseman, going forward with a bound toward Dick with his pistol in his hand.

In another moment all was over. Dick slipped under his horse's nose; at the same instant that the man fired, Dick's horse lashed out, and Dick, catching at the rein of the man who was riding him down, shot him in the body. The yell that went through the air did not come from this man, however—he was past yelling; it came from his companion, whose leg Dick had heard break like a stick of barley sugar beneath the kick of the roan. The second yell came from half a mile down the road; for, not being able to control his horse, the animal had bolted with him.

Dick knew nothing of this. He had his attention fully occupied at the head of the rearing horse of the man whom he had shot. The horse reared, and when Dick tugged at the reins he plunged forward. A limp arm struck Dick in the face, and he had to be agile to evade the headlong fall of the limp body.

It was a busy half-minute. It was such a whirl of the wheels of chance that Dick Sheridan could scarcely be blamed for standing aghast for quite another half-minute. He was bewildered by the effort of trying to think what had happened. A minute before he had been a man suffering all the pangs of defeat—plunged into those depths of despair which overwhelm a man who needs to ride like a god upon the wings of the wind, but finds himself crippled with a lame horse; whereas now. . . .

He gave a cheer and in a second was on the back of the fine horse—his mane was dripping with the blood of the rider whom he had thrown over his head—and flying along the road at a speed that he had not surpassed even

when mounted on Mr. Long's Sultan. The highwaymen were excellent judges of cattle, he was bound to confess. He galloped like one of Lützow's wild huntsmen, and in the exhilaration of the moment he shouted with delight—he shouted and cheered until, swinging round a curve in the road, he saw before him Beckhampton Common, with the woods at one side and the long row of poplars at the other. But while the common was still a long way off, and he was flying past a high bank densely planted with small firs, he heard something that caused him to throw all his weight upon the reins, and almost to bring his horse upon his haunches.

What he heard, or fancied he heard, was his name called out by the most musical voice in the world:

"Dick—Dick! you have come!"

The first words struck his ears when he was beneath the high bank; before the last were uttered he was a hundred yards away, tugging at the reins. When he succeeded in bringing his horse to a standstill, he heard in front of him a hailing of voices. Peering forward beyond the shade of the bank on the white road, he saw figures moving—figures with a swaying lantern.

He responded to their hail, and saw them hurrying toward him, their lantern swinging more rapidly.

And then behind him he heard Betsy Linley's voice crying:

"Dick—Dick, come back to me—come back!"

He swung his horse round with a cry of delight.

There she stood, a white figure at the foot of the firs of a wooded slope—there she stood, waving her white arms to him—waving him back to her.

"Thank God—thank God—thank God!"

He could gasp nothing more as he flung himself from his saddle, and she sprang from the bank into his arms.

"My Betsy—my own dear Betsy!"

"Dick—Dick, you have saved me! Oh, I never doubted it, my Dick!—I knew you would be in time to save me."

He had thrown the reins on his horse's neck. But the animal was well trained: he was as faithful to the man who had just dismounted as though he were a highwayman who had left his saddle to plunder a coach. He only turned his head when the figures with the lantern came in sight beyond the curve in the road.

"Who are these—your friends or our enemy?" whispered Dick.

He had hold of her hand, and they were both gazing up the road.

"It can only be he," she cried. "We were attacked by highwaymen. A horse was shot, and when the wretch was helping the postboys, I escaped from the coach and fled hither. I was hiding among the trees!"

"Stand back among the trees again—only for a moment—only for a moment," he said in a low voice.

"You will not kill him!" said the girl piteously. "Dick, I could not bear to think of your killing him, wretch though he be."

"Perhaps I may not. Stand back among the trees."

"Found—she is found!" came the voice of Mathews on the road. He was running ahead of the postboys with the chaise lantern. Postboys were poor things on their feet.

Dick waited with the firs behind him. He was silent. His features could not be seen—only his figure.

