was afraid. And so, as the time went by, and no Vincent Holroyd came to the door to denounce her, she took comfort, and never knew how her fears were shared by her new brother-in-law.

CHAPTER XXVII

AGAG

AT a certain point between Basle and Schaffhausen, the Rhine, after winding in wide curves through low green meadows fringed with poplars, suddenly finds itself contracted to a narrow and precipitous channel, down which it foams with a continuous musical roar. On the rocks forming this channel, connected by a quaint old bridge, stand the twin towns, Gross and Klein Laufenburg. Of the two there can be no question which has the superior dignity, for, while Klein Laufenburg (which belongs to Baden) is all comprised in a single narrow street ending in a massive gatehouse, Gross Laufenburg, which stands in Swiss territory, boasts at least two streets and a half, besides the advantages of a public platz that can scarcely be smaller than an average London back garden, a church with a handsome cupola and blue and gold faced clock, and the ruins of what was once an Austrian stronghold crowning the hill around which the roofs are clustered, with a withered tree on the ragged top of its solitary tall grey tower. Gross Laufenburg has seen more stirring times than at present; it was a thriving post town once, a halting-place for all the diligences. Napoleon passed through it, too, on his way to Moscow, and on the roofs of an old tower outside the gate is still to be seen a grotesque metal profile, riddled with the bullets of French conscripts, who made a target of it in sport or insult, when a halt was called. Now the place is sleepy and quiet enough: there are no diligences to rattle and lumber over the stones, and the most warlike spectacle there is provided by the Swiss militia-men as they march in periodically from the neighbouring villages to have their arms inspected, singing choruses all the way. There is a railway, it is true, on the Klein Laufenburg bank, but a railway where the little station and mouth of the tunnel have been so ornamentally treated that at a slight distance a train coming in irresistibly

suggests one of those working models set in motion by either a dropped penny or the fraudulent action of the human breath, as conscience permits. So innocent an affair is powerless to corrupt Laufenburg, and has brought as yet but few foreigners to its gates. English, Russian, and American tourists may perhaps exclaim admiringly as the trains stop, affording a momentary view of the little town grouped compactly on the rocks with the blue-green cataract rushing by—but they are bound for Schaffhausen or the Black Forest or Constance, and cannot break the journey—so the hosts of personally conducted ones pass Laufenburg by, and Laufenburg seems upon the whole resigned to its obscurity. But Mark Ashburn, at least, had felt its gentle attractions, having come upon it almost by accident, as he returned alone from the Black Forest after the tour with Caffyn. His thoughts were constantly of Mabel Langton at that time, and he found a dreamy pleasure in the idea of coming to Laufenburg some day when she should be his companion, which made him look upon everything he saw merely as a background for her fair face. It had seemed a very hopeless dream then, and yet a few months more and the dream had come to pass. He was at Laufenburg once again, and Mabel was by his side. The long nightmare of those days before the wedding was over at last. He had not dared to feel secure, even in the church, so strong was his presentiment of evil. But nothing had happened, the words were spoken which made Mabel his own, and neither man nor angel intervened. And now a week had gone by, during which nothing from without had threatened his happiness; and for a time, as he resolutely shut his eyes to all but the present, he had been supremely happy. Then by degrees the fox revived and began to gnaw once more. His soul sickened as he remembered in what a Fool's Paradise he was living. Unless Holroyd decided to leave England at once with this young Gilroy of whom Caffyn had spoken—a stranger—he would certainly learn how he had been tricked with regard to Mabel's marriage, and this would lead him on to the full discovery of his wrongs. In his mad determination to win her at all costs, Mark had disregarded everything but the immediate future. If shame and misery were to come upon him, he had told himself,

he would at least have the memory of a period of perfect bliss to console him—he might lose all else, but Mabel could not be taken from him. But now, as she took no pains to hide the content which filled her heart, he would scarcely bear to meet her sweet grey eyes for the thought that soon the love he read in them would change to aversion and cold contempt, and each dainty caress was charged for him with a ferocious irony. He knew at last his miserable selfishness in having linked her lot with his, and there were times when in his torture he longed for courage to tell her all, and put an end with his own hand to a happiness which was to him the bitterest of delusions. But he dared not; he had had such marvellous escapes already that he clung to the hope that some miracle might save him yet.

