Miss Churchill: A Study
By Christian Reid

NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

1887

Miss Churchill: A Study.

BOOK I

AMONG THE PINES

Chapter I.

To one unaccustomed to their aspect, there are perhaps few things more melancholy than the great pine-forests of the South. Their vast extent, their absolute monotony, the total lack of other growth or any picturesque features connected with the landscape, render them oppressive in the extreme to one who journeys through them for the first time, or who takes up his abode among them reluctantly. But to one who has lived long in their midst, or to the new-comer of poetic soul, there is a strange fascination in this region of apparent gloom. Stateliest of all evergreens, the giant trees rise to an immense height, giving a great sense of space below. Between their splendid trunks one walks as through the pillared aisles of a vast cathedral, while overhead the sea-like murmur of their plumy branches fills the air, and underfoot their fragrant needles, interspersed here and there with resinous cones, cover the earth as with a carpet. Balsamic odors are inhaled with every breath, and some aspects of beauty strike the observant eye so strongly that they can never be forgotten — serried ranks of spear-like pines, ranged like embattled Titans against a stormy sunset; deep-green crests stretching with solemn majesty toward a far, golden horizon; or a close-girdling wood, full of the suggestion of infinite melancholy, as the trees lift their dark boughs against a cold, gray sky. These pictures, and many more, came as familiar memories to a man who for the first time in twenty years found himself traveling through the pine-lands. All day long the railroad-car in which he sat had been filled with the unflattering comments of travelers, new to the country, on the gloomy and monotonous scenes presented to their view; but Bernard Lysle, who had seen pretty much everything that the world could show, from tropical jungles to Russian steppes, sat silent, gazing out of the window beside him and recalling the half-forgotten memories of his early youth. He had been a mere child when he first saw these somber forests, coming with his father from the far Canadian North in search of health for the latter. In the pine-lands — not then so well known as they are now for their salubrious qualities — Mr. Lysle gained, if not health, at least a longer lease of life; and here he spent the greater part of several years. Recollection of these years thronged upon Bernard as the great forest opened its interminable vistas to his gaze. They were recollections of scenes and people changed or vanished now in the storm of war that had burst over them. At the first muttering of that storm, Mr. Lysle had left the country, taking the reluctant boy who, then of the mature age of thirteen, ardently longed to become a

soldier. Ruthlessly making an end of these warlike aspirations, his father hurried away, and from that time to the present Bernard had not looked again upon the soft Southern sky, the solemn Southern pines.

When the death of Mr. Lysle occurred, a year or so later, the boy was sent to England for his education, and he had never returned to America until a few months before the day that saw him traveling through the pine-lands. It was not curiosity alone that had drawn him back to these scenes of his youth, but an interest which had been strong enough to survive the great length of time that had elapsed since his departure. Chief among the friends of those childish days had been the family of Governor Churchill, one of the foremost men of the State, to whom his father had carried letters of introduction, and who had made them welcome with the open-handed hospitality of the South, both in his summer lodge among the pine-lands and at his great estate upon the seaboard. To the last — the old seat of the family — Bernard had paid many visits, and his special friend had been Hugh Churchill, a boy two or three years older than himself, although at that time Bernard's quicker intelligence had made him seem the elder. The difference in age told, however, in the fact that, before the war ended, Hugh, like the rest of his class and generation, was old enough to bear arms and make a campaign or two, of which his friend at school in England heard with regretful envy. The war over, some communication passed between them; but young Churchill was absorbed in the terrible struggle for existence of those days, and his friend's letters remained unanswered and finally ceased. Lysle, on his side, had many things to occupy him and drive old memories from his mind. But when circumstances at last led his wandering footsteps back to America, he at once recalled to mind his old friend, and wrote to him. After long delay a reply reached him, bearing the post-mark of a town in the interior of the State.

" I have been living here for ten years," Churchill wrote, "life on the sea-coast having become unbearable through the worthlessness and insubordination of the negroes. The sea-islands are abandoned, the rice-fields hardly worked at all; so, giving up in despair the hope of doing anything on the old estate, I came here, bought a few hundred acres, and manage to live. Will you come and see how? There is no one I would rather see than yourself, and my wife will be delighted to meet you. Did you know that I have a wife? I do not think that I have heard from you or written to you since my marriage. Come, then, and see me in my character of *pater familias*."

Lysle smiled over this letter, and felt that he should very much like to see the writer again. A few days later, therefore, found him traveling toward the small town of Oldfield, situated in the midst of the pine-belt. It was late in the afternoon of a soft autumn day when he reached his destination, and as he stepped from the train his hand was seized by a tall, handsome man with laughing eyes and bold, clear-cut features, whose slight shabbiness of dress could not conceal an air of personal distinction.

"Bernard, my dear fellow, how delighted I am to see you again!" he cried, m a cordial voice. “This is what I call a compliment indeed — to come so far to look up an old friend."

"My dear Hugh, I would have gone much farther to look you up," answered Lysle.

And then, since the first moments of meeting, after long separation, are not usually moments of expansion, the two friends regarded each other silently for an instant. What Lysle perceived has been said: Churchill on his side saw a small man, slightly and elegantly built, with something peculiarly refined and even picturesque in his appearance, with keen dark eyes that seemed made to look through everything, and the air and manner of a thorough man of the world. It was the latter whose brief scrutiny ended first, and who spoke again.

"How much you are like your father, Hugh! I should have known you anywhere by that likeness; but how did you know me?"

Churchill laughed. "If you could see yourself," he said, "you would not need to ask. Not many people of your stamp appear in Oldfield. Then, after all, you are not greatly changed. And so you think I resemble my father? I am glad of that, though I shall never be the courtly gentleman that he was — God

bless him! "We have fallen on rough days, and they leave their impress on me as well as on others. But this way, Bernard. Here is my trap."

He led the way to where a Jersey wagon stood, in the back of which two negroes were laboriously assisting each other to place Lysle's luggage. The equipage, like its owner's coat, was somewhat shabby; but the horses were handsome and well groomed. Churchill sprang in and took the reins, Lysle followed, and the next moment they were driving rapidly through the streets of Oldfield and thence out into the open country. When they left the little town behind, and the great pine-woods closed around them, filling the nostrils with aromatic odors, while the wagon rolled smoothly, the horses trotted briskly over the level road, Lysle had a curious sensation as if all the memories and feelings of his youth were waiting for him among those solemn and majestic trees.

"You see we are on a ridge," Churchill explained. "It is very healthy here, as the pine-lands mostly are; but on each side of us are valleys where malaria exists. Hence every one endeavors to live on the ridge. Oldfield is built on it, as you observe, and so is my house, though my plantation lies a mile or two away."

"I am sorry that you should have been forced to leave your beautiful old home," said Lysle. "But I hope that you are prospering now."

"So-so," answered the other, cheerily. "It has been a hard fight, but the worst is over. My marriage looked like simple madness at the time it took place, but Nettie — that is, my wife — was left an orphan, and I felt that, if I ever meant to take care of her, then was the time to do it. She has never repented our rashness, nor have I. 'Heaven helps those who help themselves,' and no man ever found a more willing and cheerful helpmate than she has been to me."

"Who was she? Did I know her people?"

"Of course you did — the Derringers! They were our near neighbors. Her father and her brothers fell in the war; her mother died of a broken heart soon after; and the poor little girl was left penniless — for the ocean might as well have risen and whelmed our sea-board estates, for all the good they were to us. We struggled on separately for a year or two, and then I could stand it no longer. 'If you are not afraid, Nettie,' I said, 'come and let us try it together.' She looks like a flower, but she has the courage of a soldier. She was not afraid. For several years we endured more privations than I care to remember, but we kept debt and starvation at bay, and now we are 'out of the woods' — *Deo gratias*!"

If Lysle smiled at the tone, there was none the less a softening of the bright dark eyes which showed how his heart was touched; for he knew enough to be able to divine much that was hidden under the story so simply told. He remembered the splendid heritage to which the speaker had been born, the luxury and ease in which his early years had been passed, and he felt that the brave gentlemen of the past had no cause to blush for their descendant.

"But," he said, after a short pause, "had you not a sister? I remember a fair-haired little girl in your father's house."

"To be sure I had, and have," Churchill answered. "But I was relieved of the care of her by her aunt — my father married twice, so she is only my half-sister — who insisted on taking her at the time of my father's death, and with whom she lived until about two years ago, when Mrs. Austin herself died. Since then, Cecil has made her home with me. I believe that is all there is to know of us, except that I have — Why, hallo! where do you scamps come from?"

This question was addressed to a party of children who suddenly appeared at the side of the road, and raised a shout at sight of the wagon. The horses shied a little, but Churchill pulled them up; when Lysle saw that the group was composed of three children and a young lady who stood a little farther back under the pines.

There was much in the accident of time and place to make an enduring memory of this his first sight of Cecil Churchill. Through tall, straight stems the sunshine slanted, full of the golden pathos of

autumn, the dark-green foliage overhead stretched away with the melancholy aspect that only pines possess, while on the verge of the forest, touched by mingled light and shadow, this figure stood with the dim woodland depths behind it.

A graceful figure — so much he perceived at once — tall for a woman, as her brother was tall for a man, but slender and stately as the trees that surrounded her. A broad hat of rough straw was pushed back from a face that challenged questioning rather than immediate admiration. Was it beautiful? Most people would have answered in the negative. "Striking," they would have said — "interesting," they might have added; but they would not have been likely to admit that it possessed beauty. Lysle, however, knew many types of many arts, and he recognized that there was beauty of a striking and unusual order in the nobly molded features, in the wide low forehead framed by hair the color of an oak-leaf in autumn, in the eyes deep-set as those of antique sculpture under level brows, in the lips which were exquisite in form and expression, though too thin to please the ordinary taste; even in the pale, slightly hollowed cheeks and square contour of chin. It was with a swift glance that he took all this in, while the children answered the question with which Churchill had stopped:

"Take up Nettie, papa — Nettie's tired."

"Yes, take her, Hugh; I have brought her too far," said the young lady.

"Very well," answered Churchill, good-humoredly. Then he added, “Here is my sister, Bernard."

"I can not flatter myself that Miss Churchill remembers me," said Lysle, springing to the ground. But, since I remember her very well, I must beg to shake hands."

“I do remember you, however," said Miss Churchill, smiling as she placed her hand in his. “Children have better memories than people fancy. I not only remember you, but I remember that I liked you best of all Hugh's friends. So I am glad that, after such long years of absence and silence, you have cared enough for him to come to see him."

She spoke with a gracious sweetness of tone and manner that charmed him. "What can I say," he answered, "except that it shall not be my fault if you do not continue to like me best of all Hugh's friends? And, as a beginning, let me suggest that you, as well as
Nettie, come with us."

"Come, Cecil," said Churchill. "There is room enough for you and the youngsters."

"No, thank you," she replied. "We are out for exercise, and would rather walk. But Nettie is tired — take her."

"This is Nettie, I presume," said Lysle, looking at a young person, apparently about three years old, with long, golden curls and large dark eyes. "Will mademoiselle allow me?"

He lifted her into the wagon, where she promptly took refuge between her father's knees, and then he turned again to Miss Churchill.

"I am sorry that you are so resolutely bent on exercise," he said; "for I am sure these young gentlemen would like a drive."

"Very likely," she answered, for the other children — two sturdy boys of seven and nine respectively — regarded Nettie with evident envy. "But they are too gallant to leave me to walk home alone."

"So am I," said Lysle, laughing a little, "if you will permit me to accompany you. Pray, do not refuse! I should like very much to stretch my limbs after sitting in a railroad-car all day; and to renew my acquaintance with my old friends the pine-woods."

Miss Churchill did not refuse, but she looked at her brother, who said, easily:

"Take him with you, Cecil. — And now, you boys, if you want to drive, up with you!"

The boys required no second invitation. They clambered quickly into Lysle's vacated place, and the wagon rolled away down the green vista of the road, leaving the two old yet new acquaintances standing together under the pines.

Chapter II.

"I HOPE that you do not consider me very presumptuous, Miss Churchill," said Lysle, turning to his companion with a smile, as the equipage disappeared.

"Oh, no," she answered. “I think it very natural that you should prefer to walk after having been in a railroad-car all day. And no doubt you remember how pleasant it is among the pines."

"I remember very well. It is really curious how much I recollect of my life in this country, considering what an interval of time has elapsed since I left here. Twenty years! That is long at any period of existence, but in youth it is an age. I have before my eyes a proof of what it can do. When I saw you last, you were Nettie's age. And now —"

"I was a little more than Nettie's age, or perhaps I should not remember you," she said. “I was five years old when the war began — and I think you went away then."

"Yes, I went away then — sadly against my will. I felt that I was leaving untold possibilities of glorious excitement for the humdrum of ordinary existence. Bat I have learned since what the glorious excitement of war means when one comes to see it close at hand."

"You have seen it often, have you not?"

"Very often. I have been a war correspondent, as you are perhaps aware. In that capacity I went through the Franco-Prussian War, and several lesser campaigns. When I was younger than I am now, I had a great taste for adventure, as well as a passion for letters, and the two fancies served each other in that way."

"What a great thing it is to be a man!" she said, looking at him with the most evident envy shining in her eyes — eyes that he now saw were of a clear and beautiful golden-hazel "You could make your capacity serve your taste; but I — that is, a woman — must submit to the bondage of circumstances, without any hope of using her capacity or gratifying her taste."

"Do you think so?" he asked. "That was the case a generation or two ago, but women are pretty well emancipated now, and have perfect liberty, as far as the opinion of the world goes, to use whatever capacity they may possess. It is true they have not yet become war correspondents, but very likely they will, some day. Meanwhile, they are authors, artists, travelers, scientists, or anything else that they like."

"Ah! you are speaking of the world," she said, in a tone of half-unconscious sadness. "That is all true — in the world. But it is not much good to know that others are free, if one is in prison one's self."

"All prisons have doors," said Lysle, looking at her with interest.

She shook her head. "Not all. Some, I think, are like those ancient dungeons of which one reads, that have only a well-like opening above, through which the soul will escape some day. But see, Mr. Lysle — if you like the pines, here they are in their glory."

They had turned from the road to follow a path leading through the woods, and were indeed in the midst of the great trees. Far as the eye could reach, vistas of pillar-like trunks opened to the gaze, while the dark crests above formed a shade so dense that hardly the noonday sun could pierce it. The shadow which reigned here was toned to softness by the absence of any color save the rich brown of the stems, the paler brown of the fallen needles, and the somber green of the mighty boughs. It was a region of subdued light, monotonous tint, and solemn silence. There seemed no reason why the path that led through these dim forest-aisles should ever end.

“How familiar it all is!" said Lysle, with a glance that took in every detail of the picture. "And full of a charm which even as a child I dimly felt — the charm of infinite repose, subtly mingled with melancholy."

"With melancholy, yes," his companion answered. “Though these woods have a fascination for me, I confess that I feel their melancholy deeply. I can not shake off the influence; yet when I am in lighter, happier regions, I miss and long for it."

Lysle's quick, dark glance again rested on her for an instant.

“I can fancy that," he said; "the longing for it, I mean, in what you call lighter and happier regions. Some scenes, like some people, are very bright, but also very shallow. There is no shallowness in the pines."

She smiled. "No, indeed. On the contrary, they seem filled with a knowledge of some mystery of life or death which they never cease uttering to ears too dull to interpret it. Listen! — do you not like to hear their murmur?"

She stood still, lifting her face toward the boughs overhead, whence came the mysterious whisper which the pines are forever sighing, even "though all the wings of all the winds seem furled."

Lysle paused and listened also to the sound, pleasant to his ear as the murmur of the sea, and full of poetic suggestion. But, while he listened, he looked at the face that more and more revealed its character to him — a character of infinite sensitiveness and the inherent melancholy that in some souls never fails to vibrate in response to the deep note that runs through Nature. He saw that, despite the firmness of the chin, the lips were delicate and tremulous as the petals of a flower, and that the eyes had depths of sadness as well as of beauty.

"How often I have lain under the trees, listening to that voice, so full of incommunicable things!" he observed, when they presently walked on. "I am inclined to think that I was rather a strange child when I remember all that it said to me."

"Hugh declares that you were a most uncommon child," she said. "I am sure that no pinnacle of greatness to which you could have climbed would have surprised him."

"He must be surprised, then, that I have climbed to none at all," answered Lysle, with a slight inflection of mockery in his pleasant voice. “Have you any idea of what it is to feel yourself a failure, Miss Churchill? I am a failure."

"Mr. Lysle!"

"Oh, yes," shrugging his shoulders lightly, "I know what you mean. I have done some things that the world has noticed and praised. But, as it has chanced, they were things of which I was ashamed, or, if not ashamed, at least thoroughly indifferent to; while the things in which I have put the best that is in me, have fallen unnoticed. Hence I know that I am a failure. But," he added humorously, "I tell you this in confidence. Believe me, I do not go about the world proclaiming it."

She seemed doubtful whether he was in jest or earnest, as she looked at him with her deep eyes, divided between sympathy and incredulity. Lysle smiled — a whimsical smile which she was destined to learn to know very well.

"You do not believe me," he said.

"I find it hard to believe you," she answered, frankly. "You have always been to me — to us, that is — an impersonation of success. We have felt as if we were not cut off entirely from the life of the world, since we knew, however remotely, one in the midst of its currents and its strifes, one whose name is familiar to everybody who has any knowledge of the affairs and the literature of the time."

"You put it most flatteringly," said Lysle, surprised and touched. "But, believe me, I am not depreciating myself in order that you may exalt me, when
I declare that I have by no means accomplished all that you imagine. I have some reputation, it is true; but, as 1 said before, it is based on the things for which I care least. You are so kind as to be interested. Shall I tell you a little about myself?"

"Pray do," she said, with an eager glance.

"I will try not to make the story long. Shall I commence with the beginning of such reputation as I possess? No; I think I must go a little behind that, in order to make you understand. Well, even as a child I possessed a great deal of imagination, and all my dominant tastes were intellectual, so you may conceive what bent my ambition took as I grew older. I had hardly left Oxford when I published a volume of poems, which were received with praise from a few critics, but fell dead as far as the public was concerned. A year or two later I produced some dramatic studies, on which I had bestowed infinite pains and all the scholarship I possessed, but which shared the same fate. About this time I lost some money by the failure of a company in the stock of which my father had invested largely, and I saw that it was necessary to put my Pegasus in harness. A little anonymous journalistic work had given me credit with editors; and when the Franco-Prussian War broke out I accepted an offer to go abroad as war correspondent. The work was not to my taste, but I liked adventure, and I went. I dashed off descriptions of what was passing before my eyes with reckless haste and utter want of care — writing in camps, by bivouac-fires, in wayside inns, at red heat, and sending off the pages without even a glance of correction. It was work of which to be heartily ashamed, but it was the success of the day in London. I can scarcely express to you the sense of stupefaction with which I learned this. 'So picturesque, so graphic, so powerful!' people said, who had not noticed my most careful labor."

“But do you not see," cried the girl, "that it was your fine qualities, if you will let me say so, that enabled you to do this work so that it touched people?
Your imagination, your dramatic insight, your faculty of seeing things as a poet sees — oh, surely all this was needed by one who would paint such a terrible struggle, with all its warring forces! The minute touches of pathos and interest, as well as the great movements of armies — those are the things which commonplace eyes never see, but which go straight to the heart, when they are vividly and truthfully portrayed."

Her words rushed out so impetuously that she only paused here with a sudden blush. "Pardon me," she said, "but that is how it seems to me."

"And it seems to me," said Lysle, "that I have never found a listener who understood so quickly or divined so well! No doubt you are right — in part, at least. I had some qualities that gave a peculiar value to my work; but that did not alter the fact that it was not work to which I should have wished to owe anything. Yet I owed to it that I stepped from obscurity into fame, and could thereafter dictate terms to editors and publishers. The war-sketches were subjected to a little correction, issued in book-form, and sold immensely. After that I went to the East — to India, to Afghanistan, to Upper Egypt — and, since I have written less superficially than most travelers and correspondents on the countries I have visited and the campaigns I have witnessed, my works have succeeded amazingly, and I have become rather an authority on Oriental affairs. Now, Miss Churchill, that is an epitome of what the world calls mv success, and what I consider my failure. In which light does it strike *you*?"

As she turned her face again toward him, he could see that she was much moved. The lightness of tone with which he had finished found no reflection in any lightness of mood in her — indeed, as he learned afterward, lightness of mood was not common with Cecil Churchill.

"It does not strike me," she said, "as either complete success or complete failure. Of course, I understand that you have won your reputation by what you feel to be your lower powers, when yon would have wished to win it by your higher. But I am sure that you could not have won it without the aid of the higher.
And you have this consolation, that now the world will listen to whatever you wish to say."

"I am not sure that I have anything now that I wish to say to it," he answered. "One's life ends by imposing itself upon one, and a failure which looks like a success is, after all, not very uncommon. But really it is uncommon for me to indulge in so much egotism!" he added, suddenly. "I hardly know how I have been beguiled into it."

"By my interest, I think," she said, smiling. "You know — or you don't know, but perhaps you may imagine — what a wonderful thing it is in my life to come into contact with a man who has done and seen all that you have — a man of letters and of the world. You will not misunderstand me when I tell you that I have wondered, ever since we knew you were coming, what you would be like, and what I could hope to learn from you. I did not venture to think of your talking to me in this manner — talking of the things I long most to know — at once."

She spoke with so much simplicity, with so little thought of herself or any impression she might make, that Lysle felt his interest more and more stirred.

"You do not know yourself, then," he said, "or you would not be surprised at any confidence which might be bestowed upon you. Your sympathy makes everything possible."

“But I am not of a sympathetic nature," she answered.

"Are you not? I think I must be appointed to reveal you to yourself."

“No," she said; "it is you who mistake, and I should be sorry for you to begin with too good an opinion of me. I am not sympathetic, in a general sense.
It is only some things that rouse my interest — things, unfortunately, that lie remote from my life."

"I feel, then, that I have been peculiarly fortunate in rousing it this afternoon; and if I may ask a favor of you —"

"Oh, yes," she said, as he paused.

"It is, that you will command whatever knowledge I possess. I have seen a good deal of the world, and no doubt there are many things in my experience that would interest you. Look upon me as a book, open the pages where you will, and be sure that I shall endeavor to make the record as entertaining as possible."

"May I indeed do that?" she said, with an eager regard. "You can not tell how glad I shall be! I only fear that I shall bore you terribly if I ask all that I want to know."

"That is impossible," he answered, with evident sincerity, "for do you know I have a presentiment that we shall be very good friends?"

"I hope so," she replied. "Indeed, if I were not afraid of speaking too precipitately, I should say that I am sure of it. But here we are at home. This is my brother's house before us."

Lysle looked up as they emerged from the pines, and saw on the other side of the sandy road — which, like a stream, had made a bend around them while they followed a straight line from point to point — a low, wide-porticoed house, which, without architectural pretensions, pleased the eye by its perfect adaptation to the climate and the life which it enshrined. Its doors stood hospitably open to the soft air, flowers surrounded it, vines clambered over it, and numerous chairs scattered about the piazzas indicated how much of the family life went on there. As the two figures, leaving the shadow of the forest, crossed the road to the gate, set in the midst of a luxuriant mock-orange hedge, Churchill, who was reading on the piazza, came forward, newspaper in hand, to welcome his friend again.

Chapter III.

When Lysle, acting on a sudden impulse, had begged to accompany Miss Churchill on her homeward walk, he felt, if he had not distinctly said to himself, "Here is some one whom I wish to know, and who will interest me." But he had not expected that the interest would develop so quickly, or that the conversation would fall immediately into such a personal channel.

After he had been conducted to his chamber and left alone, he found himself recalling, with a sense of surprise, his own expansiveness. He was not prone to talk of himself — much experience had

eradicated the impulse, if it had ever existed with him — and far less was he disposed to take others into his confidence with regard to the sense of failure that rendered his apparent success worthless in his own eyes. Yet he had laid bare this inmost secret of his life to a girl who was an absolute stranger to him, and that on an acquaintance of half an hour. If it had been the other way — if he had drawn forth her confidence — the matter would not have been so surprising; but for him, a man of the world trained in reticence and self-suppression, to be led to talk of himself like a schoolboy — this was too astonishing not to need an explanation.

And the explanation was soon forthcoming. He had only to recall the pale, beautiful face, the deep eyes with their lurking sadness, and the sensitive, delicate lips, to understand that his impulse of confidence had simply been the first step toward winning hers. He had wished to interest her as a means of studying her, so he had seized the first subject that was available, the first that would serve his purpose — which chanced to be that of himself. And it had served his purpose well. He recalled the look, the tone, with which she had said, "Do you not see that it was your fine qualities that enabled you to do this work so that it touched people?" He had known it himself, but he could not have imagined that she would grasp the truth so quickly, guided only by his slight and imperfect explanation. "There is something in her that answers to it," he thought. "But what is there besides?" He smiled a little. It would not be his fault if he did not learn what there was besides. He felt this with a sense of pleasure such as only the man who has a desire for fresh intellectual interest knows.

He found that no fresh intellectual interest awaited him, however, when he went down-stairs and made the acquaintance of Mrs. Churchill — a pretty, delicate, dark-eyed woman, who received him with much kindness. Her gentle voice and caressing manners revived memories of many such women whom he had seen in his youth at Governor Churchill's and elsewhere. Singularly enough, these memories had not been stirred by anything about Cecil. With her, individuality was so strong that she seemed a creature *sui generis*, belonging to no class or order; but Mrs. Churchill was the embodiment of traditions, of gentle influences and fine social culture, which made her the type of a sufficiently numerous class. She pleased Lysle in herself as well as for the sake of those past shadowy days, which yet seemed very real while he sat listening to the flow of her voice, with its soft Southern accent, telling what had become of all the old friends whose names he could recall. "Poor Miles was killed, and Ralph — you remember his brother Ralph? — is hard at work like the rest of us, trying to make both ends meet," she was saying, when Churchill came up and sat down beside them.

"Barnard looks quite melancholy under the influence of your reminiscences, Nettie," he said. "Suppose we try to find some more cheerful subject."

"With all my heart," she answered. "What shall it be?"

"Well, we can make him talk of himself."

"Ah, pardon," cried Lysle, with a laugh, "but that is not a cheerful subject at all."

"I am sure it ought to be, then," said Churchill, lighting a cigar — for they were on the veranda after tea; "a man who has succeeded and made a name in the world as you have, ought to find the subject of himself very cheerful indeed."

Lysle, who was conscious that Miss Churchill was within hearing, glanced at her, but she did not meet his eyes. She was sitting near one of the arches of the veranda, which framed her like a picture, with her figure in relief against a luminous sky. On this side the house overlooked a slight valley that gave a wider opening and horizon toward the west. One of the beautiful sunsets of the pine-lands was glowing on the sky, and Cecil’s eyes were fastened on it, so that, if she heard her brother's remark, she made no sign.

"I can not imagine a man, who is not an incurable egotist, finding the subject of himself very interesting," said Lysle, after a pause. "But I shall be happy to tell you about some of my adventures with other people, if you care to hear them."

"Of course we care," said Churchill. "Do you suppose we are devoid of the spirit of adventure because we are forced to live in a rut? Tell ns something about that campaign in Afghanistan a year or so ago."

So Lysle began, describing not only the incidents of the campaign that with its clash of arms had seemed so remote to the civilized world, but also the country which made the scene of it — that vast plateau of Central Asia, with its history stretching back into remote antiquity, those towering mountains which divide the rich plains of India from the table-lands and snowy heights of Afghanistan, the fierce, unconquerable tribes that dwell in those fastnesses, the wild grandeur of the great Khyber Pass, through which from earliest ages the tide of conquest and plunder has rolled. He was conscious that he had never talked better — not even to a London audience — than to this little group who sat rapt in silence under his words. The sunset glow faded, the yellow moon came up over the pines in the east and changed from gold to silver in the purple sky, and still he spoke, led on by questions from his listeners whenever he ceased. It was as Cecil had said : the poet in him came out in all that he uttered, the past history and traditions of man, the wonderful aspects of Nature, the picturesque suggestions of characters, customs, and manners different from anything which modern nations produce — for how modern is Europe, with her civilization of a thousand years, beside the ancient East! — all were present with him as he talked, coloring his words and conveying to his hearers a vivid realization of that which he described.

One of them, at least, almost held her breath while she listened. She seemed to see around her not the familiar girdling pines of the New World, but those stupendous heights of hoary Asia, those vast table-lands from which, in the dimness of prehistoric time, the tribes that were to form nations and peoples began their westward march. The great movement seemed to unroll before her like an antique frieze, mingled with later pictures — of the hosts of Alexander, of the hordes of Timour, and finally of the conflict, deferred yet certain to come, when in this region, fit for a strife of giants, the power of England would meet face to face the might of the White Czar.

The striking of a clock within the house at length startled them all. Mrs. Churchill uttered a slight exclamation. "Can that be ten o'clock?" she cried. "O Mr. Lysle, how delightfully you have entertained us; but how we have imposed upon you! To make you talk for hours — that is inexcusable!"

"It is inexcusable in me," answered Lysle. "I fear I have bored you very much. You must take care another time how you set me off."

"We shall certainly take care to set you off," said Churchill. "I can't tell when I have been so much interested! And what vague ideas I had before of the country, and the fighting, and what it was all about! My dear fellow, I don't wonder that you have succeeded, if you write as you talk."

"Just what I was thinking," said Mrs. Churchill.

But Cecil said nothing; and looking at her face as the moonlight fell on it, showing its outlines and the eyes that under their level brows seemed gazing into some immeasurable distance, rather than at the silvery mist which filled the valley, Lysle felt a strong inclination to hear what she thought. He rose, and, with some comment on the beauty of the night, walked to the edge of the piazza, pausing near her chair. As he stood silent, she turned her head and looked at him.

' I wish," she said, in a low tone, “that I could tell you what pictures you have brought before me."

"And can you not?"

"Oh, no. Even if it were worth while, I do not think I could. But it would be very absurd to describe to you, who have seen the real things, the pictures in my mind."

"The pictures in your mind might be better worth seeing than the real things," he said, smiling. "Imagination is a great painter."

"But imagination must have material with which to paint, and you gave me the materials." She paused, then added, quickly: "I see now that I was right in what I said to you this afternoon. It is the qualities you bring to bear on your work that make it what it is."

“So much can be said of all work — that it is what the qualities brought to bear upon it make it."

"Yes. But it is not often, I am sure, that qualities such as yours are brought to bear on such work. Do not most people describe only what they see? But you make one feel so much besides — it is like the forty centuries looking down from the Pyramids. One realizes all the past as well as the present; one feels the continuity of human action, and that the events of to-day are only one page of a great drama which had its beginning in remotest time."

She looked away from him again before she finished speaking — over the silver-flooded valley to the dark crests of the pines crowning the opposite ridge — and Lysle, whose perceptions were quick, felt that the spell of the images he had evoked was stronger than that of his presence. This consciousness, which might have piqued another man, only interested him.

"I am very fortunate if I make you feel those things," he said; “but I think you give me too much credit — for you supply, on your side, an imagination and a discernment that few people possess."

“Oh, I am not making myself a standard," she answered, simply. "I know that I am not exactly like other people. I found that out when I was a child. One discovers such things early."

"Yes — generally by the price of isolation that one must pay," said Lysle, who had some experiences of the kind himself.

"I never cared for that," she said. "It was the least of two evils. Isolation was better than uncongenial companionship."

"You are not of a social nature, then?"

"If you mean by that, one who likes indiscriminate society — not at all. It wearies me; and I have no art to hide my weariness. But I think I should like some kinds of society — such society as (I have fancied) might be found in the great world."

"Yes," said Lysle, thoughtfully, "I am sure you would like that. It is a pity —"

He paused — suddenly conscious that he did not yet know her well enough to utter the words on his lips; but she looked at him with comprehension in her eyes.

"A pity," she said, "that the prison has no opening? It may be, and yet — one can at least say, like Dante, that

> 'Even through the body's prison-bars
> One's soul possessed the sun and stars.' "

"Unfortunately, they are very remote, and do not always satisfy one," said Lysle. "They did not satisfy Dante. "Where in all the world is there another face filled with such deep melancholy as his?"

"That seems to me the saddest thing about great genius," she said. "It is always so melancholy. Those who possess it are not only oppressed by the insight which enables them to see deeper into life than others, but their own lives are always so profoundly unhappy. There is hardly an exception to the rule."

"Except Goethe."

"I suppose Goethe was an exception — perhaps for that reason I have never found him very interesting."

"He was a Greek pagan in soul — a true child of the Renaissance," said Lysle. "That accounts for much. And then he had the good sense to live a long time. Most great geniuses die before the world knows them."

"I hope you do not mean to emulate their example, Mr. Lysle," said Mrs. Churchill, who had approached in time to hear the last words. "You must not die before the world knows you even better than it knows you now."

“That might readily be without my achieving any very great fame," said Lysle, laughing; "but 1 have not the least intention of dying, I assure you. I find the world, with all its drawbacks, rather an amusing place."

"I am afraid you will not find this an amusing place," said she, with a sigh. "It is really very dull. I have my house and my children to occupy me, and Hugh has his business; but I am often sorry for Cecil—"

"And I often tell you that there is no reason why you should be," interposed the latter.

"There is reason why I should be," replied Mrs. Churchill, "though that is neither here nor there. What I was going to say is, that I fear Mr. Lysle will be bored to death."

"My dear Mrs. Churchill," said Lysle, with great impressiveness, "I beg you to dismiss such an idea from your mind. Mere dullness — if by that you mean the absence of excitement, social or otherwise — never bores me. In fact, I like it. So much of my life has been passed at high-pressure, that I welcome any period of repose that offers itself. And I hoped that such a period was before me when I came here."

"Then you were quite right," said she. "Repose we can offer in unlimited quantity, but nothing else. We have no society, no amusements —"

"Why do you tell him such things?" asked Churchill, also drawing near. "Do you suppose that if he had been in search of society and amusements he would have come here? He has come to see us, and to take a rest in the pine-lands — eh, Bernard? A fellow who lives as you do, must need complete rest now and then, I should think."

"You think correctly," answered Lysle, "and you define my motives in coming exactly — to see you, and to rest in the pine-lands. *Voil à tout*!"

"I hope, then, we may be able to keep you a long time," said Mrs. Churchill, with friendly cordiality. "If we have little or nothing to offer you, you have a great deal to offer us, so the hope is a little selfish, perhaps, but very sincere. And now I must bid you good-night, for, not being strong, I am obliged to retire early. Don't let Hugh keep you up too late, or tell adventures that should be kept for the public ear. — Cecil, shall I bid you good-night also?"

"No," answered Miss Churchill, "'I will go with you." She rose, and turning toward Lysle looked at him with a smile. "I hope," she said, "that our pines may bestow on you their gift of pleasant slumber. For myself, I know I shall dream of all the wild and wonderful scenes into which you have taken us. So, good-night."

Chapter IV.

Lysle found it a very good night indeed. Whether it was owing to the weariness caused by his journey, or to the aromatic breath of the pines with which the pure, mild air was laden, he fell into a dreamless slumber, from which he wakened to find the world flooded with golden sunshine, and a bell ringing somewhere below-stairs.

While he was debating, according to the manner of one only half awake, what this was most likely intended as a summons for, a knock at his door was followed by the entrance of a servant — a slim, chocolate-colored youth — bringing fresh water, who informed him that it was "the risin'-bell."

This being the case, the proper thing to do was of course to rise, and, when once he had faced the beauty of the day, Lysle felt that slumber was no longer possible. He had come immediately from regions where October was decked with a robe of gorgeous color and the clear air was sharp with the touch of frost; but here there seemed no such thing possible as sharpness. All was mellowed to the softness of a

dream, yet full of radiance. The air, in addition to the lightness and buoyancy which distinguished it at all times, had a caressing warmth, as if it held the sunshine dissolved in it. The pines, although they wore no color but their own dark green, were yet changed in aspect by the magical atmosphere which threw a veil of enchantment over everything. They were not the same trees that stood in gloomy majesty under a lowering heaven, or asserted themselves with such sharp distinctness against a clear, pale horizon. The radiant sky, the flooding sunshine, and the faint delicate haze that softened without obscuring the splendor of the day, contained a spell that seemed to wrap them in repose and golden dreams.

But when Lysle descended, in obedience to the summons of another bell, he found color enough spread before his eyes. The windows of the dining-room commanded a view of garden-beds where flowers ran riot in profusion and variety, and around the house were set shrubs and young trees that wore autumn's glowing tints. Seen now in the clear light of day, he perceived more distinctly the mingled simplicity and elegance of all the appointments of the house. Money to spare for mere adornment there had evidently been none; but the taste which selected necessary things had never been at fault; while untiring care plainly presided over all the household machinery. Indeed, as he came to know later, Mrs. Churchill possessed in her small body a spirit of infinite energy and ambition. "I have seen households," she sometimes said, "where, when poverty came, carelessness, disorder, and slatternly habits followed; children grew up without training in gentle ways or without memories of refinement. That shall never be in my house. "We must live simply, but my children shall always remember that we lived with order and propriety, and such grace as I can command. If we had but a crust of bread, I should insist upon serving it properly."

With this ideal animating the person from whom the household takes its tone, it was not surprising that Lysle's eyes were pleased by the pretty picture which the breakfast-room presented as he entered. Sunshine was streaming on the dark, polished floor with its square red rug in the center, on the brass mountings of the old-fashioned sideboard, and on the breakfast-table, where, in the midst of shining damask, of china and silver, was placed a large bowl filled with freshly gathered roses, as if the wealth of bloom and fragrance without had overflowed within. Cordial salutations greeted him as he appeared; and after he had replied, and assured Mrs. Churchill that he had slept exceedingly well, he looked across the table, and said, "What a beautiful day it is!" to Miss Churchill, who was seated opposite him.

"Is it not?" she answered. "We are so accustomed to beautiful days, especially at this season, that I fear we almost cease to appreciate them properly."

"Why do you think so?" asked her brother. "Because we don't spend our time in admiring them? That is not necessary, surely, as a proof of appreciation. But it is fine weather, and I hope yon will enjoy it, Bernard. What are you going to do with yourself to-day? Should you like to ride with me over to my plantation? I must go, and I can give you a pretty good mount."

"If you will allow me, I will avail myself of that pleasure another day," replied Lysle. I have made up my mind that this is a day specially designed for *dolce far niente*. One should not do anything; one should simply enjoy it. I see you have a hammock under the trees: I think I shall lie in that, and look at the pines."

"Very well," said Churchill, with a laugh. "Just as you like. It would not be my idea of a lively amusement; but every one to his taste. If you grow tired of the pines, Nettie will do her best to entertain you, I am sure."

"And I am sure, in that case, of being well entertained," said Lysle, with a bow toward his hostess. But, even as he uttered the little speech, he was saying to himself, Why Nettie? Why had Hugh not mentioned his sister? He looked across at that young lady, who no doubt read the question in his eyes, for she said, quietly:

"Since Hugh offers you a horse, and Nettie is to entertain you, Mr. Lysle, I am sorry that I can only offer the advice not to trust yourself too unreservedly to that hammock, which is somewhat weakened by age."

"You are very kind; I shall bear the warning in mind," said Lysle. "And you — may I ask how you intend to spend the day?"

"Very much as usual. I am always occupied in the morning. I teach school."

"She insists upon teaching these children," said Mrs. Churchill, quickly. "It is awfully good of her, as Hugh and I both feel. And since she teaches them, she has also consented to take two or three others — children of our neighbors and friends — as a matter of accommodation."

Miss Churchill smiled at the last words, but she made no comment on them, and, as she proceeded with her breakfast, Lysle cast more than one glance at her face, thinking that all his conclusions of the day before were strengthened by time and the searching morning light, which found no flaw in the clear, pale skin, the beautiful eyes and sensitive lips.

Breakfast over, Cecil disappeared, while Lysle walked out on the piazza with Churchill, whose horse was already saddled and waiting for him. "I am sorry that I must go," said the latter; "but eternal vigilance is the price of other things besides liberty. A man whose income depends on his crops can not indulge in *dolce far niente*, else I'd like nothing better than to spend the morning with you, talking of old times."

"We shall have other opportunities for that," said Lysle; " I warn you that you may have me on your hands for some time."

"The longer the better," answered Hugh, with a sincerity which could not be doubted. "Make yourself thoroughly at home; do just what you like, and don't let anybody — not even Nettie — make you do anything you don't like."

"Nobody ever does," responded Lysle, truthfully.

They walked down to the gate together, where Churchill mounted and rode away, while the other strolled with his cigar into the woods. He was gone for an hour or two, and Mrs. Churchill, who had meanwhile established herself with her work in a shady nook of the veranda, began to wonder what had become of him, when he reappeared as deliberately as he had disappeared, crossed the road, let himself in the gate, and walked quietly toward her.

"I am glad to see you," she said, as he mounted the steps and sat down in an inviting chair under the shade of the vines. "I began to feel afraid that you might be lost. The numerous paths and neighborhood roads through the pines are very bewildering to one who is not familiar with them, for they are all exactly alike."