"Sir," said Mathews, when still a dozen yards away—"sir, you have found the lady—my wife—I thank you."

"I have found the greatest villain that lives," cried Dick, stepping into the road. "He shall soon cease to live."

Back went Mathews with an oath—back half a dozen steps.

The whiz of Dick's sword through the air was like the sudden sweep of a hailstorm.

Mathews had already drawn his weapon. In a second he had rushed upon Dick. Nothing could have resisted such an attack. Dick made no attempt to resist it. He sprang to one side and so avoided the point of the sword. He took care that Mathews should not have another such chance. The man had barely time to turn and put up his guard before Dick was upon him. With heads bent eagerly forward (the situation was not one for the punctilios of the duello), the men crossed blades—the rasp of steel against steel—the heavy breathing—the quick lunge and the deft response—a little gasp—a flash—more rasping of steel—backward and forward—flat hands in the air—a fierce lunge—a second—a third—fierce—fiercer—fiercest—a whiz and a whirl. Mathews' sword flashed through the air. The two postboys with the lantern sprang apart to avoid its fall. The next instant Mathews had sprung upon Dick, catching him by the throat, and trying to force him back. Dick tried to shorten his sword, but failed. Mathews made a clutch for the blade, but missed it, and Dick struck him full in the face with the steel guard; a second blow made a gash on his left temple, and the man went down in a heap. He fell neither backward nor forward. His legs seemed to be paralysed, and he went down as though a swordsman had cut him through as one does a sheep.

Dick took the man's sword—a grinning postboy had picked it up—and snapped it in two across his knee.

"He is not dead—he cannot be dead!" cried Betsy.

"I am sorry to say that he will not die just now—vermin are not so easily killed," said Dick.

DICK STRUCK HIM FULL IN THE FACE WITH THE STEEL GUARD.
[*page* 362.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Dick ordered the postboys to return to the chaise.

"We will return with you to Bath," said he. "Put the harness of your horse which was shot on mine. We will join you before you have got the horse in the traces. Carry the man to the bank and lay him among the trees."

"Not back to Bath, Dick—not back to Bath," said Betsy, when the postboys had gone.

"Good heavens! if not to Bath—whither?" he cried.

"The thought came to me just now—an inspiration," she said. "I will not return home. I have not the courage. Do you know what has happened? I have told Mr. Long that I cannot marry him, and when my father heard it he was furious, and gave me notice that I must begin singing once more at his concerts. I cannot do that! Oh, it would kill me, Dick!"

"Dear one," he said, "I will do my best to carry out any plan that you may suggest—I give you my promise, dear Betsy."

"I spoke to Mr. Long of my hope—of the one longing there is in my heart, Dick. Your sisters told me of the convent at Lille, beside where they lived. The old grey building among the ancient trees—far away from any sound of the world. Oh, surely that is the one spot in the world where rest—the divine rest—the peace of God—may be found. O Dick, Dick, if you could know how I long for it!"

He started away from her.

"Is it possible that that is your choice, Betsy?" he cried, and there was agony in his voice. "Is it possible that you can shut yourself off from your friends—from those who love you? Ah, dear child, you know that I——"

"Do not say it—ah, do not say the words that are trembling on your lips, Dick. You will not say them when you know that they will make me miserable. Dick, I will think of you as my dear, dear brother, and you will take me away to that place of rest. Ah, I feel that all I have gone through to-day since that man sent a forged message to me at nine o'clock to the effect that my father wished me to play the harpsichord in his place at the concert, and so trapped me into the chair which he had waiting and on to the chaise, the linkmen whom he had bribed standing so close to the windows that I was quite concealed, and my cries to the passers-by were unheeded,—all that I have gone through, I say, must have been designed by Heaven to enable me to reach my goal—my place of rest."

"I will take you there, Betsy," he said in a low voice. "You may trust me to take you there, dear sister—sweet sister Betsy."