And this was Mark's condition on the morning when this chapter finds him. There is a certain retreat which the town would seem to have provided for the express benefit of lovers—a rustic arbour on a little mount near the railway station overlooking the Rhine Fall. The surly red-bearded signalman who watched over the striped barrier at the level crossing by the tunnel had understood the case from the first, and (not altogether from disinterested motives, perhaps) would hasten to the station as soon as he saw the young couple crossing the bridge and fetch the key of the little wooden gate which kept off all unlicensed intruders.

It was on this mount that Mark stood now with Mabel by his side, looking down on the scene below. Spring had only just set in, and the stunted acacia trees along the road to the bridge were still bare, and had the appearance of distorted candelabra; the poplars showed only the mistiest green as yet, the elms were leafless, and the horse-chestnuts had not unfolded a single one of their crumpled claws. But the day was warm and bright, the sky a faint blue, with a few pinkish-white clouds shaded with dove colour near the horizon; pigeons were fluttering round the lichened piers of the old bridge, which cast a broad band of purple on the bright green water, and the cuckoo was calling incessantly from the distant woods. Opposite were the tall houses, tinted in faint pink and grey and cream colour, with their crazy wooden balconies over-

hanging the rocks, and above the high-pitched brown roofs rose the church and the square tree-crowned ruin, behind which was a background of pine-covered hills, where the snow still lay amongst the trunks in a silver graining on the dark red soil. Such life as the little place could boast was in full stir; every now and then an ox-cart or a little hooded gig would pass along the bridge, and townsmen in brown straw hats would meet half-way with elaborate salutations and linger long to gossip, and bare-headed girls with long plaited pigtails present their baskets and bundles to be peered into or prodded suspiciously by the customs officer stationed at the Baden frontier-post, striped in brilliant crimson and yellow, like a giant sugar-stick. Over on the little Laufenplatz children were playing about amongst the big iron salmon cages, and old people were sitting in the sunshine on the seats by the fountain, where from time to time a woman would fill her shining tin pails, or a man come to rinse out a tall wooden funnel before strapping it on his back. Down on the rocks below, in a little green cradle swinging over the torrent, sat a man busy with his pipe and newspaper, which he occasionally left to haul up and examine the big salmon nets by the aid of the complicated rigging of masts and yards at his side.

"How charming it all is!" said Mabel, turning her bright face to Mark. "I am so glad we didn't let ourselves be talked into going anywhere else. Mother thought we were mad to come here so early in the year. I think she fancied it was somewhere in the heart of the Alps, though, and I never expected anything like this myself."

"How would you like to stay out here more than a month, Mabel—all the summer, perhaps?" he asked.

"It would be delightful, for some things," she said, "but I think I shall be willing to go back when the end of the month comes, Mark; we *must*, you know; our house will be ready for us, and then there is your work waiting for you, you know you would never write a line here, you are so disgracefully idle!"

"I—I was only joking," he said (although his expression was far from jocular); "we will enjoy all this while we can, and when—when the end comes we can remember how happy we were!"

"When the end of this comes we shall only be beginning

to be very happy in another way at home in our own pretty house, Mark. I'm not in the least afraid of the future. Are you ? "

He drew her slight form towards him and pressed her to his heart with a fervour in which there was despair as well as love.

" Do you think I could be afraid of any future, so long as you were part of it, darling ? " he said. " It is only the fear of losing you that comes over me sometimes ! "

" You silly boy ! " said Mabel, looking up at his overcast face with a little tender laugh. " I never knew you could be so sentimental. I am quite well, and I don't mean to die as long as you want me to take care of you ! "

He dreaded to lose her by a parting far bitterer than death ; but he had said too much already, and only smiled sadly to himself at the thought of the ghastly mockery which the memory of her words now might have for him in a day or two. She was daintily rearranging the violets in his buttonhole, and he caught the slender white hands in his, and, lifting them to his lips, kissed them with a passionate humility. A little while, perhaps, and those dear hands would never again thrill warm in his grasp as he felt them now !

" I'm afraid," said Mabel a little later, " you're letting yourself be worried still by something. Is it the new book ? Are you getting impatient to hear about it ? "

" I did expect some letters before this," replied Mark (he was indeed fast growing desperate at Caffyn's silence) ; " but I daresay everything is going on well."

" The train from Basle came in just as we got here," said Mabel. " See, there is the postman crossing the bridge now ; I'm getting anxious too, Mark ; I can't think why I have had no letters from home lately. I hope it is nothing to do with Dolly. She was looking quite ill when we went away, almost as she did—oh, Mark, if I thought Harold had dared to frighten her again ! "

Mark remembered that afternoon in South Audley Street. He had never sought to know why Dolly had gone away so obediently, but now he felt a new uneasiness ; he had never meant her to be frightened ; he would see into it if he ever came home again.

