A LIFE'S ASSIZE.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF

'GEORGE GEITH,' 'CITY AND SUBURB,' 'TOO MUCH ALONE,' ETC., ETC.

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By the same Author.

AUSTIN FRIARS.
TOO MUCH ALONE.
THE RICH HUSBAND.
MAXWELL DREWITT.
FAR ABOVE RUBIES.
A LIFE'S ASSIZE.
THE WORLD IN THE CHURCH.
HOME, SWEET HOME.
PHEMIE KELLER.
RACE FOR WEALTH.
THE EARL S PROMISE.
MORTOMLEY'S ESTATE.
FRANK SINCLAIR'S WIFE.
THE RULING PASSION.
MY FIRST AND MY LAST LOVE.
CITY AND SUBURB.
ABOVE SUSPICION.
JOY AFTER SORROW.

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TO

FREDERICK C. SKEY, C.B., F.R.C.S.,

Late President of the Royal College of Surgeons,

IN ADMIRATION OF HIS GENIUS,

AS A TOKEN OF ESTEEM,

IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF KINDNESS

THAT FOR YEARS HAS NEVER VARIED,

AND OF SKILL,

THE EXERCISE OF WHICH HAS NEVER BEEN ASKED IN VAIN,

This Story,

WHICH IS NOT ALL FICTION, IS DEDICATED,

BY HIS FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

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A LIFE'S ASSIZE.

CHAPTER I.

THE QUEEN OF THE SOUTH.

OVER the border; beyond that vast expanse of moss across which the express speeds northward after leaving Carlisle; west of the Southern Highlands, there stands—like one who has voluntarily stepped aside from the world's hurry and turmoil—in the tranquil valley of Nithsdale, the fair 'Queen of the South,' Dumfries.

Now-a-days, Dumfries is but little visited. Tourists journeying post-haste on to Loch Lomond and the Trosachs, speeding away to look at frowning mountains and darksome lakes, have no leisure, and less inclination, to tarry at so insignificant a spot. Sterner beauties, noted from generation to generation, beckon to them from the northern fastnesses; and accordingly it comes to pass that the humbler and softer loveliness of Nithsdale is left unregarded, and the town where my story opens blooms like the flower of the wilderness, only to gladden the heart and refresh the spirit of some chance wayfarer.

Very soft, very stealing, very long-enduring, is the beauty of this part of Scotland. It does not assail the imagination with beetling cliff, with foaming waterfall, with lakes silent and gloomy, with rugged defiles, with frowning precipices—but it leaves an impression on the imagination which very much grander scenery often fails to do.

When we have lived our lives—lived, that is, the few years, short and evil, full of hope and sorrow, of disappointment and

rejoicing, which make up the real sum-total of any human existence, and, after our work, sit down to think over the past, it is not the heights of ambition whereto we have climbed successfully, it is not the great houses we have seen, not the grand people we have met, who come in the twilight and stand beside us. Ah! no; it is the old home, the trusted friend, the patient parent, the humble pets thankful for slight kindness, that fill in the canvas of the mental picture.

And, in like manner, when we have travelled north, east, south, and west; when we have seen the great wonders of God's earth; our souls, flying away from the confinement of city life, do not speed back to mountain peak or wave-lashed shore; nay, rather, they brood like doves over some home landscape, they revert to something like Dumfries nestling in her Nithsdale valley, with Criffel rising in the purple distance, and the corn-fields stretching down to the river near at hand.

To my thinking Dumfries has met with but scant justice at the hands of either novelist or poet. But this fact may, perhaps, be readily accounted for, when we remember that the men who have written most and written best concerning Scotland's scenery, were well aware that, even in the way of quiet loveliness, many and many a nook could be found infinitely surpassing Dumfries. Truth is, the land is too grand, too beautiful; and after the Highlands and the Holy Loch, after the Bridge of Allan and the Isles of Arran, it may be that, to many, the unassuming loveliness of Nithsdale might fail to charm a native after the fashion in which it certainly does a stranger.

But as this story opens in the town which even Scott dismisses with a single paragraph, I must crave permission to speak more fully of it; for the man in whose fortunes the reader's interest is entreated, never, to the last hour of his life, could close his eyes without the vision of a flowing river, spanned by two picturesque bridges, bordered by trees, and fields, and pleasant houses, appearing before him. Flowing, ever flowing, dashing over its weir with a noise like that of the sea washing in on a low shingly shore, it seemed to have made a channel for itself through his very soul, to have incorporated its waters with the stream of his own existence.

There are places and things which thus stamp themselves upon a man's memory; and most wonderful to me is it that the mental agony which oftentimes accompanies this photographing—nay, is the very cause of it—does not obliterate the merely physical impression which scenery under such circumstances produces. Whilst the soul is wrestling with its anguish, should we

—arguing from fancy instead of fact—not imagine that the outward eyes would be blind? Should we not think that when tempests of passion were raging in the heart there could be no external sense left sufficiently idle to note the branches waving in the breeze, the brilliant scarlet of the poppies amongst the corn, the swaying to and fro of a bough bending into the stream, the slanting sunbeams falling on ruined wall or grassy sward? And yet, for a truth, we know it is in times of the direst extremity that men's faculties of observation are most keenly exercised. The whole system is sharpened, each power is intensified by some tremendous and apparently all-absorbing trouble. And so satisfied am I of this truth, that I believe the poor wretch standing on the scaffold, with the terror both of the present and of the vast unknown stretching away before him, amid all the horror of his position, carries with him into the plains of eternity—unconsciously, perhaps, but still certainly—some ghastly daguerreotype of the terrible crowd below.

What would you? We live in a place for years—that orderly, comfortable, respectable, orthodox life, which, being strictly correct, is also too frequently strictly unexciting; and whilst we are in the place we know the position of every shrub and tree, of every book and article of furniture, and yet, behold! we leave that pleasant orderly existence, and in a short time the map of our memory becomes blurred and indistinct. As wave swallows up wave, so one piece of order destroys the recollection of another. It is only when the waves rear their heads and take away a portion of our lives from us, that we remember through the years the crested billows, and the wild waste of waters amid which the ship of our hopes went down.

Remember! Is that the word for it? Nay, rather, cannot forget, cannot forget! Ah, me! And thus it came to pass, that from having endured great agony there, the man whose story I wish to tell never could forget Dumfries.

It would return to him in the night season, with its narrow streets and its wide 'Sands,' so called, though the sands are nothing but a paved road, leading along the water's edge. Buccleugh Street was to him a bodily presence, and the Mid Steeple as a thing accursed. When he thought of the evening shadows settling down over Sweetheart Abbey, there came upon him a faint sickness—like that felt when the air of a room grows heavy and the scent of flowers overpowering; when he remembered the sweet peace of Lincluden, he could have wept for very desire of rest; when he recalled the wild desolation of that road which leads away towards Caerlaverock Castle—that road which winds

beside the ever-widening Nith till its waters merge in the sea—he could have fallen down and prayed for one hour from the past to be given to him again, one hour wherein he might feel as he had once felt—before he went hence and was no more seen.

He had taken his last look of the town from that bridge, built by Dervorgilla, who not merely did all manner of good 'dedis devotly,' but was 'rycht plesand of bewte.'

'A bettyr ladye than sche was nane,' state the old chroniclers. But as he stood watching the moonlight dancing on the swiftly flowing waters of the Nith, Andrew Hardell bitterly lamented that she had ever been born to build Sweetheart Abbey, or the bridge which led across the river towards the New Abbey Road

He had come to Dumfries a man full of hope, life, vigour, and promise, and he was leaving it at five-and-twenty, with grey hairs plentifully sprinkled amongst the brown, with the hope and the promise crushed out of him, with his health impaired, his spirit broken, and a darkness like that which enveloped the land of Egypt shrouding his future.

And the moon danced on the surface of the waters, and the Nith went flowing to the sea, and the lights gleamed in many a window, and foot-passengers walked across the bridge at long intervals, and from the old streets on the Maxwelltown side of the river came sometimes the voices of children—sometimes the snatch of a song—sometimes the noise of drunken brawling—while the man reviewed his past and faced his present.

The Nith fell over the weir, lying but a little distance below Dervorgilla's Bridge, with a regular sorrowful, rushing plash, and then widening out swept smoothly on its course towards the Solway. To his right were soft green hills, sloping gently towards the river; to his left lay, first the Sands, and then farther on that pleasant path which winds by the water's side—southward. With his outward eyes he hoped and expected he should never more behold that winding river, nor the soft green of its grassy banks. To him, from that night forth, it was all to be coffined and hidden away from view. There was no pleasure—there was no profit ever likely to accrue to him in the future from anything connected with the place, and yet he looked upon it as a man will look upon the face of his dead, thinking it all the time strange and terrible and exceeding sorrowful.

Once he turned and looked northward—to the new bridge, beyond which the stream narrows for some distance: but with that natural instinct which causes us all to prefer gazing towards the outlet rather than the source, he resumed his former position, and with arms resting upon the parapet of the bridge, followed

the Nith as it danced onward joyously, reflecting the fickle moonbeams that flitted to and fro—to and fro—upon the surface.

After he had filled his soul with the landscape; after he had taken in every detail of the scene—every tree, every dwelling, every eddy in the stream, every effect of light and shade, of strong moonlight, of darksome shadow—he walked slowly off the bridge, and passing up Friars Vennel, came in due time to the Mid Steeple, to the open space in front of the 'King's Arms' and Commercial Hotels. Keeping well in the shadow, he paused for a moment beside the latter building. From the windows of the first floor there streamed down into the street, light, and the sound of music.

'What is going on here?' Andrew Hardell asked of a passer-by.

'It is the circuit dinner,' was the reply: 'the judge entertaining the bar, sheriffs, and town generally.'

'Thank you,' Mr Hardell answered, and he proceeded on his way.

As he passed the door of the Commercial Hotel, a man, standing on the threshold, beside one of the waiters, suddenly remarked—

'Surely that is the fellow who was tried for murder to-day.' Then the two stepped out on to the pavement, and looked after the retreating figure.

Five minutes later he had shaken the dust of Dumfries from his shoes, and was walking steadily and sturdily towards the border.

Meantime, in the old room which was occupied by Charles Edward when he passed through Dumfries, there was feasting, and formal and stately revelry. Through the night the man who had been after a fashion acquitted, strode southward, while at the circuit dinner-table there was much talk concerning the trial; talk which did not greatly delight the Advocate Depute, who had failed to convict him. There had been a hard battle fought that day in the old courthouse, a battle which the Advocate Depute considered he ought to have won. If he had won it, Mr Hardell, instead of walking whither he listed in the darkness, would at that moment have been lying in the condemned cell, counting the days till his execution; and although the Advocate Depute was by no means a hard-hearted man, still he greatly regretted the prisoner's escape; honestly believing he deserved death, and that the jury had made a serious mistake in not convicting him.

Of course there were not wanting a few in the assemblage who took Andrew Hardell's part, who refused to believe in his

guilt, and considered he had not escaped by a mere piece of good fortune ; but as a rule the tide of opinion set against him. Even Lord Glanlorn, who had summed up, giving him the benefit of a certain doubt of which more shall be said hereafter, remarked to the High Sheriff and to the Provost,—

'Yes, certainly, the jury could not have convicted him, though no doubt they were morally certain he was guilty.'

And this speech may be considered as expressing the sentiments of most people in Dumfries that night. The Advocate Depute had been beaten, indeed, but not without honour, for the prisoner's character was stained for life. The counsel for the defence had won, not altogether gloriously, and although he looked pleased enough over his victory, those who knew him best were well aware he did not altogether attribute his success to the power of his own eloquence or the cleverness of his cross-examination.

Between the toasts—after the trumpeters stationed in the passage had played the airs they considered appropriate to each toast—the conversation turned mainly on Andrew Hardell.

'For my own part,' remarked an individual, 'I always expected he would have pled guilty to culpable homicide.'

'Ah ! he was too deep for that,' was the reply.

'He played a risky game, though,' observed another.

'And won,' said his neighbour quietly.

'If you call that winning,' broke in a fifth.

'I call it better than two or three years' imprisonment, at any rate,' came from across the table ; and so at intervals the talk ran on till the entertainment concluded, and Lords Craigie and Glanlorn had taken a courteous leave of their guests.

When they departed, Mr Dunbar, the great lawyer, who had been brought down specially from Edinburgh to defend the prisoner Hardell, excused himself from repairing to the judge's private room, on the ground that as his head was aching badly he wished to try if a stroll down by the river would do it any good.

'He has been very anxious about this case,' Lord Craigie remarked to the other learned judge, as Mr Dunbar went along the passage and down the stairs.

'Naturally so,' was the reply : 'it hung on a thread.'

'Almost literally,' answered Lord Craigie, who was addicted to mild puns.

The case, however, had not, with all due respect to Lord Glanlorn, hung exactly on a thread; but rather on a question that during the entire trial Mr Dunbar dreaded each moment might be asked—which opinion he expressed to a man who,

having come over from the 'King's Arms,' now walked with him along Irish Street, and thence down to the Sands.

'If the Advocate Depute or either of the judges had inquired whether a suit of your clothes might not by accident have come into Andrew Hardell's possession, I would not have given that for his chances of acquittal.'

And the speaker snapped his fingers.

CHAPTER II.

EXPLANATORY.

The day previous to that especial evening of September on which my story opens—with much pomp and ceremony, Lords Craigie and Glanlorn had made their entry into Dumfries.

At the present time, the judge's procession, spite of clashing bells and silver trumpets, and carriages hired regardless of expense, is but a poor affair—a faint reflection of the pomp and circumstance of a former period.

Up to the platform steams the train, and out of one particular compartment, round the door of which municipal officers hustle each other, steps my lord, courteously bowing to, and shaking hands with, the attendant authorities. Outside the station stands an expectant crowd, silent and observant, taking their pleasure phlegmatically—viewing the spectacle critically, as might be assumed of a people weaned on the Westminster Confession of Faith, and having an intimate and conversational knowledge of God's eternal decree. The members composing this crowd regard the pageant stolidly, and if they offer any remark, seldom venture beyond the observation that Jock, one of the trumpeters, knows his business, or that his lordship is just like 'ony other mon.'

No length of time seems to acquaint the municipal body with a perfect knowledge of 'who goes first.' The small amount of practice they go through for such ceremonials cannot make the mounted men perfectly manage their steeds and their instruments at the same time.

Throughout the three kingdoms a non-military pageant is necessarily but a poor and imperfect mockery of a military procession; and the judge's entry seems now so utterly an inconse-

quent affair, that the marvel is that any public entry should be attempted. The business was more imposing in the year of grace when Lords Craigie and Glanlorn came south; for steam, the universal leveller, had not then come puffing near Dumfries, as it does now amongst flowers to the pretty station nestling in Nithsdale, and the two great men were met along the Edinburgh Road, and escorted with much care and circumstance to the Commercial Hotel, whilst the bells clashed and the bells rang, and horses pranced, and music played, and 'that is the one side of it,' remarked an onlooker sententiously. That the picture, spite of the sunshine, had another, might have occurred to the understanding of an even obtuser individual than the person addressed, for the same sunshine streamed into the old prison in Buccleugh Street, and the same bells clanged out the announcement to the anxious wretches confined there, that before many days were over the question of their guilt or innocence would be decided, so far as punishment was concerned; that it would soon be freedom or transportation—freedom or an organized prayer and a long rope—liberty, or the best years cut out of a life—liberty, or all the future years cut suddenly short.

The power of breathing God's pure air; the ability to stand in God's sunshine; the choice of labour or of idleness; the right to go here or to go there with never an one to say yea or to say nay; or, on the other hand, entire subjugation to the will of those put above him; years of profitless labour; of enforced obedience; of work which should always leave a stain; of punishment which should trace scars upon a man's soul that death only could efface! Or, worse still, perhaps, to contemplate death itself—death, with Jack Ketch for nurse, and the prison chaplain for doctor; with the sheriffs in lieu of your own regular solicitor; and a sea of upturned faces instead of sympathizing friends;—death without sickness—without weakness—without resignation; a compulsory leap from life to the grave. Here, one hour, with the blood coursing through the veins, the pulse beating strong; and there the next, with the quick-lime being shovelled in on the almost warm body, and the earth piled over what remained of that which had gone through such mortal agony so brief a time before.

As the bells of the Mid Steeple and the Greyfriars Church clashed out with brazen tongues their welcome to the judges, all that I have tried to tell—and more—a hundred times more—filled the breast of the man whom you have already seen standing on Dervorgilla's Bridge—Andrew Hardell—lying at that time in Dumfries jail, and waiting to stand his trial for the wilful murder of Kenneth Challerson, Esquire.

When a charge of murder is preferred against a man imperfectly educated; destitute of imagination, with a keen relish for all animal pleasures; happily obtuse to all possible consequences till such consequences really stare him in the face; with a blind unreasoning belief in luck and the skill of his advocate till the trial is over, and then with an equally unreasoning faith that they won't hang him—that a reprieve will come,—it is not an easy matter for any other human being differently nurtured even to surmise how such an one bears the monotony of the days before the judges arrive; how he endures to hear those bells ringing and that music playing which announce that the time of suspense is almost over—that the period of certainty is close at hand.

Between us and such a criminal yawns a gulf wide and deep as any humanity can comprehend. If we credit him with mental anguish; if, judging by our own standard, we believe him capable of mental agony, of bitter repentance—of a vain tearing at the chains with lacerated hands and bleeding heart—we may be wasting our sympathy all in vain; and yet, if we run to the other extreme, and think that the stolid face, the regular appetite, the unbroken sleep, the jibing repartee, betoken no dread—indicate no mortal tremor—we should err, no doubt, grievously.

When hands come to be laid upon him; when—in the expressive Scotch phrase—the poor wretch 'tholes his assize,' then terror must come upon him like an armed man. The very animals have a comprehension when their hour is come; and though the prisoner hang on the slightest thread of hope—though, like a hunted creature, he looks in the face of judge and jury—of Advocate Depute and his own often utterly incompetent counsel—there must be a dread of the worst; a horror of that 'hanging by the neck,' the advent of which my lord puts on his black cap to enunciate.

When in the papers we read that John Oakes has hammered in Thomas Styles' skull, or that Daniel Brooks has murdered Mary, his wife, because she provided cold fat mutton for his dinner instead of the savoury stew that the mouth of the said Daniel watered for as he walked across the sopping meadows home—we feel that whilst we are very sorry for both criminals, we can no more enter into the ante-execution feelings of John Oakes and Daniel Brooks, than we can into the mind of a man capable of murdering his neighbour for twopence farthing, or taking a woman's life because the expected meal was not prepared for his return.

In Andrew Hardell's case, however, it was not difficult to understand the alternations of hope and despair, of courage and terror,

that he passed through as he lay waiting for his trial. There was no great gulf separating him from the men who were to judge his case. By education, by nature, by association, by profession, he was a gentleman—no villain, who, having premeditated a crime, deliberately takes the consequences of such crime upon his shoulders; no clever calculating scoundrel, who, having played a game and lost, regards the result but as the consequence of a bad shuffle of the cards, which has resulted in the cutting, instead of an honour, of a useless five or six.

No; by misadventure he, the Rev. Andrew Hardell, late a prisoner in Kirkcudbright jail, was now waiting for a jury to decide his fate. His case had been decided so far—as worthy of trial by the Sheriff Substitute of Kirkcudbright, by the Procurator Fiscal, and by the Advocate Depute, each one of whom believed him guilty; and yet there was only one man on earth beside himself who was aware for certain whether he had done the deed whereof he stood accused, and that man's name was Anthony Hardell—neither kith nor kin that could be counted, nor aught save staunch friend and evil genius of Andrew Hardell so far as either knew.

This pair had been educated together; at college together; taken orders together; and yet Andrew Hardell was the son of a yeoman, while Anthony claimed kindred with one of the wealthiest and proudest families in Somersetshire. Not that such kindred availed him much, for he was absolutely poorer than Andrew; and there were not wanting those who asserted that, had Anthony been richer, Andrew would not have long experienced the advantage of his friendship, and who lamented that so clever and rising a man as the yeoman's son, should allow himself to be led utterly by one who had not half his brains nor half his courage.

However well-grounded such lamentations might be, the assertion that Anthony's friendship was mercenary may, however, at once be contradicted. There was no man whom Anthony loved as he loved this Andrew, for whose fate he, sitting in the 'King's Arms,' trembled, while the bells rang out, and the procession drew nearer—no man, and only one woman.

Whereby hangs a tale, which cannot be wondered at, since there never was a story told since the creation but a woman figured in it somewhere. And a woman was the cause why Andrew Hardell lay in Dumfries jail, with his life hanging in the balance, and with the hope, and the pride, and the youth crushed out of him, whether the verdict were favourable or the reverse.

All through the glorious summer weather the two friends had

travelled together. Their school-days were over; their college life past; their old familiar associations were almost at an end; but, still clinging to the love which had been so very pleasant to them, they agreed to spend their last long holiday together, and to see the Scottish and the English lakes, before they settled down to work in different parts of the country.

Anthony, already in priest's orders, had arranged to commence his, to him, most uncongenial labours in an East-end parish on All Saints' Day; whilst Andrew, still only a deacon, was to remain in Somersetshire, assisting their old schoolmaster, the Vicar of Langmore, in his parish.

That either man entertained any very inordinate hopes of ultimate worldly aggrandizement it would be useless to affirm. The limit of Anthony's expectation was a small living in the gift of an old college friend of his father; whilst Andrew, without much money, and altogether destitute of interest, looked forward to nothing better than a curacy, unless, indeed, the might of his own tongue, the force of his own will, should enable him to climb successfully the difficult ladder of church promotion.

There was this difference, however, between the two men, that whereas Anthony disliked his profession, Andrew loved it—not, perhaps, for the love of God, but for the love of the talents wherewith God had endowed him.

He had the gift of winning popularity, and for popularity his soul thirsted. He liked, as was natural, considering his birth, all those outward signs and tokens of respect which a clergyman desirous of being respected can so easily secure. He had an enormous capacity for work; bodily or mentally he had never understood the meaning of the word weariness, and he longed for some field of labour where this superfluous energy might be turned to good account.

As a horse confined to one stall longs for the freedom of common and marsh, so this man, seeing his present sphere of labour nothing larger than an insignificant country parish, yearned for the wider arena from which Anthony revolted—for a densely populated and poor district, where he might seek out, and visit, and assist, and reform, and try his power of eloquence upon the poor, before soaring to those greater heights to which his merits justly entitled him to ascend.

He was very fond of the sound of his own voice; no music could have seemed sweeter to him than the words of one of his own discourses. He believed in himself—believed he could right wrongs, and convert infidels, and save souls, and create a taste for morality, religion, baths, and lectures. He was young, he

was enthusiastic, he was cheerful, his life was before him when, talking on these subjects, sometimes on the days gone by, oftenest about the incidents of their journey, the two men early in July crossed the border.

Their mode of travelling was that which is the pleasantest of all—on foot. Encumbered with no luggage save a knapsack each—sending forward two portmanteaus to the larger cities where they contemplated remaining for any length of time—they tramped all through the Southern and the West Highlands, visited the lakes, did the land of Burns, wandered among the Lothians, fished when the fancy took them, rested at quiet country inns, and led as utterly easy, happy, idle lives, as the heart of man could desire to compass.

When they left England there was some vague talk of their proceeding as far north as Aberdeen; but at Inverness, Anthony Hardell met with some friends who induced a change of plan, and the two young men turned their faces southward again with Mr and Mrs Challerson.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE HILL-SIDE.

At this point Andrew Hardell's history, properly speaking, begins. He could not hitherto be said to have lived, for the simple reason that he had not suffered.

A man cannot fully appreciate health till he has been racked with pain; a man cannot understand the terrible mystery of his existence until he has in his agony turned his face to the wall, and been alone with himself and God.

Up to the time when Kenneth Challerson shouted a boisterous welcome to Anthony Hardell, greeting him with many expletives and many expressions of surprise, Andrew had never known a day's real sorrow, and no prevision of evil oppressed him when he looked in Laura Challerson's face, and acknowledged that she was very beautiful—beautiful exceedingly.

There are little incidents in the lives of our fellows with which even the nearest and dearest are oftentimes unacquainted; and accordingly Andrew did not know that his friend had been in love with this woman before her marriage, and after, and that

he was in love with her still—in a feeble, purposeless, sinless, senseless kind of fashion, when her husband introduced them into her sitting-room, remarking,—

'Laura, my love, here is your old friend, Mr Hardell. Met him quite by chance; is it not wonderful?'

Whereupon Laura raised her dark eyes, and with the prettiest innocence, and the sweetest smile, and the most infantile simplicity, declared it was wonderful—astonishing—delightful.

'And your friend, too; another Mr Hardell. *The* other Mr Hardell, rather. I am so glad to see you,' she added, clasping Andrew's hand with her white, soft fingers; 'I have heard so much of you—so much.'

In reply, Andrew stated, and very truly, that he had heard of Mr and Mrs Challerson, and that he was delighted to have the pleasure, etcetera, etcetera. After which the quartette fell into the most utter and unrestrained companionship.

Pedestrianism was abandoned, and other modes of locomotion resorted to. They travelled by the same routes, they stopped at the same hotels, they climbed the same mountains, they ate together, walked together, rode together, talked together, and the days slipped by pleasantly enough, though not quite so pleasantly, Andrew considered, as had been the case before loud-talking, dogmatic Mr Challerson was added to the party.

With this gentleman Anthony Hardell decidedly agreed better than Andrew, the fact being that Mr Challerson was growing jealous of the latter, a fact Anthony confided to his friend as a capital joke.

Into this joke Andrew, conscious of his own perfect rectitude and indifference, entered with an unhappy disregard of consequences. At his friend's suggestion, he devoted himself to Mrs Challerson, studying her wishes, and humouring her whims, till at length Mr Challerson made his distaste for these attentions so evident, that the younger man was fain to leave the lady to Anthony, and himself bear her husband company.

