HAPPY AT LAST.

By the Author of "Lost in the Winning," "A Leaf from a Life," etc.

CHAPTER II

THE COTTAGE.

Seaton's cottage was situated upon a hillside not far from the wood; nay it might almost be said to be skirting it. It possessed a garden at both back and front, and both were well stored with flowers. At the back there were some outhouses, where Seaton, in bad seasons, placed the pheasants and partridges eggs, which he obtained from the preserves, and put them beneath hens, to hatch and rear, turning the birds into the woods as soon as they were able to take care of themselves and thus keeping up a good stock of game. The only other resident of the cottage was Amy. An elderly woman from a farm at no great distance, came daily to the cottage—for Seaton, for some reason which he never hinted, would not permit Amy to do any menial work whatever; and under his same influence, he had placed her for some years at an excellent establishment for young ladies at Buxton, where she had received an education much above her station. It was this, indeed, which gave her so much elegance and refinement of manner, and caused the humble dwelling and its fitting appointments to serve as a foil to her. It was this which added to the remarkable lovableness of her features and beautifully modelled frame, so powerfully impressed and influence Arnold.

A though born in so high a sphere, and surrounded with all the elegancies and luxuries of his station, he had been thrown among rough companions, and in a daily routine which made contact with one so gentle and so really lady-like, because so unaffected, originate a sense that he was in the presence of one superior to himself. He could not comprehend the contempt his father displayed for her. When speaking of her, he could understand it as relative to her position, but not to her. He felt that she would grace any position; and as for the Ladies Blanche and Cecile, his sisters, why the fact was, he could not help feeling quite sure that she was more like the idea of a lady of title, of the three

All this he rehearsed in his mind, while his father was recovering from his swoon occasioned by the mention of the name of the Countess, a mystery, by the way, which greatly puzzled Arnold, who could only presume, with a shudder of horror, that some dreadful tale of shame lay beneath it. It, however, determined him in not resigning Amy: he felt that he was not equal to the sacrifice, and if his father, his sisters, and Eustace, refused to receive her, they should not have the chance of receiving him. He remained within all that day, but he found himself on the morrow unable to remain away from Amy; and so without a word to any one, he slipped off to the cottage, purposing to see her, relate all that had transpired, beg her to consent to an immediate marriage, and as soon as possible after it he would join another ship. He would remain away until he had attained his majority and then he would return, claim he in the face of the world and a fig for what anybody said. That was his scheme; he was delighted with it—it was so simple and so easily carried out. He overlooked one thing essential to its success and that was the complicity of Amy; but such an idea as her dissent it never crossed him, so he hurried down to the cottage to see her and arrange he details with her

On his arrival he had learned that Seaton had gone up to the hall, having been suddenly sent for by the earl. He had been puzzling his brain for a plan to get rid of him, and lo! the thing was done. Amy seemed so glad to see him; and as he kissed her small ruby lips, he asked her if she had missed him. She—who thought him in the early morn, the daylight, eventide, when she lay down to repose, who breathed his name in her prayers—saw him in her dreams—she miss him? He was a constant presence to her—a secret treasure, which, miser-like, she would retire to a nook, and unseen, gloat over—an idol for mental adoration. She miss him? The very supposition brought tears into her eyes Arnold kissed them off, and with his natural impetuosity, told her, and unfortunately, in too plain words, all that had transpired betwe en him and his father. Then he sketched out his plan with rapid enunciation, enlarging upon it with enthusiasm, and submitting it to her with a full conviction that it would command her unqualified approbation. He did not notice, as he went on with his narration of the terrible interview which had taken place between the earl and him, that the smile fond devotion with which she had at first regarded him faded away—and she grew pale, and silent, and motionless; and it was only just ere he had finished his plan for the future, that a heavy fall of her head upon his shoulder drew his attention to the fact that she had swooned.

Overwhelmed with agony and alarm at the discovery, he staggered and nearly fell, but recovering himself by a strong exertion, he bore her gently to a bench without the cottage door, and laid her there. He obtained some cold water, bathed her temples, and gradually she exhibited signs of returning consciousness. At length she was sufficiently restored to be conducted into the cottage and then ensued a scene between these two young creatures, of pain and agony, such as is rarely witnessed—we l that it is so!—in a life-pilgrimage.

Amy Seaton had awaked from a dream of heaven. The progress of her liking into love for Arnold had been imperceptible; it had originated in his kind and courteous manner to her; it had been fostered by his beaming eyes, his handsome manly face, and strengthened as much by the nobility of his character as by the increased frequency of his visits and his direct assaults upon her affections The process of ripening affection had been almost blissful; the disparity of position had not once reared its baneful head to disturb her joy in his society: but now it surrounded both like a sudden tempest-cloud, and denoted its presence by a thunderbolt.

