

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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THE WOMAN IN WHITE.

PART THE THIRD. THE NARRATIVE OF ISIDORE OTTAVIO BALDASSARE FOSCO. COUNT OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE. KNIGHT GRAND CROSS OF THE ORDER OF THE BRAZEN CROWN. ARCH-MASTER OF THE ROSICRUCIAN MASONS OF MESOPOTAMIA. ATTACHED, IN HONORARY CAPACITIES, TO SOCIETIES MEDICAL, SOCIETIES MUSICAL, SOCIETIES PHILOSOPHICAL, AND SOCIETIES GENERAL BENEVOLENT, THROUGHOUT EUROPE, &c. &c. &c.

IN the summer of eighteen hundred and fifty, I arrived in England, charged with a delicate political mission from abroad. Confidential persons were semi-officially connected with me, whose exertions I was authorised to direct—Monsieur and Madame Rubelle being among the number. Some weeks of spare time were at my disposal, before I entered on my functions by establishing myself in the suburbs of London. Curiosity may stop here, to ask for some explanation of those functions on my part. I entirely sympathise with the request. I also regret that diplomatic reserve forbids me to comply with it.

I arranged to pass the preliminary period of repose, to which I have just referred, in the superb mansion of my late lamented friend, Sir Percival Glyde. He arrived from the Continent with his wife. I arrived from the Continent with mine. England is the land of domestic happiness—how appropriately we entered it under these domestic circumstances!

The bond of friendship which united Percival and myself, was strengthened, on this occasion, by a touching similarity in the pecuniary position, on his side and on mine. We both wanted money. Immense necessity! Universal want! Is there a civilised human being who does not feel for us? How insensible must that man be! Or how rich!

I enter into no sordid particulars, in discussing this part of the subject. My mind recoils from them. With a Roman austerity, I show my empty purse and Percival's to the shrinking public gaze. Let us allow the deplorable fact to assert itself, once for all, in that manner—and pass on.

We were received at the mansion by the magnificent creature who is inscribed on my heart as "Marian"—who is known in the colder atmosphere of Society, as "Miss Halcombe."

Just Heaven! with what inconceivable rapidity I learnt to adore that woman. At sixty, I worshipped her with the volcanic ardour of eighteen. All the gold of my rich nature was poured hopelessly at her feet. My wife—poor angel!—my wife, who adores me, got nothing but the shillings and the pennies. Such is the World; such Man; such Love. What are we (I ask) but puppets in a show-box? Oh, omnipotent Destiny, pull our strings gently! Dance us mercifully off our miserable little stage!

The preceding lines, rightly understood, express an entire system of philosophy. It is Mine. I resume.

The domestic position at the commencement of our residence at Blackwater Park has been drawn with amazing accuracy, with profound mental insight, by the hand of Marian herself. (Pass me the intoxicating familiarity of mentioning this sublime creature by her Christian name.) Accurate knowledge of the contents of her journal—to which I obtained access by clandestine means, unspeakably precious to me in the remembrance—warns my eager pen from topics which this essentially exhaustive woman has already made her own.

The interests—interests, breathless and immense!—with which I am here concerned, begin with the deplorable calamity of Marian's illness.

The situation, at this period, was emphatically a serious one. Large sums of money, due at a certain time, were wanted by Percival (I say nothing of the modicum equally necessary to myself); and the one source to look to for supplying them was the fortune of his wife, of which not one farthing was at his disposal until her death. Bad, so far; but—in the language of the all-pervading Shakespeare—worse remained behind. My lamented friend had private troubles of his own, into which the delicacy of my disinterested attachment to him forbade me from inquiring too curiously. I knew nothing but that a woman, named Anne Catherick, was hidden in the neighbourhood; that she was in communication with Lady Glyde; and that the disclosure of a secret, which would be the certain ruin of Percival, might be the result. He had told me himself that he was a lost man, unless his wife was silenced, and unless Anne Catherick was found. If he was a lost man, what would become of our pecuniary interests? Courageous

as I am by nature, I absolutely trembled at the idea!

The whole force of my intelligence was now directed to the finding of Anne Catherick. Our money affairs, important as they were, admitted of delay—but the necessity of discovering the woman admitted of none. I only knew her, by description, as presenting an extraordinary personal resemblance to Lady Glyde. The statement of this curious fact—intended merely to assist me in identifying the person of whom we were in search—when coupled with the additional information that Anne Catherick had escaped from a madhouse, started the first immense conception in my mind, which subsequently led to such amazing results. That conception involved nothing less than the complete transformation of two separate identities. Lady Glyde and Anne Catherick were to change names, places, and destinies, the one with the other—the prodigious consequences contemplated by the change, being the gain of thirty thousand pounds, and the eternal preservation of Percival's secret.

My instincts (which seldom err) suggested to me, on reviewing the circumstances, that our invisible Anne would, sooner or later, return to the boat-house at the Blackwater lake. There I posted myself; previously mentioning to Mrs. Michelson, the house-keeper, that I might be found when wanted, immersed in study, in that solitary place. It is my rule never to make unnecessary mysteries, and never to set people suspecting me for want of a little seasonable candour, on my part. Mrs. Michelson believed in me from first to last. This ladylike person (widow of a Protestant Priest) overflowed with faith. Touched by such superfluity of simple confidence, in a woman of her mature years, I opened the ample reservoirs of my nature, and absorbed it all.

I was rewarded for posting myself sentinel at the lake, by the appearance—not of Anne Catherick herself, but of the person in charge of her. This individual also overflowed with simple faith, which I absorbed in myself, as in the case already mentioned. I leave her to describe the circumstances (if she has not done so already) under which she introduced me to the object of her maternal care. When I first saw Anne Catherick, she was asleep. I was electrified by the likeness between this unhappy woman and Lady Glyde. The details of the grand scheme, which had suggested themselves in outline only, up to that period, occurred to me, in all their masterly combination, at the sight of the sleeping face. At the same time, my heart, always accessible to tender influences, dissolved in tears at the spectacle of suffering before me. I instantly set myself to impart relief. In other words, I provided the necessary stimulant for strengthening Anne Catherick to perform the journey to London.

At this point, I enter a necessary protest, and correct a lamentable error.

The best years of my life have been passed in

the ardent study of medical and chemical science. Chemistry, especially, has always had irresistible attractions for me, from the enormous, the illimitable power which the knowledge of it confers. Chemists, I assert it emphatically, might sway, if they pleased, the destinies of humanity. Let me explain this before I go further.