Up to this time not a suspicion had entered Andrew's mind as to the *bona fides* of his friend's conduct; but suddenly it dawned upon him that Anthony's persistence in a mere joke was remarkable; that the joke was being carried too far; that there was something about Mrs Challerson he did not exactly like; that, all things considered, there was no actual necessity for them to travel in company. Acting upon which impression, he suggested to his friend the desirability of their returning to England alone; alleging, as a principal reason, the indisputable fact

that living with the Challersons increased, instead of decreasing, their expenses.

Somewhat to his surprise Anthony at once agreed to this proposition, and after many leave-takings, and many expressions of their hope that they should all meet in London at some future period, they parted from the Challersons, and set out on their return to England.

Before they were half-way to the border, however, Anthony declared that nothing should induce him to quit Scotland without seeing the Redgauntlet country. He would visit the Solway Sands, and Caerlaverock Castle, and Dundrennan Abbey, where Queen Mary slept.

'It would be a shame,' he said, 'for them to pass so near, and still leave unvisited places round which hung such a halo of romance.'

Often and often in the after time Andrew Hardell recalled the hour, and the spot, and the season when and where his friend made this speech.

It was an afternoon in the early part of August, and the sun was pouring his beams over the mountains and through the passes of the Southern Highlands.

In the very midst of these Highlands there is a hill covered with the shortest, smoothest, thickest turf. It slopes more lovingly towards the south and west than its companions; and over the green sward there are always playing golden shadows—golden caresses from the sun.

Through the centuries that turf has remained intact; God only knows—for man cannot remember—whether since the creation the sward has been disturbed by plough or spade. At the foot of the hill flows a tiny rivulet, which trickles over the white and black pebbles, and goes singing on its devious way.

It is in the summer time but the merest brook, and yet the landscape could not spare that thread of water winding round and about amongst the hills—now disappearing behind a grassy mound—now reappearing to view as it crosses a bit of level, mossy, marshy ground, where the rushes and the large grey stones fret the rill, and impede its progress.

From the spot where he lay, however, half-way up the side of that particular hill on which the sun looks so lovingly, Andrew Hardell could see the little stream flowing uninterruptedly.

Beyond, stretched a wide, desolate valley—untilled, uninhabited, whilst further still, rose hills, and hills, one higher than another.

To right and left—in front of the travellers and behind—

were hills; there was no sign of human dwelling—no living thing seemed to exist in all that solitude save themselves and the sheep, browsing on the short, sweet grass.

It was a scene of peace and quiet—of loveliness, and loneliness, and repose, not easily to be forgotten; there was a beauty about the place such as sometimes rests on the face of a woman—making it hard to part with her—which caused the young men to tarry for one look more, and yet another; and it was after they had lain for some time on the smooth close sward that Anthony broke the silence with—

'We shall not see anything like this for many a day again, I am afraid.'

'No,' was the reply; while Andrew let his eyes wander wistfully over the landscape.

'Then why should we be in any hurry to get back to England? Why cannot we, as I said before, make our way leisurely to Dumfries, and live peacefully and virtuously there for another month? We ought not to leave Scotland without a sight of the Redgauntlet country. I want to see the Solway Sands, and the place where Herries destroyed the nets. Burns is buried at Dumfries; he wrote a poem at Lincluden, or about it. We might walk from Dumfries to Kirkcudbright, where there is a steamer to Liverpool. Challerson, who has a family vault, or some such hereditary property, in the next shire, told me we certainly ought to go to Dumfries.'

'But you refused to do so when we were coming north.'

'Yes—because I did not then know there was anything worth seeing in the neighbourhood.'

'You had read "Guy Mannering" and "Redgauntlet?"'

'But we had not then been to the Lakes or to Edinburgh, or Stirling, or Inverness. Now we are leaving everything behind, instead of having everything before us, and have leisure to get up an enthusiasm about minor places. There is an inn at Dumfries where Charles Edward stopped; we shall behold the scene of the Red Comyn tragedy; we can explore Nithsdale, and even sail across, like Alan Fairfax, into Cumberland.'

'And the money needful for all this?' Andrew inquired.

'Pooh!' was the reply, 'it will not cost much; living quietly we can do the thing as cheaply here as at home, and even supposing we could not, what then? Forget prudence for once, old fellow, and let us enjoy ourselves while we may. It is hard to tell when we shall ever have such another chance again.'

'Why not? Is it outside the bounds of probability that you and I should ever come north again together?'

'I think so,' Anthony answered: 'I think it is quite certain that the same You and I shall never cross the border more; we shall not be what we are now this time twelvemonth; we shall have been separated; we shall have formed fresh interests, got jammed into different crevices of the world's social surface. We shall like one another just as well, I hope, to the last page of the volume; but we are very near the point where the story diverges. It may be even that I shall leave England——'

'Leave England!' the other interrupted. 'What are you talking about? What nonsense is all this?'

'Sober, sound sense,' was the reply. 'I hate the notion of spending my life visiting a lot of old women, and looking after the temporal and spiritual welfare of a parcel of snub-nosed children. The more I see of the life clerical, the more unsuited I feel myself for it; and I declare to you solemnly, that if I saw my way more clearly I would cut the whole thing, and transfer myself and my fortunes to America, Australia, or New Zealand, with as little delay as possible.'

'He would flee from Mrs Challerson,' thought Andrew, and he turned and looked in his friend's face very tenderly; then involuntarily almost, the two men grasped hands, after which there ensued a silence.

At length Andrew Hardell spoke—'What would I not give for the chances with which you are so dissatisfied?' he began. 'Instead of wasting your life in a country parish you can go at once to London and make your mark.'

'I make a mark!' interposed Anthony with a short ungenial laugh. 'Such a mark, perhaps, as a sweep might with his finger and thumb on a sheet of white paper. No! I suppose I must accept it, but the life promises to be unendurable. Suppose we exchange lots—you take my certain curacy and problematical living, while I take your twelve hundred pounds and emigrate.'

'Ought we not to be moving on?' Andrew Hardell exclaimed, suddenly rising from the turf. 'It seems to me we have wasted a great deal of time basking here.'

'Nay,' said the other, 'do not be angry; I was not envying your greater wealth, any more than you were envying me my brilliant prospects. I was only supposing that you were I, and I you—you cannot see any sin in such a speculation, I hope?'

'No!' was the answer; and yet something in the speech or the manner of it—something, perhaps, in the sudden revulsion of feeling caused by the question of money having so swiftly succeeded to a sentiment of pity, had jarred through all Andrew Hardell's frame.

It was not that he valued his poor hundreds—which he meant at some future day to settle upon Madge Forster—but he had been so sorry for his friend; and behold! in a moment it seemed as though his own small inheritance were all Anthony wanted to make him happy.

Men require to have lived many years in this world, and to have known wearing money embarrassments themselves, before they can make due allowance for, and understand the feelings of, those who are smarting under the lash of that necessity which a few hundreds could buy off.

Youth is generous enough in proffering assistance when it sees distress, but it cannot endure that the friend of its bosom should be so prosaic as to desire pecuniary help. Often and often Andrew Hardell had shared the contents of his purse with Anthony—Anthony always suffering such division under protest —but it was the first time his friend had ever openly coveted his small inheritance; and, hurt and chafed for the moment, the younger man stood looking out over the landscape at the hills, at the babbling brook, at the daisies beneath his feet, at the sheep dotted over the grass..

As he did so; as he gazed at the pure, passionless, unchanging face of nature, a great calm fell upon him. It seemed as though the very sight of the everlasting hills opened his heart and thrust charity therein. He felt, vaguely, it is true, but still he felt that there is something more real, more eternal, than any mere fancy or any conventional sentiment—Sorrow.

Like one who through the darkness stretches forth his hand to seize some object which he comprehends is present, and yet which eludes his grasp, his mind clutched at that moment the skirt of an angel's robe; and he understood, in a dreamy sort of way, that it is sympathy which links man to man: that it is the comprehension of the has been of his past, or the may-be of his future, which makes, in the human ocean, the soul of one man answer unto the soul of another; as in the material ocean deep calls, and deep answers unto deep.

The comprehension of this was, as I have said, very vague; and when Andrew Hardell spoke again it was like a woman, out of his feeling, instead of out of his understanding.

'If that twelve hundred, Anthony, or any part of it, can make you a happier man, take it freely, as though your father had left it to you. I shall never miss it; at least, I can do without it.'

'You dear old bear,' the other answered; 'I would not touch your money if you counted it out in Bank of England notes at my feet. No! I shall never make a good thing of my own life,

but I won't mar yours. I do not relish the parson existence; but if it is to be so—Amen! As for you, if you desire an open field and no favour, why do you not come up with me to London? You could get a curacy there fast enough, and make your way fast enough too, for that matter.'

'There is no use talking about what might have been in my case any more than your own,' answered Mr Andrew Hardell; Madge would never——'

'Of course not; but why not make your name first, and marry Madge after?' returned Anthony.

'I never thought of that?' answered Andrew, in a tone that seemed to imply he meant to think of it now. From which the sagacious reader will infer his love for Madge was of the purely domestic order; of the kind that when it packs up its carpet-bag, and goes away for definite periods, writes regularly home and sends due reports of its whereabouts; the kind that thanks God for well-aired linen, punctual dinners, and unfailing shirt-buttons; for a virtuous wife and a sufficiency of children; the kind that obtains in ordinary households, and wears deep mourning, and erects headstones, and marries again suitably; the kind that knows no better, suspects no higher attachment, and goes on with a half-comprehension of the joy and the anguish, of the jealousy and the trust, of the despair and the triumph, of a different love often to the end of the chapter.

Clearly travel was opening Mr Andrew Hardell's mind, though not delivering him from the domination of his friend, who carried him to Dumfries, where the pair took up their quarters in the 'King's Arms' Hotel, and made daily excursions in the pleasant summer weather to all the principal points of interest in the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER IV.

AT DUMFRIES.

By the time, however, Anthony Hardell had been a week at Dumfries, he seemed to weary of the place. He grew restless and dissatisfied; he was constantly complaining of the length of the days, and yet, as though to make the hours more tedious, he rose betimes in the mornings; he took solitary walks; he did

not affect either Andrew Hardell's company, or that of the winding river; rather he eschewed the Nith, and made excursions, as his friend finally ascertained, in an entirely contrary direction.

He was sick of sight-seeing, he obligingly explained, and, indeed, most of the sights were exhausted. A morning is sufficient to inspect Dumfries, to visit Comyn Court, and the sight of the old Grey Friars Monastery, to behold the well whence the old monks drew their supplies of water, and the retired hostelry, where the ancient fireplace of the Friars is still to be seen.

The Vennel—the quaint streets of the older part of the town—St Michael's, the churchyard of which was not then so full of hideous monuments as is the case at present; Burns's great mausoleum, a building singularly inappropriate for covering the remains of one who loved the turf and the daisies, the trees and the songs of birds, and who might have lain far more fitly at Lincluden Abbey; the Sands; Dervorgilla's Bridge; all these various places of interest occupied the strangers but for a single forenoon.

The jail where Hare was lodged in order that he might escape the fury of the populace, had a longer time devoted to it than most of the other buildings. There were still the marks on its doors of the stones and missiles flung against them, and Anthony found those who could describe how, whilst the mob were surrounding the 'King's Arms' Hotel, Hare was smuggled away through a back entrance into a chaise, and driven round by the Sands at a gallop to the jail, which he reached just in time to cheat those who would in their righteous indignation have torn him limb from limb.

'And then, because they could not get him, they fell to and broke all the windows in Buccleugh Street,' Anthony repeated out loud, echoing the words of his informant. 'How like the people—the sovereign people, that is—an unreasoning rage always succeeding to a just anger!'

They went over the jail, too, where they saw men herded together within iron enclosures, after the fashion of beasts in a zoological garden. Perhaps the authorities regarded them as a strange variety of humanity, for railways, a new experiment in that part of the country, being then in course of progress, the prison was full of unwonted inmates, and a number of navvies were consequently penned up in Dumfries jail, which was then about one of the worst in Scotland.

There is not a stone of it standing now, but the new building was undesigned when Anthony and Andrew Hardell walked together down Buccleugh Street, and across the bridge to Maxwell-

town; not Maxwelltown where Annie Laurie lived on the dew-laden braes, and had a love-song composed in her honour, but another Maxwelltown, a suburb of Dumfries, which, though now respectable and reputable enough, was once a sort of Alsatia, a thieves' quarter, a city of refuge, a very Zoar of safety for evil-doers.

On this side the river lies the road to Dulce Cœur Abbey, founded by Dervorgilla, who, as the touching chronicle tells, was buried at the age of seventy-six in the same grave with her husband's embalmed heart; and the friends visited the ruins of that building together, as well as Caerlaverock Castle, Lincluden, and the various other places best worth seeing in the neighbourhood.

When he had once 'done them,' however, as Anthony irreverently phrased it, he expressed no wish to repeat the pleasure, and accordingly he took to solitary rambles; whilst Andrew Hardell amused himself as best he might—fishing, talking to chance acquaintances, wandering along the river's side, roaming down towards the Solway, exploring that low, lonely shore, which skirts the eastern bank of the Nith on its way to the sea, and visiting and revisiting Lincluden and New Abbey, till he knew every tree growing beside the Cluden; and could have told better, perhaps, than any inhabitant of Shambellie, the precise spot from which the river can be seen to greatest advantage; the very stone on the wayside from which Criffel and New Abbey, the green valley and the purple hills, the dark fir woods, and the glittering river may be beheld, grouped together in an utter perfection of contrast and combination.

He knew—none better—the path under the old wall of the monastery—that path which leads away, past the graveyard and the stile; he knew the slight plank bridge across the stream where the alders grow, and where the trout's speckled back sparkles and shines as he darts beneath the clear water; he knew that most peaceful of farm-houses which faces the open country, stretching off towards the Solway, with its snug home-yard, filled with yellow stacks—its sloping fields, its sunny aspect; he knew the road which winds from thence round through the woods to New Abbey; and he knew that other road over which Criffel frowns, skirting through woods also—along the side whereof trickles the tiniest brook possible to imagine, and where grow ferns and mosses of all sorts and descriptions the eye could desire to see—even to the pale green water-moss, that clothes the old grey stones with a garment of beauty such as Titania herself might not have disdained to wear.

If I am tedious, pardon me. I would that in bearing com-

pany through many pages with the man whose life was marred at its very outset—who came so young to hold a story in his memory—you should have a clear idea of every accessory, however slight, which served just at that period to fill in the mental picture.

In a painting may oftentimes be beheld trifles scattered around the objects of principal interest; and, in like manner, when the great limner reproduces for a man's benefit the main scenes of interest in his own existence, she reproduces, at the same moment, not merely everything which may have happened to him just about the period, but also the small inanimate objects which he beheld.

Memory seems to receive a negative impression for the time being, but at will—ay, and often without her will—produces a positive from it, whereon may be found traced, not only the features of a dead joy or a living sorrow, but just as distinctly the violets strewed over the body, the white rose lying pure and unfaded on the cold bosom, the branches waving in the breeze, or the hare scudding off amongst the underwood.

And as Andrew Hardell remembered every inch of that fair country—as its mountains, its hills, its valleys, its streams, its brooks, its trees, its ferns—never quite departed from out his life, but remained in the volume of his existence like flowers pressed between the leaves of a book, only fresher and fairer, invisible to any one who beheld it closed, but perfectly distinct to him as in the days when his memory gathered them—so the reader is entreated to remember those accessories likewise, to the end that something of the freshness and the freedom, the fragrance and the beauty of that time of hope and sunshine, of youth and happiness, many linger even about the darker season, to which, all unconsciously, he was walking forward.

Not a leaf, not a cloud, not an effect of light and shade, not a flower by the wayside did memory fail to store up.

She culled them to use as simples in the after-time, to soothe him, to revive, to heal, to remind him of a period of hope, and a state of feeling to which he could no more return for ever than the stream can to its source, or the oak to the acorn.

Anthony Hardell had spoken prophetically when he said they twain—the same men—might never cross the border together—might never look with the same eyes on the same scene again.

Already Anthony was changed; for the old familiar associations he had ceased to care. Life was for the present clasped within a feminine edition of the Book of Beauty. Vaguely sometimes he tore at the chain which held him, and vowed he

would get away—leave her—free himself—but he was not strong enough to carry out his purpose. He loved the woman; he had loved her formerly, and she deserted him for a richer suitor; compelled into that course, she said, by the necessities of an incompetent father, since dead, and the entreaties of a manœuvring mother, on whom Kenneth Challerson had settled an annuity.

It is no part of this story to record the history of unholy love, to trace step by step the descent from virtue to vice, from honesty to concealment--to show how, the husband growing day by day more unendurable, the lover seemed less and less able to be parted with—to shadow forth how by degrees the idea of unfaithfulness entered the wife's mind, and the notion of conniving at her dishonour grew familiar to Anthony.

The tale of Anthony's life is not that which it falls to me to chronicle, and the story of his temptation is merely necessary to record, inasmuch as his sin changed the whole current of Andrew Hardell's life. Laura Challerson was not a good woman. To know her was to breathe an atmosphere not quite pure, and the atmosphere proved unwholesome for Anthony Hardell.

He could not wear God's livery, however, and be either a concealed or open profligate. His vows bound, his cloth restrained him. It was not in his nature to preach the word of everlasting life, and yet to entertain an unholy passion for another man's wife; and thus it came to pass that before the month was over, he said to his friend while they sat together in the little parlour in the 'King's Arms' Hotel, which overlooked the yard, and the grooms and the horses being harnessed and driven forth—

'Andrew, old fellow, do you remember that day amongst the hills when you offered me your money? Offer it to me again, and I will not refuse the chance. I am a slave here, fettered and accursed—give me freedom, and I will bless you, my friend, my brother, in the far-away land.'

Then Andrew Hardell answered, turning his younger face to his friend—

'You would flee from the evil to come. That—is not that it?'

'Yes,' the other replied; but he was thinking of a different evil from the one Andrew intended to imply.

'You think I am blind,' went on Andrew, 'that I cannot guess what these lonely walks, these long absences, mean. Well, there, I will not speak of her. If you have made up your mind to go—go; if you think there is no safety in England, leave it. We shall not like one another a bit the less in the years to come for this separation, shall we?—you said so yourself not long ago.

Leave the country, leave her—leave the chance of meeting h at once—you can have the money, or as much of it as you want, if it will only do you any good, if it will only save you from perdition.'

Whereat Anthony Hardell becoming visibly affected, Andrew paused to comfort him.

What followed there is little need to repeat. They talked of the East-end curacy—and the prospective living—of the chances of fortune in a strange country—of the unjustifiableness of putting a hand to the plough, and of then turning back—of the power for good a clergyman might exercise at the other side of the globe—of the certainty of money-making, and of repaying Andrew's loan twice over, ay, more than twice.

Although Anthony was conscious of a certain deception, he talked on as if guilt and he could now live in the same house together; only when he came to bid Andrew good-bye, when the old familiar intercourse drew to an end, and the hour of parting approached, he fell on his friend's neck, and wept bitterly.

Then it was again Andrew's part to reassure and comfort him; then the two men separated, little dreaming when and where, and under what circumstances they were soon to meet again.

CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE NIGHT.

All alone in his sitting-room at the 'King's Arms'—the excitement of parting from his friend over, the enthusiasm of having rescued a soul from perdition a little subsided, the noon day of reason gradually succeeding to the night of feeling filled with fantastic dreams and inconsequent actions, Andrew Hardell began to think over his actual position, and the result of his meditations proved to be anything rather than satisfactory.

From a worldly point of view, indeed, it may be questioned whether any act of generosity, utterly incapable apparently of bearing at a future time profitable fruit for the donor's delectation, ever assumed another aspect than that of foolish Quixotism.

In the debit and credit account which so many worthy people carefully keep against heaven, such acts find no place. They are not business, and have no claim to be considered other than mis-

takes—bad debts, in fact, that may as well be written off at once, since they are irrecoverable either in this world or the next.

Beyond the tithe given to God to the end that God may bless their undertakings—may increase their herds and flocks, and cause their crops to grow, and their ships to return safe to harbour, laden with golden grain—no entries are to be found in the books to which I have referred.

'Charity,' say the elders of the people, 'should be sensible, and not erratic. Behold our deeds! Are they not written for angels to inspect in the subscription-lists of hospitals, asylums, missionary societies, and associations for relieving various forms of distress? Are they not chronicled and printed (on very excellent paper in very clear type)? are they not spread out for the Almighty to see without the slightest trouble? and shall we not find every halfpenny we have laid out here in healing the sick, in feeding the hungry, in providing refuges for the destitute, duly carried forward from the day-books of time to the journals and ledgers of eternity, where the amounts thus paid on earth, together with interest and compound interest, await our arrival in a better world?'

Everything, both in time and for eternity, ought to be done on some settled principle, and that impulsive generosity which helps a man simply because he is a man, and because for the moment you chance to feel his sorrows as keenly as you might your own, is, if not wicked, at least foolish.

To waste your substance on your brother in a spurt of excitement, is like giving away over your cups to a boon companion your watch, or your snuff-box, or your favourite hunter.

There is a mental drunkenness in the one case as in the other, and for this reason perhaps it is that the men who are best thought of here, who stand highest in the world's estimation, and are accounted most sensible, most liberal, most to be commended, are those whose feelings are never likely to lead to such disastrous results. Mere pity—strong though it may be theoretically—is not strong enough to get into their heads, and produce even momentary inebriety.

Even over men whose kingdom is professedly not of this world, the opinions of this world have a considerable effect; and it is no disparagement either to Andrew Hardell's friendship or Christianity to say, that when he found himself alone in Dumfries, minus his companion and his small fortune, a re-action set in, and he commenced asking himself whether the result obtained were worth the price paid, whether he had not permitted his feelings to outstrip his discretion, whether he had done quite

right (that is the way the devil generally blackens our best deeds to ourselves and others), whether he had done quite right in thinking so much of his friend, and so little of himself?

He had left himself without any means if sickness fell to his lot. When Madge and he married, she would have to content herself with fewer comforts than those with which he had intended to surround her. He had given all to one, and kept back little or nothing wherewith to help the need of others. As is usual in such cases the money given grew and grew in his imagination till he felt as though he had thrown away his usefulness for life with it. Never before, God knew, had he thought much of those poor hundreds, and he hated himself for valuing and regretting them now.

If his friend had need should he not give—if he were sinking among the billows of temptation should he not strive to save him—if his small fortune were the only rope that could compass this end, should it not be thrown to the rescue, never doubting? which was all very good and creditable reasoning, but which did not in cool blood prevent Andrew Hardell from feeling he had paid a large price for Anthony's safety, and that this safety might just as well have been purchased for a smaller sum.

There is a second self within a man which always grudges its other self the reward of liberality—which always comes to take the glow off a good action, with, 'You ought not to have done that; half would have sufficed. It is all very well to be generous, but you should first be just. After all you should consider *me* as well as others, for it has been truly said the man who does best for himself in a worldly sense does best for his neighbours. The unimpulsive man pays his debts, employs labour and recompenses it fairly, marries prudently, lays by fortunes for his children, makes friends, and can get good appointments for his relations; but you,—pooh! you!—a nice thing with your generosity you have made of life for *me!*'

And with this pleasant spirit for company, Andrew Hardell sat in the 'King's Arms' Hotel, listening to the discourse of his second self, till he fairly arrived at conclusions following: first, that he ought not to have given away his small patrimony; second, that Anthony ought not to have accepted the sacrifice; third, that such a sacrifice was useless, insomuch as that the man who could not keep out of temptation in one country, would no doubt fall into temptation in another; that he who could not rule himself in England, would fall a willing slave in Australia; that instead of fleeing the country, he ought to have fled merely from Laura Challerson; that he should have turned to his work and his

labour, and with work and labour, and the grace of God, conquered the world, the flesh, and the devil.

When he had settled all this to his own dissatisfaction, he went out and walked up the river as far as Lincluden Abbey, where he climbed the mount and lay down among the fir-trees, and there, amidst the great hush and calm of nature, with no noise to distract him—nothing to come between himself and his Maker, save the songs of birds and the murmur of the Cluden, and the distant bleating of sheep, and the rustling of the wind amidst the trees—the evil spirit passed out of him, and he said to himself, looking up through the branches of the firs at the clear blue sky, that if he had possessed ten times a thousand pounds it should all have gone cheerfully, if need were, to save his friend.

And then worldliness took another form, and whispered to him, in justification of his own good deed—

'You have saved him, remember, not merely from eternal, but temporal, punishment; for how could a man, commencing life with a stain on his character, ever hope to make a good thing of it? He could never expect to succeed in the Church, for the Church reserves her best places only for men of good repute and unblemished reputation.' Having arrived at which comfortable but fallacious conclusion, Andrew Hardell could not avoid congratulating himself that he was not as Anthony, but a man much more likely to push himself into exalted positions than his friend.

For all of which reasons Andrew Hardell decided to rejoice rather than lament concerning his lost inheritance.

That was to be his last night in Dumfries, so he walked leisurely back to the town, and then took a stroll down the river below the weir, before returning to his hotel.

Already he had packed up all his wearing apparel beyond that he actually required, and dispatched his portmanteau to the Selkirk Arms' at Kirkcudbright, there to await his arrival. For now Anthony was gone, he determined to pursue the plan proposed that day, when they rested on the hill-side in the midst of the Southern Highlands, and walk from Dumfries to Kirkcudbright by the coast.

It was his intention to proceed to New Abbey, where he proposed spending the following night, and proceed from thence to Whitehill and Colvend by a short cut across Criffel.

From Colvend his way would lead him round the coast past Dundrennan Abbey to Kirkcudbright; and already he was thinking with no small pleasure of visiting that last spot of Scottish

ground on which Mary stood before she left for ever the country she had entered with bitter tears barely seven years before.

Given youth, health, an easy conscience, and the glorious summer weather, and could any earthly programme read pleasanter than that I have sketched out?

Andrew Hardell thought not, at all events. The absence of a companion was almost a relief, for Anthony and he had not proved much of companions lately one to another. It seemed to him almost as though with Anthony a care were gone, and he walked about Dumfries that evening with a new sense of liberty upon him.