“I know that," he answered, " and therefore I should not think of trusting to them. I always take my bearings in a strange place with this" — he indicated a small compass hanging to his watch-chain — "and then I am in no danger of being lost. Besides, much travel in wild lands has made me observant of many natural signs which escape most people."

"I should like so much to ask you to tell me something about those wild lands," she said; "only I feel as if it would be taking an unfair advantage of poor Cecil."

“How long is Miss Churchill occupied with her school?" he asked.

"Until two o'clock. I think, myself, that it is useless to give so much time; but Cecil is very thorough in all that she undertakes."

"And she teaches others besides your children?"

"Yes, four others — two little Ryders and two little Lawfords. Hugh dislikes it exceedingly; but Cecil is very obstinate. She will not consent to stay with us unless we allow her to teach the children; and as she teaches our children, she might as well teach others — at least she thinks so."

"She impresses me as a person of very decided character," observed Lysle.

Mrs. Churchill made a gesture which seemed to signify that the decision of her sister-in-law's character was beyond bounds. "She has always had her own way," she said, as if in explanation, "and she is — I regret to say it, but there can be no doubt of it — she is decidedly peculiar."

"Peculiarity is sometimes interesting," said Lysle. "Almost anything is better than being commonplace."

"Do you think so?" asked the lady, rather skeptically. "For my part, I prefer commonplaceness to peculiarity. The latter is so — hopeless."

"I should have said that it was just the other way — that commonplaceness was hopeless. But I am open to enlightenment."

She looked at him doubtfully, for, though not an intellectual woman, she was too shrewd not to know when she was laughed at.

"If you are open to enlightenment," she said, "Cecil is a very good case in point. No one could be more hopeless than she is. What is to become of her, I do not know; or rather, I do know — only too well. She will spend her life teaching a wretched little school, for she dislikes society, and she is so unapproachable that every one is afraid of her. She might have married well, if she would; but no man has ever come near her whom she would even take into consideration. What can be done with a girl like that? Am I not right in saying that she is hopeless? Perhaps," with a quick blush of recollection, " I ought not to tell you these things; but you would soon discover them for yourself."

"I have already discovered that Miss Churchill is not — commonplace," said Lysle. "As for the hopelessness, I do not see that. Why should you wish her to be exactly like other people?"

Mrs. Churchill regarded him with surprise, “I thought I had told you," she said; "because, if she were like other people, she would have a much happier life."

"I have not observed that to be commonplace is an infallible recipe for being happy,” he said, a little dryly. "If it were, and one had any option, one might feel that even happiness was too dearly bought. But I can not think that Miss Churchill is debarred from it because she has an original character. Her beauty alone should propitiate Fate."

“Her beauty!" Mrs. Churchill's eyes opened wide with astonishment. "Do you think her beautiful? She has never been considered more than fine-looking — hardly pretty."

"Pretty is not a word that applies to her at all."

"Perhaps not, but *beautiful*! I can not believe you really think her that."

"I assure you, however, that I do. She has a face that, if she were in the world, artists and poets, and the large class that follow their lead, would rave over."

"Would they, indeed?" said Mrs. Churchill. Her surprise was not abated, and, with her needle in the hand suspended above her work, she sat for a minute gazing at him. "What a pity," she said at length, “that she is not in what you call the world, by which, I suppose, you mean Europe! Perhaps she would allow herself to be admired by artists and poets, and people of that kind."

"It *is* a pity," said Lysle, with a smile. "Why does she not go? The fair American has become a conquering force over there, you know."

"Yes; but the fair American with money-bags," said Mrs. Churchill. "And who in the South— that is *anybody* — has money now? Most of us can manage to live — after a fashion. But that is all. We have no means to go abroad and compete with millionaires in foreign society."

"I suppose not," said Lysle, thoughtfully; and then there was a pause, which lasted for some time. Mrs. Churchill resumed her work, but she glanced occasionally at her companion with a look that would have amused him had he seen it; for it said many things. There was but one explanation, to her mind, of this interest in Cecil. If Lysle had not already fallen in love, he was in a fair way to do so; and hence, what would be easier than for him to rescue the girl from the narrowness of her present lot, and introduce her

into what he called "the world"? It was all delightfully simple to Mrs. Churchill's imagination, in which no complex considerations of any kind were likely to find a place.

Lysle, on his part, did not observe her glances. He was leaning back in his chair, looking at the sun-bathed tops of the pines, and thinking of a life, rich in possibilities of all kinds, bound down by relentless circumstances to an existence in which there was no room for mental growth, doomed to see youth fade and hope die, under a round of petty labors and cares. He felt as if it were intolerable; and yet his interest and concern were purely impersonal, little as Mrs. Churchill could have credited it. His compassion was stirred, and he was conscious of a chivalrous impulse to assist and, if possible, rescue; but the mode of rescue, which at once suggested itself to Mrs. Churchill, was far from his imagination. To admire a noble face, to be interested in an original character, was one thing; but to think of throwing himself into the breach and sacrificing his own life and his own freedom — for so it would have seemed to him — in order to play the part of rescuer, was an idea that did not even occur to him.

Presently he withdrew his eyes from their fixed but absent contemplation of the tree-tops, and fastened them on Mrs. Churchill, meeting and arresting one of the looks which she had been at intervals casting toward him. It seemed to her that the dark, shining glance penetrated to her brain and read all the thoughts that by this time had got as far as Cecil's wedding-dress. But Lysle was not at all cognizant of her thoughts; he was absorbed in his own.

“Some way must be found," said he, confidently. "There are many problems that look hopeless until one sets to work with a resolute will to solve them."

"A resolute will can do a great deal," said Mrs. Churchill, who did not know to what problem he alluded, but whose speculations followed their own bent. “If Hugh and I had listened to the warnings of our friends, I should not have the pleasure of being here to entertain you now."

"And you have never regretted that you took the risk?" said Lysle, with ready sympathy. He did not perceive the connection between this remark and his own speech; but he was accustomed to the personal turn which most people like to give to conversation.

"Regretted it! — oh!" Words seemed too feeble to express how little she had regretted it. "I tremble when I think we might have feared and not risked it!" she cried. "I do not think there is a happier woman in the world than I have been through all our hardships, which were not hardships at all compared with what it would have been to be separated. And that is what makes me sorry for Cecil — that there has not seemed to be any chance of such happiness for her. There are men who admire her, but she will not look at them; and to grow old without any home or life of your own — that is dreadful!"

Lysle could not repress a smile. Little as he knew Cecil, he felt certain that the life which appeared so desirable to her sister-in-law would appear to her as a bondage worse than loneliness. But he was aware that no words could make this comprehensible to the woman before him — the woman who was the type of a class as wide as the world and as old as humanity, to whom the happiness and the duties of domestic life form the solid foundations of existence — without which, indeed, existence would seem a thing void of purpose or meaning.

"I hope that Miss Churchill may be able to command a life of her own," he said. "But some lives can not be framed on the universal pattern, you know; something must be allowed for singularity of character. I can not tell what would suit her until I know her better," he added, as if speaking to himself.

Mrs. Churchill gave him a glance of surprise. It seemed very plain to her what would suit Cecil best.

"I do not think you will find any difficulty in knowing her better," she said. "Most people do find difficulty in knowing, or, at least, in understanding her, but you will not. She has been very much interested in you. I have never seen her so much pleased by anything as by the prospect of your coming."

This was not new intelligence to Lysle. He remembered the voice that had told him much the same thing under the pines the evening before. It made him feel now, as then, that he must offer

something in return; that such pathetic expectation (for was it not like a prisoner longing for one brief glimpse of the outer world through the eyes of a friend?) could not be disappointed.

"I shall be happy if my coming can give her any pleasure," he said; "or, better yet, if I can serve her in any way. She fills one with the desire to take away the fetters on her life, and give her the existence for which she was made. I should like to see her," he said, with a soft laugh, "fully launched in that existence. I should like to see what she would do, what she would become."

Could words be plainer than these? Mrs. Churchill thought not, and she gave him another glance of approbation, though she felt that it was necessary to seem not to recognize his meaning.

"I am sure you will find that you have a great deal in common," she said.

Chapter V.

"My dear Cecil," said Mrs. Churchill, earnestly, "pray do not wear that dress! Mr. Lysle is going to walk with yon, I am sure. He is in the hammock pretending to read; but I have seen him for the last half-hour watching the house, and I am certain he is waiting for you to appear."

"Well, and what then?" asked Cecil, who was standing before the mirror in her chamber putting on her hat. "I shall be glad if he goes, for I like to talk to him, or, rather, to hear him talk; but what has that to do with my dress?"

"You foolish girl!" cried her sister-in-law. "Why, it has everything to do with it! A man, whether he knows it or not, thinks twice as much of a woman who is prettily dressed, and takes twice as much interest in talking to her. Now, that old serge is disgraceful!"

"Is it?" said the wearer of the serge, calmly regarding it. "I really can not see that. It is old, of course, but good enough for the pine-woods."

"For the pine-woods, yes — but not good enough for Mr. Lysle. Put on your new surah."

"Nettie, are you distracted?"

"Oh, no!" cried Nettie; "it is you who are distracted — you who will not heed anything that more experienced people tell you!" Then, with a sudden change of tone: "To oblige me, pray do. I can not bear Mr. Lysle to see you such a dowdy!"

' To oblige you I would do a great deal," said Cecil; "but I really can not sacrifice my best dress, for I have promised the boys to take them to Elliott's Pond, and that is rather a rough walk. How can you think that Mr. Lysle would observe what I wear — or that it would make any difference if he did observe it?"

"Because I know more of the world and more of men than you do."

"That is very possible," said Miss Churchill, quietly; "but I know best what is suitable for a walk to Elliott's Pond. By-the-by, I wish you would divert Nettie's attention, for she can not go with us; it is too far."

She drew on her gloves as she spoke and left the room, while her defeated and provoked sister-in-law, looking after her, could not deny that the much-worn serge fitted her figure well, and that its soft folds had a great deal of grace. "But that is because she is so graceful herself that anything would look well on her," she thought. "It is to be hoped that Mr. Lysle is as unobservant as some men, and that he will not discover how shabby she is."

Lysle would not have described himself as unobservant, nor would any one else have been likely to apply the term to him, but certainly the idea of shabbiness, as connected with Miss Churchill, did not occur to his mind when he saw her. If he thought of her dress at all, it was to reflect how well its lines

showed the curves of her beautifully molded form. But, in fact, this was only a passing impression, entirely subordinate to the attention which he gave to the cordial frankness of her smile.

"You are coming with us?" she said, as he rose and advanced to meet her. "I thought you might perhaps like to do so, but I must warn you that we are going rather far."

"That does not matter," he answered. "What is not too far for you is certainly not too far for me — that is, if I shall not be in your way."

"Oh, not at all. I have promised the boys to take them to Elliott's Pond — the only sheet of water in our neighborhood, and therefore highly esteemed by them — so 1 can promise you a little more variety than there would be in any other walk we could choose."

"The variety is not necessary as an inducement. I have told you how much I like the monotony of the pines."

"You will not escape the pines," she said, smiling. "Our way, of course, lies through them — but not in the same direction we followed yesterday."

As she spoke, they turned toward the valley on the western side of the house. At the bottom of this valley a small stream flowed, and Lysle was informed that by following it for about two miles they would reach their destination — the pond from which it issued. He was well content to do so. A much greater distance would not have dismayed him, with the golden beauty of the October afternoon around him, and Cecil Churchill by his side. The boys, with their intimate friend and companion — a great Newfoundland dog — ran on before, while these two paced slowly along over the carpet of pine-straw, with the solemn trees above, and the soft, warm air encompassing them like a caress of Nature.

“And so," said Lysle, following with his eyes the two small figures which disappeared around a gentle slope in front of them, "you are an instructor of youth, Miss Churchill?"

"Yes," she answered, "after a fashion."

He glanced at her with one of his quick smiles. "I fancy that it must be after a very good fashion," he said. “You do not strike me as a person who would undertake to do a thing which you could not do thoroughly."

"That is very kind of you," she began, but he interrupted:

"Kind of me — pardon — to receive a certain impression of you? I am sure you do not think that!"

"Well, perhaps not," she said, with a laugh, "since you put it in that way. And you are right in so far that I would not undertake to teach what I did not know thoroughly. But to know is not enough. In order to teach well, one should have the faculty of imparting knowledge, of interesting and quickening the intelligence of others — and I fail in those things."

"Why?"

"Because I can not put myself sufficiently *en rapport* with the children's minds, I suppose. They weary instead of interesting me."

"You do not like children?"

"Why should one like children simply as children? You might as well ask me if I like people. I like some children, as I like some people — but not many."

"I should think that your liking would be of a very discriminating order," he said, smiling again. "But this consciousness — shall I call it? — on your part must make the labor very irksome to you."

"It does. But what then? The world could not go on if people gave up labor whenever it became irksome."

"Oh, the world!" He made a little gesture of indifference. “That may go on as best it can. I confess that I am not interested in it. But *you* — why should you do this thing if it is disagreeable to you? I know," he added, quickly, "that it is a question I have no right to ask — but perhaps you will pardon me for asking it."

"It is a natural question, if Nettie has been telling you that I do it for my amusement, as very likely she has," Miss Churchill answered, quietly. "But the truth is, that I do it for the sake of independence. I can not feel that I am a charge upon my brother so long as I save him the expense of a governess for his children. And with regard to the others whom I teach — well, that is in order to 'put money in my purse.' Not much, certainly, but enough for my personal needs. Now, are you satisfied, Mr. Lysle?"

"I am answered. Miss Churchill; but I can not honestly declare that I am satisfied. I suppose you know what it is to have your sense of the fitness of things offended? Well, my sense of the fitness of things is altogether offended by the picture you have drawn of yourself — wasting your youth and your powers in teaching half a dozen small children to read, and write, and parse."

"Wasting my youth and my powers!" she repeated. "I grant the youth — although I really do not see what else I could do with it. But the powers — I am afraid, Mr. Lysle, that you must be laughing at me."

"No," said Lysle. "Forgive me, but you are not afraid of anything of the kind. You know that I mean what I say, and you also know that you have powers which are not ordinary."

The expression of her face changed as suddenly as if a mask had been removed from it. She turned her head and looked at him with eyes full of sadness.

"I do not know it," she said. "I know that I have desires which torment me, and (that I have aspirations which, no doubt, are only follies; but I do not know that I have any powers. How could I know it?"

"The question is, rather, how could you avoid knowing it?" said Lysle, trying to speak lightly, yet touched by the pathetic fall of the voice over the last words. "Do you think — do you really think — that you are made of commonplace material?"

"Not exactly," she answered. "The fact of my peculiarity has been very carefully impressed upon me from my childhood. But one may be peculiar without being remarkable otherwise."

"That depends entirely upon the form which the peculiarity takes. I should say that yours means that you are — remarkable."

"You have not known me long enough to discover that," she said, quickly.

"You pay a very poor compliment to my penetration," he returned. "Have you forgotten our conversation yesterday afternoon? I learned a great many things in the course of that."

"I thought it was the other way — that I learned a good many things. But perhaps you will tell me what you learned?"

"For one thing, I learned that you possess so much discernment, that if I had been as certain of your indulgence as of the kindness of your judgment, I should have been tempted to ask how you had acquired it — here?"

"And 1 should have answered that, if I have any discernment of the kind you mean, I have not acquired it here — or anywhere. It is an instinct, not an acquirement."

"Exactly. And so are other things — other powers which you possess, and of which you must be as conscious as I am that I possess the capability of — let us say, writing a readable book within a reasonable length of time."

“You forget that you have written books. I have done nothing."

"But I was more sure of my power before I had written anything than I am now. *Now* I know its limitations; *then* it had none — in my fancy, at least. Do not try to make me believe, Miss Churchill, that you have no faith in yourself, for I am certain that you must have."

"No," she said, "I have none. Believe it, and let us talk of something else — of your life, if you have no objection. To talk of mine oppresses me — like the life itself; but, when I hear you talk, I seem to feel myself transported into another existence. Wonderful fresh airs seem blowing round me; continents

and seas unroll before me; the lights of great cities shine before my eyes; I realize all that there is in the world — and all that there might be."

"For you," he said, "there might be intense pleasure, for you would find in yourself a response to every influence of nature or of art."

"Perhaps so" — she drew her brows together as if in pain; "but why will you persist in talking of me?"

"Because the subject possesses an interest for me which it apparently does not for you. But, since you desire it, I will talk of something else. Only tell me what it shall be."

"You wish me to choose the subject?"

"Can you ask? Have you forgotten so soon your promise of yesterday? The volume is in your hands: turn to what page you will."

"You are very good. Tell me, then, something of intellectual society in London. I suppose you know it very well?"

"I know it tolerably well — that is, I know most of the intellectual and artistic celebrities. But you are, perhaps, aware that we have nothing in London answering to the French *salon*, so there is no solidarity in our intellectual world. The people exist, however, and therefore — shall I commence with the older, or younger, celebrities?"

"Commence with the older and pass on to the younger," said she, smiling.

Perhaps Lysle exerted himself to talk specially well, or perhaps he talked well without exertion, inspired by the close attention of his listener; but, certainly, two miles had never before appeared so short to Cecil. One after another of those whose names are famous throughout the world seemed to pass before her, until she felt as if the winding valley, with its golden atmosphere, would ever after be filled with a procession of great figures, shadowy yet distinct.

Meanwhile, as they advanced, the gentle ridges on each side grew bolder, and presently, turning round the projecting slope of a hill, they found themselves in a glen where the heights, taking a more abrupt character, suddenly closed around a sheet of water that lay imprisoned in their embrace. So still it lay, so absolutely devoid of motion, that it was like an enchanted lake, buried here in the far recesses of the hills. Steep banks rose on every side from the clear expanse, that as a mirror reflected the dark masses of trees surrounding it. Deep shadows and soft lights made up the scene, in which there was a suggestion of infinite melancholy; for, although floods of sunshine fell on the surface of the water, it was like an illusive brightness, that could not touch the depths below, which seemed to hold and brood over some secret whispered by the solemn, girdling pines.

"What a melancholy place!" said Lysle, involuntarily.

Cecil looked at him with a smile. "Do you think it melancholy now?" she asked. "You should see it on a sunless day — say of late November or December — when the sky is covered with gray cloud, and there is not a ray of light or a tint of color anywhere. You would call it melancholy then."

"I dare say I should. And you — do you always make a point of coming to see it on such days?"

She laughed. "Oh, no. But I confess that on such a day I am very likely to think of it; and if I go out, and if there is nothing else to do, I have more inclination to turn my face in this direction than in any other."

"I see," said Lysle. The glance which rested on her seemed to indicate that he saw a good deal.

She caught and understood it, for she colored a little. "I am afraid you think me morbid," she said.

"No," he answered, smiling. "Some one of a robustly cheerful and unimaginative disposition might think you so, but I do not. I only think that you need more brightness in your life."

"Mr. Lysle, have I not told you —"

"Yes," he interposed, "but you must suffer me to disregard what you have told me. Let us sit down — you must be tired — and then let me ask you a question or two about this life of yours."

There was a gentle insistence in his tone and manner so far removed from anything presumptuous, and so full of unspoken interest and sympathy, that she yielded, and sat down on the bank, with its warm, dry carpet of pine-straw, the still water at her feet and the whispering trees above. The slumberous softness of the afternoon was all about them, broken only by the shouts of laughter of the boys, who had gone to the upper end of the pond and were amusing themselves by sending the dog into the water after fragments of stick.

Lysle threw himself down by Miss Churchill's side and held his peace for a moment. He had a singular sensation — an anticipation of the future, as it were — which made him feel that he should long recall this spot, with its bright stillness and its underlying melancholy, as a frame for the figure beside him, for the pale, beautiful face that looked at him with wistful eyes. His own eyes passed from point to point, taking in every detail — brown hill-sides, shadowy ravines, dream-like water, and mellow sunshine falling on the rich, deep green of the massed pine-foliage. There was a spell in the scene which his voice hardly seemed to break when he spoke:

"You think that I am persistent in wishing to discuss your life, but it is because I received from it much the same impression which this water gives me — that of a thing confined in such narrow limits that it has sunk into still hopelessness."

"Well," she said, without looking at him, for her own eves were fastened on the mirror-like surface at her feet — "and if I admit that your comparison is a good one, what then? The limits exist, and must remain."

"Not necessarily. This water might be released, to rush down the valley in a quick, rejoicing stream, instead of being pent here in silence and loneliness."

"The water? Yes, no doubt that could easily be done; but there your comparison fails. There is no power to set my life free in that way."

"Again forgive my persistence, but why not?"

She looked at him with evident surprise. "Surely you know," she said, simply. "When one is poor, one's life must be bound in narrow limits — and I am poor. Have you not understood that? I have no fortune at all. How, then, would you propose that my life should be set free?"

It was a direct and practical question, which Lysle found himself altogether unable to answer. In the eagerness of his interest he had not sufficiently considered the fact of the ruin that had overtaken the Churchills. He saw Hugh prospering after a manner, and he failed to realize that his sister might be penniless. The realization came to him with a shock. As he looked at her with a startled glance, she smiled.

"You see it is as 1 told you yesterday afternoon," she said. "A woman is powerless to make her tastes or her capacities serve her needs. I can not go and become a war correspondent. I must sit at home and teach a few small children."

"You can not go and become a war correspondent — no," he answered. "But you are mistaken if you think there are not many other ways in which a woman's tastes and capacities can serve her needs. It is the narrowness of your life which makes you entertain such an idea."

"Again let me remind you that I told you yesterday how fully I am aware that in the world many things are open to women as well as to men. But if one is not in the world, and if one has not the means of going there — if one is bound fast in a life of the narrowest possible opportunities — what would you propose that one should do? Ah, believe me" — her voice changed suddenly from calm reasoning to passionate feeling —"l have beaten my wings against the bars until I know their strength; I have thought of everything, and if I have tried nothing, it has only been because there was nothing to try. You talked, a little while ago, of my powers, and I hope you did not guess what mockery your words seemed to me. For even if it were true that I have some capabilities, some gifts which are not common, of what use are they without cultivation? And I have been debarred from that, as from all else. You can not imagine how I feel the need of wider education and higher culture — how I have vainly stretched out my hands and caught

what glimpses and fragments I could — how I have eaten out my heart in longing for what I had no power to reach. Ah, what bitterness it has been!" She suddenly turned her face away from him. "I don't see why I should tell you all this," she added, after a moment, in a different tone.

"I see," said Lysle, softly. He was deeply moved and touched. "You tell me because you are as sure of my understanding and sympathy as I was sure of yours yesterday afternoon. It is as I said then: we are meant to be friends — and friends should help each other. You must suffer me to help you."

"That is impossible," she said, coldly and proudly. "No one can help me, and I have only told you because —"

"Because I was so insistent. Yes, I know. But I have seen a good deal of the world, and if I might read the riddle to you, and point out, perhaps, how your abilities could be employed to further your wishes —"

He paused, for she looked at him now with something of quickened eagerness under the sad hopelessness of her eyes. But the gleam faded almost as quickly as it came.

"It is impossible," she said again. "If I have any capacities, they are untrained; and what is untrained is useless; I know enough to be sure of that."

"You are determined to take an absolutely hopeless view of the case," he said. "But you rouse my obstinacy, and I am determined to make you see things in a different light."

Again she drew her brows together as if in pain or displeasure. "You mean to be kind, Mr. Lysle," she said; "I have no doubt of that. But I really can not perceive why you should take so much interest —"

"Then let me tell you why," said Lysle, gently. He saw that it was necessary to assure his footing before he could advance a step farther with this proud and susceptible spirit, and, being a man of many happy inspirations, he knew at once how it could best be done. "When I came first to this country," he said, "I was a lonely, companionless child, with a father who was dying. I shall never forget, Miss Churchill, the infinite kindness of your father toward us. There were absolutely no bounds to that kindness, to his splendid hospitality, or to the delicate consideration that seemed always trying to do us a benefit or give us a pleasure. And how many pleasures he gave me! My life contains no brighter or happier memories than of the days — nay, the weeks and months — I spent at your beautiful old home on the sea-coast. How I can see it at this moment — the great house, alive always with gayety and movement, the noble avenues of live-oaks, the spacious gardens filled with fragrance, and the wide stretch of the river opening to the sea! All the delights that boyhood most keenly loves, I knew there in perfection; and all of them had a deeper zest from the admiration and affection that I felt for your father. He lives in my memory as a model of stately manhood, yet so genial, so kindly, that no child could fear him for an instant."

"Ah, how true that is!" she said, softly. "I only knew him as a child, but it is just so that I remember him."

"Well," said Lysle, "think of all that kindness treasured in my memory — as I assure you that it has been — during the long years that have passed since I went away, with not the least power to return it in any degree, or even to show my recollection of it; and now. Miss Churchill — now, if I can do the least service to you, shall I not be only repaying in some small degree my debt to your father? And should you deny me the pleasure of doing that? Surely not, if you are as generous as he was."

She smiled a little, though crystal moisture was shining in her eyes. "I suppose we all like better to give than to receive," she said. "At least, I am sure that I do. But you have made your plea well, Mr. Lysle, and have rendered it impossible for me to refuse to let you serve me — if there were any way in which you could. But there is none."

"That is the point you must let me decide," he said, quickly. "I do not wish to annoy you, but you can not deny that you have always been conscious of something in yourself which sets you apart from the people around you — that you feel the stirring of a power which may not yet have found its particular

expression, or that, again, may have done so. That is what I should like to know, if you have no objection to telling me — whether it has found expression."

"I see," she said, "that I might as well tell you everything of the little there is to tell. Yes, it has found its expression. I have tried — to write. But what I have attempted has fallen so far short of what I wished to do — I have been so disgusted and discouraged by every effort I have made — that I have said to myself that my aspiration is only a folly, and that I have no real power at all."

"You are not the best judge of that," he said. "In fact, you are no judge at all. I grant you that it is possible to possess the artistic temperament without artistic power — strange as it may seem. But that is not the case with you. I am certain of it."

“How can you be certain? You know nothing — well, then, so little — of me."

"Must I remind you again that I lay claim to some power of penetration? I divined you — may I say? — the first moment that I looked at you; and every word that you have uttered since then has deepened my interest, and proved the accuracy of my first impression."

She did not answer, as she looked away meditatively, over the sunlit water, at the pine-clad slopes of the opposite bank. Lysle, on his part, regarded the pure, pale profile, the large, full, thoughtful eyes, and said to himself that the interest which had first made him desire to lead her to reveal herself was indeed deepening with every moment. He felt that she was like the water before him in more respects than that of which he had spoken. Like it, she showed a surface calm and even sunny, but he knew that underneath there were depths which he had not even begun to sound. Perhaps it was natural that this realization should have filled him with a desire to sound them.

He did not break her musing pause, and at length she glanced around and met his gaze. "The question is," she said, "How are you going to test the accuracy of your belief?"

"Surely," he answered, "that is easily done. I have exercised my judgment in a critical capacity very often; will you not let me exercise it once more? Will you not show me something that you have written?"

She drew back quickly. "No; it is impossible," she said. "Have I not told you that I have failed — utterly?"

"You think so; but for that very reason I do not believe that you have. If you were satisfied with your efforts, I should have less hope. That is a paradox, perhaps," he said, with a smile, “but I think you will understand it."

"Yes, I understand," she answered, "but you are mistaken."

He lifted his shoulders lightly. "Then it is very easy to convince me of the fact."

“I suppose it is." She frowned, however, as she looked away again. Her reluctance to what he proposed was evidently very deep-seated. "It may seem strange," she said, at length, "that I should mind this so much, when I have told you that I have failed. It would appear as if I should not care what you thought of that which has disgusted myself. And yet, does one like to show one's failures to a critical eye, when — O Mr. Lysle, you force me to say it! — one feels that under kindlier circumstances one might have done better?"

Mr. Lysle's critical eye gave a flash of triumph.

"Ah!" he said, "I have forced you to acknowledge that you have some faith in yourself. I understand what you feel; but do not fear that I shall not know how to make allowances for all the difficulties under which you have labored. I shall not look for fulfillment; I shall only look for promise."

“Well, then," she said, with a faint smile, "on that condition I may think of it. And there is something else. Will you promise not to utter one word of compliment — not to gloss over the truth in the faintest degree?"

"Am I not even to praise, if praise is due? You may be sure I shall not praise if it is not due."

"I had rather you did not think that there was even a possibility of praise; for, honestly, I should not believe in its sincerity."

"That is because you do me less than justice," he said. "I should not think of insulting you with false praise. But we will not speak of praise at all. I shall simply tell you what I believe your efforts indicate — what degree of power and hope for your future."

She bent her head with the gesture of one who accepts an offered service. "If you will do that," she said, "and that only, I shall be grateful. After all, it is hard to estimate the exact value of what one does one's self. And now" — she rose — "I think it is time we should be setting our faces homeward. Will you call the boys?"

Chapter VI.

Lysle took care that Miss Churchill should not forget her promise. He reminded her of it a few days later, as they sat one evening in the gloaming on the piazza. He was not surprised that her reluctance to fulfill it seemed as strong as ever; he had felt sure she would regret the confidence he had in a measure extorted, and that her life-long reticence could not be broken without pain to herself. But he was not prepared for her penetration, when she said:

"Why are yon so anxious for this, Mr. Lysle? Is it because you want to study myself in my poor efforts?"

He smiled. "I admit that you are a very interesting study," he replied; "but 1 assure you that, if I have such a selfish end in view at all, it is at least not my chief end. What I desire — I must repeat it, though you will not believe me — is to serve you if I can, by means of such critical faculty and knowledge of life as I possess."

Even in the twilight he saw that she blushed. "You must pardon me for making yon repeat it," she said; "but faith is not my strong point — neither faith in myself nor in others."

"I should like," he said, "to teach you faith in yourself, and after that a limited faith in me. I would not be unreasonable: I would not ask that it should be boundless, but only that you would believe in the sincerity of my good intentions."

"I do not doubt your sincerity," she answered, gravely. “You must not think so."

"Then you doubt something else — the degree of my interest, or my capacity to judge, or my power to serve you. Doubt all, if you will, but give me at least an opportunity to prove that you are mistaken. It comes to this — I claim your promise."

He spoke eagerly, and in his eagerness held out his hand — a slender, nervous, muscular hand — as if he expected her to produce at once what he desired; but she only sat silent for a minute, looking at him. Their glances met in the dusk — his bright and vivid, hers deep, doubtful, searching. At length, with a supreme effort, her hesitation seemed to end. She said, in a low tone, "Wait!" and, rising, entered the house. Lysle smiled to himself as he leaned back in his chair. He had gained his point, and, in the satisfaction of feeling this, he forgot to consider that it would be rather awkward if, after all, he had to declare the worthlessness of what was to be submitted to him.

Cecil returned in a few minutes with a small package in her hand. He rose quickly, and she gave it to him, saying: "It is true that I promised, so here is the fulfillment of my promise; but it will serve no purpose."

"That remains to be seen," he answered, as he slipped the parcel into an inner pocket of his coat. "Meanwhile, I thank you for trusting me."

She did not answer, for at that moment there was a step behind them. Mrs. Churchill appeared, and opportunity for further speech was at an end.

Lysle felt like a victor with a hardly-won trophy, when, in the safe seclusion of his chamber a few hours later, he drew forth the package. Yet he also felt as if he were violating the secrecy of this reserved spirit — this soul that locked in itself with jealous care all the wealth of its imagination and the passion of its aspiration. He was like one who stood on the threshold of a sanctuary where no profane foot had ever entered before. What should he find within? What revelation of weakness or of power would these pages hold? He looked at them as if half regretting the persistence which had placed them in his hands. Then, with a smile at his own folly, he sat down and began to read.

He read at first with careful and critical attention, then, as his interest quickened, with rapid eagerness. His taste, trained according to the finest standard of French rather than English art, found faults and to spare; but he also found a power for which he was unprepared, much as he had said to Cecil of belief in her capabilities. What she had given him was a story dealing with the rude class — the wood-cutters and turpentine-gatherers — that live in the remotest depths of the pine-lands. It was a recital of brief passion ending in swift tragedy, and, while crude in many respects, there was a vigor in every stroke, and a strong dramatic instinct which missed no essential point. As was to be expected, it was steeped in local color. The somber aisles of the great forest opened in long vistas; its deep melancholy unconsciously acting upon the narrow lives of those who dwelt within it, was presented vividly on every page, and gave to the whole narrative a tinge of romanticism — as if the events took place in some dim region of shadow rather than in the broad light of common day. But if the characters were also a little shadowy, as became the scene in which they moved, there was strong and living emotion behind them — emotion which seized the attention and held it as by a spell, while the story of a wild, almost barbarous life, and of the most primitive human passion, hurried on. The very primitiveness of the passion gave an impression of power which studies of a more complex order lack. Lysle felt as if living hearts were bleeding and breaking before him; and when a few strong touches painted the final climax, and the melancholy forest depths seemed to close upon a tragedy complete and simple as that of the Greek dramatists, he let the sheet fall from his hand, and sat for a moment staring at it.

Perhaps his first impulse was to laugh at himself. He remembered how he had talked to Miss Churchill with easy patronage of her "power," little reckoning on such power as was here. He had opened her manuscript, looking for little of artistic value, but for some interesting revelations of herself, and almost from the first line he had been compelled to forget herself in what she had produced. He knew that this was the supreme test of the ability of the creative artist, and he longed to assure her of a triumph in which she could not but believe. He rose from his chair; in his impatience he felt as if he could hardly wait for the morning in order to say, "You have but to spread your wings and fly!" There was, however, nothing to do at present but to walk over to the window, to sit clown and light a cigar.

It was after midnight, and not only the house but the whole outer world was wrapped in stillness. Silver radiance flooded everything, for the moon was high in the heaven, and flung her light broadly over the landscape, steeped in the quiet of night, over the pines that seemed altogether motionless as they stood in dark relief against the sky, over the flowers in the garden below, and over the valley that led to the pond among the hills. Lysle thought of that pond, and fancied how the light fell on its still surface, and how deep were the shadows of its pine-clad banks, while he said to himself that he realized now more clearly than before how the imprisoned water, reflecting only the somber trees and the distant sky, was a perfect image of Cecil Churchill's life. How was that life to be set free? More than ever he recognized the necessity for freedom, for the high culture that can only be obtained by contact with the world of intellectual thought and effort, for varied experience and knowledge of life. All this was essential, if the power displayed in the effort which had moved him so strongly was ever to reach its full development, or indeed any development at all. "The prison must be opened!" he thought. "But how?"

It was a question more easily asked than answered; and he sat long, taking counsel of the night upon it. And was it the night which whispered a solution that stirred his pulses strangely? Should he stretch out his hand and offer freedom, coupled with a bondage that wider knowledge might make as irksome as that from which he opened escape? He saw all that was implied in this, and all that might flow from it, as he sat motionless, gazing with bright, intent eyes into the distance. No, it was impossible — or possible only as a last resort. He wanted to remove the fetters that bound her life, not to substitute others for them; he wanted to see the unfolding of her nature and her powers in perfect freedom. After that had been accomplished, then, perhaps — but here he paused with another soft inward laugh. "As if the future ever fulfills any dream that we are foolish enough to make concerning it!" he thought. "Better leave it alone. I shall have my study, in any event; I shall see what change her nature and her genius will undergo in those altered conditions which must be brought about."

The long meditation finally ended in his returning to the table, where a lamp burned and the scattered sheets of Cecil's manuscript lay. There he opened his writing-case, and began a letter. It proved to be of considerable length: page after page was covered by his compact handwriting before the end came. Then he folded, inclosed, and addressed it to "La Marchesa del Ferrata, Florence, Italy." After that he went to bed.

The first distinct thought in his mind, when he opened his eyes to the sunshine the next morning, was one of vexation that several hours must elapse before he could have an opportunity of seeing Cecil alone. He execrated the school which seemed so absurd as connected with her; and then suddenly the recollection that it was Saturday flashed upon him, and brought comfort in its train. If she followed the ordinary custom of giving a holiday on that day, he might be able to see her immediately after breakfast, and relieve himself of all that he was so eager to say.

But disappointment is a good discipline, no doubt, and, in the hopes which he indulged, Mr. Lysle forgot that Miss Churchill and himself were not the inhabitants of a desert island. He reckoned entirely without his hosts — who, he soon found, were to be taken into consideration. After breakfast Hugh announced that, instead of going to the plantation, he had business in Oldfield which demanded his attention, and would Lysle care to ride there with him, he asked. Lysle pleaded indolence, and declined; so then Mr. Churchill decided that afternoon would do as well as morning for his business, and that he, too, would indulge in *dolce far niente*. He lighted a cigar, and sat down on the veranda, where Mrs. Churchill presently appeared with her needlework. Lysle groaned in spirit when he found himself thus encompassed. What was he to do? In common decency he could not rush away from these cordial people in search of Cecil, even had he known where to find her, and that he did not know. She had disappeared after breakfast as usual, and, although he perceived the children at liberty, and knew, therefore, that she was not in school, he did not know in the least where else she might be.

All of this impatience was, however, confined within his own breast. There was no sign of it in his tranquil manner, in his easy speech, or in the attention that he gave to Hugh's conversation and Mrs. Churchill's comments. Long practice had enabled him to preserve this perfect outward composure under most circumstances, and at present, as he was well aware what he desired was only delayed. Cecil must appear, his opportunity must come after a while, and, this being so, he could listen with a sufficient degree of interest to Churchill’s animated description of the political, social, and agricultural state of the country.

But, when he least expected it, diversion and relief arrived. Suddenly an open carriage, filled with ladies, drove up to the gate, Mrs. Churchill, with a start, cried, "Oh, there are the Denhams!" and Hugh, throwing away his cigar, went to meet them. Lysle rose also, and moved toward the window that opened to the floor behind him.

"Are you going away, Mr. Lysle?" asked Mrs. Churchill, glancing at him. "Pray, don't! I know they would like to meet you."

"Pardon me," said Lysle, with a smile, “but I do not really think they would. I do not feel any capability of proving interesting as a new acquaintance — so early in the day."

"I am sure they would think you interesting at any time; but, of course, I will not insist. Please find Cecil, though, and tell her that she must come."

"With pleasure," he answered, disappearing with alacrity.

Find Cecil! He smiled again as he went away, thinking how entirely this was what he wished to do. But where was he to find her? The manner in which Mrs. Churchill spoke seemed to imply that it was an easy task; but he had little or no knowledge of Miss Churchill's habits, and knew not where to turn. He soon encountered one of the children, however, who promptly gave the desired information.

"Aunt Cecil?" said Jack. "Oh, yes, I know where she is. She's in the school-house, down there at the end of the garden."

A small finger pointed as lie spoke, and Lysle, following it with his eye, perceived a building half-buried in green vines. It occurred to him that perhaps he ought to send Jack to inform Miss Churchill of the demand that society made upon her; but, his own desires being strongly opposed to this, he decided to follow their dictate, and so took his way along the garden paths toward the small house that, as he approached, more clearly revealed itself as a very primitive structure overrun on one side by a luxuriant climbing rose, and on the other by yellow jasmine. Evidently it contained only one room; but there was a rustic porch at the door, and into this he stepped, not prepared to find the door itself standing open.

It was, however, wide open, and he looked directly into the room where Cecil sat at a table near a window, through which the sunshine fell, throwing flickering shadows of the vines upon her. At the sound of his step she looked up, and her surprise had no need of words to express it. He answered at once the unspoken interrogation of her glance.

"Forgive me, if I disturb you. My excuse is that Mrs. Churchill bade me find you, and tell you that you are wanted."

"For what?"

"For the fulfillment of a social duty. Some ladies have just arrived — their name, I think, is Denham. You are wanted to see them."

Having delivered himself of this speech, Mr. Lysle leaned against the side of the door in an easy attitude, and looked at Miss Churchill, who frowned.

"Why should I be wanted to see them?" she asked. ' They are Nettie's friends — she knows that I care nothing about them."

"If one only saw the people whom one cared about —" observed Lysle, with a shrug which significantly finished the sentence. "But that is nevertheless what I hoped you would say, for I want very much to see you — more, I am sure, than the ladies in question possibly can."

"Oh!" said Cecil. She rose, as if he offered her an inducement to go away immediately. "I suppose that I must see them," she said.

"But not at once, surely?" said Lysle. "They will stay some time, will they not? People who visit in the country mostly do. And I have been anxious to see you ever since — well, ever since I read your manuscript last night. It was as much as I could do to go to bed without telling you what I thought of it. But I said to myself, 'In the morning.' Yet here is the morning nearly gone, and I have not had an opportunity to tell you anything! Are you indifferent, or distrustful, or regretful. Miss Churchill, that you have taken such pains not to give me the opportunity?"

"I have taken no pains at all," she said. "I have simply done what I always do — come here on Saturday morning to look over and correct the compositions of the children. How did I know that you had even read mine?" She smiled faintly and a little bitterly. "I wonder if it did not seem to you very much what these" — she pointed to the blotted pages before her — “seem to me?"

"How is it possible for you to do yourself such injustice!" cried he, quickly. "If you were not *you*, I should —"

"Doubt my sincerity?" she said, as he paused. "Well, perhaps I deserve that you should. Self-dispraise is almost as bad as self-praise. But, if you read my manuscript last night, Mr. Lysle, I spent the night on a bed of repentance for having given it to you."