Mind, they say, rules the world. But what rules the mind? The body. The body (follow me closely here) lies at the mercy of the most omnipotent of all mortal potentates—the Chemist. Give me—Fosco—chemistry; and when Shakespeare has conceived Hamlet, and sits down to execute the conception—with a few grains of powder dropped into his daily food, I will reduce his mind, by the action of his body, till his pen pours out the most abject drivel that has ever degraded paper. Under similar circumstances, revive me the illustrious Newton. I guarantee that, when he sees the apple fall, he shall eat it, instead of discovering the principle of gravitation. Nero's dinner, shall transform Nero into the mildest of men, before he has done digesting it; and the morning draught of Alexander the Great, shall make Alexander run for his life, at the first sight of the enemy, the same afternoon. On my sacred word of honour, it is lucky for society that modern chemists are, by incomprehensible good fortune, the most harmless of mankind. The mass are good fathers of families, who keep shops. The few, are philosophers besotted with admiration for the sound of their own lecturing voices; visionaries who waste their lives on fantastic impossibilities; or quacks whose ambition soars no higher than our corns. Thus Society escapes; and the illimitable power of Chemistry remains the slave of the most superficial and the most insignificant ends.

Why this outburst? Why this withering eloquence?

Because my conduct has been misrepresented; because my motives have been misunderstood. It has been assumed that I used my vast chemical resources against Anne Catherick; and that I would have used them, if I could, against the magnificent Marian herself. Odious insinuations both! All my interests were concerned (as will be seen presently) in the preservation of Anne Catherick's life. All my anxieties were concentrated on Marian's rescue from the hands of the licensed Imbecile who attended her; and who found my advice confirmed, from first to last, by the physician from London. On two occasions only—both equally harmless to the individual on whom I practised—did I summon to myself the assistance of chemical knowledge. On the first of the two, after following Marian to the Inn at Blackwater (studying, behind a convenient waggon which hid me from her, the poetry of motion, as embodied in her walk), I availed myself of the services of my invaluable wife, to copy one and to intercept the other of two letters which my adored enemy had entrusted to a discarded maid. In this case, the letters being in the bosom of the girl's dress, Madame Fosco could only open them, read them,

perform her instructions, seal them, and put them back again, by scientific assistance—which assistance I rendered in a half-ounce bottle. The second occasion when the same means were employed, was the occasion (to which I shall soon refer) of Lady Glyde's arrival in London. Never, at any other time, was I indebted to my Art, as distinguished from myself. To all other emergencies and complications my natural capacity for grappling, single-handed, with circumstances, was invariably equal. I affirm the all-pervading intelligence of that capacity. At the expense of the Chemist, I vindicate the Man.

Respect this outburst of generous indignation. It has inexpressibly relieved me. *En route!* Let us proceed.

Having suggested to Mrs. Clements (or Clements, I am not sure which) that the best method of keeping Anne out of Percival's reach was to remove her to London; having found that my proposal was eagerly received; and having appointed a day to meet the travellers at the station, and to see them leave it—I was at liberty to return to the house, and to confront the difficulties which still remained to be met.

My first proceeding was to avail myself of the sublime devotion of my wife. I had arranged with Mrs. Clements that she should communicate her London address, in Anne's interests, to Lady Glyde. But this was not enough. Designing persons, in my absence, might shake the simple confidence of Mrs. Clements, and she might not write, after all. Who could I find capable of travelling to London by the train she travelled by, and of privately seeing her home? I asked myself this question. The conjugal part of me immediately answered—Madame Fosco.

After deciding on my wife's mission to London, I arranged that the journey should serve a double purpose. A nurse for the suffering Marian, equally devoted to the patient and to myself, was a necessity of my position. One of the most eminently confidential and capable women in existence, was by good fortune at my disposal. I refer to that respectable matron, Madame Rubelle—to whom I addressed a letter, at her residence in London, by the hands of my wife.

On the appointed day, Mrs. Clements and Anne Catherick met me at the station. I politely saw them off. I politely saw Madame Fosco off by the same train. The last thing at night, my wife returned to Blackwater, having followed her instructions with the most unimpeachable accuracy. She was accompanied by Madame Rubelle; and she brought me the London address of Mrs. Clements. After-events proved this last precaution to have been unnecessary. Mrs. Clements punctually informed Lady Glyde of her place of abode. With a wary eye on future emergencies, I kept the letter.

The same day, I had a brief interview with the doctor, at which I protested, in the sacred interests of humanity, against his treatment of

Marian's case. He was insolent, as all ignorant people are. I showed no resentment; I deferred quarrelling with him till it was necessary to quarrel to some purpose.

My next proceeding was to leave Blackwater myself. I had my London residence to take, in anticipation of coming events. I had also a little business, of the domestic sort, to transact with Mr. Frederick Fairlie. I found the house I wanted, in St. John's Wood. I found Mr. Fairlie at Limmeridge, Cumberland.

My own private familiarity with the nature of Marian's correspondence, had previously informed me that she had written to Mr. Fairlie, proposing, as a relief to Lady Glyde's matrimonial embarrassments, to take her on a visit to her uncle in Cumberland. This letter I had wisely allowed to reach its destination; feeling, at the time, that it could do no harm, and might do good. I now presented myself before Mr. Fairlie, to support Marian's own proposal—with certain modifications which, happily for the success of my plans, were rendered really inevitable by her illness. It was necessary that Lady Glyde should leave Blackwater alone, by her uncle's invitation, and that she should rest a night on the journey, at her aunt's house (the house I had taken in St. John's Wood), by her uncle's express advice. To achieve these results, and to secure a note of invitation which could be shown to Lady Glyde, were the objects of my visit to Mr. Fairlie. When I have mentioned that this gentleman was equally feeble in mind and body, and that I let loose the whole force of my character on him, I have said enough. I came, saw, and conquered Fairlie.

On my return to Blackwater Park (with the letter of invitation) I found that the doctor's imbecile treatment of Marian's case had led to the most alarming results. The fever had turned to Typhus. Lady Glyde, on the day of my return, tried to force herself into the room to nurse her sister. She and I had no affinities of sympathy; she had committed the unpardonable outrage on my sensibilities of calling me a Spy; she was a stumbling-block in my way and in Percival's—but, for all that, my magnanimity forbade me to put her in danger of infection with my own hand. At the same time, I offered no hindrance to her putting herself in danger. If she had succeeded in doing so, the intricate knot which I was slowly and patiently operating on, might perhaps have been cut, by circumstances. As it was, the doctor interfered, and she was kept out of the room.

I had myself previously recommended sending for advice to London. This course had been now taken. The physician, on his arrival, confirmed my view of the case. The crisis was serious. But we had hope of our charming patient on the fifth day from the appearance of the Typhus. I was only once absent from Blackwater at this time—when I went to London by the morning train, to make the final arrangements at my house in St. John's Wood; to assure myself, by private inquiry, that Mrs. Clements had not moved; and to settle one or two little preliminary matters

with the husband of Madame Rubelle. I returned at night. Five days afterwards, the physician pronounced our interesting Marian to be out of all danger, and to be in need of nothing but careful nursing. This was the time I had waited for. Now that medical attendance was no longer indispensable, I played the first move in the game by asserting myself against the doctor. He was one among many witnesses in my way, whom it was necessary to remove. A lively altercation between us (in which Percival, previously instructed by me, refused to interfere) served the purpose in view. I descended on the miserable man in an irresistible avalanche of indignation—and swept him from the house.