" I don't think he would do such a thing now," he said,

and tried to believe so himself. "I always thought, you know, Mabel, you were rather hard on him about that affair."

"I can never change my mind about it," said Mabel.

"When you are angry, do you never forgive?" asked Mark.

"I could never forgive treachery," she said. "Dolly believed every word he said, and he knew it, and played on her trust in him for some horrible pleasure I suppose he found in it. No, I can never forgive him for that, Mark, never!"

He turned away with a spasm of conscience. If Caffyn had been a traitor, what was he?

He was roused from a gloomy reverie by Mabel's light touch on his arm.

"Look, Mark," she cried, "there is something you wanted to see—there's a timber raft coming down the river."

For within the last few days the Rhine had risen sufficiently to make it possible to send the timber down the streams, instead of by the long and costly transport overland, and as she spoke the compact mass of pine trunks lashed together came slowly round the bend of the river, gradually increasing in pace until it shot the arch of the bridge and plunged through the boiling white rapids, while the raft broke up with a dull thunder followed by sharp reports as the more slender trunks snapped with the strain.

Mark looked on with a sombre fascination, as if the raft typified his life's happiness, till it was all over, and some of the trunks, carried by a cross current into a little creek, had been pulled in to the shore with long hooks, and the rest had floated on again in placid procession, their scraped wet edges gleaming in the sunlight.

As he turned towards the town again, he saw the porter of their hotel crossing the bridge, with the director's little son, a sturdy flaxen-haired boy of about four, running by his side. They passed through the covered part of the bridge and were hidden for an instant, and then turned up the road towards the station.

"They are coming this way," said Mabel. "I do believe little Max is bringing me a letter, the darling! I'll run down to the gate and give him a kiss for it."

For the child's stolid shyness had soon given way to Mabel's advances, and now he would run along the hotel corridors after her like a little dog, and his greatest delight was to be allowed to take her letters to her. They were close to the mount now, the porter in his green baize apron and official flat cap, and little Max in his speckled blue blouse, trotting along to keep up, and waving the envelope he held in his brown fist. Mark could see from where hs stood that it was not a letter that the child was carrying.

"It's a telegram, Mabel," he said, disturbed, though there was no particular cause as yet for being so.

Mabel instantly concluded the worst. "I knew it," she said, and the colour left her cheeks, and she caught at the rough wooden rail for support. "Dolly is ill . . . go down and see what it is. . . I'm afraid!"

Mark ran down to the gate, and took the telegram away from little Max, whose mouth trembled piteously at not being allowed to deliver it in person to the pretty English lady, and—scarcely waiting to hear the porter's explanation that as he had come up to the station he had brought the message with him, knowing that he would probably find the English couple in their favourite retreat—he tore open the envelope as he went up the winding path. The first thing he looked for was the sender's name: *From H. Caffyn, Pillar Hotel, Westwater*, and he dared not read further. Something very serious must have happened, since Caffyn had sent a telegram! Before he could read further Mabel came down to meet him.

"It *is* Dolly, then!" she cried as she saw Mark's face "Oh, let us go back at once, Mark, let us go back!"

"It's not from home," said Mark; "it's private; go up again, Mabel, I will come to you presently."

Mabel turned without a word, wounded that he should have troubles which she might not share with him.

When Mark read the telegram he could scarcely believe his eyes at first. Could it really be that the miracle had happened? For the words ran, "*H. of his own accord decided to leave England without further delay. Started yesterday.*" That could only mean one thing after what Caffyn had said when they met last. Vincent had gone with Gilroy. In India he would be comparatively harmless; it would be even possible now to carry out some

scheme by which the book could be restored without scandal. At last the danger was past! He tore up the telegram, and then sprang up to rejoin Mabel, whose fears vanished as she met his radiant look.

"I hope I didn't frighten you, darling," he said. "It was a business telegram, about which I was getting anxious. I was really afraid to read it for a time; but it's all right, it's good news, Mabel. You don't know what a relief it is to me! And now what shall we do? I feel as if I couldn't stay up here any longer. Shall we go and explore the surrounding country? It won't tire you?"

Mabel was ready to agree to anything in her delight at seeing Mark his old self again, and they went up the narrow street of Klein Laufenburg, and through the gate-house out upon the long white tree-bordered main road, from which they struck into a narrow path which led through the woods to the villages scattered here and there on the distant green slopes.

