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Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Dostoyevsky Smith Willis
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Henry Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
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Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Vinci
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Gogol Busch
Darwin Thoreau Twain Plato Scott
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Dickens Plato Scott
Andersen Andersen Cervantes Burton Hesse Harte
London Descartes Wells Voltaire Cooke
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The Arbiter A Novel

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THE ARBITER

A NOVEL

BY

LADY F. E. E. BELL

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PROPHETS,"
"FAIRY-TALE PLAYS," ETC., ETC.

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[Pg 1]

THE ARBITER

CHAPTER I

"It is a great mistake," said Miss Martin emphatically, "for any sensible woman to show a husband she adores him."

"Even her own, Aunt Anna?" said Lady Gore, with a contented smile which Aunt Anna felt to be ignoble.

"Of course I meant her own," she said stiffly. "I should hardly have thought, Elinor, that after being married so many years you would have made jokes of that sort."

"That is just it," said Lady Gore, still annoyingly pleased with herself. "After adoring my husband for twenty-four years, it seems to me that I am an authority on the subject."

"Well, it is a great mistake," repeated Miss Martin firmly, as she got up, feeling that the repetition notably strengthened her position. "As I said before, no sensible woman should do it."

Lady Gore began to feel a little annoyed. It is [Pg 2] fatiguing to hear one's aunt say the same thing twice. The burden of conversation is unequally distributed if one has to think of two answers to each one remark of one's interlocutor.

"And you are bringing up Rachel to do the same thing, you know," the old lady went on, roused to fresh indignation at the thought of her great-niece, and she pulled her little cloth jacket down, and generally shook herself together. Crabbed age and jackets should not live together. Age should be wrapped in the ample and tolerant cloak, hider of frailties. It was not Aunt Anna's fault, however, if her garments were uncompromising and scanty of outline. Predestination reigns nowhere more strongly than in clothes, and it would have been inconceivable that either Miss Martin's body or her mind should have assimilated the harmonious fluid adaptability of the draperies that framed and surrounded Lady Gore as she lay on her couch.

"I don't think it does her much harm," said Lady Gore, a good deal understating her conviction of her daughter's perfections.

"That's as may be," said Miss Martin encouragingly. "Where is she to-day, by the way?" she said, stopping on her way to the door.

"For a wonder she is not at home," Lady Gore said. "She has gone to stay away from me for the first time in her life; she is at Mrs. Feversham's, at Maidenhead, for the night."

"How girls do gad nowadays, to be sure!" said Miss Martin.

[Pg 3]

"I hardly think that can be said of Rachel," said Lady Gore.

"Whether Rachel does or not, my dear Elinor, girls do gad — there is no doubt about that. I'm sorry I have not seen William. He is too busy, I suppose," with a slightly ironical intonation. "Goodbye!"

"Can you find your way out?" said Lady Gore, ringing a hand-bell.

"Oh dear, yes," said Miss Martin. "Goodbye," and out she went.

Lady Gore leant back with a sigh of relief. A companion like Miss Martin makes a most excellent foil to solitude, and after she had departed, Lady Gore lay for a while in a state of pleasant quiescence. Why, she wondered, even supposing she herself did think too well of her husband, should Miss Martin object? Why do on-lookers appear to resent the spectacle of a too united family? There is, no doubt, something exasperating in an excess of indiscriminating kindness. But it is an amiable fault after all; and, besides, more discrimination may sometimes be required to discover the hidden good lurking in a fellow-creature than to perceive and deride his more obvious absurdities and defects. It would no doubt be a very great misfortune to see our belongings as they appear to the world at large, and the fay who should "gie us that giftie" ought indeed to be banished from every christening. Let us console ourselves: she commonly is.

