

CHAPTER XV

CONCERNING DR. VEREKER AND HIS MAMMA, WHO HAD KNOWN IT ALL ALONG. HOW SALLY LUNCHEd WITH THE SALES WILSONS, AND GOT SPECULATING ABOUT HER FATHER. HOW TISHY LET OUT ABOUT MAJOR ROPER. HOW THERE WAS A WEDDING

THE segment of a circle of Society that did duty for a sphere, in the case of Mrs. Nightingale and Sally, was collectively surprised when it heard of the intended marriage of the former, having settled in its own mind that the latter was the magnet to Mr. Fenwick's lodestone. But each several individual that composed it had, it seemed, foreseen exactly what was going to happen, and had predicted it in language that could only have been wilfully mistaken by persons interested in proving that the speaker was not a prophet. Exceptional insight had been epidemic. The only wonder was (to the individual speaker) that Mrs. Nightingale had remained single so long, and the only other wonder was that none of the other cases had seen it. They had evidently only taken seership mildly.

Dr. Vereker had a good opportunity of studying omniscience of a malignant type in the very well marked case of his own mother. You may remember Sally's denunciation of her as an old hen that came wobbling down on you. When her son (in the simplicity of his heart) announced to her as a great and curious piece of news that Mr. Fenwick was going to marry Mrs. Nightingale, she did not even look up from her knitting to reply: "What did I say to you, Conny?" For his name was Conrad, as Sally had reported. His discretion was not on the alert on this occasion, for he incautiously asked, "When?"

The good lady laid down her knitting on her knees, and folded her hands, interlacing her fingers, which were fat, as far as they would go, and leaning back with closed eyes—eyes intended to remain closed during anticipated patience.

"Fancy asking me that!" said she.

"Well, but—hang it!—*when?*"

"Do not use profane language, Conrad, in your mother's presence. Can you really ask me, 'When?' Try and recollect!"

Conrad appeared to consider; but as he had to contend with the problem of finding out when a thing had been said, the only clue to the nature of which was the date of its utterance, it was no great wonder that his cogitations ended in a shake of the head subdivided into its elements—shakes taken a brace at a time—and an expression of face as of one who whistles *sotto voce*. His questioner must have been looking between her eyelids, which wasn't playing fair; for she indicted him on the spot, and pushed him, as it were, into the dock.

"*That*, I suppose, means that I speak untruth. Very well, my dear!" Resignation set in.

"Come, mother, I say, now! Be a reasonable maternal parent. When did I say anybody spoke untruth?"

"My dear, you *said* nothing. But if your father could have heard what you did *not* say, you know perfectly well, my dear Conrad, what he would have *thought*. Was he likely to sit by and hear me insulted? Did he ever do so?"

The doctor was writing letters at a desk-table that he used for miscellaneous correspondence as much as possible, in order that this very same mother of his should be left alone as little as possible. He ended a responsible letter, and directed it, and made it a thing of the past with a stamp on it in a little basket on the hall-table outside. Then he came back to his mother, and bestowed on her the kiss, or peck, of peace. It always made him uncomfortable when he had to go away to the hospital under the shadow of dissension at home.

"Well, mother dear, what was it you really did say about the Fenwick engagement?"

"It would be more proper, my dear, to speak of it as the Nightingale engagement. You will say it is a matter of form, but . . ."

"All right. The Nightingale engagement. . . ."

"My dear! So abrupt! To your mother!"

"Well, dear mammy, what was it, really now?" This cajolery took effect, and the Widow Vereker's soul softened. She resumed her knitting.

"If you don't remember what it was, dear, it doesn't matter." The doctor saw that nothing short of complete concession would procure a tranquil sea.

"Of course, I remember perfectly well," he said mendaciously. He knew that, left alone, his mother would supply a summary of what he remembered. She did so, with a bound.

"I said, my dear (and I am glad you recollect it, Conrad)—I said from the very first, when Mr. Fenwick was living at Krakatoa—it was all *quite* right, my dear. Do you think I don't know? A grown-up daughter and two servants!)—I said that any one with eyes in their head could see. And has it turned out exactly as I expected, or has it not?"