Mark felt an exquisite happiness as they walked on; the black veil which clouded the landscape was rent. Nature had abandoned her irony. As he walked through the pine-woods and saw the solemn cathedral dimness suddenly chased away as the sunbeams stole down the stately aisles, dappling the red trunks with golden patches and lighting the brilliant emeralds of the moss below, he almost felt it as intended in delicate allusion to the dissipation of his own gloom. Mabel was by his side, and he need tremble no longer at the thought of resigning the sweet companionship; he could listen while she confided her plans and hopes for the future, with no inward foreboding that a day would scatter them to the winds! His old careless gaiety came back as they sat at lunch together in the long low room of an old village inn, while Mabel herself forgot her anxiety about Dolly and caught the infection of his high spirits. They walked back through little groups of low white houses, where the air was sweet with the smell of pine and cattle, and the men were splitting firewood and women gossiping at the doors, and then across the fields where the peasants looked up to mutter a gruffly civil "*G'n Abend*" as they turned the ox-plough at the end of the furrow. Now and then they came upon one of the large crucifixes common in the district, and

stopped to examine the curious collection of painted wooden emblems grouped around the central figure, or passed a wayside shrine like a large alcove, with a woman or child kneeling before the gaudily coloured images, but not too absorbed in prayer to cast a glance in the direction of the footsteps.

The sun had set when they reached the old gatehouse again, and saw through its archway the narrow little street with its irregular outlines in bold relief against a pale-green evening sky.

"I haven't tired you, have I?" said Mark, as they drew near the striped frontier-post at the entrance to the bridge.

"No, indeed," she said; "it has been only too delightful. Why," she exclaimed suddenly, "I thought we were the only English people in Laufenburg. Mark, surely that's a fellow-countryman?"

"Where?" said Mark. The light was beginning to fade a little, and at first he only saw a stout little man with important pursed lips trimming the oil-lamp which lit up the covered way over the bridge.

"Straight in front; in the angle there," said Mabel; and even at that distance he recognised the man whose face he had hoped to see no more. His back was turned to them just then, but Mark could not mistake the figure and dress. They were Vincent Holroyd's!

In one horrible moment the joyous security he had felt only the moment before became a distant memory. He stopped short in an agony of irresolution. What could he do? If he went on and Holroyd saw them, as he must, his first words would tell Mabel everything. Yet he must face him soon; there was no escape, no other way but across that bridge. At least, he thought, the words which ruined him should not be spoken in his hearing; he could not stand by and see Mabel's face change as the shameful truth first burst upon her mind.

His nerves were just sufficiently under his control to allow him to invent a hurried pretext for leaving her. He had forgotten to buy some tobacco in a shop they had just passed, he said; he would go back for it now, she must walk on slowly and he would overtake her directly; and so he turned and left her to meet Vincent Holroyd alone.

CHAPTER XXVIII

At Wastwater

In a little private sitting-room of the rambling old white-washed building, half farmhouse, half country inn, known to tourists as the Pillar Hotel, Wastwater, Holroyd and Caffyn were sitting one evening, nearly a week after their first arrival in the Lake district. Both were somewhat silent, but the silence was not that contented one which comes of a perfect mutual understanding, as appeared by the conscious manner in which they endeavoured to break it, now and then, without much success. By this time, indeed, each was becoming heartily tired of the other, and whatever cordiality there had been between them was fast disappearing on a closer acquaintance. During the day they kept apart by unspoken consent, as Caffyn's natural indolence was enough of itself to prevent him from being Vincent's companion in the long mountain walks by which he tried to weary out his aching sense of failure; but at night, as the hotel was empty at that season, they were necessarily thrown together, and found it a sufficient infliction.

Every day Holroyd determined that he would put an end to it as soon as he could with decency, as a nameless something in Caffyn's manner jarred on him more and more, while nothing but policy restrained Caffyn himself from provoking an open rupture. And so Holroyd was gazing absently into the fire, where the peat and ling cracked noisily as it fell into fantastic peaks and caves, and Caffyn was idly turning over the tattered leaves of a visitors' book, which bore the usual eloquent testimony to the stimulating influence of scenery upon the human intellect. When he came to the last entry, in which, while the size of the mountains was mentioned with some approval, the saltness of the hotel butter was made the subject of severe comment, he shut the book up with a yawn.