Next day it proved so sultry in the afternoon, that he decided not to start for New Abbey until the evening, and it was therefore late—nearly seven o'clock—before he set out on his circuitous journey home.

In the centre of Dervorgilla's Bridge he paused to take a last view of Dumfries. Like a sheet of molten gold the river flowed on tranquilly—grandly, to the sea; while piled up, house above house, the town stood bathed in the full glory of the August sun.

It was still close and sultry, and black clouds were coming up against the wind, betokening a storm before long; so with all the windows of those houses facing westward, reflecting back the sunbeams, and that thick darkness stealing slowly from the east, Andrew Hardell left Dumfries and turned his face towards New Abbey.

He was in no hurry to reach it; the roads were hot and dusty; his knapsack heavy; for at the eleventh hour—after he had packed up his own belonging, he found a suit of Anthony's grey walking clothes, which, though at first he felt inclined to present to the waiter, he afterwards decided to carry with him. He might want a change, he considered; it was through a thorough wetting that the clothes chanced to be left behind at all. Anthony had laid them out to be dried and forgotten them, and the waiter, thinking they belonged to Andrew, brought them into his room.

Very heartily, as he toiled along the New Abbey Road, the latter wished he had acted on his generous impulse, and bestowed them upon the man.

'Really, it seems as though we were never satisfied either to give or to withhold,' he thought, as he passed under the birch-trees, which grew more luxuriantly along that road than English imaginations can conceive. 'If one give, one is sorry; and if one do not give, then one is sorry too; only, after the giving there is less weight to carry,' he finished, almost laughing at his

own conclusion; and then he toiled up the hill beyond the woods of Maybe, and came to as sweet a little bit of rural scenery as the heart of an artist need have desired to behold.

A morsel of copse, a mere scrap of green turf, a pool of water too small to call a pond; indeed, only a pool, because at that point a mountain rivulet had been banked up with sods, over which the water, after being formed into a basin, trickled at one point, and danced down the hill rejoicingly. In the distance a background of mountain and wood; for foreground, sheep, looking against the green grass white as the driven snow, and two women washing linen in the brook.

At this point Andrew Hardell sat down and rested himself. He talked to the women, while the shepherd's dog came up, and after sniffing all round him, laid his head on the tourist's knee, in token of confidence and welcome.

Behind him lay the valley of Nithsdale, with hills—soft hills, that seemed to melt away into the distance, hemming it in; below him the eye wandered away over waving woods—over plantations of pine-trees, that were not so tall then as they are now, to the winding Nith. To the south-west was Criffel, clothed in kingly robes of royal purple, which the setting sun seemed almost to set aflame, as his beams fell fiercely upon the mountain-side. To the east more hills, with the black clouds forming in dark battalions behind, and advancing swiftly and more swiftly to take possession of the sky, so soon as the sun should have retreated from it.

That was the last scene on which the man who sat gazing over it ever looked with unsorrowful eyes. It does not take many minutes sometimes to change the whole current of a life's story; and as the sun was even then sinking behind Criffel, even so the hope and the promise of Andrew Hardell's existence set that night behind a mountain, in comparison to which Criffel was but a mole-hill, something easy to climb, and look over and defy.

At last the sun set: all athwart the grass and the streamlet, the woods and the distant hills, he threw, ere he departed, patches and streaks of gold; and then, amid a pomp of red, and purple, and orange, he disappeared, while the darkness came swiftly on, dropping a sombre pall over valley and mountain, over tree and field.

Then, but not till then, Andrew Hardell arose to go. Bidding the women 'Good even,' and patting the dog's head in token of farewell, he departed on his way—not, however, immediately re-entering the road, but passing round the pool, and walking through the fields. To this fact the women swore afterwards

gladly, as became their sex, for the strange young gentleman had been courteous and pleasant; and there was no thought of that formula, 'As I shall answer before God,' being put into requisition, when he sat resting himself, with the dog's head laid on his knee.

Not far from the spot where he parted from them, however, it was necessary either to resume the road, or else make a considerable *détour*, and accordingly, as the evening shadows were stealing down, he leapt into the highway, and walked on towards the Abbey, under the trees that now began to form a roof over his head.

Up to this time, excepting the women washing at the stream, he had scarcely met any one since he had got quite clear of Maxwelltown. There are not many who traverse that road now, and there were still fewer then. A cart was not to be observed frequently, whilst any better class of conveyance proved a rarity justifying a prolonged examination. Even tourists were infrequent at New Abbey, and the way to it was lonely as the loneliest country-lane in England.

In the woods by which Andrew Hardell was passing grew blaeberries that there were no hands to gather; and there also lurked in the long grass, adders.

Further on, after a little space without shelter, came more trees, darkening the road; and it was just when he had reached this point, that the traveller heard the sound of hoofs coming thundering after him. Involuntarily almost, Andrew Hardell drew close to the old, low wall, covered with moss and lichen, which forms the boundary of the wood, and, turning, beheld in the twilight a horse galloping at full speed, urged on by a rider who seemed to be either mad or drunk.

As the horseman came alongside, his eye fell on Andrew, and he at once strove to pull up; but he was riding at so furious a pace that, although he tore at the mouth of the animal he bestrode with both snaffle and curb, he could not immediately stop him. When, however, he succeeded in doing so, he wheeled round, and reining-in his panting and excited horse close to where Andrew stood, exclaimed—

'So, you villain, I have overtaken you at last! Where is my wife?'

'Your wife!' repeated the other, blankly.

'Yes, sir—or, at least, the woman who was my wife! Where is she? What have you done with her? Where is she to be found?'

'I know nothing whatever about Mrs Challerson,' answered

Andrew Hardell; 'you are labouring under some great misapprehension. You are utterly mistaken if you think——'

'Where is my wife?'

As Mr Challerson asked this question once again, he sprang from his horse, and came still nearer to the man he addressed.

'Mr Challerson, if you will not believe my word that I know nothing whatever of your wife, that I have never seen her since we parted company at Edinburgh—that, if my life depended on it, I could not tell you where you should find her—what more can I do? If Mrs Challerson have, as your words seem to imply, left your house, the evidence of your own senses must tell you she has not left it with me. I am now on my way to Kirkcudbright, from whence I purpose crossing over to Liverpool, and returning, as fast as may be, to Langmore. I do not know,' finished Mr Hardell, 'why I should give you all this information—unless, indeed, it may be because I am sorry for your trouble, and want to prove to you that I have no share in causing it.'

'Sorry for me—are you?' repeated Mr Challerson; 'I think you will be sorry for yourself before we part.'

'That can scarcely be,' was the reply; 'for you will find it difficult to make me angry at anything you may choose to say.'

'I have no intention of saying much more,' answered Mr Challerson. 'Once again and for the last time—where is my wife? Come!—no subterfuges—no prevarication—out with it, man! Where are you to meet her?'

'For the last time—I do not know where Mrs Challerson is. I wish to God I never had met her; and I hope to God I may never meet her again. Is that explicit enough?'

'No!' thundered the other; 'you either tell me where I may find her, or you shall never leave here alive. I will never live with her again; but, by the Lord, neither shall you. I don't want to make a scandal, and if you will only speak out, I will spare your miserable carcase the flogging I intended to have given it. Tell me where she is, will you?—Damn you, can't you speak?'

Just then a flash of lightning lit up Mr Challerson's face, and immediately the muttering of the far-away thunder was borne to their ears. The horse, frightened, reared and plunged, and it was only after a pause, filled in with a volley of oaths, that Mr Challerson succeeded in quieting him.

'Now, sir,' he said, when he had done so, 'open your lying lips, and speak the truth for once; I cannot stay here all night waiting for an answer.'

'I have given you my answer,' was the reply; 'all the answer I can give. I know nothing about your wife; if I could tell you where to find her I would.'

Another flash and then another, followed by a peal of thunder so loud that the excited horse rose straight on its hind legs, and was only brought to the ground again by Mr Challerson's strong hand on the bridle.

'Curses on you—can't you stand still?' and he poured forth a volley of execrations, in comparison to which Andrew thought the thunder mild as music. 'Well, then, damnation to you,' he added, as the creature only became more restive, 'go,'—and he loosened his hold of the rein—and while the horse galloped madly away, turned again to his companion, and said—'I will thrash it out of you. If you will not give me the information I ask by fair means you shall by foul; a sneaking, canting, sucking priest!'

'Mr Challerson, will you let me pass?' said Andrew. 'You do not exactly know what you are either saying or doing. Grief or wine, or perhaps both, has stolen away your senses. Come on with me to New Abbey, and I will there try to convince you that you are completely mistaken in imagining I am concerned directly or indirectly in Mrs Challerson's flight.'

What Mr Hardell meant to say if he had got him to New Abbey he would have been puzzled to tell; but the real fact was he began to feel alarmed. The lightning, now playing about them, showed him a face perfectly livid and distorted with rage; he knew the temper—the infernal temper, as Anthony Hardell had often called it—of the man with whom he stood alone in that lonely place, and he would have given him the whole of the money, possessed of which he now felt satisfied his friend meant to elope with Laura Challerson, to find himself safe in Langmore parish.

'Go with you to New Abbey?' Mr Challerson repeated. 'No, thank you; we will settle our accounts here. Are you not afraid of me, man, that you refuse to tell me what I want to know? Look here! I will give you another chance. Say the name of the place where you are to meet before I count three, or, by my Maker, you shall rue it!'

'I assure you——' Andrew began.

But high above his deprecating tones the other shouted—'One!—Two—you had better speak—Three!'—and in another moment they were struggling together, with the lightning flashing and the thunder pealing, and the rain pouring down upon them.

They were more evenly matched than might have been supposed; for though Andrew Hardell was a slighter and a smaller man than his opponent, he was yet lithe, active, and cool.

Further, he knew his life depended on his keeping Mr Challerson at bay till help arrived—if, indeed, it ever came. Once down—once vanquished—he was well aware that now the man's blood was up he would think no more of stamping him to death than he would of shooting a snipe. It was a foot-to-foot and hand-to-hand fight, in which each man put out the whole of his strength, and strained every muscle in his body for victory.

At first Mr Challerson strove to lash at the younger man with his riding-whip; but the other had been too quick for him, and closing, they grappled with one another, each endeavouring to throw his opponent. It was simple wrestling, in which they both tried every old trick and art of defence unused by either, probably, since boyhood. Suddenly, however, Mr Challerson released his right arm, and raising it high, shifted his whip with the intention of bringing the butt-end of it down on his opponent's head.

It occupied a shorter time than it has taken me to write, for him to accomplish this feat—but, quick as he was, Andrew Hardell was quicker. Even as the blow was descending he caught the whip out of Mr Challerson's grasp, and swinging it round with all his force, struck his adversary across the forehead.

With a dull heavy thud the man went down, clutching at Andrew as he fell.

There was a great silence for a moment, during which Mr Hardell, thinking his opponent might be feigning, stood irresolute.

The next instant a flash of lightning lit up the whole scene, and showed him, Kenneth Challerson, lying there with staring eye-balls, dead!

But a minute before they had been fighting fiercely, full of life, and strength, and health; and now there was one stretched by the wayside, murdered—and another with the mark of Cain upon him, fleeing through the night, though no man pursued.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST LAW OF NATURE.

How far he fled Andrew Hardell never knew. Afterwards he had only a vague recollection of running on—on through the pelting rain—on, with a maddening desire to escape from himself—on, as a man runs in a dream with a horrible fear urging him forward—on, anywhere away from IT.

In the first agony and horror which came upon him, he would have rushed out of the world in a very access of despair. Had his way led him seaward, he would, in his blind terror, have rushed up to his neck in the waves. As a child flies from the consequences of its unreasoning passion, without a thought as to whither its steps are tending, or whither it proposes going, so he sped on through the rain and the tempest, mad because of the deed he had done—because of the man he could bring back to life no more. Until suddenly the horror growing greater than he was able to bear, there ensued a re-action.

It could not be—the lightning had played him false. He would return and find him living—badly hurt it might be—but dead, certainly not.

And then he faced about and retraced his steps—the conviction growing stronger and stronger each moment that it was impossible he had *killed* the man. 'I shall not find him where I left him,' he muttered; 'he will have recovered by this time, and crept, it may be, a little farther on. Likely he is propping himself up against the wall, or perhaps I may meet him;' and how earnestly he peered through the darkness, striving vainly to discern the approaching figure of the man who might never more tread that or any other road, God alone, who saw the brief tragedy acted out—knew.

His life—which he had thought so much of a short time before—he would have given up thankfully to behold Kenneth Challerson walking towards him. His life, of what value did it seem—of what account did he hold it, when at length he regained the spot where he had left the dead man. and found him lying just as he had last seen him—stiffening by the wayside?

When once he was assured of this—convinced that no skill could avail—that it was no delusion, but a stern reality which he must face—a sudden revulsion took place in Andrew Hardell's breast.

Whereas previously he had only thought with horror of the deed done—with a terrible sickening despair of the life he had taken—now he began to consider only himself.

What was to become of him? what was he to do? Should he procure help and relate his share in the business? Who would believe his tale? How, with the dead man's lips closed, could he ever persuade any one that the whole thing was the mere result of accident—that without premeditation, without even passion, in pure self-defence, he had struck the blow which left strong, noisy, obstinate Kenneth Challerson silent for ever?

Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and from that moment every feeling of Andrew Hardell's mind was strained to save himself.

After all, the man's blood was on his own head. Before God Andrew reared himself up in the darkness, and justified his deed. To man he would never answer for it, to no human being would he ever offer any explanation of it.

Punishment he would not endure—detection he would elude. No one could say for certain that he and Kenneth Challerson had met. Eye had not seen—witness there was none; he would simply hold his peace—he would go forward to New Abbey as he had intended. In a blind stupid sort of way he felt any deviation from his original plan would be sure to bring suspicion upon him, and accordingly he pressed forward with a definite purpose towards his inn, leaving *that* still lying by the wayside, with the rain pouring down upon it, and its white set face turned up to the dark sky.

Under the trees he strode resolutely on—over the river he passed—by the mill, and so up to the little Commercial Inn where he was well known, and where the landlady, declaring, in her soft border accent, that he must be 'just dreeped,' entreated him, seeing there was no fire in the parlour, to sit down by the kitchen hearth and get himself dried a-bit.

But with a shiver Andrew turned from the blazing fire, and declaring he was soaked to the skin, said he would go to bed, if first she would give him a glass of hot whisky-and-water.

While he stood waiting for this, his eye fell on the clock, which he remarked must surely be fast.

'I don't think she is—at least, not more nor about five minutes,' answered the landlady; whereupon Andrew Hardell consulted his watch, which, however, he said, had stopped.

'I did not fancy it could have taken me so long to walk from Dumfries,' he remarked, 'but I suppose it must.'

'Ay, it is a good step,' answered the landlady, 'drink this up

now—it will warm ye ; ye're just trembling like a leaf ; it will be lucky if ye don't take a bad cold after it.' Which prophecy Andrew laughed off, saying he was not given that way, and that he had been out many a worse night ; and then he drank to the landlady's good health, and went his way upstairs to the little bedroom prepared for him by a sturdy, buxom servant who had received from the young man, on the occasion of his previous visits to the inn, many a compliment and many a half-crown.

'And if ye put out your things, sir, we'll have them fine and dry for ye by the morn,' said this handmaiden.

'Thank you,' replied Mr Hardell, and he shut the door of his room.

The first thing he did on finding himself alone, was to take out his pocket flask and drain it to the last drop, then he divested himself of his dripping garments, threw them all in a heap outside on the landing, extinguished his candle, and flung himself into bed.

Of the agony of that night who may conceive—of the alternations of abject terror and of fixed resolve—of the tumult of conflicting feelings—of the long, long hours of wakefulness—of the fitful slumbers from which he started painfully to recall his actual position—of the feverish tossing—of the maddened reflections—of the desperate, useless longing that he had at once sought for help, and confessed everything—that he had not commenced a struggle which, dimly and uncertainly, but still truly, he felt would now be life-long.

Thinking of that confined, low room in the after-time, he could not help marvelling how so small a space was capable of containing so much misery through the night. He felt that, out in the woods, or on the mountain-side, he could have borne it better ; that the thunder and lightning, the dash of the rain, and the swirl of the tempest had been preferable to the utter silence of his apartment, where there was no noise, not the faintest sound to drown the mad cry of his own heart at the cruel trouble which had come upon it.

In the presence of such a grief language must stand mute. There is no form of words capable of even faintly describing the hell of thought into which he, that night, descended.

Around him all was darkness—a mental, actual, and spiritual darkness that might be felt, whilst within, the flames of imagination burnt all the fiercer, because of that very hopeless, surrounding darkness.

With their fiery tongues they seem to lick up the blood in his veins ; they made clear every event in the night's tragedy ; they

kept hissing every word which had been spoken, and constantly revealing IT lying by the road-side, with the rain welling up against it, making pools around on the wet soft turf.

And then, as he had before marvelled, when, his sudden panic over, he retraced his steps, he began to wonder again whether it would be there when morning broke; whether, when the grey light dawned, that ghastly face would still be upturned to meet the coming day; whether it would be found before sunrise; and, supposing it were not, who would then find it, and where they would take it; and whether he should ever have, save in memory, to look upon it more.

And so at length, worn out, he fell into a sleep so deep that no thought of his trouble could follow him; and when he awoke it was with a start to find the night past, the rain over, the sun shining, and a new day begun.

As a man who, one morning, rises to gaze over fruit-laden vineyards and smiling plains, and the next, looks forth to note where the hot lava has made all which was beautiful, desolate; even so Andrew Hardell surveyed, in that first moment of consciousness, the ruins of his life's edifice.

Gone were the stately palaces, the smiling homesteads, the soft, green pastures, and the clear waters; gone the hopes, the aspirations, the dreams, the desires of his former existence, and nothing remained but a darkened past and a gloomy future.

Already—when all chance of a full and free confession was over—he was beginning to understand that there is more good in temporal punishment than most people are willing to allow; that the crime undetected may be harder to endure than the crime for which a full penalty has been paid; that there is something in making a 'clean breast' of even an accidental offence; that there may be a peace and calm in knowing the worst, which successful eluding of consequences never achieves.

To the best of his belief there was not a tittle of evidence which could possibly connect him with Kenneth Challerson's death, and yet already he felt he would have given all he possessed, or was ever likely to possess, to be able to retrace his first false step, and boldly face the matter out.

But there was no help for the error now—as he had chosen he must abide. After all it was better not to court an inquiry which might terminate no one could tell how. It could not bring Kenneth Challerson back to life, and it would ruin his own prospects.

There was not a circumstance which could point him out as guilty—not one; and even as he came to this decision he sat

down in his chair faint and sick—dizzy and confused for the moment, as though some one had whispered in his ear 'Thou art the man.'

He had left, he felt certain, no sign nor token behind in the dead man's keeping—no mute testimony which those clenched fingers should deliver up in evidence against him.

Had he not, truly? If this were so, what did that button missing from his coat, with a piece of cloth torn also away, mean?

Mean! it only meant this, and he knew it; that there was a button and a jagged morsel of tweed in the possession either of the corpse or of those who had found the body; and that there, in the coat he had flung unthinkingly off the previous night, was the rent which that bit of cloth would fit, and a button missing, which that button, pulled off by Kenneth Challerson as he fell, would replace.

For a moment the room swam round before him, and then his head steadied. Previously he had not guessed the depth or the peril of the waters across which he had elected to pass to safety; but now that he did understand his danger, everything in the man's character likely to be of use to him at such an extremity, rose up to do battle against the danger he beheld approaching.

True, there was just a possibility that the bit of evidence *might* have slipped from the dead man's fingers as he fell; that they *might* have loosened for an instant before the death struggle; and that the button *might* have dropped on to the grass, where it *might* have been beaten into the earth by the heavy rains, and *might* thus elude detection.

Once the body was lifted, Andrew knew it would be very difficult for any one to say for certain the precise spot where it had lain; and if by chance the button were not in Kenneth Challerson's hand, it was then a hundred to one if any subsequent searching discovered it; or supposing even that it were discovered, the clue would be too uncertain and remote to lead to any very definite conclusion.

Almost as I have written them, these thoughts passed through Andrew Hardell's mind, and he seized at the faint comfort they contained eagerly; but a moment's reflection sufficed to show him how utterly futile such comfort was.

As he recalled the grasp his opponent had laid upon him ere he fell, the clutch with which the dying man seized convulsively (as he now knew) the first object his fingers touched, he felt no shadow of doubt but that clenched in his right hand lay the

damning bit of evidence that if once brought home would put the rope round his, Andrew Hardell's, neck.

Instinctively he raised his hand to his throat, for as this thought occurred to him he felt as if he were choking. For the moment he seemed hemmed in, but it was only for the moment; next instant he recollected Anthony Hardell's suit of clothes lying snugly in his knapsack, and quickly as his eager haste would let him, he flung off his own garments, and dressed in the others. Then he stuffed his discarded habiliments into the knapsack, and stepped out with it in his hand into the parlour adjoining his bedroom.

Upon no *might*, upon no *if*, would he risk his safety now. He knew just what he had to do—and that was, to get rid of his clothes; and, till he was rid of them, never to let the knapsack out of his sight.

His agony of despair was over; he had spent himself during the night in wrestling with his misery, and he could feel nothing now, excepting a dead, dull pain, and a determination to keep himself free from all suspicion capable of confirmation.

He looked out at the bright sunshine through windows that still contain the same glass—for older dates than the year in which this story opens are traced on the small panes; he beheld the trees still dripping after the night's rain; he saw Criffel, purple-clad, straight before him; he noticed the few villagers coming and going, stopping to talk and comparing notes concerning the storm; and all the time he was thinking of where he could hide his burden—of the best way in which to dispose of this evidence against him.

Breakfast came up, brought by the buxom damsel aforementioned, and he had to eat, lest his lack of appetite should excite suspicion, though every morsel he swallowed seemed to choke him.

The landlady came, and asked if he were going to stay over the day with them; and he fancied she looked strangely at him when he replied he was on his way back to England, and meant to walk round the coast to Kirkcudbright.

A few minutes later, when he was descending the stairs on his way out, a cart drew up to the door, the driver of which brought apparently strange tidings, for soon the whole establishment—landlord and landlady, servant and stable-boy—were out in the morning sunshine, gathered open-mouthed round the man, listening to what he had to say.

Andrew Hardell stepped aside into the kitchen, to take his

breath before going out to hear the news, which he already knew too well.

It was quite deserted; and as he stood alone just within the doorway, his eye fell again upon the clock; when it did so, he remembered the remark he had made on the previous night about its being too fast.

Not a second did it take him to open the glass front, and twirl round the hands till they pointed to a quarter to nine, instead of a quarter past eight. He had his senses about him now, and he was not going to neglect any chance of escape, no matter how remote such chance might seem.

Then, still unnoticed, he stepped out into the passage, and passing through the inner door, joined the group gathered round the cart.

'Eh, sir! such a dreadful thing!' exclaimed the landlady, when her eye rested upon him; 'a gentleman found dead on the road-side this morn, just at sun-rising!'

'Killed by the lightning?' inquired Mr Hardell.

'Na! na!' answered the individual who had brought the news, and round whom the whole population of the village was rapidly collecting; 'it was no' the will of God, but the wickedness of man laid him low! Robbed and slain—and, they do say, not a drap o' bluid to be seen!'

'Robbed and slain!' repeated Andrew Hardell, in a tone which elicited something like a rebuke from the narrator.

'It may well try ye to conceive o' such a thing being done; but it has been done; for I met them that saw him, and they say his pockets were turned inside out, and that there was not a sign of a hurt about him.'

'It must have been the lightning, then,' repeated Andrew; 'it is nonsense to talk of a man being murdered in a quiet neighbourhood like this.'

'But the lightning wadna take his siller nor his watch!' said the landlord, sententiously.

'Somebody might have robbed him afterwards,' persisted Mr Hardell.

'Hoot! wha would thieve frae a deid man but his murderer?' retorted the news-bearer.

'They do say the very studs in his shirt were taken away,' added the landlady.

'Who was he?' asked Andrew Hardell.

'A Southerner, like yersel',' replied the man, evidently implying that this circumstance was not at all to the advantage

either of the individual murdered or of the person he addressed. 'They tell me he has been staying at some place wi' freens away beyond Dumfrice.'

'People 'll be feared to walk along the roads!' remarked an old woman, who had come hobbling down from the Abbey to hear the news.

'There's no call for you to be feared, Nannie,' answered the messenger of ill-tidings; 'no one 'll meddle with you, I'm thinking!' which speech raised a laugh—for all the clothes Nannie stood up in would not have paid a thief for the trouble of stopping her, added to which her beauty was not so remarkable as that of Moore's heroine.

Like the rest, Andrew Hardell laughed too. Often, in the after-time, he wondered what made him do so; and how, in that hour of mortal trouble and bitter anxiety, it was possible for any absurdity to tickle his fancy. Spite of himself, however, he laughed heartily; and the fact was remembered, not to his disadvantage, subsequently.

Very soon the clock struck nine, and, hearing it, the landlady bustled back into the house, exclaiming she had been standing out there idling for near an hour.

This was the signal for the remainder of the group gradually to disperse; and when the last of the stragglers had departed, and the driver of the cart, after partaking of a dram, whipped up his horse, and disappeared from view, Andrew Hardell paid his score, fee'd the handmaiden, bade 'Good-bye' to his host and hostess, and, knapsack on back, started off, ostensibly to climb Criffel, and walk round the shore to Kirkcudbright, but really to find a place where he might hide away for ever the testimony against him, which he was even then carrying from New Abbey.

CHAPTER VII.

BY THE SOLWAY.

UNTIL a man have something to conceal, he can form no idea of the difficulty he will experience in hiding it.

Had any one told Andrew Hardell, on the morning when he left Dumfries, that a person desirous of secreting a suit of clothes should, with all the lonely hills before him—with the

woods rich in fern and grass, and tangled bramble, at his right hand and his left—with the Nith and the sea accessible—fail to get rid of his burden easily, the young man would have laughed scornfully.