"I do not doubt that," he answered. "But never was repentance more misplaced. And now I must ask a question — Are you going to believe what I tell you? Have you confidence in my judgment and in my sincerity?"

She sank back in her chair, and looked at him for a moment as if doubtful what to answer. Then she said, with a slight increase of color: "I thought we settled that yesterday. Should I have given you my manuscript if I had not believed in your sincerity and your judgment?"

"Perhaps you believed in them when you gave me the manuscript — at least I hope so. But what were you regretting during your night of repentance, if it was not having trusted me?"

"Mr. Lysle," she said, "you cover me with shame. I have never doubted your good intentions — not for a moment. I have only feared that your kindness might lead you to disguise the truth to me. I can see that you are kind — you would dislike to say a disagreeable thing — and — so — and so —"

"And so you thought that I would break my promise, and deceive you shamefully in order to say a few pleasant things? You are right, Miss Churchill: faith is not your strong point."

There was something appealing in her eyes as she raised them to his face. "I am sorry," she said, simply, "but how can I help it? Teach me, if you can, to believe in myself. When I hear you speak, I already believe in you."

His smile showed that he was pleased. "Then," he said, "you will believe me when I tell you the truth about your writing?"

"It will be hard to believe, if you praise it — as I almost think you mean to do — but I will try."

He made a slight impatient gesture. "There is to be no such thing as praise — we settled that some time ago; there is to be only a candid opinion, which will be none the less candid because truth compels it to be favorable. Miss Churchill, your work amazed me."

Despite herself, the breath came quickly on her lips. "How?" she asked.

"By the power which it displays — much greater power than I had expected or thought possible. I knew that you possessed mental qualities of a rare order; but until the actual test is made one can never be sure of the productive faculty. Some of the cleverest people I have ever known lacked it altogether, or, if they possessed it in degree, lacked the divine spark, the flash of fire which gives it value. I could not be sure — I could not even hazard an opinion — whether or not you possessed this, until I had your writing in my hands. I thought it likely that you did possess it — in an undeveloped form: but I was not prepared for the development I found. I began to read what you had written, full of my interest in yourself; but it was not long before I lost sight of you in the interest roused by your work. Do you understand all which is implied in that?"

She bent her head. Her eyes filled with tears, and she could not speak. It was as she had said — while she listened to him she could not doubt his sincerity, and his words of praise, with the ring of critical authority which gave them value, seemed to fill her veins like a strong cordial. Her despair had, after all, been but the revulsion from a great hope, and the rebound was therefore altogether possible. He divined her emotion as he had divined so much else with regard to her, and went on speaking more easily and lightly:

"I do not mean to imply that your work is faultless. You would be right not to believe me if I said so. It has many faults of manner and style. But these will be readily overcome by study. The essential things, which no study can give, are there: the power to seize and present vividly certain types of human nature and phases of human life; the dramatic instinct which tells you where to make a point and when it

is made; the insight into human feeling and the ability to interpret it. Forgive me," he broke off suddenly with his soft laugh, "if I am taking an odiously professional tone, and talking like a review. But that is what I would say if I were giving in cold blood and black print my opinion. Miss Churchill."

She looked at him now with a grateful smile. "I thought I should find it hard to believe you, Mr. Lysle," she said, "but you make it very easy. How can one refuse to believe what is so kind, so pleasant? Yet, after all, why should I be glad to know that I possess these powers? They need a wide field in which to develop, and I" — she glanced around the room in which she sat — "I am in prison."

"Prisons have doors. I told you that profound truth within half an hour of our first meeting."

"And I told you that mine was an exception."

"Then we will make a door. There is no good in shaking your head; you have no idea of the energy and the obstinacy which I can display on occasion. And I have never known an occasion that called for those qualities more than this. That you should spend the bright years of your youth — those years in which you should be garnering a thousand impressions and experiences for use in your art — pent in a place like this, is out of the question!"

He spoke indignantly, and she answered him with a sad little laugh. "You are very good to take so much interest," she said, “but you forget, or do not understand, many things. I can not explain them to you just now, for yonder is a messenger who, my prophetic soul tells me, is coming to summon me again to see the Denhams."

Lysle looked around. The slim, chocolate-colored youth, with whom he had by this time an amicable acquaintance, was advancing leisurely down the garden-path. When he reached the porch, he paused with one foot on the step, and spoke:

"Miss Cecil, Miss Nettie says the ladies axed for you particular, and you mus' come."

"Very well, Jasper," answered Cecil, with a slight sigh. "Say that I will be there in a few minutes."

She rose as she spoke, and began to put away the blurred pages she had been correcting. This done, she looked at Lysle, who was watching her from the door.

"How shamefully inhospitable I have been not to ask you in and give you a chair!" she said. "And now it is too late, if I have to go and see those Denhams. That is so often the case with me— I forget, or do not realize, what should be done until it is too late to do it."

"I hope your conscience may never reproach you for a more important omission," he said. “I preferred my position to any that you could have given me."

And, indeed, he felt that, during the time he stood there, a picture had been painted in his memory, to serve as a companion to other pictures of Cecil Churchill, that he would not soon forget. Side by side with the silent water and the solemn pines he would see this rustic school-room — the narrow frame of a figure so unsuited to it; he would see the waving shadows of the vines falling over her graceful head, and the quick light of awakening life in her eyes as she lifted them to his own.

Chapter VII.

It was not until late afternoon that Lysle found an opportunity to continue his interrupted conversation with Miss Churchill. But he was not troubled by impatience in the interval. He had gained enough to assure him of all the rest that he wished to gain, and it lay before him as a reserved pleasure which would lose nothing by delay. He bore his part, therefore, admirably in entertaining the Misses Denham, who were easily persuaded to remain to dinner; and, after their departure — which took place in

the middle of the afternoon — he quietly retired to the hammock to await the hour when Cecil would go to walk, for he had learned that this was her invariable habit.

Cecil, on her part, was by no means disposed to change her habit. If Lysle found pleasure in the study of a new character and contact with a fresh mind, it was, after all, slight compared with her pleasure in association with one who opened to her all the world of thought and knowledge into which she had so long desired to enter. She had enjoyed this from the first, and, if there had been a slight shrinking back — the revulsion inevitable to a sensitive nature — after he had in a manner forced her confidence, that had been dissipated by their conversation of the morning. She had now no sense of reluctance in the thought of the *t ête-à-t ête* before her.

He saw this plainly in her expression — for her face had by this time few secrets from him — when he joined her, and they followed one of the roads leading into the forest. As the solemn woods closed around them with their monotony and their charm, he said, with a glance into the shadowy depths:

"I wonder if you have any idea of how well you have succeeded in presenting not only the aspect but the spirit of all this! Your pages seem steeped in the color and the odor of the pines."

She smiled. "It would be strange if they were not. *I* am steeped in the pines," she said.

"Ah!" he answered, "you do not understand how little that has to do with it; how few of those who are capable of feeling an impression are capable also of presenting it, so that others shall feel it through their words."

She looked around her. "How could one fail to paint this?" she said. "It is so strong it seizes upon one, and it is so unlike anything else. There are some aspects of Nature of which a careless person might be unobservant; but the pines are like the ocean — no one can be insensible to their influence."

"You have indicated that with a very true touch. The characters you have drawn are influenced by their surroundings, though they do not know or suspect it. Did instinct or did observation tell you that?"

"Both, I think. I have observed it, and instinct told me more than I observed. Perhaps — for I must be quite honest — the influence may be heightened a little for artistic effect. One does such things unconsciously."

"It is a part of the artistic impulse — of that artistic insight which sees so much," said Lysle. “The artist who describes no more than lies on the surface is like one who substitutes the camera for the pencil and brush. He is no true artist if he does not feel that there is more than is revealed, and if the power which we call genius does not help him to realize and interpret it. But why should I say this to you, Miss Churchill? You have avoided both the Scylla and the Charybdis of most young writers — unreality on the one hand, bald realism on the other. Your artistic instinct is never at fault."

She glanced at him gratefully.

"I wonder," she said, "if you can imagine what your praise is to me? While I listen to you, I can not doubt its sincerity, and it is like water to one who has been traveling through a desert."

The emotion of her tone touched him. "I wish that I could say something that would impress you with a trust in my sincerity when you are not listening to me," he answered; "for that is most important. I am glad to give you pleasure; but to give you pleasure is by no means the chief end that I have in view. I want you to fulfill the promise that lies in your powers; and in order to do this, you must have faith enough in me to suffer me to direct you in a degree."

"I have faith in your judgment," she said, "and I shall be grateful for your advice — about my work."

"You will think me presumptuous, perhaps," he said, "but I want you to permit me to advise you about your life as well as about your work."

She regarded him with some surprise. "Then you have not yet understood that my life is hopelessly fixed in very narrow limits, unless these powers, which you tell me I possess, can open a door for me where no door has seemed possible?"

"I think I understand perfectly," he replied; "but what I have to beg of you is, that you will not use your powers until you have gained much more knowledge and experience of life than you now possess."

"But surely you must see the dilemma in which you would place me! I can not gain more knowledge and experience of life without going into the world, and I can not go into the world unless my own powers open the way for me."

"I am not so stupid as you imagine," said Lysle. "I realize the dilemma; but there may be a way out of it which you do not perceive. Will you not trust me for a little while, until I can tell you what it is?"

There was more distrust than trust in the eyes which met his own. "There is no other way possible," she said. "In what you have told me, in the encouragement you have given, you have done much for me. But there is nothing further in your power to do."

"I know that you think so," he replied, alive to all the proud inflection of her tone. “But will you not reserve your judgment for a short time — until I can lay my plans before you? That is not much to ask, since you will be free to reject them."

"But, Mr. Lysle—”

"But, Miss Churchill, you promised to have a little faith in me. Now is the time for its exercise. I shall not keep you in suspense very long. And — you may be sure of this — I shall propose nothing which your father's daughter need for an instant hesitate to do."

"I did not fear that," she said, flushing a little. "I feared — But it does not matter. I will trust you. I do not think that you will — make a mistake."

"I hope that I shall not," said Lysle, gravely.

They walked on silently for a few minutes, their footsteps falling almost soundlessly on the pine-straw. Before them the great forest stretched away into obscurity, while a faint breeze stirred the tree-tops into the murmur of the sea. It was Lysle who presently spoke:

"Will you forgive me if I ask a very personal question: Have you many friends? I do not mean acquaintances, more or less intimate, but friends in the true sense of the term."

"What is a friend 'in the true sense of the term'?" she asked, with a faint smile. "I must beg you to define it, else I might make a mistake in my answer."

He shrugged his shoulders slightly. “There are many definitions that I might give, but perhaps the supreme tests are sympathy and service. A friend in the sense I mean is one to whom you would not hesitate to speak your inmost thoughts, secure at least of comprehension, and of whom you would demand any service in his or her power to render."

"And you ask me if I have many such friends!" she said, in a tone of wonder. "The world must be a different place from what I have imagined it if any one has *many*. As for me, I have none."

"Not one. Miss Churchill?"

"Not one, Mr. Lysle. Perhaps" — after an instant's pause — "you think I should count you. But that is not possible. One does not make such a friend in a week."

Lysle smiled. "One might make such a friend in a week," he said, "but it would be too much to ask that he should be recognized. Believe me, I was not thinking of myself at all. I wondered if you had such a friend among those whom you have known much longer than a week."

She shook her head. "I have some old friends —in the ordinary sense — who are attached to me, and to whom I am attached, but they are very far from being what you mean. They know my life only on its surface, and could have no sympathy with anything else. Indeed, it would never occur to me to hint of the existence of anything else to them."

Again Lysle was silent for a moment. It seemed to him that he had never known a sadder case of mental and spiritual isolation; and the desire to see how this nature would expand in another atmosphere, began to yield to a more personal desire to remove the fetters that weighed upon it. He was fast losing sight of the gratification of his own interest, in thinking of Cecil herself.

"Perhaps I should apologize for my question," he said at length, "but I wondered if there was any one — and I was thinking of a woman whose life has been the exact opposite of your own. I believe that you might make a friend of her if you knew her."

Miss Churchill looked doubtful. Like most clever women in a narrow life, she had not formed a very high opinion of her own sex. But she did not commit herself to an expression of this opinion; she only said, "Who is she?"

"The answer to that question is tolerably long. She is, to begin with, of very mixed nationality. Her father was a Greek, her mother an Englishwoman — a distant relative of my own — and she is the widow of an Italian marchese. She is very wealthy, she is intellectual, she has always lived in one or the other of the capitals of Europe, and taken her place in what is known as 'the great world'; but she is devoted to letters and to art, and her *salon* is a resort of the cleverest men of the day. Do you not think you could make a friend of such a woman as that, Miss Churchill?"

"I!" said Cecil. Her eyes, as she looked at him, were dark with pain. "What could I have in common with her? Are you trying to make me feel the absurdity of my aspirations, Mr. Lysle?"

"God forbid!" he cried, hastily. "Why do you misunderstand me so? I mean exactly what I say: do you not think that of such a woman you could make a friend?"

"Friendship means equality, or it means nothing. How could such a woman make a friend of *me*?"

"Miss Churchill, are you really so ignorant of what you are? The marchesa would discern you at once. An intellectual woman herself, she delights to meet intellect in others; a sympathetic woman, she appreciates sympathy as the rare and precious gift that it is; and, though a woman of the world, she is as simple and spontaneous as a child, I am sure that you would be friends."

"Perhaps so; but it is hardly worth while to speculate on what might follow the meeting of two people whose lives are set as far apart as it is possible for lives to be. Can you not find another subject, Mr. Lysle? I am not envious of your marchesa: I am really glad that there should be a woman so fortunate; but contrast with her life seems to make the hopelessness of mine more apparent, and so it depresses me."

"I would not willingly depress you," said Lysle, "therefore we will certainly change the subject."

He promptly changed it; but Cecil's thoughts for once did not follow him. They hovered with a species of fascination about the idea of the woman who had everything that she lacked — this beautiful (she supposed that she was beautiful) marchesa, with her wealth, her cleverness, and her high social position. The girl's heart sank within her. It was not envy, as she had said, but only that the sunshine of this life made the shadow of her own seem deeper; and, let Lysle say what he would, she felt that there was little hope that the walls which inclosed her would ever open, that wider opportunities would ever be granted her.

But such a mood was naturally not lasting. It yielded to the influence of Lysle's companionship, of his subtile sympathy, and of the encouragement which he conveyed indirectly as well as directly. Nature had been a true fairy godmother in bestowing upon him many gifts, but none which had served him better than his power of throwing himself into the thoughts and feelings of others. As time went on, he had no difficulty in gratifying his desire to study Miss Churchill, for, her reserve once conquered, she met his interest with a frankness that knew nothing of caprice. He felt that her mind was open to him; that there was no corner of it into which he was not privileged to look. Her opinions, her tastes, her desires — he could examine and sift them all, and there was no intellectual ground upon which she was not able to meet him with the clearest intelligence. In their long conversations upon literature, and all the fields of thought and speculation that open from it, there was a sense of camaraderie which sometimes astonished him; for, although it had chanced to him before to enjoy intellectual companionship with a woman, it had never chanced to him to meet one who seemed so thoroughly at home in the somewhat rarefied atmosphere of the mind, or who gave so little thought to her womanhood and the charm derived from it.

He said to himself that the emotional side of her nature was dormant, and that it was not her mind alone but her whole nature that would expand when once the fetters were lifted from her life.

In this companionship, so full of interest to both, the days — soft, golden days of autumn — went on, until suddenly Lysle roused himself to the realization that, if he meant to carry out certain plans which he had formed, he must go. He did not announce this decision, however, until he found himself alone with Cecil. It was evening, and they were watching the sunset from one of the gentle eminences of the valley which led to the pond among the hills. It was one of those sunsets peculiar to the pine-lands, when all that is barren becomes glorious, and all that is gloomy radiant through the magic of a splendor that fills earth, air, and sky. The west was like a great altar, on which sacrificial fires were kindled that streamed upward even to the zenith, and were reflected in softest tints of rose and lilac upon the eastern sky. The pines on the opposite ridge lifted their spear-like crests against the background of vivid gold and flame-like scarlet with an air of solemn majesty, and above them the evening star began to gleam like a great diamond out of the roseate effulgence. The two who were watching this pomp had been silent for some time, as only those who know each other intimately can be silent together. It was Lysle who spoke at length, somewhat abruptly.

“Do you know," he said, "that it is three weeks this evening since I arrived, and we took our first walk together?"

Cecil turned her eves from the clouds and looked at him with a smile. "No," she answered, "I have not thought of the lapse of time at all. But it appears to me much longer than three weeks."

"I am exceedingly flattered."

"You have reason to be, though I know that remark does not sound very flattering. It appears long to me, because I have received such a number of new impressions since you have been here. I hardly seem to myself the same person that I was when I met you that first afternoon."

"How are you changed?" he asked, with a quick glance.

"It is rather hard to define," she answered; "but I feel the difference, as if a door had opened in my life, through which I have a glimpse of the outer world, of which I had only dreamed before. Then I was so hopeless, and you have given me hope. I have a sense that my power is doubled, since somebody believes in it. I did not believe in it myself when you came."

He smiled. "It was a strange and happy chance that led my feet here," he said.

"Strange — yes. But happy — " She paused, and looked back again at the sunset. "Perhaps we had better wait a little before we decide on that. If I fail, after all—"

“You will not fail," he said, confidently. "But you must not be in haste. I am to lay a plan before you, you know, and you have promised to trust me."

"How absolute must the trust be?" she asked, lifting her eyebrows a little. "Your plan seems long in maturing."

"Yes, but it will now soon be matured. Have patience. A few weeks at farthest will end the suspense. Meanwhile, I am going away, so you will be relieved of my presence until I can lay everything before you."

She looked startled rather than relieved at present. "Are you going away indeed?" she said. "It seems very soon. From that point of view I do not find the three weeks long at all. And Hugh will be sorry — we shall all be sorry."

"You are very kind. I am sorry, too — exceedingly sorry — to think of going. But when I turned my face southward, I meant to go at least as far as Texas, and if I am to accomplish that intention, I can not delay longer, since I must be back in England by a certain time. I will leave to-morrow, and in two or three weeks, if you will allow me, I will return and spend a few days here before my final departure."

"You must know that we shall be delighted to see you whenever you can return," she answered.

They were silent then for a few minutes. Some of the sunset illumination had burned itself out, but the colors that lingered on the sky were even more beautiful than those which had faded. Lysle found himself looking at a band of clear, tender aquamarine, while he wondered what change, if any, there was in the expression of Cecil's voice as she uttered those last words and the expression of her voice when she had bidden him welcome three weeks before. Cecil, on her part, looking at the same emerald space, appeared to herself to be looking into the blankness which life would present after this new and stimulating companionship had passed out of it. The three weeks that had been filled with the association of this man of letters and of the world formed an epoch in her life. That life could not sink back into its old hopeless monotony, for he had given her both hope and faith; but how she would miss his presence, his conversation, full of everything that she most wished to know, and the interest with which he had filled the waste places of her existence!

When Mr. Churchill heard of his friend's intended departure, he was vexed and derisive.

"Go to Texas!" he said. "Why on earth should you want to go to Texas? You will find nothing to interest you there."

"I think that I shall," Lysle answered. "I have a friend who has lately settled there, and who begs me to come and see him. His ‘ranch' — do you call it? — is somewhere in the middle of the State."

"Considering the size of Texas, I hope you know his whereabout somewhat more definitely than that."

"Oh, yes. I have only to consult his last letter to find out exactly where he is. I shall do that when I get to New Orleans."

"Well, I suppose one should not be grasping," said Mrs. Churchill. "We ought to be willing for you to give the same pleasure to your friend that you have given us. But you must promise that we shall see you again — that you will not cheat us by taking some other route in order to see more of the country, and leaving us in the lurch on your return."

"I promise most solemnly that no route shall tempt me, save the route that leads to Oldfield," said Lysle. Involuntarily he looked at Cecil as he said this, and Mrs. Churchill, seeing the look, was satisfied.

Chapter VIII.

Three weeks had passed since Lysle's departure — weeks which Cecil found long in a different manner from the three weeks of his stay — and no word came from him to the household among the pines. Mrs. Churchill began to wonder when he would return, and was exceedingly vexed with her husband, who said, easily, that he should not be surprised if he did not return at all.

"You have not much confidence in the word of your friend," she replied. "He promised that he would come back."

"Oh, I've no doubt he meant to come back — when he was here," Hugh answered; "but now that he is away something else will interest him, and he'll be led in another direction. Perhaps he will go to Cuba, or to Mexico. That would be just like him."

"If he went to — Patagonia, I am sure he would return here!" said Mrs. Churchill. Then she added, as if in explanation, "Hugh, you are awfully stupid!"

"Very likely, my dear," replied Hugh, calmly. "How does the stupidity exhibit itself just now?"

"Why, in not perceiving that Mr. Lysle was very much attracted by Cecil."

Hugh justified the charge of stupidity by staring broadly for a moment. "I certainly did not perceive anything of the kind," he said; "and really, Nettie, I think you must be mistaken. Women are apt

to fancy such things; but a man who has seen as much of the world as Lysle would not be easily attracted — at least not by a girl as peculiar as Cecil."

"He admires her very much, peculiarity and all," said Mrs. Churchill. "He thinks her beautiful. He told me so. But I do not expect you to believe me." Hugh was shaking his head. “I only want you to understand *that he will come back*.”

The tone in which these words were uttered closed the discussion; for, like some other men, Hugh had found that it was quite useless to argue with a settled impression of his wife's. Events would prove her either right or wrong. If right, she was moderate in triumph; if wrong, she had generally candor enough to acknowledge as much. He smiled to himself with a pleasant sense of superiority, and thought that he would wait for time to prove her wrong in the present instance.

But time was not long in proving her right, at least as far as her belief in Lysle's return was concerned. Hugh came in with rather a significant smile on his face one day, and threw down a letter. "Your faith in Bernard is justified," he observed to his wife. "This is a letter saying that he will be here next week."

There was a flash of satisfaction in Mrs. Churchill's glance, but she only said, quietly, "I knew that he would come," as she took up the letter and opened it.

Lysle wrote that he hoped to be in Oldfield early the next week, but was unable to say on what day. He would telegraph from New Orleans to let Hugh know when to expect him. He was still in Texas, and had made a pleasant excursion into Mexico; he would have liked to give more time to that interesting country, but was forced to set his face homeward. A few days were all that he could promise himself with his friends in the pine-lands, but nothing would induce him to forego that pleasure.

' I was very sure of it," said Mrs. Churchill, as she handed the letter to Cecil, who received and read it without comment. To herself she said that she, too, had been sure. The want of faith, of which she had accused herself, had been vanquished as far as Lysle was concerned. She had never entertained the least doubt of his return. He had told her that he would do so, and that he would then submit to her the plan of which he had spoken. She did not allow herself to build any hopes upon this vaguely defined plan, but she had a natural curiosity to learn what it would be.

Five or six days passed, however, without further news of the expected guest; then came the promised telegram, announcing that he would be in Oldfield the next day. The train on which he would arrive was due in the morning, so Hugh drove into Oldfield immediately after breakfast; while Cecil went as usual to her school-room, for there could be no walk through the pines, no meeting by the road-side, on this occasion. The children saw no difference in their teacher during the long hours of the morning; but the teacher was conscious of a difference in herself which provoked her. When before had she been so eager for these hours to end? when had she been so conscious of a suppressed excitement in all her veins, a distraction in her mind, and an almost overmastering impatience of the restraint laid upon her?

Yet, when freedom came with the dismissal of the school, and she went to the house, it was to find that Hugh and his friend had not arrived. It was so common an occurrence for a train to be behind time that it never excited alarm. Cecil agreed that it was very probably the case to-day, and, after waiting for some time, the two ladies sat down to dinner. An hour afterward, a glance along the road still showing no sign of Hugh's equipage, and Nettie's conjectures becoming rather trying, Cecil, with the excuse of some work to do, went back to the school-room. There she sat, with a book open before her, determined not to yield to the restless impatience which possessed her. But it is to be feared that she did not derive many ideas from the page before her eyes. As time went on, thoughts of possible accidents began to occur to her, and she had an inward vision of what a blank would come upon her life if she were never to see again the man who two months before had only been a name to her. She looked up suddenly at the clock. It was well on in the afternoon, and she rose quickly with the intention of returning to the house to learn if

nothing had been heard, when a glance through the open door showed Lysle advancing down the alley of the garden. She stood for a moment motionless, then went forward to meet him with a smile of welcome.

Of *his* pleasure in the meeting there could be no doubt. His dark eyes were glowing with light as he took her hand. "I hope you will forgive me for coming here to seek you," he said. "Mrs. Churchill wished to send for you, but I begged to come. I thought you would not object."

"Oh, no," she answered. "I am glad to be able to offer you the hospitality of my school-room. When yon came here before, I remember that I did not ask you to sit down. Let me repair the omission now."

He sat down in the chair she offered, but his shining eyes did not leave her face. "I am glad to come back," he said. “It seems long since I went away."

"Time always seems long that has been filled with new and varied impressions," said Cecil.

"I remember you told me that before," he answered, with a smile. “But the new and varied impressions are not at all the reason why this time has seemed long to me. I have simply been anxious to return here."

"We are certainly very much flattered. But what has made you so late in arriving to-day? I — we began to fear some accident."

"The train was several hours behind its schedule time, and then Hugh had some business which detained him in Oldfield. I was glad not to arrive while you were in your school. It would have been very tantalizing to be so near you, and yet have to wait several hours to see you."

Cecil's heart began to beat a little rapidly. What did all this eagerness, this warmth, mean? Nettie's innuendoes had fallen on deaf ears, and she had never for a moment thought of Lysle consciously as a lover. They had become excellent friends, he was keenly interested in her intellectual development, and he would serve her to the best of his ability — she was sure of that; but she would have repudiated the idea of anything else with something like scorn. To her it was commonplace and vulgar to imagine that a man could have no attachment for, no interest in, a woman unless he were in "love." That term, so musical to most women's ears, positively disgusted her, so entirely did it seem to exclude all finer and wider sympathies for a narrow, selfish, and inane passion. But, notwithstanding these sentiments, it had been her fate to inspire this passion more than once, and she knew its signs from experience as well as from instinct. Almost unconsciously it was borne to her now that there was more than friendly interest in Lysle's eyes and tones; and so her heart quickened its action, as she said:

“Well, it is I who have waited several hours, and that is best, since women are proverbially more patient than men; though I have always fancied that they are only more patient because they must be. The whole discipline of life for an average woman is that of waiting; she has so little power to order events, she can do so little for herself."

"Have you been feeling this with peculiar force lately?" he asked, with the quick intuition she knew so well. "I feared that you might be: I knew the suspense must be trying. But I was forced to wait for a letter, which reached me only a day or two ago."

"A letter?" she repeated.

"Yes, a letter without which it was of no use for me to return. Until I received it, I could not have told you what I am happy to be able to tell you now — that I am ready to lay before you a plan which will open the door of your prison, if you choose."

Always pale, she turned paler as he spoke. At that moment her own image had a passionate force and meaning for her. She felt all the narrowness and constraint of her life pressing upon her with the hopelessness of accumulated years, and she saw Lysle with his hand on a door that would open escape — if she chose. Was there any form of escape that she would not choose? If he held out his hand with his heart in it, would she refuse to give him her own? It was all a flash of instinct; but the same instinct which told her what was possible with him, told her also that she would not refuse.

She did not speak, but her eyes bade him go on, and he did so. "Shall I tell you what it is now?" he said. "There is no reason for longer delay. The person from whom I waited to hear was the Marchesa Ferrata. You have not forgotten what I told you of her?"

Cecil had a sense of inwardly smiling at herself. There was a quick rush of mingled relief and disappointment, but the perceptible pause was very slight before she answered:

“I remember everything that you told me of her."

"Did I tell you that she has the kindest heart, the most generous nature imaginable? And she is, besides, a thorough woman of the world, with such a knowledge of life as only wide experience can give. Knowing her so well, I felt that I could not do better than to tell her of you — of your life, of your powers — and to ask her advice concerning what would be best for you. Her answer is like her: she offers to take you under her protection for a year. That limit is given in order to see how you will like each other. When it has expired, you can enter into a longer companionship, if you like."

He paused, for Cecil's astonishment was evident on her face. "She offers to take me under her protection — this woman whom I have never seen, who knows nothing of me!" she said.

"Do you credit me with no powers of description?" he asked, smiling. "She knows as much of you as I could tell, and it has proved enough to interest her deeply. She does more than merely offer her protection: she begs that you will come to her. And 1 beg also that you will do so, for I know, as you can not know yet, how completely it is in her power to open to you the life for which you were formed — the life in which your powers can develop, your whole nature expand." Then, as she did not speak, he added, quickly: "It is impossible that you can hesitate. Your life here is simply mental suicide."

"Yes," she said, "it is that. You do not realize it any more clearly than I do. Any more clearly, do I say? Good heavens! how can you be said to realize it at all, compared with my realization? But there is something which I have always felt might be worse, and that is, to owe anything to the patronage of another."

"Do you call kindness and service 'patronage'?"

"No. You are the last person who should ask me that question, for surely I have accepted both from you. But what this stranger offers, that is patronage, though no doubt kindly meant, and I can not accept it, not even to escape from the bondage of my present existence. For what claim have I upon her? What reason is there that she should do this thing?”

"One reason I have told you: she is interested in you, and she is at once quick to conceive an interest and eager in following it up. Nothing would give her more pleasure than to be of use to you in the manner I have indicated. But there is also another reason, which may set your pride at ease: she is in need of a companion, and she would like to find one who might become a friend, and who would certainly be a social equal. If you will not go to her as a guest, will you go as a companion?"

"I fear that it would be a distinction without a difference — something which you have arranged merely to 'set my pride at ease.'"

"How distrustful you are!" he exclaimed. "I flattered myself that I had won a little faith from you, but it seems that I have not. How can I make you believe that I would not deceive you — not even to set you free! Listen to what the marchesa herself says." He took from his pocket a letter bearing a foreign postmark, and written on thin, foreign, scented paper, opened it, turned over a page, and began to read: "If Miss Churchill is all that you describe, I shall not only be glad to be of use to her, but she may be of great use to me, and perhaps it may be well to tell her this. Since the marriage of my niece, I need a companion very much — a companion in the real sense of the term; one who can go out with me, can assist me in receiving my guests, and who is not commonplace, for you know I abhor commonplace people. I want refinement, social grace, intellectual culture, and a certain interesting quality. I have been wondering for some time where I am to find these things. Certainly not in any one who answers to the ordinary idea of a "companion," or who has adopted the calling as a profession. Among my relations and friends, those who

would suit me can not come to me, and those who could come I do not want. You perceive the situation, and you will understand that I am not altogether unselfish in offering to take charge of Miss Churchill. She may prove all that I want, and I am sure that I can give her some things which she wants. Arrange, then, for her to come to me on any footing that you think best or find most practicable. It may be that she would be more at ease — have less sense of obligation — if she came avowedly as companion. Should you find this to be the case, offer any salary that you think — ' "

A sudden exclamation from Cecil stopped the reader here. He looked up to find that a flush had appeared on her clear white cheeks.

"There could be no question of that," she said, hastily. "If I took the matter into consideration — if, on the ground that I might be of use, I went — I should look upon the great advantages offered me as far out-weighing any service I could render."

"That may be," said Lysle, "yet I am not sure that a regular business arrangement might not be best. The services you can render to the marchesa would be worth more to her than you think; and she is so well able to offer a remuneration —"

Miss Churchill made a slight gesture, as of one who ends a discussion. "I would not accept it," she said. "Not from any sentiment of foolish pride — for I should be glad to make money, if I could really give value for value received — but because I know, as the marchesa herself does not know, as even you do not know, Mr. Lysle, what she would be doing for me, what doors she wo aid be opening, which by no other possible chance could be opened for me."

"Then you will go?" said Lysle, eagerly. This was to him the only important point — that she should go. In what way mattered little.

She hesitated, looking at him with her eyes full of a light that seemed to him very pathetic. “How can I?" she said at length, with wistful simplicity. "You can not imagine with what intensity I long to do so, but there are many things that I must consider. Even if I can make up my mind to the venture — it is a great venture, surely, to cross the ocean in order to cast my life with a perfect stranger, whom I might not suit, or who, perhaps, might not suit me, for I am very hard to please — there is the question of ways and means. The world does not abound in places for people who have little or no money; but I am very sure that the world in which the marchesa lives contains no such place at all."

"The marchesa's house does," said Lysle. “Your expenses there would be very small. The only item of any importance would be your toilet, and that, surely, need not be great. Everything that you wear looks well."

"Do not tell Nettie that, if you do not wish her to lose all respect for your judgment. My toilet is her despair. It costs me little here, as you may imagine; but if I were with the marchesa it would be very different. Even I know enough of the world to be aware of that."

“But you would not let such a paltry consideration keep you from embracing this great opportunity!" he said, indignantly.

"Such paltry considerations often interfere with great things," she answered, faintly smiling. "You must let me think a little."

He rose at once. "I will leave you," he said. "But an hour or so hence may I not hope for our walk in the pines? I should be sorry to miss that, for I shall only be here a day or two."

"Oh, yes, I will come," she answered, "within an hour."

' I hope that you may decide wisely," he said, and then quietly went away.

Cecil, sitting motionless where he left her, watched his slender figure as it passed down the garden-walk with roses blooming on each side, and the soft sunshine falling over it. What a change the coming of that figure into her life had made! Should she let it pass away without appreciable result, and fall back into the old monotony? She rose quickly to her feet, as if not her mind alone but her whole being answered the question in the negative, and began to pace the floor.

Life—

> "... not the mere being
> Of daily ebb and flow,
> But life itself—"

opened before her with a vista of infinite possibilities. Could she turn from it, let the cost or the consequences be what they might?

CHAPTER IX.

Words were scarcely needed between Lysle and Cecil when they met, so clearly was her resolve evident to him on her face. A new light had come into her eyes — the light of possible freedom; and when they met his own, he felt with a thrill that the die was cast. She would go. The other alternative, which he had held in reserve, need not be tried. The opportunity for development and expansion, which he desired for her, was to be hers in the manner he desired. As soon as they found themselves alone he spoke eager approval.

"You have decided wisely," he said. "I see that you will go."

She glanced at him with a smile. "Do you see it?" she said. "Is it so plain as that? Yes, I have decided; whether wisely or not, I don't know. But I will go."

"It is certainly wise," he said. "You will find that it will be to you the beginning of life. All that has passed heretofore has been but the preface."

She looked up at the pines under which they were walking. "It is strange," she said, "but during all my life I have had a sense as if it were not life — as if I were merely existing until some avenue of escape opened to mo. At least, when I was younger I used to dream of some wonderful chance — like this; but for the last four or five years I have fallen into hopelessness. What was the good, I felt, of expecting the impossible? And then, when I had ceased to expect it, the impossible came — *you* came."

"I have had some strokes of luck in my life," said Lysle, "but nothing for which I ever felt so grateful as for this — the chance to serve you, to be instrumental in the least degree in opening the door which you were so certain did not exist."

"It is your hand — yours only — which has opened it," she said. "I shall never forget that."

Lysle might have answered that he would never forget it either; but, in fact, he was wondering if by any possible chance he should ever be forced to regret it. Prisoned and sunless as it was, this life, as he had found it, had at least been secure from the storms that sometimes wreck existence in the world to which he had opened the way. Yet he knew Cecil would say that any possible shipwreck was better than the dead calm which held no such danger, but of which heart and mind alike sickened. This was indeed his own feeling. Better the utmost stress of life, than the dull monotony of an existence which held no possibilities. And what possibilities might there not be for her in the new life before her? He looked at her as she walked beside him, with her noble presence, her stately step, and said to himself that to study the development of such a nature was an opportunity for which he could never have hoped.

Presently she spoke again: “You know I told you that there were some practical difficulties to be overcome. Shall I tell you how I have decided to overcome them?"

"I shall be very much interested to hear."

"And I wish to tell you, because I want you to persuade my brother that I am not mad. He will certainly think so when he hears that I intend to sell the only piece of property I possess that is of any value — a house which my aunt left me."

"But is that necessary?" asked Lysle, himself a little startled.

"Very necessary. There is no other way by which I can command the means I need."

"You are positively determined, then, against the position of companion and the question of salary?"

"I am positively determined against the last. But I will undertake the duties of companion, as understood by the marchesa, and after a certain time, if she finds that I am of use to her, I will not object to remuneration. That, however, must be left to the future. We may not suit each other at all, and in that case I wish to be free to end the association at once."

"It is very well to be free," said Lysle, "but I am sure that you will suit each other."

"Are you really so sure?" She looked at him wistfully. "It is strange that you should be. How can I, coming out of this narrow, provincial life, suit a woman who knows only the great world? It seems almost incredible."

"There is nothing narrow or provincial about you," he said. "Some people unconsciously reject such influences. When you enter the great world you will have much to learn, but nothing to unlearn. That is a very important point."

"You are certainly formed for comforter and encourager, Mr. Lysle. While I listen to you, I can never doubt you, no matter what flattering things you tell me; though when I am alone I often say to myself, 'His kindness makes him exaggerate.' "

"My kindness does *not*," said Lysle, positively. "In fact, 1 have no kindness of that sort at all. If you imagine that I am philanthropically inclined, or that I go about the world comforting and encouraging people, I must tell you that you are very much mistaken. I am as selfish as most other men, and I very seldom find any one who really excites my interest. Indeed, you must pardon me if I say that I never met any one who excited it so much as yourself, Miss Churchill."

She smiled. "I have known from the first that you regarded me as an interesting study," she said.

"As a very interesting study — yes," he answered. "But not only as that. Your instincts are too fine for you not to know how personal is my interest in you."

She colored quickly, feeling that she had made a mistake — that her instincts had indeed told her too much to make it safe to enter upon the question of the exact nature of his interest.

"Oh," she said, hastily, "I do not doubt that your interest in me is personal as well as — artistic, shall I say? I believe in the reality of the old friendship that brought you here. And, *à propos* of that, my brother has so much respect for your judgment and knowledge of the world, that I hope I am not asking too much in begging you to inform him of your — our plan. He would think me quite wild if I went to him and told him that I intended to part with my only source of income in order to go to Europe to a woman I never saw."

"It does sound rather wild, stated in that way," said Lysle, with a smile. "I will gladly undertake to lay the matter before him in all its bearings. And I have no doubt of finding him reasonable."

"He is always reasonable," said his sister. "Sometimes a little too reasonable."

"I understand what you mean, but I do not think he will prove too reasonable in this case."

Mr. Churchill justified his friend's opinion by listening without any offensive display of reason to a plan which certainly sounded somewhat wild. The two men were smoking together, according to their usual custom after the ladies had retired for the night, and, as Lysle unfolded the details of his arrangement, he did not perceive a shade of disappointment that settled on the other's face. In fact, when, with a little diffidence, he had said, "I should like to speak to you about your sister, Hugh," Churchill had thought that Nettie, after all, was right, and that he was to have the pleasure of giving his fraternal benediction to the suit of the one man ever likely to please Cecil. He could not repress a sense of disappointment, therefore, at the very different proposal unfolded to him; and this sense of

disappointment had the effect of making him more silent than he would otherwise have been, as he listened. Only when Lysle paused did he remove his pipe from his lips, and say:

"As far as I understand, you propose that Cecil shall go abroad, to live as companion with a lady whom she has never seen. May I ask what she would gain by such an arrangement?"

"Everything," answered Lysle, comprehensively. "The marchesa offers great social advantages to any one whom she takes under her protection; and although she speaks of a companion, what she desires is an equal and friend. Miss Churchill will see life under very favorable conditions with her, and will have opportunities for mental culture which she could not command in any other way."

"But what will be gained by it?" Hugh repeated. "I do not speak of the risk in the association of two people who do not know each other — a risk which, on Cecil's side at least, is greater than you can imagine. Put that aside, and tell me what she will gain, for I can easily tell you what she will lose."

"What?" asked Lysle.

"All content with life here — the life to which, in the ordinary course of events, she must return. I am not blind: I know that she does not like it now. But what is dislike now will be aversion then; and yet she must bear it."

"She need not return," said Lysle, slowly.

"You think, then, that it will be an improvement on her present life — a life in which she has at least a recognized position among her friends and equals — to become the mere appendage of a woman of rank?" asked Churchill, almost angrily. "If so, I must differ with you. And to wish to deprive us of her, finally and definitely, in order that this marchesa may have a companion, is, if you will pardon me, a strange proof of friendship."

"You misunderstand entirely," said Lysle, with great earnestness. "Listen, while I speak with perfect openness. I must tell you that my interest in your sister is deeper than mere friendship. If I thought of myself only — if I listened to the dictates of my own heart — I should ask her to let one open the doors of the world to her. But that would be to defeat the chief object that I have in view. It is true that I have held this as a possibility in reserve. I said to myself, that if she refused the offer of the marchesa, I might then make my offer; but she has accepted the first, so I have held my peace."

"Why? — in Heaven's name!" asked Hugh, whose surprise was ascending from the comparative to the superlative degree.