Amy had overlooked it,—nay, it had never presented itself to her—somehow she had not felt herself, while in Arnold's society, to be of inferior condition to him—education had done that for her; but it burst upon her with full force. She saw a fearfully vivid light thrown upon the wide space which separated them—he, a lord and the heir-apparent to a coronet she, a gamekeeper's daughter. It did not admit of argument, of reflection, of aught but sundering the connexion existing between them, though her heart-strings snapped in the act. Through her blinding tears she invoked him so; while he in a paroxysm of excitement, repudiated such a proceeding as impossible impracticable He urged, entreated, implored her to be privately married to him, but she steadfastly refused. He taunted her with not loving her. Oh! how that taunt wrung her heart. Not love him! Why then her tears, her agony, her dreadful mental distress? Such a charge was cruel, and he knew it, and withdrew it almost as soon as uttered, for her hysterical emotion, when he made it, too powerfully proved the contrary. Yet she remained firm against all the arguments the appeals and exhortations he employed to induce her to adopt the plan he had marked out; and after he had worked upon her strong love with all the influence it was possible for him to possess over her will, the interview was brought to a close by an arrangement that they should stand, as now, in the same relation to each other, until his return from sea, to which he determined immediately to repair, and he had attained his majority Then, master of his own actions, if he remained in soul and spirit as now,—if, still loving her, he claimed her hand, she would yield to him, and give up all the world to go with him where he would, and be to him in all times and under all circumstances, faithful and devoted.

He pressed her to his heart.

"And will you, when I am far away over the wide sea, Amy, remember me and be true to me?" he said with passionate earnestness "Let no other arm encircle this dear waist, no other press those lips after mine, for so long and dreary a time, have taken their last kiss from them."

She slid through his arms and falling on her knees, raised her hands upward, exclaiming, "As I prove false or true to you, Arnold, so heaven aid or desert me!"

He knelt by her side, passed one arm round her waist, extended the other heavenward and said earnestly, "May I perish in the moment of anticipated enjoyment if I be not true and faithful to you, Amy, or if I forget or evade hereafter what I have now so solemnly promised!"

One passionate embrace and they parted—parted, as they believed, for two years, for she had steadfastly refused to see him again until he returned to England entitled to claim her and he remained true to his faith.

He rushed in wild excitement from the cottage; she retired to her chamber to kneel and pray and weep the long, long hours away.

In the meanwhile Seaton made his appearance at the hall and was ushered into the earl's study, where the proud noble, pale from his recent visitation, was seated in his library chair to receive him. After the common preliminaries of such a meeting had passed, the earl said, "Seaton, I have sent for you respecting the sudden passion Lord Arnold has conceived for shooting. Can you explain it?"

"No, my lord," returned the gamekeeper—a tall, elderly man, of rather grim aspect.

"Are you sure, Seaton?"

"Quite, my lord."

"Has it never occurred to you that there might be a hidden motive, which does not appear on the surface?"

"No, my lord," returned Seaton. "Lord Arnold does seem fond of the sport, and he is a good shot."

"But there is a secret cause!" exclaimed the earl, with emphasis, and fixing his eyes steadfastly upon Seaton's face The gamekeeper betrayed no emotion under the inspection; a slight smile only passed over his features.

"Lord Arnold is very frank, and open in his way," he said; "and I have seen no secret reason for his fondness for the sport, and I don't believe there is one"

"I this ignorance real or affected, Seaton?"

"I don't understand you, my lord. Will you be so good as to explain?"

"Why well!" Seaton you have a daughter—a young and pretty girl."

"Well, my lord!"

"Well? My God, man! are your eyes not opened yet? Lord Arnold comes to your cottage; does he come to see your young daughter? He trots with her a one in the woods; is it his fondness for the sport, for bringing down pheasants with his gun that makes him do this?"

The game keeper started, a shiver ran through his frame his hands clenched convulsively, and the noise of his grating teeth might be distinctly heard.

"Oh! you are beginning to awake now, are you?" asked the earl.

"My lord," said the gamekeeper hoarsely, "your son cannot have been so treacherous—such a scoundrel as to—"

The earl interrupted him with a wave of the hand.

"Those are harsh epithets, as applied to my son, the Lord Arnold," he said, haughtily; and then added, "No; his lordship ha not so far committed himself as to bring ruin on the girl and shame on you, that I know, but you are quite conscious that marriage between them is out of the sphere of possibility, and therefore, as any continuance of their intimacy is likely to end only in that we would both wish to avoid, you will see the necessity of sending her away at once, and of keeping from Lord Arnold all possibility of knowing where she has been conveyed. As you obey me in this so will you win my favor, and, mark me, Seaton, reserve your daughter's honor. Good morning."

Seaten bowed stiffly and left the presence. His breast was like a raging cauldron He hurried through the park towards his cottage. He remembered so much now—too much. It recurred to him that Amy had changed in manner, had grown thoughtful, and, if not absolutely dull, strangely absent in manner. He recollected, too, how much more she indulged in lonely—as he then thought—rambles in the wood. God! what might have occurred in these ramblings in the wood? What chance would a simple, innocent girl and against the wiles of one who had seen so much of the world, and was a lord, too! He twisted his hands in his hair, and ran forward to his home, uttering a howl, forced from him by the torture of his mind. He pressed onward through a portion of the plantation leading to his cottage, and in a wild and lonely copse he encountered Lord Arnold.