"Exactly."

"Very well, dear. I'm glad you say so. Now, don't contradict me another time."

The close observer of the actual (whom we lay claim to be) has occasionally to report the apparently impossible. We do not suppose we shall be believed when we say that Mrs. Vereker added: "Besides, there was the Major."

Professor Sales Wilson, Lætitia's father, was *the* Professor Sales Wilson. Only, if you had seen that eminent scholar when he got outside his library by accident and wanted to get back, you wouldn't have thought he was *the* anybody, and would probably have likened him to a disestablished hermit-crab—in respect, that is, of such a one's desire to disappear into his shell, and that respect only. For no hermit-crab would ever cause an acquaintance to wonder why he should shave at all if he could do it no better than that; nor what he was talking to himself about so frequently; nor whether he polished his spectacles so long at a time to give the deep groove they were making across his nose a chance of filling up; nor whether he would be less bald if he rubbed his head less; nor what he had really got inside that overpowering phrenology of brow, and behind that aspect of chronic concentration. But about the retiring habits of both there could be no doubt.

He lived in his library, attired by nature in a dressing-gown and skull-cap. But from its secret recesses he issued manifestoes which shook classical Europe. He corrected versions, excerpted

passages, disallowed authenticities, ascribed works to their true authors, and exposed the pretensions of sciolists with a vigour which ought to have finally dispersed that unhallowed class. Only it didn't, because they are a class incapable of shame, and will go on madly, even when they have been proved to be *mere*, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Perhaps they had secret information about the domestic circumstances of their destroyer, and didn't care. If Yamen had had private means of knowing that Vishnu was on uncomfortable terms with his wife, a corrected version of the whole Hindu mythology might have been necessary.

However, so far as can be conjectured, the image the world formed of the Professor was a sort of aggregate of Dr. Johnson, Bentley, Grotius, Mezzofanti, and a slight touch of, say Conington, to bring him well up to date. But so much of the first that whenever the *raconteur* repeated one of the Professor's moderately bon-mots, he always put "sir" in—as, for instance, "A punster, sir, is a man who demoralises two meanings in one word;" or, "Should you call that fast life, sir? I should call it slow death." The *raconteur* was rather given to making use of him, and assigning to him *mots* which were not at all *bons*, because they only had the "sir" in them, and were otherwise meaningless. He was distressed, not without reason, when he heard that he had said to Max Müller, or some one of that calibre, "There is no such thing, sir, as the English language!" But he very seldom heard anything about himself, or any one else; as he passed his life, as aforesaid, in his library, buried in the Phœnician Dictionary he hoped he might live to bring out. He had begun the fourth letter; but *we* don't know the Phœnician alphabet. Perhaps it has only four letters in it.

He came out of the library for meals, of course. But he took very little notice of anything that passed at the family board, and read nearly the whole time, occasionally saying something forcible to himself. Indeed, he never conversed with his family unless deprived of his book. This occurred on the occasion when Sally carried the momentous news of her mother's intended marriage to Ladbrooke Grove Road, the second day after they had talked till two in the morning. Matrimony was canvassed and discussed in all its aspects, and the particular case riddled and sifted, and elucidated from every point of the compass, without

the Professor being the least aware that anything unusual was afoot, until Grotiefend got in the mayonnaise sauce.

"Take your master's book away, Jenkins," said the lady of the house. And Jenkins, the tender-hearted parlourmaid, allowed master to keep hold just to the end of the sentence. "Take it away, as I told you, and wipe that sauce off!"

Sally did so want to box that woman's ears—at least, she said so after. She was a great horny, overbearing woman, was Mrs. Sales Wilson, and Sally was frightened lest Lætitia should grow like her. Only, Tishy's teeth never *could* get as big as that! Nor wiggle.

The Professor, being deprived of his volume, seemed to awake compulsorily, and come out into a cold, unlearned world. But he smiled amiably, and rubbed his hands round themselves rhythmically.

"Well, then!" said he. "Say it all again."

"Say what, papa?"