"I shall miss the life and stir of all this," he observed, "when I get back to town again." Holroyd did not appear to have heard him, and, as Caffyn had intended a covert sting, the absence of all response did not improve

his temper. "I can't think why the devil they don't send me the paper," he went on irritably. "I ordered it to be sent down here regularly, but it never turns up by any chance. I should think even you must be getting anxious to know what's become of the world outside this happy valley?"

"I can't say I am particularly," said Holroyd; "I'm so used to being without papers now."

"Ah," said Caffyn, with the slightest of sneers, "you've got one of those minds which can be converted into pocket kingdoms on an emergency. I haven't, you know. I'm a poor creature, and I confess I do like to know who of my friends have been the last to die, or burst up, or bolt, or marry—just now the last particularly. I wonder what's going on in the kitchen, eh?" he added, as now and then shouts and laughter came from that direction. "Hallo, Jennie, Polly, whatever your name is," he said to the red-cheeked waiting-maid who entered that instant, "we didn't ring, but never mind; you've just come in time to tell us the cause of these unwonted festivities—who've you got in your kitchen?"

"It's t' hoons," said the girl.

"Hounds, is it? Jolly dogs, rather, I should say."

"Ay, they've killed near here, and they're soopin' now. Postman's come over fra' Drigg wi' a letter—will it be for wan of ye?" and she held out an eccentrically shaped and tinted envelope; "there's a bonny smell on it," she observed.

"It's all right," said Caffyn, "it's mine; no newspapers, eh? Well, perhaps this will do as well!" and as the door closed upon the maid he tore open the letter with some eagerness. "From the magnificent Miss Featherstone—must say there's no stiffness about her style, though! What should *you* say when a letter begins like this—— I forgot, though," he said, stopping himself, "you're the kind of man who gets no love-letters to speak of."

"None at all," said Vincent; "certainly not to speak of."

"Well, it's best to keep out of that sort of thing, I dare say, if you can. Gilda tells me that she's been officiating as bridesmaid—full list of costumes and presents—'sure it will interest me,' is she? Well, perhaps she's right.

Do you know, Holroyd, I rather think I shall go in and see how the jovial huntsmen are getting on in there. You don't mind my leaving you ? "

" Not in the least," said Holroyd ; " I shall be very comfortable here."

" I don't quite like leaving you in here with nothing to occupy your powerful mind, though," and he left the room. He came back almost directly, however, with a copy of some paper in his hand : " Just remembered it as I was shutting the door," he said ; " it's only a stale old *Review* I happened to have in my portmanteau ; but you may not have seen it, so I ran up and brought it down for you."

" It's awfully good of you to think of it, really," said Vincent, much more cordially than he had spoken of late. He had been allowing himself to dislike the other more and more, and this slight mark of thoughtfulness gave him a pang of self-reproach.

" Well, it may amuse you to run through it," said Caffyn, " so I got it for you."

" Thanks " said Holroyd, without offering to open the paper. " I'll look at it presently."

" Don't make a favour of it, you know," said Caffyn ; " perhaps you prefer something heavier (you've mental resources of your own, I know) ; but there it is if you care to look at it."

" I'd give anything to see him read it ! " he thought when he was outside ; " but it really wouldn't be safe. I don't want him to suspect my share in the business." So he went on to the kitchen and was almost instantly on the best of terms with the worthy farmers and innkeepers, who had been tracking the fox on foot all day across the mountains. Vincent shivered as he sat over the fire ; he had overwalked himself and caught a chill trudging home in the rain that afternoon over the squelching rushy turf of Ennerdale, and now he was feeling too languid and ill to rouse himself. There was a letter that must be written to Mabel, but he felt himself unequal to attempting it just then, and was rather glad than otherwise that the hotel inkstand, containing as it did a deposit of black mud and a brace of pre-Adamite pens, decided the matter for him. He took up the *Review* Caffyn had so considerately provided for his entertainment and began to turn over the

pages, more from a sense of obligation than anything else. For some time he could not keep his attention upon what he read.

He had dreamy lapses, in which he stood again on the mountain top he had climbed that day, and looked down on the ridges of the neighbouring ranges, which rose up all around like the curved spines of couching monsters asleep there in the solemn stillness—and then he came to himself with a start as the wind moaned along the winding passages of the inn, stealthily lifting the latch of the primitive sitting-room door, and swelling the carpet in a highly uncanny fashion.