The glare which shot in Seaton's eyes told him that all was known Seaton saw that Arnold was now aware of the discovery.

"Lord Arnold," shouted Seaton, "are you a man infamous villain, to destroy the sanctity of my home, ruin my child, and break my heart."

"How dare you charge me with such infamy, old man?" cried Arnold, his eyes sparkling with rage, "I say 'tis false!"

"How dare I? What, with treacherous deceit you worm yourself into my confidence, and use it to crush me?" roared Seaton, foaming at the mouth.

"Seaton, you are mad!" cried Arnold, passionately. "If you repeat such language, I will not answer for the consequences. My blood is up, and I am almost as mad as you are—do not move me further——"

"Not move you!—not move you—the wolf that has stolen into the fold, and devoured the fairest lamb?"

"Seaton, I will not listen to these frantic revilings!" cried Arnold, his lip quivering, and his whole frame convulsed with passion. "Let me pass—stand aside!"

"No—you have foully, basely wronged me!"

"I swear I have not."

"Liar!"

With a yell of mad passion, Arnold uplifted a stick he bore in his hand, and it descended with a tremendous force upon the head of Seaton, who fell to the ground as if shot, insensible Without casting a glance upon the prostrate body, Arnold bounded past, entered the castle, and retiring to his room, gave way to a terrible ebullition of bitter grief. Then he packed a few things into a small valise, hastily; gave instructions to his groom to saddle his blood mare and accompany him and shortly afterwards left the Hall. Here Hall, and made for the railway station: here he dismissed his groom with the horses, and he went on alone to London.

When he fled from the copse, a ter striking Seaton to the earth, he was not yet out of sight when the branches of some young trees were forced aside and a man with resolusive features, but, by his attire, one of the lower class of menials in the service of the earl, made his appearance. He watched the retreating form of Arnold, and when it was lost to sight he looked round at the gamekeeper who lay senseless on the green sward, the blood slowly trickling from an abrasion of the skin upon the forehead.

"He is only stunned," he muttered, "although it was a tremendous whack I wish it had been harder I do! I'd a beat his brain out, I would! You got me two years, did you, for poaching? I left for not hat! I ain't forgot that! I have sworn to have my revenge and I think it's come now—rather! So here goes!"

The ruffian drew from his pocket a formidable clasp knife, and knelt down by the gamekeeper's side.

"Don't tell anyone, will yer?" he said, as he raised his arm, and then plunged the blade of the knife up to the hilt into the prostrate man's breast; he drew it out, and the blood spurted out like a fountain over the assassin's face and hands. He uttered an exclamation of sickening horror: but when he was able to repeat the blow, the low, hoarse bark of a large hound broke on his ear. He turned round with an affrighted look and then leaping to his feet he hurled the knife from him, and muttering, with an oath, "One of Seaton's dogs—I know his tongue," he turned into the woods, and fled.

CHAPTER III.

THE EARL.

Warren Earl De la More, after the departure of his game keeper, sat alone in his chamber, pondering. The position of affairs in which his eldest son and the daughter of the gamekeeper were the principal actors, occasioned him great discomfort. He looked back into the solemn past, and the retrospect was anything but reassuring. Two well he remembered the overwhelming influence female beauty had over him in his early days; with bitterness he looked back to the time when the counsels of friends, the commands of parents even the prospects of unhappiness, failed to emancipate him from the fascination of a loveliness which then appeared to him to be scarcely mortal. What extent of obedience was he, therefore, to expect from his son, Arnold, whom he knew to be selfwilled, impetuous and the creature of impulse. He had with in his noble nature, the greatest possible confidence in his honor and it was the very estimate of the brighter portion of his character which raised up within the earl a painful foreboding that Arnold would, upon discovering the truth, girl had really made herself the mistress of his affections, offer his hand to her. The earl had too elevated a notion of the splendor of his position; too keen a sense of his rank and great wealth, to believe that any girl in so humble a sphere as Amy Seaton, would refuse the opportunity of being made a lady at once, with the full prospects of becoming a countess, while the son and heir of Arnold would unfit him to be properly a judge of the vast disparity of their relative positions, to induce him to hesitate taking the only honorable step by which he could obtain possession of the prize coveted. The earl, therefore, formed the immediate determination of severing the connection at once effectually and for ever. He was not quite sure that Seaton himself would not be dazzled by the glittering prospects almost within his daughter's grasp; he therefore sketched out a plan upon which he deemed instantly to act, the principal features of which were—send Amy abroad, completely out of the way of Arnold, and to bear him off London, introduce him to the splendid circles to which his rank entitled him to admission, throw him among the young and lovely females of his own sphere; even to lead him, by other hands, through a round of dissipation, so that the fascination of Amy might be forgotten; or if remembered a sense of his own unfitness might aid in impelling him to separate himself from her, no matter how keen might be his conscience of the unworthy course he had pursued toward one whom thus he made to feel that she had not "loved him wisely, but too well."

