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NEPTUNE'S SHORE.

BY C. F. WOOLSON.

I.

OLD Mrs. Preston had not been able to endure the hotel at Salerno. She had therefore taken, for two months, this house on the shore.

"I might as well be here as anywhere, saddled as I am with the Abercrombies," she remarked to her cousin, Isabella Holland. "Arthur may really do something; I have hopes of Arthur. But as to Rose, Hildegarde, and Dorothea, I shall plainly have to drag them about with me, and drag them about with me, year after year, in the hope that the constant seeing of so many straight statues, to say nothing of

"YOU KNOW I AM YOUR SLAVE."—[SEE PAGE 766.]

pictures, may at last teach them to have spines. Here they are now: did you ever see such shoulders, or rather such a lack of them? Hildegarde, child, come here a moment," she added, as the three girls drew near. "I have an idea. Don't you think you could *hold* your shoulders up a little? Try it now; put them up high, as though you were shrugging them; and expand your chest too; you mustn't cramp

that. There!—that is what I mean; don't you think, my dear, that you could keep yourself so?"

Hildegarde, with her shoulders elevated and her long chin run out, began to blush painfully, until her milk-white face was dyed red. "I am afraid I could not keep myself so long, aunt," she answered, in a low voice.

"Never mind; let them down, then: it's of no use," commented Mrs. Preston, despairingly. "Go and dance for twenty-five minutes in the upper hall, all of you. And dance as hard as you can."

The three girls, moving lifelessly, went down the echoing vaulted corridor. They were sisters, the eldest not quite sixteen, all three having the same lank figures with sloping shoulders and long thin throats, and the same curiously white, milk-white skin. Orphans, they had been sent with their brother Arthur to their aunt, Mrs. Octavia Preston, five years before, having come to her from one of the West India Islands, their former home.

"Those girls have done nothing but eat raw meat, take sea baths, and practise calisthenics and dancing ever since I first took charge of them," Mrs. Preston was accustomed to remark to intimate friends; "yet look at them now! Of course I could not send them to school—they would only grow lanker. So I take them about with me patiently, governess and all."

But Mrs. Preston was not very patient.

The three girls having disappeared, Isabella thought the occasion favorable for a few words upon another subject. "Do you like to have Paulie riding so often with Mr. Ash, Cousin Octavia? I can't help being distressed about it."

"Don't be Mistering John Ash, I beg; no one in the world but you, Isabella, would dream of doing it—a great swooping creature like that—the horseman in 'Heliodorus.'"

"You mean Raphael's fresco? Oh, Cousin Octavia, how can you think so? Raphael—such a religious painter, and John Ash, who looks so dissipated!"

"Did I say he didn't look dissipated? I said he could ride. John Ash is one of the most dissipated-looking youths I have ever met," pursued Mrs. Preston, comfortably. "The clever sort, not the brutal."

"And you don't mind Paulie's being with him?"

"Pauline Euphemia Graham has been married, Pauline Euphemia Graham is a

widow; it ill becomes those who have not had a title of her experience (though they may be *much* older) to set themselves up as judges of her conduct."

Mrs. Preston had a deep rich voice, and slow enunciation; her simplest sentences, therefore, often took on the tone of declamation, and when she held forth at any length, it was like a Gregorian chant.

"Oh, I didn't mean to judge, I'm sure," said Isabella; "I only meant that it would be such a pity—such a bad match for dear Paulie in case she should be thinking of marrying again. Even if one were sure of John Ash—and certainly the reverse is the case—look at his mother! I am interested, naturally, as Paulie is my first cousin, you know."

"Do you mean that your first cousin's becoming Mrs. John Ash might endanger your own matrimonial prospects?"

"Oh dear no," said poor little Isabella, shrinking back to her embroidery. She was fifty, small, plain, extremely good. In her heart she wished that people would take the tone that Isabella had "never cared to marry."

"Here is Pauline now, I think," said Mrs. Preston, as a figure appeared at the end of the hall.

Isabella was afraid to add, "And going out to ride again!" But it was evident that Mrs. Graham intended to ride: she wore her habit.

"I wish you were going too," she said to Mrs. Preston, pausing in the doorway with her skirt uplifted. Her graceful figure in the closely fitting habit was a pleasant sight to see.

"Thanks, my dear; I should enjoy going very much if I were a little more slender."

"You are magnificent as you are," responded Pauline, admiringly.

And in truth the old lady was very handsome, with her thick silver hair, fine eyes with heavy black eyebrows, and well-cut aquiline profile. Her straight back, noble shoulders, and beautiful hands took from her massive form the idea of unwieldiness.

"Isabella—you who are always posing for enthusiasm—when will you learn to say anything so genuine as that?" chanted Cousin Octavia's deep voice. "I mention it merely on your account, as a question of styles conversational. Here is Isabella, who thinks John Ash so dissipated, Pauline; she fears that it may injure the

family connection if you marry him. I have told her that no one here was thinking of marrying or of giving in marriage; if she has such ideas, she must have brought them with her from Florence. There are a great many old maids in Florence."

"I can only answer for myself: I certainly am not thinking of marriage," said Pauline, laughing, as she went down the stairs.

"Oh, Cousin Octavia, you have set Paulie against me!" exclaimed Isabella, in distress.

"Don't be an idiot; Pauline isn't against any one: she doesn't care enough about it. She is a good deal for herself, I acknowledge; but she's not against any one. Pauline bears no malice; she is delightfully uncertain; she hasn't a theory in the world to live up to; in addition, to have her in the house is like going to the play all the time—she *is* such a stupendous liar!"

Isabella, who was punching round holes in a linen band with an implement of ivory, stopped punching. "I am sure poor Paulie—"

"Am I to sit through a defence of Pauline Euphemia Graham, born Preston, at your hands, Isabella? Pray spare me that. I am much more Pauline's friend than you ever can be. Did I say that she lied? Nature has given her a face that speaks one language and a mind that speaks another; she, of course, follows the language of her mind; but others follow that of her face, and this makes the play. Eh!—what noise is that?"

"We have come to pay you a visit, Aunt Octavia," called a boyish voice; its owner was evidently mounting the stairs three at a time: now he was in the room. "They're all down at the door—Freemantle and Gates and Beckett. And what do you think—we've got Griff!"

"Griff himself?" said Aunt Octavia, benevolently, as the lad, with a very pretty gallantry, bent to kiss her hand.

"Yes, Griff himself; you may be sure we're drawing like mad. Griff has come down from Paris for only three weeks, and he says he will go with us to Pæstum, and all about here—to Amalfi, Ravello, and everywhere. But of course Pæstum's the stunner."

"Yes, of course Pæstum's the stunner," repeated Aunt Octavia, as if trying it in Shakespearian tones.

"I say, may they come up?" Arthur went on.