"All the chatter, of course."

"What for, papa?"

"For me to hear. Off we go! *Who's* going to be married?"

"You see, he was listening all the time. I shouldn't tell him, if I were you. Your father is really unendurable. And he gets worse." Thus the lady of the house.

"What does your mother say?" There is a shade of asperity in the Professor's voice.

"Says you were listening all the time, papa. So you were!" This is from Lætitia's younger sister, Theeny. Her name was Athene. Her brother Egerton called her "Gallows Athene"—an offensive perversion of the name of the lady she was called after. Her mother had carefully taught all her children contempt for their father from earliest childhood. But toleration of his weaknesses—etymology, and so on—had taken root in spite of her motherly care, and the Professor was on very good terms with his offspring. He negatived Theeny amiably.

"No, my dear, I was like Mrs. Cluppins. The voices were loud, and forced themselves upon my ear. But as you all spoke at once, I have no idea what anybody said. My question was conjectural—purely conjectural. *Is* anybody going to marry anybody? I don't know."

"What is your father talking about over there? *Is* he going to help that tongue or not? Ask him." For a peculiarity in this family was that the two heads of it always spoke to one another through an agent. So clearly was this understood that direct speech between them, on its rare occasions, was always ascribed by distant hearers to an outbreak of hostilities. If either speaker had addressed the other by name, the advent of the Sergeant-at-Arms would have been the next thing looked for. On this occasion Lætitia's literal transmission of "*Are* you going to help the tongue or not, papa?" recalled his wandering mind to his responsibilities. Sally's liver-wing—she was the visitor—was pleading at his elbow for its complement of tongue.

But soon a four-inch space intervened between the lonely tongue-tip on the dish and what had once been, in military language, its base of operations. Everybody that took tongue had got tongue.

"Well, then, how about who's married whom?" Thus the Professor, resuming his hand-rubbing, and neglecting the leg of a fowl.

"Make your father eat his lunch, Lætitia. We *cannot* be late again this afternoon." Whereon every one ate too fast; and Sally felt very glad the Professor had given her such a big slice of tongue, as she knew she wouldn't have the courage to have a second supply, if offered, much less ask for it.

"Do you hear, papa? I'm to make you eat your lunch," says Lætitia; and her mother murmurs "That's right; make him," as though he were an anaconda in the snake-house, and her daughter a keeper who could go inside the cage. Lætitia then adds briefly that Mrs. Nightingale is going to marry Fenwick.

"Ha! Mercy on us!" says the Professor quite vaguely, and, even more so, adds: "Chicken—chicken—chicken—chicken—chicken!" Though what he says next is more intelligible, it is unfortunate and ill-chosen: "And who *is* Mrs. Nightingale?"

The sphinx is mobility itself compared with Mrs. Wilson's intense preservation of her *status quo*. The import of which is that the Professor's blunders are things of everyday occurrence—every minute, rather. She merely says to Europe, "You see," and leaves that continent to deal with the position. Sally, who always gets impatient with the Wilson family, except the Pro-

fessor himself and Lætitia—though *she* is trying sometimes—now ignores Europe, and gets the offender into order on her own account.

"Why, Professor dear, don't you know Mrs. Nightingale's my mother? I'm Sally Nightingale, you know!"

"I'm not at all sure that I did, my dear. I think I thought you were Sally Something-else. My mind is very absent sometimes. You must forgive me. Sally Nightingale! To be sure!"

"Never mind, Professor *déar!*" But the Professor still looks vexed at his blunder. So Sally says in confirmation, "I've forgiven you. Shake hands!" And doesn't make matters much better, for her action seems unaccountable to the absent-minded one, who says, "Why?" first, and then, "Oh, ah, yes—I see. Shake hands, certainly!" On which the Sphinx, at the far end of the table, wondered whether the ancient Phœnicians were rude, under her breath.