She put her arms about him and kissed him on both cheeks.

* * * * *

It was the scheme of a boy and a girl, that flight of Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Elizabeth Linley to France as brother and sister. It has never been explained, nor can any explanation of it be offered that is not founded upon the passionate yearning of that purest-minded girl that ever lived in the world, for a time of seclusion such as she had never known—for a period of tranquillity such as had never come to her.

Dick led her to the chaise, and gave the postboys orders

to go on to the next stage at which Mathews had ordered fresh horses to await his arrival. The men grumbled. Dick threatened them with hanging. They should have trouble in proving to any jury that they were not privy to the abduction of the lady, he said; adding, that if they did not keep the secret of the change in the lady's companionship at the various stages of the journey, they would be running their heads into the hangman's noose. The men protested that they were on his side down to every rowel of their spurs, and one of them went so far, in demonstration of his good-will, as to curse soundly Captain Mathews and all his connections.

In the chaise Betsy gave Dick a circumstantial account of the attack made by the highwaymen—the highwaymen of Providence, Dick ventured to term them. The two shots which he had heard in the distance when he was assuring himself that his horse had become lame, were fired, the first by Mathews on the appearance of the highwaymen, the second by one of the highwaymen. Only the latter had taken effect; it had brought down the off-wheeler, and then, the chaise coming to a standstill, a man had stood with a cocked pistol at each of the windows until Mathews handed over his purse. The robbers had then ridden off, and while Mathews was helping the postboys to disentangle the harness of the dead horse, she had, unperceived by any one, crept out of the chaise and made her way up the bank where she had hidden among the trees.

"But I never doubted that you would come to my help, Dick," she said in conclusion. "Oh, no! I had faith in you from the very first to the very last. When we saw the figures of the two highwaymen in the distance, I cried out, 'Tis Dick—Dick and Mr. Long come to save me!' And when I heard the sound of your horse galloping on the road I said, 'Tis Dick come to save me!' I had called out your name before the horse came abreast of the bank. But how

did you learn what had happened? Who could have been near us when that man dragged me from the chair and forced me into the chaise?"

He told her that it was Mrs. Abington who had come to him with the news, and she was amazed.

"But how could she—why should she be at that part of the road at such an hour?"

"Alas, my dear Betsy, she had a fancy that you were being carried off, not by Mathews, but another," said Dick. "She must have acquired by some means an inkling of the plot, and she was foolish enough to take it for granted that the man who was playing the chief part was—some one else. But we cannot refuse her our gratitude. When she had found out that it was Mathews who was the abductor, she did not falter in her purpose. It is to her that we owe your safety."

There was a long pause before Betsy said:

"She acted honourably—nobly. 'Tis for us to respond in like. We shall not fail, Dick."

At the end of the next stage Dick wrote a letter to Mr. Long acquainting him in brief with all that had occurred, and telling him of Betsy's desire to go to the convent at Lille. He ordered the letter to be posted to Bath at once. Betsy wrote to her father.

When they reached London he drove with her to the house of a friend of his—a Mr. Ewart; and Mr. Ewart and his wife assumed that Betsy was his elder sister.

"Yes, this is Elizabeth," said Dick. "I am taking her on to Lille for a holiday."

Mrs. Ewart, knowing that the Sheridan family had lived at Lille for some years, merely said:

"You must have formed many friendships in France, my dear?"

"I have got some dear friends there," said Betsy.

Mr. Ewart found out that a packet was leaving Margate

in two days for Calais, and at Dick's request wrote to secure cabins aboard. After staying two nights at the Ewarts' house, the boy and girl posted to Margate, and duly set sail in the packet, which was really only a smack, but one with a reputation for making rapid passages. It acted up to its traditions by landing them at Calais in twenty-two hours.

The first person whom they met on the quayside was Mr. Long.

They were both astonished. How on earth did he contrive to reach Calais before them? they inquired.