They came up—three boys of seventeen and eighteen, and Griffith Carew, who was ten years older. These three youths, with Arthur Abercrombie, were studying architecture at the Beaux-Arts, Paris; this spring they had given to a tour in Italy for the purpose of making architectural drawings. Griffith Carew was also an architect, but a full-fledged one. His indomitable perseverance and painstaking accuracy caused all the younger men to respect him; the American students went further; they were sure that Griff had only to "let himself go," and the United States would bloom from end to end with City Halls of beauty unparalleled. In the mean time Griff, while waiting for the City Halls perhaps, was so kind-hearted and jovial and unselfish that they all adored him for that too. It was a master-treat, therefore, to Arthur and his companions, to have their paragon to themselves for a while on this temple-haunted shore.

Griff sat down placidly, and began to talk to Aunt Octavia. He was of medium height, his figure heavy and strong; he had a dark complexion and thick features, lighted by pleasant brown eyes, and white teeth that gleamed when he smiled.

Aunt Octavia was gracious to Griff; she had always distinguished him from "Arthur's horde." This was not in the least because the horde considered him the architect of the future. Aunt Octavia did not care much about the future; her tests were those of the past. She had known Griff's mother, and the persons whose mothers Aunt Octavia had known—ah, that was a certificate!

II.

In the mean while Pauline Graham had left Salerno behind her, and was flying over the plain with John Ash.

Pauline all her life had had a passion for riding at breakneck speed; one of the explanations of her fancy for Ash lay in the fact that, having the same passion himself, he enabled her to gratify her own. Whenever she had felt in the mood during the past five weeks there had always been a horse and a mounted escort at her door. Upon this occasion, after what they called an inspiring ride (to any one else a series of mad gallops), they had dismounted at a farm-house, and

leaving their horses, had strolled down to the shore. It was a lovely day, toward the last of March; the sea, of the soft misty blue of the southern Mediterranean, stretched out before them without a sail; at their feet the same clear water laved the shore in long smooth wavelets, hardly a foot high, whose gentle roll upon the sands had an indescribably caressing sound. There was no one in sight. It is a lonely coast. Pauline stood, gazing absently over the blue.

"Sit down for a moment," suggested Ash.

"Not now."

"Not now? When do you expect to be here again?"

She came back to the present, laughing. "True; but I did not mean that; I meant that you were not the ideal companion for sea-side musing; you never meditate. I venture to say you have never quoted poetry in your life."

"No; I live my poetry," John Ash responded.

"But for a ride you are perfect; for a rush over the plain, in the teeth of the wind, I have never had any one approaching you. You are a cavalier of the gods."

"Have you had many?"

"Cavaliers?—plenty. Of the gods?—no."

"Plenty! I reckon you have," said Ash, half to himself.

"Would you wish me to have had few? You must remember that I have been in many countries and have seen many peoples. I shouldn't have appreciated *you* otherwise; I should have thought you dangerous—horrible! There is Isabella, who has not been in many countries; Isabella is sure that you are 'so dissipated.'"

"Dissipated!—mild term!"

"Then you acknowledge it?"

"Freely."

Pauline looked about for a rock of the right height, and finding one, seated herself, and began to draw off her gloves. "Some time—in some other existence—will you come and tell me how it has paid you, please? You are so preternaturally intelligent, and you have such a will of your own, that you cannot have fallen into it from stupidity, as so many do." Her gloves off, she began to tighten the braids of her hair, loosened by the gallop.

"It pays as it goes; it makes one forget for a moment the hideous tiresomeness of existence. But you put your question off to some other life; you have no intention, then, of redeeming me in this?"

"I shouldn't succeed. In the first place, I have no influence—"

"You know I am your slave," said Ash; his voice suddenly deepened.

"And how much of a slave shall you be to the next pretty peasant girl you meet?" Mrs. Graham demanded, turning toward him, both hands still occupied with her hair.

"I don't deny that. But it has nothing to do with the subject."

"In one way I know it has not," she answered, after she had fastened the last braid in its place with a long gold pin.

"How right I was to like you! You understand of yourself the thing that so few women can ever be brought to comprehend. Well, if you acknowledge that it makes no difference—I mean about the peasant girls—we're just where we were: I am your slave, yet you have no desire to reclaim me. I believe you like me better as I am," he added, abruptly.

"Do you want me to tell you that you are impertinent?" demanded Pauline, with her lovely smile, that always contradicted in its sweetness any apparent rebuke expressed by her words. "Do I know what you are in reality, or care to know? I know what you seem, and what you seem is admirable, perfect, for these rides of ours, the most enchanting rides I have ever had."

"And the rides are to be the end of it? You wouldn't care for me elsewhere?"

"Ah!" said Pauline, rising and drawing on her gloves, "you wouldn't care for *me*. In Paris I am altogether another person; I am not at all as you see me here. In Paris you would call me a doll. Come, don't dissect the happy present; enjoy it as I do. 'He only is rich who owns the day,' and we own this—for our ride.

"I hear the hoofs upon the hill;
I hear them fainter, fainter still,"

she sang in her clear voice. "The idea of that old Virginia song coming to me here!"

"This talk about reclaiming and reforming is all bosh," remarked Ash, leaning back against a high fragment of rock, with his hands in his pockets. "I am

what I am because I choose to be, that's all. The usual successes of American life, what are they? I no longer care a rap about them, because I've had them, or at least have seen them within my reach. I came up from nothing; I got an education—no matter now how I got it; I studied law. In ten years I had won such a position in my profession (my branch of it—I was never an office lawyer) that everything lay open before me. It was only a question of a certain number of years. Not only was this generally prophesied, but I knew it myself. But by that time I had found out the unutterable stupidity of people and their pursuits; I couldn't help despising them. I had made enough to make my mother comfortable, and there came over me a horror of a plodding life. I said to myself, 'What is the use of it?' Of pleasure there was no question. But I could go back to that plodding life to-morrow if I chose. Don't you believe it, Pauline?"

"Yes."

"Yet you don't say—try?"

"Try, by all means."

"At a safe distance from you!"

"Yes, at a safe distance from me," Pauline answered. "I should do you no good; I am not enough in earnest. I am never in earnest long about anything. I am changeable too—you have no idea how changeable. There has been no opportunity to show you."

"Is that a threat? You know that I am deeply in love with you." He did not move as he said this, but his eyes were fixed passionately upon her face.

"I neither know it nor believe it; it is with you simply as it is with me—there is no one else here." She stood there watching the wavelets break at her feet. Nothing in her countenance corresponded in the least with the description she had just given of herself.

"How you say that! What am I to think of you? You have a face to worship: does it lie?" said Ash.

"Oh, my face!" She turned, and began to cross the field toward the farm.