"I'm so absent, Sally Nightingale, that I didn't even know your father wasn't living." Lætitia looks uncomfortable, and when Sally merely says, "I never saw my father," thinks to herself what a very discreet girl Sally is. Naturally she supposes Sally to be a wise enough child to know something about her own father. But the Wilson family were not completely in the dark about an unsatisfactory "something queer" in Sally's extraction; so that she credits that unconscious young person with having steered herself skilfully out of shoal-waters; but she is not sure whether to class her achievement as intrepidity or cheek. She is wanted in the intelligence department before she can decide this point.

"Perhaps, if you try, Lætitia, you'll be able to make out whether your father is or is not going to eat his lunch."

But as this appeal of necessity causes the Professor to run the risk of choking himself before Lætitia has time to formulate an inquiry, she can fairly allow the matter to lapse, as far as she is concerned. The dragon, her mother—for that was how Sally spoke of the horny one—kept an eye firmly fixed on the unhappy honorary member of most learned societies, and gave the word of command, "Take away!" with such promptitude that Jenkins nearly carried off the plate from under his knife and fork as he placed them on it.

A citation from the *Odyssey* was received in stony silence by the Dragon, who, however, remarked to her younger daughter that it was no use talking about Phineus and the Harpies, because they had to be at St. Pancras at 3.10, or lose the train. And perhaps, if the servants were to be called Harpies, your father would engage the next one himself. They were trouble enough now, without that.

Owing to all which, the reference to Sally's father got lost sight of; and she wasn't sorry, because Theeny, at any rate, wasn't wanted to know anything about him, whatever Lætitia and her mother knew or suspected.

But, as a matter of fact, Sally's declaration that she "never saw" him was neither discretion, nor intrepidity, nor cheek. It was simple Nature. She had always regarded her father as having been accessory to herself before the fact; also as having been, for some mysterious reason, unpopular—perhaps a *mauvais sujet*. But he was Ancient History now—had joined the Phœnicians. Why should *she* want to know? Her attitude of uninquiring acquiescence had been cultivated by her mother, and it is wonderful what a dominant influence from early babyhood can do. Sally seldom spoke of this mysterious father of hers in any other terms than those she had just used. She had never had an opportunity of making his acquaintance—that was all. In some way, undefined, he had not behaved well to her mother; and naturally she sided with the latter. Once, and once only, her mother had said to her, "Sally darling, I don't wish to talk about your father, but to forget him. I have forgiven him, because of you. Because—how could I have done without you, kitten?" And thereafter, as Sally's curiosity was a feeble force when set against the possibility that its gratification might cause pain to her mother, she suppressed it easily.

But now and again little things would be said in her presence that would set her a-thinking—little things such as what the Professor has just said. She may easily have been abnormally sensitive on the point—made more prone to reflection than usual—by last night's momentous announcement. Anyhow, she resolved to talk to Tishy about her parentage as soon as they should get back to the drawing-room, where they were practising. All the two hours they ought to have played in the morning Tishy

would talk about nothing but Julius Bradshaw. And look how ridiculous it all was! Because she *did* call him "shop-boy"—you know she did—only six weeks ago. Sally didn't see why *her* affairs shouldn't have a turn now; and although she was quite aware that her friend wanted her to begin again where they had left off before lunch, she held out no helping hand, but gave the preference to her own thoughts.

"I suppose my father drank," said Sally to Tishy.

"If you don't know, dear, how should I?" said Tishy to Sally. And that did seem plausible, and made Sally the more reflective.

The holly-leaves were gone now that had been conducive to thought at Christmas in this same room when we heard the two girls count four so often, but Sally could pull an azalea flower to pieces over her cogitations, and did so, instead of tuning up forthwith. Lætitia was preoccupied—couldn't take an interest in other people's fathers, nor her own for that matter. She tuned up, though, and told Sally to look alive. But while Sally looks alive she backs into a conversation of the forenoon, and out of the pending discussion of Sally's paternity. Their two pre-occupations pull in opposite directions.

"You *will* remember not to say anything, won't you, Sally dear? Do promise."

"Say anything? Oh no; I shan't say anything. I never do say things. What about?"

"You know as well as I do, dear—about Julius Bradshaw."

"Of course I shan't, Tishy. Except mother; she doesn't count. I say, Tishy!"