The servants were the next encumbrances to get rid of. Again I instructed Percival (whose moral courage required perpetual stimulants), and Mrs. Michelson was amazed, one day, by hearing from her master that the establishment was to be broken up. We cleared the house of all the servants but one, who was kept for domestic purposes, and whose lumpish stupidity we could trust to make no embarrassing discoveries. When they were gone, nothing remained but to relieve ourselves of Mrs. Michelson—a result which was easily achieved by sending this amiable lady to find lodgings for her mistress at the sea-side.

The circumstances were now—exactly what they were required to be. Lady Glyde was confined to her room by nervous illness; and the lumpish housemaid (I forget her name) was shut up there, at night, in attendance on her mistress. Marian, though fast recovering, still kept her bed, with Mrs. Rubelle for nurse. No other living creatures but my wife, myself, and Percival, were in the house. With all the chances thus in our favour, I confronted the next emergency, and played the second move in the game.

The object of the second move was to induce Lady Glyde to leave Blackwater, unaccompanied by her sister. Unless we could persuade her that Marian had gone on to Cumberland first, there was no chance of removing her, of her own free will, from the house. To produce this necessary operation in her mind, we concealed our interesting invalid in one of the uninhabited bedrooms at Blackwater. At the dead of night, Madame Fosco, Madame Rubelle, and myself (Percival not being cool enough to be trusted), accomplished the concealment. The scene was picturesque, mysterious, dramatic, in the highest degree. By my directions, the bed had been made, in the morning, on a strong movable framework of wood. We had only to lift the framework gently at the head and foot, and to transport our patient where we pleased, without disturbing herself or her bed. No chemical assistance was needed, or used, in this case. Our interesting Marian lay in the deep repose of convalescence. We placed the candles and opened the doors, beforehand. I, in right of my great personal strength, took the head of the framework—my wife and Madame Rubelle took the foot. I bore my share of that inestimably precious burden with a manly tenderness, with

a fatherly care. Where is the modern Rembrandt who could depict our midnight procession? Alas for the Arts! alas for this most pictorial of subjects! the modern Rembrandt is nowhere to be found.

The next morning, my wife and I started for London—leaving Marian secluded, in the uninhabited middle of the house, under care of Madame Rubelle; who kindly consented to imprison herself with her patient for two or three days. Before taking our departure, I gave Percival Mr. Fairlie's letter of invitation to his niece (instructing her to sleep on the journey to Cumberland at her aunt's house), with directions to show it to Lady Glyde on hearing from me. I also obtained from him the address of the Asylum in which Anne Catherick had been confined, and a letter to the proprietor, announcing to that gentleman the return of his runaway patient to medical care.

I had arranged, at my last visit to the metropolis, to have our modest domestic establishment ready to receive us when we arrived in London by the early train. In consequence of this wise precaution, we were enabled that same day to play the third move in the game—the getting possession of Anne Catherick.

Dates are of importance here. I combine in myself the opposite characteristics of a Man of Sentiment and a Man of Business. I have all the dates at my fingers' ends.

On the 27th of July, 1850, I sent my wife, in a cab, to clear Mrs. Clements out of the way, in the first place. A supposed message from Lady Glyde in London, was sufficient to obtain this result. Mrs. Clements was taken away in the cab, and was left in the cab, while my wife (on pretence of purchasing something at a shop) gave her the slip, and returned to receive her expected visitor at our house in St. John's Wood. It is hardly necessary to add that the visitor had been described to the servants as "Lady Glyde."

In the mean while I had followed in another cab, with a note for Anne Catherick, merely mentioning that Lady Glyde intended to keep Mrs. Clements to spend the day with her, and that she was to join them, under care of the good gentleman waiting outside, who had already saved her from discovery in Hampshire by Sir Percival. The "good gentleman" sent in this note by a street boy, and paused for results, a door or two farther on. At the moment when Anne appeared at the house-door and closed it, this excellent man had the cab-door open ready for her—absorbed her into the vehicle—and drove off.

(Pass me, here, one exclamation in parenthesis. How interesting this is!)

On the way to Forest-road, my companion showed no fear. I can be paternal—no man more so—when I please; and I was intensely paternal on this occasion. What titles I had to her confidence! I had compounded the medicine which had done her good; I had warned her of her danger from Sir Percival. Perhaps, I trusted too implicitly to these titles; perhaps,

I underrated the keenness of the lower instincts in persons of weak intellect—it is certain that I neglected to prepare her sufficiently for a disappointment on entering my house. When I took her into the drawing-room—when she saw no one present but Madame Fosco, who was a stranger to her—she exhibited the most violent agitation: if she had scented danger in the air, as a dog scents the presence of some creature unseen, her alarm could not have displayed itself more suddenly and more causelessly. I interposed in vain. The fear from which she was suffering, I might have soothed—but the serious heart-disease, under which she laboured, was beyond the reach of all moral palliatives. To my unspeakable horror, she was seized with convulsions—a shock to the system, in her condition, which might have laid her dead at any moment, at our feet.

The nearest doctor was sent for, and was told that “Lady Glyde” required his immediate services. To my infinite relief, he was a capable man. I represented my visitor to him as a person of weak intellect, and subject to delusions; and I arranged that no nurse but my wife should watch in the sick-room. The unhappy woman was too ill, however, to cause any anxiety about what she might say. The one dread which now oppressed me, was the dread that the false Lady Glyde might die, before the true Lady Glyde arrived in London.

I had written a note in the morning to Madame Rubelle, telling her to join me, at her husband’s house, on the evening of the 29th; with another note to Percival, warning him to show his wife her uncle’s letter of invitation, to assert that Marian had gone on before her, and to despatch her to town, by the mid-day train, on the 29th, also. On reflection, I had felt the necessity, in Anne Catherick’s state of health, of precipitating events, and of having Lady Glyde at my disposal earlier than I had originally contemplated. What fresh directions, in the terrible uncertainty of my position, could I now issue? I could do nothing but trust to chance and the doctor. My emotions expressed themselves in pathetic apostrophes—which I was just self-possessed enough to couple, in the hearing of other people, with the name of “Lady Glyde.” In all other respects, Fosco, on that memorable day, was Fosco shrouded in total eclipse.

She passed a bad night—she awoke worn out—but, later in the day, she revived amazingly. My elastic spirits revived with her. I could receive no answers from Percival and Madame Rubelle till the morning of the next day—the 29th. In anticipation of their following my directions, which, accident apart, I knew they would do, I went to secure a fly to fetch Lady Glyde from the railway; directing it to be at my house, on the 29th, at two o’clock. After seeing the order entered in the book, I went on to arrange matters with Monsieur Rubelle. I also procured the services of two gentlemen, who could furnish me with the necessary certificates of lunacy. One of them I knew personally: the other was known to Monsieur Rubelle.