"It shouldn't have that expression, then," he said, joining her, and walking by her side. "I don't believe you know what it is yourself, Pauline—that expression. It seems to say as you talk, coming straight from those divine lips, those sweet eyes: 'I could love you. Be good and I will.' Why, you have almost made

me determine to be 'good' again, almost made me begin to dream of going back to that plodding life that I loathe. And you don't know what I am."

Mrs. Graham did not answer; she did not look up, though she knew that his head was bent beseechingly toward her.

John Ash was obliged to bend; he was very tall. His figure was rather thin, and he had a slouching gait; his broad shoulders and well-knit muscles showed that he had plenty of force, and his slouching step seemed to come from laziness, as though he found it too much trouble to plant his feet firmly, to carry his long length erect. He was holding his hat in his hand, and the light from the sea showed his face clearly, its good points and its bad. His head was well shaped, covered with thick brown hair, closely cut; but, in spite of the shortness, many silver threads could be seen on the brown—a premature silver, as he was not yet thirty-five. His face was beardless, thin, with a bold, eagle-like outline, and strong, warm blue eyes, the blue eyes that go with a great deal of color. Ordinarily, Ash had now but little color; that is, there was but little red; his complexion had a dark brown hue; there were many deep lines. The mouth, the worst feature, had a cynical droop; the jaw conveyed suggestions that were not agreeable. The expression of the whole countenance was that of recklessness and cleverness, both of no common order. Of late the recklessness had often changed into a mere happy merriment when he was with Pauline, the careless merriment of a boy; one could see then plainly how handsome he must have been before the lines, and the heaviness, and alas! the evil, had come to darken his youth, and to sadden (for so it must have been) his silent, frightened-looking mother.

They reached the farm; he led out the horses and mounted her. She gathered up the reins; but he still held the bridle. "How tired you look!" he said.

Her face was flushed slightly, high on the cheeks close under the eyes; between the fair eyebrows a perpendicular line was visible; for the moment, she showed to the full her thirty years.

"Yes, I am tired; and it's dangerous to tire me," she answered, smiling. She had recovered her light-hearted carelessness.

Ash still looked at her. A sudden con-

viction seemed to seize him. "Don't throw me over, Pauline," he pleaded. And as he spoke, on his brown, deeply lined face there was an expression which was boyishly young and trusting.

"As I told you, so long as there is no one else," Pauline answered.

The next moment they were flying over the plain.

III.

The *table d'hôte* of the Star of Italy, the Salerno inn from whose mysteries (of eels and chestnuts) Mrs. Preston had fled—this unctuous *table d'hôte* had been unusually brilliant during this month of March; upon several occasions there had been no less than fifteen travellers present, and the operatic young landlord himself, with his affectionate smile, had come in to hand the peas.

The most unnoticed person was always a tall woman of fifty-five, who, entering with noiseless step, slipped into her chair so quickly and furtively that it seemed as if she were afraid of being seen standing upon her feet. Once in her place, she ate sparingly, looking neither to the right nor the left, holding her knife and fork with care, and laying them down cautiously, as though she were trying not to waken some one who was asleep. But the *table d'hôte* of the Star of Italy was never asleep; the travellers, English and American, could not help feeling that they were far from home on this shore where so recently brigands had prowled. It is well known that this feeling promotes conversation.

One evening a pink-cheeked woman, who wore a little round lace cap perched on the top of her smooth gray hair, addressed the silent stranger at her left hand. "You have been to Pæstum, I dare say?" she said, in her pleasant English voice.

"No."

"But you are going, probably? Directly we came, yesterday morning, we engaged horses and started at once."

"I don't know as I care about going."

"Not to see the temples?"

"I didn't know as there were temples," murmured the other, shyly.

"Fancy! But you really ought to go, you know," the pleasant voice resumed, doing a little missionary-work (which can never come amiss). "The temples are well worth seeing; they are Greek."

"I've been ter see a good many build-ings already: in Paris there were a good

many; my son took me," the tall woman answered, her tone becoming more assured as she mentioned "my son."

"But these temples are—are rather different. I was saying to our neighbor here that she really ought on no account to miss going down to Pæstum," the fresh-faced English woman continued, addressing her husband, who sat next to her on the right, for the moment very busy with his peas (which were good, but a little oily). "The drive is not difficult. And we found it most interesting."

"Interesting? It may well be interesting; finest Greek remains outside of Athens," answered the husband, a portly Warwickshire vicar. He bent forward a little to glance past his wife at this ignorer of temples at her other hand. "American," he said to himself, and returned to his peas.

The friendly vicaress offered a few words more the next day. Coming in from her walk, in her stout shoes, and broad straw hat garnished with white muslin, she was entering the inn by the back door, when she espied her neighbor of the dinner-table sitting near by on a bench. There was nothing to see but a paling fence; she was unoccupied, unless a basket with *Souvenir de Lucerne* on one side, and a flat bouquet of artificial flowers on the other, represented occupation.

"Do you prefer this to the garden in front?" the English woman asked, in some surprise.

"Yes, I think I do."

"I must differ from you, then, because there we have the sea, you know; 'tis such a pretty view."

"I don't know as I care about the sea; it's all water—nothing to look at."

"Ah! I dare say it makes you ill. We had a very nasty day when we crossed from Folkestone."

"No; it ain't that exactly. I sit here because I like ter see the things grow," hazarded the American, timidly, as if she felt that some explanation was expected.

"The things?"

"Yes, in there." (She pointed to the paling fence). "There's peas, and asparagus, and beans, and some sorts I don't know; you wouldn't believe how they do push up, day after day."

"Ah, indeed! I dare say they do," the English woman answered, a little bewildered, looking at the lines of green behind the palings.

"Her name is Ash, Azubah Ash—fancy!" she said to her husband, later. "I saw it written on a Swiss basket in which she keeps her crewel-work. She is extremely odd. She has no maid, yet she

"I dare say she *is* having rather a hard time of it, she is so *bornée*. I would offer her a book, but I don't think she ever reads. And when I told her that I should be very pleased to show her some of the



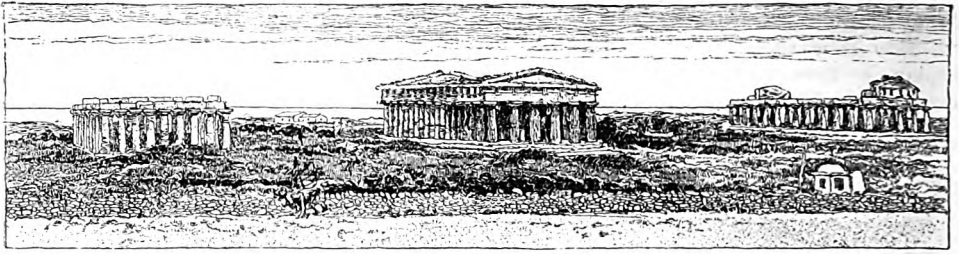
AZUBAH ASH.

wears those very good diamonds; and she always appears in that Paris gown of rich black silk—the very richest quality, I assure you, Augustus: she wears it and the diamonds at breakfast. She has spoken of a son, but apparently he never turns up. And she spends all her time on a bench behind the house watching the beans grow."