After one of these recoveries he made some effort to fix his thoughts, and presently he found himself reading a passage which had a strangely familiar ring in it—he thought at first it was merely that passing impression of a vague sameness in things which would vanish on analysis —but, as he read on, the impression grew stronger at every line. He turned to the beginning of the article, a notice on a recent book, and read it from beginning to end with eager care. Was he dreaming still, or mad? or how was it that in this work, with a different title and by a strange writer, he seemed to recognise the creation of his own brain? He was sure of it; this book "Illusion" was practically the same in plot and character—even in names —as the manuscript he had entrusted to Mark Ashburn, and believed a hopeless failure. If this was really his book, one of his most cherished ambitions had not failed after all; it was noticed in a spirit of warm and generous praise, the critic wrote of it as having even then obtained a marked success—could it be that life had possibilities for him beyond his wildest hopes?

The excitement of the discovery blinded Vincent just then to all matters of detail; he was too dazzled to think calmly, and only realised that he could not rest until he had found out whether he was deceiving himself or not. Obviously he could learn nothing where he was, and he resolved to go up to town immediately. He would see Mark there, if he was still in London, and from him he would probably get information on which he might act—for, as yet, it did not even occur to Vincent that his friend could have played a treacherous part. Should he confide

in Caffyn before he went? Somehow he felt reluctant to do that; he thought that Caffyn would feel no interest in such things (though here, as we know, he did him an injustice), and he decided to tell no more than might seem absolutely necessary.

He rang and ordered the dog-cart to take him to Drigg next day in time to meet the morning train, and, after packing such things as he would want, lay awake for some time in a sleeplessness which was not irksome, and then lost himself in dreams of a fantastically brilliant future.

When Caffyn had had enough of the huntsmen he returned to the sitting-room, and was disgusted to find that Holroyd had retired and left the *Review*.

"I shall hear all about it to-morrow," he said to himself; "and if he knows nothing—I shall have to enlighten him myself!"

But not being an early riser at any time, he overslept himself even more than usual next day, ignoring occasional noises at his door, the consequence being that, when he came down to breakfast, it was only to find a note from Vincent on his plate: "I find myself obliged to go to town at once on important business," he had written. "I tried to wake you and explain matters, but could not make you hear. I would not go off in this way if I could help it; but I don't suppose you will very much mind."

Caffyn felt a keen disappointment, for he had been looking forward to the pleasure of observing the way in which Vincent would take the discovery; but he consoled himself.

"After all, it doesn't matter," he thought; "there's only one thing that could start him off like that! What he doesn't know he'll pick up as he goes on. When he knows all, what will he do? Shouldn't wonder if he went straight for Mark. Somehow I'm rather sorry for that poor devil of a Mark—he did me a bad turn once, but I've really almost forgiven him, and—but for Mabel—I think I should have shipped dear Vincent off in perfect ignorance—dear Vincent did bore me so! But I want to be quits with charming, scornful Mabel, and, when she discovers that she's tied for life to a sham, I do think it will make her slightly uncomfortable—especially if I can tell her she's indebted to me for it all! Well, in a day or two

there will be an excellent performance of the cottage-act from the 'Lady of Lyons' over there, and I only wish I could have got a seat for it. She'll be magnificent. I do pity that miserable beggar, upon my soul, I do—it's some comfort to think that I never did him any harm; he lost me Mabel—and I kept him from losing her. I can tell him that if he tries any reproaches! "

Meanwhile Vincent was spinning along in the dog-cart on his way to Drigg. There had been a fall of snow during the night, and the mountains across the lake seemed grander and more awful, their rugged points showing sharp and black against the blue-tinted snow which lay in the drifts and hollows, and their peaks rising in glittering silver against a pale-blue sky. The air was keen and bracing, and his spirits rose as they drove past the grey-green lake, and through the plantations of bright young larches and sombre fir. He arrived at Drigg in good time for the London train, and, as soon as it stopped at a station of importance, seized the opportunity of procuring a copy of " Illusion " (one of the earlier editions), which he was fortunate enough to find on the bookstall there. He began to read it at once with a painful interest, for he dreaded lest he had deluded himself in some strange way, but he had not read very far before he became convinced that this was indeed his book—his very own. Here and there, it was true, there were passages which he did not remember having written, some even so obviously foreign to the whole spirit of the book that he grew hot with anger as he read them—but for the most part each line brought back vivid recollections of the very mood and place in which it had been composed. And now he observed something which he had not noticed in first reading the *Review*—namely, that " Illusion " was published by the very firm to which he had sent his own manuscript. Had not Mark given him to understand that Chilton and Fladgate had rejected it? How could he reconcile this and the story that the manuscript had afterwards been accidentally destroyed, with the fact of its publication in its present form? And why was the title changed? Who was this Cyril Ernstone, who had dared to interfere with the text? The name seemed to be one he had met before in some connection—but where? Had not Mark shown him long