'Be at a loss with all that wealth of heather, all that wilderness of gorse? Why, if he only stuck the things down far enough, they might stay there safely concealed till they rotted.'

This is the sort of remark he would have made twenty-four hours previously, had such a difficulty been submitted to him; but it was now twenty-four hours after, and the wide difference between might and would was already revealing itself to his understanding.

He had stepped from the land of theory into the land of practice, and the paths of that latter country are not usually easy.

Theoretically, he could have hidden away a whole wardrobe on the top of Criffel; practically, he toiled over the mountain, and pursued his road to Whitehill and Colvend, carrying the evidence with him which he most earnestly desired to destroy.

It seemed to his imagination as if there were no place on the earth, or under the earth, where that coat, wanting a button, might be concealed.

The heather would wither—the cattle would eat the grass—the rain would wash the earth away—the loose stones, if he piled them above, would be wanted for some purpose, and carted off.

If he descended into the plantations lying below him, and hid his burden amongst the underwood and brambles, the children, searching for blaeberries, would be sure to find it; if he cast the accursed thing into the sea, the waves would wash the bundle to shore.

Had the desolate mountain, and the silent hills, and the quiet valleys, been earth's most populous places, he could not have felt more eyes were upon his actions than in that most wretched summers day's walk.

How he passed the hours he never could accurately remember. As a man in delirium gets through the weary days with scarcely a recollection as to how they were spent, so he strode on, mile after mile, which seemed to melt into air behind him.

When the dew still lay heavy on the grass, he climbed up to the top of Criffel—when the noon-day sun stood high in heaven he passed by the little lake, which appears less a lake than a point where the stream stands still, and wished his bundle were lying at the bottom of its waters. When the afternoon was hottest he toiled along the hill-side beyond Colvend; toiled amongst the gorse and the heather; with the sun streaming

down upon him; with the blue expanse of glittering sea dazzling his eyes; with the Highland cattle lifting their heads, and looking with astonishment at the passer-by; with the sheep standing till he might almost have laid his hand on them before they leisurely trotted off; with the rabbits running in and out of the low, loose clay fence which separates the grass and the heather, and the gorse from the cliffs going sheer down to the shore; with the oyster birds hovering over the surface of the water, or looking on the sands, when viewed from above, like so many black specks; with the jer-falcon pluming itself in the sunshine, or flying screaming from point to point; with the rocks covered with lichens and mosses—green, and red, and grey, and purple, showing their marvellous colours in the light, which, streaming across the sea, seemed brighter than the common light of day; with the Cumberland hills showing blue beyond the expanse of calm unruffled water; with the hill-side a blaze of yellow and purple; with the blue-bells nodding beside his path; with everything whispering of peace, and rest, and beauty, he strode on, able really to see nothing save a lonely road, overshadowed by trees, where a man lay with his face upturned to the darkness—grasping in his cold, still fingers a button and a bit of cloth.

Like a funeral procession in a bright street, this darkness seemed constantly passing between him and the light. It lay on the top of Criffel, and he beheld it on the sunlit sea.

With his outward eyes he might see cliffs and sands, miles of cliff—miles of sands—with the water stealing over them; purple-clad hills and rocks clothed with every variety of moss; but with his mental vision he could discern nothing save Kenneth Challerson; and when he thought otherwise than in a confused sort of delirium, it was only to imagine where *it* was now—where *it* was lying—how *it* looked in the daylight—whether there were a sheet drawn decently over the rigid face, and whether the eyes were still staring as he had last beheld them.

What he learned that day I might never hope to tell. It seemed to him afterwards that he went to school, and acquired all he knew of his fellows, of their temptations, their remorse, their terror, while he walked amongst the heather, alone with nature and his own misery.

Stumbling amongst the grass—sick, weary, dizzy—he conned line upon line of lessons destined never to be forgotten. He went down into the wells of his heart, and drank waters of bitterness therefrom—he experienced the terrors of a troubled mind—he went through agonies of regret—through depths of despair—he beat against the door which had so suddenly closed between

him and the light, until, for very weariness, he was fain to believe in the darkness that had fallen on his noontide—in his anguish he cried to God, asking, was it just, was it well? and throughout all, in a dull, persistent way, he looked for some place where he might hide the evidence against him, where he might rid himself of his burden, and walk on, dreading no pursuit defiant of detection.

The day drew on. He had not tasted food, and he had walked miles upon miles since leaving New Abbey; he was growing faint, and sick, and weary, when the path led suddenly down towards the shore, down from the hill-side to the lower ground which lies beyond the cliffs I have mentioned, and brought him into a tiny cove that appeared to his imagination like a corner cut out of fairyland.

For the moment he forgot his trouble, forgot himself in astonishment at the place where he stood—a bay hemmed in by high rocks, between which only a glimpse of the sea could be obtained, carpeted by the finest, whitest sand, and thousands upon thousands of liliputian shells.

Beside the path by which he had descended grew brambles and ivy, broom and ferns innumerable, wild flowers decked the little knolls of earth that were piled, one above another, on the land side of the bay.

Great rocks, almost like giant stones placed on end, only larger and loftier than any giant stones we know, formed ramparts about the cove; and when Andrew Hardell passed round and between these rocks he found more tiny bays, each guarded, each sheltered, each with its own special look-out seaward, each with its own peculiar charm.

The man who can say he ever beheld anything similar to this cluster of fairy coves must have had most fortunate experiences. No description could give an idea of their singular beauty, no artist reproduce their particular charm, no writer ever hope to convey an adequate impression of their marvellous loveliness.

Creek within creek; bay without bay; rocks where one could play at hide-and-seek with the sea; places where no man might find; spots where the traveller seems to have reached the last confines of earth, and to be standing on the very shore of eternity.

For the first time that day Andrew Hardell felt himself alone—hidden.

He was sheltered from the glare of the sun; shaded by the rocks, he could look forth as from a bower with undazzled eyes upon the calm sea, rippling lazily, leisurely in on the sand.

At the outlet of one of the creeks he found a natural basin that, covered by the tide twice a-day, remained full of water when it ebbed.

Into this, the sides of which were covered with small shell-fish and sea-weed, Andrew Hardell plunged his head.

Again and again he dipped it into the water: then he shook the moisture from his hair, and with a sense of refreshment looking up, beheld what he had travelled so far to find—a hiding-place.

Far above high-water mark appeared in all directions fissures in the rocks; cracks, narrow and deep, such as the sun makes sometimes in the earth. Here no cattle could come to browse, no children's hands be thrust in to discover, no man could get his arm down to search for anything which might lie concealed. All the day long he had been scanning the earth and the sea, the purple heather and the blue expanse of water, searching for a hiding-place in vain, and now, all at once, by the merest accident, as it seemed, he had come upon that which he sought.

It was no easy matter to climb the rocks, but he managed at length to do so, and search out the most likely fissure in which to rid himself of his burden.

He selected one which lay on the westerly side of a rock, standing more out towards the sea than most of its companions; a rock backed against two others, encrusted up to a certain point with limpets and mussels, and clothed all over with grey lichen and long green sea-weed.

It took him a weary time to coax bit after bit of the coat down through the crevice; and when at length it was completely hidden from view, he had still to find another fissure in which to conceal the remainder of the suit.

Patiently he cut the cloth to pieces; with his knife he slit the seams, and separated the whole into portions convenient to thrust down the cracks. When the last morsel disappeared, with a rod, which he tore from amongst the brambles, he measured the depth the pieces had dropped, and having thrust them down as far as he could, he collected small stones in his knapsack, and half filled up the crevices with them. Stones, and shell, and sand, he gathered and carried up with a great terror and a great joy contending together in his breast.

In the after years, whenever by the sea-shore he beheld children digging in the sand, and picking up pebbles and shells, his thoughts flew back to an evening by the Solway, when he, too, scooped up the sand in handfuls, and sought for shells and pebbles, not for amusement, but to save his life.

A stretch of sea-shore with the sun's rays streaming from the west over it, always brought in the days which were then all to be passed through, the memory of fairy bays shut in by rocks, where the evidence lay buried that would have sufficed to hang him.

When he had finished he left the creek, and wandering in and out between the rocks came to a point from whence he could behold the low coast lying beyond. The smooth sand was left behind, and the shore became rough and uneven, covered with stones, while into the sea ran out sunken rocks, over which the advancing waves broke sullenly, and with a monotonous plash.

Looking over the water there came upon the man an intense desire to plunge into it.

Rid of the burden he had carried all day, with a sense of relief upon him, with the door of escape standing at length wide open, he felt he might bathe safely; so retracing his steps to the nearest of the enclosed bays he had just quitted, he threw off his clothes and swam out, meeting the advancing tide.

It was a lovely evening; already the sun was sinking towards the horizon, and over the Solway Andrew Hardell could see the bold Cumberland coast standing clear and distinct against the western sky, reflecting back his beams.

Looking landward he could trace the way he had come; he could see the grassy hills, the jagged headlands, the solitary rocks: and as he beheld the still beauty of the scene, as he felt the lash of the waves coming up towards the shore, the strength – the hope he had lost seemed to come back, and he bethought him—God knows why, for our memories are linked together after a fashion, to which man can give no clue—of the leper who dipped seven times in Jordan, and came forth clean as a little child.

That, Andrew Hardell knew, might never be his fate; and yet already he commenced to feel that the happiness had not quite departed out of his life; that the face of nature might once again smile for him as it smiled for others; that it was quite possible suspicion might never knock at his door; that he might yet return to England and quietly resume the old roads of existence, no one but himself knowing of the secret hidden in his heart—of the evidence on which he had so recently piled sand and stones and shells.

Mightily refreshed and invigorated he returned to the shore and dressed himself; then, just as the sun was setting, he left the beach, and regaining the grass, struck into a path winding by the shore, that seemed to lead off in the direction he desired to go.

He had not proceeded fifty yards, however, when, from beside a clump of gorse and heather, up rose a shepherd, who bade 'Good even' to the stranger.

From him Andrew inquired his way, and the chances there were of his being able to reach any inn before nightfall.

'You'll not hev' travelled far,' suggested the man.

'Indeed I have, though,' answered Mr Hardell. 'So far that I am hungry and tired, and should be glad both of food and shelter.'

'There's a bit of a hoose jest beyond, where ye micht git baith if ye can put up with what they ha'e to gi'e. Ye're a wonderfu' swimmer,' he added, unable longer to keep off this subject. 'I hev' been watchin' ye wi' Jess here,' indicating his dog, who pricked up her ears and lolled out her tongue in acknowledgment of the attention—'swimmin', swimmin', till I thocht ye must be makin' for England.'

'I was tired and hot,' said Andrew, laughing at the compliment—'and glad to have a dip.'

'Ay, it was verra warm just about the time ye cam' across the hill. I saw ye climbin' up from Colvend, and walkin' as fast as if the snaw was on the groun'; but I lost ye when ye went doun among the rocks, and I was jest goin' to see if onything had happened ye, as ye stayed sae lang doun there, when ye cam' oot, and then went back. I watched to see wu'd ye gang up the hill-side again, but Jess spied ye oot in the water, and we hev' been sittin' ever syne, looking at ye.'

Very sharply Andrew Hardell looked in his turn at the speaker, to ascertain whether there were any second meaning in his words—but the old man's face was innocent of suspicion.

'I could have stayed amongst the rocks for hours longer,' he remarked, after a short pause—'those little bays are the most beautiful things I ever saw. I could not bear to leave them, they are like no other place on earth. I forgot all about time, and how far I had to go.'

'Ay, they are thocht verra fine,' answered the man in a tone which implied that the bays were not exactly in his estimation prophets in their own country. 'Folks come doun to see them, and I have heerd mony a one praise them. I like the hill-side wi' the sheep and the lammies on it best mysel', but I'm no judge o' sich things.'

'Where did ye say the house was where I might have a chance of staying for the night?' asked Mr Hardell.

'Jest round the next point, straicht before ye'—and with a friendly 'Good even' the pair parted.

'A weel-spoken, decent lad,' reflected the shepherd—to which opinion he gave utterance, when at a later period of this story the Advocate Depute pressed him to say what he had thought of the stranger, and whether his manner struck him as flurried or excited.

Wearily, with the old depression coming over him once again, Andrew Hardell pursued his way. For a few minutes he had shaken off his dread, but now the horror returned. Into the chamber, swept and garnished, crept the devil the man had cast out, and following in his wake came seven other devils, fiercer, crueller than himself—devils of fear which represented the hiding-place as unsafe; the rock as public, and exposed to view; the shepherd a spy; the evidence undestroyed and indestructible.

All in vain he gathered up his strength and defied his foes—they beat him down, for he was faint and weary; weary, not merely with a spent excitement, but with absolute physical exertion; faint, because he had eaten nothing, and he was sick and cowardly for very want of food.

Gladly enough, fearing his species and dreading to meet with and talk to them, he would have passed the cottage and walked forward, but his sense told him he ought not to let his strength sink—that in mental and bodily health alone lay his chance of safety.

Illness, delirium, he knew would lead to suspicion and detection, and he was sane enough now to understand he had been mad while crossing Criffel, and stumbling amongst the heather and over the stones.

With the cool night-air fanning his temples, he recalled with horror his sensations as he crossed the mountains, and carried his burden under the noon-tide sun. His mind was clear at length, and he meant to keep it so—he said this to himself as he stopped by the open door of the cottage, and stating that he was a traveller, asked if they could give him any refreshment.

It was not much the poor larder contained, but all it boasted was set before him; oaten cake, and butter, and milk; off these viands Andrew Hardell contrived to sup heartily, and when he had finished and pressed in vain any pecuniary acknowledgment on his hosts, he rose to depart, declining the offer of shelter which was made to him with a heartiness that touched the man whose soul was so exceeding heavy, most sensibly, and made his way through the night seem brighter to him for a little space.

He felt he was in no state of mind to endure remaining in that close atmosphere in that confined house for any length of

time; better a thousand times the hill-side or the sea-shore, with the stars shining above him, and the wind coming and going as it listed, than the shelter so cordially offered—so gratefully declined.

'I would rather push on now than through the heat,' he remarked—and so, after a hearty 'Good-night,' and earnest 'Wush you weel,' he started off again, and walked a couple of miles farther, when, fairly overcome with fatigue, he flung himself on the turf, and fell fast asleep.

With the earliest streak of day he started up, frightened, and marvelling at the place in which he found himself; he looked out over the sea, he gazed at the lonely landscape, he saw the Cumberland mountains dimly in the distance, the mists of morning hanging over their summits.

He remembered how, over-night, he had beheld lights on the coast; how he had stood to watch the fires of the iron-works flaring up against the sky; how, the previous day, he had rid himself of his burden; and he looked back on the way he had come, to see the place where relief arrived.

There, in the soft grey light, he saw the dark rocks standing out, as it seemed, between the sea and the sky; and, thanking God, he lay down again and slept till the sun was streaming over the water and the land; over the heather, and the gorse, and the turf—over the wide Solway, and the house where Kenneth Challerson's body lay awaiting burial.

All the day Andrew Hardell walked on, thinking over his position—perfecting his plans.

If everything went well, he would sail from Kirkcudbright for England on the following Wednesday; if anything went ill, he would know simply nothing. It would lie he knew with the prosecutors to prove him guilty. It was not his part to prove himself innocent. He decided that, now the coat was safely secreted, he could not be proved guilty; no one could convict him but himself, and he could only do so by opening his mouth.

Few criminals, he proceeded to consider, understood the exceeding virtue of reticence: 'The power of passive resistance,' he reflected, 'is very imperfectly comprehended; people have no idea of the value of inaction, of the difficulty of overcoming it. A bridge does nothing, a sea-wall does nothing, a tree does nothing, and yet, behold, spite of the conveyances rolling across, of the waves dashing over it, of the wind blowing about it, the bridge, and the wall, and the tree remain passively resisting the active hostility brought to bear against them.'

Quite coolly now he argued out the *pros* and *cons* of his posi-

tion. He was clever, as has previously been said, and his mind was of that order which can stand calm in the presence of a great danger, and calculate the chances of escape even when the gallows, with all the ghastly accessories of executioner and rope, gaping crowd, and pitying priest, are looming in the distance.

Under the pressure of circumstances, borne away by a torrent of accidents, he felt as a good rider feels when his horse, having got the better of him, bolts across a dangerous country.

'If once I lose my head I shall lose my life,' many a brave man has mentally ejaculated in such an extremity; and the very knowledge of the extent of his peril has enabled him to keep his head and pull through.

'If once suspicion fall upon me—and I fail to be true to myself, I had better never have been born,' thought Andrew Hardell, as he stepped over the wild flowers, and picked his way across the gurgling brooks.

The impression was strong upon him that suspicion would fall, that he should require all his coolness, all his courage, before reaching the blessed land of safety; but life was very dear to him, and he argued the matter backward and forward till he thought he knew by heart everything which could by possibility be urged against him—everything wherewith a case could be got up and supported.

There was now no room in his heart for sentimental regret—for weak remorse—for unavailing sorrow. The man was dead, and he had brought his death on himself. It might be horrible to think of his passion—his oaths—his violence—of the face distorted with rage one moment, and rigid in death the next; of the tongue uttering blasphemous denunciations the very second before it was hushed and silenced for ever; but at Andrew Hardell's age it is not easy for one of his temperament to disbelieve in the mercy and long-suffering of God, and very contentedly he left Kenneth Challerson's soul in the hand of his Maker.

Had he been stricken down with a knot of bystanders looking on, Andrew Hardell would have felt his death a comparatively slight misfortune; but as Anthony stood, the way in which death affected his own prospects altered the aspect of affairs materially—it took the sun out of the heaven, and the glory from off the earth; it destroyed the happiness of the present, and it overshadowed the future with a dread not to be expressed in words.

But for that ghostly presence—but for that haunting fear, how he would have enjoyed his visit to Kirkcudbright! how the pretty country town, with its few streets, where the grass springs between the stones; with its quaint old buildings, its fine ivy-

covered ruin, its broad river, its intense retirement, its utter originality, its difference from all other towns and villages—would have delighted him! how dear the Dee must have grown to him! how familiar the Tor Hill! what pleasant memories he could have garnered and stowed away!

But as it was—so it was.

He could not look at the jail without a shudder; he viewed the river but as a highway by which he might depart from out the country; he grew to fearing that eyes, keen, sharp, and shrewd, were watching his movements; when he was at the 'Selkirk Arms,' he dreaded each moment to see the door open, and his enemy appear; when he was out he imagined he was followed, that there were inquiries being made for him at his inn.

But Wednesday came, and still no sign had been made that he was wanted. His portmanteau was packed; his passage taken; when the tide served, the vessel, lying there under the shadow of the willow trees, within sight of the old castle, was to bear him and his fortunes to Liverpool. He was sitting in that comfortable apartment which commands a view, not of the street, but of the garden and yard in the rear of the 'Selkirk Arms,' waiting for his dinner, the last he hoped he should ever eat on Scottish ground, to be served, when the head-constable from Dumfries opened the door, and quietly walking across the room, informed Andrew Hardell that he was his prisoner.

He had expected it all along, but it came upon him with a shock nevertheless.

For a minute he could not steady his voice; but then he said there must be some mistake—that the officer must have confused him with some other person.

'I have committed no crime that I am aware of,' went on Andrew Hardell; 'you must have made some great mistake in the matter.'

Hearing which remark, uttered apparently in the most perfect good faith, the officer stated that he arrested him for the murder of Mr Kenneth Challerson.

'Of Kenneth Challerson?' repeated Andrew Hardell; and he went away down the street, followed by the tears of the women and the pity of the men, who had grown even in a few days to like him, and who thought it 'an uncommon hard thing' to see any one so young in so terrible a strait.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE NEWS TRAVELLED SOUTH.

A VERY few days after that on which Andrew Hardell was escorted from the 'Selkirk Arms,' to seek an interview with Mr Holmes Graeme, Sheriff Substitute, Madge Forster, in the light of the summer's morning, came tripping downstairs at Langmore.

Permit me, with the morning glory streaming upon the fresh young face, to introduce her to your acquaintance. Allow me to say—' Here, my dear reader, is not indeed the heroine of my story, but the woman I like best in its pages, though you will see but little of her or of any other woman. A girl and a woman of a thousand; a maiden endowed, as you may see, with no remarkable beauty, but possessed, nevertheless, of qualities which might stand any man with whom she elected to cast her lot, in good stead when the evil hours came, that will come in the middle or evening of the most prosperous day; like the rain and the wind which pour down at some time or other on all the earthly palaces our hands so fondly build upon the sands of time.

Not beautiful, and yet fair, and sweet, and fresh, and young; with no chiselled features, no wealth of either raven or auburn hair; no flashing or melting eyes; no coquettish artifices, no prudish affectations; only a good, loving, trusting, healthy English country girl; one of a race which, spite the unbelief of Saturday Reviewers, still happily exists to salt the earth, and savour it.

Scarcely of the middle height, with her slight figure well-rounded and well-proportioned; with fine brown hair, smooth and waveless, braided on her forehead, and then swept back into a thick knot behind; with a pure pink and white complexion, a little delicate it might be, but all the more refined for that; with kindly brown eyes, and a frank, pleasant mouth,—there she is for you, as well as I can paint her, floating in a pretty light muslin dress down the old-fashioned staircase, with the morning sunlight streaming upon her.

If you have ever known a girl whose first thought was of others; who, let her be ever so tired, was always ready to start off and procure whatever a parent, or sister, or brother desired; who had no need to crucify self, simply because self for her was a creature without existence; whose feet were swift to bear her on errands of kindness and charity; whose hands were soft, and

cool, and tender in illness; whose voice seemed to bring cheerfulness and hope into the house; who was like a sunbeam, a bright thing in a dark place; who was loved by high and low, by rich and poor; who could not bear to hear gossip; to whom the very tone of slander was a pain; who was always ready to stand up for the absent; to whom the children came confidingly, and on whose head the aged laid their hands in blessing—then you have known Madge Forster, who passed out into the garden behind the Vicarage, and gathered flowers to place on the breakfast-table, singing to herself as she flitted about.

She had grown up amongst the trees and the flowers, and yet the place never palled upon her. She never wearied of the trim, old-fashioned garden; of the parterres edged with boxwood; of the straight grass-paths; of the little 'wilderness' at the end; of the brook which babbled softly between the elms; of the narrow rustic bridge leading away into the croft beyond; where Dapple, and Cowslip, and Daisy, the clerical cows, and the clerical pony lived at such amity together, as befitted the quadrupeds of a well-ordered establishment.

Sufficient for her was the small domain with its sheltering trees; its old-fashioned flowers; its common fruit and vegetables.

The moss-rose tree blooming in the corner was to her as the grandest hothouse exotic. Sweet the cabbage-rose; lovely the blue gentianella; brilliant the anemones and ranunculus. What could heart desire more than the jessamine blossoms, shining like stars amongst the dark green leaves; than the westeria covering the windows; than the trumpet honeysuckle, thrusting its sweet presence into her bedroom; than the mignionette, scenting the breakfast-parlour; and the tea-rose, climbing ambitiously beside the jessamine and magnolia?

Langmore Vicarage was a long, low house, covered front and back with greenery. Generations of men had lived in it, and each man had added, not destroyed—so that now, whether the habitation were of wood, or stone, or brick, a stranger looking at it would have been puzzled to decide.

Many a tourist, wandering across the village-green, stopped to admire the quaint old house over which the ivy grew thick and strong, and green up to the very eaves, round the frames of the latticed windows. There was no carriage-way up to the house—never a Vicar of Langmore had been wealthy enough to own phaeton or brougham, or aught save, when his legs began to fail him, a steady-going, sedate, stiff-built cob—who partook of oats as his owner did of port-wine, at long and uncertain intervals

—but who, nevertheless, munched his hay as the Vicar drank home-brewed ale, contentedly, and throve upon it too.

A path winding around a grass-plot led up to the front, which, like the rest of the building, was covered with ivy. Flowers in pots and boxes were placed on the sills of the windows, on the flat roof of the porch—flowers that seemed bedded amongst the greenery, and that gave forth a delicious perfume.

Trees overshadowed the Vicarage; in the stillness of the summer morning could be heard the cooing of the pigeons; the prating of the hens. In the distance, farther away from the parsonage than is usually the case in country villages, stood Langmore Church, the graveyard surrounding it sparsely covered with monuments or head-stones; the green turf lapping up securely enough the quiet sleepers, who needed no memorial to record they lived—they died—they toiled—they rest.

From the village-green the Vicarage-grounds (if such a term be not too ambitious) were divided only by a rustic fence. The living was a poor one, and the man who looked after the souls of his scattered flock was poor likewise—poor, and a gentleman; a gentleman and a scholar; for both of which last reasons perhaps he bore his poverty meekly; was thankful for the home, and the peace, and the quiet he had known, and never repined because he saw worse men winning higher prizes in the world's game of chances; because the bishop remembered his next neighbour at Great Langmore, and passed him by.

On the contrary, he loved Langmore, and would have grieved to leave it. There were graves in the churchyard which were very dear to him; and he could not pass them without thinking of a woman very like Madge who had made the Vicarage a paradise to him; of baby fingers that had never grown strong enough to clutch at any of the fruits men esteem valuable; of little ones sleeping safe from all earth's turmoil; of stalwart sons who might have been; of comely daughters who were never to grow up.

He had married late in life, and the happiness which comes late is always highly prized. There had been a fight sometimes in that poor Vicarage to meet the inadequacy of ways and means, to do all things decently and in order as befits a clergyman's establishment; but the brave hearts had won, and without other help than one human being may take from another and never feel ashamed, the husband and wife had battled through their troubles and won.