Both were men whose vigorous minds soared superior to narrow scruples—both were labouring under temporary embarrassments—both believed in ME.

It was past five o’clock in the afternoon before I returned from the performance of these duties. When I got back, Anne Catherick was dead. Dead on the 28th; and Lady Glyde was not to arrive in London till the 29th!

I was stunned. Meditate on that. Fosco stunned!

It was too late to retrace our steps. Before my return, the doctor had officiously undertaken to save me all trouble, by registering the death, on the date when it happened, with his own hand. My grand scheme, unassailable hitherto, had its weak place now—no efforts, on my part, could alter the fatal event of the 28th. I turned manfully to the future. Percival’s interests and mine being still at stake, nothing was left but to play the game through to the end. I recalled my impenetrable calm—and played it.

On the morning of the 29th, Percival’s letter reached me, announcing his wife’s arrival by the mid-day train. Madame Rubelle also wrote to say she would follow in the evening. I started in the fly, leaving the false Lady Glyde dead in the house, to receive the true Lady Glyde, on her arrival by the railway, at three o’clock. Hidden under the seat of the carriage, I carried with me all the clothes Anne Catherick had worn on coming into my house—they were destined to assist the resurrection of the woman who was dead, in the person of the woman who was living. What a situation! I suggest it to the rising romance writers of England. I offer it, as totally new, to the worn-out dramatists of France.

Lady Glyde was at the station. There was great crowding and confusion, and more delay than I liked (in case any of her friends had happened to be at the station), in reclaiming her luggage. Her first questions, as we drove off, implored me to tell her news of her sister. I invented news of the most pacifying kind; assuring her that she was about to see her sister at my house. My house, on this occasion only, was in the neighbourhood of Leicester-square, and was in the occupation of Monsieur Rubelle, who received us in the hall.

I took my visitor up-stairs into a back room; the two medical gentlemen being there in waiting on the floor beneath, to see the patient, and to give me their certificates. After quieting Lady Glyde by the necessary assurances about her sister, I introduced my friends, separately, to her presence. They performed the formalities of the occasion, briefly, intelligently, conscientiously. I entered the room again, as soon as they had left it; and at once precipitated events by a reference, of the alarming kind, to “Miss Halcombe’s” state of health.

Results followed as I had anticipated. Lady Glyde became frightened, and turned faint. For the second time, and the last, I called Science to my assistance. A medicated glass of water, and a medicated bottle of smelling-salts, re-

lieved her of all further embarrassment and alarm. Additional applications, later in the evening, procured her the inestimable blessing of a good night's rest. Madame Rubelle arrived in time to preside at Lady Glyde's toilet. Her own clothes were taken away from her at night, and Anne Catherick's were put on her in the morning, with the strictest regard to propriety, by the matronly hands of the good Rubelle. Throughout the day, I kept our patient in a state of partially-suspended consciousness, until the dexterous assistance of my medical friends enabled me to procure the necessary order, rather earlier than I had ventured to hope. That evening (the evening of the 30th) Madame Rubelle and I took our revived "Anne Catherick" to the Asylum. She was received, with great surprise—but without suspicion; thanks to the order and certificates, to Percival's letter, to the likeness, to the clothes, and to the patient's own confused mental condition at the time. I returned at once to assist Madame Fosco in the preparations for the burial of the false "Lady Glyde," having the clothes of the true "Lady Glyde" in my possession. They were afterwards sent to Cumberland by the conveyance which was used for the funeral. I attended the funeral, with becoming dignity, attired in the deepest mourning.

My narrative of these remarkable events, written under equally remarkable circumstances, closes here. The minor precautions which I observed, in communicating with Limmeridge House, are already known—so is the magnificent success of my enterprise—so are the solid pecuniary results which followed it. I have to assert, with the whole force of my conviction, that the one weak place in my scheme, would never have been found out, if the one weak place in my heart had not been discovered first. Nothing but my fatal admiration for Marian restrained me from stepping in to my own rescue, when she effected her sister's escape. I ran the risk, and trusted in the complete destruction of Lady Glyde's identity. If either Marian or Mr. Hartright attempted to assert that identity, they would publicly expose themselves to the imputation of sustaining a rank deception; they would be distrusted and discredited accordingly; and they would, therefore, be powerless to place my interests or Percival's secret in jeopardy. I committed one error in trusting myself to such a blindfold calculation of chances as this. I committed another when Percival had paid the penalty of his own obstinacy and violence, by granting Lady Glyde a second reprieve from the madhouse, and allowing Mr. Hartright a second chance of escaping me. In brief, Fosco, at this serious crisis, was untrue to himself. Deploable and uncharacteristic fault! Behold the cause, in my heart—behold, in the image of Marian Halcombe, the first and last weakness of Fosco's life!

At the ripe age of sixty, I make this unparal-

leled confession. Youths! I invoke your sympathy. Maidens! I claim your tears.

A word more—and the attention of the reader (concentrated breathlessly on myself) shall be released.

My own mental insight informs me that three inevitable questions will be asked, here, by persons of inquiring minds. They shall be stated; they shall be answered.

First question. What is the secret of Madame Fosco's unhesitating devotion of herself to the fulfilment of my boldest wishes, to the furtherance of my deepest plans? I might answer this, by simply referring to my own character, and by asking, in my turn:—Where, in the history of the world, has a man of my order ever been found without a woman in the background, self-immolated on the altar of his life? But, I remember that I am writing in England; I remember that I was married in England—and I ask, if a woman's marriage-obligations, in this country, provide for her private opinion of her husband's principles? No! They charge her unreservedly, to love, honour, and obey him. That is exactly what my wife has done. I stand, here, on a supreme moral elevation; and I loftily assert her accurate performance of her conjugal duties. Silence, Calumny! Your sympathy, Wives of England, for Madame Fosco!

Second question. If Anne Catherick had not died when she did, what should I have done? I should, in that case, have assisted worn-out Nature in finding permanent repose. I should have opened the doors of the Prison of Life, and have extended to the captive (incurably afflicted in mind and body both) a happy release.

Third question. On a calm revision of all the circumstances—Is my conduct worthy of any serious blame? Most emphatically, No! Have I not carefully avoided exposing myself to the odium of committing unnecessary crime? With my vast resources in chemistry, I might have taken Lady Glyde's life. At immense personal sacrifice, I followed the dictates of my own ingenuity, my own humanity, my own caution—and took her identity, instead. Judge me by what I might have done. How comparatively innocent! how indirectly virtuous I appear, in what I really did!

I announced, on beginning it, that this narrative would be a remarkable document. It has entirely answered my expectations. Receive these fervid lines—my last legacy to the country I leave for ever. They are worthy of the occasion, and worthy of

FOSCO.