ago a short article of his own which had been published in some magazine over that or some very similar signature ? Terrible suspicions flashed across him when these and many other similar circumstances occurred to him. He fought hard against them, however, and succeeded in dismissing them as unworthy of himself and his friend ; he shrank from wronging Mark, even in thought, by believing him capable of such treachery as was implied in these doubts. He felt sure of his honour, and that he had only to meet him to receive a perfectly satisfactory explanation of his conduct in the matter, and then Mark and he would hunt down this impostor, Cyril Ernstone, together, and clear up all that was mysterious enough at present. In the meantime he would try to banish it from his mind altogether, and dwell only on the new prospects which had opened so suddenly before him ; and in this he found abundant occupation for the remainder of his journey.

He reached Euston too late to do anything that night, and the next morning his first act, even before going in search of Mark, was to drive to Kensington Park Gardens with some faint hope of finding that Mabel had returned. But the windows were blank, and even the front door, as he stood there knocking and ringing repeatedly, had an air of dust and neglect about it which prepared him for the worst. After considerable delay a journeyman plumber unfastened the door and explained that the caretaker had just stepped out, while he himself had been employed on a job with the cistern at the back of the house. He was not able to give Vincent much information. The family were all away ; they might be abroad, but he did not know for certain ; so Vincent had to leave with the questions he longed to put unasked. At South Audley Street he was again disappointed. The servant there had not been long in the place, but knew that Mr. Ashburn, the last lodger, had gone away for good and had left no address, saying he would write or call for his letters. Holroyd could not be at ease until he had satisfied himself that his friend had been true to him. He almost hated himself for feeling any doubt on the subject, and yet Mark had certainly behaved very strangely ; in any case he must try to find out who this Cyril Ernstone might be, and he went on to

the City and called at Messrs. Chilton and Fladgate's offices with that intention.

Mr. Fladgate himself came down to receive him in the little room in which Mark Ashburn had once waited.

"You wished to speak to me?" he began.

"You have published a book called 'Illusion,'" said Vincent, going straight to the point in his impatience. "I want to know if you feel at liberty to give me any information as to its author?" Mr. Fladgate's eyebrows went up, and the vertical fold between them deepened.

"Information," he repeated. "Oh, dear me, no; it is not our practice, really. But you can put your question of course, if you like, and I will tell you if we should be justified in answering you," he added, as he saw nothing offensive in his visitor's manner.

"Thank you," said Vincent. "I will, then. Would you be justified in telling me if the name of 'Cyril Ernstone' is a real or assumed one?"

"A few days ago I should have said certainly not; as it is—I presume you are anxious to meet Mr. Ernstone?"

"I am," said Vincent; "very much so."

"Ah, just so; well, it happens that you need not have given yourself the trouble to come here to ask that question. As you are here, however, I can gratify your curiosity without the slightest breach of confidence. There is our later edition of the book on that table; the title page will tell you all you want to know."

Vincent's hand trembled as he took the book. Then he opened it, and the title page did tell him all. His worst suspicions were more than verified. He had been meanly betrayed by the man he had trusted—the man whom he had thought his dearest friend! The shock stunned him almost as if it had found him totally unprepared.

"It was Mark, then," he said only half aloud, as he put the book down again very gently.

"Ah, so you know him?" said Mr. Fladgate, who stood by smiling.

"He was one of my oldest friends," replied Vincent, still in a low voice.

"And you suspected him, eh?" continued the publisher, who was not the most observant of men.

"He took some pains to put me off the scent," said Vincent.

"Yes; he kept his secret very well, didn't he? Now, you see, he feels quite safe in declaring himself—a very brilliant young man, sir. I congratulate you in finding an old friend in him."

"I am very fortunate, I know," said Vincent, grimly.

"Oh, and it will be a pleasant surprise for him too!" said Mr. Fladgate, "very pleasant on both sides. Success hasn't spoilt him in the least—you won't find him at all stuck up!"

"No," agreed Vincent, "I don't think I shall. And now perhaps you will have no objection to give me his present address, and then I need trouble you no longer at present."

"I see—you would naturally like to congratulate him!"

"I should like to let him know what I think about it," said Holroyd.