But poor Miss Martin had no adoring belongings to shed the genial light of affection on her doings, [Pg 4] to give her even mistaken admiration, better than none at all. Life had dealt but bleakly with her; she had always been in the shadow: small wonder then if her

nature was blighted and her view of life soured. Lady Gore smiled to herself, a little wistfully perhaps, as she tried to put herself in Miss Martin's place—of all mental operations one of the most difficult to achieve successfully. Lady Gore's sheer power of sympathy might enable her to get nearer to it than many people, but still she inevitably reckoned up the balance, after the fashion of our kind, seeing only one side of the scale and not knowing what was in the other, and as she did so, it seemed to her still possible that Miss Martin might have the best of it, or at any rate might not fall so short of the best as at first appeared. For in spite of her age she still had the great inestimable boon of health; she was well, she was independent, she could, when it seemed good to her, get up and go out and join in the life of other people. While as for herself ... and again the feeling of impotent misery, of rebellion against her own destiny, came over Lady Gore like a wave whose strength she was powerless to resist. For since the rheumatic fever which five years ago had left her practically an incurable invalid, the effort to accept her fate still needed to be constantly renewed; an effort that had to be made alone, for the acceptance of such a fate by those who surround the sufferer is generally made, more or less, once for all in a moment of emotion, and then gradually becomes part of the habitual [Pg 5] circumstance of daily life. Mercifully she did not realise all at once the thing that had happened to her. In the first days when she was returning to health—she who up to the time of her illness had been so full of life and energy—the mere pleasure in existence, the mere joy of the summer's day in which she could lie near an open window, look out on the world and the people in it, was enough; she was too languid to want to do more. Then her strength slowly returned, and with it the desire to resume her ordinary life. But weeks passed in which she still remained at the same stage, they lengthened into months, and brought her gradually a horrible misgiving. Then, at last, despairingly she faced the truth, and knew that from all she had been in the habit of doing, from all that she had meant to do, she was cut off for ever. She began to realise then, as people do who, unable to carry their treasures with them, look over them despairingly before they cast them away one by one, all that her ambitions had been. She smiled bitterly to herself during the hours in which she lay there looking her fate in the face and trying to encounter it with becoming courage, as she realised how,

with more than half of her life, at the best, behind her, she had up to this moment been spending the rest of it still looking onward, still living in the future. She had dreamt of the time when, helped by her, her husband should go forward in his career, when, steered under her guidance, Rachel would go along the smiling path to happiness. And now, instead, she was to be to [Pg 6] husband and daughter but the constant object of care and solicitude and pity. Yes, pity—that was the worst of it. "An invalid," she repeated to herself, and felt that at last she knew what that word meant that she had heard all her life, that she had applied unconcernedly to one fellow-creature or another without realising all that it means of tragedy, of startled, growing dread, followed by hopeless and despairing acceptance. Then there came a day when, calling all her courage to her help, she made up her mind bravely to begin life afresh, to sketch her destiny from another point of view, and yet to make a success of the picture. The battle had to be fought out alone. Sir William, after the agony of thinking he was going to lose her, after the rapture of joy at knowing that the parting was not to be yet, had insensibly become accustomed, as one does become accustomed to the trials of another, to the altered conditions of their lives, and it was even unconsciously a sort of agreeable certainty that whatever the weather, whatever the claims of the day, she would every afternoon be found in the same place, never away, never occupied about the house, always ready to listen, to sympathise. She had made up her mind that since now she was debarred from active participation in the lives of her husband and daughter, she would by unceasing, strenuous daily effort keep abreast of their daily interests, and be by her sympathy as much a part of their existence as though she had been, as before, their constant companion.

[Pg 7]

The smallness of such a family circle may act in two ways: it may either send the members of it in different directions, or it may draw them together in an intense concentration of interests and sympathy. This latter was happily the condition of the Gores. The varying degrees of their strength and weaknesses had been so mercifully adjusted by destiny that each could find in the other some support—whether real or fancied does not matter. For illusions, if they last, form as good a working basis for life as reality, and in the Gore

household, whether by imagination or not, the equipoise of life had been most skilfully adjusted. The amount of shining phantasies that had interwoven themselves into the woof of the family destiny had become so much a part of the real fabric that they were indistinguishable from it.