"I should think she would bore herself to extinction," said the easy-going vicar.

pretty walks about here, she said that she never walked. She must be sadly lonely, poor thing!"

But Mrs. Ash was not lonely; or, if she was, she did not know the name of her malady. The comings and goings of her son were without doubt very uncertain; but the mother had been born among people who believe that the "men-folks" of a family have an existence apart from that of mothers and sisters, and that it is



"BY-AND-BY THE THREE TEMPLES LOOMED INTO VIEW."—[SEE PAGE 773.]

right that they should have it. Her son, who never went himself to a public table, had taken it for granted that his mother would prefer to have her meals served privately in one of the four large rooms which he had engaged for her at the inn.

"I think I like it better in the big dining-room, John," Mrs. Ash had replied. She did not tell him that she found it less difficult to eat her dinner when the attention of the waiter was distracted by the necessity of attending to the wants of ten persons than when his gaze was concentrated upon her solitary knife and fork alone.

John Ash was fond of his mother. It did not occur to him that this nomad life abroad was causing her any suffering. Her shyness, her dread of being looked at, her dread of foreign servants, he did not fully see, because when he was present she controlled them; when he was present, also, in a great measure, they disappeared. He knew that she would not have had one moment's content had he left her behind him, even if he had left her in the finest house his money could purchase; so he took her with him, and travelled slowly, for her sake, making no journeys that she could not make, sending forward to engage the best rooms for her at the inns where he intended to stop.

That he had not taken her to Pæstum was not an evidence of neglect. During the first months of their wanderings he had been at pains to take her everywhere he had thought that she would enjoy it. But Mrs. Ash had enjoyed nothing—save the going about on her son's arm. If he left her alone amid the most exquisite scenery in the world, she did not even see the scenery; she thought a dusty jaunt in a horse-car "very pleasant" if John was there. So at last John gave her his sim-

ple presence often, but troubled her with descriptions and excursions no more.

Dumb, shy, hopelessly out of her element as she was, this mother had, on the whole, enjoyed her two years abroad. The reason was found in the fact that she could say to herself, or rather could hope to herself, that John was more "steady" over here.

The rustic term covered much—the days and the nights when John had not been "steady."

These six weeks at Salerno particularly had been a season of blessed repose to Azubah Ash; the days had gone by so peacefully that life had become almost comfortable to her again, in spite of the ordeal of dinner. She had even been beguiled into thinking a little of the future—of the farm she should like to have some day, with fruit and cream and vegetables—yes, especially vegetables; and she dreamed of an old pleasure of her youth, that of hunting for little round artichokes in the cool brown earth. John had been contented all the time, and his mood had been very tranquil. His mother liked this much better than high spirits. There was an element sometimes in John's high spirits that had made her tremble.

But on the day succeeding that last ride with Mrs. Graham, when they had dismounted and walked down to the shore, John had come back to the inn with a darkened face. The dark mood had lasted now for ten days. His mother began to lead her old sleepless, restless life again. Her awkward crochet-needle had stopped of itself; she went no more to her bench beside the asparagus. Instead, she remained in her room—her four rooms—every now and then peeping anxiously through the blinds. Nothing happened—so any one would have said; the

sea continued blue and misty, the sky blue and clear; every one came and went as usual in the divine weather of the Italian spring. But John Ash's mother had, to use an old expression, her heart in her mouth all the time.

It choked her, and she gave up going to the *table d'hôte*; she let her son suppose that the meal was served in her sitting-room, but in reality she took no dinner at all. When he came in she was always there, always carefully dressed in the black silk whose rich texture the vicar's wife had noticed, with the "very good" diamonds fastening her collar, and on her thin hands. She made a constant effort that her son should notice no change in her.

Azubah Ash had a gaunt frame with large bones; her chest was hollow, and she stooped a little as she walked. Yet, looking at her, one felt sure that she would live to be an old woman. Her large features were roughly moulded, her cheeks thin; her thick dusky hair was put plainly back from her face, and arranged with a high comb after a fashion of her youth. Her eyes, large, dark, and appealing, were sunken; they were beautiful eyes, if one could have removed from them their expression of apprehension, but that seemed now to have grown a part of them, to have become fixed by time. Observers of physiognomy who met Azubah during these two years of her sojourn abroad never forgot her—that tall gaunt woman with the awkward step and bearing, with the rich dress and diamonds, from whose timid face with its rough features those beautiful eyes looked appealingly out.

"Mother, I am going to Pæstum to-morrow," announced Ash on that eleventh day. "Perhaps you had better go with me." He had come in and thrown himself down upon the sofa, where he sat staring at the wall.

"Pæstum—yes, that's where that English lady said I'd oughter go," answered Mrs. Ash. Then, after a moment, "She said there were temples there." She had her hands folded tightly as she looked at her son.

"They're all going—old lady Preston, with her ghosts of Abercrombies, little Miss Holland, Mrs. Graham, and all. Those boys are sketching down there; they've been there some time."

"I shall be very glad ter go, John, if

you are going. Would you like ter have me—ter have me ride horseback?"

Ash, coming out of his abstraction, broke into a laugh. "I shall take you in the finest landau in Salerno, marmer," he said, coming across to kiss her; "old lady Preston will have to put up with the second best. You haven't forgotten, then, that you used to ride, marmer, have you?"

The mother's eyes had filled upon hearing the old name, the "marmer" of the days when he had been her devoted, constantly following, tyrannical, but very loving little boy. But she did not let the tears drop: she never made scenes of any kind before John. "Well, you've ben riding horseback every day now for a long while; you haven't seemed to care at all for carriages. And I did use to ride horseback a good deal when I was a girl; I used to ride to the mill."

"I know you did. And carry the grist to be ground." He kissed her again. "Don't be afraid of anything or anybody to-morrow, marmer, I beg. You're the bravest and most sensible woman I know, and I want you to look what you are."

"Shall I wear my India shawl, then?"

"Wear the best you have; I wish it were a hundred times better. You are handsomer than any of them as it is."

"Oh no, John; I ain't good-looking; I never was," said his mother, blushing. She put her hand up for a moment, nervously, over her mouth—a gesture habitual with her.

"Yes, you are, marmer. Look at your eyes. It's only that you have got into a way of not thinking so. But I think so, and others shall." He went back to the sofa, and sank into abstraction again.

At length his mother broke the silence, which had lasted very long. "I hope they are all well over there to-day?" she asked, hesitatingly. "Over there" was her name for the house on the shore, the house where she knew her son had for many weeks spent all his time.