"Well, dear. Do look alive. I'm all ready."

"All right. Don't be in a hurry. I want to know whether you really think my father drank."

"Why should I, dear? I never heard anything about him—at least, I never heard anything myself. Mamma heard something. Only I wasn't to repeat it. Besides, it was nothing whatever to do with drink." The moment Lætitia said this, she knew that she had lost her hold on her only resource against cross-examination. When the difficulty of concealing anything is thrown into the same scale with the pleasure of telling it, the featherweights of duty and previous resolutions kick the beam. Then you are sorry when it's too late. Lætitia was, and could

see her way to nothing but obeying the direction on her music, which was *attacca*. To her satisfaction, Sally came in promptly in the right place, and a first movement in B sharp went steadily through without a back-lash. There seemed a chance that Sally hadn't caught the last remark, but, alas! it vanished.

"What was it, then, if it wasn't drink?" said she, exactly as if there had been no music at all. Lætitia once said of Sally that she was a horribly direct little Turk. She was very often—in this instance certainly.

"I suppose it was the usual thing." Twenty-four, of course, knew more than nineteen, and could speak to the point of what was and wasn't usual in matters of this kind. But if Lætitia hoped that vagueness would shake hands with delicacy and that details could be lubricated away, she was reckoning without her Turk.

"What *is* the usual thing?"

"Hadn't we better go on to the fugue? I don't care for the next movement, and it's easy——"

"Not till you say what you mean by 'the usual thing.'"

"Well, dear, I suppose you know what half the divorce-cases are about?"

"Tishy!"

"What, dear?"

"There was *no* divorce!"

"How do you know, dear?"

"I *should* have known of it."

"How do you know that?"

"You might go on for ever that way. Now, Tishy dear, do be kind and tell me what you heard and who said it. I should tell *you*. You *know* I should." This appeal produces concession.

"It was old Major Roper told mamma—with blue pockets under his eyes and red all over, creeks and wheezes when he speaks—do you know him?"

"No, I don't, and I don't want to. At least, I've just seen him at a distance. I could see he was purple. *Our* Major—Colonel Lund, you know—says he's a horrible old gossip, and you can't rely on a word he says. But what *did* he say?"

"Well, of course, I oughtn't to tell you this, because I prom-

ised not. What he *said* was that your mother went out to be married to your father in India, and the year after he got a divorce because he was jealous of some man your mother had met on the way out."

"How old was I?"

"Gracious me, child! how should *I* know. He only said you were a baby in arms. Of course, you must have been, if you think of it." Lætitia here feels that possible calculations may be embarrassing, and tries to avert them. "Do let's get on to the third movement. We shall spend all the afternoon talking."

"Very well, Tishy, fire away! Oh, no; it's me." And the third movement is got under way, till we reach a *pizzicato* passage which Sally begins playing with the bow by mistake.

"That's *pits!*" says the first violin, and we have to begin again at the top of the page, and the Professor in his library wonders why on earth those girls can't play straight on. The Ancient Phœnicians are fidgeted by the jerks in the music.

But it comes to an end in time, and then Sally begins again:

"I *know* that story's all nonsense now, Tishy."

"Why?"

"Because mother told me once that my father never saw me, so come now! Because the new-bornest baby that ever was couldn't be too small for its father to see." Sally pauses reflectively, then adds: "Unless he was blind. And mother would have said if he'd been blind."

"He couldn't have been blind, because——"

"Now, Tishy, you see! You're keeping back lots of things that old wheezy squeaker said. And you *ought* to tell me—you know you ought. Why couldn't he?"

"You're in such a hurry, dear. I was going to tell you. Major Roper said he never saw him but once, and it was out shooting tigers, and he was the best shot for a civilian he'd ever seen. There was a tiger was just going to lay hold of a man and carry him off when your father shot him from two hundred yards off——"

"The man or the tiger? I'm on the tiger's side. I always am."

"The tiger, stupid! You wouldn't want your own father to aim at a tiger and hit a man?"