But there came other troubles that it is not in the power of man to alleviate; grievous sickness swept through the parish; and

when the scourge was stayed, three children were missing from the Vicarage, and there were three fresh green mounds in Langmore churchyard. After that Mrs Forster's health declined, and though she lingered for a considerable period, still there at length arrived a day when she too dropped out of her accustomed place; when the arm-chair and pillows were no longer put into requisition; when there was no need to search the poultry-yard for new-laid eggs; to set aside the sunniest peach; to stint the household, that the poor invalid might have delicacies; to move about on tiptoe; to hush the voice, and check the sound of laughter.

Madge was just old enough, when her mother died, to understand that from henceforth she must be 'mamma to papa.' With a touching submissiveness she dried up her tears, when told the sight of her grief would make her father worse; with an earnest purpose she made up her mind to be good; with an almost womanly instinct she assumed her mother's place, flitting about in her little black frock, arranging this and considering that; trying to remember everything papa liked best; everything mamma had told her not to forget.

Sweet was the forethought that suggested to the child in the hours ere the last terrible hour came, all she was to do, all she was to think of; that, considering how in mere trifles the lonely man might miss her, who had grown to be as his very right hand, tried before she departed to strengthen her child's weakness, so as to attend to her father's wants.

There are things which it seems frivolous to mention, and yet that may mar, though they cannot make, the happiness of a man's life; things the absence or neglect of which constantly recall the presence and the thoughtfulness of the departed; and it was a portion of Mrs Forster's existence to understand all this, and to teach Madge to be of use when she herself was gone.

Buttonless shirts—wretched dinners—untidy rooms—unaired linen—slippers and dressing-gown not to his hand—his ink bottle dry—his books undusted,—all these trifles would by their absence have recalled his Margaret and her attention a hundred times a day; but as it was, Madge stepped forward to fill the breach—made his tea, brought in his letters, armed herself with an immense darning needle and mended his socks, asked their servant to do this and that, till the woman 'Lord blessed' herself, and declared Miss Madge was wiser than many a missus,—laid his sermon paper out all ready for him, and when he was going on a visit put up his dress suit with a solemnity and decorum befitting an experienced matron.

Happily for Madge the mother died before her child could miss more than her love; before companionship had begun—happily—for such partings take so much of the sunshine out of a young life, that it oftentimes requires the best portion of an existence to coax it back again.

As it was, Madge did not quite understand all she had lost; and after awhile her laugh sounded as gay, her smile was as bright, as though there were no such thing as a head-stone sacred to memory of Margaret Forster in Langmore churchyard, as though there had been for her no such thing as death, and sorrow and sickness, in the world.

And this is the same child, grown to girlhood, whom we see in the morning sunlight gathering flowers. When she had completed her bouquet she re-entered the house, and passing into the breakfast-room, arranged the buds in a saucer of water, made tea, drew up her father's chair to his favourite corner of the table, placed the paper-cutter ready to his hand, pulled down the blinds to the exact point which he approved, and then went and stood by the window, waiting for the postman's arrival, an event which was usually heralded by the blowing of a horn.

At last he came in sight. Madge saw Martha, their faithful but not good-tempered or handsome servant, receive the letters from him.

What could Martha be doing after the postman's departure? Madge wondered. Why did she not bring in the letters? Her mode of proceeding was perfectly familiar to Miss Forster, but familiarity did not in this case produce a due philosophy with regard to results.

Martha would boil the eggs, and make the toast; she would burn the toast and she would scrape it; she would forget the salt, and she would return for that necessary article; she would put the letters on one corner of the tray, and when everything else was ready she would enter the room with them.

There had been a time when Madge was wont to rush out and secure the letters, but that happened in the days before the young lady owned a lover; and Martha, who as a general principle disapproved of followers and 'sweethearting,' and who disapproved of Miss Forster's engagement and sweetheart in particular, took a malicious pleasure both in retarding the delivery of Mr Hardell's epistles, and observing how sedulously Madge refrained from seeming to expect any.

'Ha—ah!' exclaimed Martha to herself, with a prolonged emphasis on the word to which no spelling can do justice; 'not

fit to clean her shoes; if I had had a voice in it he might have gone farther.'

From which speech, however, I must beg it not to be inferred that the serving-woman underrated Andrew Hardell. No; on the contrary, she only fairly rated Madge, and knew that the man was not worthy to be husband to so sweet a creature—at least, not then.

In the days when he grew more able to appreciate a nature such as hers, he would have seemed, according to Martha's worldly wisdom, a more undesirable husband still!

But in spite of intelligible hints and muttered innuendoes, the affair had long been settled.

Whenever Andrew was ordained priest, he and Madge were to be married. Mr Forster, anxious perhaps that his daughter should not be left to battle with the world if he were called away, made no objection to receiving Andrew as a son-in-law.

In point of family, indeed, the young man was deficient; but in most other respects he was just the husband to whom Mr Forster would have chosen to confide his child's happiness. He was clever; he was well-tempered; he had a high feeling concerning the sacredness of his calling, and an intense love for his profession; he would push his way in the world, no doubt; and husbands were not plentiful at Langmore.

On the whole, dowerless, and living in comparative solitude, it was strange that Madge should so young be engaged at all. Many other parents had to see their children go out as governesses and companions, and eat the bitter bread of dependence; but no such dreary future as this stretched out before Madge. Seeing her flitting among her flowers, no sigh concerning her uncertain prospects escaped Mr Forster.

She would be happy with her husband, as her father and mother had been happy together, in some quiet curacy or modest parsonage. They had learned, Madge and her father, the true secret of all earthly felicity—that of being content where God had cast their lots; and there was a sweet peace about Langmore Vicarage, a sunny cheerfulness, which might be sought for in grander dwellings, and sought in vain.

But had Mr Forster been more observant, or Madge more experienced, they might both have known the love wherewith Andrew Hardell loved the girl was not that which shall make a man contented in lowly places—which shall be to him as a shield and a buckler—a tower and a fortified place against the world's troubles, the world's opinions, the world's sins, and the world's temptations. It was a love which, as I have said before, knew

no better, which mistook its own character, which was not love so much as affection—which was less passionate attachment than unfortunate propinquity—which might burn to the last hour of life with a taper light, indeed, but which could never burst into flame—never illumine even for an hour the whole of a man's existence—never satisfy that hunger and thirst for full and perfect sympathy, which no human being may pass from the cradle to the grave without experiencing at some time or other of the lonesome journey.

But Madge did not know, and Mr Forster did not see; and accordingly when Martha, having deposited the letters, together with toast, and ham, and eggs, and butter on the table, left the room, carrying her tray with her like a breastplate, the young girl, knowing by the woman's manner that there was a letter directed in the well-known hand, crossed eagerly over to the table, and singled out the epistle meant for her from the rest of the budget.

It was not a long letter, and the words it contained might have failed to satisfy a more exacting heart; but Madge read and re-read the lines with a blushing, pleased delight.

'Andrew will be home in a few days, papa,' she said, as her father entered. 'He writes from Kirkcudbright' (which Madge pronounced, in her pretty English accent, as it is spelt), 'and says he is only waiting for the sailing of the steamer to cross to Liverpool.'

'That is all right, Madge,' answered her father, stroking her hair fondly: 'I shall be glad for him to come back now. There are many things being neglected, which he will attend to. He has had a long holiday, and will have plenty to tell us.'

And then Mr Forster proceeded slowly and deliberately to open his letters, and read them over one by one.

There was no skimming of communications in that leisurely life; no breaking of seal after seal with feverish haste, and rushing through an epistle at express speed.

One thing at a time, one letter at a time, was the Vicar's rule and practice, and accordingly, spectacles on nose, he read conscientiously on, while his tea cooled, and the toast Madge buttered for him remained untasted.

'Dear papa!' she remonstrated, 'your breakfast will be cold as ice.' But the old man had got hold of an interesting letter on some theological question, and paid no attention to her remark.

Now it was a rule of Madge's life, intelligible enough to careful housekeepers, that she never poured herself out a second cup

of tea till her father had finished his first; and to while away the tedium of this interlude, on the present occasion, she stretched out her hand and took up 'The Times,' which a friend forwarded to the Vicarage on the evening of publication.

Still the Vicar read on; still his breakfast remained untouched; still his other letters lay unopened; until suddenly, with an exclamation, Madge rose up and came to him.

'Oh! papa, papa! what does that mean?' she asked piteously, and she held out the paper towards him.

In a moment the letter was dropped, and Mr Forster looked at the passage indicated.

'Murder of Mr Challerson,' it was headed. 'By letters from Dumfries we hear that a young English clergyman, the Rev. Andrew Hardell, has been arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the above diabolical outrage. He was apprehended on Wednesday, and lodged the same evening in Kirkcudbright jail. He will be tried at the assizes, which are to be held at Dumfries on the 22nd prox.'

'Andrew Hardell?' repeated the old Vicar, 'Andrew Hardell?'

'Oh! papa, can't we go to him,—can't we start at once—of course, it is all untrue; but he will be so miserable, so lonely—he is there all among strangers, and——'

'My darling, it is a misprint,' said Mr Forster, striving to stop her sobs, speaking the first words which came into his mind, while he groped about in the dark, trying vainly to find some clue to the mystery. 'I am afraid it must mean Anthony. He, you know, was a friend of the Challersons,—he was on very intimate terms with——'

But there the Vicar suddenly stopped. Some hint concerning Laura Challerson and his former pupil had reached his ears; but even in that moment of supreme trouble he was not going to enlarge on such matters to his child.

'We will write and ascertain what it means,' he went on feebly.

'Cannot we go?' she persisted.

'My love, think of the expense; and if we were there, what could we do? Depend upon it this means Anthony, who though, please God, innocent as I am, has yet got unhappily mixed up in the affair; and Andrew will see that everything is done for him that is necessary and expedient. My darling, you must not,—for my sake do try and be calm! It sounds very dreadful; but the poor fellow will come out clear from any stain. I will write to Andrew—he will tell us all about it. It cannot be

Andrew, because in the letter to you he speaks of coming home immediately.'

Madge took the epistle from her pocket. 'It was written on Tuesday,' she sobbed, 'and the paper says Wednesday;' then she began to turn over the envelopes lying on the table.

'There is a letter from Anthony,' she remarked; 'open it and see what he has to tell us. I knew I had seen a letter from him, but I forgot.'

With eager hands, and yet with a terrible misgiving oppressing him, Mr Forster drew the enclosure out of the envelope.

There were only a few lines hastily scribbled on the paper—

'London, Friday.

'I am afraid you may see the passage in this morning's "Times," and so write to say I start for Scotland to-night to ascertain what it all means. Keep it from Madge. I will bring him back with me if possible.'

Like one speaking in a dream, the Vicar turned to his daughter:

'That is Anthony's writing, dear, is it not?'

'Yes, papa,' she answered; 'you see he says he will bring him back with him, if possible.'

'If possible,' he repeated, scarcely knowing what he said—'if possible.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST STEPS.

In a very old book—a book so old, that, spite of new editions, many persons have such slight knowledge of its contents, as to assume, when it is quoted, that the speaker must be repeating a passage from 'The Immortal Bard,'—there is a sentence:

'Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it.'

By virtue of his profession, Andrew Hardell was acquainted with this sentence, and many a time it recurred to his memory while he lay in Kirkcudbright jail, building his tower of defence.

and calculating whether he should have wherewith to finish and hold it against the enemy

When through the pitiless storm and the pelting rain he had walked on towards New Abbey, counting the cost, the idea of such an expenditure as this being necessary, never occurred to him.

When through the watches of the night he wrestled with his agony—when he fell asleep only to wake and find that the difficulties of his scheme were greater than he had calculated on—still, even then, he under-counted the cost.

When, with the brightness of the summer morning streaming over hill and vale—over mountain and sea, when, with the dew hanging on the grass, and the trees gently waving their branches in the light, soft breeze, he climbed up Criffel, and looked forth over the land which was so exceeding fair to see, with no thought save how to get rid of the evidence against him—when under the noon-tide sun he strode on—when over the grass and through the heather he pursued his way westward—when he concealed the clothes—when he destroyed the testimony—when he gathered the sand and the shells, and poured them down the fissure—when, with a sense of relief on him, he cast aside his garments, and flung himself into the sea—when he walked by the low land lying by the shore, on towards Kirkcudbright—when pacing slowly beside the Dee—or wandering up towards the Tor Hill, he thought over the *pros* and *cons* of his position—still he never fairly and with knowledge counted the cost.

All his life long he was, in fact, like one who, having elected to cast his all upon one venture, finds, when it is too late, that he has miscalculated chances, that loss as well as profit lay concealed in the cards—who, after having taken shares in some promising concern, discovers the dream castle to have been built in air—from whom the ideality of riches and glory fades away, whilst the reality of harass and poverty remains.

The game he had decided to play was one for which fresh candles were continually being required—there was no end to the calls that were constantly made upon him.

This wolf, which he had decided to elude instead of face, claimed from him, in due course, everything that a man ordinarily holds most dear—everything, certainly, Andrew Hardell had hitherto deemed the most necessary to happiness.

One after another his most cherished plans, his brightest hopes, his fondest aspirations, had to be thrown out to satisfy the demands of the monster with which he had feared to do battle.

He had not counted the cost.

He had not considered whether he, with ten thousand men,

should be able to meet him who came against him with twenty thousand. He had not, while his enemy was yet a long way off, sent an embassy, and desired conditions of peace.

He had done as seemed to him wisely, and behold his wisdom was foolishness.

He had risked his life on the cast of a die, and the sole fruit of his venture, so far, was that he had plenty of time for reflection whilst he lay in Kirkcudbright jail, awaiting his trial.

There were many things which, in the hurry of making his calculations, the young man had overlooked; and now, when the worst was come upon him—when it was a question of life or death—he felt like one who, having entered into a strange and hostile country, meets with enemies, and encounters perils at every turn.

The first circumstance which struck him with a terrible dismay was the difference of the legal proceedings between Scotland and England.

The bulk of persons dwelling south of the Tweed know no more about Scottish law than they do about Presbyterianism.

That there is a difference in the marriage laws most Englishmen are aware—indeed, considering the newspaper reports, how could they be ignorant? but still, considering the proximity of the two countries, it is singular people should understand so much less about the laws of Scotland than the laws of France—that they should remember the existence of a public prosecutor across the Channel, and fail to comprehend the functions of a Lord Advocate north of the Tweed—that the fact of Scotland being in many respects much nearer France than we are—should be lost sight of altogether.

With fear and trembling it soon dawned upon Andrew Hardell that the ways of the country in which he found himself were not as the ways of England—that the whole of the law proceedings from the time a man is arrested till he leaves the dock free, or is escorted back to jail convicted, were different from those of his own country.

No coroner's inquest—no public examination before a magistrate—no knowledge of the evidence against him—all a blind groping in the dark—a constant dread—an utter absence of certainty—this was what came to him in that pleasant little town through which the Dee flows on its way to the sea.

He had not counted on this—he had thought he should at least know what was against him—what this witness had to say and that—the points where his own defence wanted strengthen-

ing—the circumstances most likely to tell in his disfavour before a jury.

It was all solemn, still, passionless—like a private execution, it added a new horror to death. The absence of all personal considerations—the utter silence of the official office, which was broken only by the question and answer of Sheriff Substitute and prisoner—the want of spectators, whether pitying or angry—the strange accent—the unfamiliar expressions—the un-English construction of every sentence addressed to him—the absence of a friendly face in which to look—these things made the man feel that he was indeed a stranger in a strange land—amongst people who, just though they might be, were wanting his life from him.

There is nothing, perhaps, which seems so terrible to one in such a strait, as perfectly even-handed justice—as law sitting holding the scales without a tremor—law, it is as impossible to influence, as concerning the course of which it is unreasonable to complain—which is all in favour of an innocent man, but utterly against the guilty—which is colder, more formal, less susceptible to outward pressure, less human, if the word be permissible, than the law with which Englishmen are best acquainted, and which, even in its preliminary stages, is frequently enlivened with absurd passages, with displays of temper, with disputes between magistrates and lawyers, with the conflicting evidence of witnesses, with the titters of an appreciative audience.

At first the idea of that public examination seemed very terrible to Andrew Hardell—but the quiet office, the calm questioning, the ever-varying inquiries—the drift of which, not knowing the evidence against him, he was unable to grasp—were more terrible still, and mentally he cursed the whole law procedure of the country in which he found himself, and wished, with all his heart and soul and strength, that if it were written in the book of fate a man should die by his own hand, he had killed him in any part of the habitable globe rather than Scotland.

But through all, the man's outward courage never forsook him; the questions addressed to him he answered according to the programme he had laid out for himself. The words rehearsed when he was climbing over Criffel, and in a sort of delirium, looking away towards the Solway Sands, were repeated now without mistake or hesitation when the great play of his life came to be acted by himself and real performers.

He did not refuse to answer any questions; he replied almost too readily—as more than one person considered. He was not moved by the production of the button and riding-whip

—he declared he had never seen the latter—that the former certainly resembled the buttons on his coat, but that it could not be one of his, on account of the piece of cloth attached to it.

When asked if on such and such a night no button was absent from his coat, he said 'Yes,' that in unfastening his wet clothes, he pulled one off, which, however, he sewed on a day or two afterwards himself—and in effect this proved to be so, for when his coat was examined, one button appeared to be sewed with a different thread from the others, whilst the work was evidently that of an amateur.

At this point the eyes of Andrew Hardell and the Sheriff Substitute chanced to meet, and from that moment the latter felt certain of the prisoner's guilt.

Of course the expression in a man's eyes cannot be taken as legal evidence, and the Sheriff Substitute was bound not to receive it as such. Nevertheless, he knew—and Andrew Hardell knew he knew, that there was some juggle in the affair—that somehow, and at some place, the accused had contrived to get rid of the torn coat; that it was the business of the prosecution to prove this; that let the death of Mr Challerson have taken place under what circumstances it might, the Reverend Andrew Hardell was his murderer, and that against so cool a hand, and so clever and highly educated a prisoner, it would not be easy to obtain a conviction.

Gathering up the threads of the case in their hands, both the Sheriff Substitute and the Procurator Fiscal found the clue they held merely led thus far, and proved this much, *viz.*:

That Kenneth Challerson had been murdered by some one, and that the presumption was he had met his death at the hands of Andrew Hardell; that in support of this presumption there was first the fact of Mr Challerson having left Dumfries with the avowed intention of following the man whom he suspected of having wronged him. Secondly, the certainty that, riding rapidly, he must have overtaken the prisoner just about the spot where his body was discovered. Thirdly, the late hour at which Andrew Hardell reached New Abbey. Fourth, the character of the weapon with which death had been inflicted. Fifth, the button and piece of cloth discovered in the dead man's hand. Sixth, the statement of the landlady at the Commercial Inn, New Abbey, which went to prove there was a button missing from the coat she dried for Andrew Hardell, on the night of his arrival, and the evidence of the buxom servant, that involved not merely a missing button, but a 'tear in the tweed.'

Now, looking at all these links, they certainly, when strung

together, formed a strong chain of circumstantial evidence against the prisoner; but then, on the other hand, there was the difficulty of stringing them.

Andrew Hardell stated, and in this statement his evidence was confirmed by the women who had been washing their linen, that at the pond he left the highway, and pursued his route through the fields.

At what point he resumed the road was of course a mere matter of supposition. At what hour Kenneth Challerson met with his death was a matter of conjecture also. The rain had begun early in the night, and lasted till after daybreak. The dead man's horse was found the next morning, miles away from the scene of the catastrophe, grazing in some meadows down by the Frith. Had the animal made for his own stable, a clue as to the possible time of the murder might have been obtained; but frightened, no doubt, by the lightning, as well as by his rider's violence, he had rushed madly on.

The woman—a widow—who showed the ruins, spoke vaguely to having heard the sound of a horse galloping past her door on the night of the murder; but when pressed as to whether the noise she heard might not have been produced by the beating of the rain, the rush of the wind, or the distant thunder, she wavered, and said she could not be positive. It seemed to her like a horse's feet, but as it was 'just momentary,' she would not like to be sure.

Concerning the button, there appeared a like uncertainty. The landlady couldn't 'mind' whether there was a hole in the coat or not; the servant had not thought about the tear, till some one came and told her there was a reward out, and that there had been a piece of cloth found. Mr Hardell, it was clear, did not change his clothes on the night of his arrival at New Abbey, neither did he make any mention of having a second suit with him. His own statement was, that he possessed but two suits of tweed, both of which were found—one on his person, the other in his portmanteau; that he knew nothing of how Kenneth Challerson came by his death; that he knew nothing of Mrs Challerson's whereabouts, and that he certainly had no share in inducing her to leave home; that when he started from Dumfries, he had done so, intending to work his way on foot to New Abbey, and from thence across Criffel, and by the coast to Kirkcudbright. When he was arrested, he had learned, indeed, from the newspapers, that Kenneth Challerson was dead, but he was ignorant of all particulars. Naturally he felt shocked at the tidings, he said, because for some time they were very intimate acquaintances.

'Were you ever friends?' asked the Procurator Fiscal, on the occasion of a subsequent examination.

'Certainly not,' was the reply.

'You were on terms of closer intimacy with Mrs Challerson, probably?' was the next inquiry.

'No; I never was on very intimate terms with either,' the young man answered. 'Though I had reason to believe Mrs Challerson was in the neighbourhood, I never saw either her or her husband during the whole period of my stay in Dumfries.'

'Your travelling companion probably saw more of them?'

'He may,' Andrew answered. 'Mr Challerson always liked him better than he did me.'

'Why did he not like you?' asked the Procurator Fiscal.

'Want of taste, probably,' replied the prisoner with a slight shrug. 'Jealousy also, perhaps, may have had some share in his lack of appreciation. He imagined I admired Mrs Challerson, and he was mistaken.'

'The onus of proving me guilty lies with them,' Andrew Hardell had said to himself in the days when he was miscounting the cost, which was true; but he found the onus of proving himself innocent lay with him, and the process turned out anything rather than agreeable.

'Before an English magistrate, in an English Court, I should not have experienced the least difficulty,' he considered, and he was to a certain extent right.

These examinations, where every chance word had to be considered—every sentence calculated, soon began to tell upon his health. He felt as one feels walking on the brink of a precipice, when a moment's want of courage, the slightest faltering—would be fatal.

He had decided to say nothing; but to say nothing would, he found, tell against him. He had to make his statement in ignorance of what the evidence might be in the hands of the prosecutor—sign and stick to it. He had to seem frank and yet be cautious. With the knowledge that the Sheriff Substitute was on the right scent, he had still to seem unconscious of the fact. Every step he took—every word he spoke—every reply he made, rendered retreat more and more impossible. There was nothing for it now but to go on—on—face the worst, and fight it out, never doubting.

But a struggle of this kind was never urged by any man of Andrew Hardell's temperament without producing evil effects.

His brain was always on the rack, striving to remember exactly what he had said, trying to plan what he should say,

while the sudden change from an active life to one of complete and compulsory inaction was not long either before it produced bad results.

The prisoner began to grow thin, his face lengthened, his clothes commenced to hang on him. In a week he was in appearance an altered man, and when at length Anthony Hardell made his appearance on the scene, he found his friend in the infirmary of Kirkcudbright jail, very ill indeed.

At any other time—considering how his confidence had been abused, his friendship played upon, his trust betrayed—Andrew Hardell would have met the man who had deceived him coldly, and would have had that matter of Laura Challerson 'out' with his visitor; but as matters stood, the very sight of a familiar face, the sound of an English voice, were as sunshine and music to the lonely man, who, holding out his hand to Anthony, burst into tears.

There were very few words exchanged between them—two or three commonplace inquiries, two or three sentences of hope and encouragement, and then Anthony, telling him he did not mean to leave Kirkcudbright for some time to come, arose to take his leave.

'Stoop down,' Andrew whispered, and the other complied.

'Do you remember that suit of clothes you left behind you?' the prisoner inquired, and Anthony nodded assent.

'You must forget about it,' Andrew said.

For a moment Anthony Hardell looked hard into his friend's face—while wistfully, like one born in a strange land, who tries to make an Englishman understand by expression and gesticulation what he means, Andrew looked back at Anthony.

'I understand!' said the latter, after a second pause. 'God help us both!'

'Amen!' ejaculated Andrew Hardell, and then, when his visitor had departed, he laid his head down again on the pillow, and turned his face towards the wall.

CHAPTER X.

IN COURT.

Of the days that intervened between his committal and his trial, the prisoner kept no account

They passed somehow, that was all he ever knew about them: they were spent—those long daylight hours, those desolate nights—in sickness, in struggle, in alternations of hope and fear, in forming wild plans of escape, in turning over in his mind whether it might not be advisable for him to take that middle course which is involved in pleading guilty to culpable homicide, and abiding the consequences.

But it was only at very long intervals, and for very short periods, he entertained this idea.

He thought—and thought rightly—that the time had gone by for making a confession of any kind, with any chance of backing out of the consequences of the deed he had committed with honour or even safety.

He knew he had told as many falsehoods as he could ever be called upon to repeat. His judgment was satisfied that as he had elected to play for high stakes, his game could scarcely be improved.

Whether the stake to be gained was worth the candle, he could not now afford to consider.

Even if he hedged, he should make very little by it. A long imprisonment seemed to him, in his then state of mind, as bad or worse than death; besides, he felt sure that if he only could keep up his courage, he should escape.

Illness and imprisonment alone, he thought, produced his want of mental strength. Anything would be better than the solitary days and the wakeful nights. Let him once have to meet his fellows, to face the judges and the spectators, and he could and would hold his own bravely.

His sole fear was Anthony—but he had made a bold stroke with regard to him.

He told his solicitor not to summon Anthony as a witness, and having done this, he abided the event with calmness.

What his own solicitor thought about the matter may be conjectured from the fact that he asked Andrew whether, considering the difficulty of the case, it might not be well to plead guilty to the lesser crime.

'I am sure the matter could be arranged with the Advocate Depute,' observed Mr McCallum.

'Then I am sure the Advocate Depute feels he has no chance of a conviction,' answered Andrew, who had not lived all this time in Kirkcudbright jail for nothing. 'No, I am either innocent or guilty, and I am content to abide the result.'

Whereat Mr McCallum shrugged his shoulders, and remarked that circumstantial evidence had hanged many a man.