"Well? They're extraordinarily well," said Ash. He got up and walked restlessly about the room. After a while he stopped, and now he seemed to have forgotten his mother's presence, for his eyes rested upon her without seeing her. "One of them is a little too well," he said, menacingly; "let him look to himself—that's all." And then into his face,

his mother, watching him, saw coming slowly something she knew. The expression changed him so completely that the ladies who had seen so much of him would not have recognized their visitor. His mother recognized him. That expression on her son's face was her life's long terror.

He left the room. She listened as long as she could hear his steps; then, after sitting for some time with her head upon her arms on the table before her, she rose, and went slowly to put on her bonnet and shawl. Coming back, still slowly, she paused, and for five minutes stood there motionless. Then her hands dropped despairingly by her sides, and her worn face quivered. "O God, O our Father, I really don't know what ter do!" she murmured, breaking into helpless sobs, the stifled, difficult sobs of a person unaccustomed to self-expression, even the self-expression of grief.

She did not go out. Instead of that, she went back to the inner room and knelt down.

IV.

The next morning three carriages and two persons on horseback were following the long road that stretches southward from Salerno to Pæstum.

In the first carriage old Mrs. Preston sat enthroned amid cushions and shawls; opposite she had placed her nephew Arthur, first because he was slim, second because he was a man (Mrs. Preston was accustomed to say, "Too much lady talk dries my brain"); the second carriage held Isabella Holland and the Abercrombie girls; in the third, a landau drawn by two spirited horses, were Mrs. Ash and her son. The two persons on horseback were Pauline Graham and Griffith Carrew.

In the soft spring air the mountains that rise all the way on the left at no great distance from the road had in perfection the vague, dreamy outlines and violet hues that form so characteristic a feature of the Italian landscape. Up in the sky their peaks shone whitely, powdered with snow. The flat plain that stretches from the base of the mountains to the sea had beauty of another kind; often a fever-swept marsh, it possessed at this season all a marsh's luxuriance of waving reeds and flowers and tasselled jungles, with water birds rising from their feeding-places, and flying along, low

down, with a slow motion of their broad wings, their feet stretched out behind. Troops of buffalo could be seen here and there. At rare intervals there was an oasis of cultivated ground, with a solitary farm-house. On the right, all the way, the Mediterranean, meeting the flat land flatly, stretched forward from thence into space, going on bluely, and rising a little on the horizon line, as though it were surmounting a low hill.

Occasionally the carriages passed a little band of the small, quick-stepping Italian soldiers.

"Oh, I say, did you know, aunt, that people were murdered by brigands on this very bridge only ten years ago?" said Arthur, as they rolled across a stone causeway raised in the form of an arch over a sluggish stream.

"I should like very much to see the brigand who did it!" Mrs. Preston answered, smacking her lips contemptuously.

Arthur at least was very sure that no ten brigands could have vanquished his aunt.

"This, girls, is the ancient Tyrrhenian Gulf," began Isabella to her companions, waving one neatly gloved hand toward the sea. Isabella, owing to the singularly incessant death of relatives, was always in mourning; her neat gloves therefore were sable. "The temples we are about to visit are very ancient also, having been built ages ago by Greeks, who came from—from Greece, of course, naturally; and never ceased to regret it. And all this shore, and the temples also, were sacred to Neptune, or Poseidon, as he was called in Greek. And the Greeks lamented—but I will read you that later at the threshold of the temples; you cannot fail to be interested."

"I shall not be interested at all," said Hildegarde.

"Nor I," said Rose.

"They had nothing to lament about; they had no dancing to do," added Dorothea. And the three white faces glared suddenly and sullenly at their astonished companion.

"I am shocked," began Isabella.

"Shocked yourself," said Rose.

"You are a busybody," said Dorothea.

"And a gormandizer," added Hildegarde.

"And a *Worm!*" said Rose, with decision. "We have decided not to pretend

any more before *you*, Worm! Dance yourself till your legs drop off, and see how you like it."

The three girls had weak soft voices; they possessed no other tones; the strong words they used, therefore, were all the more startling because so gently, almost sighingly, spoken.

In the landau there had been silence. Mrs. Ash, after respecting her son's sombre mood for more than an hour, at last spoke: "I guess you don't care very much about those triflin' temples, after all, do you, John? And it's going to be very long. Supposing we turn back?" She wore her India shawl and a Paris bonnet; she was sitting without touching the cushions of the carriage behind her. She had looked neither at the mountains nor at the sea; most of the time her eyes had rested on the blue cloth of the empty seat opposite. Occasionally, however, they had followed the two figures on horseback, and it was after these figures had passed them a second time, pushing on ahead in order to get a free space of road for a gallop, that she had offered her suggestion.

"Go back? Not for ten thousand dollars—not for ten thousand devils!" said John Ash. "What a lazy girl you are, marm!" And he became gay and talkative.

His mother responded to his gayety as well as she could: she laughed when he did. Her laugh was eager. It was almost obsequious.

By-and-by the three temples loomed into view, standing in all their beauty on the barren waste, majestic, uninjured, extraordinary. Their rows of fluted columns, their brilliant tawny hues, their perfect Doric architecture, made the loneliness surrounding them even more lonely, made the sound of the sea breaking near by on the lifeless shore a melancholy dirge. When the party reached the great colonnades there were exclamations; there was even declamation, Mrs. Preston having been fitted by nature for that. Freemantle, Gates, and Beckett had come rushing forward to meet their arriving friends. In reality, however, it was Griff whom they had rushed to meet. Griff to their minds was the only important person present, even though the unimportant included Pauline.

"Hallo, Griff, old fellow! how are you?"

"Couldn't you stay, Griff? We've got a tent for you."

They laughed, and made jokes, and hovered about him, longing to drag him off immediately to show him their drawings, and to discuss with him a hundred disputed points. But though they thus paid small attention to Pauline, they were obliged to form part of her train; for as Griff remained with her, and they remained with Griff, naturally, as Isabella would have said, they made the tour of inspection in her company.

In the mean while Isabella, who had it upon her strictly kept conscience not to neglect her own duties in spite of the Abercrombie revolt, had taken her stand before the great temple of Neptune, with her instructive little book in her hand. "'The men of Poseidonia,' she began, "'having been at first true Greeks, had in process of time gradually become barbarized, changing to Romans.' Poseidonia, girls, was the ancient name of Pæstum," she interpolated in explanation, glancing over her glasses at her silent audience.

The Abercrombies could not retort this time, because Aunt Octavia was very near them, sitting at the base of one of the great columns of travertine with the air and manner of Neptune's only lawful wife. But their backs were toward her; she could not see their faces; they were able, therefore, to make grimaces at Isabella, and this they immediately proceeded to do in unison, flattening their thin lips over their teeth in a very ghastly way, and turning up their eyes so unnaturally far that Isabella was afraid the pupils would never come down again.