Sally reflects. "I don't think I should. But, I say, Tishy, do you mean to say that Major Roper meant to say that he was out shooting with my father and didn't know what his name was?"

"Oh, no. He said his name, of course. It was Palliser . . . that was right, wasn't it?"

"Oh dear, no; it was Graythorpe. Palliser indeed!"

"It was true about the tiger though, because Major Roper says he's got the skin himself now."

"Only it wasn't my father that shot it. That's quite clear." Sally was feeling greatly relieved, and showed it in the way she added: "Now, doesn't that just show what a parcel of nonsense the whole story is?"

Sally had never told her friend about her mother's name before she took that of Nightingale. Very slight hints had sufficed to make her reticent about Graythorpe. Colonel Lund had once said to her: "Of course, your mother was Mrs. Graythorpe when she came to England; that was before she changed her name to Nightingale, you know?" She knew that her mother's money had come to her from a "grandfather Nightingale," whose name had somehow accompanied it, and had been (very properly, as it seemed to her) bestowed on herself as well as her mother. They were part and parcel of each other obviously. In fact, she had never more than just known of the existence of the name Graythorpe in her family at all, and it had been imputed by her to this unpopular father of hers, and put aside, as it were, on a shelf with him. Even if her mother had not suggested a desire that the name should lapse, she herself would have accepted its extinction on her own account.

But now this name came out of the past as a consolation. Palliser indeed! How could mamma have been Mrs. Graythorpe if her husband's name had been Palliser? Sally was not wise enough in worldly matters to know that divorced ladies commonly fall back on their maiden names. And she had been kept, or left, so much in the dark that she had taken for granted that her mother's had been Nightingale—that, in fact, she had retaken her maiden name at her father's wish, possibly as a censure on the misbehaviour of a husband who drank or gambled or was otherwise reprobate. Her young mind had been manipu-

lated all one way—had been in contact only with its manipulators. Had she had a sister or brother, they would have canvassed the subject, speculated, run conclusions to earth, and demanded enlightenment. She had none but her mother to go to, unless it were Colonel Lund; and the painful but inevitable task of both was to keep her in the dark about her parentage at all hazards. "If ever," said the former to the latter, "my darling girl has a child of her own, I may be able to tell her her mother's story." Till then, it would be impossible.

Sally had had a narrow escape of knowing more about this story when the veteran Sub-Dean qualified himself for an obituary in the "Times," which she chanced upon and read before her mother had time to detect and suppress it. Luckily, a reasonable economy of type had restricted the names and designations of all the wives he had driven tandem, and no more was said of his third than that she was Rosalind, the widow of Paul Nightingale. So, as soon as Sally's mother had read the text herself, she was able to say to the Major, quite undisturbedly, that the old Sub-Dean had gone at last, leaving thirteen children. The name Graythorpe had not crept in.

But we left Sally with a question unanswered. Didn't that show what nonsense old Major Roper's story was? Lætitia was rather glad to assent, and get the story quashed, or at least prorogued *sine die*.

"It did seem rather nonsense, Sally dear. Major Roper was a stupid old man, and evidently took more than was good for him." Intoxicants are often of great service in conversation.

In this case they contributed to the reinstatement of Mr. Bradshaw. Dear me, it did seem so funny to Sally! Only the other day this young man had been known to her on no other lines than as an established fool, who came to stare at her out of the corners of his dark eyes all through the morning service at St. Satisfax. And now it was St. John's, Ladbroke Grove Road, and, what was more, he was being tolerated as a semi-visitor at the Wilsons—a visitor with explanations in an undertone. This was the burden of Lætitia, as soon as she had contrived to get Sally's troublesome parent shelved.

"Why mamma needs always to be in such a furious fuss to drag in his violin, I do not know. As if he needed to be ac-

counted for! Of course, if you ask a Hottentot to evenings, you have to explain him. But the office-staff at Cattley's (which is really one of the largest firms in the country) are none of them Hottentots, but the contrary. . . . Now I know, dear, you're going to say what's the contrary of a Hottentot, and all the while you know perfectly well what I mean."

"Cut away, Tishy! What next?"