PART THE THIRD. HARTRIGHT'S NARRATIVE,
CONCLUDED.

I.

WHEN I closed the last leaf of the Count's manuscript, the half-hour during which I had engaged to remain at Forest-road had expired. Monsieur Rubelle looked at his watch, and bowed. I rose immediately, and left the agent

in possession of the empty house. I never saw him again; I never heard more of him or of his wife. Out of the dark byways of villany and deceit, they had crawled across our path—into the same byways they crawled back secretly, and were lost.

In a quarter of an hour after leaving Forest-road, I was at home again.

But few words sufficed to tell Laura and Marian how my desperate venture had ended, and what the next event in our lives was likely to be. I left all details to be described later in the day; and hastened back to St. John's Wood, to see the person of whom Count Fosco had ordered the fly, when he went to meet Laura at the station.

The address in my possession led me to some "livery stables," about a quarter of a mile distant from Forest-road. The proprietor proved to be a civil and respectable man. When I explained that an important family matter obliged me to ask him to refer to his books, for the purpose of ascertaining a date with which the record of his business transactions might supply me, he offered no objection to granting my request. The book was produced; and there, under the date of "July 29th, 1850," the order was entered, in these words:

"Brougham to Count Fosco, 5, Forest-road. Two o'clock. (John Owen)."

I found, on inquiry, that the name of "John Owen," attached to the entry, referred to the man who had been employed to drive the fly. He was then at work in the stable-yard, and was sent for to see me, at my request.

"Do you remember driving a gentleman, in the month of July last, from Number Five, Forest-road, to the Waterloo-bridge station?" I asked.

"Well, sir," said the man; "I can't exactly say I do."

"Perhaps you remember the gentleman himself? Can you call to mind driving a foreigner, last summer—a tall gentleman, and remarkably fat?"

The man's face brightened directly. "I remember him, sir! The fattest gentleman as ever I see—and the heaviest customer as ever I drove. Yes, yes—I call him to mind, sir. We *did* go to the station, and it *was* from Forest-road. There was a parrot, or summat like it, screeching in the window. The gentleman was in a mortal hurry about the lady's luggage; and he give me a handsome present for looking sharp and getting the boxes."

Getting the boxes! I recollected immediately that Laura's own account of herself, on her arrival in London, described her luggage as being collected for her by some person whom Count Fosco brought with him to the station. This was the man.

"Did you see the lady?" I asked. "What did she look like? Was she young or old?"

"Well, sir, what with the hurry and the crowd of people pushing about, I can't rightly say what the lady looked like. I can't call nothing to mind about her that I know of—excepting her name."

"You remember her name!"

"Yes, sir. Her name was Lady Glyde."

"How do you come to remember that, when you have forgotten what she looked like?"

The man smiled, and shifted his feet in some little embarrassment.

"Why, to tell you the truth, sir," he said, "I hadn't been long married at that time; and my wife's name, before she changed it for mine, was the same as the lady's—meaning the name of Glyde, sir. The lady mentioned it herself. 'Is your name on your boxes, ma'am?' says I. 'Yes,' says she, 'my name is on my luggage—it is Lady Glyde.' 'Come!' I says to myself, 'I've a bad head for gentlefolks' names in general—but this one comes like an old friend, at any rate.' I can't say nothing about the time, sir; it might be nigh on a year ago, or it mightn't. But I can swear to the stout gentleman, and swear to the lady's name."

There was no need that he should remember the time; the date was positively established by his master's order-book. I felt at once that the means were at last in my power of striking down the whole conspiracy at a blow with the irresistible weapon of plain fact. Without a moment's hesitation, I took the proprietor of the livery stables aside, and told him what the real importance was of the evidence of his order-book and the evidence of his driver. An arrangement to compensate him for the temporary loss of the man's services was easily made; and a copy of the entry in the book was taken by myself, and certified as true by the master's own signature. I left the livery stables, having settled that John Owen was to hold himself at my disposal for the next three days, or for a longer period, if necessity required it.

I now had in my possession all the papers that I wanted; the district registrar's own copy of the certificate of death, and Sir Percival's dated letter to the Count, being safe in my pocket-book.

With this written evidence about me, and with the coachman's answers fresh in my memory, I next turned my steps, for the first time since the beginning of all my inquiries, in the direction of Mr. Kyrle's office. One of my objects, in paying him this second visit, was, necessarily, to tell him what I had done. The other, was to warn him of my resolution to take my wife to Limmeridge the next morning, and to have her publicly received and recognised in her uncle's house. I left it to Mr. Kyrle to decide, under these circumstances, and in Mr. Gilmore's absence, whether he was or was not bound, as the family solicitor, to be present, on that occasion, in the family interests.

I will say nothing of Mr. Kyrle's amazement, or of the terms in which he expressed his opinion of my conduct, from the first stage of the investigation to the last. It is only necessary to mention that he at once decided on accompanying us to Cumberland.

We started, the next morning, by the early train. Laura, Marian, Mr. Kyrle, and myself in

one carriage; and John Owen, with a clerk from Mr. Kyrle's office, occupying places in another. On reaching the Limmeridge station, we went first to the farm-house at Todd's Corner. It was my firm determination that Laura should not enter her uncle's house till she appeared there publicly recognised as his niece. I left Marian to settle the question of accommodation with Mrs. Todd, as soon as the good woman had recovered from the bewilderment of hearing what our errand was in Cumberland; and I arranged with her husband that John Owen was to be committed to the ready hospitality of the farm-servants. These preliminaries completed, Mr. Kyrle and I set forth together for Limmeridge House.

I cannot write at any length of our interview with Mr. Fairlie, for I cannot recal it to mind, without feelings of impatience and contempt, which make the scene, even in remembrance only, utterly repulsive to me. I prefer to record simply that I carried my point. Mr. Fairlie attempted to treat us on his customary plan. We passed without notice his polite insolence at the outset of the interview. We heard without sympathy the protestations with which he tried next to persuade us that the disclosure of the conspiracy had overwhelmed him. He absolutely whined and whimpered, at last, like a fretful child. "How was he to know that his niece was alive, when he was told that she was dead? He would welcome dear Laura, with pleasure, if we would only allow him time to recover. Did we think he looked as if he wanted hurrying into his grave? No. Then, why hurry him?" He reiterated these remonstrances at every available opportunity, until I checked them once for all, by placing him firmly between two inevitable alternatives. I gave him his choice between doing his niece justice, on my terms—or facing the consequences of a public assertion of her identity in a court of law. Mr. Kyrle, to whom he turned for help, told him plainly that he must decide the question, then and there. Characteristically choosing the alternative which promised soonest to release him from all personal anxiety, he announced, with a sudden outburst of energy, that he was not strong enough to bear any more bullying, and that we might do as we pleased.