Barbarous as the whole scheme was, in so far as Amy was concerned, the earl sternly determined to carry into execution, and permit no tears or human weakness to step between him and his object. The general plan once devised, he resolved to leave the details for circumstances as they should arise; but he felt the necessity of losing no time in the matter, and proceeded directly to enter upon the first portion of the plan by paying a visit to the gamekeeper's cottage, and in an interview with Amy see how far he could work upon her feelings to induce her to give up all notions of an alliance with Arnold. He had no very great faith in the success of his errand, for he knew as well as any human being beneathing that love is not to be taken on, or put off, at will; and though her sense of respect for his power, almost as sovereign lord over the actions of his tenants might induce her tacitly, or outwardly, to bend to his command, yet the paramount influence of the love he dreaded to exist would exhibit itself as soon as his back was turned, and the danger be as great as ever. But at least the girl would hear from his own lips his insurmountable opposition to such a preposterous as he considered it—alliance; and she would be made fully to understand, not only that any edding must be clandestine, but illegal, and every effort would be employed to oose it asiae. He would leave it to her to decide whether she would persist in entailing misery upon herself and her father—for he would at once be dismissed with ignominy from the service he had held for so many years and bring affliction upon a family which had been benefactors to her and those connected with her from infancy till now. A course of argument such as this he hoped would have some effect and he quitted the castle hoping to find Amy alone, or probably in the presence of her father, which, of the two was an event he would perhaps rather wish to happen, as he thought he could count upon Seaton's advocacy in his views; unless he had suddenly grown ambitious to seize upon what he might imagine would be a splendid opening for his daughter. Even then the earl fancied he knew how to manage him.

His way lay through the park, and thence across a meadow into the plantation, through which there was a beaten track leading to the cottage of the gamekeeper. He had to pass the copse where Arnold had unhappily encountered Seaton, and on reaching it was startled by the prolonged wailing howl of a hound—a long, dreary, terrible cry it was, and made him shudder. He quickened his step, but he drew only nearer to the sound, and a sudden wind of the path brought to his view a sight which made him quail and grow faint.

Upon the grass, stretched out in the grim aspect of death, lay the body of his gamekeeper. Seaton, blood upon his forehead, blood weltering from his side slowly, it is true but still weeping from the wound made by the earl's ruffian emissary. At his head recline a favorite lurcher, who uttered the mournful howl and wh seemed to cast his large eye in eagerness upon the earl, as though to ask for aid

Shocked and almost terrified the earl knelt down by the body and seized one of Seaton's hands; it was clenched, but cold as marble—life indeed appeared to be quite extinct. At first the thoughts that Seaton had committed self destruction crowded into his mind; but a glance at the position of his body, and the marks of feet trampling down the grass where the body lay, forbade him for a moment entertaining any such supposition. The man had evidently been murdered; but by whom? He clasped his hands wildly together, and rushed at once to the gamekeeper's cottage to raise an alarm and obtain assistance. All the while he fled the question rung like some dreadful knell through his ears: "Who has done this murder?" and, wherefore he knew not, a dread settled on his brain—his heart; he dared not try to think or attempt to discover by whose hand this dreadful crime had been committed.

Out of the copse, through the tangled plantation to the hill side, where stood the cottage of which he was in quest, on he flew; on reaching it pale, breathless, he staggered up to it, and pushing open the door, entered. The apartment was untenanted; he called but no reply was made; he passed through into the back rooms, he searched the out buildings. No one was there. He returned to the front room, and was about to ascend to the chamber above, in the hope yet to meet some one who would aid him in raising an alarm, when he observed a shadow fall upon the window. He turned his eyes thither, and through the diamond panes he observed the sallow and repulsive face of the man he had employed to track the footsteps of his son Arnold, and report to him faithfully his every action

It was a relief, notwithstanding the man's hang-dog visage, to see him. The earl beckoned him hastily; and the man giving an uneasy look to right and left obeyed the summons.

"I want you, Stark," exclaimed the earl, "to hunt up some of my people to your utmost speed. A foul crime has been committed."

"What, my lord," exclaimed the fellow, in a voice which was but a hissing whisper,—"did you come here through the copse?"

"I did."

"And you saw——"

"A human body lying there—a man who has been murdered. You know of this, Stark?"

"I am sorry to say I do, my lord."

"Speak out, man! What have you to say? Do you know who it is, who lies there murdered?"

"I do, my lord?"

"And you did not summon help?"

"No!"

"Wherefore, fellow? Away with your misery, and tell me all you know."

The man, Stark, turned his white face and sickly eyes round the room, he peered out of the window, he even strode to the door, and looked in all directions then he returned to the earl and said—

"Has your lordship nerve enough to know all?"

"What are you driving at, Stark," cried the earl, a dreadful apprehension taking possession of him. "Speak out at once, and I command you, and summon assistance."

"Your lordship must not blame me, then, if the disclosure does not prove agreeable," said Stark, looking up between his beetling brows at him.