Well, he had got Dick's letter the morning after Dick had posted it, and he had set out at once for Dover, where he had found a faster boat even than the Margate smack. He had been at Calais since the previous afternoon.

He led them to his inn, and ordered breakfast. When they were alone together after that repast, he said:

"My dear children, I do not think that this story of ours should have an unhappy ending, and every young woman of sense who has read Mr. Richardson's novels—assuming that any young woman of sense ever read novels—will tell you that a convent in a foreign land cannot possibly be regarded as furnishing a happy ending to a story. Ah, my dear Betsy, when I saw you and Dick just now walking side by side on the quay, I knew that you were meant by Heaven to walk side by side through life. Will you not consent to make me happy? I have money enough to allow of your living in some peaceful cottage until Dick gets a footing in a profession. Dear child, I know that you love him, and I think that he loves you, too."

"I will consent with joy if he consent," said she. "But I know that he will not. I do not think that I could love him if he were to consent. Dear sir, 'tis to Mrs. Abington I owe my safety, and can I act with such base ingratitude to her as to do what you suggest?"

"God help me!" said Dick. "I am weak—oh, so weak! It seems as if I should be turning my back upon all the happiness which I could ever hope for in the world, were I to refuse now what is offered to me. O Betsy, tell me what to do! Will you not raise your finger to help me, Betsy?"

"I dare not, dear. There is one who stands between us. You owe everything to her. I owe everything to her."

"You have helped me," he said in a low voice. "Mr. Long, you will take Betsy on to Lille. I shall return alone to Bath."

"No, my boy," said Mr. Long, "we shall return to Bath together. Mrs. Abington is more than generous—she is sensible. She came to me before I started on my journey. She brought with her a letter, charging me to put it into your hands. Read it, Dick."

Dick, with nervous fingers, tore open the letter which Mr. Long handed to him. He read it, but he gave no cry of gladness. Tears were in his eyes. He handed it to Betsy. She read it. It dropped from her grasp. There was a long pause. Then each looked into the face of the other.

The next moment they were in each other's arms.

L'ENVOI

(*FROM THE DIARY OF MR. WALTER LONG*),

October 1st.—I have just returned from paying my long-promised visit to Dick Sheridan and his wife at their cottage. During the three days that I was with them I have been looking at happiness through these young people's eyes, and indeed I think that I felt as happy as they. Betsy's few months of married life seem to have added to that half divine beauty which ever dwelt upon her face. A lovely light came to her eyes when I told her that such was my thought. "Ah, yes," she said, "when one has been living in heaven for a space, one cannot help acquiring something of a region that is all divine." No flaw in her happiness seems to exist, though I fancied that I detected a certain momentary uneasiness on her face when Dick began to talk of his plans and his hopes for the future. He has a mind to write a comedy satirising Bath society—nay, he has even progressed so far as to have found a name for his heroine—a very foolish young woman, as full of ridiculous whims as any Bath belle—Miss Lydia Languish she is to be called; but 'tis doubtful if the name will ever become familiar to playgoers, in spite of the attractive jingle there is in it. I do not say that Betsy has yet come to look upon Miss Lydia Languish as a rival, but I am sure that she does not like to hear the wench's name so often on the lips of her husband, though, like a good wife, she tries

to brighten up and to discuss all the points of character which the young woman should possess. Has she a fear that Dick will some of these days tire of the blessed retirement—the sweet peace of this cottage to which she has led him? I know not. If he be wise he will perceive that the world can give him no more perfect measure of happiness than that which is his to-day; but alas! a man's ambition soon passes beyond the pure tranquillity of a wife's devotion. Alas! alas!