As far as Sir William's career, if we may give it that name, was concerned, the calamity which had fallen upon his wife had in some strange manner explained and justified it. The younger son of a country gentleman of good family, he had, by the death of his elder brother, come into the title, the estate, and the sufficient means bequeathed by his father. Elinor Calthorpe, the daughter of a neighbouring squire, had been ever since her childhood on terms of intimate friendship with the Gore boys; as far back as she could remember, William Gore, big, strong, full of life and spirits, a striking contrast to his delicate elder brother, had been her ideal of everything that was manly and splendid: [Pg 8] and when after his brother's death he asked her to marry him, she felt that life had nothing more to offer. In that belief she had never wavered. Sir William, by nature estimable and from circumstances irreproachable, made an excellent husband; that is to say, that during nearly a quarter of a century of marriage he had never wavered either in his allegiance to his wife or in his undivided acceptance of her allegiance, and hers alone. She on her side had never once during all those years realised that the light which shone round her idol came from the lamp she herself kept alive before the shrine, nor even that it was her more acute intelligence, blind in one direction only, which suggested the opinion or course of action that he quite unconsciously afterwards offered to the world as his own. It was she who infused into his life every possibility beyond the obvious. It was her keenness, her ardent interest in those possibilities, that urged him on. When she finally persuaded him to stand for Parliament as member for their county town, it was in a great measure her popularity that won him the seat.

He was in the House without making any special mark for two years, with a comfortable sense, not clearly stated perhaps even to himself, that there was time before him. Men go long in harness in these days; some day for certain that mark would be made. Then his party went out, and in spite of another unsuccessful attempt in his

own constituency, and then in one further afield, he was left [Pg 9] by the roadside, while the tide of politics swept on. His wife consoled herself by thinking that at the next opportunity he would surely get in. But when the opportunity came, she was so ill that he could not leave her, and the moment passed. Then when they began to realise what her ultimate condition might be, and she was recommended to take some special German waters which might work a cure, he and Rachel went with her. Sir William, when the necessity of going abroad first presented itself to him—a heroic necessity for the ordinary stay-at-home Englishman—had felt the not unpleasant stimulus, the tightening of the threads of life, which the need for a given unexpected course of action presents to the not very much occupied person. Then came those months away from his own country and his own surroundings—months in which he acquired the habit of reading an English newspaper two days old and being quite satisfied with it, when everything else also had two days' less importance than it would at home, and gradually he tasted the delights of the detached onlooker who need do nothing but warn, criticise, prophesy, protest. With absolute sincerity to himself he attributed this attitude which Fate had assigned to him as entirely owing to his having had to leave England on his wife's account. He had quite easily, quite calmly drifted into a conviction that for his wife's sake he had chivalrously renounced his chances of distinction. Lady Gore on her side—it was another bitterness added to the rest—did not [Pg 10] for a moment doubt that it was her condition and the sacrifice that her husband had made of his life to her which had ruined his political career. And they both of them gradually succeeded in forgetting that the alternative had not been a certainty. They believed, they knew, they even said openly, that if it had not been for his incessant attendance on her he would have gone into the House, he would have taken office, and eventually have been one of the shapers of his country's destiny. The phraseology of their current talk to one another and to outsiders reflected this belief. "If I had continued in the House," Sir William would say, with a manner and inflection which conveyed that he had left it of his own free will and not attempted to return to it, "I should have—" or, "If I had taken office—" or even sometimes, "If I were leading the Liberal party—" and no one, indeed, was in a position to affirm that these things might not have been. If a man's capacities are hinted at or

even stated by himself to his fellow-creatures with a certain amount of discretion, and if he does not court failure by putting them to the proof, it does not occur to most people to contradict him, and the possible truth of the contradiction soon sinks out of sight. So Sir William sat on the brink of the river and watched the others plunging into the waves, diving, rising, breasting the current, and was agreeably supported by the consciousness that if Fate had so ordained it, he himself would have been capable of performing all these feats just as [Pg 11] creditably. No need now to stifle a misgiving that in the old days would occasionally obtrude itself into the glowing views of the future, that he was possibly not of a stature to play the great parts for which he might be cast. On the contrary, what now remained was the blessed peace brought by renunciation, the calm renunciation of prospects that in the light of ceasing to try to attain them seemed absolutely certain. No one now could ever say that he had failed. He had been prevented by circumstances from achieving any success of a definite and conspicuous kind, although the position he had attained, the consideration nearly always accorded to the ordinary prosperous middle-aged Englishman of the upper classes who has done nothing to forfeit his claim to it, and more than all, the plenitude of assurance which he received of his deserts from his immediate surroundings, might well have been considered success enough. And on his return to England, after eighteen months of wandering, although he was no longer in Parliament and had no actual voice in deciding the politics of his country, it pleased him to think that if he chose he could still take an active line, that he could belong to the volunteer army of orators who make speeches at other people's elections and who write letters to the newspaper that the world may know their views on a given situation.