"Exactly—well, let me see, I *ought* to have his address somewhere. I had a letter from him only the other day—did I put it on my file? no, here it is,—yes, 'Hotel Rheinfall, Gross Laufenburg, Switzerland'—if you write to your friend any time this month, it will find him there."

Vincent took the address down in his notebook and turned to go.

"Good day," said Mr. Fladgate, "delighted to have been of any service to you—by the way, I suppose you saw your friend's"—but before he could allude to Mark Ashburn's marriage he found himself alone, Vincent having already taken a somewhat abrupt departure.

He could not trust himself to hear Mark talked of in this pleasant vein any longer. It had required some effort on his part to restrain himself when he first knew the truth, and only the consciousness that his unsupported assertions would do no good had kept him silent. He would wait to make his claim until he could bring evidence that could not be disregarded—he would go to Mark Ashburn and force him to give him an acknowledgment which would carry conviction to every mind.

He would go at once. Mark had evidently gone to this place, Gross Laufenburg, with the idea of avoiding him—he would follow him there! He lost no time in making

inquiries, and soon learnt that Gross Laufenburg was about an hour's journey from Basle, and that by leaving London next morning he would catch the fast train through from Calais to Basle, and arrive there early on the following day. He made all necessary arrangements for starting, and wrote to Caffyn to say that he was going abroad, though he did not enter into further details, and on receiving this letter Caffyn took the opportunity of gratifying his malicious sense of humour by despatching at considerable trouble and expense to himself (for Wastwater is far enough from any telegraph poles) the message Mark had received from little Max's hand on the mount.

Vincent set out on his journey with a fierce impatience for the end, when he would find himself face to face with this man whom he had thought his friend, whose affectionate emotion had touched and cheered him when they met at Plymouth, and who had been deliberately deceiving him from the first.

All the night through he pictured the meeting to himself, with a stern joy at the thought of seeing Mark's handsome false face change with terror at the sight of him—would he beg for mercy, or try to defend himself? Would he dare to persist in his fraud? At the bare thought of this last possibility a wave of mad passion swept over his brain—he felt that in such a case he could not answer for what he might say or do.

But with the morning calmer thoughts came; he did not want revenge—only justice. Mark should restore everything in full—it was his own fault if he had placed himself in such a position that he could not do that without confessing his own infamy. If there was any way of recovering his own and sparing Mark to some extent in the eyes of the world, he would agree to it for the sake of their old friendship, which had been strong and sincere on his own side at least; but no sentimental considerations should stand between him and his right.

Basle was reached in the early morning, and the pretty city was flushed with rose, and the newly risen sun was sparkling on the variegated roofs and cupolas as he drove across the bridge to the Baden station. He felt jaded and ill after a journey in which he had slept but little, and, finding that he would not be able to go to Laufenburg for

some time, was obliged to recruit himself by a few hours' sleep at an hotel.

It was past midday when he awoke, and the next train, which started late in the afternoon, brought him to Laufenburg just as the last sunset rays were reddening the old grey ruin on the hill, and the towns and river below showed themselves in an enchanted atmosphere of violet haze.

Leaving his luggage at the station until he should have found a place to stay at for the night, Vincent walked down to the bridge, intending to go to the Rheinfall Hotel and inquire for Mark. There is a point where the covered portion of the bridge ends, and the structure is supported by a massive stone pier, whose angles, facing up and down the river and protected by a broad parapet, form recesses on either side of the roadway. Here he stopped for a moment, fascinated by the charm of the scene, and leaning upon the ledge watched the last touches of scarlet fading out of the slate-coloured cloud-masses in the west. He was roused from this occupation by a voice which called his name in a low tremulous tone which sent the blood rushing back to his heart, and as he turned to see a graceful figure just passing out from under the arched roof towards him, he recognised Mabel Langton.

The dying light fell full on her face, which had an expression half of awe, half of incredulous joy—she came towards him, holding out two eager hands, and the awe vanished, but the joy grew more assured.

"Vincent!" she cried. "Is it really you? you have come back to us—or am I dreaming?"

He had met her at last, and in this place to which he had come anticipating nothing but pain and contest . . . she had not forgotten him—the glad shining in her sweet eyes told him that, and a great and glorious hope sprang up within him.

In her presence he forgot his wrongs, he forgot the very object of a journey which had thus led him to her side, all his past feelings seemed petty and ignoble, and fame itself a matter of little worth; he took her small gloved hands and stood there, resting his eyes on the dear face which had haunted his thought through all his weary exile.

"Thank God," he murmured, "it is no dream—this time!"