* * * * *

A REVERIE

(*WRITTEN APPARENTLY ON THE SAME DAY*)

Beloved, who art ever by my side, whose gracious presence, unseen by mortal eye, is ever, ever felt by me—dear Companion, ever youthful, ever lovely, come with me into the autumn woodland and let us converse together. See, my dear one, the bend of the river by which we wander has brought us within view of the wonderful tints of the hedgerow. If the summer has died it has left the autumn wealthy, and its treasury is a hedgerow. Here on this first day of autumn we see scattered in profusion the yellow gold and the mellow bronze of Nature's cunning coinage. One might be tempted not to forsake the simile, but to anticipate the coming of those bleak days when the spendthrift winds —children of the autumn—rush down in riotous mirth to disperse with prodigal fingers the wealth of the season's store, only that the tinge of melancholy which one feels when looking over the autumn landscape at the close of day quickly passes in view of the charms of mingled tints that meet the eye. The gracious warmth of green leaves whose edges are embroidered with bronze may be found when the hedgerow is sheltered by a sturdy ash from both

wind and sun. Does not the full depth of rich colour at this place suggest June rather than October? but where the hedgerow bourgeons out beyond the line of straggling leafless trees, the signs of the month are apparent. Here, beneath the fringe of a dark cloud of russet leafage, shine a few stars of brilliant yellow—the Pleiades of the hedgerow —and light up the dimness with their mellow radiance. Further down the variegated forms of the crisp foliage become more fantastic. In requires no vivid imagination to see here and there a thick cluster of yellow grapes, through which the sun shines as they show themselves among the close network of vine leaves, and for a single moment one recalls a day spent in the South, where the grapes overhung the dusty roadway, and a muleteer paused to gather a splendid cluster. But quickly the vision passes, when our eyes wander on down the leafy path of autumn that was once the primrose path of spring; for there we see—is it an autumn hedgerow or an ocean on a night when the air is saturate with golden moonlight? All before our eyes is yellow—not a russet tinge appears among those gracious leaf-ripples that lose themselves in the distance. We wander along until the mellow line is broken by a forest of bramble. The purple berries are set like jewels among the golden leaves—the amethyst, the topaz, and here and there an exquisite emerald appear in profusion. Have we indeed reached the yellow strand of an ocean island where every pebble is a precious stone? Alas! a few steps onward, and we are face to face with the realities of autumn, for here the hedgerow has been exposed to the blast of a cold wind from the north, and we see nothing but a tangled network of gaunt branches. Weird skeleton fingers are stretched out at us on every side. Every leaf save one has been swept away, and as we stand looking at this desolate place—the visible boundary of autumn and winter—the sere solitary leaf flutters to the ground at our feet.

The wind that comes from where the sun is setting in lurid glory sends a faint whisper through the woodland. We stand in the silence, and the touch of the spirit of autumn is upon us. We feel that every sound of the woodland is a sigh for its departed glories—the glories of blossom and leafage and days that have passed away. When the autumn winds have garnered their harvest from the boughs of the woodland, their aftermath begins in the meadow. But, my Beloved, neither you nor I can be altogether melancholy among the autumn hedgerows, for, through the signs of the year's decay, the Hope that is in us seems to break more abundantly into bloom. We feel that death is not for all things that made life beautiful; Love and Faith and Truth are not among the spoils of Time. We are lifted up and strengthened by this reflection as we retrace our steps amid the slowly gathering shadows of the evening.

THE END

Printed by Hazell, Watson, & Viney, Ld., London and Aylesbury.

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.'s New Novels, Autumn 1901

By "IOTA."

Jill Drake

By the Author of "A Yellow Aster," "A Quaker Grandmother," etc., etc.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6*s.*

Mrs. Caffyn has taken a somewhat reckless but brilliant Irish girl as the heroine of her new story. She knows the Irish character well; there is great force in her portraiture, and apart from the Author's style, which is distinctly her own, the story is uncommon in its plot and unconventional in treatment.

By ALLEN RAINE.