"Go on," exclaimed the earl, drawing a deep breath, and turning dead cold at suggestions, which in spite of him elf, would present themselves to him, as he tried to think, without a shadow of fas ination.

"Your lordship employed me to keep a constant eye upon the movements of Lord Arnold," said Stark; "to ascertain whi her he went, to whom he spoke, with whom he associated, and to give you a strict account of his actions taking place out of your sight. Th m I believe is nearly your lordship's own words——"

"True—true! Go on—you rack me with your prolixity" exclaimed the earl impatiently.

"I believe I have done my task well for your lordship has known all about the meetings of Lord Arnold and Amy Seaton, as they have taken place since I was put on the scent. Your lordship has known all but this last affair, and this I don't think you'll like to hear; but when you have heard it your lordship will understand that it will be worth a pretty heavy sum to keep it from slipping between my teeth——"

"Wretch! You torture me beyond endurance? Repeat all you mean in possession of with respect to this dreadful matter, or leave me at once."

"Well, here goes, then!" said Stark again glancing uneasily around him. "If so be as you will have it, the fault ain't mine Your Lordship knows I followed Lord Arnold on his last visit there. I followed him on his return to the castle. In the copse he met Seaton coming from an interview with you, my lord."

"My God!"

"As soon as they faced each other, hot and angry words ensued; the gamekeeper challenged Lord Arnold with endeavoring to ruin the peace of his family and his lordship denied it One word brought on another, when Seaton called his lordship a liar. Then Lord Arnold struck him with a stick then they closed, my lord, and grappled, and twisted; and then your son drew from his shooting jacket a clasp knife——"

"Almighty God, sustain me!" gasped the earl.

"He did no use it?"

"He gripped the handle tight in his hand, and stuck the blade in o the old man's heart and he fell down like a stone, dead on the grass."

A horrified shriek pierced the ears of the earl and his myrmidon, as the last sentence left the lips of the latter. They turned their eyes with a startled expression to the spot from whence the cry proceeded, and saw standing in the doorway leading to the upper apartment, my Seaton, with her hands clasped white as death itself, swaying to and fro—her who expect one of the direst agony. At the instant, and she fell to the ground, utterly insensible

The earl pressed his two hands to his brain, and felt like one bereft of his senses; he groaned and shivered, and sunk into a chair, quite powerless.

Stark, though excited, and even trembling in every limb, was more self possessed than the earl, and obtaining some water, he bathed the earl's temples; and then when he found he was recovering, he raised Amy from the floor and bore her to the couch which was in the room, upon which he laid her, still motionless and, to all appearances, dead.

The earl made desperate efforts to control the fearful emotion under which he labored, and succeeded sufficiently to bid Stark, "Leave the poor girl to my charge; hurry and rather some of the household, and bring hither the—the—the—body of Seaton Quick—quick! Then hasten to the village, and send hither the medical man who attends the Hall; but not a word of——"

The earl paused as if it would choke him to utter words which had reference to the fearful event in which his son was so deeply implicated.

"Am I the price of this secrecy?" exclaimed Stark in an undertone, with a furtive glance at him.

"You shall be paid well never fear—even beyond your most sanguine expectations!" cried the earl. "The honor of my family must be preserved. And now, begone; for such reparation as can be made to this poor child shall be done"

He waved his hand, and Stark quitted the cottage; not, however, to pass through the copse again; he had not courage for that.—Even as it was he took a wide circuit to the Hall, quite by another route, for he had a wholesome fear of meeting Seaton's lurcher, Star

When he had gone, the earl bathed his temples and chafed the hands of Amy; but he only succeeded in restoring her to life, for her to fall into a rapid succession of hysterical fits accompanied by delirous raving, in which the names of Arnold and her father were coupled but only in the wildest and most incomprehensible manner. The earl tried by exclamations, by exhortations, by appeals, to bring her to a calmer state of mind, but in vain, and it was not until she was utterly exhausted that she fell into a state of lethargy, which it was difficult for him to understand whether it was another phase of syncope, or the precursor of death, arising from a sudden and tremendous shock to the system. The latter seemed to him to be the most probable, and her lovely face, so pale and wan, her closed eyes and faintly heaving breast, all seemed to betoken that she was sinking fast into that sleep from which she could no more awaken. Th tears at length had ceased to wash away his cyclics, and coursed each other down his cheeks.

"Has it come to this?" he exclaimed. "Both to fall a sacrifice! It had been better far had he married her, in spite of the world's scorn, than this had come to pass. Oh, heaven! should the fatal truth become known. Where, then will be the pride of ancestry, the ostentation of rank the pomp of wealth?"

The agony of his face in the anguish of soul groaning, upon his knees at the side of Amy.

He was aroused from this position by the sound of horse's feet, which approached the cottage, and paused before the door. He hurried out It was the doctor Stark had been fortunate enough to encounter him at no very great distance from the co tage, returning from a patient.

"I am very glad to see you, Goodman," cried the earl. "Your services are required here in a case of much emergency."

