

FALSE COLOURS

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CHAPTER I.

THE VARGRAVES.

"Yes, pleasant society enough ; but about as much like the real thing, the thing I mean, as those gardens are like country-house gardens, or as I am like you, Isabelle—to go even wider of a well-defined mark than I have gone before."

"Poor dear Cecile ! when will your fate and will agree?" a second speaker said, cheerfully ; "now as far as ignominious 'me' is concerned, I am quite happy in this society, that you find pleasant enough : it's as good as we can ever hope to mix in, you know that, Cecile ; and after all, who is more respected and looked up to than papa, about here?"

"No one," the one who had spoken first, a girl of about twenty-seven, answered, quickly, laughing as readily as she spoke. "No one ; and that proves so much, doesn't it ? Proves that the neighbourhood is so entirely right, and he is so entirely worthy, and I am so utterly in the wrong in not finding everything all-sufficient. Well, how are we to mix in 'pleasant society' this day ? that is all I ask."

"Why, there is Mrs. Foster's garden-party—don't pretend to have forgotten that."

"No, I won't ; and after this garden-party, there is a long dark hour of nothingness, and then the hour with the company of singers we have been beguiled into joining, and then bed, and then the consciousness of a day well spent to soothe us to slumber."

"Cecile, how you do contrive to grate on one's feelings !" This second speaker was a young lady about twenty-one. "You don't like to be quite happy yourself, and so you

won't let me be quite happy when I have everything to make me so ; where did you get your discontent from ? not from the Vargraves, I am sure."

"Don't bother your brains by attempting to solve the mystery of my discontent," Cecile answered, with good-natured, tolerant scornfulness ; "let me have your white chip-hat, to arrange some rose-buds in for the benefit of Mrs. Foster's guests ; and don't tell your father what I have been saying ; don't, please, dear."

She went out of the room as she made this request, and made her way up to her own bedroom, singing blithely enough as she went. She, Cecile Vargrave, was only the niece of this house in which she lived, and the one with whom she had been talking was the only daughter. But it had always been Mr. Vargrave's aim, and Mrs. Vargrave's ambition, that neither observant friends, nor the girls themselves, should be able to detect any difference in the manner of their treatment. But though the treatment had been applied for the last five years, the treated ones did not in the slightest degree resemble one another. The twigs had both been carefully bent in precisely the same direction. But the one was of stronger growth than the other. Cecile, who had it in her power to do so much, had it in her will to do so little, that Mrs. Vargrave found herself at times giving unwilling heed to the memory of the scandal she had heard of Cecile's mother having been a woman who was strongly suspected of no origin at all. The girl had lived with them for the last five years. She had been taken to the same safe marts, she had been adorned by the taste of the same milliner. The same riding-master had instructed Isabelle and her to come down to their saddles, and swing off in a canter, without any other movement than a gentle swerve, however hard their horses pulled, during the hours of fullest excitement in the Row. Yet for all these advantages, and a thousand others which cannot be enumerated here, Cecile, to the best of Mrs. Vargrave's knowledge, was as absolutely unsought as when she had come to Bayswater, fresh from a struggling life somewhere, five years ago.

She came into such a different atmosphere—an atmosphere which was redolent of peace and plenty, and respectability—and yet she could never bring herself heartily to feel and declare that the one she had left was less pleasant to her. "How rejoiced you must be to have nothing more to do with the humours of landladies, and the discomforts of