A Welsh Witch

By the Author of "A Welsh Singer," "Torn Sails," "Garthowen," etc.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6*s.*

No one can write a Welsh story like "Allen Raine." She commands the field, and there is not one of her novels that has not been read by thousands of admirers of her work. The new story will be even more generally liked, for it marks a great advance in the Author's work; it is stronger in the delineation of character, while possessing all the charm of style which is so characteristic of the earlier works, and it has, moreover, an uncommonly interesting story.

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.'s New Novels, Autumn 1901

By A. W. MARCHMONT.

For Love or Crown

By the Author of "By Right of Sword," "A Dash for a Throne," etc.

With 8 Full-page Illustrations by D. MURRAY SMITH.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6*s.*

The many thousands of readers of the Author's novels, "By Right of Sword" and "A Dash for a Throne," will read with avidity this new stirring story. It is full of incident, and the action never flags. The heroine is kidnapped; there are escapes, rescues, duels, and exciting situations which carry the reader along in a way the Author has made peculiarly his own, until in the end the heroine renounces her claim to a throne to mate with the lover who has encountered innumerable perils on her behalf.

By E. EVERETT-GREEN.

Olivia's Experiment

By the Author of "Golden Gwendolyn," "The Silver Axe," etc.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6*s.*

Lady Charteris, who has lost both husband and children, adopts the baby boy of a depraved woman. The story gives the life history of this boy, who is underbred and low in the scale of moral development. A bright and noble girl comes largely into the story, and there are several love-threads. The story is very readable, and the moral excellent. It will appeal to all those who like such writers as Rosa N. Carey, Charlotte M. Yonge, and L. T. Meade.

HUTCHINSON & CO., PATERNOSTER ROW

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.'s New Novels, Autumn 1901

By ADELINE SERGEANT.

The Marriage of Lydia Mainwaring

By the Author of "The Idol Maker," "The Mistress of Quest," etc.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6s.

Miss Sergeant can always be relied upon for a good story, and her new novel will not disappoint her many readers. It is on a level with her best work, which is saying much.

By MARIAN FRANCIS

Where Honour Leads

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6s.

This story of events during the reign of George II. has for its chief actors a Canon of York and his motherless daughter. It is full of incident, and the characterisation is excellent, the heroine in particular, a noble and heroic figure, being a fine study. There is also much charm to be found in the thorough grasp which its Author has of the period of which she writes. She has distinctly realised its atmosphere and tone of thought. The story is one of Hanoverians and Jacobites; but it has the novelty of concentrating the interest upon the Hanoverians and not on the Jacobites. The book is a delightful picture of eighteenth-century life in England.

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.'s New Novels, Autumn 1901

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Captain Ishmael

By the Author of "The Angel of the Revolution," "The Outlaws of the Air," etc.

With a Frontispiece and Cover design by HAROLD PIFFARD.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6s.

This Saga of the South Seas is a legitimate mixture of fact and legendary fancy, so woven together that a most spirited and weird story of adventure is achieved. It quickens in action as it proceeds, until a fine climax is reached; and all who have read the Author's previous book, "The Angel of the Revolution," will be grateful for such a thrilling story as he has given here. It deals with vast treasures, naval engagements, guns of marvellous power, volcanic isles, and other marvels which the Author knows so well how to turn to account in an exciting work of fiction.

By CHRIS. HEALY.

The Work of his Hands

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6s.

This unusually powerful story by a clever new novelist is bound to command attention. It is altogether original, and exceptionally well written. The principal character is a wood-carver—a genius: he is devoted to his art, but is unstable; his weaknesses bring him much trouble; he passes through fire, but his good angel saves him. The characters are strongly drawn, the style is vigorous, and the story itself absorbingly interesting.

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.'s New Novels, Autumn 1901

By ARABELLA KENEALY.

The Love of Richard Herrick

By the Author of "A Semi-Detached Marriage," "Charming Renée," etc.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6*s.*

There is a freshness about every new novel by Miss Kenealy which is as welcome as it is rare in the realm of fiction. "The Love of Richard Herrick" is a quite original book by a very capable writer, and it is sure of attention.