"'Yet they still observed one Hellenic festival,'" she read stumbingly on—stumbingly because she felt obliged from a sort of fascination to glance every now and then at the distorted countenances before her—"one Hellenic festival, when they met together here to call to remembrance the old days and the old customs, and to weep upon each other's necks, and to lament drearily. And then, when the time of their mourning was over, they departed, each man in silence to his Roman home."

"Very fine," said Mrs. Preston, commendingly, from her column.

But Isabella had closed her book, and was walking away, wiping her forehead: those girls' faces were really too horrible.

"Where are you going, Isabella?" Mrs. Preston called.

"I suppose I may gather some asphodel?" Isabella responded, with some asperity.

But she did not gather much asphodel. Coming upon Mrs. Ash wandering about over the fallen stones, she stayed her steps to speak to her. She was not interested in Mrs. Ash, but she was so "happily relieved" that dear Paulie lately had given up her rides with the son, that she, as Paulie's cousin (first), could afford to be civil to the mother, in spite of that mother's bad judgment as to English and diamonds. Isabella disapproved of Mrs. Ash; she thought that "such persons" did great harm by their display of "mere vulgar affluence." No vulgar affluence oppressed Isabella. She had six hundred dollars a year of her own, and each dollar was well-bred.

"We shall soon be having lunch, I suppose," she began, in a gracious tone. "It seems almost a desecration, doesn't it, to have it in the shrine itself, for I see they are arranging it there."

"Oh, is that a shrine?" said Mrs. Ash, vaguely. "I didn't know. But then I'm not a Catholic. They seem very large buildings. They seem wasted here."

Little Isabella looked up at her—she was obliged to look up, her companion was so tall. The anxious expression in Mrs. Ash's eyes had grown into anguish: she was watching her son, who had now joined Pauline and her train. Pauline had Carew on her right hand and John Ash on her left; the four boys walked stragglingly, now in front, now behind, but never far from Carew.

"You are not well," said Isabella; "the drive was too long for you. Pray take my smelling-salts; they are sometimes refreshing." And she detached from its black chain a minute funereal bottle.

"Thank you," answered Mrs. Ash, gazing down uncomprehendingly at the offering; "I am very well indeed. I was jest looking at your cousin, Mrs. Graham; she's very handsome."

"Yes," responded Isabella, gladly seizing this opportunity to convey to the Ash household a little light, "Pauline is handsome—in her own way. It is not the style that I myself admire. But then I know that my taste is severe. By ordinary people Pauline is considered attractive; it is therefore all the more to be

deplored that she should be such a sad, sad flirt."

"A flirt?" said Mrs. Ash.

"Yes—I am sorry to say it. No matter how far she may go, it means nothing, absolutely nothing; she has not the slightest intention of allowing herself either to fall in love or to marry again; she prefers her position as it is. And I don't think she realizes sufficiently that what is but pastime to her may be taken more seriously by others; and naturally, I must say, after the way she sometimes goes on. I could never do so, no matter what the temptations were, and I must say I have never been able to understand it in Pauline. At present it is Mr. Carew; she is going to Naples with him to-morrow for the day. As you may imagine, it is against our wish—Cousin Octavia Preston's and mine. But Pauline being a widow, which *she* considers an advantage, and no longer young (she is thirty, though you may not think it; she shows her age very fully in the morning)—Pauline, under these circumstances, has for some time refused a chaperon. I don't think myself that she needs a chaperon exactly, but she might take a lady friend."

"Going to Naples with him to-morrow," murmured Mrs. Ash. She put her gloved hand over her mouth for a moment, the large kid expanse very different from Isabella's little black paw. "I might as well go over there," she said, starting off with a rapid step toward Pauline.

Pauline received her smilingly; Ash frowned a little. He frowned not at his mother—she was always welcome; he frowned at her persistence in standing so near Pauline, in dogging her steps. Mrs. Ash kept this up; she sat near Pauline at lunch; she followed her when she strolled down to the beach; she gathered flowers for her; in her India shawl and Paris bonnet she hovered constantly near.

Only once did John Ash find opportunity to speak to Pauline alone. The boys had at last carried off Griff by force to their camp; Griff was willing enough to go, the "force" applied to the intellectual effort necessary on the boys' part to detach him from a lady who wished to keep him by her side. They had all been strolling up and down in the shade of the so-called Basilica, amid the fern and acanthus. Left alone with her son and Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Ash, after remaining with

them a few moments, turned aside, and entering the temple, sat down there. She was out of hearing, but still near.

"Ride with me to-morrow, Pauline," Ash said, immediately. "I have not had a chance to speak to you before. Don't refuse."

"I am afraid I must. I have an engagement."

"With Carew?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I am very good-natured to tell you. I am going to Naples with him for the day."

"You are going— Damnation!"

"You forget yourself," said Pauline. Then, when she saw the look on his face—the face of this man with whom she had played—she was startled.

"Forget myself! I wish I could. You shall not go to Naples."

"And how can you prevent it?"

"Are you daring me?"

"By no means," answered Pauline; and this time she really tried to speak gently. "I was calling to your remembrance the fact that there is no tie between us, Mr. Ash; you have no shadow of authority over my actions; I am free to do as I please."

"I know you are; that is the worst of it," he said, almost with a groan. "Pauline, don't play with me now. I have given up hoping for anything for myself—if I ever really did hope; I am not worthy of you. Whether you could make me worthy I don't know; but I don't ask you that; I don't ask you to try; it would be too much. I only ask you to be as you have been; as you were, I mean, during all those many weeks, not as you have been lately. Only a few days are left when I can see you freely; be kind to me, then, during those few days, and then I will take myself off."

"I mean to be kind; I am kind."

"Then ride with me to-morrow; just this once more."

"But I told you it was impossible; I told you I was going to Naples."

The pleading vanished from Ash's face and voice. "I never asked you to do that—to go off with me for a whole day."

Pauline did not answer; she was arranging the flowers which Mrs. Ash had industriously gathered.

"So much the greater fool I!—is that what you are thinking?" Ash went on, laughing discordantly.

For the moment Pauline forgot to be angry in the vague feeling, something like fear, which took possession of her. All fear is uncomfortable, and she hated discomfort; she gave herself a little inward shake as if to shake it off. "I shall ask Cousin Oc to go back to Paris next week," was her thought. "I have had enough of Italy for the present—Italy and madmen!"

"You won't go?" asked Ash, bending forward eagerly, as though he had gained hope from her silence.

"To Paris?"

"Are we speaking of Paris? To Naples—to-morrow."

"Oh, I must go to Naples," she answered, gayly. In spite of her gayety she turned toward the Basilica; Mrs. Ash was the nearest person.

"You are going to my mother? She, at least, is a good woman; she would never have tarnished herself with such an expedition as you are planning!" cried Ash, in a fury.