Mr. Kyrle and I at once went down stairs, and agreed upon a form of letter which was to be sent round to the tenants who had attended the false funeral, summoning them, in Mr. Fairlie's name, to assemble in Limmeridge House, on the next day but one. An order, referring to the same date, was also written, directing a statuary in Carlisle to send a man to Limmeridge churchyard, for the purpose of erasing an inscription—Mr. Kyrle, who had arranged to sleep in the house, undertaking that Mr. Fairlie should hear these letters read to him, and should sign them with his own hand.

I occupied the interval-day, at the farm, in writing a plain narrative of the conspiracy, and in adding to it a statement of the prac-

tical contradiction which facts offered to the assertion of Laura's death. This I submitted to Mr. Kyrle, before I read it, the next day, to the assembled tenants. We also arranged the form in which the evidence should be presented at the close of the reading. After these matters were settled, Mr. Kyrle endeavoured to turn the conversation, next, to Laura's affairs. Knowing, and desiring to know, nothing of those affairs; and doubting whether he would approve, as a man of business, of my conduct in relation to my wife's life-interest in the legacy left to to Madame Fosco, I begged Mr. Kyrle to excuse me if I abstained from discussing the subject. It was connected, as I could truly tell him, with those sorrows and troubles of the past, which we never referred to among ourselves, and which we instinctively shrank from discussing with others.

My last labour, as the evening approached, was to obtain "The Narrative of the Tombstone," by taking a copy of the false inscription on the grave, before it was erased.

The day came—the day when Laura once more entered the familiar breakfast-room at Limmeridge House. All the persons assembled rose from their seats as Marian and I led her in. A perceptible shock of surprise, an audible murmur of interest, ran through them, at the sight of her face. Mr. Fairlie was present (by my express stipulation), with Mr. Kyrle by his side. His valet stood behind him with a smelling-bottle ready in one hand, and a white handkerchief, saturated with eau-de-Cologne, in the other.

I opened the proceedings by publicly appealing to Mr. Fairlie to say whether I appeared there with his authority and under his express sanction. He extended an arm, on either side, to Mr. Kyrle and to his valet; was by them assisted to stand on his legs; and then expressed himself in these terms: "Allow me to present Mr. Hartright. I am as great an invalid as ever; and he is so very obliging as to speak for me. The subject is dreadfully embarrassing. Please hear him—and don't make a noise!" With those words, he slowly sank back again into the chair, and took refuge in his scented pocket-handkerchief.

My disclosure of the conspiracy followed—after I had offered my preliminary explanation, first of all, in the fewest and the plainest words. I was there present (I informed my hearers) to declare first, that my wife, then sitting by me, was the daughter of the late Mr. Philip Fairlie; secondly, to prove, by positive facts, that the funeral which they had attended in Limmeridge churchyard, was the funeral of another woman; thirdly, to give them a plain account of how it had all happened. Without further preface, I at once read the narrative of the conspiracy, describing it in clear outline, and dwelling only upon the pecuniary motive for it, in order to avoid complicating my statement by unnecessary reference to Sir Percival's secret. This done, I reminded my audience of the date of

"Lady Glyde's" death, recorded on the inscription in the churchyard (the 28th of July); and confirmed its correctness by producing the doctor's certificate. I then read them Sir Percival's letter announcing his wife's intended journey from Hampshire to London on the 29th, and dated from Blackwater on the 28th—the very day when the certificate asserted her decease in St. John's Wood. I next showed that she had actually taken that journey, by the personal testimony of the driver of the fly; and I proved that she had performed it on the day appointed in her husband's letter, by the evidence of the order-book at the livery stables. Marian, at my request, next added her own statement of the meeting between Laura and herself at the madhouse, and of her sister's escape. After which, I closed the proceedings by informing the persons present of Sir Percival's death, and of my marriage.

Mr. Kyrle rose, when I resumed my seat, and declared, as the legal adviser of the family, that my case was proved by the plainest evidence he had ever heard in his life. As he spoke those words, I put my arm round Laura, and raised her so that she was plainly visible to every one in the room. "Are you all of the same opinion?" I asked, advancing towards them a few steps, and pointing to my wife.

The effect of the question was electrical. Far down at the lower end of the room, one of the oldest tenants on the estate, started to his feet, and led the rest with him in an instant. I see the man now, with his honest brown face and his iron-grey hair, mounted on the window-seat, waving his heavy riding-whip frantically over his head, and leading the cheers. "There she is alive and hearty—God bless her! Gi' it tongue, lads! Gi' it tongue!" The shout that answered him, reiterated again and again, was the sweetest music I ever heard. The labourers in the village and the boys from the school, assembled on the lawn, caught up the cheering and echoed it back on us. The farmers' wives clustered round Laura, and struggled which should be first to shake hands with her, and to implore her, with the tears pouring over their own cheeks, to bear up bravely and not to cry. She was so completely overwhelmed, that I was obliged to take her from them, and carry her to the door. There I gave her into Marian's care—Marian, who had never failed us yet, whose courageous self-control did not fail us now. Left by myself at the door, I invited all the persons present (after thanking them in Laura's name and mine) to follow me to the churchyard, and see the false inscription struck off the tombstone with their own eyes.

They all left the house, and all joined the throng of villagers collected round the grave, where the statuary's man was waiting for us. In a breathless silence, the first sharp stroke of the steel sounded on the marble. Not a voice was heard; not a soul moved, till those three words, "Laura, Lady Glyde," had vanished from sight. Then, there was a great heave of relief among the crowd, as if they felt that the

last fetters of the conspiracy had been struck off Laura herself—and the assembly slowly withdrew. It was late in the day before the whole inscription was erased. One line only was afterwards engraved in its place: "Anne Catherick, July 28th, 1850."

I returned to Limmeridge House early enough in the evening to take leave of Mr. Kyrle. He, and his clerk, and the driver of the fly, went back to London by the night train. On their departure, an insolent message was delivered to me from Mr. Fairlie—who had been carried from the room in a shattered condition, when the first outbreak of cheering answered my appeal to the tenantry. The message conveyed to us "Mr. Fairlie's best congratulations," and requested to know whether "we contemplated stopping in the house." I sent back word that the only object for which we had entered his doors was accomplished; that I contemplated stopping in no man's house but my own; and that Mr. Fairlie need not entertain the slightest apprehension of ever seeing us, or hearing from us again. We went back to our friends at the farm, to rest that night; and the next morning—escorted to the station, with the heartiest enthusiasm and good will, by the whole village and by all the farmers in the neighbourhood—we returned to London.

As our view of the Cumberland hills faded in the distance, I thought of the first disheartening circumstances under which the long struggle that was now past and over had been pursued. It was strange to look back and to see, now, that the poverty which had denied us all hope of assistance, had been the indirect means of our success, by forcing me to act for myself. If we had been rich enough to find legal help, what would have been the result? The gain (on Mr. Kyrle's own showing) would have been more than doubtful; the loss—judging by the plain test of events as they had really happened—certain. The Law would never have obtained me my interview with Mrs. Catherick. The Law would never have made Pesca the means of forcing a confession from the Count.