At the time of which we speak political parties in England were trying in vain to re-adjust an equable balance. Conservatives and Unionists, [Pg 12] almost indistinguishable, were waving the Imperialist banner in the face of the world. The Liberals, once the advanced and subversive party, were now raising their voices in protest, tentatively advocating the claims of what they considered the oppressed races. Derisive epithets were hurled at them by their enemies; the Pro-Boers, the Little Englanders took the place of the

Home Rulers of the past. Sir William was by tradition a Liberal. Inspired by that tradition he wrote an article on the "Attitude of England," which appeared in a Liberal Review. Thrilled by the sight of his utterances in print, he determined in his secret soul to expand that article into a book. The secret was of course shared by his wife, who fervently believed in the yet unwritten masterpiece. The fact that in spite of the dearth of prominent men in his party, of men who had in them the stuff of a leader, that party had not turned to Gore in its need, aroused no surprise, no misgiving, in either his mind or that of his wife. It was simply in their eyes another step in that path of voluntary renunciation which he was treading for her sake.

With this possible interpretation of all missed opportunities entirely taken for granted, Sir William's existence flowed peacefully and prosperously on. It was with an agreeable consciousness of his dignity and prestige that he sat once or twice in the week at the board meetings of one or two governing bodies to which he belonged. They figured in his scheme of existence as his hours of [Pg 13] work, the sterner, more serious occupation which justified his hours of leisure. The rest of that leisure was spent in happy, congenial uniformity: a morning ride, followed by some time in his comfortable study, during which he might be supposed to be writing his book; an hour or two at his club; a game or two of chess, a pastime in which he excelled; and behind all this a beautiful background, the deep and enduring affection of his wife, whose companionship, and needs, and admiration for himself filled up all the vacant spaces in his life. He would, however, have been genuinely surprised if he had realised that it was by a constant, deliberate intention that she succeeded in entertaining him, in amusing him, as much as she did her friends and acquaintances; if he had thought that she had made up her mind that never, while she had power to prevent it, should he come into his own house and find it dull. And he never did.

[Pg 14]

CHAPTER II

To be a popular invalid is in itself a career: it blesses those that call and those that receive. The visitors who used day by day to go

and see Lady Gore used to congratulate themselves as they stood on her doorstep on the knowledge that they would find her within, and glad—or so each one individually thought—to see them. She was an attractive person, certainly, as she lay on her sofa. Her hair had turned white prematurely early, it enhanced the effect of the delicate faded colouring and the soft brown eyes. The sweet brightness of her manner was mingled with dignity, with the comprehensive sympathy and pliability of a woman of the world; an innate distinction of mind and person radiated from her looks. Those who watched the general grace and repose of her demeanour and surroundings involuntarily felt that there might be advantages in a condition of life which prevented the mere thought of being hot, untidy, hurried, like some of the ardent ladies who used to rush into her room between a committee meeting and a tea-party and tell her breathlessly of their flustered doings. [Pg 15] Rachel had inherited something of her mother's dainty charm. She had the same brown eyes and delicate features, framed by bright brown hair. It was certainly encouraging to those who looked upon the daughter to see in the mother what effect the course of the years was likely to have on such a personality. There was not much dread in the future when confronted with such a picture. But in truth, as far as most of the spectators who frequented the house were concerned, Rachel's personality had been merged in her mother's, and any comparison between the two was perhaps more likely to be in the direction of wondering whether Rachel in the course of years would, as time went on, become so absolutely delightful a human product as Lady Gore. Rachel's own attitude on this score was entirely consonant with that of others. Her mother was the centre of her life, the object of her passionate devotion, her guide, her ideal. It was when Rachel was seventeen that Lady Gore became helpless and dependent, and the girl suddenly found that their positions were in some ways reversed; it was she who had to take care of her mother, to inculcate prudence upon her, to minister incessantly to her daily wants; there was added to the daughter's love the yearning care that a loving woman feels for a helpless charge, and there was hardly room for anything else in her life. Rachel, fortunately for herself and for others, had no startling originality; no burning desire, arrived at womanhood, to strike out a path for herself. She was unmoved by the conviction which possesses [Pg 16] most of her young contemporar-