By MRS. HUGH FRASER.

Marna's Mutiny

By the Author of "A Diplomatist's Wife in Japan," "A Little Grey Sheep," etc.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6*s.*

"A heroine who is charming from her first appearance to her last; a delightful Japanese background, delicately painted in words, and an easy style. These three things are so rare in combination, and so pleasant, as to make 'Marna's Mutiny' a most attractive book."—*World.*

"A charming story. The characters are capitally drawn. We have heartily enjoyed its perusal."—*St. James's Gazette.*

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.'s New Novels, Autumn 1901

By ÉMILE ZOLA.

The Monomaniac

By the Author of "A Love Episode," etc.
Translated by EDWARD VIZETELLY.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt, with Frontispiece by N. TENISON. 3*s.* 6*d.*

To the large and ever-increasing public which reads Zola in the English translations this novel will make a special appeal. It is one of the Author's finest works, and of deep interest throughout. In no work has the Author portrayed diverse characters more convincingly, or worked out a more elaborate plot. It is a matter of surprise that it has not hitherto been published in England. The translation now presented has been very carefully made by Mr. Edward Vizetelly, who is already known as a translator of other of the Author's works.

By PERCY WHITE.

The Grip of the Bookmaker.

By the Author of "The West End," The Heart of the Dancer," etc.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6*s.*

*** A SECOND EDITION IMMEDIATELY CALLED FOR.

"All that one expects from Mr. White is to be found in his latest book. It abounds with cynicism so delicate and restrained as to be most unkindly telling. It gives brilliant little peeps at a world less respectable than its half-sister, the demi-monde, because so infinitely more cruel and less candid."—*Saturday Review.*

HUTCHINSON & CO., PATERNOSTER ROW

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.'s New Novels, Autumn 1901

By GEORGE GIBBS.

In Search of Mademoiselle

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6*s.*

With 8 full-page Illustrations by the Author.

Sydney Killigrew, the hero of this historical romance of the time of Elizabeth, is a young Englishman who, being impoverished, is easily induced to serve on board a ship which is about to take a hazardous voyage. He soon sees some fighting: a Spanish ship is captured, and the Mademoiselle of the story rescued from captivity. She and her father are Huguenots, and circumstances impel Killigrew to join them when they sail, with other Huguenots, for Florida. Spanish vessels follow them. On the Huguenots landing there is a massacre. Killigrew escapes, but Mademoiselle is left, and he is uncertain of her fate. Another expedition sets out from France to save the honour of the country and to avenge the massacre. Killigrew joins this expedition, hoping to save Mademoiselle; and after many misfortunes and terrible fighting, the French, being aided by the Indians, ultimately put the Spaniards to the sword, and Killigrew and Mademoiselle meet again, to enjoy together the wealth and happiness for which they have waited. There is much that is fresh in this story, for the early colonisation of Florida has not been frequently dealt with; but the story makes, in addition, special claims to attention. It is written in a simple but vigorous style, there is not a dull page in the book, the characters are boldly drawn, and, without being sensational, there are thrilling adventures vividly described. It is a fine, well-constructed romance, founded on historical facts, and a thoroughly artistic piece of work right above the average of historical novels.

HUTCHINSON & CO., PATERNOSTER ROW

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.'s New Novels, Autumn 1901

By I. F. CAUSTON.

The Comedy of a Surburban Chapel

By the Author of "A Modern Judas."