II.

Two more events remain to be added to the chain, before it reaches fairly from the outset of the story to the close.

While our new sense of freedom from the long oppression of the past was still strange to us, I was sent for by the friend who had given me my first employment in wood engraving, to receive from him a fresh testimony of his regard for my welfare. He had been commissioned by his employers to go to Paris, and to examine for them a French discovery in the practical application of his Art, the merits of which they were anxious to ascertain. His own engagements had not allowed him leisure time to undertake the errand; and he had most kindly suggested that it should be transferred to me. I could have no hesitation in thankfully accepting the offer; for if I acquitted myself of my commission as I hoped I

should, the result would be a permanent engagement on the illustrated newspaper, to which I was now only occasionally attached.

I received my instructions and packed up for the journey the next day. On leaving Laura once more (under what changed circumstances!) in her sister's care, a serious consideration recurred to me, which had more than once crossed my wife's mind, as well as my own, already—I mean the consideration of Marian's future. Had we any right to let our selfish affection accept the devotion of all that generous life? Was it not our duty, our best expression of gratitude, to forget ourselves, and to think only of *her*? I tried to say this, when we were alone for a moment, before I went away. She took my hand, and silenced me, at the first words.

"After all that we three have suffered together," she said, "there can be no parting between us, till the last parting of all. My heart and my happiness, Walter, are with Laura and you. Wait a little till there are children's voices at your fireside. I will teach them to speak for me, in *their* language; and the first lesson they say to their father and mother shall be—We can't spare our aunt!"

My journey to Paris was not undertaken alone. At the eleventh hour, Pesca decided that he would accompany me. He had not recovered his customary cheerfulness, since the night at the Opera; and he determined to try what a week's holiday would do to raise his spirits.

I performed the errand entrusted to me, and drew out the necessary report, on the fourth day from our arrival in Paris. The fifth day, I arranged to devote to sight-seeing and amusement in Pesca's company.

Our hotel had been too full to accommodate us both on the same floor. My room was on the second story, and Pesca's was above me, on the third. On the morning of the fifth day, I went up-stairs to see if the Professor was ready to go out. Just before I reached the landing, I saw his door opened from the inside; a long, delicate, nervous hand (not my friend's hand certainly) held it ajar. At the same time, I heard Pesca's voice saying eagerly, in low tones, and in his own language: "I remember the name, but I don't know the man. You saw at the Opera, he was so changed that I could not recognise him. I will forward the report—I can do no more." "No more need be done," answered a second voice. The door opened wide; and the light-haired man with the scar on his cheek—the man I had seen following Count Fosco's cab a week before—came out. He bowed, as I drew aside to let him pass—his face was fearfully pale—and he held fast by the banisters, as he descended the stairs.

I pushed open the door, and entered Pesca's room. He was crouched up, in the strangest manner, in a corner of the sofa. He seemed to shrink from himself—to shrink from me, when I approached him.

"Am I disturbing you?" I asked. "I did

not know you had a friend with you till I saw him come out."

"No friend," said Pesca, eagerly. "I see him to day for the first time, and the last."

"I am afraid he has brought you bad news?"

"Horrible news, Walter! Let us go back to London—I don't want to stop here—I am sorry I ever came. The misfortunes of my youth are very hard upon me," he said, turning his face to the wall; "very hard upon me, in my later time. I try to forget them—and they will not forget *me*!"

"We can't return, I am afraid, before the afternoon," I replied. "Would you like to come out with me, in the mean time?"

"No, my friend; I will wait here. But let us go back to-day—pray let us go back."

I left him, with the assurance that he should leave Paris that afternoon. We had arranged, the evening before, to ascend the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, with Victor Hugo's noble romance for our guide. There was nothing in the French capital that I was more anxious to see—and I departed, by myself, for the church.

Approaching Notre-Dame by the river-side, I passed, on my way, the terrible dead-house of Paris—the Morgue. A great crowd clamoured and heaved round the door. There was evidently something inside which excited the popular curiosity, and fed the popular appetite for horror.

I should have walked on to the church, if the conversation of two men and a woman on the outskirts of the crowd had not caught my ear. They had just come out from seeing the sight in the Morgue; and the account they were giving of the dead body to their neighbours, described it as the corpse of a man—a man of immense size, with a strange mark on his left arm.

The moment those words reached me, I stopped, and took my place with the crowd going in. Some dim foreshadowing of the truth had crossed my mind, when I heard Pesca's voice through the open door, and when I saw the stranger's face as he passed me on the stairs of the hotel. Now, the truth itself was revealed to me—revealed, in the chance words that had just reached my ears. Other vengeance than mine had followed that fated man from the theatre to his own door; from his own door to his refuge in Paris. Other vengeance than mine had called him to the day of reckoning, and had exacted from him the penalty of his life. The moment when I had pointed him out to Pesca, at the theatre, in the hearing of that stranger by our side, who was looking for him, too—was the moment that sealed his doom. I remembered the struggle in my own heart, when he and I stood face to face—the struggle before I could let him escape me—and shuddered as I recalled it.

Slowly, inch by inch, I pressed in with the crowd, moving nearer and nearer to the great glass screen that parts the dead from the living at the Morgue—nearer and nearer, till I was close behind the front row of spectators, and could look in.

There he lay, unowned, unknown; exposed to the flippant curiosity of a French mob—there was the dreadful end of that long life of degraded ability and heartless crime! Hushed in the sublime repose of death, the broad, firm, massive face and head fronted us so grandly, that the chattering Frenchwomen about me lifted their hands in admiration, and cried, in shrill chorus, "Ah, what a handsome man!" The wound that had killed him had been struck with a knife or dagger exactly over his heart. No other traces of violence appeared about the body, except on the left arm; and there, exactly in the place where I had seen the brand on Pesca's arm, were two deep cuts in the shape of the letter T, which entirely obliterated the mark of the Brotherhood. His clothes hung above him, showed that he had been himself conscious of his danger—they were clothes that had disguised him as a French artisan. For a few moments, but not for longer, I forced myself to see these things through the glass screen. I can write of them at no greater length, for I saw no more.

The few facts, in connexion with his death which I subsequently ascertained (partly from Pesca and partly from other sources), may be stated here, before the subject is dismissed from these pages.

His body was taken out of the Seine, in the disguise which I have described; nothing being found on him which revealed his name, his rank, or his place of abode. The hand that struck him was never traced; and the circumstances under which he was killed were never discovered. I leave others to draw their own conclusions, in reference to the secret of the assassination, as I have drawn mine. When I have intimated that the foreigner with the scar was a Member of the Brotherhood (admitted in Italy, after Pesca's departure from his native country), and when I have further added that the two cuts, in the form of a T, on the left arm of the dead man, signified the Italian word, "Traditore," and showed that justice had been done by the Brotherhood on a Traitor, I have contributed all that I know towards elucidating the mystery of Count Fosco's death.