"Well—next, don't you think it very dignified of Mr. Bradshaw to be *able* to be condescended to and explained in corners under people's breaths and not to show it?"

"He's got to lump it, if he doesn't like it." Sally, you see, has given up her admirer readily enough, but, as she herself afterwards said, it's quite another pair of shoes when you're called on to give three cheers for what's really no merit at all! What does the young man expect?

"Now, that's unkind, Sally dear. You wouldn't like *me* to. Anyhow, that's what mamma *does*. Takes ladies of a certain position or with expectations into corners, and says she hates the expression gentleman and lady, but *they* know what she means. . . ."

"I know. And they goozle comfortably at her, like Goody Vereker."

"Doesn't it make one's flesh creep to have a mother like that? I do get to hate the very sight of shot silk and binoculars on a leg when she goes on so. But I suppose we never shall get on together—mamma and I."

"What does the Professor think about him?"

"Oh—papa? Of course, papa's *perfectly hopeless!* It's the only true thing mamma ever says—that he's *perfectly hopeless*. What do you suppose he did that Sunday afternoon when Julius Bradshaw came and had tea and brought the Strad—the first time, I mean? . . . Why, he actually fancied he had come from the shop with a parcel, and never found out he couldn't have when he had tea in the drawing-room, and only suspected something when he played Rode's 'Air with Variations for Violin and Piano.' Just fancy! He wanted to know why he shouldn't have tea when every one else did, and offered him cake! And Sunday afternoon and a Stradivarius! *Do* say you think my parents trying, Sally dear!"

Sally assented to everything in an absent way; but that didn't matter as long as she did it. Lætitia only wanted to talk. She seemed, thought Sally, improved by the existing combination of events. She had had to climb down off the high stilts about Bradshaw, and had only worked in one or two slight *Grundulations* (a word of Dr. Vereker's) into her talk this morning. Tishy wasn't a bad fellow at all (Sally's expression), only, if she hadn't been taught to strut, she wouldn't have been any the worse. It was all that overpowering mother of hers!

Before she parted with her friend that afternoon Sally had a sudden access of Turkish directness:

"Tishy dear, *are* you going to accept Julius Bradshaw if he asks you, or *not*?"

"Well, dear, you know we must look at it from the point of view of what he would have been if it hadn't been for that unfortunate nervous system of his. The poor fellow couldn't help it."

"But are you, or not? That's what *I* want an answer to."

"Sally dear! Really—you're just like so much dynamite. What would you do yourself if you were me? I ask you."

"I should do exactly whatever you settle to do if I were you. It stands to reason. But what's it going to be? That's the point."

"He hasn't proposed yet."

"That has nothing whatever to do with it. What you've got to do is to make—up—your—mind." These last four words are very *staccato* indeed. Tishy recovers a dignity she has rather been allowing to lapse.

"By the time you're my age, Sally dear, you'll see there are ways and ways of looking at things. Everything can't be wrapped up in a nutshell. We're not Ancient Phœnicians nowadays, whatever papa may say. But you're a dear, impulsive little puss."

The protest was feeble in form and substance, and quite unworthy of Miss Sales Wilson, the daughter of *the* Professor Sales Wilson. No wonder Sally briefly responded, "Stuff and nonsense!" and presently went home.

Of course, the outer circle of Mrs. Nightingale's society (for in this matter we are all like Regents Park) had their say about

her proposed marriage. But they don't come into our story; and besides, they had too few data for their opinions to be of any value. What a difference it would have made if old Major Roper had met Fenwick and recalled the face of the dead shot who, it seemed, had somehow ceded his tiger-skin to him. But no such thing happened, nor did anything else come about either to revive the story of the divorce or to throw a light on the identity of Palliser and Fenwick. Eight weeks after the latter (or the former?) had for the second time disclosed his passion to the same woman, the couple were married at the church of St. Satisfax, and, having started for the Continent the same afternoon, found themselves, quite unreasonably happy, wandering about in France with hardly a thought beyond the day at most, so long as a letter came from Sally at the *postes-restantes* when expected. And he had remembered nothing!