ies that the obvious road cannot be the one to follow. Lady Gore's perceptions, far more acute as regarded her daughter than her husband, and rendered more vivid still by the whole concentration of her maternal being in Rachel, had entirely realised, while she wondered at it, the complete lack in her child of the modern ferment that seethes in the female mind of our days. But she had finally come to see that if Rachel was entirely happy and contented with her life it was a result to rejoice over rather than be discontented with, even though her horizon did not extend much beyond her own home. Besides, it is always well to rejoice over a result we cannot modify. Needless to say that the girl, who blindly accepted her mother's opinion even on indifferent subjects, was, biassed by her own affection, more than ready to endow her father with all the qualities Lady Gore believed him to possess. She had arrived at the age of twenty-two without realising that there could be for her any claims in the world that would be paramount to these, anything that could possibly come before her allegiance to her parents.

One of the bitterest pangs of Lady Gore's bitter renunciation was the moment when she realised that she could not be the one to guide Rachel's first steps in a wider world than that of her home, that all her plans and theories about the moment when the girl should grow up, when her mother would accompany her, steer her, help her at every step, must necessarily be brought to nought. And this mother, alas! [Pg 17] had been so full of plans; she had so anxiously watched other people and their daughters, so carefully accumulated from her observation the many warnings and the few examples which constitute what is called the teaching of experience. But when the time came the lesson had been learnt in vain. Rachel's eighteenth and nineteenth years were spent in anxious preoccupations about her mother's health, in solicitous care of her father and the household, and the girl had glided gently from childhood into womanhood with nothing but increased responsibility, instead of more numerous pleasures, to mark the passage. But the result was something very attractively unlike the ordinary product of the age. She had had, from the conditions of her life, no very intimate and confidential girl friends by whose point of view to readjust and possibly lower her own, and with whom to compare every fleeting manifestation of thought and feeling. She remained unconsciously

surrounded by an atmosphere of reticence and reserve, a certain shy aloofness, mingled with a direct simple dignity, that gave to her bearing an ineffable grace and charm. The mothers of more dashing damsels were wont to say that she was not "effective" in a ballroom. It was true that she had nothing particularly accentuated in demeanour or appearance which would at once arrest attention, an inadequate equipment, perhaps, in the opinion of those who hold that it is better to produce a bad effect than none at all.

Mrs. Feversham, of Bruton Street, was an old [Pg 18] friend of Lady Gore's, whose junior she was by a few years. She had no daughters of her own, and had in consequence an immense amount of undisciplined energy at the service of those of other people. She was not a lady whose views were apt to be matured in silence; she was ardently concerned about Rachel's future, and she was constantly imparting new projects to Lady Gore, who received them with smiling equanimity.

It was at an "At Home" given by Mrs. Feversham one evening early in the season, when the rooms were full of hot people talking at the top of their voices, that the hostess, looking round her with a comprehensive glance, saw Rachel standing alone. There was, however, in the girl's demeanour none of that air of aggressive solitude sometimes assumed by the neglected. The eye fell upon Rachel with a sense of rest, looking on one who did not wish to go anywhere or to do anything, who was standing with unconscious grace an entirely contented spectator of what was passing before her. Mrs. Feversham's one idea, however, as she perceived her was instantly to suggest that she should do something else, that at any price some one should take her to have some tea, or make her eat or walk, or do anything, in fact, but stand still. Rachel, however, at the moment she was swooped down upon, was well amused; a smile was unconsciously playing on her lips as she listened to an absurd conversation going on between a young man and a girl just in front of her.

[Pg 19]

"By George!" said the boy, "it is hot. Let's go and have ices."

"Ices? Right you are," the girl replied, and attempted to follow her gallant cavalier, who had started off, trying to make for himself a

path through the serried hot crowd, leaving the lady he was supposed to be convoying to follow him as near as she might.

"Hallo!" he said suddenly. "There's Billy Crowther. Do you mind if I go and slap him on the back?"

"All right, buck up, then, and slap him on the back," replied the fair one. "I'll go on." Thus gracefully encouraged, the youth flung himself in another direction, and almost overturned his hostess, who was coming towards Rachel.

"Sorry," he said, apparently not at all discomposed, and continued his wild career.

"Well! the young men of the present day!..." said Mrs. Feversham, as she joined Rachel; then suddenly remembering that a wholesale condemnation was not the attitude she wished to inculcate in her present hearer, she went on: "Not that they are all alike, of course; some of them are—are different," she supplemented luminously. "Now, my child, have you had anything to eat?"