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6*s.*

The interest of this novel is focussed on a large and important Wesleyan Chapel in one of the London suburbs. The action is concerned with the doings of members of the congregation, which is composed of well-to-do middle-class folk. The love interest is supplied by two girls who are both in love with the same man. There is a good plot well worked out, and some excellent delineations of character, particularly of the Neve family—Mr. and Mrs. Neve and their seven daughters. Mrs. Neve is a born match-maker, and has the instinct of a general for planning attacks, the masterly manner in which she contrives to marry off her daughters being described in a most amusing manner. The manœuvring mother is not altogether a novelty; but the Author has made of Mrs. Neve a humorous and original figure, and withal she is a good-natured and likeable woman. John Blount, the wealthy man and chief pillar of the congregation, is also an admirable study. He is not a humbug; his religion is real; but his self-importance is terrible. The Author writes with a skilful hand, his style is good, and he is evidently thoroughly acquainted with the subject of which he treats. In talent, humour, and insight, this story is far superior to the ordinary run of novels.

HUTCHINSON & CO., PATERNOSTER ROW

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.'s New Novels, Autumn 1901

By LILIAN BELL.

The Expatriates

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6s.

The principal characters of the story are rich Americans and titled Parisians, and the action takes place largely in Paris. It depicts a certain class of modern Parisians, which looks upon the rich Americans as legitimate prey, uses them, and despises them. The writer shows up the malice, the meanness, the greed, the utter callousness of this class. The Author evidently writes from first-hand knowledge, and feels keenly; but if the work is somewhat bitter, it is undoubtedly clever, and contains a most interesting story. There is, too, a freshness about the characters—the heroine, Rose, being a delightful type of the American girl.

By VIOLET TWEEDALE

Her Grace's Secret

By the Author of "The Kingdom of Mammon," etc.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6s.

This Society story is written by one who clearly knows Society from the inside. There is a go about it that will attract many readers. She is daring, and deals strongly with the faults and foibles of the great world, in a style not unlike that of "Ouida."

"Mrs. Tweedale's best novel. It is a distinct advance in skilful construction upon "The Kingdom of Mammon," and is a striking story, told with vigour and intensity. The situation is remarkably clever and quite novel."—*World.*

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.'s New Novels, Autumn 1901

By JOHN OXENHAM.

Our Lady of Deliverance

By the Author of "God's Prisoner," etc.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6s.

The teller of this story, Lamont, a young Scotsman of partially French extraction, becoming enamoured of the portrait of a beautiful girl, tracks the original, and finds her in the hands of those who mean mischief; her brother is in New Caledonia under charge of treason by a man who wishes to marry her. The story concerns itself with Lamont's successful efforts to free Denise and her brother; and there is a joyful ending, after exciting scenes. Denise makes a capital heroine, and the Author has succeeded in making his story move along quickly, and keeping the interest alive from start to finish.

By DOUGLAS SLADEN

My Son Richard

A Romance of the River Thames

SECOND LARGE EDITION.

In crown 8vo, cloth gilt. 6s.

"A delightful book; charming pictures of river life; an irresistible atmosphere; very human; a book to enjoy a long success."—*Standard.*

"Seldom have I read a book with better appreciation, or laid one down with more regret—altogether a delightful book."—*Sporting Times* ("The Pink 'Un").

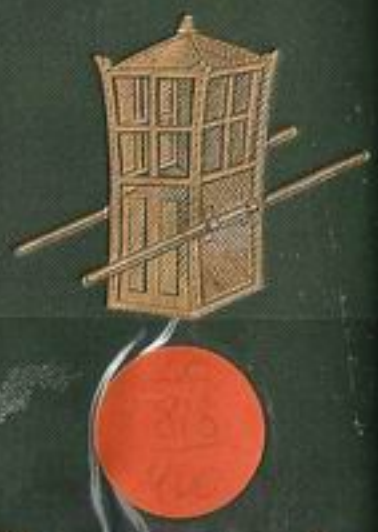
"I have not read any book which is so deliciously saturated with the gay spirit of the river."—*Star.*

"Strikes a fresh note, and presents us with charming visions of English youth and maidenhood on the loveliest reaches of the Thames."—*Queen.*

HUTCHINSON & CO., PATERNOSTER ROW

A Nest of Linnets

Frank Frankfort Moore



Hutchinson & Co.