"Aye, my lord," returned the doctor, bustling into the cottage. "Stark, the fellow who had stayed me, has given me an inkling of what's amiss. Ah, I see, our patient is here. Hysteria! This girl is very ill—dangerously ill, my lord. She must be removed at once to bed. Is there no woman here?"

"I have seen no other than this poor girl since I came here to break to her the unhappy event which has thrown her into this distressing state," said the earl, his face becoming the hue of scarlet, and his ears tingling as he uttered this false statement of the purport of his visit.

"Oh, yes, there is," exclaimed the doctor "Old Goody Gosling somewhere about. She's as deaf as a post but I'll find her."

He darted out of the back entrance, and in two or three minutes returned with an elderly dame, who did the hard work of the cottage. As soon as she saw Amy, she uttered a cry of distress, and commenced wringing her hands, and giving way to the most extravagant gestures, but a few words from the doctor, shouted in her ear made her comprehend the necessity of doing her best to assist, instead of wasting her strength in weeping and lamentations.

The doctor with her help, conveyed Amy to her bedroom, where the old woman contrived to get her into bed, while the doctor descende and applied to his case for some restoratives, not holding out at the same time to the earl any very sanguine hopes of restoring Amy to her reason, even if he rescued her from death. Still he promised to do all that was possible, and once more ascended to the bedroom, leaving the earl below, expecting each moment to hear the dull tramp of many feet, and to see the ghastly body of old Seaton brought into the apartment, stark and rigid! a terrible retributive evidence of the vain pride which had produced consequences so terrible

He paced up and down the small room in a whirl of contending emotions What immunity did his earldom now give him from misery from shame and disgrace? What had wealth and rank done for him, if it could not prevent him from having for a son a murderer—if it could not rescue him from the horror of having his nearest and dearest relative have hanged? Could he now walk erect into you peerage hall? Could he now swep along in his carriage attended by his outriders, with the same proud bearin as before? Nay, no! The title, and its attendant wealth had not saved him from unhappiness in earlier days—it did not promise to save him a yet deeper agony and grief now. Far far better had he assented to the union between his son and the humble girl above—for aught he knew, dying from his son's act—than the dreadful event which had occurred should have come to pass.

While these thoughts were burning through his brain, a footstep approached the cottage; a shadow darkened the doorway, and the figure of a woman closely muffled in traveling attire entered. The earl turned towards her, and as she caught sight of his face she started and retreated two or three steps, uttering a faint exclamation of surprise.

The earl waited for her to speak, but as she did not do so, he inquired whether she was a friend of Amy's who, perhaps having heard of her sudden blow, had come to offer her aid?

"I am a friend, my lord, to Amy Seaton—a near and dear one" she replied; till keeping her face closely concealed "It is with pain I learn from you that she is ill, but be assured she will have my closest attention and fondest care."

Without another word, she hurried up the stairs, to Amy's sleeping chamber. Almost at the same moment, the sound of the hurried tread of men's feet was caught by the quick expectant ear of the earl. His heart throbbed fiercely and violently: his face grew ghastly pale; he staggered and clung to a chair to keep himself from falling. The cottage door was rudely flung open, and a party of servants, headed by the constable entered.

And the body, where was that?

The men had not met with them. The earl expected each instant to see four men march in with it upon their shoulders, but they came not; and then he began to grow conscious that they were telling him that they had searched the copse for the body, but it was not there; that they had hunted in every direction for it, but though traces of a struggle were palpable enough in the broken twigs, the mark of feet and blood upon the grass, the body of Seaton, the gamekeeper, was nowhere to be seen. Incredible as this appeared to the earl, it was yet truth, and he accompanied the men back to make a yet further search, but with no better success. The body could not be found; but while they were searching the second time, dreadful cries for help were heard, accompanied by the baying growls of a hound. All rushed to the spot whence the sounds issued—fortunately, as it proved for Stark for the lurcher belonging to Seaton had fastened upon his neck, and would have torn him to pieces, if he had not been beaten off and secured

Although the dog who had watched by the body was thus forthcoming, no further trace of Seaton was found, notwithstanding the search was kept up for several days.

Not less singular was the fact that when the earl attended by Mr. Goodhead, paid an early visit to the cottage the following morning to ascertain the state of Amy, they found the cottage closed up; and on effecting an entrance through the window, it was discovered that the strange female, Goody Gosling and Amy had departed. Not a living thing was left in the cottage, and it was plain by the confusion in which many articles of wearing apparel were tossed about, that the departure had been as sudden as secret.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHANGE—THE LETTER—A CLUE—THE RUFFIAN.