'Well, I would rather be hanged on circumstantial evidence than acquitted on a point of law,' Andrew Hardell answered; whereupon the lawyer observed—

'Hanging is not a nice thing, but no doubt you are right in principle.'

All of which went to prove that not a single person believed him innocent—a hard cross to bear, with the knowledge of guilt in his own soul.

Meanwhile, however, there was an ever-growing, ever-increasing conviction in the minds of those who had much to do with the matter in which he was personally interested, that although Andrew Hardell might have killed Kenneth Challerson, he was not guilty of actual murder, and the Advocate Depute, to whom in due time—as to a grand jury—the case was submitted, felt the difficulty of the position—felt the obstacles which might arise in obtaining a conviction from a Scottish majority.

For a Scotch jury is very different from an English one. Sawney is much more on his guard than John Bull. The argumentative, Presbyterian, non-impulsive mind resists the temptations of flowery sentences, of impassioned appeals, of harrowing pictures, as it might the seductions of the evil one.

Unlike the British mind, the Scotch has a keen and all-absorbing sense of duty and of self-importance. It is not to be led by the judge nor by the counsel—rather, it sets itself up in direct opposition to them.

The consciousness of power is pleasant to the northern individual. The very constitution of the jury increases that consciousness. In England, it is true, one man may starve out eleven, or eleven may coerce one, but in Scotland each unit is either of the majority or minority. Each man stands by himself; each man has his specific weight for or against the prisoner; to make or to mar, to spoil or to spend.

Further, the character of Scotch education is to produce individualism of character. Thus each man has an opinion of his own, and does not hesitate to express it. The judge has yet to be born who should carry a Scotch juror beyond the depth to which he personally elected to wade.

Born—partly of his nation, partly of his religion, there is a great sense of his individuality, and of his power individually; and that sense of power resents the interposition of any other person's influence.

For all of which reasons, unless a man's guilt be self-apparent, let him pray to be tried by a Scotch jury.

He will have justice dealt to him, and something more; he

will have the benefit of the doubt given to him, which is not an unimportant consideration amongst a people capable of weighing the value and the significance of a doubt.

These things were all in due time taken into account by the Advocate Depute, who hesitated not to intimate to Mr Dunbar —a personal friend of his own—that if the prisoner chose to plead guilty to culpable homicide, that plea would be accepted.

To which remark Mr Dunbar replying that his client intended to plead 'Not Guilty;' and maintained he was so, the Advocate Depute from thenceforward maintained an injured silence. and said within himself, that if he could hang Andrew Hardell he would.

Such trials were not of frequent occurrence; it would add, he felt, a laurel to his fame if he succeeded in obtaining a conviction. As for my lords Craigie and Glanlorn, they were supposed to know nothing, or next to nothing, of the matter, till they donned their official robes, and the assize commenced. And so September wore on, and the date for the trial approached, and in due time Andrew Hardell was removed from Kirkcudbright jail, and conveyed, not by the sea-shore, and across Criffel, but by drearier inland roads, back to Dumfries, where he lay for a few days in the old jail, waiting for the time to come which should decide his fate.

Very different was the old jail from that which now fronts Buccleugh Street; very different are both from the pleasant prison at Kirkcudbright, the exercise-ground in which commands a view of the far-away country; of the Dee and the Tor Hill; and the quaint, rich, old-fashioned town, no bigger than an English village.

Often in the after-time Andrew Hardell thought of a remark he then heard made, to the effect that if the whole population of Scotland were criminals, its jails were large enough to contain them.

He had plenty of leisure then to heed any observation, and remember it, for neither friend nor foe intruded on his solitude. Anthony was afraid to do so, and returned to England after the interview mentioned; while Mr Forster, for whom he consented to do duty, starting for Scotland, purposing to comfort his pupil, fell ill by the way, and was obliged to return to Langmore, looking very old indeed.

In truth, Andrew's trouble had entered into his very soul, and seeing this, Madge hushed her own sorrow to comfort his, and condoled herself by writing long letters to the prisoner, assuring him of her conviction of his innocence, of her deep grief

for the position in which he was placed, of her wish to be near him in his trouble.

'Which, thank God, my little girl, you cannot be,' he said to himself, and then he sat down in his cell and faced his position—as he had never faced it yet—and found that the old things so dear to him in the past, might never again be parts and parcel of his being; that however affairs turned, he should have to begin a new life amongst new people, for the simple reason that those with whom he had formerly associated did not know that they were all defending him in ignorance—that he had not counted the cost.

But now, when my lords were entering Dumfries—when the supreme moment was at hand—Andrew Hardell counted the cost both ways, to the best of his ability.

Both ways a loser—both ways; whether he won or whether he failed—a desolate forsaken man. If he were acquitted, should he return to the peaceful household, and be a liar in the midst? If he were convicted—well—well, the future would be out of his hands then. Let that possibility pass silently.

For decently, and as a man comes gradually to reconcile himself to the idea of whatever may come speedily—Andrew Hardell was strengthening his soul to face the worst.

Never an one who heard the bells ringing in honour of the judge's entrance had a keener appreciation of the fact that those bells might even then be sounding his death-knell—and yet he set his face and turned it resolutely to meet the danger—none the less defiantly, probably, because he knew men were looking to see how he bore up—watching to ascertain whether there were not some sign of wavering, some token by which they might know he intended to change his tactics at the eleventh hour, and plead guilty to culpable homicide.

When Mr Dunbar's arrival was announced, people grew terribly anxious on the subject of the prisoner's plea.

There had not been a 'good trial' in Dumfries for many a day—not a really interesting case for several years previously, and now here was a really peculiar case, one calculated to put the Advocate Depute on his mettle, and to induce Mr Dunbar to exert those powers of cross-examination and rhetoric for which he was famous.

Long and close was the conversation which took place between Mr McCallum and the great man—many were the questions asked—numerous the observations made—and when Mr Dunbar at length retired to rest it was with the air of a man who felt he had his work cut out for him on the next day—a nice piece of

work, which it might not be quite easy to hold together till the end.

So at length the morning of the trial dawned—clear, bright, and autumnal; and with the sun shining upon them, the judges marched, as was and is the custom in that ancient town, from the Commercial Hotel to the Court-house.

The Sheriff of the town and counties of Dumfriesshire and Kirkcudbright—the Procurator Fiscals—the Provost—the Bar—all went down the street in solemn procession, whilst the mob stared and the trumpeters blew—and the bells rang—and the inhabitants came to their doors and windows to look at the grave ceremonial.

Down the street—past the Mid Steeple—past the site of the ancient Greyfriars, scene of the Comyn tragedy—and then sharp round into Buccleugh Street, where the new Court-house was then unbuilt, and the old still deemed large enough and handsome enough for the business which had to be transacted in it.

At ten o'clock, precisely, Lords Craigie and Glanlorn entered the Court, clad in their judicial robes—red, trimmed with white, and ornamented with St Andrew crosses. Graciously the learned judges bowed to the persons assembled, and then the business of the circuit was opened by an extempore prayer—which, as is usual in such cases, contained petitions for, and references to, everything in the heavens above and the earth beneath, always excepting the real business that had brought so many persons of different ranks, tastes, and feelings together.

At the fag-end of the prayer indeed the minister was good enough to allude slightly to the judges and the prisoners. As some courteous persons finish their letters with vaguely kind regards—so the clergyman commended the people who alone were the cause of his being there, to the attention of the Almighty.

Curiously mingling the Church of England formula with the more voluminous diction of his own pulpit, he wound up by entreating the Lord of all Power and Might so to incline the hearts of all those placed in authority, that they might wield the sword placed in their hands by their gracious Queen and Governor, to the honour and praise of His holy name, the setting forth of His glory, and the extension of His dominion.

Further, the minister entreated that as at Marah the bitter waters were sweetened by the casting of a tree into the fountain, 'even so, O Lord! the evil nature may this day be made holy by reason of the arm of justice extended over the wrong-doer—turn them, Heavenly Father, turn them from their sinful ways

—lead them as Thou leddest Thy people Israel through the Red Sea and the arid desert—give them manna to eat, and let them drink from the refreshing wells of Elim, set round with palm trees—for ever and for ever—Amen.'

Having concluded which appropriate peroration in the loudest voice a human being might be considered capable of possessing, the minister, greatly to the relief of Lord Glanlorn—a man of slightly Jacobite and High Church proclivities—ended his part of the day's proceedings, and sat down.

Immediately after, the first prisoner was brought up, and a jury sworn in.

Of this portion of the ceremonial it is unnecessary to speak at length, because, although the whole process of swearing is different to the same portion of a trial in England, that difference will have to be mentioned hereafter, since it struck Andrew Hardell, when the witnesses were sworn in, with an unutterable dread.

'As I stand before God, and as I shall answer before God at the Great Day of Judgment,' he found himself repeating in the watches of the night.

'As I stand before God,'—so each man, right hand extended, swore to try the case well and truly.

'As I stand before God,'—many a time, in the after-day, Andrew Hardell recalled that formula to mind, and contrasted it with the clerk's cry in the English Courts—'a true verdict give according to the evidence, so Help you God. Kiss the Book.'

As at dinner people regale themselves with a few spoonfuls of soup, a morsel of fish, and the merest suspicion of an *entrée*, before attacking the more formidable joints, so on the occasion of this trial, a few prisoners preceded Andrew Hardell at the bar, uninteresting and unexciting prisoners, who were merely calculated to whet the public appetite, and make it the more eager for the appearance of the principal performer.

It was a great relief to the spectators when, after a couple of people had pleaded guilty to uttering counterfeit coin, and a most common-place case of 'resetting' ended in the prisoner being sentenced to seven years' transportation, the chief actor in the day's proceedings appeared; a pale, worn, changed man—looking, so one individual remarked to his friend, 'like a hardened ruffian,' while another whispered, 'He carries innocence in his face.'

For the first moment he was confused. They had brought him to the place of trial through that underground passage, now disused, which formerly led beneath Buccleugh Street, from the

old jail, into the dock of the old Court-house ; and coming in an instant from the darkness into the light—from the quiet of his cell into the midst of a hall crowded to suffocation, the scene swam before him. As through a mist he beheld judges and counsel—officials and spectators. Like something very far away, he heard the murmur and the rustle caused by his appearance—vaguely he tried to make a clutch at his own individuality, and to grasp the fact that it was he—Andrew Hardell—he, and no other, who stood amongst all those people, about to be tried for his life. For a moment it was all vague and shadowy—he felt like one who sees some terrible vision in a dream, and is appalled by it—though all the time he knows what frightens him is but a dream.

Standing there, with every eye in the Court fixed upon him, he felt as if he were being swung a long way out into space—out as far as he could go, while his heart seemed to stop beating, and his limbs grew numbed, and his head giddy.

Then with a jerk he appeared to himself to swing back again, and the light grew clearer and the mist lifted, and the blood poured through his veins hot and fierce, and he looked round for a moment, to see if there were any friend near.

Then his eyes fell on the face of Anthony, and a glance of recognition passed between the pair, whilst an expression of unutterable regret flitted across Anthony's countenance.

It came back to his memory then the recollection of the hill-side, amongst the Southern Highlands, where they had sat them down to rest, while the lights and shadows flitted hither and thither over the landscape.

They had started, meaning to have such a pleasant holiday, and behold this was the end of it.

'Let me pass, if you please,' he said to the spectators, who were standing behind him, and he went out into the vestibule, saying to himself, 'Oh! my God, I cannot bear this ; it is too much.'

Meanwhile, in Court the judge was putting the usual questions to the prisoner. From the time of his entrance Andrew had remained standing, behind the low railed dock, that looks strange to English eyes. The two men in red coats and curious cocked-hats (which were turned up and flattened at the back), who had escorted him along the passage and up the winding stairs, sat down, one on each side of the prisoner, but he did not attempt to follow their example ; consequently there was no necessity for the judge to order him to 'stand up,' when answering to 'Guilty, or Not Guilty ?'

'Not Guilty, my lord,' said the prisoner, firmly; on hearing which the audience breathed freely.

There was to be no strangling of the case, then, no plea of Culpable Homicide—no arranging of the matter between Advocate Depute and Defendant's Counsel—no mere 'bit of a speech,' entreating a light sentence—nothing of the kind—there was to be a struggle; and when this became apparent, there ensued a few minutes' stir and bustle—caused by the spectators settling themselves in their places, and preparing for a lengthened stay in Court.

Then one of the turnkeys intimated to the prisoner that he might sit down.

'He would have stood the whole time, I b'lieve,' remarked the man afterwards, with a lofty contempt for the Southerner's want of acquaintance with Scottish etiquette, 'or leastways till he dropped, for I never did see a mon so white and ghaistlike afore. It was all strange to him, poor lad.'

CHAPTER XI.

THOLING HIS ASSIZE.

Many a kindly Scotch heart felt sore that day for the 'puir laddie,' to whom it was all indeed very strange.

His want of self-assurance, his pale, wasted face, his thin, white hands, his very lack of knowledge of their forms—all these things sensibly touched a people hospitable to an extent, and possessed in no small degree both of imagination and perception.

Certainly the righteous indignation of men who call things by their proper names, had been roused by the generally-received idea that the prisoner, having first induced the woman to leave her husband, murdered the man when he followed to reclaim his unfaithful wife; but still the truth of this idea remained to be proved.

The prisoner had decided to let the matter be sifted, and although there were some who thought his calmness a sign of guilt, and found in his English face corroboration of his desperate depravity, yet, on the whole, the opinion of the majority was favourable.

Perhaps the woman might have tempted him, and the hus-

band been rash—anyhow, he had suffered. His face was not the healthy, comely countenance of that of the young fellow many a one of them had seen walking by the banks of the Nith, and making for Lincluden. His voice was low and weak; he was not bold and brazen-tongued about the matter; his manner towards the judge was very respectful, which pleased the spectators, for though their own manner may not in all cases be over-courteous towards their superiors in station, it is gratifying to the Scotch to see their great men 'treated according' by strangers.

And besides all this, the man was being tried for his life, which each one present felt to be a serious matter,—a matter indeed the full importance of which no one can ever quite estimate till he have sat in Court, watching the accused while the evidence is being given that may either hang or acquit.

'He is looking awful bad, puir fellow,' was the cautious criticism of the gallery.

'Whist, man, they're beginnin' the examining,'* and the pair craned forward their heads to see.

'Put out your right hand, sir,' said Lord Glanlorn, and the witness did so.

'As I stand before God, and as I shall answer to God at the Great Day of Judgment'—so the oath proceeded, and looking up at the sound of this solemn formula, Andrew Hardell beheld the face of a man whose word he knew might hang him.

'Your name is David Johnstoun, I believe?' With this question the Advocate Depute commenced his examination.

'It is.'

'And you are a waiter at the "King's Arms" Hotel in this town?'

'I am.'

'And you have been a waiter there for some time?'

'Two years come Hallow-e'en.'

'Exactly so. Now, Mr Johnstoun, we want you to tell us all you know about this business. You mind the twenty-third of August last?'

'I would not like to swear that I do.'

'Well, at any rate, you remember Mr Challerson coming to the "King's Arms," inquiring after Mr Andrew Hardell?'

'I mind a mon riding up to the door when I was standing there, and asking me was one Mr Andrew Hardell inside. He was on a dark-brown horse, with a star in the middle of his forehead; and he had spurs and a heavy whip—but whether he was

* In Scotland there is no oratorical 'opening of the case,' the Advocate Depute merely states the nature of the offence, and then calls his witnesses.

Mr Challerson or no, I canna swear, as I never set eyes on him before to my knowledge.'

'You saw the body of Mr Challerson afterwards, however, and identified it?'

'I was shown a body, and some person told me it was Kenneth Challerson's; but I canna swear mysel' anything about that. The corpse was the corpse of the man that spoke to me.'

'That is just what I want to know, Mr Johnstoun; and now will you tell us what he said to you?'

'He asked, was Mr Andrew Hardell stopping at the hawtel, and when I made answer that he was just gone, he began to swear and bite the handle of his whip. I thought he was disappointed at missing him, and said, that although Mr Anthony Hardell was gone south, Mr Andrew was not very far off—that he could na' be more nor a piece of the way to New Abbey.

'"Are you sure of that?" he spoke out quite quick and sudden-like; and when I told him I was, he clapped spurs intil his horse and was off down the street as hard as the beast could go.'

'He seemed in a passion, then?' suggested the Advocate Depute.

'He seemed vexed; I could not tell you why—folk are like that sometimes when they canna' fall in wi' the body they want.'

'You say you took notice of his whip?'

'I did.'

Then ensued a pause, during which the article in question was produced.

Almost curiously Andrew Hardell looked at it again while the witness took it in his hand.

A straight—rather thick whip—gold-mounted—heavily loaded—the sort of whip a man might use who habitually rode an obstinate and vicious horse; a horse which refused to go till urged with blow and spur—and then reared.

Some memory of a speech Mr Challerson once made about having felled a stubborn brute with a blow between the ears, recurred to Andrew while he watched the witness examining the whip.

'This is like the one I saw in his hand,' said the man, after a short silence. 'I took particular notice of the gold about it, because it shone in the sun while he was talking, and I wondered was it gold or gilding.'

'That will do,' said the Advocate Depute; and the whip, numbered '13' among the articles mentioned in the indictment, was removed. 'Now, Mr Johnstoun, I must ask you a few ques-

tions more. You recollect two young clergymen staying at your hotel? was the prisoner at the bar one of them?'

For the first time since his appearance in the box the witness turned his face towards the dock. As in a dream, Andrew Hardell heard some one tell him to stand up, and without any will of his own, so it seemed to him, he rose and looked at David Johnstoun.

Immediately he did this, David Johnstoun quickly averted his eyes, and turned them towards the Advocate Depute.

'Yes,' he said. 'That is Mr Andrew Hardell, and he stayed for about three weeks at our house.'

'He was a good deal out and round the country during that time?'

'He was very seldom within, or his friend either.'

'Did they generally go out together?'

'Sometimes, not always.'

'You waited upon them mostly?' It was a miracle to Andrew Hardell to hear how the Advocate Depute adapted his language to the ear of the man he addressed, and how he adopted the phraseology to which the man was accustomed as no English barrister would have dreamed of doing, unless, indeed, he were ridiculing a witness. 'You waited upon them mostly?'

'Yes.'

'Perhaps you can tell me, then, if the prisoner had a light top-coat—grey, with large horn buttons; a loose coat.'

'He had; but I never saw it on him.'

'Never saw it on him!' repeated the Advocate Depute. 'Now, Mr Johnstoun, pray be careful—do you mean, on your oath, to say you never saw the prisoner dressed in that light-grey top-coat?'

'I was wrang,' said the witness, deprecatingly; 'I did once see him in it—the evening he came first to the "King's Arms."'

'Oh! you remember that now? Well, perhaps you will stretch your memory a little further, and try to remember some other occasion when he wore that coat.'

'He never wore it to the best of my belief. I have seen it in his room, but I never saw it on his back save that once.'

'You are on your oath, sir.'

'I never said I wasn't,' retorted the witness.

'And, on your oath, you never saw Mr Andrew Hardell in that coat excepting when he came the first evening to the "King's Arms?" Take your time, now, before you answer me.'

'I needn't tak' any time,' answered David Johnstoun, defiantly; 'for I am not going to tell a lee to please you nor ony

mon. Mr Andrew Hardell never had that coat on him, so far as I know, from the day he came to Dumfries till the day he left it.'

'Perhaps you did not see him every time he went out.'

'Likely enough; I was na' his nurse.'

Whereupon a grave, low laugh ran round the Court, and the Advocate Depute remarked—

'You are witty, sir.'

'I am obleeged to you,' was the reply, from which it will be seen that the Advocate Depute had all the sir-ing on his own side.

Throughout the trial, indeed, Andrew could not help remarking the utter absence of any acknowledgment of rank—which is the more singular in a nation that attaches as much importance to birth as any on the face of the earth.

'Although, unhappily for him, you were not the prisoner's nurse, Mr Johnstoun,' recommenced the Advocate Depute, hitching up his gown on his shoulders, and adjusting his wig, 'you appear to have taken friendly notice of what he wore. Perhaps, therefore, you can describe to me the clothes he had on the evening he left Dumfries for New Abbey.'

'He had on a suit of tweed, a "soft" hat, and a pair of lace-up boots,' was the prompt reply.

'What kind of buttons had he on his coat?'

'Bone—lighter nor the tweed.'

'Did you remark if there was one off?'

'I didna remark; if there had been one wanting, though, I think I should have observed it.'

'Was the tweed light or dark?'

'Dark.'

'Could you swear to it?'

'I misdoubt whether I could; likely there was more nor one piece made the same year his was woven.'

At which point Lord Glanlorn, interposing, told the witness he was not answering properly. Lord Glanlorn was kind enough further to explain to the Court generally, while he apparently limited his remarks to the witness, that the question before them was, the prisoner's suit of tweed—not how many pieces had been woven in that year, or any year.

After which the examination proceeded:—

'The button,' witness said, in answer to a question from the Advocate Depute, and looking at the button and piece of cloth in his hand, 'is very like the one used to be on Mr Hardell's coat; but I canna say more nor that. I canna swear to it. The tweed is like what he used to wear—but I have seen other people in tweed like it.'

'How many suits of clothes had the prisoner?' asked the Advocate Depute.

'I have seen but two of tweed and one of black.'

'You can go down,' said the Advocate Depute, whereupon Lord Glanlorn looked inquiringly towards Mr Dunbar, as much as to say, 'Are you not going to cross-examine?' to which look Mr Dunbar replied with one that seemed to imply—

'He is too unimportant for me—wait a little, my lord.'

Meanwhile, however, one of the jurymen was on his feet, vainly endeavouring to catch Lord Glanlorn's eye.

'What is it?' the learned judge asked at length, having his attention drawn to the circumstance by his brother Craigie.

'I only weshed to ask the wetness a question;' and leave having been vouchsafed, he said—

'I thenk, David,'—the materials for many a glass of toddy had been brought to the speaker by David, and he was at once patronizing and familiar accordingly—'I thenk, David, you said the prisoner did not wear the light top-coat?'

'He did not, Mr Crawford,' answered David, and retired amongst the crowd, while the Advocate Depute confounded him and Mr Crawford in a series of mental sentences which need not be recorded.

The next witnesses examined were the women who had been washing at the pond, and the old shepherd; but beyond speaking to the time when Andrew Hardell left them, and the route he took, their evidence was unimportant.

After them appeared the mistress of the Commercial Inn, who identified the prisoner with a sob; who spoke with volubility as to the 'drookit' state in which he appeared at her door; who was sure she had seen a button off his coat; who could swear to the time he arrived, because he spoke about it himself.

Cross-examined by Mr Dunbar:—

'Knew the prisoner quite well. He had often stayed at her house before. Never saw a lady with him. Couldn't say whether the button seemed to have been torn off or not. Knew the coat was awful wet—took no notice of it that morning. Supposed if there had been a piece wanting she might have taken thought to it in the daylight; only just as Mr Hardell came down she first heard anything about the murder. Did not seem to think he took the news any way but natural like. They all talked about it outside the door. Her clock might have been fast, but in a common way it went slow. Somebody else told her the clock was fast beside Mr Hardell; she could not mind now who; it might have been the post, or it might have been a pairty

come to see the ruins—she could not mind. It was far frae her thochts then onybody wad ever even the like o' murder to such a ceevil, quiet, decent young man. He was not in a bit of hurry about starting. He ate his breakfast, and he talked wi' them a' at the door. He said the man must have been struck by the lightning. She minded him laughing. It was when an auld wife said people would be feared to walk along the roads; and then Sandy Wilson made answer, "That there was no call for her to be feared."'

'She was neither so young nor so handsome as you, Mrs McBurnie, we may conclude,' suggested the Advocate Depute; in reply to which remark Mrs McBurnie, with a heightened colour, declared he was just foolish like all the rest of the men, and insinuated he had no very clear idea what he was talking about.

'I only want to know,' said the gentleman against whom this libel was uttered, 'if you observed whether there were a bit of cloth torn away with the button you say was wanting?'

'I canna tell, there may or there may not—the coat was that wet. I did not tak' particular heed to onything else.'

'But when it was dry, Mrs McBurnie?'

'I had no say to it then—we left it afore the fire a' night, and in the morn the girl took it and the rest of the clothes up to the parlour, where she had kindled a fire, and she said there was a piece wanting, but——'

'My good woman,' interposed Lord Glanlorn, 'you must confine yourself to what you know; what any one said to you is not evidence.'

This was a pleasant way Lord Glanlorn had. He always took the prisoner's side through the trial, and then, by way of proving his strict impartiality, summed up against him.

There could not be a worse sign in a case than that Lord Glanlorn interfered in favour of the accused, and those who knew the judge best augured badly from this fact for Andrew Hardell's chances of escape. The prisoner himself, however, and the prisoner's friend—God help the man, he had but one that he knew of—too hastily concluded the judge to be convinced of his innocence, and plucked up heart accordingly, but hope was speedily damped by a false move made by Mr Dunbar.

Thinking, perhaps, a sufficient number of witnesses had gone down without being put on the rack, he inquired of Mrs McBurnie *how* it chanced she could be so positive concerning the missing button.

'When I was wiping down the coat with a clean claith,' she answered, 'I felt there was one wanting, and I thocht at the

minute if I could find one to match I would put it on for the young man in the morn, but when the morn came something pit it out of my head, and I never minded it again.'

'Do you not believe, however, that if a piece of the cloth had been missing you must have observed it?'

'I canna say—the tweed was that wet and shrunk, it would hardly show a tear. I thocht at the time he would scarce be able to get into any of his clothes again.'

'Did you observe in the morning whether he had on the same suit?' asked the Advocate Depute; and then Mr Dunbar felt he had better have let the witness go when his learned brother was willing.

'No,' she answered, 'when he cam out we had all just heard o' the murder, and I did nae give a thocht to his claiths.'