Lysle laughed a little as he looked at the pale-blue smoke ascending from a cigar held between his fingers. "I suppose it does seem rather a queer proceeding to you," he said. "I wonder if I can explain, so as to make it clear? In the first place, then, are you aware that your sister is by no means an ordinary person?"

"I am very well aware of it. No one could know Cecil without discovering that she is peculiar — and clever also. I fully recognize that."

"She is much more than clever. She has mental gifts of the highest order, and a nature so richly endowed, that the poverty of her present life, in all opportunities for development, is simply terrible. She is like a plant starving for sunshine. All her powers are straitened and crippled, because she lacks both the culture that can only be obtained by intercourse with the intellectual world, and the experience and knowledge of life that are absolutely necessary to the creative artist. What I desire above all things — what I have desired from the first day I met her — is, that she should possess the opportunity for complete development. And in order that it may be complete, she must be free. The artistic nature will not bear fetters. It submits to them, perhaps — as she is submitting now — but it suffers in every way, in loss of power as well as in sensation. If I asked her to marry me, she might consent to do so, for there is, of course, a certain sympathy between us, and she likes and trusts me; but she would enter the world, in that case, bound instead of free; her intellectual development could not be so perfect; and it is possible that, with wider knowledge, she might even discover that she had made a great mistake."

As Lysle proceeded, his voice becoming more emphatic, despite its quietude, with every sentence, Churchill's eyes expanded with growing amazement. All this seemed to him unreal in the highest degree — a fanciful development of Lysle's own imagination, at which he might have launched if the result had not been so serious. But the perception of the result rendered him grave enough.

"It strikes me," he said, "that *you* are making a great mistake. What is this intellectual development, that you should lay so much stress on it, and that you should be willing to sacrifice to it your own happiness, and perhaps that of Cecil also?"

“I hope that I shall not sacrifice either," answered Lysle; "but certainly, if so, it will only be my own. I am not likely to change — 1 am old enough to speak with some certainty on that point; and therefore, when Miss Churchill has seen more of the world, she will have the opportunity to refuse or to accept the devotion which I do not think it fair to offer to her inexperience now. That was what I meant when I said that she might not return."

Hugh shook his head. "You are making a great mistake," he reiterated. "I know Cecil better than you do. Oh, you need not smile; I am not alluding to the exact nature of her mental qualities. You are no doubt much better able to define that than I am. But I know her character, and I tell you that a more capricious and changeable creature does not exist. Even as a child she was fickle in all her likings, and as she grew older she discarded friend after friend — cooling rapidly toward them and dropping them; until now, if she has one left, I do not know who it is."

"She outgrew them," said Lysle. "They failed to respond to her intellectual needs. That is often the case with the artistic temperament: it quickly exhausts all that it can assimilate in those with whom it comes in contact, and then, of course, weariness follows. It is purely an intellectual process; the heart has nothing to do with it."

"I should say not," answered Hugh, dryly. “In fact, between ourselves, I doubt exceedingly if Cecil is troubled with much heart."

Lysle smiled slightly. The smile meant that he recognized this charge as a very common one against those whose hearts are not manifested in the usual manner of commonplace humanity. Churchill caught the smile again and answered it.

"If," he said, "you think that I am in error, if you have reason to believe that she has a heart, take my advice, and gain it while you may. Your opportunity will be lost when once she goes out into the distractions of what you call the world. I should not say this without reason — the strongest reason. It is not a pleasant duty to urge forward a reluctant suitor."

The other flushed deeply. "If I am reluctant, it is because I think of *her*,” he said. "If I thought of myself — But I do not wish to do that. I thought you would understand me better, Hugh. I thought you would realize, as I do, that if she listened to me now it might be only through her ignorance."

"And why only through her ignorance?" demanded Hugh. "If it were necessary for every woman to go into the world and acquire an exhaustive knowledge of men before she could decide whether or not it was for her happiness to accept one man, how many would marry at all?"

"We are not talking of every woman; we are talking of your sister, who, we have agreed, is not to be judged by ordinary rules."

"You insist upon making her more extraordinary than she is. And where in all the world could she find a man better suited to her than you are? Again I say that you are making a mistake, and a mistake that you will regret, if you really care for her."

"The doubt implied is, from your point of view, natural, I suppose," said Lysle. "I can not help it. I can not fetter her — not even with her own consent — at the time she should be free. It would be gross selfishness. And, if it is a mistake, I alone shall suffer for it."

“There would be no particular consolation in that, so far as I can perceive," said Churchill.

They were both silent after this for a moment, each conscious of being slightly chafed with the other — Churchill by what he thought the folly, Lysle by what he considered the dullness, of his friend. It was Lysle who, being most of a philosopher, recovered himself first.

"What fools we are sometimes!" he observed, meditatively. "I am not alluding to you, my dear Churchill, but to myself. Before we began to talk, I really indulged the anticipation of inducing you to regard this matter as I regard it. But I realize now what I have often had occasion to realize before — that it is hardly possible to look at anything with the eyes of another. I can not make you understand how deeply I am impressed by your sister's abilities, nor how important I consider it to secure for her the intellectual culture, the sympathetic atmosphere, the freedom that she needs. You disapprove of my scheme, and I think — I fear — that you are inclined to distrust me."

"No," said Churchill, "I do not distrust you, else I should make short work of the matter. But I do disapprove of the scheme, and therefore it is impossible for me to give a cordial assent to it. I think that it will end badly for Cecil, and— and, if I am to credit fully all that you have told me, badly also for you."

“I have no fear of its ending badly for her; and, for myself, I am willing to take all risks. I hope, therefore, that you will not throw any obstacles in the way of what she wishes to do."

"It is not in my power to throw any obstacles in her way, even if I desired to do so. I have no control over her, and she has never paid much heed to advice."

"There is more in your power than you imagine. The marchesa, as I think I told you, offers a salary, which Miss Churchill declines to accept. I am glad that she does decline. It leaves her more free, but it also forces her to incur some expense. Now, she fears that you will object to the means by which she proposes to meet this expense."

“What does she want to do?" asked Hugh, with an apprehensive look which seemed to say that nothing would surprise him.

"She wishes to sell a house which she owns — which was left her, as I understand, by her aunt."

"To sell her house — the rent of which is her chief source of income! Why, it would be madness!"

“No doubt it looks so to you," said Lysle; "but I do not think it would be madness, even if it had to be done. But I hope that it need not be done. Surely there must be some other way."

"That remains to be seen," replied Hugh, briefly. An hour before he would have talked freely of his financial difficulties to his friend; but now his dormant but always existent pride was roused by the consciousness that Lysle stood in the position of a possible suitor to Cecil. It was enough to remember that he had urged him to come forward with his suit; it would be too much to seem to offer an additional reason for doing so. The house had better be sacrificed than that. So he answered briefly, and changed the subject by saying, "If she insists upon going — as I have no doubt she will — I suppose we may at least have the comfort of knowing that the position of this marchesa is all that it should be?"

"She is a woman of the highest social position and the most unblemished personal character," answered Lysle. "I would be incapable of advising Miss Churchill to place herself under the protection of any one about whose position there was the least question. There is none about that of the Marchesa Ferrata."

"Did I understand you to say that she is English?"

"Partly English and partly Greek. I have always regarded it as one of the good fortunes of my life that I should be distantly connected with her; and she has been very kind to me from my boyhood. Therefore I knew that I might rely upon her kindness for Miss Churchill."

"How old is she?"

"Really, I hardly know. One does not think of the age of a charming woman. Not less than forty, however."

"That will do," said Churchill, picturing to himself a sedate, middle-aged person. "Well, as there is no good in fighting against the inevitable, I suppose I might as well make up my mind to aid Cecil to go, with as good a grace as I can command."

"I am sure that you will not regret it," said Lysle.

"I wish I were as sure that you will not," was the significant reply.

CHAPTER X.

Sunset again in the pine-lands, and the two, who had grown accustomed to each other's companionship at this hour, were looking at it with the consciousness that it was the last they would watch together. The haze of Indian summer, which had filled the air and dimmed the sunshine all day, softened also the sunset glory from resplendence to tenderness. The sun had gone down as a red ball through the mist, leaving no dazzling clouds in his wake, but only a diffused glow of roseate gold, which overarched a purple world, out of which spicy, balsamic odors came on the freshening wings of the evening wind.

"I wonder," said Lysle, breaking a silence of some length, "when you and I will watch another sunset together!"

Cecil started a little, but did not look at him. "Ah, when?" she said. "That is a question impossible to answer."

"And best not to think of when one considers the conditions of life — how seldom a thing ever occurs as we fancy or as we desire it. There really seems a premium placed upon not desiring anything," said he, abstractedly stripping a small pine shrub beside him of its odorous needles, "for the thing which we do not desire is almost certain to be the thing which comes to pass."

“How consoling your philosophy is this evening," said Miss Churchill, "especially since I am on the brink of a great change!"

"Forgive me," he said, quickly. "But in truth my words did not apply to you at all. I was thinking altogether of myself and my own experience."

She looked at him then — curiosity as well as sympathy in her glance. "And has the thing you desired never come to pass?" she asked.

"Never — or, if it came to pass, it had changed its character so entirely that it proved to be not at all what I desired."

"Perhaps you had changed — not the thing. I can understand that."

"Can you? But I do not think it was I who had changed. I still knew distinctly what I wanted — too distinctly, perhaps, since neither circumstances nor people are apt to fill exactly the outlines of an ideal."

"Oh, if you wanted the outlines of an ideal filled, I am no longer surprised at your disappointment. Why, even I know better than to expect that!"

He laughed. "You are wisdom itself. Miss Churchill. And indeed I should not be uttering such complaints, if complaints they can be called — just now, when Fate has given me one thing which I very much desired. Whatever comes or does not come to *me*, the door which leads into the world is open to *you* now."

"Yes," she said, looking back again to the rosy sky, where, like Diana's bow, the silver crescent of the new moon hung. "Yes," she repeated after a moment's meditation, "it is open; but what shall I find beyond? Do you think the outlines of my ideals are likely to be filled, Mr. Lysle."

"You have just said that you do not expect it."

"That is very true. Yet let one lower one's expectations as one may, there is always room for disappointment. You, who have discovered so many cheerful things, must be aware of that."

"I am very well aware of it myself, but I decline to believe in it for you. I believe that your ideals are going to be fulfilled more completely than you imagine, in the life opening before you. I speak with confidence — because I know the life, and I know you."

"Do you think that you know me?" she asked, with a slight smile. "I am not sure of it."

"Not exhaustively, perhaps. 1 could not have the presumption to declare that. But I know you well enough to be sure of what will suit you in every fiber of your being. I have never anticipated a greater pleasure than that of seeing you expand in the existence for which you were made."

She turned her eyes on him again, and perhaps it was the sunset glow reflected on them which made them seem so full of light.

"When you speak in that way," she said, "you force me to recall your words a few minutes ago — how you declared that nothing you desired ever came to you. Do not expect too much from me, Mr. Lysle, or you may prepare for yourself another disappointment."

Despite himself, Lysle started. These words seemed like an echo of some others that he had heard very lately.

"Do you mean," he said, after a moment, "that you do not think the life will suit you?"

"Oh, no — I have very little doubt of that. It is the life for which I have always longed passionately, hopelessly. It will suit me, as you have said, in every fiber of my being. But I want to prepare you for the fact that it may not affect me exactly in the way you anticipate. I am accustomed to disappointing myself, but I should be sorry to disappoint you."

"I confess," he said, "that I do not understand you."

"Do you not? Then it is the first time I have had to reproach you with slowness of apprehension. But I think you do understand. You are looking for me to develop into something very brilliant, and I shall disappoint you — I feel that I shall."

He shook his head. “Make another prophecy. That is impossible."

"I prophesy, then, that the form the development will take will disappoint you. You need not smile incredulously. I know you — at least in part — as well as you know me. You are a man whose ideals can be very easily disappointed."

“Yes," he answered, with a quick light in his dark eyes as they met her own, "but I am a man whose instincts tell him that you will never disappoint any ideal that I may form of you. All this is only another phase of self-distrust — the self-distrust which made it so hard for you to believe in yourself."

"Ah, well," she said, with a short sigh, "what is the good of talking? Words are misleading sometimes, even when one is trying most to be frank. But remember I warn you — do not hope for too much."

"I do not hope for anything at all," he replied. "I am certain of some things. The rest I leave to — Fate."

"The Fate which has never given you anything you desired?"

"Perhaps it may relent at last. If not — what will be, will be."

His voice fell over the last words. He made a slight motion with his hand, as if he were dismissing something — some hope, some probability, perhaps — and then for a little while there was silence. Cecil sat motionless, her eyes fastened on the sunset sky, with the pines outlined against its gold, while Lysle's gaze presently fixed itself on her face. How entirely alone they were! — how much alone in every sense! The solemn forest which encircled them might have been that of some legend of enchantment, so entirely did it seem to divide them from the world of which they spoke — the world that might yet place a barrier between lives that a word might now unite. Was it the consciousness of this possibility which made that word tremble on Lysle's lip? The instinct which never played him false told

him that under Cecil's calm her pulses were beating like his own, and that if he spoke she might turn with a divine light in her deep, beautiful eyes. Was Hugh right, after all? If he surrendered this chance, would he never possess another? Life, he knew, was not prone to offer twice the chances that undecided fingers let slip. Now his was the only touch upon her life, the only influence to which she responded — how would it be when other touches came, when she was bent and swayed by other influences? The thought made him draw a quick, sharp breath as he looked at her. Yet in the very stress of the temptation lay the strongest reason for resisting it. If this were his only chance, then (he said to himself) it was no chance at all, but only an advantage taken of her ignorance. If his influence would not prove strong enough to resist the influences about to enter her life, then certainly he would forge no outside bond to hold her. He would not offer freedom in name and take it away in fact. Better any disappointment, any pain to himself, than that. It was with the strength of this resolve in his voice that he spoke at length:

"After all, the present is our only real concern. To-morrow, which may never come, and which will certainly find us changed in many ways when it does come, may be left to take care of itself. We can only act to-day according to the best light we have."

"Yes?" she said, without looking at him. "And by what light are you acting?"

He was a little startled; the question seemed to bear so directly upon his inward struggle. Yet he said to himself that, after all, he could not suppose her entirely unaware of it, and that it was best she should understand his motive as far as might be possible.

"By what light am I acting?" he repeated slowly. "Surely you must know. By that which seems to me best for you. The door of your prison — of the narrow life that held all your faculties dormant and chained — is open, and I want you to go forth without a fetter upon you, without anything that could retard the development from which I hope so much. Do not say again that I may be disappointed. That is not the point at all — my disappointment. I have no fear of it; but if it were so — if I were disappointed and yet you found happiness in the way that suited you best — believe me I should not be sorry. I should be glad."

She glanced at him swiftly, but she did not meet his gaze. In uttering the last words he had looked away from her. His eyes were fastened on the dim purple rim of the horizon, as if he saw there the possibility for which he should be glad.

"You think of me very much and very kindly," she said, in a low tone. "You may believe this — that I will never consciously disappoint you."

"Oh, but that will not do!" he said, quickly — and now their eyes met, as he turned his face toward her in the energy of protest — "that is what I wish to avoid, that you should be bound in any way. What I desire for you is perfect freedom."

"You desire an impossibility. Who is perfectly free?"

"A few people, I think. But if that is too comprehensive, I will amend it and say that I desire for you as much freedom as the limitations and conditions of life permit. I want you to develop in the manner intended by Nature. I see what you are in your chill, darkened life. I want to see what you will become with air, space, sunshine."

She laughed slightly. "Still the study! I have told you before that that is chiefly the form your interest in me takes."

"Well — and if it were so, do you object to being regarded as a study?"

"Oh, no." She lifted her shoulders with a gesture expressive of indifference. "Why should I object? Are we not all, in one way or another, studies to one another? But I have an idea that you will find me unsatisfactory in the end. Every one does."

“Who is every one? I distinctly object to being classed with people of whom I know nothing. But you remind me that I have had a warning about you lately."

"A warning — about me!" she turned, with haughty quickness. "Who could have ventured —"

“Your brother. And what he told me was that you soon wearied of your friends, and that, when you wearied, you discarded them without ceremony. This information did not frighten me, however. If I had the misfortune to weary you, I should prefer to be discarded without ceremony to being endured with patience. So let ceremony be as short as possible, Miss Churchill."

"I promise you that it shall be, Mr. Lysle, when I am tired of you. But how could Hugh tell you such a thing? It was natural enough from his point of view, I suppose, and yet —”

“It was altogether natural from his point of view, but I had the presumption to take another view. I have not known you as long as your brother has, but I think — I believe — that I know you a little better. I know that the people of whom you wearied were people whom you had endowed out of your own imagination with qualities which they did not possess. When you found your mistake, you — dropped them."

"Yes, sometimes very precipitately, I fear."

"Such things are best done decidedly if they are to be done at all. And it was necessary that it should be done, because disgust as well as weariness took the place of your former interest."

"Yes," she said again. "You know so much about it that I think you must have had some experiences of the kind yourself."

"Now and then, of course. But what I wish to say is, that there is no reason at all for you to blame yourself in the matter, as I think you are inclined to do."

"Sometimes I despise myself," she said. "I seem to have no constancy, no depth or strength of feeling at all. Why do you smile, Mr. Lysle? Is there not something contemptible in that? Is it not the mark of a shallow nature?"

"Not always. Sometimes it is the mark of a nature not easily satisfied by ordinary things — a nature in which depth of possible feeling, vivid imagination, and fastidious judgment are united. The feeling is eager to expend itself on objects which the imagination has invested with qualities they do not possess, and from which the judgment soon recoils. There is the whole story."

"You say that very coolly, but have you any idea what a wretched, disenchanting kind of thing it is, the strife between imagination and judgment; how tired one grows of finding people different from what one has conceived them to be, until at last one grows hard, cold, and skeptical?"

Looking at her, he saw in her eyes, as he heard in her tone, how much she had suffered under the process thus briefly described. The perception made his own voice very gentle as he answered:

"I think I understand. What you have borne has been that penalty of isolation which all who are formed in a finer mold than their fellows must endure. How heavy a penalty it is only those who have suffered it know. But it is enough to suffer without adding self-blame."

She gazed at him wistfully. "There is no quality which I admire so much as constancy," she said; "and it is the one in which I am absolutely lacking."

"There must be certain qualities to inspire confidence," he replied. "Would you have one constant to something which one's judgment condemned? I should call that folly, not fidelity. The last is a beautiful virtue, but a great deal of nonsense passes current under its name. Do not let your supposed inconstancy trouble you. Believe me, when you find that which is worthy of faith, you will be faithful."

"Shall I?" She gave a quick glance at him as if she would read all that he was thinking or feeling, and then looked back once more at the fading sunset. "It is almost gone," she said, indicating the dying color, "and we must be going. But let me say once, Mr. Lysle, what I have not said yet — how deeply I feel all your kindness, your interest —"

He lifted his hand with a gesture that silenced her. "I beg of you, not a word!" he said. "A year hence you may tell me whether or not you thank me for what I have done, but not now. There is too much uncertainty in the future."

' Whatever it holds, your intention to serve me remains the same."

“Yes; but we judge in this world not by intention, but by result. Wait! When we look at our next sunset together, you may be able to speak with more certainty of what you owe or do not owe to me."

BOOK 11.

"IN TWILIGHT OF THE ILEX."

CHAPTER I.

The Marchesa Ferrata was, as Lysle had said, familiar with many places, but there was only one place which she called home, and that was the beautiful Villa Ferrata, which stood on the hills above Florence, and looked down on the Val d'Arno spreading in rich loveliness toward the vine and olive girt heights that encompass it, on the historic river that flows by the palaces and under the bridges of Florence, on the marvelous dome of Brunelleschi and the lily tower of Giotto rising out of golden mist and dominating that city which is the wonder of the world, and on the mountains which, spreading afar into amethystine distance, range over range and peak above peak, guard forever this paradise of earthly beauty.

The scene was familiar enough to Lysle, as he left Florence overflowing with light and fragrance one day of spring, and drove out toward the villa. All the exquisite charm of the awakening of Nature — that awakening which is nowhere so enchanting as in Italy — was around him. The fields were green with springing cereals, the hill-sides were carpeted with hyacinths, daffodils, and sweet wild narcissi, the fruit-trees were out in a cloud of delicate-tinted bloom, the olive-trees turned their silvery leaves to the light, the hills were bathed in divinest color, and at every curve of the road a new picture opened to the gaze. It was all familiar, yet he found himself regarding it with the eyes of one who looked on it for the first time; and he said to himself that its surpassing loveliness, its classic charm, and the glamour of varied history, poetry, and romance might render it almost intoxicating to one who came for the first time to so rich a feast.

How was it with Cecil? He could hardly imagine, though his mind was full of conjectures. He had not seen her since they parted among the solemn pines beyond the Western ocean; and, although he had heard from her now and then in the interval, her letters had told him little of what he most wished to know. He understood why this had been. She was in a period of transition, when one impression followed another with bewildering rapidity, and the changed conditions of her life produced a mental confusion that for a time rendered it impossible for her to analyze her own sensations and opinions. She had made no attempt to do so in her letters to him. They had been very brief, and altogether conventional. In fulfillment of a promise, she wrote when all arrangements for her departure had been made, and she was on the point of sailing from America, again when (having landed at Havre) she met the marchesa in Paris, and yet again, for the last time, when they were established at Florence. "I feel like one who lives and moves and has her being in a dream," she said in this last letter, "quite incapable of telling you anything except that the marchesa is as kind as she is charming, and that the life in which I find myself is all that you painted it. I am too unfamiliar with it as yet to formulate any impressions, however, or to tell you anything of its effect upon myself. You must wait for that, and, meanwhile, believe that my sense of the great service you have rendered me deepens daily."

Three months had passed since that letter was dated, and now he was about to see for himself how it was with her. The marchesa had written of the agreeable impression the young stranger made upon

her, but this again told him nothing; and so it came to pass that he found himself unable to imagine how the great change which he had brought about had affected the girl who, six months before, stood by the road-side under the pines and welcomed him as he drove out from Oldfield.

Six months — and what a change! Again it was with her eyes, not his own, that he looked at the green and golden beauty of the fairest scene in the world, at the dreamful plains and the azure mountains, at the hills dark with the shadow of chestnut and ilex, at the walled roads and the old stone bridges, at the gleaming villages upon their heights, with the convent-towers above, and at the distant domes and spires which represented to the imagination all the warlike splendor, the infinite grace, and the divine genius of Florence. It was amid such scenes as these that he had fancied her, that he had dreamed of her, and now the time had come to put the touch of reality to his dreams.

It is not too much to say that he shrank a little from that touch. Eager as he was, he yet feared the result. He had known so many disappointments, so many illusions had perished with him, that he dreaded the loss of another. Would Cecil, who had seemed so simple, so noble, so fitted for the highest things and places of life, seem perhaps out of place and out of harmony here where the culture of ages had produced the finest results? He did not fear it, he only thought of it as possible, knowing the tendency of life to disappoint our dreams and make a mockery of our expectations.

When the carriage — which had been sent by the marchesa to meet him in Florence — rolled into the gates of the villa, he looked out eagerly. Would the figure, that had stood under the pines on that October day, meet him now with the spring sunshine around it? He knew that it was not likely, yet he had a sense of disappointment when he saw the broad terrace with its stone steps altogether empty, and when only a servant stepped from the *loggia* to receive him.

He was conducted at once to a room which he knew well — the boudoir of the marchesa, where only her most intimate friends were admitted. It opened out of the suite of reception-rooms — such noble, lofty rooms as are found only in Italian palaces — but was itself a small and charming apartment, hung with satin, and filled with everything that a taste cultivated to the verge of extreme refinement would be likely to gather. Pictures, delicate old ivory carving, books in overflowing abundance, and flowers in profusion, were there; while the deep windows looked out on the purple beauty of the distant hills. A small fire of logs blazed on the hearth, for, bright and warm as the day was outside, a chill yet lingered within these great stone walls built to resist the heats of summer, and in a low deep chair by this fire sat a lady who looked up with an exclamation of pleasure when the servant who drew back the *portière* announced Mr. Lysle.

"My dear Bernard," she said, rising, "how charmed I am to see you!"

"And I to return once more to you," he said, kissing the hand she gave him.

She smiled a little. "Is it exactly to me that you have returned?" she asked. "But no matter. I am unselfish enough — or selfish enough, which is it? — to be glad to see you, for whatever reason you come. Sit down, and you shall have a cup of tea in a moment."

He sat down, and looked at her with a smile. If he felt a thrill of disappointment that no one else was present to greet him, there was no sign of it in his face or manner. Indeed, he spoke truly when he said that it was always a pleasure to him to return to this woman, who long ago had taught him what an education there may be in the friendship and intimacy of such a woman as herself. In his boyhood he had adored her as a boy adores the goddess who stands far above him, and she had responded to his homage with the frankest and kindest interest — that interest easily kindled in a woman of intellect by youth with a touch of genius. The ardent, undimmed passion of such youth has sometimes a strange power to touch and fascinate women who have known most of the world, but Ida, Marchesa del Ferrata was not a woman whom any passion could touch, to more than sympathy and compassion. One supreme passion her heart had known, and that for the man whom she had married — the finest and highest type of an Italian noble, with the elevation of character, the infinite gentleness, and the courtly dignity which in comparison make

all other men, and especially men of the arrogant Anglo-Saxon race, seem like boors. A few short years of happiness were granted her with this man, and then he had died, leaving her still young, still beautiful, with all her immense wealth and a broken heart. She might have made any alliance that she chose, but as time went on the world began to perceive that no alliance, however brilliant, would tempt her, men grew weary of courting rejection, and it was at length clearly understood that she would never marry again. She was strong enough, however, to take her life, after its greatest good had gone out of it, and strive to make interests for herself of such good as remained. She cultivated her intellectual and artistic tastes to the utmost, her wealth and her rank opened to her every circle worth knowing in every country of Europe; but that which she liked best was to find herself at home on her husband's estate, in the old Ferrata villa, surrounded by the people who had loved and mourned him with that touching feudal devotion which still exists in Italy between the lords of the soil and those who dwell upon it. Here she could do all that he had wished to do— all that they had dreamed and planned in the brief time granted them together— and find her own happiness in making the happiness of others.

She was a very beautiful woman still, though she had passed by some years the age that Lysle had vaguely assigned to her. There was no mistaking her Greek descent. It showed itself in the classic grace of her features, in the classic poise of her head, and in the full beauty of her large dark eyes. Those eyes were looking now with a very kindly scrutiny at the young man before her.

"You are wondering, no doubt, where Cecil is," she said. "We did not look for you so soon, and she has not returned from an excursion to Certosa. It has been talked of for several days, and the morning was so fine that they thought it best not to defer it longer."

"'They!' You have guests, then?"

"I am seldom without them, you know — at least at this season. But only Nina and Carlo are with me at present, though we have many visitors from Florence."

"Naturally. And have Nina and Carlo taken Miss Churchill to Certosa?"

"Yes — with Herbert Dorrian. He has been here this winter, and we see a good deal of him."

Lysle did not say again, "Naturally," though he might readily have done so. For what was more natural than that Dorrian, whom he knew well as the most fastidious and art-loving of *dilettante*, should find himself in his element at the Villa Ferrata? He made no comment on the statement, and indeed a diversion was created at the moment by the entrance of a servant bringing tea.

As he received the fragrant cup which she prepared for him, the marchesa said: “What is the meaning of that hint in your letter that you can only give me a day or two? I shall be here for another month, and you know how delighted I will be if you can remain for that length of time."

"Do not tempt me!" he answered, as a swift vision passed before his eyes of all that a month might hold — here, in enchanted Italy — of pleasure and happiness. “I am on my way to Egypt. Important events are looked for soon, and I have been selected for the honor of a special mission. Positive information is wanted immediately, so you see a day or two is the very utmost indulgence that I can allow myself."

"Are you sent by the Government?"

"Indirectly, yes. They need information which their official agents are not able to give, and which they think I can obtain."

"Do you think so, too?"

"I should not have accepted the mission if I did not think so. There are some strings in the tangled affairs of Egypt that I have learned to pull. There is one man in England who might have better opportunities of knowledge than I have — but I think only one."

"And he is not there?"

A moment's pause, during which both sipped their tea, and the soft noise of the fire filled the silence. But presently the marchesa lifted her full, brilliant glance to her companion's face.

"Under these circumstances," she said, "it is very good of you to have given us even a day or two. I understand why you have done so. Bernard, may I speak frankly?"

His glance met hers. "There is nothing you could ask which I should refuse to answer," he said.

"That gives me leave to ask what I will? Then, to save time — for we may be interrupted — I shall go at once to the heart of things. I know that you love this girl whom you have placed with me; are you also engaged to her?"

"Certainly not," he answered, with decision. "Why should you think of such a thing?"

"Why should I not? It seems possible. You can not deny that you are in love with her."

"I have no wish to deny it. But she knows nothing of it — at least, from me. One can never answer for what a woman's instinct may tell her. How has yours revealed this to you?"

"Did you think me so stupid as not to be able to read between the lines of that letter in which you described her to me and implored my help? What but my knowledge of that would have made me offer to take charge of her?"

"I was simple enough to think that your kindness of heart induced you to do so."

She laughed softly. "*Caro mio,* kindness of heart might have made me offer any substantial assistance in my power, but it would never of itself have induced me to dream of embarrassing myself — it might have proved a very serious embarrassment — with a girl whom I never saw, and who did not belong to any people or any society of which I had the least knowledge, who might have violated every decorum of civilized life —"

"You surely believed me when I set your mind at ease on those points?" he interposed.

"Oh, yes, I believed you, as far as your knowledge went. But how could I tell how far that was? If her life had been as secluded as you represented, who could say how she would bear herself when suddenly introduced into a world for which she had no training, no preparation? I assure you, I shivered while I wrote that letter. And nothing but my interest, my affection for you, made me write it. I was determined that, if you cared for the girl, I would do all I could to render her worthy of you."

He leaned forward, and, taking one of the beautiful hands that lay in her lap, kissed it again. "What a friend you are! What a friend you have been to me always!" he said. "I knew I could rely on you for aid; yet, if I had suspected that you shivered with such apprehension, I should never have asked or accepted it. And, when you saw her, what then?"

"Then I realized what I suppose I should have known from the first, that you were not a man to make mistakes — at least, not of a certain kind. She had much to learn, of course — the habits, customs, *je ne sais quoi* of the world, and into all she has fallen with the utmost ease and rapidity. But the essentials of fine breeding were already hers — instinct, manner, bearing — to a wonderful degree."

Lysle's eyes gave a soft, luminous flash. He remembered how he had once prophesied to Cecil for her reassurance much such a verdict as this. Would all his other prophecies prove as true?

"Yes," he said, quietly, "I knew that. I knew the people of whom she came. You did not, so your fears were excusable. But the rest — her character, her mental qualities? How have they impressed you?"

"As much as you could desire. Genius is so rare that it must impress one whenever one meets it; and, like yourself, I have seen too much of the intellectual world not to recognize the signs of something very remarkable here. She has the true artistic nature, but whether or not she has the creative power I can not tell — no one can tell until the test is made."

"The test has been made. She possesses it."

"Then there may be a brilliant future before her — it is impossible to doubt that. But, Bernard, forgive me if I remind you — now, while she stands on the threshold of it — that such futures are very likely to unfit a woman for the ordinary lot of her sex. If you love her, take her before she has entered on it. And it will be better for your happiness if she never enters it at all."

He paled a little. How the same advice met him everywhere! This woman of the world, knowing the world to its core, echoed the words which honest Hugh Churchill had uttered in the remote Southern pine-land. Why could none of them understand? Why would none of them believe that his own happiness was not the end which he had in view?

"You draw a very natural conclusion," he said, after a short silence, "but I think you will comprehend when I tell you that it was with no view of preparing a wife for myself that I tried to enlist your interest for Miss Churchill. What I desired then, what I desire now, is to give a rare and finely gifted nature the opportunity to develop in the life suited to it. I believe in that brilliant future which you presage, and nothing would induce me to take one step to hinder it. To hinder it, do I say? There is nothing which I could do to render it assured that I would not do! If you could have known this spirit as I knew it first — prisoned, starving, hopeless, with no outlet for the powers and the aspirations which burned like a hidden lire — you would understand the longing which I felt to release it, to give it scope and liberty. And, having done this, having opened the door of one prison, do you think I would ask her to enter another because it was gilded with love — if, indeed, a passion so selfish could deserve the name?"

"A prison! Would you call union with your life *that*?"

"Yes, because even my life would make demands upon hers that would deprive it of the ideal liberty I desire for her. Perhaps I have the partial fondness of the discoverer, but it seems to me that one is not likely to find a Cecil Churchill twice in existence, and I wish to see if she will justify all my hopes of her, all my belief in her. Happiness would be too dearly gained which was bought at the price of laying a single fetter upon her newly won freedom."

The marchesa leaned back in her chair and looked at him as if she could hardly decide whether to laugh or expostulate. She knew him too well to doubt how thoroughly he was in earnest, and perhaps it was the realization of this which made her at length say, gravely:

"My dear Bernard, yon force me to ask, what do you propose as the final end of your love?"

“I propose nothing," he answered, quietly. "I leave its final end to Fate— to the future. Believe me when I say again that it was with no thought of myself I opened her prison. I should have done it if I had not loved her, and I would not suffer my love to prevent my doing it."

“You are too quixotic. If you love her, you should assert your influence while it is still strong with her. And it is strong now. But after a while, if it does not increase, it must, with widened knowledge of the world and of men, grow less. You know that."

He bent his head in assent. "I know it well; and that will be the test. I would rather lose her than win her through her ignorance."

The marchesa lifted her hand with a gesture of impatience. "You talk like a boy!" she said. "Has not life taught you better than such uncompromising ideas? He who insists upon everything gains nothing. He who puts his happiness to unwise tests, loses it."

"So be it." He rose to his feet and stood before her, smiling slightly. "You insisted upon knowing — no, forgive me, you did not insist, but you desired to know my position toward Miss Churchill. Here is what it is — a friend infinitely interested in her welfare, who hopes that you will not regret your kindness now that you know the truth."

"No," she answered slowly — "no, I do not regret it, for I too am interested now, and she really proves all that I desired as a companion. But she would not be here if I had not thought I was serving you."

"And so you are serving me — most deeply. Have I talked to so little purpose that you doubt it?"

"Ah! I mean serving you as a woman best likes to serve a man to whom she is attached as I am attached to you — serving you by helping you to that which your heart desires. But I begin to doubt if your heart really desires this. Instinctively a man puts out his hand and grasps what he desires with the strength of passion."

Lysle, looking down at the brands on the hearth, was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Perhaps you are right. Very likely I have not the true strength of passion. But do I not hear voices approaching? And there is Nina's laugh. One can not mistake that."

CHAPTER II.

It was a laugh sweet as a peal of silver bells, and child-like in its suggestion of light-hearted gayety. The next moment the opening door revealed a figure altogether in keeping with the laugh — a small, dainty person exquisitely dressed, a face of the freshest, most Greuze-like type of beauty, framed by a cloud of golden hair. Nina, Contessa Salvieri, was the niece to whom the marchesa had alluded in that letter to Lysle in which she declared that she needed some one to fill her vacant place. The child of the marchesa's half-sister, she was altogether English, and having been left an orphan with a slender inheritance, had been adopted by her aunt and brought up in the cosmopolitan atmosphere in which the latter lived. She had lately married a young Roman, who followed her into the room, and whose delicate dark grace contrasted well with her blonde *riante* loveliness. She smiled brightly when she saw Lysle.

"So here you are!" she exclaimed. "How delightful to see you again! Why have you not come before?" We have been expecting you so long!"

"Is it possible you have given a thought to any one outside your own charmed circle?" he said. “That was very good of you. Happiness usually makes people selfish; and one has but to look at you to perceive that you are happy."

"Was I ever anything else?" she asked, naively. "But that was comparative, and this is superlative. Carlo mio, I believe you know my cousin, Bernard Lysle."

The young count with much grace replied that he had met M. Lysle; and while the two men exchanged courteous speeches in the language which lends itself most readily to compliment, Lysle found himself watching the door for Cecil's entrance.

A moment later she appeared, and as she entered what a thrill passed through him! He knew himself so well that he was aware how much depended upon the first impression she would make — whether it was of disappointment or of realization. If she had seemed to him beautiful when they had walked together in the pine- woods, or he had seen her in the little rustic school-room, which was so strange a memory to connect with her, what did she seem now, in surroundings that would have brought into immediate relief the least failure in grace of bearing or ease of manner?

He said to himself that those old walls had never looked down upon a presence better fitted to dwell within them. As she entered with an unconscious grace which had always belonged to her, her dress bearing the stamp of highest elegance yet infinitely picturesque in the soft folds that draped her slender form, with her pale, clear cheek faintly flushed like a Malmaison rose, her rich hair showing under the dark plumes of her hat, and her hands full of wild hyacinths and narcissi, she was a figure thoroughly in harmony with all the stateliness and luxury around her. The marchesa herself was not more simply and nobly beautiful. Lysle's heart gave a throb of triumph and unselfish pleasure. These were the scenes in which Nature had fitted her to move, and it was his hand which had placed her here! He felt at this moment that to have done so was enough.

She did not perceive him immediately; she was smiling at some low-toned remark of her companion — a tall, pale, slender man, whose extreme distinction of appearance was the only thing remarkable about him. But when she turned her eyes toward the group at the fire, a sudden light came into them, and with quick impulsiveness she moved forward, crying eagerly:

"Oh, you have come! How glad I am to see you —at last!"

He met her in the middle of the room, and took her flower-filled hands within his own. At that moment he would have given much to be alone with her; to be at liberty to lift those hands to his lips; to say — what would he have said? Perhaps it was as well that there were ears around to be considered. He smiled a little — the well-remembered smile which seemed to transport her as if by magic to the place where they had parted.

"Will your gladness help you in any degree to measure mine?" he said. "Can you imagine how happy I am to see you again, and to see you looking so well?"

"I am very well," she answered. "Who could be other than well here? O, Mr. Lysle, am I dreaming? Sometimes I think I must be, and now it seems to me that, if I close my eyes, I shall hear the pines murmuring above my head."

"Do not close them, then! I am sorry if I bring back memories of the prison; but one can not help such things. And, to my eyes, all the sunshine of Italy is about you."

She smiled. "You see it, then? But you always see everything. I know that of old. And I am glad you recognize this, since I never forget that I owe all this sunshine to your —"

"Good-fortune," he interposed, quickly. "Nothing more. You must not exaggerate an opportunity into an obligation. I was simply the medium to bring together two people who I knew would suit each other."

“I hope that I suit the marchesa," she said, simply. "She suits me as I never imagined any woman could. But she is looking at us. I must wait, to tell you all that I think of her, until she is not so near."

"And there is much besides that I wish to hear at the first convenient season," he observed, as they moved toward the tea-table, where Contessa Nina was handing a cup to Mr. Dorrian.

Lysle and that gentleman shook hands with the surface cordiality of men who have met frequently, but who would be no nearer friendship at the end of fifty years than they were at the beginning. There was, in fact, very little sympathy between them. Lysle had not much respect for a man who could find no better use for a fine fortune and undoubted talents than to live the life of a *dilettante* in foreign cities, gratifying every taste to the utmost, and acknowledging no law but his own caprice; while Dorrian regarded Lysle as one who had put his talents into a harness quite unworthy of them. Of the love of adventure which had made the latter run many risks, he had no comprehension. To him it was all a vulgar seeking of notoriety, a casting life and ability into the scales of the money-changers. Having himself no need of those personages, he was contemptuous of those who had. The art or the book that was "popular" had for him the brand of condemnation upon it, and, of course, the man whose ultimate end was that of making money, must also have for his ultimate end that of popularity. This, in his mind, admitted of no question, and, from the high, serene atmosphere in which he lived, he regarded all such men with a disdain which did not, however, interfere with a certain tolerance when they were liked or admired by the world in which he moved.

Such a tolerance he extended to Lysle; but, while the marchesa and her niece questioned the latter about things and people in London, he drank his tea in silence. Nothing interested him less than English affairs. He had occasionally been known to characterize his countrymen as "splendid savages," but, except for their savage-like qualities of courage, endurance, and daring, he considered them with a scorn somewhat less delicate than that of Mr. Ruskin. Their insular narrowness — which not even a world-wide empire can enlarge — their Philistinism in art, their love of brutal sports, and their arrogant attitude toward races and nations infinitely their superiors in everything except material prosperity, disgusted the man whose knowledge was cosmopolitan, and whose sympathies were refined to the highest degree.

Needless to say that, with these ideas, he was looked upon by the most of his countrymen with whom he came in contact as an effeminate creature, very little, if any, better than a foreigner. But to Mr. Dorrian nothing on earth, or of the things beneath the earth, mattered less than the opinion of his compatriots. He habitually avoided them; and it is not too much to affirm that he would have gone to

Bagdad, had such a journey been necessary, to escape contact with the "English colony" which flourishes in most Continental cities. At Florence he had his villa, into which no Philistine foot ever entered, where he spent the greater part of his existence in the midst of a rare collection of beautiful things, and where he now and then entertained his cosmopolitan friends, who were chiefly French, Italian, and Russian.