The body was identified, the day after I had seen it, by means of an anonymous letter addressed to his wife. He was buried, by Madame Fosco, in the cemetery of Père la Chaise. Fresh funeral wreaths continue, to this day, to be hung on the ornamental bronze-railings round the tomb, by the Countess's own hand. She lives, in the strictest retirement, at Versailles. Not long since, she published a Biography of her deceased husband. The work throws no light whatever on the name that was really his own, or on the secret history of his life: it is almost entirely devoted to the praise of his domestic virtues, the assertion of his rare abilities, and the enumeration of the honours conferred on him. The circumstances attending his death are very briefly noticed; and are summed up, on the last page, in this sentence:

—His life was one long assertion of the rights of the aristocracy, and the sacred principles of Order—and he died a Martyr to his cause."

III.

THE summer and autumn passed, after my return from Paris, and brought no changes with them which need be noticed here. We lived so simply and quietly, that the income which I was now steadily earning sufficed for all our wants.

In the February of the new year, our first child was born—a son. My mother and sister and Mrs. Vesey, were our guests at the little christening party; and Mrs. Clements was present, to assist my wife, on the same occasion. Marian was our boy's godmother; and Pesca and Mr. Gilmore (the latter acting by proxy) were his godfathers. I may add here, that, when Mr. Gilmore returned to us, a year later, he assisted the design of these pages, at my request, by writing the Narrative which appears early in the story under his name, and which, though the first in order of precedence, was thus, in order of time, the last that I received.

The only event in our lives which now remains to be recorded, occurred when our little Walter was six months old.

At that time, I was sent to Ireland, to make sketches for certain forthcoming illustrations in the newspaper to which I was attached. I was away for nearly a fortnight, corresponding regularly with my wife and Marian, except during the last three days of my absence, when my movements were too uncertain to enable me to receive letters. I performed the latter part of my journey back, at night; and when I reached home in the morning, to my utter astonishment, there was no one to receive me. Laura and Marian and the child had left the house on the day before my return.

A note from my wife, which was given to me by the servant, only increased my surprise, by informing me that they had gone to Limmeridge House. Marian had prohibited any attempt at written explanations—I was entreated to follow them the moment I came back—complete enlightenment awaited me on my arrival in Cumberland—and I was forbidden to feel the slightest anxiety, in the mean time. There the note ended.

It was still early enough to catch the morning train. I reached Limmeridge House the same afternoon.

My wife and Marian were both up-stairs. They had established themselves (by way of completing my amazement) in the little room which had once been assigned to me for a studio, when I was employed on Mr. Fairlie's drawings. On the very chair which I used to occupy when I was at work, Marian was sitting now, with the child industriously sucking his coral upon her lap—while Laura was standing by the well-remembered drawing-table which I had so often used, with the little album that I had filled for her, in past times, open under her hand.

"What in the name of heaven has brought

you here?" I asked. "Does Mr. Fairlie know—?"

Marian suspended the question on my lips, by telling me that Mr Fairlie was dead. He had been struck by paralysis, and had never rallied after the shock. Mr. Kyrle had informed them of his death, and had advised them to proceed immediately to Limmeridge House.

Some dim perception of a great change dawned on my mind. Laura spoke before I had quite realised it. She stole close to me, to enjoy the surprise which was still expressed in my face.

"My darling Walter," she said, "must we really account for our boldness in coming here? I am afraid, love, I can only explain it by breaking through our rule, and referring to the past."

"There is not the least necessity for doing anything of the kind," said Marian. "We can be just as explicit, and much more interesting, by referring to the future." She rose; and held up the child, kicking and crowing in her arms. "Do you know who this is, Walter?" she asked, with bright tears of happiness gathering in her eyes.

"Even my bewilderment has its limits," I replied. "I think I can still answer for knowing my own child."

"Child!" she exclaimed, with all her easy gaiety of old times. "Do you talk in that familiar manner of one of the landed gentry of England? Are you aware, when I present this august baby to your notice, in whose presence you stand? Evidently not! Let me make two eminent personages known to one another: Mr. Walter Hartright—the *Heir of Limmeridge*."

So she spoke. In writing those last words, I have written all. The pen falters in my hand; the long, happy labour of many months is over! Marian was the good angel of our lives—let Marian end our Story.

THE END.

OLD KING HAKE.

BORN of the Sea on a rocky coast
Was old King Hake,
Where inner fire and outer frost
Brave virtue make!
He was a hero in the old
Blood-letting days;
An iron hero of Norse mould,
And warring ways.
He lived according to the light
That lighted him;
Then strode into the eternal night,
Resolved and grim.
His grip was stern for free sword play,
When men were mown;
His feet were roughshod for the day
Of treading down.
When angry, out the blood would start
With old King Hake;
Not sneak in dark caves of the heart,
Where curls the snake,
And secret murder's hiss is heard
Ere the deed be done.

He wove no web of wile and word;
He bore with none.
When sharp within its sheath asleep
Lay his good sword,
He held it royal work to keep
His kingly word.
A man of valour, bloody and wild,
In Viking need;
And yet of firelight feeling mild
As honey-mead.

Once in his youth, from farm to farm,
Collecting scatt,
He gathered gifts and welcomes warm;
And one night sat,
With hearts all happy for his throne—
Wishing no higher—
Where peasant faces merrily shone
Across the fire.
Their Braga-bowl was handed round
By one fair girl:
The Sea-King looked and thought, "I've found
My hidden pearl."
Her wavy hair was golden fair,
With sunbeams curled;
Her eyes clear blue as heaven, and there
Lay his new world.
He drank out of the mighty horn,
Strong, stinging stuff;
Then wiped his manly mouth unshorn
With hand as rough,
And kissed her; drew her to his side,
With loving mien,
Saying, "If you will make her a Bride,
I'll make her a Queen."
And round her waist she felt an arm,
For, in those days,
A waist could feel: 'twas lithe and warm,
And wore no stays.
"How many brave deeds have you done?"
She asked her wooer,
Counting the arm's gold rings: they won
One victory more.
The blood of joy looked rich and red
Out of his face;
And to his smiling strength he wed
Her maiden grace.
'Twas thus King Hake struck royal root
In homely ground;
And healthier buds with goodlier fruit
His branches crowned.

But Hake could never bind at home
His spirit free;
It grew familiar with the foam
Of many a sea;
A rare good blade whose way was rent
In many a war,
And wore no gem for ornament
But notch and scar.
In day of battle and hour of strife,
Cried Old King Hake:
"Kings live for honour, not long life."
Then would he break
Right through their circle of shields, to reach
Some chief of a race
That never yielded ground, but each
Died in his place.
There the old Norseman stood up tall
Above the rest;
Mainmast of battle, head of all,
They saw his crest
Toss, where the war-wave reared, and rode
O'er mounds of dead,