Pauline turned white. "I am well paid for ever having endured you, ever having liked you," she said, in a low voice, as she hastened on. "I might have known—I might have known."

There was not much to choose now between the expression of the two faces, for the woman's sweet countenance showed in its pallor an anger as vivid as that which had flushed the face of the man beside her with a red so dark that his blue eyes looked unnaturally light by contrast, as though they had been set in the face of an Indian.

Mrs. Ash had come hurriedly out to meet them. Her son paid no attention to her; all his powers were evidently concentrated upon holding himself in check. "I shouldn't have said it, even if it were the plain brutal truth," he said. "But you madden me, Pauline. I mean what I say—you really do drive me into a kind of madness."

"I have no desire to drive you into anything; I have no desire to talk with you further," she answered.

"No, no, dearie, don't say that; talk ter him a little longer," said Mrs. Ash, coming forward, her face set in a tremulous smile. "I'm sure it's very pleasant here—beside these buildings. And John thinks so much of you; he means no harm."

"Poor mother!" said Ash, his voice

softening. "She does not dare to say to you what she longs to say; she would whisper it if she could; and that is, 'Don't provoke him!' She has some pretty bad memories—haven't you, mother?—of times when I've—when I've gone a-hunting, as one may say. She'll tell you about them if you like."

"I don't want to hear about them; I don't want to hear about anything," answered Mrs. Graham, troubled out of all her composure, troubled even out of her anger by the strangeness of this strange pair. She looked about for some one, and seeing Carew coming from the tents of the camp, she waved her hand to attract his attention and beckoned to him; then she went forward to meet him as he hastened toward her.

Ash disengaged himself from his mother, who, however, had only touched his arm entreatingly, for she had learned to be very cautious where her son was concerned; he strode forward to Pauline's side.

"I should rather see you dead before me than go with that man to-morrow."

"Pray don't kill me, at least till the day is over," Pauline answered, her courage, and her unconquerable carelessness too, returning in the approach of Carew. "It would be quite too great a disappointment to lose my day."

"You *shall* lose it!" said Ash, with a loud coarse oath.

"Oh!" said the woman, all her lovely delicate person shrinking away from him.

Her intonation had been one of disgust. She held the skirt of her habit closer, as if to avoid all contact.

V.

At five o'clock of the same afternoon Freemantle, Gates, and Beckett, with Arthur Abercrombie, came running along the narrow streets of a village some miles from Pæstum.

The stone houses of which this village was composed stood like two solid walls facing each other, rising directly from the stone-paved road, which was barely ten feet wide; down this conduit water was pouring like a brook. The houses were about forty in number, twenty on each side, and this one short street was all there was of the town.

It was raining, not in drops, but in torrents, with great pats of water coming over, almost like stones, and striking

upon the heads of those who were passing below; every two or three minutes there came a glare of blindingly white lightning, followed immediately by the crash of thunder, which seemed to be rolling on the very roofs of the houses themselves. The four boys must have been out in the storm for some time, for they paid no attention to it. Their faces were set, excited. Every thread of their clothing was wet through.

"This is the house," said Arthur.

They looked up, sheltering their eyes with their arms from the blows of the rain-balls. From the closed windows above, the faces of Isabella Holland and the three Abercrombie girls looked down at them, pressed flatly against the small panes, in order to see; for the storm had made the air so dark that the street lay in gloom.

The next moment the boys entered.

"No, we haven't found him," said Arthur, in answer to his white sisters' look. "But we're going to."

"Yes, we're going to," said the others. And then, walking on tiptoe in their soaked shoes, they went softly into an inner room.

Here on a couch lay Griffith Carew, dying.

An Italian doctor was still trying to do something for the unconscious man. He had an assistant, and the two were at work together. Near by, old Mrs. Preston sat waiting, her hands folded upon the knob of a cane which stood on the floor before her, her chin resting upon her hands. In this bent position, with her disordered white hair and great black eyes, she looked witch-like. Three candles burned on a table at the head of the bed, illumining Carew and the two doctors and the waiting old woman. The room was long, and its far end was in shadow. Was there another person present—sitting there silent and motionless? Yes—Pauline. The boys came to the foot of the bed and gazed with full hearts at Griff.

Griff had been shot by John Ash two hours before. The deed had been done just as they had reached the shelter of this village, swept into it almost by a tornado, which, preceding the darker storm, had driven them far from their rightful road. The darker storm had broken upon them immediately afterward with a terrible sound and fury; but the boys had

barely heard the crash in the sky above them as they carried Griff through the stony little street. They had found a doctor—two of them; they had done everything possible. Then they had been told that Griff must die, and they had gone out to look for the murderer.

He could not be far, for the village was small, and he could not have quitted the village, because the half-broken young horses that had brought him from Salerno, frightened by the incessant glare of the lightning, had become unmanageable, dragged their fastenings loose, and disappeared. In any case the plain was impassable; the roar of the sea, with the night coming on, indicated that the floods were out; they had covered the shore, and would soon be creeping inland; the road would be drowned and lost. Ash, therefore, could not be far.

Yet they had been unable to find him, though they had searched every house. And they had found no trace of his mother.

During these long hours four times the boys had sallied forth and hunted the street up and down. The Italians, crowded into their narrow dark dwellings from fear of the storm, had allowed them to pass freely in and out, to go from floor to floor; some of the men had even lighted their little oil lamps and gone down with them to search the shallow cellars. But the women did not look up; they were telling their beads or kneeling before their little in-door shrines, the frightened children clinging to their skirts and crying. For both the street and the dark houses were lighted every minute or two by that unearthly blinding glare.

The village version of the story was that the two *forestieri* had sprung at each other's throats, maddened by jealousy; poniards had been drawn, and one of them had fallen. One had fallen, indeed, but only one had attacked. And there had been no poniards: it was a well-aimed bullet from an American revolver that had struck down Griffith Carew.

The four boys, brought back each time from their search by a sudden hope that perhaps Griff might have rallied, and forced each time to yield up their hope at the sight of his death-like face, were animated in their grief by one burning determination: they would bring the murderer to justice. It was a foreign land and a remote shore; they were boys; and

he was a bold, bad man with a wonderful brain—for they had always appreciated Ash's cleverness, though they had never liked him. In spite of all this he should not escape; they would hunt him like hounds—blood-hounds; and though it should take months, even years, of their lives, they would bring him to justice at the last.

This hot vow kept the poor lads from crying. They were very young, and their heads were throbbing with their unshed tears; there were big lumps in their throats when poor Griff, opening his dull eyes for a moment, knew them, and tried to smile in his cheery old way. But he relapsed into unconsciousness immediately. And the watch went on.