It is only necessary to say, further, that he had long been one of the most devoted of the marchesa's admirers. Indeed, at one time, while it was still held possible that she might marry again, his name had frequently been connected with hers. No one knew whether or not he had ever gone so far as to offer himself; but, if so, the fact of his rejection had not interfered with their friendly relations. He remained devoted to her with a devotion which seemed to put marriage with any one else out of the question; while she, perhaps, knew him better than did any one else in the world, and liked him well, notwithstanding his many affectations.

At present, however, Lysle did not fail to observe that, while he drank his tea in silence, his eyes, under their drooping lids, were turned to Cecil, who, also in silence, sat listening to the conversation. But there is a silence which can be more eloquent than any words, and such was this of hers. Every line of her face, and the brightness of her large eyes, showed how much she was interested while she sat, still as a picture, in a chair with a high, carved back, which threw into picture-like relief the fairness of her face. It was no wonder that Dorrian, with his passion for all beautiful things, should have looked at her; and, although Lysle would have repudiated with indignation the idea that he had any need of Dorrian's judgment to confirm his own, there could be no doubt that this admiring gaze told him how well he had judged in assuring Mrs. Churchill that Cecil's beauty was of a kind to please the cultured taste of men who made beauty the study of their lives.

"Bernard assures me," said the marchesa, presently, addressing her niece, "that he can not give us more than a day or two. What shall we do, then, to entertain him best?"

Contessa Nina looked at him like a pretty bird, with her head on one side. "Only a day or two!" she repeated. "How English that sounds! You need to stay in Italy for a time, Bernardo mio, if only to learn not to rush through life in that dreadful break-neck manner, Now, why on earth should it be only a day or two? Why not as long as you like?"

"Because, my dear Nina, I have promised to be in Egypt by a certain date, which allows me here only the day or two of which I have spoken."

"In Egypt — to be grilled alive! Oh, what a man you are! Have you not had enough of those awful places? I assure you that to read your descriptions of them makes my hair stand on end. If we have only one life to live, why spend it in deserts, on camels, and in dangers of all kinds ? "

Lysle laughed. "Why, indeed? — except that some one must do such things, and I, strange as it may appear to you, like the deserts, the camels, and even the dangers. But the only danger in the mission on which I now go is the danger of blundering."

"And that you will never do," said she with confidence. "It is not possible to you."

"Ah, I wish that I were sure of that!" he said, glancing involuntarily at Cecil. "But it is something of which no man can be sure."

"A mistake is one thing, and a blunder is another," said the marchesa. "I agree with Nina that the last is impossible to you, though the first may not be. There is something clumsy in a blunder; and you are never clumsy, my dear Bernard. But she has given no answer to my question, how we shall best entertain you."

“I hope that Nina knows — I should certainly have expected you to know — that I require no entertainment beyond the pleasure of being with you," he said, quickly. "For Heaven's sake, don't make up any parties, have any dinners, or go on any excursions on my account!"

The marchesa laughed. "Don't you think you might trust us not to bore you?" she said. "But rest tranquil; nothing shall be done on your account that would not have been done in any event. We do not exactly live in a hermitage, you know; and it is the season now for *alfresco* amusements."

"I think you would have liked it if you had been with us at Certosa to-day," said Cecil.

He looked at her with a smile. "Ah, yes — I am sure I should have liked it at Certosa," he said. "Why did you not wait for me? We could have gone to-morrow."

"To-morrow," said Dorrian, speaking for the first time, in his languid voice, "the ladies have kindly promised to visit my villa. I hope you can be induced to come also. I shall be charmed to see you."

Lysle murmured an acceptance — there was nothing else to do — and then moved with quiet determination over to Cecil.

"When I have had the pleasure of being here before," he said, "I thought that the gardens of this villa were as lovely as any in Italy. I suppose they have lost none of their charm, but I should like to satisfy myself on the point. We have taken many walks together under the pines — do you feel inclined to take one under the ilex?"

"Very much," she answered, rising without the slightest hesitation of look or manner. "We have just time for a turn in the ilex avenue before it is necessary to dress for dinner."

CHAPTER III.

If there is anything in the world more beautiful than an Italian garden, where shall one go to find it? In its formality there is a classic grace, in its wildness a poetical charm which all other gardens, let them be beautiful as they may, of necessity lack. In the noble ilex shades Virgil and Horace seem to walk; over the moss-grown, naiad-guarded fountains Petrarch might muse; along the stately terraces Raphael might move, looking at the silvery loveliness of the nearer olive slopes, and the heavenly blueness of the distant hills; on the flowery sward the story-tellers of Boccaccio might gather; and in the green dimness of dreamful avenues poets, scholars, and saints might each find the ideal solitude that inspiration needs.

Such a garden was that of the Villa Ferrata. It was of great extent, with the broad, balustraded terraces that always suggest a court, or at least courtly figures, with alleys lined by walls of box and shaded by giant cypresses, with ilex groves and avenues, where in the deep shade through which scarcely a ray of sunshine could flicker, statues and antique columns stood, with fountains that flung their flashing spray amid a wilderness of acanthus-leaves, and fell with musical murmur into the great basins fringed with ferns, and with a wealth of flowers that bloomed continuously from early spring to latest autumn — myrtles, acacias, roses, oleanders, tropical cacti, and lemon-trees, with their golden fruit shining through glistening leaves.

In these lovely shades, which knew no change save the natural changes of the season, Lysle and Cecil found themselves together for the first time since they had walked under the distant Southern pines. The thought was so strongly in the minds of both, that they had hardly left the villa when Cecil, glancing at her companion, said, with a smile:

"Are you a magician, Mr. Lysle? I sometimes think you must be, when I look around and realize how wildly improbable it would have appeared a few months ago that I could ever be in such scenes as these."

"You would not say so if you could see yourself," he answered. "You seem made for them."

She flushed a little. "You are very good to say so. And, since you stand pledged by an old promise not to flatter me, I will believe you now, as I have believed your pleasant words of praise before. But that does not make it one whit less remarkable that I should be here."

"It does not strike me as remarkable at all — only a very simple and eminently suitable arrangement. And you like my cousin? I am glad of that."

"Like her!" She paused a moment with a quick light on her face. "Do you know that, if I belonged to the romantic order of women, I should say that I was in love with the marchesa? She fascinates me; she is all that 1 ever dreamed a woman could or should be. Her life" — she sighed a little — "is my ideal existence."

"I do not think it is her own," answered Lysle. "Hers, I am sure, would include the love she has lost, and to which she remains faithful."

“Ah — perhaps so," said Miss Churchill, with the air of one to whom a new thought is suggested. "But it does not seem to me that her life lacks anything. Indeed, one of its greatest charms is its absolute freedom."

"You would not, then, have considered her free if the husband to whom she was devoted had lived?"

"How could any one have considered her free then? There may be compensations in love for the loss of freedom — at least people say so — but that it is lost there can be no question."

"You will admit, however, that it is sometimes happily, lost," said Lysle, conscious of a curious sensation — a mingling of pain with a sense of the justification of his own wisdom.

She lifted her shoulders with a little foreign gesture which she had caught. "Of course, one must admit it, in view of the overwhelming testimony to that effect, but I think it is only happily lost by those who are unaware of its value."

"And you are aware of it?"

"Fully, I think. It has always seemed to me of supreme value. 1 do not mean that life might not offer an inducement sufficiently great to influence one to sacrifice it — but one would be distinctly conscious of the sacrifice."

"I suppose so," said Lysle, with a swift smile, which she would scarcely have understood had she seen it. He was thinking how well it was that he had held inflexibly to his own opinion, and had not offered an inducement which might have justified a sacrifice distinctly felt to be such.

They were silent then for a few minutes. This was not the turn he had intended the conversation to take when he had asked her to come out with him; but there is a singular perversity in human affairs sometimes and the thing which we do not mean to say is frequently the thing which is said. So they walked through the stately grace of the beautiful garden as they had often walked through the vast aisles of the pine-forest — silent, yet with a sense of thorough companionship. It was Cecil who at length spoke again:

"No doubt you are so familiar with this place, and other places like it, that it has not the same charm for you as for me, but I feel like the Spanish monk in Lord Houghton's poem, as if the great figures of the past that have walked here were alone real, and *I* were the shadow."

"I can understand the feeling," said Lysle, as he looked at the dim avenues down which those figures had passed, the terraces where they had lingered, and the bosky depths of shade, musical with the sound of falling water, where they had woven intrigues or whispered love. “They were so splendid, so noble, so picturesque, those old figures of Florence, that they may well dominate forever the scenes where they have moved. And you — who have always lived in the world of the imagination — you feel it, of course, as no ordinary person would."

"I might not feel it so much if, like those around me, I had always lived among such associations," she said. "But to come from a land which has no history — or only a history of yesterday — and to step at once into the scenes which surround me here — the most beautiful, the most famous, the most hallowed by human genius of any in the world — can you wonder that I am like one who walks in a dream?"

"I do not wonder at all. I am only glad that the dream is so beautiful."

"Ah, how beautiful you can not possibly know! I wish that I could tell you what I felt the day I entered Florence, when in the light of a luminous sunset her marvelous beauty first broke on me like a revelation, when her classic loveliness, her imperishable greatness and her mighty memories all at once laid a spell of absolute enchantment upon me!"

He smiled as one who is well pleased. "You tell me much," he said, "and I can — in some degree at least — imagine the rest. I am not insensible to such influences myself. And I knew what they would be to you." He paused an instant, then said, softly, "Do you ever think of the pond among the hills?"

She answered with a quick glance: "Can I ever forget it? Do you think the stream, though it were set free, could ever forget the desolate hills and somber trees that had shadowed it so long?"

"It seems to me that it might do so, if it reflected the sky of Italy, the towers and palaces of Florence."

She shook her head. "All that may be a delight, but the memory and the influence of the past must remain. How can one cut out a part of one's life and throw it away? Surely existence would be a much simpler and more agreeable matter than it is if one only could. And that was why I rebelled so against that life — I had not only to endure it, but I knew that it was laying its ineffaceable influence upon me."

"1 do not think you will find it ineffaceable, now that you are free."

"I fear that I shall. How can one alter that which has been? How can one replace wasted years? In this atmosphere of noble culture I feel the value of every day; and I have lost so many — so many!"

"Let them go without regret. You have so many yet to come; and you have but to stretch out your hand and make all forms of culture your own. In the maturity of your powers it will cost you no effort to do so."

"You think too well of me — you expect too much of me," she cried, almost sharply. "Have I not warned you not to look for anything but disappointment from me?"

“Would it be disappointment if I looked for it?" he asked, smiling. "But why say such things of yourself? Do you regret — the freedom?"

"Regret it!" There was a passionate light in the eyes that looked at him. "If I knew that it would lead to the utmost misery human nature could endure, I should not regret it! If I have never fitly expressed my gratitude for the immensity of the gift you brought when you came that autumn day to my narrow school-room, it was because there seemed no words strong enough to express it. I felt then, by the irksome bitterness of captivity, what freedom might be; but now that I know — oh, remember always that nothing could make me regret it!"

He bent his head in token of satisfaction, and he did not again disclaim her gratitude; he knew well that he had indeed carried a great gift when he went to her that autumn day. The final result neither of them could foresee, but it was something to be assured in that passionate voice, with those passionate eyes, that nothing could make her regret it.

They were meanwhile walking in the ilex avenue of which Cecil had spoken — a space lined by great old trees, with massive leaning trunks, and mighty interlacing boughs forming a dense canopy overhead. At noon — the high noon of Italy, with all its radiant, penetrating light — there was always the "ilex twilight" here, a delicious green obscurity from which one looked through an arch of foliage on a wide plain swimming in golden light, and distant hills, fair as the heights of heaven. Behind those hills just now the sun was sinking, touching their mighty summits with a kiss, under which they glowed into jewel-like splendor.

At this moment Cecil and Lysle emerged from the avenue to the terrace on which it opened — and a picture, than which the earth can show nothing fairer, was spread before them. The Val d'Arno lay at their feet, filled with ethereal, rosy mist, its silvery olive-woods, its flower-sown meadows, its villas and gardens bathed in radiance, while out of the midst of the sea of light and color Florence lifted her

shining domes and airy towers like the city of a poet's dream. As the sun sank behind the violet range of Carrara, her bells rang out the *Ave Maria*, and were answered by village churches and embowered convents on plain and hill. These sweet sounds, softened by distance and filling all the air, mingled with the luminous pomegranate-flushed vapor and the countless perfumes of opening blossoms to complete the enchantment of the scene. The great ranges of encircling mountains caught from the sunset tints of changing glory, while soft cirrus clouds, like scattered rose-leaves, floated over their summits. All the spell, the charm, the infinite loveliness of Italy, seemed at this moment to touch the two where they stood on the villa-terrace, with the olive-clad hill-side sloping downward at their feet, and about them a cloud of almond-trees in bloom.

Walking to the edge of the terrace, Cecil leaned against the stone balustrade and let her glance wander over the wide, radiant scene, from villa-crowned Fiesole to the dark pines of Vallombrosa. Then she turned and looked at Lysle.

"You ask me if I could regret — ever — to have seen this before I die?" she said, in a low, thrilling tone. "Oh, how would it be possible?"

"You have answered," he said, "a question which I brought you here to ask. Do you remember our last walk in the pine-lands? — and how I bade you wait until we looked at our next sunset together to tell me whether or not you held it well done that I had opened the way into the world for you?"

She held out her hand to him with a quick impulsive gesture full of grace. "You have given me life," she said. "What I had before was merely a dull existence full of the sense of pain, of smothered aspiration, and crippled powers. I may disappoint you, Mr. Lysle — 1 have told you again and again I may not become anything that you expect — but always remember that I owe you a debt which nothing can repay. You have brought me into a world which suits me, as you once said it would, in every fiber of my being. The days are one long enchantment — I have missed nothing, wanted nothing, since I have been here."

"Nothing?" he repeated. It was strange how often in her unconsciousness she seemed fated to pain him this evening — the evening to which he had looked forward with so much vague hope and longing. He had been honest with himself and honest with his cousin when he had said that he would not, if he could, lay a fetter upon her; but if, perhaps, absence had made her feel the need of him, why, then it would be no fetter that he might offer, but the fulfillment of love and hope. He thought of the evening in the pine-lands to which he had alluded, when she had seemed so near to him, when he had felt that he had but to put out his hand and take all that he desired. And now, her frankly given hand lay in his, her eyes shone like stars as they gazed at him, and yet how far she was from him — how far, as she said that she had missed nothing, wanted nothing, since they parted! A faint sigh passed his lips as he echoed her word; then, bending his head, he lightly kissed her hand and let it go.

"Do not talk of debt or repayment unless you wish to wound me — and that I know you do not wish," he said. "Granting that you owe me anything, I am more than repaid by your happiness. To see you happy, to see you in a life suited to you, I would have done much. As it happens, I did nothing — except write a letter. And never before, I am sure, was so small an exertion so greatly rewarded. Yet, although I have been fully rewarded, I will beg one favor of you."

"And that is— ?"

"Never to speak again of disappointing me. As I have told you before, it is impossible. Being yourself, you can not disappoint me. But you do me injustice when you seem to imply that I expect you to become something which you are not."

"Believe me," she said, "I would not willingly do you injustice."

"I am certain of that, and so I ask you to believe that your happiness is sufficient to satisfy me, whether you find it in the joy of artistic production — as I think that you will — or in that enjoyment of what others have produced, which may be called the passive side of the intellectual life."

“I have felt no desire to produce anything since I have been here," she said, dreamily.

"No, because you are absorbed in receiving impressions. We must be receptive before we can be productive. But after a while, when the intoxication of novelty has worn off, when you have fully assimilated all the new influences which surround you, then the impulse, the passion, the need to produce, will wake in you again. Until that day, rest tranquil — steep yourself as you will in art and history and natural beauty. All these things are forces which will one day enrich your work."

As she listened to him with slightly parted lips and shining eyes, he could not but recall the day he had uttered his first words of encouragement, when he had declared to her the value of her work and the promise of her future. He saw the school-room walls, the dancing shadow of the vines, the beautiful, earnest face listening to him as to an oracle. The same face was turned to him now, while sunset burned above the crests of the Apennines, and Florence lay below with all her magic beauty, her divine inheritance of genius and art.

"No one stimulates me as you do," she said. "When I listen to you, everything seems possible; but when you are gone, I question and doubt. It has always been so with me."

"It will not always be so with you," he said. "The time will come when you will feel your own power too strongly to doubt yourself. Then you will no longer need my voice to stimulate you. But, as long as you do need it, I promise that it shall not fail."

"I have implicit confidence in you," she said. "But I fear that, with the best will imaginable on your part, your voice can not speak to me very effectively from Egypt or Afghanistan."

"I shall not be always in Egypt or Afghanistan."

"I hope not, indeed — but I wish that you were not going at all."

"I was tempted to wish that also a short time ago, but now I think it is best. Your 'sweet Val d'Arno' would prove an enervating paradise if one lingered long in it, I fear."

She looked at him wistfully. Some words seemed trembling on her lip, but she did not utter them. She looked away again toward the distant mountains, over which a dark purple shade was now stealing as twilight fell.

"But its influence is just what you need," he went on, after a moment. "I could desire nothing better for you; and when we meet again I hope you can still tell me that you have missed nothing, wanted nothing, in the interval."

CHAPTER IV.

The villa of Dorrian was not far from the Villa Ferrata, but higher up among the hills — a noble place which he had purchased from an impoverished princely family and spent immense sums in restoring and embellishing. It was not a show-place, for the very good reason that he was absolutely intolerant of sight-seers, but those who were admitted as guests within its gates brought away such glowing accounts of its beauty, that public curiosity — especially the curiosity of his own countrymen — ran high concerning it. But all applications for permission to visit it were refused; and only his most special friends were ever invited to enter the jealously closed doors.

It will be perceived, therefore, that Lysle should not have been insensible to the privilege accorded him; but it is to be feared that he was completely insensible. So far from desiring to inspect the treasures accumulated by one of the foremost of virtuosi, he was irritated to think of giving so many hours of his brief stay to a visit which offered nothing agreeable to him. He did not express these sentiments, but the marchesa, whose perceptions were as quick as his own, saw that he did not wish to go.

"I am sorry that we have this engagement while you are with us," she said to him, “for I know that you do not like Herbert Dorrian. I would put off the visit if I could, but that is hardly possible. Nina is very anxious to go."

"I should not think of allowing you to put it off on my account," said Lysle. "If I were averse to going, what would be easier than to remain behind? But no doubt the villa is well worth seeing; and Dorrian can not monopolize every one at once."

She gave him a quick glance. "There is no reason why he should monopolize Miss Churchill at all," she said.

So he went with them, driving along a road which led through the deep shadow of cypress and ilex woods, between the gnarled stems of old olives whose roots were blue with violets and hyacinths, by gray walls overtopped by the white snow of blossoming plum trees or the rosy flush of almond-blooms, with picturesque gorges full of silvery light and solemn shade around them, below ever and anon a gleam of water or a glimpse of the city shining through its cloud of olives, and afar, soft, dream-like, ethereal, great violet mountains fold on fold.

Cecil scarcely spoke as they passed along this way so wildly beautiful and strewed with memories "thick as autumn leaves in Vallambrosa." To Lysle her silence was like a veil of delicate reserve which she drew around her thoughts and feelings, the result of habit as well as of instinct — the habit of one who has lived long in mental solitude. He saw the light in her eyes as they dwelt on the constantly changing scene, and he knew that she hardly heard, and heeded not at all, the gay talk of the young contessa, chattering of the cosmopolitan gossip in which Florence abounds.

At length a turn of the upward, winding way brought them to where the villa stood in the midst of its wide gardens, surrounded by the shade of ilex[1] and chestnut-woods. It had been once a castle, as a single battlemented tower remained to testify, but had been modernized when the Renaissance swept with resistless force over Italy. In a *loggia* full of classic grace, with Ionic columns and frescoes by Il Volterrano, Dorrian received his guests. Thence passing into a lofty hall green with palms and set with statues, they entered a series of reception-rooms in which Lorenzo the Magnificent might have found himself at home. One vast and lofty saloon succeeded another — all frescoed by Andrea del Sarto, by Francia, Pontormo, and many others, all radiant with light and fragrance, all full of the most beautiful products of ancient and modern art, all pervaded by a faultless taste and redolent of a classic charm. Through the wide windows sunshine fell on mosaic-paved floors, on the still, white grace of statues, on the indescribable harmonies of old tapestry, on priceless vases and delicate carved cabinets, on alabaster and porphyry[2] and rare old work of gold and silver, such as in the day of giants was wrought down in Florence by the Arte degli Orefici. And if the beauty within allowed the gazer to glance without, he saw a garden full of bloom and shade, while far away the pinnacles of Florence gleamed, in the midst of the shining plain.

"It is perfect, Herbert," said the marchesa. "It is like an embodied dream of the Renaissance. One fancies Lorenzo here with his Platonic Academy around him."

"Unfortunately, it was not in this villa that they held their meetings," said Dorrian, who would have liked the association. "But will you permit me to lead you to breakfast?"

They went into the splendid banqueting-hall, lofty as a temple, garlanded with frescoes, and rich with the tints of old carved wood and Spanish leather. Here was served that midday meal which, whether under its English name of luncheon or its Continental name of breakfast, can be made as light or as elaborate as may be desired. It was sufficiently elaborate now to prove that Mr. Dorrian had a *cordon bleu*

---

[1]冬青

[2]斑岩

in his kitchen, and it was rendered beautiful by the exquisite ware on which it was served — by the old Urbino plates, the delicate Venetian glass, and the rare Capo di Monte.

The party was so small that conversation was general, and sparkling as the wine that filled their glasses; but Lysle observed that Cecil bore little part in it. Her veil of reserve seemed still to inwrap her. When addressed she answered readily and with grace, but, unless appealed to individually, she seldom spoke. Was she overpowered by the beauty and magnificence that indeed recalled the palmiest days of the Renaissance? It was scarcely like Cecil to be so overpowered. She might be thrilled by beauty or touched by poetry, but mere magnificence would not so affect her. Of that he was sure, and, watching her, he seemed to realize that her silence was the stillness of one whose thoughts were too deep or too delicate for ready translation into speech.

After breakfast they went into the gardens, filled with leafy coolness and fragrant bloom, with fountains and statues and vases, with ilex and cypress avenues and great hedges of box. And here for the first time Cecil found Dorrian by her side.

"You are very silent, Miss Churchill," he said. "You know that one has one's little vanity as a collector. My villa is my toy, perhaps. 1 hope that it has pleased you."

"Pleased me!" She lifted her great golden eyes to his face. "How can you speak of it in such a tone as that? — anything so beautiful, so like a dream! Do you not know that there are people in the world doomed to live narrow, colorless lives, yet in whom the passionate love of beauty is so strong that it would be like heaven to them to breathe for one hour in such a place as this, to feast their eyes and their souls on what you hold so lightly?"

He was surprised, but he made a little gesture of indifference. "There may be such people," he said, ' but why think of them?"

"In order that one may value properly what one possesses — you this fairy place, and I the great pleasure of seeing it."

"I am deeply gratified if it has given you pleasure. I thought that perhaps it would. When I have seen your delight in other places, I have thought that you might find something to enjoy in what I have collected here. That was why I begged the marchesa to come to-day."

He looked at her as he uttered the last words; perhaps he was curious to see how they would affect her, being conscious himself of the compliment implied and of the manner in which it would have been received by many women. But Cecil, who had all her life been accustomed to homage, merely bent her head slightly in acknowledgment, as a young princess might.

"You are very kind," she said. "I have seen nothing which has pleased me so much — all is so perfect here, so ideal. One feels one's self in a world where grace, beauty, and harmony reign supreme; one moves in a dream of mingled poetry and history. "That," she added with a smile, "is why I have been silent."

"Should I apologize for making you break the silence? If one has been so fortunate as to succeed in weaving a spell, one should not disturb it."

"You do not," she said, quietly. "You are in harmony with it. I can easily fancy you here alone — steeping yourself in this atmosphere of still grace." She paused and looked around her. "I think if I were subjected habitually to the influence of such a place, I should be as intolerant as you are of rude and jarring and unbeautiful things."

He smiled slightly. "You suit it as well as it suits you," he said. "I have watched you as you moved through the rooms with your eyes full of dreams, and never once were you out of harmony by movement or gesture. It is saying a great deal. You do not know how often beautiful women have lost their beauty to me here. They lacked the repose, the nobility and simplicity of style for these great classic rooms. They were charming in a satin-lined, Louis Quinze boudoir, but, brought into apartments filled with the grace of the antique world, they shrank into pettiness; they seemed artificial as dolls."

"Probably they had no feeling of harmony," said Cecil. "They could not transport themselves into the world which all these things embody. It is not every one who is adaptive in that manner."

"Not every one, indeed. Few and far between are those who can shake off the influences and traditions of their environment and choose the atmosphere in which they will live; fewer still, having chosen, can adapt themselves in any thorough sense to a world which is not that of the hour and the moment. But you, Miss Churchill" — he paused and looked down at her, smiling still, but with a curious regard in his languid gray eyes — "will you forgive me if I am a little impertinent, if I say something which has been in my mind a long time? You are able to do this in a degree that I have never seen surpassed. Coming from a country which makes one shudder with its crudity, you seem to have no narrow or provincial stamp whatever, you reflect and adapt yourself to every great influence, you seem born for the enjoyment and the adornment of that supreme world which knows no country, and which we call art — a world of beautiful images, of beautiful memories, of beautiful dreams."

He spoke so quietly and his tone was so far removed from flattery, that Cecil listened and answered as quietly herself — only the faint flush which came into her cheeks showing that she was moved:

"If it is true that I have no stamp of any special life — narrow or otherwise — upon me, it is because I have had no life except in the imagination. My outward existence had no meaning for me, no influence upon me — until I came here. My only real life was in my dreams."

He bent his head. "It is the only real life for one like you — under ordinary circumstances," he said.

A sound of laughter floated to them at this moment, and turning they saw the marchesa and Lysle, with the Conte and Contessa Salvieri, advancing toward them down a green avenue, with the white columns of a Greek temple revealed in the vista behind. It occurred to Cecil that to suit the scene they should have come with floating garments, with dancing feet and garlands of roses, or else in the rich and stately dress of Florence in the *moyen age*. She looked at Dorrian with a smile.

"You should lay down a law of costume for your guests in order to be quite perfect," she said.

He glanced at her dress of soft India silk, exquisite as only Eastern fabrics can be in tone of color and draped with almost classic grace around her pliant figure. "Now and then," he said, “I have a guest for whom such a law would be unnecessary."

"Ah, yes — the marchesa looks as if she had just stepped out of a picture," said Cecil, who had not observed the glance.

The smile which was his only answer was still on his lips when the others reached them, and the marchesa sat down on a stone seat overshadowed by towering laurels.

"This is a charming place in which to rest," she said; "and indeed the day and the scene make one feel that exertion is altogether misplaced. It is like living in the Decamerone to loiter in such a garden and look down upon Val d'Arno."

"Let us then remain here," said Dorrian, "although you have not seen half that I wish to show you."

"Keep the rest for another time. It will give you an excuse to ask us to come again."

"Willingly," he said with a laugh, as he threw himself down on the grass at her feet, "and more willingly that it is the mediaeval portion of the villa which you have not explored."

"Why have you a mediaeval portion when you are so little in accord with the mediaeval spirit?"

"What could I do with that part of the old castle which is left, save fit it up in the style of the twelfth century? I do not like it in the least — I am thoroughly out of harmony with the whole life which it expresses — but there is a certain satisfaction in doing thoroughly what one undertakes. I flatter myself that some of my rooms are not surpassed by any in the Hotel de Cluny."

"You must be sadly out of place in them," said the marchesa, smiling.

"Oh," he shrugged his shoulders, " I rarely enter them. I can imagine only one thing less to my taste, and that would be anything which was a product of the nineteenth century."

"Well," said the marchesa, meditatively, "I can understand many things; but how you — how any one — can fail to admire the art and the spirit produced by the middle ages, I can not understand."

"Yet it is very natural," said Lysle, "that one steeped in the paganism of the Renaissance — a paganism without any of the virtues which redeemed the true paganism of antiquity — should have no sympathy for the stern, high, mediaeval spirit, with its intense religious faith, its ardent chivalry, its burning enthusiasms for the most lofty ends, its strenuous life of *doing*. When men ceased to do, and thought only of crowning themselves with flowers in voluptuous paradises, where the old heathen arts were revived and worshiped, then indeed the age of great things was over for the world."

Dorrian regarded the speaker with languid superciliousness. "You and I," he said, "speak — nay, we think — in different languages. I grant you that there was more original genius in the middle ages than the world has seen since the glory of Greece, and any amount of that strenuous 'doing' of which you speak, in the way of wars and crusades, but everything was stamped with the seal of a religion which inculcated sacrifice and pain, and the renunciation of all natural desires. The Renaissance came to break those fetters; in reviving pagan art, it revived, also, pagan reason; and it taught again the free, elemental, conscienceless spirit of enjoyment which the mediaeval world anathematized."

"It would be more correct to say that in reviving pagan art it revived pagan license," said Lysle. "But one of your epithets is at least well chosen — it indeed taught a 'conscienceless spirit of enjoyment' which has many modern apostles."

"I never argue with a moralist," said Dorrian, carelessly. "He always wants certain premises granted which I do not grant. And I have no desire to convert any one to my beliefs."

"Have you any?" laughed the young contessa, bending to look at herself in the fountain which made this green and flowery nook musical with its falling waters.

"I worship beauty and I adore art," he answered, glancing at her. "I need hardly add that it must be true beauty and true art. And that being so, a great advantage of the *cultus*[3] is that one is altogether independent of fellow-worshipers."

"And does not even desire them except in limited degree," said the marchesa. "Confess that beauty itself — the beauty you worship — would lose half its charm if the number of its worshipers was increased, if it was not the *cultus* and possession of a few only."

"In that case," said the young count, "it would fare ill with you if the Florence shining yonder were the Florence of old — the city in which art was the inheritance and possession of the people to a degree never known before or since."

"Never since," said the marchesa, "but before — come, I am Greek as well as Florentine. Were not the knowledge and the love of art as widely spread, think you, in Athens, as even in mediaeval Florence?"

"The inference is that it was, for only from the thorough cultivation of the popular taste can such great and glorious work as that of Athens arise; but we do not know all the details of the popular and social life of Athens as we know that of Florence," was the reply. "We do not know that the people were such supreme judges and critics of art as the people of Florence when they bore Cimabue's masterpiece through the streets in triumph, when every workshop was the seat and shrine of art in its truest sense, when springing from the people as naturally and spontaneously as the lily springs in her meadows, rose a flower of genius which the world has never surpassed."

"One might fancy you a Florentine, Carlo *mio*," said Contessa Nina, with a smile.

"He is an Italian," said Dorrian; "it is the same."

---

[3] Established or accepted religious rites or customs of worship; state of religious development

"It is not the same in any sense whatever," said the young count. "And I, for one, never merge the greater in the lesser name. I am a Roman. And when I speak of Tuscany, it is with the *bocca romana*."

So talking lightly, they sat with the golden idyllic beauty of the spring day all about them, and opening on every side the long avenues of the garden full of dreamful charm. Cecil glanced down these for some time, and at length rising softly moved away. Dorrian looked after her, but did not stir from his position at the marchesa's feet, and it was Lysle who rose and followed her.

She smiled as if pleased when he reached her side. "Do you, too, feel as if it were a shame not to enjoy more of all this beauty?" she said. "One can talk anywhere, but one can only seldom wander through such scenes as these."

"They are very beautiful," he said, with a glance around him. "But I confess that I do not like the spirit of the place: it is too much of a voluptuous, enervating paradise, in which a man could forget, in which a man has forgotten, that such a thing as duty exists."

She laughed a little. "Mr. Dorrian would say that it is a harsh and stern word which has no meaning here."

"Mr. Dorrian might say it — yes. It is exactly what he would say, and indeed it has for him no meaning anywhere. But you do not say it?"

She hesitated for a moment. Then, "I think," she said, "that I understand what he means. I enter into his feeling— though I suppose one should not approve of it. Yet it is hard to disapprove — here. In this abode of beauty, of harmony, of grace, one does not wish to think anything hard or stern; one wishes purely and simply to enjoy."

Lysle looked at her with one of his swift, keen glances. This was a mood in which he had never seen her before, and it surprised him. Perhaps it would be too much to say that it did not please him, but at least he had no sympathy for it. And when had he ever failed in sympathy for a mood of hers before?

"I should not have imagined," he said, "that you could enter into the spirit of the modern epicureanism which is as dead to every aspiration as to every duty, which is contemptuous of all the hopes and fears of our common humanity, which forms for itself a paradise of the senses in which it hears nothing of the great movements of mankind, and cares nothing for the great deeds of men who hold life to have been given for some earnest purpose."

It was now Cecil's turn to look at him with surprise. "*You* seem very much in earnest," she said.

He laughed. "More in earnest than the subject deserves, perhaps. But I am surprised to find that such a philosophy — if one can call it a philosophy — should possess any attraction to you."

"Are you surprised?" she said. She paused, and her glance swept over the beautiful garden, the golden Val d'Arno and the far violet heights. "That is because you know me only imperfectly," she said. "I always told you so. You do not know the epicurean side of my nature. Yet it is stronger, perhaps, than any other. And to these influences I am the more susceptible because I have been debarred from them so long and so hopelessly. I rush toward them as one who has been imprisoned in the dark rushes toward sunlight. I ask nothing better than to enjoy what my nature has always demanded and what is for the first time given to it.""

"I comprehend that," said Lysle in a softer tone. "But I know you better than you think, and I do not believe that the mere enjoyment of beauty through the senses and the intellect can satisfy you. Just now, as you say, your nature rushes toward it, because you have the artistic temperament, and it has so long been forced to live upon husks. But you have a power within you which must rise from mere enjoyment to something higher. I am sure of that."

"Are you?" she said again, meditatively. "If you are sure — and if you are right — you know me better than I know myself. For I am not sure: I think, if Fate allowed it, I should ask nothing better than merely to enjoy such a life as this. See how the light quivers on those distant heights, how exquisite are

their tints, how Florence shines yonder like the city of a dream! Only think where you found me, and then wonder, if you can, that I feel this life too entrancing for speech."

"I do not wonder," said Lysle, a little sadly. The accent in his own voice startled him. Why should he be sad over what he had foreseen and desired — her passionate enjoyment of this new life? Was it because he felt that, despite her gratitude toward him, every influence that surrounded her was separating them farther, rather than drawing them nearer together, than when they walked under the pines?

CHAPTER V.

That evening Lysle asked the marchesa what were her plans for the next few months.

"I have thought of going to London for the season," she answered. "It is several years since I have been there, and I fancied you would like Miss Churchill to see something of what is now — in the sad decadence of Paris — the foremost capital of the world."

He smiled. "One may trust you to think of everything. I should like Miss Churchill to enjoy a London season — and I had hoped to be there also. But Fate, you see, has ordered otherwise — and no doubt it is as well."

The marchesa shook her head. “I do not think it is as well," she answered. "I wish you were to be there. How long shall you remain in Egypt?"

"That is a question which it is impossible for me to answer. I may return in a few weeks, or I may be detained for months. It depends entirely upon the condition of affairs over which I have no control."

"If you return in a few weeks, you will meet us in London?"

"Yes — if I return. But I think such a return very doubtful, and as I observed a moment ago, it is as well, nay, it is better, that I should not be there."

She looked at him quickly. “Why do you say that? Why is it better?" she asked.

"Because there is no telling into what depth of selfishness one may fall, and it is possible that, after having brought a prisoner into the sunshine, I might grow jealous of that sunshine. It is surely well to avoid such a temptation."

"Bernard!" There was something like indignation in the marchesa's voice. "You shall not do yourself injustice — to me who know you so well. But tell me plainly what you mean: what have you discovered in Miss Churchill since you came?"

"What was naturally to be expected. I have discovered that if I had yielded to my own wishes and the advice of others, if I had forged any claim upon her life out of the sympathy which existed between us when we were together last, I should have built on a foundation of sand. I was something to her then, because I represented the world from which she was exiled; I am nothing now, when she has the world itself, and sees its culture displayed in others."

"If I thought that, I should despise her!" said the marchesa, impetuously.

“No!" said Lysle, in a tone as if he had received a blow — "no. For Heaven's sake, do not misunderstand me! What I mean is simply this — that our sympathy over yonder did not rest on anything personal to myself, but only upon certain things which I possess in common with many others, but from which she was debarred. I brought to her a breath of the world for which all the intellectual strength, all the artistic passion of her nature yearned. That was all. Now that she possesses it and enjoys it as I knew that she could enjoy, I am only the instrument which helped her to obtain it. Do not think of me — think of her, and you will own that it is natural."

"It is *not* natural — unless she is entirely selfish and self-absorbed. She should be able to appreciate what you are, and she knows what she owes to you."

"Granting that she owed me ten times more than she does, would that command love? O wise woman of the world, how can you be so foolish because your own heart speaks for me? She is as grateful as you could desire, she gives me her confidence freely, her friendship is unchanged — but I hold no place in her life which makes me necessary to her in the least degree. All is said in that."

The marchesa did not answer for a moment. In the fragrant dusk, which had softly fallen over valley and mountain, they were slowly pacing the southern terrace on which the windows of the great *sala* opened. Through these windows they saw the beautiful, stately room with its globe-like lamps, while above them stars began to gleam out in the tender sky.

"If all this be true," said the soft voice, at length, "does it mean that you give up hope entirely?"

"Ah!" — he laughed a little — "who ever gives up hope entirely until it has received its death-blow in some violent fashion? Common sense, indeed, tells me that if I could not win her heart in the solitude where I met her first, where I had no rival, and where I embodied so much for which she longed, I am not likely to do so in her present life; yet I say to myself that it is necessary to be patient, to wait a little, to let the intoxication of novelty subside, to give her judgment time to act, her heart time to speak. And so it is best that I am going to Egypt. When I return — well, then perhaps hope will receive its violent death-blow."

"If so, I shall hate her. Frankly, I tell yon that. And meanwhile — what do you wish me to do? Shall I go to London, or would it not be better to remain quietly here?"

"Go to London by all means. Make the test complete — let her enjoy the world in its fullness. God forbid that I should throw my shadow across the sunshine which has come to her so late, and for which she seems made! Give her the immense advantages which it is in your power to give, and believe that, whatever the end may be, I shall be none the less your debtor for life."

She sighed slightly. "So be it. But my heart misgives me. If you are right, if she is at present so insensible to you, how can you expect anything but complete forgetfulness when you are absent, and she is plunged into a world which absorbs and dazzles even those who are most accustomed to it?"

"I expect nothing. He who expects anything only prepares disappointment for himself. If I hope a little — knowing well that hope is also a fallacy and mistake — that is my own affair, and I am prepared to bear the consequences. No one else shall bear them — that I promise you. For the rest, remember that you are serving me in a manner which I can never repay nor even fitly acknowledge, when you open to her every possible door of enjoyment and of intellectual culture. And — one thing more — let me hear from you now and then. Tell me exactly the truth with regard to her. You can see all that I could if I were with her."

The marchesa answered only by the pressure of the arm on which she leaned, for at this moment a figure stood in the open window of the *sala* — a graceful figure which Lysle once thought had something of the stateliness of the pines under which he had seen it first. In draperies of cream-colored lace, with here and there a touch of crimson, it was a figure that seemed altogether in keeping with the rich background behind it now.

"May I come out?" said Cecil. "That is, if I do not interrupt — "

"You interrupt nothing,'" said the marchesa. "Come and join us for the few minutes that remain before dinner. I have just been telling Bernard that he must endeavor to let us see him in London before the season is over."

"Oh, you will, surely you will!" said Cecil, turning toward him. "I have looked forward to seeing you there so certainly! You know you have told me more of London than of anything else, and it is therefore so closely associated with you. It would be a great disappointment if you were not there to pilot me through the strange, new world in which I shall find myself."

"You will have the best of all possible pilots," he said. "With her you could not miss me, or any one else."

"The marchesa herself," said Cecil, "will be the first to understand how much I shall miss you."

“I understand it so well," said the marchesa, "that I insist upon his returning at the first moment he possibly can. — Mind, Bernard, there is to be no excuse, no playing one false — "

"I do not think," he said, quietly, “that there is the least hope of my being in England again for several months. If you will understand that, there need be no disappointment. You see," he added, with a smile, "I have faith. I believe in the possibility of the disappointment."

"You would be very ungrateful if you did not believe in it," said the marchesa. "But here is Nina, and dinner will be announced in a moment."

Turning, she entered the sola, where the young contessa had appeared. But Lysle and Cecil lingered yet a moment in the magic twilight. Around them the earth seemed exhaling perfume, above the skies began to assume the soft, luminous purple tint which is always associated with Florence, while the darkening outlines of the mountains were still visible along the horizon. There was a short silence, then Cecil spoke in a voice, so low that it came almost in a whisper to Lysle's ear, yet had in it a suggestion of tenderness:

"Do you mean that there is no hope that I shall see you in London?"

His heart stirred under the softness of the tone, the control in which he held himself involuntarily relaxed a little, he turned quickly toward her.