The next witness was Euphemia Stewart, who swore positively not only to the fact of a piece of the cloth being torn away, but also that she 'took thocht to herself at the time the suit Mr Hardell wore at breakfast could nae be the same she had brought up to him. The one was shrunk and run, and the other looked almost new like.'

Upon this Euphemia Stewart Mr Dunbar, exasperated, perhaps, by his previous failure, hurled himself ruthlessly.

'When did she first mention anything about the rent in the tweed?' he asked.

'Weel, she could nae just be sure.'

'Was it not after she heard a piece of cloth and a button had been found, and that the prisoner was suspected?'

'It might.'

'At what time did she begin to remember the prisoner's coat looked fresh when he was having his breakfast? Take your time now, and do not answer in a hurry,' proceeded Mr Dunbar, who knew how to make a point as well as any man; 'was it when you took him up his ham and eggs, or when he was settling the bill, or when he was standing out in front of the inn in the broad daylight, or when'—this with tremendous emphasis, like the culminating sentence in a tragedy—'or when *you heard there was a reward offered for the murderer of Kenneth Challerson?*'

Of course the girl could not tell. She, notwithstanding her training and her country, was puzzled by the higher training which accosted her.

The woman's very truthfulness was against her; she had a vague impression of having 'thocht' at some time, but at what time she could not swear.

'Likely she had never made any talk about it till the reward

was out; then, likely she and the mistress and a friend or two spoke about it, and then it got to the police, and she had to go to Kirkcudbright, and tell a gentleman there what she knew. She never wanted the reward, she would swear that—she might have talked about going to America with her father, but it was only words of course—she did not mean to go with the reward money—if she had ever said such a thing, she said it never thinking.'

'Perhaps you spoke about the tear in the same way,' suggested Mr Dunbar.

'No, she didn't—the minute she heard tell of the bit of cloth in the dead man's hand, it all came back into her mind like a flash of lightning, and without thought she spoke and said there was a bit wanting in the tweed coat of the young man stopped wi' them that night. If she had taken thought she, maybe, would not have spoken: she did not want to get anybody into trouble.'

'Unless you could get to America in consequence,' suggested Mr Dunbar; and then he let her go down, feeling he had to a certain extent retrieved his error with regard to Mrs McBurnie.

By this time the sharp pain which the prisoner had experienced at the commencement of the trial, was to a certain extent numbed. Like toothache, it had worn itself out by its very intensity, and with only a dull throbbing in his temples, and a sort of trembling at his heart, he sat listening to the remainder of the evidence as it was given against him.

As for Anthony, he stayed in the back of the gallery, reading over and over again the indictment, with a copy of which Mr Dunbar had provided him.

Unconsciously he learned the form off while listening with straining ears to the words each successive witness uttered · and subsequently, when thousands of miles of sea fretted and tossed and rippled between him and Scotland, he found himself often in solitude muttering over the sentences he had conned that day while suffering agonies of suspense in Dumfries.

'ANDREW HARDELL, now or lately a prisoner in the prison of Kirkcudbright, you are Indicted and Accused at the instance of Archibald Murray, Esq., Her Majesty's Advocate for Her Majesty's interest, THAT ALBEIT by the laws of this and of every other well-governed realm, MURDER is a crime of an heinous nature, and severely punishable; YET TRUE IT IS AND OF VERITY that you the said Andrew Hardell are guilty of the said crime, actor, or art, and part IN SO FAR AS,' and thus the dreary paper ran on, till it finished with

'ALL WHICH or part thereof being found proven by the verdict of an assize, or admitted by the judicial confession of you the said Andrew Hardell, before the Lord Justice General, Lord Justice Clerk, and Lords Commissioners of Justiciary in a Circuit Court of Justiciary, to be holden by them or by any one or more of their number within the Burgh of Dumfries, in the month of September, in the present year 184—. You, the said Andrew Hardell, OUGHT to be punished with all the pains of law, to deter others from committing the like crimes in all time coming.'

And then, while the evidence still proceeded, he conned over to himself the 'list of articles referred to in the foregoing indictment,' as also the list of witnesses, till the unfamiliar Scottish names swam before him, and an old man sitting near, holding a stout stick, and leaning his chin on his clasped hands, bade him 'quet turning the leaf over, and let other folk hearken to the trial.'

'If all these witnesses are going to be examined, it will last for ever,' thought Anthony; and though it was a cool day, the sweat stood in beads on his forehead as he tortured himself with thinking how it might end—what the result might prove.

He was not one-half so composed as the prisoner, who, with the morbid feeling ever growing, listened to all the evidence which could be adduced against him.

There was nothing new in it to his apprehension. He had rehearsed the whole business over hundreds of times in Kirkcudbright jail. He had lain awake at night considering what this witness and that might find to say—mentally he had examined and cross-examined every man and woman—in his cell he had called a court together for himself, and been judge, jury, prosecutor, witnesses, prisoner, all in one. He had sifted the evidence, and he had summed up; he had heard one verdict given, and knew he was free; he had heard another verdict given, and then death stared him in the face; death not to be averted save by the influence of friends, who all asked him why he had not given himself up at once.

He had gone through every stage and phase of the play, and altered the *dénouement* according to the mood of mind he chanced to be in. Kenneth Challerson's death and the accessories thereof were to him but as so many bits of coloured glass, which, let the kaleidoscope of fancy be shaken as often as it might, still presented some slightly different combination.

Now it was this man whose evidence convicted him—now it was that witness whose cross-examination shook the jury's belief in his guilt.

He had gone through it all in the watches of the night, in the weary lonely hours, and no present horror could be like that of waking in the darkness and considering the trial was still to come.

Lo! it had come, and he was in the midst of it. Behold, the strong man armed had arrived at last, and he sat powerless waiting to hear what was going to be the result—whether acquittal or conviction—life or death.

And still the trial went on. As in some shifting scene a man beholds familiar places reproduced—well-known rivers and plains, towns and mountains, flitting before him—so that day witness after witness came forward and reminded him of every step he had travelled, and then stood down, only to make way for another, who brought the end a little nearer.

The warm summer's evening, the dusty roads, the pond where the women were washing, the green turf dotted with sheep, the sun setting behind Criffel, the clouds coming up from the east, the trees arching over the highway, the babbling brook, the old broken, moss-covered wall, the gathering night, the galloping horse, the lightning, the thunder, the pelting rain, the hand-to-hand fight, the darkness rendered visible for a moment, only to reveal a dead man stretched on the grass, a long panting race through the night, and then a return to the spot where *it* still lay; a walk, with the wet pouring down upon him, on to New Abbey—the sound of a swollen river rushing beneath a bridge came back to his ears, together with Mrs McBurnie's exclamation when he entered the inn, 'dreeping;' all this was the scenery in the first act of the drama.

If they had asked him to give evidence, *he* could have remembered everything, every detail, even to the rabbits scudding away at his approach, to the colour of the cattle grazing on the hills, to the distance the tide was out when he first caught sight of the Solway, the morning after *that* occurred—to the golden gorse, to the purple heather, and the blue-bells nodding beside his path.

To him the witnesses seemed stupid and unintelligent; he remembered each sentence better than they did; he wondered why people could not recollect, and then he thought it was a very good thing for him they were so stupid.

The old shepherd, for example, could not say for certain how long he stayed in the cove. Andrew could have told him just where the sun stood when he descended to the shore, and how far it had sunk before he flung off his clothes and swam away from land.

The doctor examined as to how Kenneth Challerson's murder

was accomplished, owned he was at a loss to imagine how such a blow could have been inflicted upon so tall a man as the deceased by the prisoner; he could not understand how sufficient purchase was obtained to give it, unless during a struggle Mr Challerson had been brought to his knees or thrown down; he could have comprehended it better from a different weapon, from a short stick for instance, which would not have swayed in the hand.

He had no reasonable doubt of death having resulted from a blow inflicted by the loaded end of the whip—the metal was a little dented, and the slight cut on the temple had evidently been caused by the chased edge; but that the blow was given while the deceased stood erect on his guard, seemed to him impossible.

The doctor, in the interests of science, occupied much time in explaining his meaning, and Lord Glanlorn added a great amount of valuable information to that he already possessed. He asked so many questions, in fact, and the doctor replied to them at such length, that it finally seemed a moot point whether death could have resulted at all; and but for the fact of Kenneth Challerson having been buried, the audience might have doubted the reality of his decease.

As it was, Lord Glanlorn elicited one desirable piece of evidence. By forestalling a question Mr Dunbar proposed asking when his lordship's hungering and thirsting after medical knowledge should be satisfied, the learned judge ascertained that such a blow could not have been dealt excepting by accident.

'Good light, a steady eye, and a still foe,' the doctor affirmed, would all have been necessary adjuncts to a pre-determined act of this nature; 'a knowledge of anatomy also,' he went on to say, 'might have been useful, though not indispensable, since most people knew it was possible to kill a man by striking him on the temple;' and then the doctor—who called brow 'brew'—treated the Court to a detailed series of reasons why a blow on the temple was specially dangerous.

To all of this Andrew Hardell listened with a sort of vague wonder as to why it had never occurred to anybody that the ground sloped down a little from the road towards the wall, and that Kenneth Challerson stood nearest the wall, and was stooping forward a little, with his left hand round his—Andrew's—body, when the whip was wrested from him, and the blow dealt which ended the quarrel.

In grappling with Andrew, he had not stood quite at his fair height, and this fact enabled the blow to be given in the manner which puzzled the doctor.

His evidence, however, excited a marked degree of interest in

the jury—all the keener, perhaps, because neither they nor any other human being could perfectly understand it; and when this witness stood down, Mr Dunbar began to think that perhaps his client had judged wisely.

'He may get off after all,' he considered. 'There has certainly been no great point made against him yet.'

It was a very curious feature indeed in this trial, that the only two points throughout the case which told strongly in the prisoner's disfavour were two of which his own conscience entirely acquitted him.

He knew he had never gone to see Laura Challerson alone in his life—that he had certainly not worn his light top-coat during the entire of his stay at Dumfries, while assuredly whosoever else might have rifled the dead man's pockets of their contents, he, Andrew Hardell, was innocent.

What under different circumstances—with more time in which to plan measures for his own escape—he might have done, Andrew could not tell; he only knew that none of the articles produced had been taken from the body by him—and in the midst of his own danger there came into his mind a wondering sort of interest as to the manner of man who had thus stripped the dead, and then, seized with sudden fear, flung the spoil aside.

The last witness called for the prosecution was Anthony Hardell, who stepped into the box, looking much more like the criminal than the prisoner himself.

To his English ideas there was a something very awful in the form of oath he had heard so often administered during the course of that day.

Never before had he been called upon as a witness; never before had he been sworn to speak to the facts of any case, and now knowing what he knew—fearing what others might consider it necessary to ask—he turned his back resolutely towards his friend, and facing the judge, raised his right hand, and repeated after Lord Glanlorn,—

'As I stand before Almighty God, and as I shall answer to God at the Great Day of Judgment, I swear to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.'

'He will break down,' thought Mr Dunbar, watching how the man's hand shook as he held it out. 'There is a nice little understanding between the pair somehow. I am to avoid cross-examination if it be possible, and this Mr Anthony Hardell was not to be called for the defence—well, we shall see what my learned brother makes of him,' and Mr Dunbar secretly regretting, perhaps, that he was not in his learned brother's shoes, when he

would undoubtedly have pulled the witness to pieces, settled himself in his place while the Advocate Depute began.

'You know the panel intimately, I believe, Mr Hardell?'

'I beg your pardon,' said Anthony.

'You have been acquainted with Andrew Hardell for a long time?' amended the Advocate Depute.

'Yes, for years.'

'Would you oblige me by looking round and seeing if the prisoner be your friend?'

'Stand up,' whispered one of the individuals who sat beside him; and Andrew, rising, looked pitifully at Anthony.

He it was who had brought him to this; he with his cursed, unholy passion; with his feeble, lying lips; with his false pretences; with his encouragement of the dead man's senseless jealousy—he it was, and yet Andrew did not feel angry. In the midst of his own misery and his own despair, he sorrowed for the anguish which he knew must be in his old companion's heart. The lessons learned on the hill-side, on the heights beyond Colvend, had not been quite thrown away; already the seeds were sown, destined to make him in the after-time compassionate and long-suffering, and they quickened at sight of Anthony's haggard face—a face which was not less worn and altered than his own.

'Yes,' answered the witness, 'that is Andrew Hardell.'

'Your friend?'

'My friend, whom I consider perfectly incapable of committing such a crime as that with which he is charged.'

'You are here to state facts, not to express opinions, Mr Hardell,' said the Advocate Depute, sharply, in reply to which remark Anthony bowed his head and answered, apologetically and respectfully:

'I shall not transgress again, sir.'

'They certainly are a pair o' weel brouoht up young men,' considered some of the jury, 'and it maun be a sair trial fur baith o' them.'

'You were acquainted with the late Mr Challerson and his wife?'

'Yes, I had known them in England, and when my friend and myself came north we met them at Inverness.'

'Was that the prisoner's first introduction to Mrs Challerson?'

'I believe so—in fact, I am certain he had never seen her before.'

'She is very beautiful?'

'Most persons consider her to be so. I do—but my friend

never professed any admiration for her—rather the contrary.'

'What do you mean by rather the contrary?'

'I mean that he said he did not admire her; he said hers was not the style of beauty for which he cared.'

'And you believed him when he said so?'

'I had no reason to do otherwise; one generally believes what a man says till one has cause to doubt his veracity.'

'Nevertheless, he greatly affected the lady's society?'

'He affected it to the extent men usually do when travelling with a handsome and clever woman—so far—but no farther.'

'So far, however, proved sufficient to excite her husband's jealousy?'

'Yes—but it excited that jealousy unjustly—Mr Challerson disliked any man who talked much with his wife. He was as unreasonably and senselessly jealous as is the case with many women.'

'He never evinced any feeling of jealousy towards you?

'Never; but I am at a loss to see what that has to do with this trial.'

'You are not bound to answer that question,' interposed Lord Glanlorn.

'Thank you, my lord; I have no objection to answer any question, only I think the lady's name ought to be kept as much out of this sad business as possible.'

Whereupon there was an approving murmur in Court. Anthony Hardell's manner was perfection, and he proved he had not studied pulpit elocution for nothing—that sort of pulpit elocution I mean which makes fashionable ladies apply handkerchiefs to their eyes, and call a man a dear, while all the time the man knows he is a humbug.

But there was no humbug in Anthony Hardell's mind *then*. God help him, he was using the best weapons he had in self-defence, and in defending his friend. If the weapons were not true it was only because steel cannot be forged save out of iron, and there was no iron in the whole of the being of this poor, weak, wretched, cowardly sinner.

'What was the reason you so suddenly parted company with your friends in Edinburgh?'

'We found travelling with them increased our expenses to a degree which our small incomes could ill afford.'

'When you left Edinburgh it was with the intention of returning to England; why then did your friend induce you to visit Dumfries?'

'I induced him,' was the reply; 'we had intended going

farther north, when that meeting with the Challersons changed our plans. I told him I wanted a longer holiday, and proposed we should visit the "Redgauntlet" country, and return to England from Kirkcudbright. He agreed to my proposition, and we came here.'

'And you left before he did? Was there any disagreement between you?'

'Not the slightest. A plan presented itself that seemed calculated to promote my happiness and advancement in life. I mentioned it to my friend, and I may add he assisted me with the means to carry it out. We parted—I to go to London, and he to return to Langmore, *viâ* Kirkcudbright.'

'May I inquire what the plan was to which you have referred?'

'Certainly not; it was altogether a private enterprise of my own.'

'And you say the prisoner assisted you with the means to carry it out?'

'Yes; he lent me all the money he had—I mean all his capital; and as it has been suggested he meant to run away with Mrs Challerson, I may add, his loan to me deprived him of all ready money, except a very small amount indeed—quite insufficient to meet the requirements of a lady with such expensive tastes as those affected by Mrs Challerson.'

'Have you been able to carry out your plan, Mr Hardell?'

'I have not,' was the reply, and thereupon dark visions of contemplated simony crossed the minds of some of the jury.

'He purposed buying a leeving,' thought some of them, who were aware of the fact of English benefices being bought and sold, and never heard of the overthrowing of the money-changers' tables, without associating the idea of Church and State therewith.

'Was the prisoner aware Mr and Mrs Challerson intended visiting friends in the neighbourhood of Dumfries?'

'I cannot say. We both knew Mr Challerson owned some property near the border, but he never told us he intended to make any stay on his way home—at least he never told me. I certainly did not know he had friends in this neighbourhood, and I believe the fact was equally strange to my friend.'

'You knew, however, of their arrival at Heron's Nest?'

'Yes; I met Mr Challerson out riding one day, and subsequently had a bow from Mrs Challerson when she was driving out with Mrs Blair—I think that is the name of the owner of Heron's Nest. I did not call, however, though urged to do so by Mr Challerson.'

'Why did you not call?'

'I thought it was not worth while to revive the old jealousy and unpleasantness. Had I done so I must have mentioned the matter to my friend, and it would have been a very awkward thing to say—"I cannot ask you to come with me, because Challerson thinks you are in love with his wife."'

'Are you ill, Mr Hardell?' asked the Advocate Depute at this juncture, noticing how the witness leaned over the front of the box, clutching the wood-work with his fingers.

'No,' was the reply.

'Then be good enough to stand up,' said Lord Glanlorn, and the witness obeyed.

'You had never any reason to suspect the prisoner visited Heron's Nest?'

'Never the slightest.'

'And you swear you believe he did not entertain any undue attachment for Mrs Challerson?'

'Not merely believe, but I am confident he did not. I am reluctant to mention the name of an innocent girl in connection with an investigation of this kind, but I should still like to mention that my friend was engaged to be married, and that I never had the slightest reason to suspect any other woman of having supplanted her in his affections.'

'You are a staunch friend, Mr Hardell.'

'I should be an ungrateful one were I otherwise.'

'The prisoner wore on his first appearance at Dumfries a light top-coat. Did you ever see it on him afterwards?'

'Never; he may have worn it; but certainly not to my knowledge.'

'Were you always with him?'

'No; we went to the noted places together, and after that we did just what we fancied. He liked walking, I liked reading. He would go over and over again to the old ruins, a process which wearied and exhausted me, while I lay on the banks of the Nith or the Cluden, reading Scott, and making the acquaintance of Burns.'

'You think he never visited Heron's Nest—that he had no appointment to meet Mrs Challerson?'

'I am sure he had not. So far as one man can answer for another, I will swear that he never clandestinely saw Mrs Challerson in his life, and further, that he never wanted to see her.'

'And yet Mr Challerson disliked and was jealous of him?'

'Yes.—but one man is not to be condemned because of the dislike or jealousy of another man.'

'There was bad blood, however, between them?'

'I cannot deny that.'

'The accused was not partial to the deceased?'

'There was no reason why he should be. Mr Challerson never particularly liked him.'

'Then there was bad blood between them?'

'On Mr Challerson's side, yes.'

'Do you mean that the prisoner never spoke bitterly of the deceased?'

'Not bitterly—he said just what I should have said myself—he expressed an opinion, in fact.'

'To what effect?'

'To the effect that Mr Challerson was a loud-talking, arrogant, offensive snob.'

'Do you not consider that talking bitterly?'

'I do not consider stating facts speaking bitterly.'

'You were acquainted, we may presume, Mr Hardell, with the contents of your friend's wardrobe. How many suits of tweed had he?'

'If you mean while we were travelling together—two.'

'You can swear to that?'

'Yes, positively.'

'Upon your oath you repeat he had but two suits of tweed?'

'Certainly but two.'

'And how many had you?'

'My lord,' exclaimed Anthony Hardell, addressing Lord Glanlorn, 'I appeal to you.'

'You are not bound to answer,' said the judge, rampant in a moment.

'I only wished to know,' remarked the Advocate Depute, 'whether you might not have lent any of your coats to the prisoner.'

'I never did.'

'Was the tweed of which your coat was made the same pattern and colour?'

'Do you mean to imply, sir, that I murdered Mr Challerson?' interrupted the witness.

'Decidedly not; I merely desire to—'

But at this juncture Anthony Hardell again interrupted him.

'I said, sir, I did not object to answer any question, nor do I. Notwithstanding this, however, I object greatly to your mode of questioning.'

'You are sworn to tell the whole truth.

'And you, sir, are trying to get me to tell falsehoods.'

Whereupon Lord Glanlorn remarked that the witness was forgetting himself, to which the witness only replied by bowing his head, as much as to say, 'I cannot argue with you, but I have my own opinion nevertheless.'

'If Mrs Challerson did not leave her home with the prisoner, can you tell us, Mr Hardell, with whom she did leave it?' resumed the Advocate Depute.

'Did she ever really leave her home? asked the witness simply.

'There can be no doubt about that matter,' was the reply.

'Then would the most direct way of satisfying your curiosity not have been to call Mrs Challerson?' inquired Anthony; 'she could have enlightened you as to her movements much better than any stranger.'

'You are flippant, sir,' said the judge.

'I beg pardon, my lord,' was the reply; then addressing the Advocate Depute, Anthony Hardell proceeded—'Whatever my suspicions may be in this matter, I am not bound to confide them to you. All I apprehend you desire to know is, whether, if Mrs Challerson left her home at all, she left it with the intention of joining my friend, and to that I answer I am quite confident she did not.'

'Can you tell me where Mrs Challerson is?'

'I cannot,' was the reply; and then the Advocate Depute and witness looked at one another defiantly.

At this juncture it occurred to the Advocate Depute that perhaps this man might be able to swear to the button and piece of tweed, which were produced accordingly.

'They are like,' said Anthony Hardell, 'but I trust you do not expect me to identify a bit of horn and a piece of rag;' and he gave the articles back to the person appointed to receive them with an air of contempt.

'Could you swear to anything, Mr Hardell?' asked the Advocate Depute.

'Yes, I could, to the fact that you have been examining me to-day,' was the reply.

'Ay, and sware at it too, if he dared,' whispered Lord Craigie to Lord Glanlorn, who thereupon fixed his spectacles more rigidly upon his nose, and looked down severely at the witness.

'You have no objection to my examining you, I suppose?' suggested the Advocate Depute.

'I have no objection exactly, but the process is not pleasant.'

'Would you mind telling me why you will not swear positively to any fact, or answer any question directly?'

I have answered to the best of my ability, and if by not swearing positively you mean my inability to identify the button which has been just shown me, I again repeat that I cannot and will not swear to anything of the kind.'

'Could you swear to the coat if you saw it?'

'I could not. I could swear to a man, but not to his covering—at all events, the covering would require to be a great deal more remarkable than a suit of tweed which I could identify.'

There is a game called 'magic music,' that perhaps some of my readers can recollect having seen and joined in 'once upon a time.'

The trick of it consists in hiding an article whilst one of the company is out of the room, and then indicating its whereabouts to him by means of music.

Thus when he is far from the object of his search the player strikes the notes softly and more softly still. As he approaches it she apprises him of the fact in a gradual *crescendo*, rising finally to *forte*, and this is sustained whilst he hovers around the prize, till, when he detects the place of concealment, she breaks forth into the loudest strains of which the instrument is capable.

It was a somewhat similar game that the Advocate Depute and Anthony Hardell played out that day in Dumfries.

Over and over again the barrister came close up to the article hidden away.

He felt confident something lay concealed—he felt sure Anthony knew all about it; he almost laid his hand on it time after time, and yet it eluded his search eventually.

Round and round the secret he manœuvred; he tried to surprise, he tried to force it, he watched it, he barked about it as an eager terrier will at a rat-hole, out of which the animal declines to put its head. He harked back to it—he watched the subterfuges and artifices of his opponent; he tried to increase his knowledge by quick, sharp glances at the prisoner; he puzzled his head—and it was a shrewd one—to find some key to the mystery, and yet he had to let it go after all; though through the whole of the ordeal Anthony Hardell's face and Anthony Hardell's manner played magic music to his search.

'I am close to it now,' thought the Advocate Depute, and behold next moment the witness's voice was calm, and his brow clearer—and the strain grew softer and softer, lower and lower.

'I wish I were in your shoes for a minute,' sighed Mr Dunbar, to whose professional sagacity such a failure in scent seemed deplorable. 'If he go on this way much longer he will stumble upon the secret, as he has tumbled over it about a dozen times

already—oh! there—thank God he is tired—and the witness I was not to cross-examine has gone down—now we shall see.'

And he girt up his loins and listened while the Advocate Depute spoke to the evidence, recounted with the precision which made him so admirable an investigator of cases that should be heard, every part telling against the prisoner.

With the most commendable clearness he put the case into form for the jury. He condensed the whole thing into about the length of a short leader in 'The Times.' He spoke to evidence, and every one in the Court felt that the evidence had not been in favour of the accused.

There was sufficient in the case to authorize its being brought before a jury, and that, under the Scotch system, where the Crown, disliking to lose, seldom ventures risking a trial of any importance, was in itself a significant fact.

'How will it be?' asked one acquaintance of another in the vestibule.

'Puir laddie, I'm feer'd he'll hae to stretch a rope.—Guid sake, sir, what ails ye?' added the speaker, as a man staggering past him leaned up against the wall; 'are ye no weel? Luik till him—he's swounded.'

Which was true—in as dead a faint as any woman could fall into, Anthony Hardell lay prone. They carried him out into the air, they threw water on him, and they would have taken him to the hotel, but that he negatived their friendly purpose.

'Let me stay,' he said feebly, 'till I know the best or the worst;' and they gave him a seat by the door, from whence he could see the sun setting, while eager messengers reported from time to time how the case was proceeding.

'Dunbar's at it now,' said one at length; and speedily the hall was emptied. Every man crept back to hear the great lawyer's speech, of which I would it were in my power to give an exact report.

Even in the vestibule Anthony Hardell heard the tones of his ponderous voice, although the words he spoke were inaudible to his ear.

Never till then had the prisoner pitied himself utterly; never till then had he quite felt all the shame and the sorrow and the terror of his position.

Great is the power of eloquence—great was the power of this man's eloquence, which could sway the bench as though it were a reed, and bring tears to women's eyes, and make masculine hearts throb faster than was their wont.