The gloomy day drew to its close; by the clocks, evening had come. There was more breathing-space now between the lightning flashes and the following thunder; the wind was no longer violent; the rain still fell heavily; its torrent, striking the pavement below, sent up a loud hollow sound. One of the doctors left the house, and came back with a fresh supply of candles and various things, vaguely frightful, because hidden, concealed in a sheet. Then the other doctor went out to get something to eat. Finally they were both on guard again. And the real night began.

Then, to the waiting group in the lighted silent room, there entered a tall figure—Azubah Ash; drenched, without bonnet or shawl, she stood there before them. Her frightened look was gone forever: she faced them with unconscious majesty. "My son is dead"—this was her announcement.

She walked forward to the bed, and gazed at the man lying there. "Perhaps he will not die," she said, turning her head to glance at the others. "God is kind—sometimes; perhaps he will not die." She bent over and stroked his hair tenderly with her large hand. "Dear heart, live! Try ter live!" she said; "we want yer to, so much!"

Then she left him, and faced them again. "I thought of warning you," she began; "you"—and she looked at Mrs. Preston; "and you"—she turned toward the figure at the end of the room. "My son was not himself when he was in a passion—I have known it ever sence he was born. Even when he was a little fellow of two and three I used ter try ter

guard him; but I couldn't do much—his will was stronger than mine. And he was always very clever, my son was—much cleverer than me. Twice before, three times before, I've ben afraid he'd take some one's life. You see, he didn't care about life so much as some people do; and now he has taken his own."

There was an involuntary stir among the boys.

Mrs. Ash turned her eyes toward them. "Would you like ter see him, so 's ter be sure? In one moment."

She went toward the bed again, and clasped her hands; then she knelt down, and began to pray beside the unconscious man in hushed tones. "O God, O our Father, give us back this life: do, Lord—O do. It's so dear ter these poor boys, and it's so dear ter many; and perhaps there's a mother too. O Lord, give it back to us! And when he's well again, help him ter be all that my poor son was not. For Christ's sake."

She rose and crossed to where the boys were standing. "Will you come now?" she said. "I'm taking him away at dawn." Then, very simply, she offered her hand to Mrs. Preston. "He was a great deal at your house; he told me that. I thank you for having ben so kind ter him. Good-by."

"But I too will go with you," answered Mrs. Preston, in her deep tones. She rose, leaning on her cane. Mrs. Ash was already crossing the room toward the door.

The boys followed her; then came Mrs. Preston, looking bent and old. The figure of Pauline in her dark corner rose as they approached.

"No," said Mrs. Ash, seeing the movement. She paused. "Don't come, my dear; I really can't let you; you'd think of it all the rest of your life if you was ter see him now, and 'twould make you feel so bad. I know you didn't mean no harm. But you mustn't come."

And Pauline, shrinking back into the shadow, was held there by the compassion of this mother—this mother whose nobler nature, and large glance quiet in the majesty of sorrow, made her, made all the women present, fade into nothingness beside her. In the outer room Isabella and the excited, peering Abercrombies were like four unimportant, unnoticed ghosts, as the little procession went by them in silence, and descended the

stairs. Then it passed out into the storm.

Mrs. Ash walked first, leading the way, the rain falling on her hair; the three boys followed; behind them came Mrs. Preston, leaning on her nephew's arm and helping herself with her cane. They passed down the narrow street, and the people brought their small lamps to the doorways to aid them in the darkness. The street ended, but the mother went on: apparently she was going out on the broad waste. They all followed, Mrs. Preston merely shaking her head when Arthur proposed that she should turn back.

At some distance beyond the town there was a grove of oaks; they went round an angle of this grove, stumbling in the darkness, and came to a mound behind it; on the summit of the mound there was something—a square structure of stone. Mrs. Ash went up, and entered a low door. Within there was but one room, empty save for a small lighted lamp standing on the dirt floor; a stairway, or rather a flight of stone steps, ascended to a room above. Mrs. Ash took the lamp and led the way up; Mrs. Preston's cane sounded on the stones as she followed.

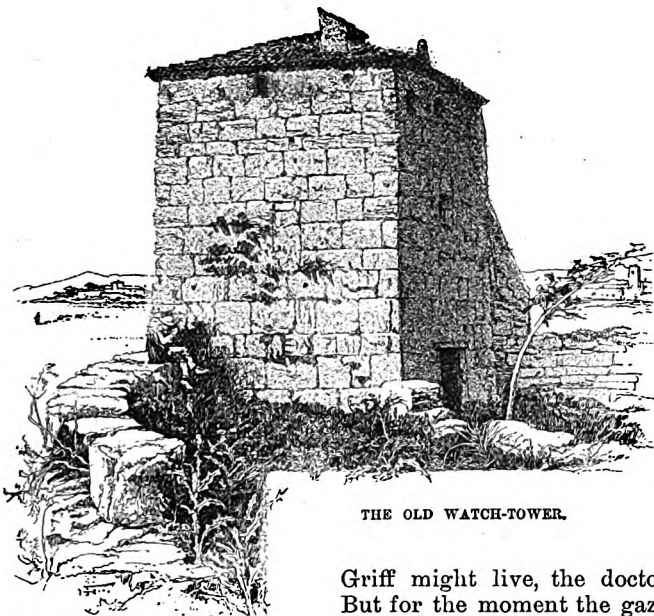
The room above was square, like the one below; it was the whole interior of the ancient house, or rather the ancient watch-tower; its roof of beams was broken; the rain came through in several places and dropped upon the floor. There was a second small lamp in the room besides the one which Mrs. Ash had brought; the two shed a dim ray over a peasant's rude bed, where something long and dark and straight was stretched out. Mrs. Ash went up to the bed, and motioning away the old peasant who was keeping watch there, she took both lamps and held them high above the still face. The others drew near. And then they saw that it was John Ash, dead.

There were no signs of the horror of it; his mother had removed them all; he lay as if asleep.

The mother held the lights up steadily for a long moment. Then she placed them on a table, and coming back, took her son's lifeless hand in hers.

"Now that you've seen him, seen that he's really gone, will you leave me alone with him?" she said. "I think there's nothing more."

There was a dignity in her face as she



THE OLD WATCH-TOWER.

stood there beside her child, which made the others feel suddenly conscious of the wantonness of further intrusion. As they looked at her, too, they perceived that she no longer thought of them, no longer even saw them: her task was ended.

Without a word they went out. Mrs. Preston's cane sounded on the stairway again; then there was silence.

At dawn they saw her drive away.

Griff might live, the doctors had said. But for the moment the gazing group of Americans forgot even that. She was in a cart, with a man walking beside the horse; the cart was going slowly across the fields, for the road was overflowed. The storm had ceased; the sky was blue; the sun, rising, shed his fresh golden light on the tall, lonely figure with its dark hair uncovered, and on the long rough box at its feet.

Looking the other way, one could see in the south the beautiful temples of Pæstum, that have gazed over that plain for more than two thousand years.