"Does it matter to you?" he asked. Would you be really disappointed if I were not there?"

"How can you doubt it?" she answered. "You said a moment ago that you had faith, but if so you would not question whether or not it mattered to me. It matters very much. I shall be more than disappointed if you are not there."

He did not speak immediately. Had he done so he would have said, impetuously, "I shall be there”; but he paused, he reflected, and finally he said:

“Unfortunately, it does not depend upon me whether or not I can be there. What I have undertaken has become a duty which must be fulfilled at any cost. And it will be a heavy cost to disappoint you. But it may be necessary. My consolation is that the disappointment will not last long."

"What do you mean?" she asked, quickly.

"I mean that the life you will lead will give you no time to think of the absent, and I could be of no real use to you if I were there. I could only stand by to witness your enjoyment, and it is possible that my presence might remind you of things which you would prefer to forget."

"Of what can your presence ever remind me except that but for you I should still be imprisoned, as hopelessly as when you found me?"

"It is just that I should like you to forget. When you look at me now you are reminding yourself to be grateful — and that is not pleasant either for you or for me. Also, I recall to your consciousness, so to speak, influences and memories which you declared yesterday were ineffaceable. I am sure that they are not ineffaceable; but, since I am the one link of association between them and your present existence, it is well that I should be removed — for a time at least. When I see you again, we can better determine how we stand toward each other. You will have taken root in this life to which you belong, and I — "

He paused abruptly. Was it well or ill that at this moment the announcement of dinner was made in the *sala* behind them? Lysle laughed as he offered his arm. "Let me take you in," he said, "and believe that, though I speak with so much philosophy of what is best, if I can I will be in London before the season ends."

CHAPTER VI.

It was well that Lysle qualified his promise to be in London, for events rendered its fulfillment impossible. While the London season was at its height, the disaffection in Egypt culminated in revolt, events followed each other with startling rapidity, early in June the fleets were in Egyptian waters, and, with the bombardment of Alexandria on the 10th of July, war began.

But in the interval between the latter event and the day on which he left Florence, Lysle's chief interest was not in palace intrigues, in the ominous signs of revolution, or in the complications which might make the life of every European in Egypt unsafe, but in the letters which reached him now and then from the marchesa. After she had conveyed herself and her household to London she wrote frequently, divining exactly what he wished to know, and telling it with graphic directness. As he read her pages, familiar pictures opened before him — drawing-rooms, ball-rooms, parks, gardens, flower-shows, concerts, all the varied scenes through which the great world revolves in the brilliant masque called society, all forming a background for one figure, full of grace and majesty, yet with something foreign in its striking beauty. His imagination perceived this at once, when he thought of Cecil among the figures that he knew so well; conventional figures, all bearing the stamp of their world, and he was not surprised that the marchesa alluded to the difference in one of her first letters.

"Miss Churchill," she wrote, "has already created a sensation, and I think that she will be one of the beauties of the season. You, who know London so well, know what this means — what a royalty beauty is here, even when its possessor has no such advantage of introduction as I am able to give. I need hardly say that the little farce of 'companionship' is by this time laid entirely aside, and that the world knows her only as my friend and guest. This is not alone for your sake, my dear Bernard — I, too, am interested in her success, in seeing what she will become, in watching the expansion of her nature and her powers. She is a brilliant creature, with a touch of strangeness in her beauty as in her character, an originality, an unconventional stamp which attracts wonderfully. I have no doubt that, in the society from which she came, she seemed no less a creature from another world than she does here. For her strangeness is not want of harmony. It is something which sets her apart from others, yet makes the difference unfavorable to them, not to her. You will understand this. I think it probable that some people might not.

"One thing which strikes me very much is the faultlessness of her instincts. She makes no mistakes. In the people she likes, in the things she admires, she seems guided by a fastidious, artistic judgment which is astonishing in one who bas seen so little of the world. Are there, after all, some rare natures for whom actual experience is unnecessary — or necessary only in degree — natures that by some inward light seize at once upon what is best and make it their own? At present she is absorbing knowledge at every pore — that wide, comprehensive knowledge of the world, of art, of society, which you have desired for her. To see such a nature brought for the first time in contact with such influences and developing under them like a flower in sunshine, is a study so interesting that I wish for you constantly — you to whom it properly belongs — to observe how quickly she responds to all these new impressions, and how stimulating their effect is upon her."

A fortnight later the marchesa wrote:

"I can not tell you how much Cecil is admired by those whose admiration sets the fashion for the world. The distinction of her beauty and her brilliant intellectual qualities have united to charm many whom ordinary beauties do not charm at all. She has become the fashion to a degree that might turn any woman's head, but hers remains wonderfully cool. I do not think she cares much for mere social success; and the fact that after the first exciting novelty has worn off, fashionable society rather bores her, lends an indifference to her manner which gives the impression of one who has been surfeited with homage, and which contrasts effectively with her quick, responsive animation when touched by anything that really rouses her interest and enthusiasm. 'What a study that girl is!' said R— , the Academician, to me the other day. 'Her beauty is quite extraordinary in its character; but there is so much in her besides her

beauty! Pray tell me, from what planet does she come? Evidently from one where she has received a very sublimated order of impressions.'

"I laughed. 'She does not strike you, then, as one to whom all impressions are new?'

" 'Very far from it,' he replied; 'rather like one who is trying all that is offered her by some standard of previous experience — which we have the misfortune to fall below very often.'

"You will see in this what an effect the fastidious attitude of which I have spoken has upon others. Of course, I did not enlighten R— . What is the good? A mystery stimulates interest, and there is nothing to do her any harm in this — that people should believe her experience greater than it is, and that the admiration now wafted to her like incense should be supposed to have encompassed her always. Apropos, I must tell you a little conversation which we had last night. After such a day of varied engagements as only London can offer, we concluded with a ball at the Greek embassy, the most magnificent affair of the season so far. The embassador, you know, is a connection of mine, and the occasion emphasized Cecil's social triumph in the most brilliant manner. She bore herself so admirably through it, with so much grace and tact, that I felt a curiosity to know, for once, what lay below the quiet surface. When we were in the carriage driving home, I said:

"'I wish that Bernard could have seen you to-night. The complete fulfillment of all his hopes, of all his prophecies, would have pleased him.'

"She turned to me quickly. 'Do you think that it would?' she said. 'I am not sure. Mr. Lysle did not anticipate social success for me — at least not in the measure in which it has come — and I do not think that he would value it.'

"' Oh, you mistake,' I answered. 'He is too much a man of the world not to value it for all that it is worth. And it is worth a good deal. The approval of London is not to be despised — so many trained and critical forces go to the making of it.'

"She caught my hand suddenly between both of hers. 'Can you tell me,' she said, 'what it is in me that has won this approval, that makes people regard me as if I were a celebrity, and crowd about me as if I had done something to merit attention? It is all very puzzling. Granting that I am beautiful — and at home no one ever thought so — why should mere beauty have such power?'

"'That is one of the mysteries of the world,' said I, half laughing. 'Here in England, beauty is like royalty — all doors open to it, all the ordinary conditions of life are reversed by it. And your beauty happens to be of an order which pleases the artistic taste of the day, which is indeed its complete realization. H you had entered London society in an obscure manner you would probably by this time have become the fashion; but entering it as you did — '

"Here she lifted my hand to her lips with one of her charming gestures. 'I know,' she said, 'all that I owe to you. A stick would have floated with your introduction. But do you know it humiliates me if I owe all this triumph to my beauty alone! I have something more in me, have I not? Mr. Lysle thought so.'

"I wish I could tell you how her voice softened as she uttered your name; I wish I could express the peculiar tone of confidence that came into it.

"'Yes,' I answered, 'you have much more in you, and it is that which influences and moves those whom your beauty in the first place attracts. Do you think that— and— (I named two or three of the most intellectual men among our special intimates) would be devoted to you as they are, if you were only a fashionable beauty? No; they perceive, in degree at least, what Bernard saw in you — what made him desire so ardently that you should have the education of a full, rich, and varied experience.'

"'How wise he was — and how kind!' she said, as if to herself. 'And what an education it is, this which he desired for me, and which he made possible! Sometimes I have a feeling as if all these people were showing themselves to me only in order that I might study them, as if all the innumerable by-plays of society were revealed, and all its phenomena displayed like a great drama, in which I have no part but that of a spectator, as it is said the artist should be.'

"'I do not think you will always be simply a spectator,' said I. 'It is not enough to study life, one must live it if one would be truly an artist.'

"I might have added that one so rich in its vital energy could not avoid living it in the deepest sense; but the carriage and the conversation stopped together just then.

"If this report of her own words does not tell you much of her development, it will at least tell you of her recollection of yourself, of her grateful sense of all that she owes to you. And to that, I am sure, you will not be insensible."

Lysle was so far from insensible, that this letter stirred in him a passionate desire to fulfill his promise to go to London. But nothing could have been less possible at that time. Better, perhaps, than any other European in Egypt, he knew on what a volcano the country stood; he was aware of all the disaffection in the air, the intrigues that abounded, the irresistible opportunity which to the Oriental mind the weakness of the ruler presented. To leave then would have been as if a soldier had forsaken his post on the eve of battle. He curbed his desire, therefore, controlled his impatience, and said to himself, "I can wait." But he watched more eagerly than ever for the letters of the marchesa; and this was the next which reached him:

"It has been some time since I wrote to you last, but you know how it is when the season reaches its height — how one is hurried and driven by the multiplicity of one's engagements; and, when one is fairly drawn into the current, how every hour makes its special demand upon one. The strain is very great, and I am surprised to see how well Cecil bears it. Instead of fatiguing, the life seems to stimulate her to an extraordinary degree, and I often look with wonder at the luster which excitement lends to her beauty. There is a great change in her since you saw her last. No doubt you anticipated it, yet I think that it would surprise you. The homage of admiration which she receives, the growing sense of her own power as she measures herself with others, does not elate her in any vulgar sense, but it seems to give her a superb self-possession which makes her walk through this strange, new world like a princess who has taken possession of her inheritance. And she is no longer regarded merely as a fashionable beauty. Those who come near enough to appreciate her mental powers are as much impressed as you could desire. Poets, artists, intellectual men of all orders, are alike struck with her, and echo your judgment.

"Somewhat to my surprise, the other day, Herbert Dorrian suddenly appeared. Of course, he fell at once into his accustomed place in my drawing-room — a place of easy intimacy which he quietly takes as a prescriptive right, wherever that drawing-room may chance to be. I am amused by his unobtrusive but attentive study of Cecil. What it means exactly — how far or in what degree he is interested — I can not determine; but of the interest itself there can be no doubt. He is generally near her, he watches her closely, and I think that he has more influence over her tastes, sentiments, and opinions than any one else.

"I have hesitated whether or not to tell you this, but I think it best to be frank, and you know Dorrian well enough to estimate all that it probably means. A passionate admirer of beauty and a constant seeker for new and refined intellectual impressions, he is the last man in the world to be interested beyond a certain point — a point that you will not need for me to indicate."

A little later came a letter which said:

"We are all greatly excited over the state of affairs in Egypt. The massacre in Alexandria the other day has made every one who has a relative or friend in the country tremble. I have confidence in your fortunate star, and still more in your knowledge of the leaders and their friendship for you; yet I wish you were safely out of it. I was talking to a member of the Government last night who frankly admitted that he feared that war was inevitable. Having fettered the Khedive so that the weakness of his rule has produced revolt, we must now put down the revolt. So much seems necessary. But what else will be necessary? Who can say?

"The news of the massacre was brought into my drawing-room one afternoon by young Rawdon, of the Foreign Office. It chanced to be my day of reception, and at five o'clock the room was very full. The interest and excitement about Egypt are so great, that the news passed like wild-fire from group to group. Cecil was at the tea-table, and I saw her suddenly put down a cup which she held, while her change of color was perceptibly marked.

"'A massacre!' she said. And then she turned to me. 'Where is Mr. Lysle?' she asked, quickly.

"'He is in Cairo,' young Rawdon answered before I could speak. 'There is no fear for him — at least not unless matters advance far beyond their present point.'

"'I should not fancy that there was likely to be danger for him at any point,' said Dorrian, who was, as usual, near Cecil. 'Generally speaking, even barbarians are aware that a "special correspondent" is very inoffensive.'

"You will pardon me for repeating this speech, when I tell you that Cecil turned on him with a flash of anger and indignation,

" 'Have yon any idea of the dangers Mr. Lysle has run, the perils he has braved, that you speak of him in that manner?' she asked. 'With those who know him best, his name is a synonym for daring — and, wherever there is daring, there is danger.'

"Rawdon nodded. 'You are quite right. Miss Churchill,' he said. 'Lysle' s daring is well known, and he will certainly never be behind where there is danger. But I really don't think that, for him, there is the least danger now. He knows Egypt so well, has so entirely the confidence of the Arabs,' etc. — I spare you the rest, since you know your own position much better than young Rawdon does.

"But he reassured Cecil, which was the chief point; and I was amused to perceive how completely she turned a cold shoulder to Mr. Dorrian after that. I do not think it has happened to this gentleman for a long time to be treated with so much disdain. Usually he is supremely master of any situation upon which he enters, and there must be a very decided flavor of novelty to him in the insensibility which Cecil has always manifested to his importance, and the difficulty which he experienced in reinstating himself in her good graces after that unlucky speech about you.

"I wish more than ever that you could come, but I recognize that such a thing can not be looked for now. If war is indeed imminent, there is no hope of seeing you until it is over. God keep you safely, and, when the end comes, I trust that you may find a reward awaiting you for the dangers through which you have passed!"

It was fortunate, perhaps, for Lysle, that this last letter was of so cheering a tone; for, in the rush of stirring events, it was long before he received another. The history of the brief campaign which ended at Tel- el-Kebir is written in contemporary history, and until it ended he had little time for thought of his own affairs. With the advance guard of the army, sharing all its dangers and hardships, his friends behind heard much of him from his vivid letters to the press, but he heard little of them until everything was over, Arabi a prisoner, his army surrendered, and the Khedive once more in possession of such measure of authority as was allowed him by his foreign dictators.

Again in Cairo, Lysle found a letter from the marchesa written in Switzerland, but promising to be at her villa near Florence by the end of September, and begging him to meet her there. "By that time surely your labors will be over," she said, "and you must need a change from that horrible Egyptian climate."

The change was, indeed, imperatively necessary. When he saw the coast of Egypt sink behind him a few weeks later, Lysle felt that relief had not come a day too soon.

CHAPTER VII.

And how grateful to eyes fresh from the sun-parched Orient were the oak and chestnut woods, the deep shade of the ilex, the shadow of the cypress, and the glory of the vines of Italy! In the terrible heat of the desert, how often Lysle had dreamed of the delicious depths of that villa-garden above Val d'Arno of its shadowy avenues, its tangled thickets, its musical fountains, its varied charm of coolness, of beauty and of repose! He had, indeed, thought of it so persistently and with such a sense of longing, that he was almost incredulous when he found himself drawing near it. Yet this incredulity did not detract from his keen and eager pleasure. For once he had forgotten his belief that the thing which we desire is not the thing which life grants; he had a sense as if Fate had relented, as if he were about to put out his hand and grasp a supreme gift. "Why not I as well as another?" he thought. "After all, other men secure sometimes that which they desire above everything else. Why not I? One may lose one's fortune by distrusting it. I will distrust no longer: I will be bold enough to take — if I may!"

The resolution seemed to animate his hope. There was hardly a shadow of faint-hearted fear about him when he reached the villa late in the golden afternoon.

The marchesa, he was told, was taking tea in the south *loggia* with a party of friends, and there he was conducted. It was a very picturesque scene on which he entered — the group, in dresses that might have been taken from the canvases of famous pictures, gathered on the marble pavement in chairs of gilded osier, with rich Eastern rugs beneath their feet, old frescoes looking down upon them, and through wide arches all the beauty of Val d'Arno spread before their eyes — the valley swimming in rosy, golden light, the dream-like domes of Florence, and the misty purple of mountain-heights beyond.

The marchesa came forward to receive him with eager cordiality. "My dear Bernard," she said, "how happy I am to see you at last! But how thin you are looking, and how sunburned!"

"I suppose so," he answered, "but I am quite well, and need nothing save a little rest in your enchanted domain. Ah!" — with a quick glance around him — "how beautiful and how grateful to the eyes it is, when one is just from Egypt!"

She smiled, and drew him forward. "You will find several of your friends here," she said. "This is almost entirely an English party. They are all anxious to see you."

“Yes," said Lysle, absently. His eyes, as he spoke, wandered over the group. There were, indeed, many familiar faces there, but it needed no second glance to assure him that one face was absent — the face that had shone before him like a star over all the weary leagues that lay between the Nile and the Arno.

The marchesa caught the glance and understood it.

"Miss Churchill was here a few minutes ago," she said, "but two or three people have wandered into the gardens — she among them. But she will return presently. Meanwhile, here is your old friend Mrs. Ferrers."

Lysle greeted his old friend Mrs. Ferrers — a pretty woman of fashion — and several other old friends of the same order. Indeed, but for the setting of the scene, he might have fancied that it was a London drawing-room. There were one or two Italians present, but the majority of the group were English — people who after the season had gone to the Continent, and who from Switzerland or the Tyrol, Lucca or Venice, found it pleasant to pass to Florence and the Villa Ferrata. Egypt, and the campaign lately ended, was a subject of absorbing interest with them, so Lysle was soon encompassed by attentive faces. They were eager to hear all that he could tell them, and showered questions upon him which he endeavored to answer in the manner expected, with animation and interest; but a sense of disappointment weighed upon him, like the familiar face of an unwelcome acquaintance which suddenly appeared when he had fancied himself free from its haunting presence.

The marchesa, who perceived the effort, presently came to his relief. "My dear Bernard," she said, "all this is very interesting to us, but I fear that it can not be as much so to you. By this time deserts,

battles, and skirmishes must have lost their novelty — and yonder comes Miss Churchill, whom you have not yet seen."

Lysle looked around quickly; his heart gave a great throb, and then seemed to stand still. For it was indeed Cecil approaching, but by her side walked a man whose air and manner struck him with a sudden sense of apprehension. He glanced involuntarily at the marchesa. As her eyes met his own an expression in them seemed to transform apprehension into certainty.

He rose and went forward quietly. The man was Dorrian — he had recognized him at once, as quickly as he had recognized the meaning of a manner which it is doubtful whether any one besides himself could have perceived. Cecil — dressed in creamy white, with a knot of oleander in her bosom — was looking more beautiful than even his memory had painted her, and she greeted him with a warmth which left nothing to be desired. For a moment, while her hand lay in his, and her deep, golden eyes were lifted to his face, he felt like one long famished who has reached the cool spring of his desire. But when he turned to Dorrian, the brief spell was broken; he was conscious again of the dreary sense of failure which had all his life pursued him where he wished most for success.

And yet there was nothing in Dorrian's manner which to the ordinary observer could have justified this impression. But it was Lysle's good or bad fortune to possess a quickness of perception which leaped with lightning-like rapidity to conclusions that were seldom if ever wrong. He had tested the accuracy of this perception so often, that it never occurred to him now to doubt it; and when he dropped Cecil's hand, it was with a sense of loss which to the unimaginative would have seemed strangely misplaced.

Meanwhile Cecil said: "How grateful I am to see you back again in safety, Mr. Lysle! We have been very anxious about you."

"You are very good," he answered, "but there was really no need for anxiety. From Oriental association, perhaps, I have become a thorough fatalist. Exposure to danger counts for little with me. When the hour of Fate comes, nothing can save me. Until then, I am immortal."

Something in his tone made her look at him with surprise. "But you will acknowledge that the hour can be hastened?" she said.

"I am not sure of it," he replied. "I have seen despairing men court death — which refused to come, let their exposure to danger be what it would. The bravest man who wears the uniform of England at this moment — the famous soldier who is known as Chinese Gordon — thinks as I do. He avoids peril so little that men who have served under him believe that he bears a charmed life."

"Some day the charm will be broken very suddenly and completely," said Dorrian. "Chance may sometimes seem to justify fatalism, but not for long."

Lysle shrugged his shoulders. "For long or for short," he said, "how does it matter?"

There was a moment's silence, in which he saw Cecil glance at him again, and he was vexedly conscious that his words and tone betrayed the underlying depression of his disappointment. He made a quick effort to rally himself.

"I hear that since we parted you have had the world at your feet," he said to her. "I know the unsatisfactoriness of human experiences too well to ask if it was all that you fancied; but was it anything of what you fancied?"

"Are there not some exceptions to the unsatisfactoriness of human experiences?" she asked. "I think that there must be. The world has not been at my feet — very far from it — but it has been kind enough to me to allow me to say that my dreams have been realized in a fuller sense than I expected. Every pulse of my being has seemed to acquire new meaning, to pulsate more freely in the great world to which you — I never forget it — opened my way."

Her voice sank a little over the last words; he had an instinct that she did not wish Dorrian to hear them. But the latter had turned away to join the group in the *loggia*, and for a moment, standing under one of the arches, Lysle was alone with the woman he had come so far to seek.

"I wish," he said, "that you would forget the small part I played in what was evidently ordained by Fate. It was plainly intended to be a very small part, for you see I have not been permitted even to witness your success and your enjoyment."

"I wished for you very often," she said.

"Did you?" He smiled a little. "That was kind — and I am grateful. But I am a fatalist in more respects than as regards the bullet or the spear that may end life. Other things seem ordained to be, or not to be, by an imperious necessity. Evidently your career in life is one of them — and evidently also the insignificance of the part which I am destined to play m it."

"Your part in my life can never be insignificant," she said, quickly. "Whether you will or not, I must always remember that, but for you, I should not have any life. Why do you say these things, Mr. Lysle? Why are you so much changed?"

"I!" he started. "Does it seem to you that I am changed? Well, perhaps I am. It is difficult to be certain about one's self. Put it down, then, to the influence of Egyptian politics, which are really enough to demoralize any one. And now tell me of your London season. Of the famous people whom you met, how many seemed to you to deserve their fame?"

"Not a great many, certainly. But although individuals might fall short of what imagination had conceived them to be, society as a whole — the mingling of many minds and the clash of many wits — was all I had fancied. Enjoyment is too poor a word for what I felt. I think that, for a time at least, I was intoxicated."

"The marchesa testified that you bore a very steady head."

"I am glad if it seemed so; but in reality it was anything else. The marvelous change seemed too great for me to realize. When I thought of the life in which you found me, its absolute hopelessness and narrowness, and when I saw myself, as if by a stroke of enchantment, moving in the most brilliant life that the world can offer, was it wonderful that I was like a creature in a dream? Sometimes I seriously asked myself if I were awake."

"I suppose the doubt has been settled by this time."

"Yes," she answered, composedly, "I feel now so familiar with the new existence, that I think before long the difficulty will be in realizing the old."

He did not reply. As he looked at her — at the beauty which had first shone upon him in its poetic simplicity beneath the Southern pines, and which now had received the touch of highest worldly fashion; at the eyes filled with the dreams of genius, and the lips curved with the scorn of commonplace — he thought of a line from a poem once very familiar to him:

> "... She seemed to tread
> Beyond my heart to the world made for her."

Well, if it were true, was it not what he had in a manner anticipated and foreseen? Only, who can ever anticipate and foresee the full bitterness of some realities?

CHAPTER VIII.

The next morning dawned beautiful and clear over Val d'Arno. Through Lysle's windows a vision of paradise seemed to smile on him as he waked from brief and troubled sleep — mountains blue as celestial heights, slopes of misty olive, vine-covered hills, and near at hand depths of glossy foliage with fragrance of blooming roses. The fairness of the scene would have touched him like a benediction had he been happy; as it was, it only suggested that change of place which seems to offer relief in pain. He rose, and, after coffee had been served to him in the pleasant foreign fashion, he passed out into the beautiful freshness and stillness.

He found very soon what he had, perhaps, unconsciously sought. On a broad terrace, beneath which the vine- and olive-clad hill-side sloped down to the plain below, a figure stood leaning against the balustrade and reading a letter. As he approached, it turned with a slight start, and Cecil held out her hand.

"The morning has tempted you out as well as myself," she said. "Is it not charming? I hope you are glad to be again in Italy."

It was a moment before Lysle could remember whether or not he was glad to be in Italy. Then he smiled with a faint tinge of irony for himself. "A month ago, a week ago, I longed for nothing so much as this scene," he said. "And now — yes, it is very charming; but it is an old story with me that the charm is not so great as I fancied it would be. I am glad if for you it remains undiminished."

"More than undiminished — it increases with time and habit. Mr. Lysle — " she looked at him with the letter she had been reading tightly clasped in one hand — "I think it would kill me to go back now to the life from which you rescued me!"

The unexpectedness of the remark surprised him. "I never imagined that you would go back," he said. "Why should you think of it?"

"Well, for one reason, because this is a letter from my brother, urging my return. Of course that does not signify. He does not understand; but his words make me realize that I may be expected to return some day."

Lysle shrugged his shoulders. "If one attempted to fulfill all the expectations of others," he said, "I need scarcely point out to you that life would become an almost impossible affair. If Hugh does not understand, he must be made to understand — that is all. You will never go back. I have known that from the first."

"Did you know it when you proposed the change to me?"

"Quite as well as I know it now. Who goes back into prison unless forced to do so? And I was certain you would not be forced."

"How could you be certain?"

"I had a faith in your future which you had not then, and which I fear you have not now."

She glanced at him quickly. "I should like you to tell me," she said, "exactly what you mean by a faith in my future. Then 1 can tell you better whether or not I share in it."

He looked toward the green shades of the garden spreading behind them. "Shall we not be more secure from interruption there?" he asked.

Assenting, she turned and they walked slowly down the dreamful avenues, saying little until they reached a spot musical with the sound of water falling in a marble basin, green with the shade of towering laurel and brilliant with the bloom of oleanders. Here on a stone seat Cecil sat down, and, after an instant's hesitation, Lysle placed himself beside her. Then, looking at the letter still clasped in her hand, he said:

"Do you remember that it is just a year since I saw you first?"

She glanced up at him. "Is it possible that I could forget it?" she asked. "It was the beginning of life for me!"

Even through the deeply bronzed surface of his skin a sudden flush showed itself. He almost said,

"And for me also — " but checked himself. He knew with how little thought of him her words had been spoken, and he would not turn them against her. Instead, he said, after a pause, "And you feel now that the experiment was well made, the venture well risked?"

"You must know," she answered, "that in this year alone, of all the years of my life, I have learned what it is to live. But the result is just what Hugh feared. To go back to that death-in-life over yonder — well, that would be death indeed!"

"But why think of it?" he repeated again.

She did not answer for a minute or two, but sat looking at the water softly plashing in the fern-fringed basin of the fountain. "I think of it," she said at last, "because one likes to know what offers as an alternative to some proposed course of action. There is certainly no need that I should go back. All that I have enjoyed — all that I desire — all that is most attractive of the gifts of the world — is offered me. I have only to put out my hand and make it my own. But, in doing so, I must give something which is of great value to me —"

"And that —?" said Lysle, holding his breath.

"Is my liberty. It is not a possession which most women value — if one may judge from their eagerness to be rid of it — but I have always valued it above everything else which was, or might possibly be, mine. Yet, in one way or another, I must resign it now."

"There is no need of that," said Lysle, in a somewhat constrained voice. "A year ago, before you had spread your wings, before wider knowledge of life had enriched your experience and matured your powers, I told you that your future was in your own hand, and I tell you so again."

"You mean —?"

"I mean that you have gifts which can win for you assured success in literature; and such success in these days is well remunerated."

She laughed — a slightly mocking laugh, which made him glance at her with surprise. Her eyes were shining with something like disdain as she looked at him. "I have told you very often," she said, "that you do not know me, and I fear I must tell you so once more. I am not what you think me, Mr. Lysle — a true artist with an artistic soul. Such an artist would ask nothing better than to win the success of which you speak, even at the cost of prolonged labor, of days debarred from enjoyment, and nights of solitary toil. But 1 shrink from all that. I am far more of an epicurean than you have ever imagined. I want to possess the world and enjoy it — I do not want to step aside from it and exhaust myself in working for a success that would be valueless to me when it came."

There was a moment's silence; then, "You force me to believe, indeed, that I have never known you," Lysle said, slowly. "Yet if you are not an artist, I am deficient in all penetration, all judgment of character and power."

"Oh, you are right enough," she said, impatiently. "I am an artist in feeling, and an artist in the desire now and then to create. But I am not an artist in resigning the actual for the ideal. When I had no other world, I contented myself with the imagination; but now that another world is before me, I wish to live — I myself — not through the medium of shadows, but in my own person. I feel myself passionately alive, passionately in love with the beauty, the luxury, the manifold enjoyments of this life which opens to me. And you think that I could willingly turn away from it, and cease to have any personal existence, while I labored over productions that might or might not bring me fame and money; but which would certainly not bring me the things I most desire! O, Mr. Lysle, how little you know, how little you have ever known me!"

"So it appears," said Lysle, as she paused, while the air seemed still to vibrate with the passionate tones of her voice. "I confess that I did not think the world would fascinate you in exactly the way it seems to have done. And yet — " he was silent a moment and looked away from her — "it is no doubt natural enough. Your youth was so prisoned, so starved, and it is the very artistic qualities of your nature

that demand the fullness of life and life's enjoyments now. But what I do not understand is why you should think it would be necessary to turn away from this enjoyment in order to produce what might bring you independence. The marchesa — "

"Is kindness itself," she interposed, "but it is impossible that I could remain with her if I decided to make literature a profession. I am enough of an artist to know that one can not play at what should be the work of life if it is anything at all. And you must not think that it is because this year has not been all that is successful and delightful that I say it can not go on. My position with the marchesa is too indefinite. She has no real need of me, and I can not be satisfied to accept all and give nothing. So it is necessary that I should decide upon my future. To return to America —" she looked down at the letter in her hand and with a quick gesture tore it in two — "that is impossible. To give up the freedom, the beauty, the ease of life to enter upon a career of laborious mental toil — that is more than I can think of so long as an alternative is open to me. And such an alternative is open."

"More than one, perhaps," said Lysle. "But will you tell me what is that to which you allude?"

She looked at him with a steady light in her eyes — a light that did not waver for a moment under the gaze of his.

"I have the alternative," she said, "of marrying Mr. Dorrian."

CHAPTER. IX.

After that announcement there was a minute's silence before either spoke again. Then Lysle said very quietly:

"And have you decided to marry him?"

"I have decided nothing," she answered, "but I think that I shall do so."

"May I ask why?"

"Should you not rather ask why not? There seems every reason why I should marry him, and none why I should not. He offers me everything that I most desire."

"Including himself."

"Yes — including himself. And if that is not of an equal value with the rest, it only proves, does it not, that I am a creature to whom Nature forgot to give the power of feeling as other women feel?"

"I do not consider myself competent to decide exactly what it proves; but are you quite sure that you have not the power of feeling as other women feel?"

"Have I not reason to be sure? I am twenty-six — and my life holds no episode of passion such as most lives know."

"What can be more natural? Must I always interpret you to yourself? It seems to me I have been doing that ever since we first met. Your life has known nothing of passion because you have been cut off from that as well as from everything else. Fastidious, imaginative, sensitive — who entered into that old life who could touch your fancy or move your heart? But is it wise to argue from this that you have no heart, or that it will never be moved? Believe me the hour may be late in striking, but it will strike at last."

She frowned quickly. "It is a prophecy which does not please me. I do not wish it to strike. I am — yes, I am afraid of myself! If I feel other things so strongly, how should I feel *that*? I shrink from it — I want none of it — I am glad that this man does not ask or expect it!"

"Are you sure that he does not? I can not imagine any man with a drop of blood in his veins, with a spark of fire in his heart, not asking, not expecting that the woman who marries him shall also love him."

She flushed deeply. Under the energy of his tone she dimly felt a vibration of contempt which stung her to the quick. She rose, making an unconsciously haughty gesture.

"It is a subject which we need not discuss," she said. "I hardly know why we are discussing it. What I feel or do not feel for Mr. Dorrian concerns only myself — and him."

"There can be no doubt of that," said Lysle. He, too, rose and stood facing her — looking very pale, but quite calm. "What you feel or do not feel for Mr. Dorrian certainly concerns only yourself — and him. But what concerns me is the fact that since I am directly accountable for the change that has taken place in your life, for the circumstances in which you find yourself, I can not stand by indifferently and see you throw away your happiness. You have often charged me with not knowing you, but I know you better than you know yourself, if you believe that you will not throw it away in such a marriage as this of which you think."

"Why should I throw it away," she asked, almost defiantly, "when I tell you that it will give me the things which I most desire, the things for which I have longed all my life?"

"It will give you command of wealth, it will surround you with beauty, it will open to you all doors of enjoyment — I grant that. But it will starve your heart, and beside your heart it will stifle every noble aspiration in your mind. Do you imagine that I do not know of what I speak, that I have not fully gauged the selfish epicureanism of the man who tempts you with his culture and his wealth? I do not say these things because I am jealous of him."

She started. "Jealous!" she repeated, involuntarily.

He smiled slightly — a smile without any mirth. "Surely you do not need for me to tell you that one must be jealous of the man who steps in and bears off before one's eyes the prize on which one's own heart was set. You knew long ago that I loved you. It is late to speak of that."

She turned pale as she looked at him. "No," she said, quickly. "No — I did not know it." There seemed something of positive violence in the denial.

"You may not have known it as one knows a certainty," he answered, "but you felt it as one feels that which is more than a certainty. Why do I speak of it now? Well, for one thing, that you may understand why I have kept silence so long. I was tempted to break that silence more than once before you left America; and, if you had refused to come here, I should have broken it. But you did not refuse, you agreed to come, and I said to myself that I would not attempt to place the slightest fetter upon you. I wanted you to be perfectly free, I wanted your nature to expand, your powers to develop, I wanted to see what you would become in the new life that opened before you— "

“In short, to perfect your study," she said. "I understand that, Mr. Lysle. Forgive me if I say that the rest I do not understand."

“You mean that you do not believe it?"

"I mean that I find it hard to believe that a man who really felt what you imply that you did feel, could have kept silence as you kept it."

"In other words, you find it hard to believe that a man might think of another more than of himself. Nevertheless, it is possible. I desired so ardently that you should at least reach your full development, and I believed so thoroughly that such development was only possible in freedom, that I put myself and my own wishes aside. Your doubt," he added, "is much such a reward as one may usually expect in this satisfactory world for disinterested actions."

A rising flush showed through the clear pallor of her skin.

"You see," she answered, "that the effect of the world is visible in more ways than one. All that I can say, Mr. Lysle, is that I am sorry — deeply sorry — if you have based any hopes on me. I am not a person likely to fulfill such hopes. I am cold-hearted, I am capricious, I am in love with the world and all that it offers — "

Lysle interposed. “Pray spare yourself," he said, "the enumeration of any more bad qualities. Frankly, I have the presumption to think that I understand you better than you understand yourself. You are trying to believe that you can live on a lower plane than is possible to you. If you attempt it, the result will be disastrous — it will be the prison over again. Only, in this case, you will find the higher powers of your mind, the aspirations of your soul, fettered. You will sell your birthright — the birthright of genius — for a mess of worldly potage, which you will end by abhorring."

It seemed to him that as she listened she grew pale as the marble nymph of the fountain by which they stood. But this was her only sign of emotion. She put out her hand and broke off a spray of oleander as she said, quietly:

“And what is it that you advise me to do?"

"I advise you," he answered, "to retain the freedom which up to this time, you have valued so highly. And, believe me, I have no thought of myself in saying this. I recognize the fact that there is no hope for me. But I do not wish you to close the door of hope on yourself."

She was silent for a long minute, stripping off the petals of the blossoms one by one with her fingers, and dropping them into the water at her feet. At length she said, slowly:

“Whether you believe it or not, your advice is based upon imperfect knowledge. What is artistic in my nature demands for its satisfaction the very conditions of life which are offered me. The past year has taught me that, if it has taught me nothing else. And as for living on a lower plane — there you are mistaken again. I am weary of aspirations that lead to nothing but disappointment. I want to forget them and the labor and stress that accompany them. Culture, luxury, beauty, in their highest expression, are offered me; and — think what you will of me, Mr. Lysle! — I shall take them."

He bent his head, as if accepting her decision. At that moment it was the irony of the situation which struck him more forcibly than anything else. He thought of all his hopes and plans for this final moment; of the last evening which they had spent in the pine-lands together, when he had felt that, if he held out his hand, what he desired might be placed in it; of his resolute determination to leave her free, and of the earnest warning of her brother. It was an old story — the story of his life — that the supreme moment of fruition should bring only disappointment. He accepted it again, as he had accepted it before, though it seemed to him now filled with the bitterness of death. It was the work of his own hand; he recognized that, and recognizing, uttered no complaint.

"So be it," he said. "I have fulfilled my duty in warning you, and I have no right to utter another word. The end is not that of which I dreamed — I mean for you. Of myself I say nothing. No doubt you are right enough in holding that a man who makes no effort to secure what he desires is not even worthy of belief. Only try to believe that I thought solely of you — of you first, last, altogether. And I think of you now in saying that I hope I may prove a false prophet, and that you may never regret the step you are determined to take."

Then he turned away and left her standing by the old fountain, amid the rosy fire of the oleanders, under the shade of the ilex.

BOOK III.

THE SHADOW OF THE PALMS

CHAPTER I.

Moonlight was lying — white, lustrous, magical — over the waters and domes of Venice, as Miss Churchill, sitting on the balcony of an apartment on the Grand Canal, looked with dreamy eyes out over the beauty of the scene. For, if enchantment remains in any spot of earth, it is surely in Venice when the moon shines upon her. Siren of the sea, as she is at all times, she reclaims at this time all of her old beauty, her old majesty, and lays a spell upon the senses which few are too cold or too indifferent to acknowledge.

It was all around Cecil at this moment. The very air seemed full of the suggestion of passion and romance, of the poetry of splendid memories and heroic deeds. She looked across the shining water at the soft mass of San Giorgio. Her glance rested on the picture which it formed with a sense of satisfying delight, and then passing farther — sweeping the distance where the canal widens into the broad lagoon — paused at the vision of a stately ship riding at anchor, her outlines clearly defined yet spiritualized in the fairy radiance.

While her gaze still dwelt on this, the draperies of an open window behind her were pushed aside and a lady stepped out upon the balcony. With a soft rustle of silk and waft of perfume, she sank on the cushioned seat. The moonlight, touching her jewels and her eyes as she glanced upward, revealed the marchesa.

"Ah, what a night!" she said. "And what a scene! Venice may be a discrowned queen while the sun shines, but when the moon rises all her old glory is hers again. I never grow weary of lingering here — yet to-morrow we must go."

"I am glad of it," said Cecil, in a tone as dreamy as her eyes. "Venice is enchanting, but I want to see all the world; nothing less will content me. And then, we are going to Greece!"

"Yes; but remember that it will not be the Greece of your dreams."

"No matter; it is the Greece which has nourished the dreams of all the earth, the very fatherland of genius. But, as I have been sitting here looking at the ship on which we will sail to-morrow, another desire has taken possession of me. Thinking of her final destination, I long to go *there* — can we not go?"

"To Alexandria, do you mean?"

"To Alexandria, to Egypt, to the East. It seems so near, and the mere thought of it has always drawn me with a fascination which I can not express. Ah, if we might only go!"

"There is no reason why we should not," said the marchesa, musingly. "After I have visited my estates in Corfu, nothing is more simple; only, I fear Egypt is not very attractive, and perhaps not very safe just now."

"Can Egypt ever be other than attractive — and more so if it does not swarm with Europeans? While for safety — it is surely safe so long as English troops are there."

"Oh, I suppose so. And we would not wish to go farther than Cairo."

"Speaking for myself, I would wish to go as far as possible; but I should recognize the limits of possibility. Dear marchesa " — she touched caressingly a white hand that lay beside her on the balustrade — “how glad I shall be to owe the gratification of my wish to your kindness! I would rather owe it to you than to any one else in the world."

The marchesa glanced quickly into her face. "Surely," she said, "there is one person in the world to whom you would prefer to owe the gratification of your wishes?"

Cecil turned away again and looked out over the wide, silver scene. "No," she said, quietly, after a moment, "there is no one. I speak of the present, you understand. The future is, happily, the future still."

"But it will become the present, in time."

"Impossible to deny. But meanwhile it has not become the present. This is the present, and yonder lies the ship that will bear us to Greece and to Egypt."

"If we are going to Egypt," said the marchesa, after a pause, "I must find out where Bernard Lysle is. He may be there."

She did not look toward Cecil as she spoke, but felt her start slightly at that unexpected name. Then in a tone the alteration of which it was beyond her power to control. Miss Churchill said: "Surely Mr. Lysle is not there now. I thought — I fancied — that he was in England."

"It is not probable that he would remain in England long. The passion for adventure has become second nature with him. Besides, every one knows that only the first act of the drama has been played in Egypt. Matters are in a very critical state. That being so, Bernard is likely to be there."

"I did not think of that," said Cecil, as if speaking to herself.

"Does it alter your desire?"