The whole hundred of Doddescombleigh, in which stood De la More Hall, was kept in a state of intense excitement the following week by the strange events which had taken place with regard to Seaton and his daughter. The statements of the earl, and of Stark, with respect to the discovery made by them of the murdered body of the gamekeeper, were received in every possible form of exaggerated and amplification. The subsequent disappearance of Amy Seaton and Goody Gosling—in itself mysterious enough—was yet made the vehicle for the most extravagant reports. Superstition stepped in and the babblers in their marvellous communications, and a fiction was at length shaped out, purporting to be a true narration of the events, but which really contained not an particle of truth beyond the mention of the discovery of the game keeper's body, as it appeared, wounded to death, and the flight of Amy. Hints were thrown out, implicating the earl in a grave manner with the affair, and it was openly cited, as a damaging fact, that Seaton had an interview with the earl on the morning of the presumed murder; that the earl had followed him immediately he left the castle, and was the first to give information of the crime which, as it seemed, he was actually near enough, if not mixed up with it, to have prevented. That Seaton's body should have vanished without the complicity of the earl, was to say it had been supernaturally spirited away by a certain person, whose name it is considered proper to keep dark; who did not think fit to wait the usual process of decomposition, but claimed his own upon the very first opportunity that afforded. The inference drawn, therefore, was that if the Evil One had not by his infernal agency swept Seaton, his daughter, and Goody Gosling off into the bargain, the earl had, upon some very strong motive, himself slain his gamekeeper, and also put Amy and Goody out of the way immediately after the doctor had quitted the cottage.

One reason for this, perhaps, was, that a belief generally obtained in the village that the earl, in years gone past, had put away his wife in some foreign land, and that Seaton—who went away with him, returned with him, and had been, as it was considered, a confidential dependant for many years—was privy to this circumstance, whether crime or not. It was therefore said, with many a nod and wink, that the murdered man had known too much; that in a late quarrel he had threatened to reveal all he was acquainted with, and the earl had purchased his silence at the fearful price of murder.

It is, unfortunately, a failing in human nature, especially the uneducated portion of it, to invest a mystery, or any event the circumstances of which they neither know nor care to explain, with criminal details. It was so in the present instance. Before two days were past, the proud Earl De la More was declared to be the hero of a dark career—a man of many crimes—an individual who neck ought to be submitted to the manipulation of the public executioner; and this, too, by the very people who were recipients of his bounty—who, indeed, had to thank him for the roof which sheltered them, and the dinner that sustained life.

Stark had only to show his nose into the village to be seized upon by the idle gossips, who put a variety of questions to him, and offered him unlimited glasses of foaming ale if he would only tell them all he knew. With many an oath and curse he thrust them aside; yet nevertheless, he assisted in keeping their tongues wagging—for he, too before a week had passed away, suddenly disappeared

A shrewd detective officer was employed by the Earl to trace the flight of Amy, but he left after a day or two, saying he had but a faint clue which he would endeavor to "work up."

A letter came to the earl from Arnold. He acknowledged striking the keeper—pleaded the provocation given—begged his father to aid Amy for his sake, and concluded by saying that he had obtained leave of absence for two years, and should depart from England for that period.

The Earl left his noble mansion for London, leaving only the housekeeper and a few servants in it At London he was called up by the detective who told him that he had ascertained that Amy Seaton, Goody Gosling, and a tall, dark woman had left Seaton's cottage in company. They had arrived in London, obtained passports for Florence and departed. The dark woman gave the name of Cecile Audley.

"Good heavens!" murmured the Earl. "That name! has she taken this method of revenging.—" He suddenly paused—and rewarded the detective, who withdrew.

As soon as the earl was left alone, he paced the room to and fro.

"The mystery thickens," he said. "The same name—the very place—what can it mean? What has she to do with Seaton's daughter? His wife was drowned, or that might afford some clue to the object. Eternal Heaven! can she, by any strange process of ability, have learned such a secret as the attachment between Arnold and the wretched girl now snuggled away, and would strike a blow at my peace through her? It cannot be! I must ascertain this—I must ascertain whether such surmise can have any foundation in truth I will follow them to Florence—I will nerve myself to my task—I will unravel the plot, I plot there be, or will prove it to be a mere suspicion of a too susceptible brain."

With impatience, Earl De la More waited the results of the efforts made to obtain tidings of Arnold; but finding all futile, he made his preparations to depart for Italy.—The evening preceding his departure he passed with Eustace and his two daughters, for he knew not how long might be his absence, or what personal dangers his visit to Italy might involve; therefore he had much to say to them, and what he did say was imbued with a tenderness to which they were unaccustomed, and which Eustace thought though he said nothing, rather magnificent fudge.—To find the cold, measured earl lose himself in the fervid parent, was not what he had been brought up to: therefore, he regarded the pathos of the noble Before him, even though he was his father, as a somewhat clever piece of acting; while the girls, keener judges of human nature, from their very womanly sympathies, read the truth as it stood, and were more gratified even than surprised. It was at a moment when the earl was more than ever disposed to discard his armor of pomp and pride, that a footmen powdered, be velveted footman entered the apartment, and made his way towards the earl. The man's head was elevated by the united aid of his starched white cravat, and his sense of his own importance, although so alive to the earl his master's greatness, that he shut his eyes whenever he came or found himself in his lordship's presence.