"I don't think I want anything, thank you," said Rachel.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Mrs. Feversham. "You must." And, looking round for the necessary escort, she saw a new arrival coming up the stairs. "The [Pg 20] very man!" she said to herself, but fortunately not aloud, as "Mr. Rendel!" was announced. A young man of apparently a little over thirty, with deep-set, far-apart eyes and clear-cut features, came up and took her outstretched hand with a little air of formal politeness refreshing after the manifestations she had been deploring.

"I am so glad to see you," she said cordially. Rendel greeted her with a smile. "Do you know Miss Gore?" Rendel and Rachel bowed.

"I have met Sir William Gore more than once," he said.

"She is dying for something to eat," said Mrs. Feversham, to Rachel's great astonishment. "Do take her downstairs, Mr. Rendel." The young people obediently went down together.

"I am not really dying for something to eat," Rachel said, as soon as they were out of hearing of their hostess. "In fact, I am not sure that I want anything."

"Oh, don't you?" said Rendel.

"Two hours ago I was still dining, you see."

"Of course," said Rendel, "so was I." They both laughed. They went on nevertheless to the door of the room from whence the clatter of glass and china was heard.

"Now, are you sure you won't be 'tempted,' according to the received expression?" said Rendel, as a hot waiter hurried past them with some dirty plates and glasses on a tray.

"No, I am afraid I am not at all tempted," said Rachel.

[Pg 21]

"Well, let us look for a cooler place," said Rendel. What a soothing companion this was he had found, who did not want him to fight for an ice or a sandwich! They went up again to a little recess on the landing by an open window. The roar of tongues came down to them from the drawing-room.

"Just listen to those people," said Rendel. A sort of wild, continuous howl filled the air, as though bursting from a company of the condemned immured in an eternal prison, instead of from a gathering of peaceable citizens met together for their diversion. "Isn't it dreadful to realise what our natural note is like?" he added. "It is hideous."

"It isn't pretty, certainly," said Rachel, unable to help smiling at his face of disgust. The roar seemed to grow louder as it went on.

"It is a pity we can't chirp and twitter like birds," said Rendel.

"I don't know that that would be very much better," said Rachel. "Have you ever been in a room with a canary singing? Think of a room with as many canaries in it as this."

"Yes, I daresay—it might have been nearly as bad," Rendel said; "though if we were canaries we should be nicer to look at perhaps," and his eye fell on an unprepossessing elderly couple who were descending the stairs with none of the winsomeness of singing birds. "Have you read Maeterlinck's 'Life of the Bees'?"

[Pg 22]

"No," Rachel answered simply.

"I agree with him," Rendel said, "that it would be just as difficult to get any idea of what human beings are about by looking down on them from a height, as it is for us to discover what insects are doing when we look down on them."

"Yes, imagine looking at that," said Rachel, pointing towards the drawing-room. "You would see people walking up and down and in and out for no reason, and jostling each other round and round."

"Yes," said Rendel. "How aimless it would look! Not more aimless than it is, after all," he added.

"It amuses me, all the same," said Rachel, rather deprecatingly. "I mean, to come to a party of this kind every now and then; perhaps because I don't do it very often."

"Why, don't you go out every night of your life in the season?" said Rendel; "I thought all young ladies did."

"I don't," she said. "It isn't quite the same for me as it is for other people—at least, I mean that I have only my father to go out with;" and then, seeing in his face the interpretation he put on her words, she added, "my mother is an invalid, and we do not like to leave her too often."

"Ah! but she is alive still," said Rendel, with a tone that sounded as if he understood what the contrary might have meant.

"Oh yes," said Rachel quickly. "Yes, yes, indeed she is alive," in a voice that told the proportion that fact assumed in existence.

[Pg 23]

"My mother died long years ago," said Rendel, in a lower voice. "Not so long, though, that I did not understand." Rachel looked at him with a soft light of pity flooding her face, and drawing the words out of him, he knew not how. "My father married again," he said, "while I was still a child—while I needed looking after, at least."

"Oh," said Rachel, "you had a stepmother?"

"Yes," he said, "I had a stepmother," and his face involuntarily became harder as he recalled that long stretch of loveless years—the