"No," she answered slowly, "why should it? Why should I shrink from seeing Mr. Lysle? It may be that he shrinks from me; but, if he does not, I should like to see him, to talk to him once more. I have never felt as if I could talk to any one so freely as to him."

"Who else has such sympathy? It is that which is his greatest charm."

"Yes." The word was breathed out with a soft intonation on the night air; after which there was silence again for several minutes.

"And he has the power to forget himself," said the marchesa, presently, in the tone of one who continues unspoken thought aloud. "That is very rare. Most men — even the best of men— are selfish. He is not selfish. Indeed, I have blamed him sometimes for being quixotic in unselfishness — yet, while I blamed, I loved him for it."

Cecil drew a quick breath. It was the first time that Lysle's name had been mentioned, save in the briefest manner, between them since he left the Villa Ferrata five months before.

"Is not strength always selfish?" she asked, in a meditative tone. “If a man desires a thing strongly, does he not instinctively put out his hand to grasp it without thinking much of others?"

"Generally speaking — yes. As I have said, most men are selfish. But you are not so deficient in appreciation as to believe that the strength which grasps without thought of others is not a poor and weak thing compared to the strength which controls desire through thought of others."

"I have sufficient appreciation to see what you mean and to acknowledge its truth — if it were possible. But I doubt the possibility. Strong desire in its very nature is selfish."

"But outside the desire there may be a higher strength to hold it in control. This is rare — as all noble things are rare — but it can exist. And it exists in Bernard Lysle. You have done him great injustice if you fail to believe it."

Again brief silence, and then Cecil said: "I am the last person in the world who should do Mr. Lysle injustice. My debt to him is measureless — a debt to which his generosity and his delicacy have added tenfold. It is a constant grief to me that I have returned his goodness by causing him pain, and that we are so alienated. To re-establish friendly relations between us I would do anything; and if you think he is in Egypt — well, that is only another reason for desiring to go there."

"Another reason for *you*," said the marchesa, "but I must think of Bernard also. What if he shrinks from seeing you?"

Cecil seemed to shrink herself at the suggestion. "Do you think that probable?" she asked. "If it were so, he should not be pained by seeing me. But if we might be friends again, I should be very glad. I have missed him very much."

"Have you?" said the marchesa. Perhaps it was not her fault that there was a shade of incredulity in her tone.

"You think that doubtful," said Cecil, understanding the significance of the inflection. "Ah, you do not know! I have seemed to throw myself into everything that life offered, without a care or thought beyond — but, of late at least, it has been a struggle to keep at bay an old enemy, the terrible consciousness that a thing is hardly gained before it is exhausted; that as soon as what one desires is given into one's hand, its power to satisfy is gone. Mr. Lysle would understand that. I told him of it long ago."

“And what did he say?"

Cecil caught her breath as if at an unwelcome memory. At that moment she saw before her not the silver waters, the palaces and domes of Venice, but a solemn expanse of pine-lands, and she heard Lysle's voice uttering certain well-remembered words. But they were words she had no desire to repeat. She felt as if utterance would make their memory more insistent.

“Mr. Lysle always thought better of me than I deserved — until I proved to him that I was right and he was wrong," she answered, with a faint trace of bitterness. "Of two paths I chose the lower, while he thought I should have chosen the higher. And now —”

"Now do you regret the choice?" asked the marchesa, as she paused.

“Why should I regret it?" was the quick reply. "Would the other be likely to be more satisfying? Should I not then regret — But what folly I am talking! The night has surely infected me with melancholy. I am glad that yonder lies our ship, that we are going to sail away — to Greece — to Egypt —”

"I must take a little time to think of that," said the marchesa. "And here come our friends to bid us good-by."

A gondola, as she spoke, drew up at the marble steps over which the green sea-water was gently plashing, and two ladies, followed by a gentleman, disembarked. They looked up with soft Italian words and waving hands to the balcony, where the marchesa bent forward in the moonlight. They were old friends who had come to bid her adieu.

But neither they, nor others who followed, banished from her mind the conversation with Cecil; and two or three hours later a letter to Lysle lay before her on her writing-table. She had spoken truly in saying that she did not know his whereabout, but she knew an address in London whence a letter would be forwarded to him wherever he might be. So she wrote, stating Cecil's wish to extend their journey from Greece to Egypt, and asking (if he were in the latter place) whether it would be painful for him to see them. "Be frank with me," she said, in conclusion. "This is a mere fancy which it will cost her nothing to deny. She has all her life before her in which to indulge any fancies that she likes. I will not suffer this one to be indulged at the cost of any pain to you. Think of yourself, for once, my dear Bernard, and tell me the truth."

She sent the letter to be mailed as soon as written, for they were going on board the Austrian Lloyd ship at midnight.

CHAPTER II.

Lysle was in Cairo when he received the marchesa's letter, for she was right in supposing that he would not remain long away from that center of intrigue and action. He had indeed been so much identified with Oriental affairs, had acquired so much knowledge of, so much interest and influence in, them, that he was not likely to be allowed to remain away, even had he desired to do so. And he did not desire it. Whether action is any true panacea for a wounded heart must remain an open question, but there can be no doubt that it is the panacea which is most eagerly sought by those who are suffering in that manner. Lysle was no exception to the rule. With a fierce impatience he hurried from Europe back to the troubled East. Movement, adventure, danger — these were the things for which he longed, as many a man suffering from the sting of pain and disappointment has longed for them before. And they were within his reach, as they are not within the reach of every one. It was easy enough to find distraction and danger in Egypt at that date. Since the overthrow of Arabi, the figure of the Mahdi had loomed into threatening prominence, like a colossal impersonation of the forces of the Great Desert, of the wild and savage tribes which were rallying to his banner. After the fall of El-Obeid, in the winter of 1882-'83, the Egyptian

Government recognized the necessity of either crushing the revolt or abandoning the Soudan, and the ill-fated Colonel Hicks was appointed to the command of the expedition sent out to accomplish the first purpose.

Lysle's arrangements to accompany this expedition were made when he received the marchesa's letter. After reading it, he hesitated a little — not with regard to his final movements, but with regard to the question whether or not he should embrace the opportunity thus offered to see Cecil again before going into danger from which he knew well that he might never return. It was a great temptation — and he decided that there was no reason why he might not yield to it. "I can harm only myself," he thought, "and that does not matter at all. The worst is done for me. I can court no greater pain, but perhaps — who knows? — there might be a lessening of it if I find her changed, as changed she assuredly must be after five months' association with Dorrian. I should like to see her again; I should like to satisfy myself that she is happy — and then I can go into the desert with a light heart."

The consequence of this decision was, that a week or two later, when the great Austrian Lloyd ship Saturno entered the harbor of Alexandria, there were two ladies on board who attracted much attention from the distinction of their appearance and the luxury with which they were surrounded. As they stood on deck, watching the land they were approaching, one of them at least felt as if all the dreams of fancy were awaiting her on that low, yellow shore, with its luminous sky and groups of palms, its ancient civilization and the mysterious depths of its Dark Continent. Her mind went swiftly back to the many pictures which Lysle's words had painted of this ancient land. All that lay before her eyes was so associated with his image, that it was with scarcely a sense of surprise that she suddenly perceived his face in one of the boats rapidly darting over the water toward the ship. She turned quickly toward the marchesa. "Yonder is Mr. Lysle!" she said. “Did you expect him?"

That lady smiled. “No," she answered. “I had no reason to expect him, but it is like him to be here. He has come from Cairo to meet us."

This was indeed the case. Lysle had come from Cairo to meet them; and his coming relieved them at once of all trouble. With the marchesa, of course, his friendly intimacy had never been impaired, but Cecil, who had anticipated some awkwardness in meeting him, was surprised to find how entirely unchanged he was toward herself, how frank in greeting, how ready for any service. There was no change in him whatever, so she decided; it had been all a dream, a fancy, that last interview, and he was again what she had always believed him, the quiet philosophical observer of life, with little personal emotion to disturb his tranquillity.

There was nothing to alter this impression during their journey to Cairo, or during the first few days which they spent in that city — days in which Lysle seemed to have no other duties than those of *cicerone*; and all that was left of Oriental beauty in Parisianized Cairo was unfolded to Cecil's eyes. They were pleasant days to both — one of those islands in life when people look neither forward nor back, but only enjoy the passing hour. From Cecil the weariness and dissatisfaction which had of late grown constantly heavier, seemed to drop away; whether the charm was in the freshness of her surroundings or in the society of Lysle, she did not ask herself. It was enough that for a little while she could again enjoy with that sense of pleasure which she had thought lost forever.

And it was strange to Lysle himself how entirely they took up the thread of their old intimacy. If Cecil turned to him with confidence and relief — the relief of meeting thorough comprehension and sympathy — on his side the old charm of reading, understanding, and influencing this nature, so difficult for others to understand or to influence, was as strongly felt as ever. It did not take him long to discover that things had not gone altogether well with her since their last parting, though he would have found it difficult to give a definite reason for the belief. It was an instinct of intuitive sympathy — an instinct such as had told him so much with regard to her, ever since he saw her first under the pines. The story which her eyes revealed to him then, they repeated now — the story of unsatisfied longing and vain aspiration.

He felt no sense of surprise; he said to himself that he had known it must be so. She had exhausted the world into which she had thrown herself for a time with a sense of passionate delight, and the homage of a *dilettante* egoist had proved no more satisfying than the pleasures which had palled, and the culture which had become a thing of course. All of this he knew without words — but the word came at length.

It was one evening when they had gone up to the citadel. While the marchesa lingered with some friends in the beautiful court of the mosque, Lysle and Cecil passed on to the parapet for that view which is one of the grandest in the world. It was just at the sunset hour. Cairo, with its countless domes and fantastic minarets glittering in the level light, lay below; eastward the long range of the tombs of the sultans stretched away into the desert toward Suez, their exquisite Saracenic architecture rising from the waves of sand which will presently bury them. In that secluded valley twilight seemed already falling as it had fallen over their dynasty and their history; but westward the scene was full of glory. On the broad breast of the ancient, sacred river, splendid reflections of color shone — color which deepened into a sea of gold near the horizon. Against this glow the mighty, solemn forms of the great pyramids stood, on the verge of the Libyan desert, overlooking the verdant valley of the Nile and the site of vanished Memphis. On that shining current all the ages seemed moving in long procession; and to glance from the vast, majestic forms of the pyramids to the fire-tipped lances of the Arabian minarets of Cairo, was to cover in a moment the centuries and the dynasties from Sesostris to Saladin.

"It is like the realization of one of my old hopeless dreams," said Cecil to Lysle. She was leaning in an angle of the parapet, while her gaze swept the wide, varied scene. "I find it difficult to believe that it is true — that I am really here in body as well as in spirit! To go to the East, to look with my own eyes on scenes and customs that would carry one back to the earliest youth of the world, to behold a life which has not altered for ages — How I longed for this when you used to talk of all that you had seen and known!"

"I remember the manner in which you listened while I talked — good heavens, how I talked! — when we met first," said Lysle. "Now you are here — and I am with you. I hope you will let me be glad of that."

She gave him a quick glance out of her sunset-dazzled eyes.

"I should miss half the pleasure if you — to whom I owe it all — were not here," she said. "The magician who created the spell should certainly have a place in it."

"You still regard me in that light? As I have told you often, you overrate immensely all that I have done; but I am selfish enough not to be sorry, since the overrating gives me a place in your thoughts which I might else lack."

"You surely know —" her voice sank a little — "that the place you hold in my life and my thoughts is a very great one."

"Is it?" he said, trying to speak lightly. "Then so much have I for which to thank Fortune — or should I thank you? I had begun to fear that I was to have no place at all, that I should hardly be remembered in your new life."

A faint, somewhat bitter smile came on her lip. "Then you have yet to learn," she said, "that I am a very selfish creature. I always remember what I miss — and I have missed you very much. There has been nobody in my new life to take your place."

Lysle looked at her, but, before he could speak, she went on with an eagerness which seemed to anticipate questioning:

"There has been no one who understood me as you understand. I always feel secure of comprehension with you — and even more secure of sympathy. You never fail to respond to whatever I am thinking or feeling. And when one has known such responsiveness once, what can one do but miss it — when it is lost?"

Her voice fell, her eyes turned from him again over the wide, wonderful scene. There was no appeal in her words, only the simple statement of a fact which she accepted quietly. But such quietness was not immediately possible to him. He was forced to struggle with himself for a moment before he could reply with outward calm:

"You must know that nothing which I can give has ever been lost to you."

"Has it not?" she said, with the faint bitterness of her smile translated into her tone. “I must differ with you. What I wanted has been wholly lost to me. For, as I said before, I am a selfish creature, and I did not want your remembrance, I wanted your companionship, your sympathy, all to which I had grown accustomed." She looked at him with eyes out of which the light had vanished. "I wanted to tell you that everything becomes wearisome as soon as one fully knows it."

"I think I warned you that it would be so — if you chose some things," said Lysle.

"I do not think the fault is in the things, but in myself," she answered. "It is the old story — nothing pleases, nothing satisfies me long. As soon as impressions grow familiar they lose their charm, and what I have exhausted I desire to throw away. Sometimes the prospect appalls me. To what weariness and staleness will not life be reduced if this continues to go on, as no doubt it will — to the end!"

"It is not a cheerful prospect," said Lysle, “but it is so much a part of your nature that I fear you can never hope to escape from it altogether. Life can never satisfy the demands of the imaginative temperament. You can only limit the weariness in degree by choosing your interests wisely." He paused with a laugh of mingled irony and vexation. "How insufferable that sounds!" he said. "And yet what can I say else? If I told you that your ideals would find their fulfillment in the realities of life, you would not believe me."

"Perhaps not," she said, slowly. "And yet — it is hard to believe that such weariness is the inevitably appointed end of all things. Honestly, Mr. Lysle, do you find it so yourself?"

"I?" he said, quickly, "I do not often pause to think about it. And I always find a certain satisfaction in my work, however unsatisfactory life may be in other respects. I believe that you too might find this if — if things were somewhat different with you."

"Ah," she said, "is not that an old *ignis fatuus*? 'If things were different,' we are apt to fancy that we would be different also. But you see I have tried that. Things are very different with me from what they were when you first knew me. Yet *I* am not different. And 1 have ceased to hope that I ever shall be. The same blight seems to fall upon everything. Of late the passion to produce has taken possession of me again. Ideas throng upon me which I long to express; but would that satisfaction last longer than any other?"

"I think that it would, because it is the one which Nature demands. I have never doubted that."

"I doubt it," she said, "as I doubt everything." The hopelessness of her tone was like the closing of a door. Lysle did not answer, for there seemed nothing that he could say. Was this indeed to be the end of all that he had hoped for her? Silence fell over them, as twilight was falling over the wide scene below, when voices drew near, and they knew that their party was at hand.

CHAPTER. III.

A surprise was awaiting Miss Churchill when she returned to Shepheard's Hotel that evening. The mail had come in during their absence, and a letter lay conspicuously on her toilet-table. Even before she crossed the floor, she knew from whom it came; and, taking it up, broke the seal with a faint sigh. But she was not prepared for the news which it contained, and which she communicated to the marchesa as soon as they met.

"I have had a letter from Mr. Dorrian," she said. "He writes that he is coming to Cairo."

"To Cairo — Herbert Dorrian!" exclaimed the marchesa. Then she laughed. "I congratulate you on your power," she said. "I am sure that no one else in the world could have induced him to form such a resolution."

“I have made no effort to induce him to form it," said Cecil. "The announcement is a great surprise to me."

"And not altogether a pleasant one, apparently," thought the marchesa. But she only said: “Yet, after all, there is nothing which need surprise one in it. He has grown tired of your absence, and a man who has nothing to keep him in one place more than another, might as well be in Egypt as in Italy — much better, indeed, I am sure he thinks, under present circumstances. And when may we expect him?"

"In a few days — I did not observe exactly when. He says that he will be in time to, accompany us back. I suppose it will be necessary to go back?"

"Well, yes," said the marchesa, smiling. "I can not say that I should like to remain definitely in Cairo — would you?"

“Like to remain definitely here? Oh, no. But I should like to go farther into these wonderful old lands. I dislike to turn back at the threshold. That sounds ungrateful, I am afraid; but you know — you understand — "

"That you would like to penetrate into the heart of Africa, notwithstanding the Mahdi? Yes, I understand that. Unfortunately, it is hardly practicable; but Bernard was making a suggestion to-day — "

"Yes," said Cecil, as she paused. "Mr. Lysle is always making some suggestion for our pleasure. What is it now?"

"That he thinks we might attempt with safety a short ascent of the Nile. It seems a somewhat reckless thing at present, but I have great confidence in Bernard's judgment."

"I have all confidence in it," said Cecil, quickly. "No one knows the state of the country so well as he does; and if he thinks it safe for us to go, you may be sure that it is safe. I, at least, should have no fear."

"Nor I, really. So we may take it into consideration; and when Herbert Dorrian comes — "

Cecil's face changed — suddenly, unexpectedly, beyond her power of control. "Do you think it necessary to wait for his coming?" she asked, in a voice as altered as her face. "I think the voyage would only bore him, and it would be well to go and return before his arrival."

“That will depend upon the time of his arrival," said the marchesa. The voyage would bore him, I think — as most things do — but we can not for that reason go away in the face of his expected coming, and leave him to wait for us; unless, indeed, the coming is to be deferred for some time. Surely he has mentioned a date?"

"I_ think not," said Cecil. "But I will look again."

She looked again, and announced that Mr. Dorrian expected to take the next steamer from Brindisi after his letter was written. "In that case," said the marchesa, "there need be no doubt regarding the time of his arrival. We have only to learn when the next P. and O. is due."

Lysle, who made his appearance presently, was able to answer this question. His face also changed a little when he heard that Dorrian was expected; but he made no comment except to agree with the marchesa that he must be included in their Nile party. "And I am glad," he added after a moment, "that he will be with you on your return — for I, unfortunately, shall not be."

"Why, where will you be?" asked the marchesa, while Cecil glanced at him hastily.

"I shall continue up the river and join Hicks's force," he answered. "But for your arrival I should be with them now. Knowing that I could join him later, however — before anything like active service began — I could not deny myself the pleasure of seeing you."

There was a short silence. No one had yet realized fully the extent of the revolt in the Soudan, or the degree of the danger to which Hicks's fated column marched; but there was sufficient knowledge to justify uneasiness concerning all those who shared in it. The marchesa gave a short sigh. "I wish," she said, "that you were not going. I wish that you would give up the expedition altogether."

He smiled slightly. "And then? What should I do?"

"Go back with us."

“You are very kind." His smile deepened to irony. "But I see what is before me in the desert. I confess that I do not see what would be before me if I went back with you. Life must have an object to be endurable."

"And do you call it an object to run the risk of being speared in the desert?"

“The risk amounts to nothing. It is *kismet*, as the Arabs say. And if there were no danger, I certainly should not go. The thing would be simply tedious and disagreeable in that case."

"Do you never remember that he who loves danger is very likely to perish in it?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "One must perish in some way; and I, for one, should prefer the rush of conflict, the swift, sharp end of bullet or spear, to the slow wearing out of life from age or disease. But this is not a cheerful discussion — and Miss Churchill looks reproachful. Let us talk, instead, of our Nile voyage. How far up the river do you think you can venture?"

"That is for you to decide. We leave it altogether to you."

"Then I must gather all the information possible, and decide carefully. Meanwhile, however, I can engage the *dahabeah*, and make arrangements — since you are positive that you will go."

The marchesa looked at Cecil and said: "Yes, you may consider it positive that we will go, even if it should be necessary to return very soon. We will see you as far on your way as you will let us."

The next few days were somewhat like a dream to Lysle. Preparations for his own departure into remote regions and stern dangers were accompanied by preparations for holiday voyaging on the Nile, by learning how far this voyaging might with safety extend, and in excursions to every place in and around Cairo which he thought likely to interest Cecil. But the quality of her interest seemed to have changed since she heard of Dorrian's expected arrival. There was a feverish touch to it now. She threw herself into every pleasure that offered, with the eagerness of one who wishes to escape thought and make the most of shortening time — a spirit very different from the manner in which she had enjoyed the first days. Lysle perceived this difference, and drew his own conclusion from it — a conclusion which did not very much lighten his heart.

For he was as singularly unselfish, in his manner of regarding her now as he had been when he opened the door which led for her into the world and himself stepped aside. There was no tinge of satisfaction in his realization that his prophecies were evidently fulfilled; that the fairy gold of luxury, culture, pleasure at which she grasped, had turned in her hand to withered leaves, and that the man whom she had promised to marry could not command her loyalty. "It would have been better if I had not stayed to see it," he thought; "but, having stayed, I might as well see it to the end now."

He felt that this end was in sight when, entering the marchesa's apartment one evening, he found Dorrian — lately arrived and altogether unchanged. A greeting of surface cordiality passed between them, and then he learned, what did not at all surprise him, that Mr. Dorrian disapproved of the projected voyage up the Nile.

"An excursion that has been vulgarized into a cockney tour," said that gentleman, "nothing to be seen but what has been described *ad nauseam* by a hundred tourists, and some danger to be incurred for the sake of a few mud villages, Arabs, camels, and crocodiles."

"With regard to the danger, you are mistaken," said Lysle. "Egypt is absolutely tranquil at present; the trouble in the Soudan has not an echo here. The ascent of the river as far as Assouan is perfectly safe, though I do not counsel the marchesa to go so far. She will be satisfied, I am sure, with a shorter voyage."

"I shall be satisfied to abide by your judgment in all respects, my dear Bernard," said the marchesa. "You, who know this country and its affairs so well, are not likely to mislead us."

"And I," said Cecil, speaking quickly with a heightened color, "am quite willing to go to Assouan."

"I have no doubt of that," said Lysle, "but we will not try your bravery so far. It is natural," he added, turning to Dorrian, on whose lip a slow, faint smile had formed, "that you should disapprove of incurring any risk, and I beg that you will satisfy yourself that there is none. You are no doubt acquainted with some of the English officials here? They will tell you whether I am right or not."

"I shall make a point of seeing one or two of them to-morrow," said Dorrian, with an air of dismissing the subject.

He paid the visits next day, but to his disappointment the officials all indorsed Lysle's opinion. Egypt proper was entirely tranquil, and there was no reason why a voyage of the kind desired should not be made with safety, although it was added with a smile that the ladies were brave who thought of it. Dorrian with a sense of irritation substituted in his own mind another word for brave, but he was forced to own that he could bring no argument to bear strong enough to dissuade them. It added to his irritation that he was assured on all sides that Lysle's presence was of the nature of a safeguard. "He knows the country and all the chiefs well, speaks Arabic fluently, and is never at fault in his judgment," said one of the leading officials. "You may feel safe as long as he sees no danger."

With the ground of his objections thus cut from under his feet, Mr. Dorrian perceived that there remained only the alternative of accompanying the party, or remaining in Cairo with the odium of cowardice attaching to him. It was not strange that he could not decide to take the latter, since the true reason of his dislike to the voyage was not fear. He had all the physical courage which characterizes his race, and, while too indolent to seek danger, possessed a contempt for it which effectually prevented his ever avoiding it. The real ground of his objection was the fact that on the expedition he could only fill a place of subordinate importance, that Lysle was the person to whose decisions and opinions the marchesa would certainly defer, and that Miss Churchill yielded to the influence of the latter in a manner far from pleasing to his pride.

Aware, however, that his own influence would be powerless to deter her from the voyage on which her heart was set, there remained the necessity of accompanying her. And it was a tribute to Cecil's power that he should have owned this necessity; that he did not offer to *her* the alternative of abandoning the voyage, or of parting with him finally. But, although he did not acknowledge to himself, he nevertheless felt that if placed in such a position she would not hesitate, but would accept willingly enough the freedom offered. This consciousness of her indifference roused whatever of latent passion and latent obstinacy his own nature contained, and his determination to maintain the bond which existed between them derived its chief force from the belief that she would break it without hesitation.

But, under these circumstances, it could hardly be said that the Nile voyage promised to be altogether a success.

CHAPTER IV.

Afloat on the broad breast of the noble river, a lustrous tranquillity in the wide, cloudless heaven, a glassy, rippling current making soft, monotonous music about the prow of the boat, the great lateen sail filled with a steady breeze, life seemed for a time to lose the sense of friction, and resolve itself into an infinite charm of repose. No one of the small party gathered on the *dahabeah* which Lysle had so carefully selected, but felt this charm. Even Dorrian could not deny that the life suited his Sybarite taste.

Lounging on the upper deck, under the awning which shielded from all heat and glare, it was a pleasure quite apart from any necessity of exertion to watch the low shores bordered by groves of plume-like palms, the shoals of yellow sand covered with pelicans, snowy ibises and fowls of strange, brilliant plumage, the villages grouped around their graceful minarets, the rich verdure of the level valley spreading to the mysterious desert, camels slowly moving in the distance, buffaloes immersed in the water, *fellaheen* busy with their hopeless toil, stately Arabs with flowing robes, boats filled with vivid color — all the panorama of varied life which for so many ages has moved along the famous immemorial river.

During the first few days Miss Churchill seemed absorbed in this panorama. She sat upon deck, for hours, almost without speaking, gazing at the changing scenes and at the far Libyan Desert with eyes that appeared to see not only the present, but all the distant, shadowy past. The languorous spell of old Egypt seemed to envelop her. She yielded to it as only the intensely imaginative and receptive temperament does yield to such influences, steeping herself in them as a flower is steeped in sunlight. Both men watched her — one sympathetically, the other curiously. What did this silence, this aloofness from her immediate surroundings, this air of rapt contemplation, mean? Of its naturalness there could be no question. When addressed, she roused herself with an effort; her eyes had a look when she turned them on the speaker as if she had been gazing at a dazzling sunset. The marchesa would ask, with a laugh, if she came back from the time of the Pharaohs.

"Do you not think," Dorrian said one day, coming over to the side of the deck where she sat, somewhat withdrawn, an unread book lying on her lap, "that it is a little selfish not to allow any one to share what seems to interest you so much? I am rather at a loss to imagine what it can be," he added, looking dispassionately at the scene before them. "Endless palms, mud villages, half-naked villagers, and buffaloes, have begun to prove a trifle monotonous; but, if any charm lies below the sameness, pray let me know, in common charity, what it is."

She smiled slightly. “I fear," she said, “that I could hardly make it apparent to you, if you have no perception of it without interpretation. It is all a matter of feeling. The wide arch of this Egyptian sky; the full, solemn flow of these waters, once so mysterious and always so great; the distant desert, and the silent hills — these things have so many suggestions that I quite forget the human beings who fill the mud villages. Not but that they, too, have an interest of their own," she added, turning her gaze upon a group on the river-bank, whose half-clad forms shone like polished bronze in a warm glow of light.

“They would make very good models for a sculptor," said Dorrian, lazily; "but, from any other point of view, I confess I am unable to detect any interesting qualities."

"I can imagine a great many. There must always be interest in the study of human nature under conditions different from those one has known before."

“There I disagree with you. Whatever its conditions, human nature always remains the same — a thing which, taken in the mass, can only disgust and bore one. What does all the study of it amount to, of which one hears so much? Only to the conclusion that there is absolutely nothing worth studying. You must cultivate human nature to a very high point before it can become worthy of attention."

"I think," she said, slowly, "that the gain in cultivation is often a sacrifice in vigor. In those — savages you would call them, would you not? — yonder, there must be a great deal of the force of primitive passion. I should like to come close enough to them to study it."

"I trust that we may not have an opportunity to study it closer than is desirable before we return to Cairo," said Dorrian. “To me the primitive passion of a savage is the least interesting of human phenomena."

"And to me," said Cecil, "there is one, at least, much less interesting — the narrow sympathy of a man whose culture does not lead him to feel himself ‘stranger to nothing that is human,' but which makes him despise all that is broadly and universally human."

Dorrian, who had thrown himself down among the cushions of a divan, looked at her with a smile.

"And I am the man?" he said. "You are very kind to let me know it in such unambiguous fashion. I fear that I must plead guilty to the charge. What is 'broadly and universally human' is essentially commonplace — and of the commonplace I have an infinite disgust."

"What I mean is not commonplace," she said. "That term applies only to petty things. What I mean are great things — passions, feelings, sentiments, which the best portion of the race have always held in common."

"Perhaps so," said Dorrian, languidly; "but what the best portion of the race have felt, interests me very little. I care only for what a few of its members have done."

"In short," she said, looking away from him into the distance, "you care only for what ministers to your individual pleasure and satisfaction. But such egoism — forgive me if I use a plain term — narrows life terribly."

"It narrows its power of annoyance," he answered. "Have you not learned yet that the wider your sympathies, the wider your possible annoyances?"

"That is true." She spoke as if to herself — then added quickly, "But it is better to pay the penalty of a wide life than to narrow it down to selfish epicureanism."

"That is for one to decide according to one's taste, said Dorrian. "*I* have decided; and I regret that it should be still an open question in your mind."

"There is much besides that which is still an open question in my mind," she said in a low tone.

Silence fell after this. Both felt that a word more might bring them to an issue which neither was prepared to face. It was a relief that at this moment the marchesa crossed the deck.

"Do you know," she said, addressing them as she approached, "that Bernard is already beginning to talk of our returning to Cairo? I am disappointed, I confess. I had set my heart on going as far as the first cataract."

"But surely he does not talk of our returning at once, or soon?" asked Cecil, with an air of consternation. "Why, the charm of the life is just beginning to grow upon us, and the river is daily becoming more interesting."

"So I represented; but he has heard some rumors that he does not like. However, we shall be at Assiout this evening, where he will see the governor of the province, and learn how much farther it is safe to go."

"I hope that the governor of the province will prove to be a man of sense, and order us back to Cairo," said Dorrian. "This life is sufficiently agreeable, but the charm hardly pays for the risk."

"I do not believe that there is any risk at all," said Cecil. "What could be more peaceful than the country? And if there were a risk, it would add to the charm! I am sure Mr. Lysle can not mean to suggest that we should go back before reaching Thebes."

"I am afraid he does mean just that," said the marchesa. "He is very sorry; but you know the responsibility of our safety rests upon him."

"Then let us relieve him of the responsibility and take it upon ourselves," said Miss Churchill, quickly. "It is too much to ask us to turn back without accomplishing anything."

"Why should we accomplish anything?" said Dorrian. "To read of the ruins of Thebes is quite as satisfactory as to see them — probably more so. And as for the charm of this Nile-life— well, that can be repeated, you know. If we like, we can come back when things finally settle down into quietness."

"Ah — come back!" said Cecil. There was a slight fall, a slighter quiver, in her voice as she looked at the distant hills, rose-red in the sunset glow. "Who cares to come back — who cares to renew a broken charm? It is always a mistake. If I came back, I should care nothing for the Nile or for Thebes. But now — I do care."

She rose as she spoke and walked across the deck to where Lysle was standing at the railing, sweeping the river-bank with his glass. He did not hear her approach, and when she spoke suddenly at his side, he lowered the glass with a start.

"What is this the marchesa is telling me, Mr. Lysle?" she began, quickly. "That you are going to order us back to Cairo? But it is impossible — you must know that it is impossible! Why, it would be absurd to go back without having seen Thebes."

He looked at her with a smile.

“I do not know when I have seen you excited before," he said. "And you really care so much for Thebes? Well, if it be possible, you may be sure that you shall see it. But if there is the least suspicion of danger, you must be content to turn back."

She shook her head. "Not on a mere suspicion. You should not ask that. And you know there is no more than, if indeed there is so much as, a suspicion — of danger. But I have a suspicion of another kind. I suspect you of being tired of this idling mode of progress; of wanting to throw us off and hurry on to the real danger that is ahead."

Even through his deeply bronzed skin a flush was visible. It seemed as if for a moment he could not meet the glance which was bent upon him so searchingly.

"You are very unkind — and unjust — to suspect that," he said, hastily. "If I thought of myself, I should wish to prolong our voyage indefinitely — for when am I likely ever to know such another? To fancy that I am anxious to give up this charming lotus-eating existence for the hardships, privations, and dangers that await me— well, that is not very likely on the face of it."

"On the face of it, perhaps not," she answered. "But sometimes one feels— one has an instinct— what lies below the face of things. And I really think that you are tired of us, Mr. Lysle — that you want to be free. I have observed your restlessness for a day or two. And, if this were so, I should like you to tell me frankly. In that case I would not object to our turning back to-morrow — and I am the only person who does object."

By this time he had recovered himself, and there was a look of amusement in the dark eyes that with all their keenness were never unkindly.

"What a fair and liberal proposal!" he said. "It is a pity that I can not close with it; but since to do so would commit me to a stupendous falsehood, and would make me suffer more than it would any one else, I must stand firm on my integrity. Seriously, I can not think that you believe me to be tired of such companionship. Tired of myself I may be — that is an old story. But not of — others."

For a moment she looked down silently at the yellow-green water flowing by the side of the boat. Then—

“I never thought," she said, in a low tone, “that you were ever tired of yourself. You seem always so self-sustained."

"So I am," he answered, lightly. "But occasionally one may grow tired of sustaining one's self. And then the use of one's friends becomes very apparent. So you may depend upon it that I shall not part with you all until my sense of responsibility forces me to do it."

She sighed a little. "You are fencing me off," she said. "You are not telling me truly what you feel. But I have no right to complain of that. Only — I should like to do what you really desire."

"You are very good," he said, " but I assure you that what I desire is to accomplish if possible what you desire in this matter."

"Then we shall go to Thebes?"

"If I am assured at Assiout that it is safe to do so. You should not ask me to take the responsibility of any risk."

"Personally I care nothing for the risk. Life is such a tame affair that I should be glad of anything to give zest to it. I wish that I could change places with you. I wish that I were going to meet the Mahdi."

There was a curious intensity and recklessness in her tone as she made this wish, which might else have passed for jesting pleasantry. Lysle was fully alive to the tone, but he thought it best to take the words as a jest.

“You would make a good campaigner," he said. "There is no doubt of that. And I think you would enjoy it, too — up to a certain point."

"Oh, one reaches the point in everything when things cease to be enjoyable," she said, a little wearily. "I have long since realized that. I am inclined to think that the pleasure of adventure, the spice of danger, might last longer than any other."

"Hardly for you— your needs are too intellectual," answered Lysle, falling into the personal discussion which he had of late avoided. "I have always believed, I still believe, that you will find your best hope of pleasure, or at least of satisfaction, in a life of intellectual activity and production."

Her lip curled a little as she glanced across the deck where Dorrian still reclined on his cushions.

"He— that is, some people— think that the period for production is past," she said, "that everything has been said which can be said, and that all art to-day is but a feeble echo of what greater men have done."

"But you do not believe such *dilettante* nonsense."

"I — yes, sometimes I believe it. In its application to myself, indeed, I have no difficulty in believing it. You know I never had much faith in myself."

"I know that you need a stimulus, and that, on the contrary, you have chosen a life which deadens all aspiration," said Lysle, too much moved to be guarded.

She looked at him wistfully and silently for a moment. "I have been a great disappointment to you, have I not?" she said. "I remember you told me once that you never expected anything save disappointment. But I think you did expect something else from me. Well, if it is any comfort to you, pray believe that 1 am as much disappointed in myself as you can be in me."

Then before he could answer, she turned abruptly and left him.

CHAPTER V.

It is almost needless to say that, after this, the *dahabeah* held steadily on her way up the river toward Thebes. It would have required more than a mere suspicion of possible danger to have nerved Lysle to order it back to Cairo after he learned how much Miss Churchill desired to see the famous ruins of "the world's great mistress on the Egyptian plain," and also after her charge that he wanted to shake off companionship and pursue his journey alone.

The sting of this charge was in the grain of truth which it contained. He had spoken truly in denying that he was tired of his companions; but he *was* tired of the constraint in which it was necessary to hold himself, of being debarred by Dorrian's presence and quiet but imperious claims from that intimate association with Cecil into which he had again drifted at Cairo, and above all, of the useless pain of witnessing her weariness and dissatisfaction with the life she had chosen. But, feeling as he did that this was their last association — for what could Herbert Dorrian's wife be but a stranger to him? — he could not deny her desire, even at the cost of prolonged pain to himself.

And so it came to pass that an evening of warm and glowing beauty saw their boat moored at Luxor.

They had spent the day on the western bank of the river, wandering amid the ruined temples and tombs of that City of the Dead over which voiceless Memnon presides in shattered majesty, the

incarnation of the mystery, the immensity, and solemnity of the mighty past. With the evening breeze they crossed from the Libyan to the Arabian side and made fast for the night.

"Are you too tired by your day's exertions for a stroll on shore?" said Lysle, then, addressing the marchesa.

"I believe I am a little tired," she replied. "We are to devote to-morrow to Luxor and Karnak are we not? I think I shall wait for that."

"I also," said Dorrian, languidly, from the depths of the lounging chair into which he had thrown himself. "It is much pleasanter to sit here and watch the scene — those columns reflected in the water, that stretch of glassy current with sunset lights on it — than to fatigue and annoy one's self by stumbling through sand and dust on shore."

"*I* am not tired," said Cecil, looking up at Lysle, "and I should like to go on shore very much."

"Then will you come?" he answered, scarcely knowing whether he was glad or sorry.

For he had avoided her all day — devoting himself to the marchesa and leaving her to the guidance of Dorrian. Once or twice there had been a wistful look in her eyes which he had found it hard to resist; but the time had come when he felt resistance necessary, when he dared no longer trust himself to the dangerous charm of her companionship. But when she turned to him now how could he refuse? — how could he even wish to refuse, since the time had grown so short in which they would yet be together? A few minutes later, therefore, saw them walking up the steep bank from the river.

The two on the boat watched them silently for a short time. Then the marchesa said, carelessly:

"Cecil has a great deal of energy — and of interest."

"Yes," answered Dorrian. "But both the energy and the interest are of a somewhat intermittent character. And they are much quickened, apparently, by Mr. Lysle's society."

The marchesa glanced at him rapidly. But if she had fancied that she would surprise any trace of annoyance — of jealousy or pique — on his face, she was mistaken. He was still watching the two figures on the bank, with an air of composure thoroughly in accord with the indifferent tone of his voice.

"They are old friends," she said, "and more than that — sympathetic friends. They have many tastes in common."

"Evidently," said Dorrian. He smiled. "My dear marchesa, do you think I require an explanation of Miss Churchill's interest in — Egyptian antiquities, let us say? I understand it perfectly."

"I doubt if you do," said the marchesa, "for the reason that I doubt if you understand her."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I do not find her a very complex study. The key-note to the character of most women is very simple; and hers is not an exception to the rule."

"And what do you call that key-note?"

"It has various names. Love of power is one of the least offensive."

"And in this case one of the least accurate. What moves her is not love of power or love of homage, but a strong desire for intellectual sympathy. If you are wise, my dear Herbert, you will offer this."

"Then I must fall into the depths of unwisdom in your opinion. Certainly I can not offer sympathy in foolish dreams that will lead to more foolish achievement. She has told me of her desires and ambitions — she would like to challenge the criticism of the world, to become one of a mob of commonplace writers. The idea is horrible."

"And you told her so?"

"I told her that her gifts, which charm now, would then lose all their distinction. They would become the property of the public, they would be taken into the market-place, they would be vulgarized and lose all their value to a refined and fastidious taste. I added that no one with a true sense of art would risk imperfect production; that it was better to feel the possibility of producing great things than to be forced to realize that one has produced small ones."

"Altogether you must have been as encouraging as possible! No wonder she is rather fond of talking to Bernard Lysle. I suppose it did not occur to you that you were not only ruthlessly crushing all her aspirations, but that you might be depriving the world of the utterances of genius — for sometimes I think there is a touch of absolute genius about her."

"I am quite sure there is; but that touch of genius, that flicker of a divine flame, I want for my own life: I do not intend to share it with the world. The fine perception, the delicate imagination which pleases me, shall not also please a horde of vulgar people. I would as soon convert my house, with all its carefully guarded art treasures, into a public museum."

"And the truth is," said the marchesa, making an Italian gesture with her hands, "that she is no more than one of your art treasures — perhaps their crown, but still, like them, intended to find her end of being in ministering to your pleasure, in stirring your languid sensations. It is a new idea, that of imprisoning for your benefit a stray bit of genius. But I call it the very culmination of egotism."

He laughed softly. The charge did not seem to affect him greatly.

"And what then?" he said, lightly. "Egotism is a word which does not frighten me. Since fortune has given me the means of gratifying my tastes, why should I not secure for my own benefit a stray bit of genius — your term, not mine, pray remember! — as well as an antique statue or vase? Why should not my own pleasure be more of an object with me than the pleasure of an unknown multitude?"

She looked at him as one might gaze at a blank, insurmountable wall. What words could reach such selfishness as this, what argument move such epicurean nonchalance?

"If you recognize no difference between the one and the other," she answered at length, "if a human soul, with all its aspiration, its passion, its force of feeling, is no more to you than a statue or vase, I do not know that I can prove to you why you should not monopolize the one as well as the other for your own pleasure. I am not learning now for the first time that there is little to be said to one who makes the gratification of his tastes the law of his life."

"There is this to be said," was the reply, "that he is the only truly wise man. Altruistic arguments are very fine, but they can never convince one who has looked on life without any softening of illusion, who has learned that while it may be possible to gratify one's self, it is never possible to gratify others, no matter how far one may go in the folly of serving them. And I," he added, calmly, "have no intention of going any length at all in such folly. Human nature is of value in my eyes only in so far as it can minister to my comfort and pleasure."