"My lord," said he, in a voice as if he was being choked with an egg, "there is a person who begs your lardship to grant 'im——"

The earl turned upon him fiercely, "I gave orders," he said, "that I would be disturbed by no one"

"But this person, my lard, says——"

"Begone scoundrel! quit the room!" cried the earl, rising up angrily

The man threw his shoulders forward, endeavored to compose himself into the arc of a circle and then retired.

In ten minutes he re-appeared, and went, through the same performance as before.

"My lard, we have exhausted every effort to get rid of this pearson, but he won't go. Had we not better send for a detachming of perlece?"

By an almost supe human effort, the earl recovered an appearance of outward calmness, and said to the servant—

"Let the man be conducted to my private closet. I will attend him there."

The man greatly surprised, withdrew, he having expected to be ordered to take a cab to Nine street for a "detachming of perlece," instead of conducting the "pearson" to an audience to a private chamber.

When he disappeared, the earl, turning to his children perceived the wonder expressed in their features, said, "It is an erratic fellow, employed by me to make some inquiries. I forgot to leave word to admit him when he came. Nothing more—nothing more."

He hurried to the chamber, and, on entering he perceived seated in an arm chair, with his muddy boots and legs tossed over one of the arms, engaged in making sarcastic observations, interlarded with oaths, to the servant—Stark!

CHAPTER V.

THE ARRIVAL IN LONDON—THE FEVER.

Lord Arnold De la More continued, from the moment that he struck down Seaton in the copse, up to the signing of the letter he addressed to his father—even up to posting in, in a whirl of excitement of that feverish and irritable kind which prevented his mind from dwelling steadily upon one subject. So long as his brain would stand the strain upon it, he acted upon the promptings of impulse. His journey to London, his visit to the Admiralty, and subsequently to the banker's where he kept his private account, with the purpose of providing himself with a large sum, in notes of small amount, a entire change of attire, and the hiring of a furnished lodging in an obscure but respectable suburb, where all the result of impulse—of unsettled purpose, taking shape of any suggestion that arose.

In passion he struck down Seaton. His self-reproach for that act—exclusively on Amy's account—was unbearable, and he rushed to London, to fly from himself, as it were. When there, the sudden quarrel, the burning insult, and its prompt punishment, haunted him like a spectral vision; but with it also was the phantom of Amy, with wan features, gazing upon him sadly and reproachfully. He could not bear it. How could he face her again? Would she not hate him? Would she not despise his miserable, ungovernable passion, which could not spare even her father? She would she must! Aye! he would away to the Spanish Main, and among the rovers there he would, perhaps, find the means of forgetfulness. He knew well enough that action, with all its graphic power, came not near the wild wonders which he had seen enacted there. Ay he would go there. Not to forget Amy—No! Oh no?—Heaven rain its choicest blessings on her head—but to remove from her sphere the influence of one so wild and wayward as he felt himself to be. He wished, in bitter anguish, that she had never turned her soft gaze upon him, that she had never beheld his glance of adoration, knowing the woe to which they were intended, or had ever listened to his passionate pleadings. O how he wished he had not won her gentle love; so that while pursuing his future wild, adventurous path, during his long and perhaps eternal separation from her, there might not be one pang visit her tender heart, one sorrow oppress her sweet frame, or a single grief sit heavy on her fair brow. But he knew she loved him; in the innocence of her noble, still childlike nature, she had told him so—admitting that he was the one sole object of her heart's aspiration on the earth. It would not be possible that while he was far, far away from her, she would be free from pain or grief on his account. And he could see her once, even, before he left, he felt it would be only to see on that beautiful face, where he had alone seen the mildness of love, the cold and gloomy shadow of reproach. No, he would leave England, and trust to time, to change and change, which he did not attempt to give a form to, to sweep away the guilt and sorrow of the past, and bring them once more together in blissful peace, as they had be n when first they met.

On this impulse, he obtained his leave of absence, he gave his name and style of address, and removed to Poplar, to hear of a ship bound to some South American port, where he could obtain a passage to the islands where he purposed transporting himself to and if chance willed it to fling away his life. Barely was he installed in his lodgings, then he changed his purpose. His project became in his eyes, mad, wicked, even criminal. Then he marked out his first decided plan, which was: preserve his incognito, and if he remained in England to watch over Amy, unseen by her, as a guardian angel, until he had attained his majority. Beyond that he would not speculate. Then he penned the epistle to his father him upon whom he looked as the cause of the sacrifice of two beings on the altar of his pride

So much for his impulse, and for the result of cool or arrangement, but he had not the opportunity of carrying into execution a scheme upon which he quickly began to doat.

He had changed his outward appearance skilfully. The son of the earl, with his black wig, artificial moustachios and whiskers, looked very much like a distinguished foreigner who, owing to inquiries of too paternal a character by his Government, had thought it advisable to seek the climate of England, under a conviction that he would be more secure of his own health there, even the Government beneath whose extremely tender auspices he was born and bred. He was master of Italian, Spanish, German and French, and therefore found no difficulty in assuming a dialect compounded of broken English and Italian, the use of which ably assisted him in concealing himself from the kind inquiries of those who were in active search for him.