The marchesa did not answer. Too much a woman of the world not to be familiar with such cynical selfishness when displayed in conduct, she was not so familiar with its frank avowal in words, and it chilled her like an icy touch. She looked toward the bank where Cecil had disappeared, and thought of the warm, passionate life which had surrendered itself to this cold egotism. A memory of Lysle's strong-hearted sacrifice occurred to her. Was it indeed true that only the selfish were wise? It was a moment of discouragement such as even the generous know, and the river filled it with its solemn, unceasing murmur — the murmur which seemed fraught with all the sadness and mystery of life.

Meanwhile, Cecil and Lysle having passed through the modern town of Luxor, were standing among the ancient temples, by the side of the famous obelisk (companion to that of Paris), and in the shadow of the noble gateway towers which still speak with mute eloquence of the splendor of the courts to which they led.

"What a mushroom thing the civilization of our age is, when compared to that which erected such monuments as these!" said Lysle, looking up meditatively at the massive outlines, and the stone which seemed alive with the shock of the warring squadrons carved in bold relief upon it. "After three thousand years what fragment of our work will remain to speak of us to posterity? But perhaps it is as well that none should remain — else what would be thought of our conceptions of art? It is to be hoped that future

generations will kindly take us at our own estimate of ourselves, as expressed in the writings which no doubt will survive."

" Yes, man's thought lasts longer than man's deed," said Cecil. "Some day all that remains of the glory of Thebes will be buried in the desert sand; but the records carved on her walls will have passed imperishably into the history of the world."

"I suppose one hardly needs a fresh proof that the mind is the immortal part of man," said Lysle. "Wonderful minds, too, they must have had, those old Egyptians — the masters of Moses and of Plato."

"Should you not like to meet one of the priests of these temples?" said Cecil. "If we only knew enough of the old magic of Egypt to summon one!"

"And could be quite sure that we should understand the language in which he would speak after being summoned. Shall we go over to Karnak and try what we can do when the moon rises?"

Cecil looked wistfully across the fields, green with freshly springing wheat, toward the solemn ruins of Karnak and the Arabian hills over which the moon would shortly appear.

"I should like to go," she said. "Is it not possible?"

"Well — hardly, I am afraid," answered Lysle, reluctantly. "The marchesa would not consent, and Dorrian would certainly vote the expedition an absurdity."

Her face changed, hardened, grew cold. "Would that matter?" she asked. "Mr. Dorrian's opinion, I mean. He thinks everything an absurdity which is not done with special reference to his taste."

"Oh, we all begin by fancying that the world is arranged for our particular benefit," said Lysle, carelessly, "and Dorrian has never passed beyond that stage. It is natural enough, I suppose. We must allow something to a man to whom Fortune has been so consistently kind."

"I am beginning to doubt whether Fortune is most kind when she showers her favors with a lavish hand," said Cecil. "A spoiled child is not a pleasant type — and many people are spoiled children of prosperity."

"We may afford to be patient with them, for, sooner or later, life teaches them a lesson, which is harder to bear from its delay," said Lysle. He moved suddenly away, as if from the subject, and paused by the great mutilated statue of Rameses II. "He might have something very instructive to tell us about the effects of human prosperity and greatness, if he could only open those silent lips," he said. "But after all, it does not matter what Fortune has given or withheld — when one is dead."

"But it matters when one is not dead," said Cecil. She spoke with sudden passion. "All the more, because life is so brief, and in the main so unsatisfactory, does one want to secure what good one can. You may call me an epicurean, if you like, Mr. Lysle — and, whether you call me so or not, I know that you think me one — but I do want to secure and to enjoy the best of life while it is mine."

There was something of compassion in Lysle's glance as he turned it on her. "If I call you an epicurean," he said, "it is not, believe me, in an offensive sense. The artistic temperament is always more or less epicurean. Its strongest longing is toward things beautiful and harmonious, toward grasping and enjoying the fullness of life. I realize and understand this. I think that I understand you; I hope that I have never done you any injustice."

"But you believe that I have made a great mistake."

He made a quick gesture. "No. Forgive me, I could not venture to decide that — and I should be sorry to believe it. But it is growing late. Shall we not return to the *dahabeah*?"

She assented, rising slowly from the fallen fragment of stone on which she had been seated, but lingering to cast another wistful glance over the plain toward Karnak.

"To-morrow we go there," she said. "And then —"

"Then you will return to Cairo, and I shall continue up the river."

"Why should you send us back?" she said. "Why should we not take you at least as far as the cataract?"

"Because, although everything seems so safe and tranquil, there might be Arab incursions from the desert. It is possible — and I can not consent that even a possibility of danger should be incurred in order to take me to the cataract."

"But if we — if I wish to go on?"

"You do well to amend your phrase. You are alone, I think, in wishing to go on. Even the marchesa would prefer to turn her face toward Cairo. And, indeed, it is not a matter open to discussion. I must go alone."

His tone was so decided that she did not answer, and they walked silently back toward the river-bank, where the palms seemed washed in gold by the last rays of the setting sun, and the rosy light with which all Nature glowed and trembled was reflected in the broad and shining current.

CHAPTER VI.

Approaching Karnak from Luxor by the long avenue bordered by mutilated fragments of what were once sphinxes — those sacred, mysterious figures evolved from the imagination of ancient Egypt, and which even to the modern mind convey irresistibly their emblematic idea of the union of wisdom and power — the party of travelers reached the noble pylon, or gateway, which leads to the vast ruins of the temples. The majestic simplicity of its colossal proportions, and the beautiful relief of its cornice, give it a peculiarly striking effect, as it stands erect and lonely amid the wrecks of an elder world, the most perfect specimen of Egyptian architecture remaining.

"It belongs to the Ptolemaic era, you know," said Lysle, when the marchesa observed how fortunate it was that one such fragment remained to speak of the glory of the past. "But it has all the distinctive features of Egyptian architecture — its massiveness, its majesty, and its imposing symbolism. One does not observe here what is apparent in later Ptolemaic art, the influence of the Greek spirit."

"I should not care for the Greek spirit in Egypt," said Cecil. "I prefer the art which is born of the soil. These vast temples with their simplicity and their solemnity, the colossal statues with their countenances half Asiatic and half African, and their impression of infinite benignant force, suit this ancient land of the Nile, the home of mysterious wisdom."

"It would be difficult to mingle the Greek spirit successfully with such an art as this," said Dorrian. "The gloomy sublimity which is its chief characteristic has nothing in common with the divine harmony and grace of Greek beauty. Miss Churchill is right, however — this is most appropriate here."

"And most interesting because most ancient," said Lysle; "but when you see the temples of Philae, you will perceive how the Greek spirit successfully mingled with the Egyptian and rendered it more graceful."

"But we are not going to Philae," said Cecil, with a tone of reproach.

"Not now," answered Lysle; "but Mr. Dorrian may care to renew his acquaintance with the Nile at another time."

"Perhaps," said Dorrian, carelessly. "I like the mode of travel, I confess."

"I wonder you never came before," said the marchesa, "just as I wonder why *I* never came before."

"As far as I am concerned the reason is very simple," said Dorrian. "It has been vulgarized into such a cockney route of travel. Just now it is bearable because fears of disturbance have frightened tourists away. But fancy it swarming with all the hordes of Cook! Forty or fifty years ago the ascent of the Nile may have been an agreeable adventure; but now —”

"Now we still find the river, the ruins, and the desert," said the marchesa; "and these are things likely to survive many generations of tourists."

"Of all famous travelers," said Lysle, "I think that, while I am here at least, I envy most Hecataeus — the only person of whom we have any knowledge who ever saw and compared the Temple of the Sun in Thebes with the Druidical temple of the same god at Stonehenge, before ruin had touched either. He was a most appreciative traveler, too. It is owing to his careful measurements of the great palace of Rameses II, that modern research has been able to identify it."

"He may have been a very interesting person," said Dorrian. "An officer of the army of Alexander, he must have seen all the wonders of the conquered East before he joined himself to Ptolemy and visited Upper Egypt. One might have listened to him with pleasure, if he did not bore one with too long tales — a weakness of travelers."

"Do you remember," said Lysle, "how he relates that when he boasted of being sixteenth in descent from Jupiter, the Theban priests showed him the mummy-cases of their predecessors standing around the walls of the temples, to the number of three hundred and forty-five, and told him that each of those priests had ruled Thebes in succession from father to son, and it was that number of generations since the gods Osiris and Horus had reigned in Egypt?"

"If that were true," said Cecil, "I don't mean about the gods, but about the three hundred and forty-five generations — what fabulous antiquity it gave to Egypt!"

"Fabulous indeed, I fancy," said the marchesa, "although we know that Egypt was a highly civilized nation when Abraham entered it. But shall we not go on to the great temple now?"

They wandered on, and for several hours were absorbed in exploring the immense wilderness of ruins, of temples, courts, propylae, gateways and obelisks which cover the plain in masses of bewildering grandeur. The spell of the past fell upon them all, and Cecil was not alone in forgetting the lapse of time and even natural fatigue, as they passed from one great monument of a dead faith and a mighty civilization to another.

The westering light was already long when, after many explorations, they finally returned to the Great Hall. Shadows were creeping through the deep recesses of its ruins, but a glow of sunset still rested on the beautiful flower-shaped capitals of the immense columns. "It is like a fantastic dream!" said the marchesa, as they slowly paced down the central avenue, while on each side pillars, obelisks, and sculptured walls formed vast arcades which stretched away into remote distance.

"This was the heart of Thebes," said Lysle. "If you observe, everything seems to radiate from here. Fancy the splendor of this hall with its hundred and thirty columns, its superb painted roof, and its courts thronged with priests and worshipers, when Rameses entered it in triumph after his Oriental conquests!"

"Should you not have liked to witness the scene?" said Cecil. She paused and stood, looking down the great vista as if she saw it, while the others walked on. Lysle glanced at her, and when the marchesa presently stopped to examine a sculptured entablature, he walked back.

"Are you tired?" he asked. "Would you like to rest?"

"I am not tired," she answered; "at least I have not thought whether I am or not; but I should like, if there were time, to remain here for a short while and watch the effects of the changing light in this wonderful place."

"Well," he said, after a moment's hesitation — a moment in which he told himself that this was the last pleasure it might ever be in his power to afford her, and so he would not refuse it — "why should you not? Sit down, while I go and tell the others to ride slowly back to Luxor and we will follow presently."

He went before she could answer; and she watched his slight, dark figure vanishing among the columns — for the others had now walked on — with a sinking of the heart which surprised her. It was suddenly borne upon her with vivid force, how soon that figure would pass out of her life, as it now

passed from her sight, and, in realizing this, she also realized all that its absence would mean. She sank on a fallen block of stone and turned her face upward. A red light was still shining on the beautiful foliated capitals of the pillars, while a solemn obscurity brooded among the vast ruins spread around. A sense of hopelessness and failure, a horrible distaste of life, seemed to overwhelm her. She had been long familiar with such feelings— at times especially, they had made existence almost unbearable — but never had they pressed upon her with so great a weight as in the silence of this vast Egyptian temple. She suddenly buried her face in her hands. What had she done with her life, what would she ever do with it, what value did it have in the past, the present, or the future? A sound passed her lips which was something between a sigh and a groan.

“I knew that you were tired!" said Lysle's voice, suddenly speaking at her side in a tone of solicitude. "I am afraid that you are overdone entirely."

"Oh no," she said, looking up with a faint smile. "I am really not tired — that is, not tired of anything I have done to-day. But I am tired to death of myself — if you know what *that* is!"

"I know what you mean," Lysle answered, “but I think that in this case the mental state is produced by the physical one. We have tried to do too much!"

"You are mistaken," she said, quickly, "very much mistaken. I wanted to do it all, and I am not tired in a physical sense. Are the others gone?"

"They soon will be. I told them to ride slowly, and we would probably overtake them before they reached Luxor."

"That means that I have only a few minutes to linger in this place of enchantment. I am sorry. I should like to stay for a long time — especially at this hour."

"We will stay as long as you like," said Lysle. "I only thought you might wish to rejoin the marchesa."

She shook her head, but did not answer otherwise — and for a moment they were silent, watching together the beautiful rose-red light fade from the summits of the lofty pillars. It was indeed a scene and an hour in which to linger. As dusky shadows crept among the vast avenues their extent seemed absolutely illimitable, while the great walls and towering obelisks assumed proportions even more gigantic than by the light of day. From where they sat, there was a view of the great propylon which formed the chief entrance to the temple, and its immense opening framed an exquisite picture of the outstretched plain with its groves of palms, the silver river flowing through it, and the distant Libyan hills perforated with countless tombs, above which the crimson fires of sunset burned.

To Lysle as well as to Cecil the sense of impending parting may have added to the deep pathos of the scene. After a silence of some length, he said, slowly:

"We have seen many sunsets together, and, if this is the last, at least we could ask no nobler setting for it."

"Why should you think it the last?" she demanded, sharply, as if in protest. "Why should we not see many more together?"

He turned toward her, and even through the gloom she felt the dark fire of his glance.

"Because," he answered, "the end has come. Even if I return from the desert — and I am not at all blind to the dangers which await me there — I do not think I shall ever see you again. Certainly not with my will."

She caught her breath with a quick, gasping sound. "Why should you say that?" she asked. "Have you come at last to despise me?"

“Despise you!" he repeated. "What reason have I ever given you to ask such a question? Have I not believed in you when you did not believe in yourself, have I not recognized you when others were blind, have I not admired — " He broke off abruptly, then, after a moment added, in a lower tone: "Do not

force me to say all that I have felt for you. I should only offend you; and to be disbelieved once is enough."

"Did I disbelieve you?" she said, in a tone even lower than his own. "I beg your pardon. I have long wanted to beg your pardon. I think I was out of my senses on that day and for many days afterward. It is only lately that I have recovered them; that I have recognized how right you were in your judgment, and how I have marred the possibilities of my life. I asked you a moment ago if you despised me. You would have a right to do so, for I despise myself. And from this self-contempt I see no road of escape. Whether I fulfill my bond or whether I break it, I am equally unworthy, equally weak. I must equally bear the burden of knowing myself to be a far poorer creature than I ever dreamed in my old, proud, confident days."

"Will it help you to overcome your self -contempt to know that I have never misunderstood, never for one moment despised you?" asked Lysle, gently. "I have always comprehended how you were dazzled, how you mistook your own needs. The artistic nature is so many-sided, it has so many needs, it can not be satisfied like an ordinary nature with a little of the world — a little happiness, a little knowledge, a narrow experience — it desires to possess life in its fullness. Hence arise what are called the vagaries of genius, and the inconstancy with which it is often charged. I recognized all this when I knew you first. It did not need your own warning or that of your brother to convince me that it would be a fatal mistake to lay a fetter upon your life. If there was ever a moment in which you might have been tempted, through ignorance, to accept such a fetter, I am glad that I was strong enough to refrain from placing it upon you. To see you chafing against the claim of another man is hard enough. I could not live and know you chafing against mine."

She was mute. How could she say, "I have learned that I should not chafe against yours"! From some words a woman's lips are sealed, even if — as in this case — loyalty to the man whose claim still bound her had not forbidden them. A sense of passionate, impotent pain possessed her. She looked at the great cornice of the wall before her. Should she ever forget how its massive lines cut against the sky, and how at that moment it seemed an embodiment of the weight upon her heart?

"You are kind — you are more than kind in trying to excuse my folly," she said at length, "but I feel nothing save the greatness — and the littleness — of my mistake. I have no longer any faith in myself: everything in life has grown hateful to me."

"To that," he answered, "I have one word to reply — patience. This state will pass."

"Into what?" she asked, wearily. "Not that it matters. The deadly indifference to all things, the sudden running down of all the springs of energy, which I have felt at times during the whole of my life, has overpowered me of late. I almost think I will go back and sit down once more among the pines."

Lysle shook his head, "No," he said, "you will never do that. You mistake in imagining that it would be possible. You must fight your way back to faith in yourself, and faith in your own capabilities, in the world where your future will lie."

"If I have any future, I can not rouse the faintest interest in it," she said. "It seems to me just now as empty as these ruins."

What could Lysle answer? He, too, remembered the bond upon her life — the bond formed by her own will. It fettered him as well as her — making such words as he might have spoken impossible in honor. Yet, even if she were free, why should he utter these words? She had once put his devotion aside with incredulity — would it be likely to win more regard from her now? He said to himself that it was not likely, that he knew her too well to mistake the meaning of her utterances, and that the only service which he might render her was the service of what poor words of sympathy he could speak in these few minutes allowed to them.

"It will not remain empty," he said, when he could presently command his usual tone of quietness. "Your nature is too rich in possibilities, too full and strong, for such a state to be more than temporary, unless — "

He paused, with a sudden drop in his voice which made her look at him and say, "Unless — what?"

"Unless the life which you elect to lead is a continual violence to your nature," he answered. "Do not ask me to say more."

There was silence for several minutes, and then she rose to her feet with a gesture as of one who throws off a fetter.

"I will *not* lead such a life!" she said in a low, thrilling voice. "Let the result be what it will of humiliation, I will be free once more! One who breaks a plighted faith has always seemed to me the most despicable of human beings; but it is my punishment that I must fall even lower than I have fallen already in my own esteem. And I am ready to pay even that price for freedom!"

Lysle's heart gave a great bound. At that moment he felt two things with equal force — one was relief at this resolution, the other a deep consciousness that it might have been himself and not Dorrian from whom, in extremity of unhappiness, she might have had to demand her freedom. "Thank God, I had strength to avoid that!" was his inmost thought as he, too, rose and stood beside her.

"This is a point of which no one but yourself can judge," he said, gravely. "Only believe that I shall rejoice in anything which is for your happiness. Wherever I am, I must desire that above all things ; and there is nothing which I would not do to secure it —if anything were in my power."

In the dusky twilight which enwrapped them, he could not see more than the indistinct outlines of her face, else perhaps there might have been some flash of expression to tell him that more than he imagined was in his power. The dead gods and heroes of Egypt looking down upon them were not more dumb than she felt herself. This, too, was part of her punishment, that honor and pride sealed her lips; that she could not even hold out her hand to the man whom she had learned to know too late.

By this time the moon was hanging full and golden over the Arabian hills, and her magic light was touching the columns, the obelisks, and long lines of wall from which the glow of sunset had so lately departed. In a little while it would reign supreme over Karnak, casting floods of silver upon sculptures where the achievements of ancient kings were carved in high relief, upon the avenues of stately columns, the massive towers and heaps of ruins, but as yet its whitening beams shone only upon the capitals and cornices, while deep shadow still reigned below.

Out of this shadow came a long, tremulous sigh as Cecil presently said: "Is it not time that we should return? I know that you are staying to gratify me, but I do not wish to be unreasonable; and — I shall never forget this hour in Karnak."

"Nor I," he said, as they turned and slowly moved away — two silent figures through the silence and solemn gloom of the vast, deserted temple.

CHAPTER VII.

"I am inclined to think that Bernard was right in his parting advice," said the marchesa, meditatively.

Miss Churchill, whom she seemed to address, looked up from the cushions of the divan on which she lay. "My experience has been that Mr. Lysle is generally right," she said. "What was the advice to which you allude?"

"That we should leave the *dahabeah* at Assiout, and take the railway to Cairo. He said that we would find the descent of the river tedious."

"And he was correct — it is tedious," said Cecil. “Speaking for myself, my interest in it is exhausted. I have seen all the palms, all the ruins, all the Arab villages I care to see. Everything is now like a twice-told tale. Let us take the railway by all means."

The marchesa smiled. "I felt sure that would be your wish," she said. "And, indeed, it is mine — not because I weary as much as you do of what has become familiar, but because, as long as we are in this boat, I shall miss Bernard so dreadfully."

"Ah!" said Cecil. She turned away her face and looked at the shore, seeing vaguely the plumy boughs of palms outlined against the purple sky, a string of laden camels slowly pacing along the river-bank, the vivid green of the outstretched valley, and afar the yellow sands of the desert. She felt a sudden, passionate loathing of the whole picture, identified as it was with the new and bitter pain that had entered her life.

"One does miss Mr. Lysle," she said, quietly, after a moment; "but I should not consider that a reason for abandoning the boat — else one might have to abandon many other things in turn. But why should we linger over scenes which none of us care for now?"

"Why, indeed?" replied the marchesa. "So we will take the railway when we reach Assiout — which will be to-morrow, Ahmed says."

"I suppose," said Cecil, after a slight silence, "that Mr. Dorrian will not object."

"It is not likely," said the marchesa, "but here he comes to speak for himself."

Dorrian, indeed, made his appearance at the moment, languidly ascending from the lower to the upper deck where the two ladies were seated, and where the dragoman was at the moment arranging a table for afternoon tea. When the idea of leaving the boat at Assiout was proposed to him, he gave it at once unqualified approval.

"So long as we were advancing from the less interesting to the more interesting," he said, "the voyage was tolerable; but when those conditions are reversed, it becomes monotonous and wearying. The sooner, therefore, it is ended, the better."

"Then we are all agreed," said the marchesa, "and at Assiout our Nile voyage will end."

Was it because it was to end so soon that the evening which followed seemed to Cecil one of the most beautiful of all their floating experience? The sun went down with unusual splendor, his last level rays burnishing with gold the palm-groves which lined the river's brink, the emerald expanse of the valley, and the bold cliffs which came down to the river on the Arabian side. The full, solemn flow of the current, the fragrance borne from the shore, the stillness of the hour, and the intense tranquillity of the broad Egyptian sky, made the twilight an interval of enchantment. The radiance under which all Nature glowed and trembled was short-lived, however: darkness fell, and the stars suddenly burst into resplendent luster, casting on the still river reflections so brilliant that the boat seemed to glide through liquid space studded with its throbbing worlds.

Cecil was standing by the rail of the deck, looking into the strange, silent beauty of the night and watching for the moonrise over the Arabian hills, when Dorrian came to her side. Perhaps it was because her thoughts had been following Lysle on his lonely journey up the river, that she started and shrank a little. Through the darkness, Dorrian perceived the movement.

"I disturb you," he said, ceremoniously. "Pardon me."

"Oh, no," she answered, hurriedly, as he seemed about to withdraw, "you do not disturb — you only startled me. What a wonderfully beautiful night it is!"

"Very beautiful," he replied, pausing. "There is a charm in this Egyptian air which is quite indescribable. Yet I am not sorry that our voyage is nearly ended."

"Sorry — no. Why should one be sorry?" said Cecil, as if to herself. “I am glad." Then she looked up at him with a sudden impulsive resolve. "I have been thinking," she said, "that perhaps it would be well if other things ended with the voyage."

"Yes," said Dorrian. He knew in an instant what she meant, and a sense of unpleasant shock vibrated through him. Nevertheless, he was determined that the full burden of explanation should fall upon her. "There are a good many things that I hope will end with the voyage," he said, in his low, indolent voice. "For one thing, I have not seen as much of you as I should like. I hope the deprivation of your society will end."

It did not occur to Cecil that he was purposely making harder what she had to say. But his words nerved her in a manner which he could not have foreseen. They brought to her mind a vivid realization of the obligations involved in her bond, and a passionate sense of the necessity to end that which she could no longer trust herself to fulfill.

"What I meant was — is — different, very different from that," she said, in a quick, tremulous tone. "I have to beg your pardon, I have to humble myself before you, I have to tell you that I am unfaithful to the promise which I gave you, and that I beg you to release me from it."

Silence fell after she had uttered these words, and it seemed to her that he might have heard the beating of her heart through it. She clasped her hands tightly together in an attempt to still the vibration of her pulses. It was a moment of sickening suspense.

Dorrian broke it with his customary deliberateness of manner and speech. The habit of years stood him in good stead, and he could control his voice, but he knew that the darkness served him well in concealing his face. "You mean," he said, "that you wish to end our engagement?"

"Yes," she answered. "I am grieved — oh, believe me, I am grieved and humiliated; but is it not best that, when such a mistake has been made, it should be ended, rather than that a worse mistake should follow?"

"What is the mistake that you think has been made?" he asked, calmly.

She knew that she was to be spared nothing; that she had given this man a hold upon her which he would not lightly relax.

"The mistake," she said, "was made when I promised to marry you. It was my fault, and you can find no words of blame which I shall not own to be just."

"Unfortunately," he replied, in an icy tone, "there are some conventional rules of courtesy which prevent a man from saying exactly what he thinks of such a mistake. You will allow me, however, to inquire when you discovered it?"

"Long ago — longer than you will believe," she answered. "I had hardly given my promise when I knew that it would cost me much to fulfill it. But now —" She paused abruptly, as if the words choked her.

"And now?" he repeated. "You will complete your confidence by informing me how you feel with regard to it now?"

"Yes, if you wish to know," she said, more steadily. “I feel now that anything would be preferable to fulfilling it. And this alone has nerved me to tell you the truth, to humble my pride, and to ask you to release me from a promise which I should never have given."

He did not answer for a moment. In truth, his impulse of resentful anger was so strong that he could not trust himself to speak. He had condescended to this woman — he, of all men the most fastidious, the most "difficult" — and this was how she repaid his condescension! She flung carelessly back to him the brilliant position which he offered her, she made him taste at once the bitterness of rejection and of betrayal; above and over all, she made him feel that he, Dorrian, suffered in her eyes by contrast with Bernard Lysle! The last was, to his vanity, perhaps, the sharpest sting of all.

"I have to thank you," he said, at last, "for your frankness. It at least makes sufficiently clear the meaning of this. Is it necessary to say that I restore your freedom with — may I be allowed to say, pleasure? Nothing was at any time further from my desire than to coerce your inclination. It would, I think, have been more candid if you had spoken earlier. But I am not too dull to understand how and why your change of sentiment has been quickened of late. May I be permitted to inquire when Mr. Lysle will rejoin you?"

She turned toward him with a quick movement of indignation. But, remembering herself: "You have a right to ask me that, or anything else," she said, "a right which my own miserable weakness has given you. One who has acted as I have done can not resent being suspected of deeper unworthiness. But your suspicion does injustice not only to me — *that* does not matter — but to Mr. Lysle. He has never said a word to me that you might not have heard. He has been to me the kindest, the most generous of friends — but that is all. When we parted the other day, it was without any plan, and with little expectation, of meeting again. If I knew that he were lying dead to-night, I should still say to you exactly what I say now — I have found the bond which unites us intolerable. I can never be your wife."

"Believe," he said, with bitter coldness, "that I shall never again ask you to be. Our engagement is dissolved as finally and completely as you can desire."

The moon — a great wheel of gold — was rising over the Arabian hills as she drew from her finger the glittering ring of her betrothal and held it out to him.

"You have a right to be indignant, you have a right to despise me," she said, with a humility which sat strangely on Cecil Churchill. "I despise myself so deeply, that I do not think I shall ever be reinstated in my own esteem. I have been tempted by the world in a way that I could never have imagined possible — for, alas! it was not you who tempted me, but the things you offered. I owe you this confession, in order to make you understand how little you have to regret. I have found that there is something within me which not even culture, luxury, beauty in the fullest degree, can satisfy. So I will go unsatisfied to the end sooner than barter away again my self-respect. Here is the symbol of all that I resign. Again I beg your pardon from my heart."

He took the ring which she gave him and looked at it for a moment in silence; then there was a quick flash of gems in the moonlight, and the waters of the river had closed over it!

“So," he said, "I cast away even the memory of an episode which your frankness has made not less humiliating to me than to you. In return for this frankness suffer me to give you a piece of advice. If you should again be tempted to accept a man, not for himself but for what he can offer, have the grace at least not to tell him so. Spare his vanity, if you have no pity for his heart."

With these words, he turned and left her. The moon was now fairly above the hills, and its rays caught the glitter of some very salt and bitter tears which dropped like the ring into the waters of the Nile.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was on the deck of the vessel that was bearing them back to Italy, and while they were sailing past the shores of Greece, that Cecil told the marchesa that she intended to return to America.

“Why?" asked the latter, somewhat startled, though she had known, ever since their return to Cairo, of the end of the engagement to Dorrian.

"Because I see no reason for remaining longer in Europe," Cecil answered. "It has been a mistake from the first. Mr. Lysle meant it in kindness — but it would have been better if he had left me in the life where he found me. I have done nothing that he hoped I should do, I have developed into nothing that he

expected. I have disappointed myself and I have given pain to others — that is all. So the sooner I return to obscurity the better."

The marchesa was silent for a moment. Not because the bitterness of this self-accusation surprised her, but because she was uncertain how to reply to it. She was touched by the sadness of the face gazing toward the enchanted isles of Hellas — that mobile, sensitive face which seemed made to express every varying mood of feeling — and after a short hesitation she laid her hand down on the hands that were clasped together in Cecil's lap.

"You forget *me*," she said. "You forget that your companionship has been a great pleasure to me, and that I should miss you very much."

The large golden eyes turned toward her gratefully, but did not lose their sadness.

"You are very good to say that," Cecil answered, "for I know that I have never really pleased you — no, do not deny it! — you have only been kind to me for Mr. Lysle's sake, and there is no reason why such kindness should continue. I shall probably never see Mr. Lysle again. He told me when we parted that he did not wish ever to see me again; and so the best service I can do him is to go where our paths need never cross."

“If he told you that," said the marchesa, "it was because he thought — he knew — that you were engaged to another man."

"He was not thinking altogether of that," said Cecil. "He was thinking — how could I blame him? — of all his disappointment in me. The disappointment was perhaps not altogether my fault. He imagined me to be something far different, far nobler, than I was — he would accept no warning to the contrary — and when he learned that instead of having a heart set on high ambitions, I was allured by the lower things of the world in a manner he could not understand, the fall of his ideal was complete. And you know one can not set up again an ideal which has fallen."

"I think you mistake him," said the marchesa. "I am sure that he has never done you any injustice."

"Injustice — no," was the quick reply. "He did me more than justice once — and when he learned his mistake, his kindness never varied. But, through the kindness, I felt the disappointment. How could it be otherwise? It was real and had a real ground. No one knows that better than I."

Her voice fell over the last words with a cadence as of one accepting the inevitable. There was silence for a minute, and then the marchesa said, gently:

"But none of this is a reason for leaving me and returning to bury yourself in America. I confess that until very lately I have not known you as I might have done. I have thought of Bernard rather than of you — that was natural, was it not? — and, so thinking, I have been inclined to condemn rather than to understand you. But I am more reasonable now. Since you ended your engagement with Herbert Dorrian, I comprehend you better — will you let me say that I also respect you more? — and since it requires some time to make a friendship in any real sense, I think you will agree with me that we have reached the point at which such friendship is possible. Moreover, you see for yourself that I need a companion, and I could not readily find again such a companion as yourself."

"You are very good," Cecil repeated, "and I understand all the kindness that makes you speak in this manner. But I do not think it would be hard for you to find a companion more satisfactory than myself, and I am sure that it is best I should return to America."

“Would Bernard say so, do you think?"

Cecil paled slightly. "I can not tell what he would say," she answered; "but I know what is best for him. It is best that he should not see or hear from me again. In return for all that he has done, or tried to do, for me, I have only made him unhappy."

"But the time may come when you will make him happy."

Cecil shook her head. "That is impossible," she said. “I know myself too well to think of it. I have no power to make any one happy. He knows it now. Dear marchesa, believe me it is best that I should go."

"It is not best that you should go immediately, at any rate," said the marchesa. "It will be long before Bernard Lysle returns to Europe. Meanwhile take time for reflection. Do not decide hastily to throw away all the advantages which your life now offers. I shall be very glad if you will stay with me. I think we shall grow to know and to like each other better as time goes on; and I, too, foresee for you in the maturing of your powers something of that brilliant future which Bernard predicted."

“No," said Cecil, quickly. "That was a dream of his."

"I have faith even in his dreams. But, however that may be — wait. Many doubts are ended, many riddles solved, by time."

Perhaps Miss Churchill was glad to be urged to wait. At least she said no more, and even after they returned to the Villa Ferrata she held her peace. She had a feeling as if she were in a state of suspense, as if some outward agency would determine her decision and her movements without direct action on her part. What this agency was to be she did not ask herself — she only yielded to the sense, and waited.

Meanwhile her second spring in Italy opened with softest beauty. But, in the midst of its radiance of color and perfume, her thoughts returned incessantly to the parching sands, the burning suns of Egypt; she saw the tawny current of the Nile, and even in her dreams she wandered amid the vast solitudes of Karnak. The shadow of the palms fell over all her thoughts; and when Hicks Pasha began his short, successful campaign in the Sennaar district against the forces of the Mahdi, the feverish anxiety with which she looked for news from the Soudan became almost unbearable. Lysle's own letters to the London journal for which he wrote gave this news in the form for which she watched most eagerly; and it seemed to her as time went on that life became little more than a breathless waiting for the end — which came at last.

It was a day of early May — a day of divinest beauty of earth and sky. The marchesa had driven with a party of friends down into Florence, but Cecil remained at the villa. Gayety, noise, distraction irritated her, and she shrank from them — preferring the deep solitude of the old garden or the terraces overlooking the hill-sides, where under the lofty stone-pines or spreading ilexes the ground was carpeted with the blue of the wild hyacinths and the gold of the wild daffodils. On this day some subtile consciousness of impending ill was with her, rousing a new unrest. Quietness was out of her power; she wandered into the garden, and finally paused by the fountain with its moss-grown basin where Lysle and herself had parted once. How vividly his face rose before her as she sat there! She saw it with the distinctness of a vision — but not as she had seen it last, either there or elsewhere. Was it the embodiment of her fears that made her see it lying pale and still on the desert sands, with unseeing eyes turned upward to the sky? She uttered a low cry, and raised her hands to her own eyes as if to shut out the sight which seemed to come with all the force of ghastly prophecy.

She was still so sitting when a step made her start, and, looking up, she saw the marchesa standing before her. In an instant she knew that the worst had come. One glance at the white face, the sorrow-filled eyes told her so. But it was as if she had been told something that she knew with absolute certainty before. She spoke — and the calmness of her own tones startled her.

"Mr. Lysle is dead!" she said. "You have heard it."

"Yes," answered the marchesa, in a voice she could hardly control. "There seems no doubt — no hope. He has been killed."

"Where?"

"In the fight near Gebel Ain, of which we have already heard. He exposed himself too much, and he was killed by an Arab spear."

"I knew it," said Cecil, with the same strange quietness. She extended her hand mechanically for a paper which the other held. "Is that the account?" she said. "I should like to see it."

The marchesa regarded her doubtfully. This calmness did not deceive her. She had an instinctive knowledge of the depth of the wound which it veiled.

"Do not read it now," she said. "Wait a little. There are sad details. It will be best that you should not read it here."

"You are mistaken — it is best that I should read it here," Cecil answered. "It was here that I wounded him and sent him away — here that I made the choice by which I must now always abide. Life knows no relenting. It is useless to try to undo what we have done. The end has come. It is fitting that I should hear it, that I should learn all there may be to know — here."

She took the paper which the other reluctantly yielded, but as her eyes fell on the heading of the column folded outward — "Details of the fight near Gebel Ain. Death of Mr. Lysle" — the strength which had so far sustained her suddenly gave way. No Arab spear could have struck with more deadly force than the sight of this announcement in its cold, calm certainty. She gave a low, gasping moan, and dropped insensible at the marchesa's feet.

CHAPTER IX.

Too strong in youth, and health, and strength to suffer long from physical prostration, Cecil rose after a few days and came forth from her darkened chamber to face the world which had been so suddenly and completely emptied for her. It had not needed the agony of those days to teach her the secret of her own heart, but it taught her the strength of passion, the infinite bitterness of vain regret, with a force and keenness altogether indescribable. She was no more than the pale shadow of herself when she emerged for the first time upon the broad southern terrace and looked with eyes that the gladness of Nature could no longer charm, over the glowing beauty of Val d'Arno. The soft loveliness of the scene seemed to mock her, recalling as it did by strength of contrast that other scene which, sleeping or waking, was ever before her eyes — the arid sands, the drooping palms, the wide African sky, and the lonely desert grave where Lysle lay buried.

Like a statue she stood, leaning against the balustrade, her eyes on Vallambrosa, but her thoughts beside that grave in the far Soudan, when the marchesa walked across the terrace and laid a hand on her arm.

"Come," she said, "and sit down in the *loggia*. You are not strong enough to stand here."

"Oh, you are mistaken," answered Cecil, quietly. "I am strong enough for anything. You need not fear for me. Heartless people are always strong. Nothing can hurt me."

"And you think yourself heartless! — But I will not discuss that. Come — you must sit down, for I want to talk to you. I have something to tell you."

Cecil turned without further protest. Something to tell meant nothing — for what could be told of interest to her? — but she was too indifferent to deny any request which the marchesa chose to make. She walked across the terrace and sat down with her under the shade of the *loggia* — its great arches framing the wide, beautiful scene, the valley swimming in amber light, the distant mountains fair as hills of paradise. There was a minute's silence, in which the marchesa seemed to hesitate. Then she said, gently:

"Do you remember any details of the last evening that Bernard spent with us — the evening at Luxor?"

Cecil looked at her with eyes full of wonder. Did she not remember every detail of that evening? As she gazed at the heights of the Apennines, had she not seemed to see the moon rising over the Arabian

hills, and the dead gods of Karnak gazing down upon her? That was the living moment: this the dead one. She almost heard the murmur of the Nile as she answered:

"I remember all of them — what then?"

"Only that I wished to recall to your recollection that, after your return from Karnak, Bernard went on shore again, saying that he wished to see the consul at Luxor."

Cecil bent her head. "I remember. And when he returned, he spoke to you for some time apart."

"Yes, he gave me two letters — one of which, addressed to a lawyer in London, he asked me to mail in Cairo. 'It contains my will,' he said. 'I have just been to the consulate to have it properly witnessed. When one is going on a service of special danger, one should be prepared for accidents; and I have had an inspiration what to do with my worldly possessions. They are not very great, and no one has any claim to them, so I can please myself, and go with a light heart into the desert. If I die, I can have the happiness of thinking that by dying I have in some slight degree served one whom life gives me no power to serve.' "

Cecil uttered a sharp exclamation. "He did not mean *me*," she said.

"Could he mean any one else?" asked the marchesa. "He foresaw, no doubt, that your engagement to Herbert Dorrian would be broken, and be feared that the want of independent fortune might mar the possibilities of your life. He had no one to consider; no one nearer to him than a cousin; so there was no reason why he should hesitate to leave his fortune to you. I knew what he meant, although he uttered no name. And to-day I have a letter from his lawyer which tells me that my conjecture was right. He has left his fortune — about thirty thousand pounds — to you, and here is the lawyer's letter to tell you so."

She laid the letter down in the lap of the other, but Cecil did not unclasp her hands to take it. She was gazing at the far azure heights, and thinking with passionate anguish of the devotion which had thus found a way to speak, to encompass her life, to help and to touch her even in death. For a moment she scarcely noted the marchesa's words as the latter went on:

"And the other package," she said, "contained two letters — one for me and one for you. Both to be opened only in case of his death. After his death I opened mine. In it he begs me to keep you with me if it be possible to do so; he reiterates all his belief in your powers and in your future, and he holds that it is only a question of time when you will find your true place and true work in the world. You know that I did not need this request to urge me to keep you with me. I have told you before that I beg you to stay; but I feel now that what I ask in Bernard Lysle's name, you can not refuse. And here is his own letter to you, inclosed with mine."

Cecil's hands unclosed with passionate eagerness to take that letter — the last message of the dead — and the marchesa, rising, walked away and left her.

When she returned an hour later, she saw that all storm of grief, all doubt or indecision was past. Tears in hot floods had rained over the pages in which Lysle had written out his heart, but the assurance of his infinite love, of his respect, his tenderness, his faith, had soothed and laid to rest the bitterness of grief for Cecil as nothing else on earth could have done. He had thought of her to the last, he had given her all that was his to give, he had gone to his brave death with a lighter heart, thinking that it might serve her; and although to the last day of her life she might mourn the blindness and folly that had kept her from him, he had taken the sharpest sting out of her regret. The rest was *not* silence: he had spoken from his grave by words and deeds which her heart might treasure always.

When the marchesa approached, she held out her hand. "Oh, how can I thank you!" she said. "How can I thank you — for this? But for you, I should never have had it! I should never have gone to Egypt, and he would never have known — something of the truth. He never knew all, but he guessed something — thank God and you for that!"

"And you will do what he asks — you will stay with me?" asked the marchesa.

"If you want me — yes. That he asks, and you desire it, is enough."

"And you will take what he gives?"

"There is nothing he could give that I would not take. I am late in saying that, am I not? But life offers us no chance to repair our great mistakes."

"Life — no," said the other, with gentle solemnity. "But since life is so brief, so sad, so wholly without lasting satisfaction, we may find courage in believing that eternity holds our lost happiness for us. Listen!" — it was the *Ave Maria* bell which rang out softly from a little chapel hidden in the chestnut-woods below — "come and let us pray that the dead may find rest, and the living strength to fight their battle to the end."

THE END.

Edited by Yawtsong Lee
April 18, 2015
Little Neck, New York