He had a bad case, and he knew it, but his speech, like the

plot of a novel, no portion of which is founded and fettered by fact, was perhaps all the better for this.

He could give the rein to his imagination freely; he had a clear road for his gallop, and he struck spurs into his steed, and spared not the whip.

He was one of the finest speakers of the day. He possessed that peculiar Scotch humour, which is unlike the humour of any other nation on the face of God's earth. He had special power of fitness in language, that ability of combining opposing words, of resolving discords into harmony, which likewise is specially Scotch. He had a deliberate delivery, which increased in volume as it rolled along, till, like a mighty river, it uprooted all old landmarks, all previously-formed opinions, in its progress. He had a power of action as beyond description as it was beyond imitation, a power which spared neither king nor kaisar, neither judge nor advocate depute, neither witness nor prisoner.

According to him, the whole case was but a storm in a tea-kettle; the man had been murdered very probably, for his part he (Mr Dunbar) would not dispute that fact, although it certainly had seemed to be a doubtful point at one portion of the trial; the man had been murdered, and somebody must have murdered him. It was for the jury to say whether, on the very slight evidence with which the Crown had favoured them, the prisoner was guilty or not guilty; whether he should go free without a stain on his character, or fall another victim to circumstantial evidence, and that of the flimsiest and most impossible nature. To the jury he left the case, in the fullest confidence. The jury was composed of Scotchmen, and the prisoner, unhappily for himself, was an Englishman.

For once, however, the fact of his nationality might stand him in good stead, for though the Scotch were proverbially hospitable, it was most unlikely they would show their hospitality by trying to keep him with them for ever.

To Scottish justice, to Scottish sense, to Scottish fair-dealing, he (Mr Dunbar) was quite content to leave the question, and he left it (so he said), confident of an acquittal.

After him came the judge.

Every point in the prisoner's favour was rehearsed; every sentence repeated which could bear on his innocence; 'but,' added Lord Glanlorn—

'Confound him!' thought Mr Dunbar; 'there he goes again;' while the Advocate Depute adjusted his wig and pulled up his gown, and smiled to himself at the sound of that ominous conjunction.

Word upon word, line upon line, the judge piled up against the prisoner. He showed how everypresumption in the case went to support the idea of his guilt. They had the evidence of two witnesses to the fact of a button being missing from the prisoner's coat. There was no reason to doubt the truthfulness of Euphemia Stewart's testimony, and she distinctly swore that not merely a button was gone, but also that a piece of cloth had gone with it. The jury would bear in mind that no such rent had been discovered in any coat worn by the prisoner, but he would not have them place too much importance on this circumstance, since the question involved really was, had the prisoner three suits of tweed, or only two? He had ample time and opportunity for disposing of one suit between the hour of his leaving New Abbey and that of his arrival at Kirkcudbright. He had a lonely shore; the darkness of night; the absence of any company; all in his favour. One circumstance, however, that looked like innocence, must not be overlooked, namely, that he had not changed his original route, but went straight forward to Kirkcudbright, as though no murder had been committed. On the other hand, the jury would bear in mind they had not in this case to deal with a criminal of the ordinary type, but with a highly-educated and clever man, possessed evidently of a mind capable of weighing consequences and calculating possibilities; and this consideration, also, should have considerable weight with them in deciding the exact amount of credence which they ought to attach to the evidence of the witness Anthony Hardell.

He (the judge) did not consider that witness had given his evidence in a satisfactory manner. He was evidently biassed by his friendship for the accused. He was labouring under considerable excitement, and had fenced off important questions with more cleverness than straightforwardness.

If the jury believed the bulk of the evidence which had been that day given, they could scarcely fail to arrive at the conclusion that the prisoner had first betrayed the confidence of a man who trusted too much in his honour, and then murdered that man.

Whether the blow were dealt in passion, or in cool blood; whether it terminated a quarrel or were given treacherously, was not the matter for them to consider.

The real question for them to decide was whether Kenneth Challerson was murdered, and, if so, whether the panel were his murderer.

And Lord Glanlorn looked as though he thought the jury ought to deliver their verdict without leaving the box.

The jury, however, apparently arrived at a different conclusion,

for after a little whispering among themselves, and putting together of heads, they retired to consult.

Then came a time, when, like Agag, the prisoner said to himself, 'Surely the bitterness of death is past.'

He knew it had all gone against him; already he seemed to be like one clean forgotten, one for whom the world's pleasures and prizes were but as the memory of a dream.

What he might have done—oh, God! what he might have done, but for this awful misfortune. He saw himself a successful preacher, a happy husband, the father of children, a respected and useful member of society—that was the might-have-been of his life—and this was the reality.

A felon's dock in a far country—with the evening shadows stealing down—not a friendly face near him, and fifteen men in an adjoining room deciding whether or not he should hang by the neck till he was dead.

He sat in the dock, with his hands clasped, and his head bowed—his eyes were so misty with tears that he could not see the scene distinctly—but he had a confused memory afterwards of observing the judges leave the bench, and perceiving the counsel break up into knots and talking with the sheriffs and such of the spectators as had seats assigned to them in the boxes near the bench.

He knew they were speaking about him. Well—well, let the future bring what it might, he thought vaguely, it could never bring an hour of such intense misery—such utter loneliness as that. He was an interesting speculation to those people, nothing more. He felt very bitter against them all—unjustly bitter, for there were many there who, even believing him guilty, pitied him exceedingly.

After a minute or two his own advocate came over to speak to him,—told him not to despair yet,—to keep up for a little while longer.

Then he too went away, and the darkness deepened. Candles were brought into Court—dips that guttered down and made long wicks—and soon after the judges returned and resumed their seats, and the jury trooped back into their places, and there was a great silence for a moment.

Instinctively the prisoner rose to meet his doom. The faces of the jury looked, in the fitful light, pale and stern and just—inexorably just. You might have heard a pin drop in Court when, in answer to the judge's question, the foreman said—

'We find a verdict of NOT PROVEN.'

Of what happened after that, Andrew Hardell had no clear

recollection. He remembered that the judge said something to him, but of what nature he never could tell. He knew that one of the men who had sat guarding him allowed him to pass out on the side farthest from the trap-door, through which he had ascended from the subterranean passage. He felt the cool air blowing on his forehead, and he saw a way cleared for him by the people, who closed up again and followed him out into the street.

There was only one man to wish him joy.

'Thank the Lord!' said a voice in his ear; and turning, he saw the face of the waiter from the 'King's Arms.'

'Take me to some place where I can be quiet,' Andrew petitioned; 'where nobody will know me;' and thus entreated, the man, under cover of the darkness, led him hurriedly along Buccleugh Street, and down the steps into the lane below, where not a soul was stirring.

'Ye'll be in need of something to eat,' said the man, and Andrew thankfully yielded himself to such friendly guidance.

CHAPTER XII.

FACING THE FUTURE.

When a man is thrown from his horse, or falls from a scaffolding, or recovers his senses after a railway accident, he does not all at once realize the serious nature of the injuries which have been inflicted. He only knows that life is still in him, and thanks God for that mercy. Afterwards comes the knowledge—the suffering—the repining.

At the moment succeeding a great deliverance, the first instinct is gratitude; subsequently, when knowledge follows ignorance, when re-action ensues after excitement, when the danger is behind and the vista of years before—a cry ascends through the darkness: 'Would that I had died!—why was I spared for this?'

To Andrew Hardell 'afterwards' had not yet arrived. But a few minutes previously, peril was present with him, and that peril could scarcely become all at once a memory of the past.

There was only a single feeling uppermost in his mind as he hurried along, guided by David Johnstoun, and that was a wondering thankfulness at his deliverance.

As to the future, he was too bewildered to think of it. He was free—the trial was over—the danger past. As to the actual meaning of the verdict, he had not yet quite grasped it.

He was spent, and he wanted rest. He was confused, and he needed time to collect his thoughts. He was faint, and he required food. He never could accurately remember what he felt while he walked through the twilight up the narrow streets, except that he was very glad.

He had not yet realized the nature of his hurt; it was not mortal, he knew, and that was then enough for him to comprehend.

Out of the darkness they turned into an inn of the commoner description, where, around a blazing fire, a number of men were gathered drinking and smoking.

A comely, middle-aged woman was in the act of supplying one of her customers with another 'noggin' of whiskey, when David beckoned and spoke to her in a low tone.

Instantly she bent her eyes on his companion with a look of curious inquiry, then, without a word, led the way up a narrow staircase and into a bed-room on the first floor.

'Ye'll be quiet enough here,' she said, setting the candlestick she carried down on a small round table, and again favouring Andrew Hardell with the same look of irrepressible curiosity she had honoured him with below. 'And ye wad like something till eat—what will ye please to have?'

'I will come down wi' ye and see to that,' David Johnstoun hurriedly interposed. 'Will ye sit, Mr Hardell, and rest yourself a-bit?' and the pair departed from the room, leaving Andrew alone.

Then all at once there fell upon him such a sense of desolation as I might never hope to put into words; the comprehension of his position dropped down into his heart as a stone drops down into a well, troubling the waters at the bottom.

He was not innocent—he knew that; and the sentence pronounced declared as much.

Not proven—ay, not proven in law—but there was not a creature in Court—not an inhabitant of Dumfries—not even the waiter from the 'King's Arms,' the only friend who had stopped to congratulate him—that believed he was other than guilty.

They had hurried him through the kitchen that he might not be recognized. They had brought him up to this room, not that he might physically be more comfortable, but that mentally he should escape annoyance.

He looked round the apartment, in which no fire blazed cheerfully, which was only lighted by a solitary dip, and contrasted

its cold dreariness with the warmth and coziness of the kitchen below.

He glanced at the bed placed in one corner, at the chest of drawers near the door, at the small round three-legged table where the candle was guttering down and making for itself a long wick with a cross of blackness at the top of the flame; he surveyed the empty grate and the strip of matting, and then his eye, still wandering round the room, fell on the looking-glass.

Moved by a sudden impulse, he took up the light, and holding it close to the mirror, beheld his own reflexion.

He looked at himself with a bitter smile. He had been, if not handsome, at least well-favoured. His had been that sort of face which mothers bless as 'bonnie,' and women admire for its frank, fearless, honest comeliness. He had never boasted chiselled features, nor dreamy, poetic speaking eyes. He had not been beautiful as a dream. In his best days no person could have said of him that he looked as though he had stepped down from the canvas of one of the old masters to walk amongst men —but yet he had been something more than passable, and he had been young.

Now he seemed young no longer; since he stood before a free man, another sculptor than nature had taken chisel and mallet in hand to alter her work. His face was worn, his cheek hollow. There was a drawn expression about his mouth; his eyes were sunk; he had lines across his forehead; his hair was thin, and streaks of grey appeared amidst the brown; his clothes hung upon him, and the hand which held the candlestick looked, reflected in the glass, like the hand of a skeleton.

The beauty of his youth was gone, and the hope of his youth with it.

Life was as unlike the life he had previously stood on the heights of manhood and gazed over, as he himself was unlike the man who had mentally done great things and built many a pleasant habitation for himself in the bright days departed.

He replaced the candle on the table, and sat down waiting in patience for some one to come to him.

It seemed a long time that he thus remained alone, but at last the door was flung open, and David Johnstoun re-appeared carrying a tray, on which were a dish of fried bacon and eggs, bread, and the materials for whiskey punch.

In his best manner the waiter whipped the cover off the ham and eggs, presented the bread to Mr Hardell, and would, seeing how white and ill he looked, have 'mixed' for him, but that Andrew, pointing to the whiskey, said:—

'I cannot take that; get me a cup of tea if you can—if not, water.'

'The spirit will do ye more good,' suggested the other; but Andrew shook his head.

'Take it away, I hate the smell of it,' he said. 'No disrespect to your national drink, Johnstoun, however,' he added, seeing the man looked vexed and disappointed, 'only I am not well, and the smell upsets me.'

'Try a thimbleful raw,' suggested David, but Mr Hardell was obstinate. He had never tasted whiskey since *that* night, and the sight and the smell of it was to him as the sight and the smell of death. Another such room as the one in which he was sitting, small and close, and illumined only by a solitary candle, the rain pouring in torrents, himself emptying his flask, and then falling asleep only to waken in the darkness to a memory of what was lying on the New Abbey Road. All this rose before him as he motioned Johnstoun to remove the whiskey, which no doubt would have done him good, could he only have swallowed it.

Then he took an egg, and a morsel of ham, and a bite of bread—'just the name of eating,' David Johnstoun afterwards affirmed—and drank a cup of very bad tea which the landlady brought him.

When the meal was finished, it suddenly occurred to him that he had no money.

Instinctively he put his fingers into his waistcoat pocket—but there was nothing there save emptiness.

'It'll be all right,' said his companion, noticing the action and the look which succeeded it. 'I'm acqueint wi' Mrs Pattison.'

'Settle with her then, will you,' answered Andrew, 'and afterwards will you go for me to my—to Mr Anthony Hardell, if you know where he is to be found, and ask him to meet me on that path down by the river under the houses—where the trees are, you know? I shall feel better out in the air—and—and—if I don't see you again, Johnstoun, thank you, and good-bye and God bless you.'

'Eh, sir!' exclaimed the man, surprised out of his former reticence, 'but my heart has been sair for ye. I knew rightly ye had no hand in Mistress Challerson's making off, whatever may have happened when you and him met——'

'Hush, for the love of God!' said Andrew, in a whisper, looking round as though he thought the very walls had ears.

'Ye needn't be feared o' me,' was the reply, 'though I was feared o' what the Depute might ask me. I was aye hoping—

hoping ye would have pled to Culpable Homicide I didna think he could have missed it both wi' Mr Anthony and myself.'

'Missed what?' asked Andrew Hardell. He never could make out afterwards what induced him to put such a question, for he knew the answer which was sure to come.

'The suit of tweed Mr Anthony left behind him. I minded all about that suit—afterwards——'

With a shudder Andrew Hardell turned away from the speaker, and stood for a moment, his head averted, and his fingers weaving and intertwining one with another.

An Englishman of the same class might have misunderstood this gesture, but not so David Johnstoun. If the system of education in Scotland have no other advantage, it has at least this, that it—together with the natural thoughtfulness of the people—enables one man to form some faint conception of the inner feelings of his fellow.

'It was ill-judged of me,' began the man, and there was a quiet pathos in that soft, mournful tone, which is the distinguishing feature of that part of Scotland. 'I ought to have known better. I hope ye're no' angry.'

'Angry!' Andrew repeated; 'angry!' and he showed his companion a white, troubled face, while he repeated the word—'but that was an awful oath, Johnstoun, for you, was it not—*knowing what you did?*'

'Knowing what I did, Mister Hardell, I'll jest settle that aith with my Maker. He'll be fairer dealing nor any of us, and I am sure and positive there is no' a minister in Scotland would say that aith bound a man to go out of his way to pit the rope round anither's neck. My mind is in no sort o' way distressed about the matter, and so yours need na be. And now I'll go and do what you want.'

'Good-bye,' Andrew Hardell said, and stretched out his hand without a feeling of there being blood upon it.

'Good-bye, sir, and I wish you well, wherever you may be.'

'And wherever I may be, if I forget your kindness may God forget me.'

'It isna for a gentleman like you to be thinking so much of what one like me has been able to do, by jest saying nothing,' answered David Johnstoun, and he was gone, leaving Mr Hardell's fingers tingling with the force of the farewell grip he had given them.

A few moments after, Andrew Hardell—having blown out the candle—groped his way down-stairs, and nodded good night to the landlady, and passed out into the Vennel, from whence he pro-

ceeded along Back and Irish Streets, to that walk under the houses, beneath the trees within sight of the Nith, where he had appointed to meet his friend.

For at least an hour he paced slowly up and down—up and down: now leaning against some garden wall, to listen for the sound of approaching footsteps, then renewing his march along the path.

Whilst he wandered thus, there came from one of the houses overlooking the Nith, a sound of music, floating through the night.

There was no great power, or very much purpose in the singer's voice, but they were the tones of a sweet old melody that stole down to the spot where Andrew Hardell stood, and as he listened—as he looked up towards the open windows—as he noticed the blazing fire, leaping and throwing strange effects of light into the darkness—there returned upon him the old sense of desolation I have mentioned, and the man, leaning up against a tree—wept.

They are pleasant houses, those in Dumfries, the windows of which command a view of the river, but it was not of the comfort or pleasantness of their interiors that Andrew Hardell thought as the unhidden tears blinded his eyes, and made the light more dim and the darkness denser before him.

It was just this,—he felt that he stood out there in a night typical of his own future.

Lights shone in the windows for others, but from no casement might any light ever again gleam cheerfully for him.

For others—the warmth, and the love, and the music, and the dear voices of home; for him—the night and the coldness, and the discords and the solitude of life. Ah! well, he would go away and make a new existence for himself in a strange land: he would change his name and start afresh upon a different career.

The Church was closed to him. 'Not Proven' had placed a padlock upon that once open door. He could not and he would not stay in England, to see once friendly faces change—to hear once kindly voices grow cold and unfamiliar.

Madge—yes, Madge; it was his duty to leave her. She would marry some one else and be happy. She would become the mother of children, who could not in the future curse their father for having bequeathed to them an inheritance of shame.

Through the night there arose a thanksgiving that he was not married; that he was free to carry himself and his sorrows far away, and still the music came floating down from the open window, and a man's voice took up the refrain—

'For Lochaber no more, for Lochaber no more,
We'll maybe return to Lochaber no more.'

For 'maybe' read 'never,' thought Andrew Hardell, and his soul was exceeding sad and bitter within him. Thus it always is; when once the passing trouble is overgot, there comes time for self-pity.

'I have been exceeding jealous for the Lord God of Hosts,' complained Elijah, but he said this not when he was fleeing for his life from the wrath of Jezebel, but when he stood in safety on Mount Horeb.

Six hours previously, had any one assured Andrew Hardell he should that night be a free man, free to go where he listed, he would have thought the news almost too good for belief, and yet now he stood out in the darkness—not unthankful, indeed, but still miserable and forlorn beyond description.

He might not, perhaps, have felt so desolate, but for that gleaming light—but for that voice stealing down through the darkness. As it was, the song and the bright room brought home to him the fact that he knew not that night where to lay his head, that the world certainly was before him—but not to choose—that the verdict pronounced left but one course open for him to pursue, *viz.* to leave England with all convenient speed, and put the ocean between him and his hopes and fears, his sin and his sorrow—for ever.

'Ye'll be tired wi' waitin',' said a familiar voice in his ear, at this juncture. 'Mister Hardell wasna' fit to come out himsel', and so he sent me. He bid me give you this letter and parcel. I told him ye would not have light to read the letter, so I was to repeat to ye most of what is in it. He wants to meet ye at a place in London, and for ye to do nothing till ye have seen him, and there's twenty pounds in this parcel, which ye will please to count.'

'I must read what he says,' answered Andrew Hardell; 'there's a public-house up the Sands;—come along with me;' and the pair strode on till they reached the inn, from the open doors of which streamed light enough to enable Andrew to decipher his friend's note.

Thus it ran:—

'I am ill, and unequal to the interview you desire. I know what you want, but must see and speak to you concerning your future plans. I send you twenty pounds, which will no doubt suffice to carry you to London; when you arrive there let me

know where I can see you. Direct to me as Mr Jones, at "The Salisbury Arms, Hertford," where I shall be almost as soon as you can reach London. I will get your things from the Procurator Fiscal, and bring them to town with me. I have suffered *tortures* to-day, but am so thankful it is all right.

'Ever yours,

'ANTHONY.'

To hear the oath with which Andrew Hardell crushed up this letter, was—so the witness of that ebullition afterwards said—'awsome.'

Out of the same mouth we know can proceed blessing and cursing, and the imprecation that followed the perusal of Anthony Hardell's letter was not less hearty than the grateful benediction which had escaped Andrew's lips when he and his companion stood together in the mean inn where he ate his frugal supper.

In a moment the execrable selfishness, the criminal weakness of this man by whose act, and through whose means, he stood that night an outcast on the face of the earth, were made evident to him, and like Job, he cursed his day; while like David, he implored the Lord's vengeance on the enemies of his peace.

'Whist—whist, it's no' weel to talk that like,' said his companion, and at the rebuke Andrew laughed aloud.

'You have not had your future destroyed; you have not had the whole of your life clouded by a weak, cowardly, insensate fool. But there, let him go, and my money with him. David, my friend, he continued, 'the wisest of men warns us not to go surety—not to put our trust in princes, but if to that advice you add mine—not to lend money to any one, and not to believe in the friend of your bosom, you will make a better thing of this world than I am likely to do.'

'Ye're young,' began the other, after a moment's silence.

'Ay, and I have therefore the more time for trouble before me,—but we won't speak about that any more,' added Andrew Hardell, abruptly. 'Tell me something I want to know; why did they talk so much concerning my light coat on the trial?—what were they driving at?'

'There was a person seen often about the Heron's Nest, wearing a light coat. Mrs Blair could have sworn to it, but she is ill, and no' expectit to get better.'

'And they thought that coat belonged to me?'

'Maybe they werena' far wrang,' was the reply.

'But I never had it on in Dumfries.'

'Somebody else might though.'

'Do you mean to say, Johnstoun, that——'

'I mean to say I believe Mr Anthony Hardell went out wi' that coat over his arm mony a time, and that if he had been man enough to say so on the trial, and to say where he went, the jury would have brought in a verdict of "Not Guilty." It was Mrs Challerson did the harm. If ye had been cleared of that, they would have cleared ye of the other. I heard them all talking about it up at the Hawtel.'

'And why did not you——' began Andrew.

'I couldna swear to a belief, and I didna even believe it quite till I was talking to him a while ago. He has a sorer heart than yours to-night, let yours be as sore as it will. And now I must be goin' back, if I can do no more for ye, for I'll be wanted. If I may make so bold, where are ye going to stay till the morn?'

'Not in Dumfries, at any rate,' Andrew Hardell answered. 'Tell Mr Anthony I will see him in London; and here, pay Mrs Pattison what I owe her.'

'Now Lord forgive ye, Mister Hardell, for the thought that I wanted or would take money from ye,' and David Johnstoun with an aggrieved air returned the ten pounds which the other had thrust into his hand. 'I'll take the woman's trifle if you wish; ye have silver, for I brought some, case ye might need it on your road.'

'I hoped you would buy something to remember me by,' Andrew explained.

'I'm no' likely ever to forget ye,' was the reply, uttered somewhat ungraciously.

'Nor I you,' returned the other, sadly and slowly, 'nor I you; if I have vexed you, Johnstoun, forgive me,' he added, stretching out his hand. 'I did not mean the money as payment of what never—God knows—can be paid. I did not, indeed.'

'I am no' vexed, and I have naithing to forgive, only English folk are apt to think money is everything, and that it can buy onybody.'

'I don't think it could buy you,' answered Andrew, heartily; and once again the two men shook hands and parted, Andrew perhaps in his heart feeling a little sorry to know from experience there are obligations money cannot recompense, and Johnstoun thinking to himself,

'It's well the moon's up now, for the puir fellow would find it lonely travelling in the dark.'

Possibly it was the very fact of the moon having sailed up from the east that made Andrew Hardell, after a moment's irresolution, leave the Sands and walk to the centre of Dervorgilla's

Bridge, where, with his arms resting upon the parapet, he took that last look of Dumfries which was mentioned in the first chapter of this story.

And so with this farewell, we leave in his company the Queen of the South: leave the flowing river and the soft green hills: the Nithsdale valley and the far-away hills, and the corn-fields all golden and glowing, stretching down even to the water's edge.

A portion of the man's life is over: the scene shifts: fresh actors are attiring themselves to appear on the boards.

Fades away the road to New Abbey, the height beyond Colvend; fades the purple of Criffel—the broad Solway—the winding Nith; fades likewise those weeks spent in Kirkcudbright jail—the old prison in Buccleugh Street, the old Court-house, the judges, the counsel, the spectators, the jury.

All these people, all these accessories, all these circumstances, are already matters of the past.

To-day has merged into yesterday. To-morrow of the man's life is at hand, and, turning his face southwards, he faces his Future.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE 'SALISBURY ARMS.'

WEEKS had passed by when, one gusty and ungenial afternoon towards the end of October, the Rev. Andrew Hardell entered Hertford, and having inquired for, and been directed to, the 'Salisbury Arms,' walked into that hotel and asked to see a gentleman who was staying there—Mr Jones.

'What name, sir?' inquired the waiter.

'Smith,' answered the visitor; and the pair ascended the stairs together, and crossed one of the broad lobbies with which that old-fashioned inn abounds.

The man opened a door at the end of this corridor, and motioning Mr Hardell to stay where he was, entered the apartment.

'Smith, did you say?' exclaimed some one in an irritable tone; 'what the deuce can he want? I know no one of that name. You mustn't show him in here, at any rate. Put him in the next room, and say I shall be with him directly.'

'Will ye walk this way, sir,' said the man to Andrew Hardell, ushering him at the same time into that long apartment with many windows, which looks so particularly cheerless without a fire, and with a dreary expanse of bare mahogany down the centre.

Beside the chimney-piece, as the most convenient vantage ground—a vantage ground which had the additional benefit of being near the door—the visitor waited for his host, who came in presently, expecting to meet a stranger, but who, at sight of his former friend, started back in surprise.

'You here!' he said. 'The fellow told me it was some Smith. I didn't think to see you.'

'You didn't want to see me, I know,' the other answered bitterly, 'and so I sent in a name which would, I believed, serve my turn. It has come to this, that I must settle my future with you; and as you would not come to me, I have come to you.'

'I am very glad you have come,' said Anthony, holding out his hand for the second time; but for the second time Andrew refused to take it.

'Are we not to be friends, then?' asked Anthony; and Andrew answered—

'No.'

'We are not to be enemies, I hope,' said the other, 'for I stand in sore need of your help just now.'

'Standing in need of help or amusement could be about the only reason why Anthony Hardell should ever honour any man with his friendship,' observed Andrew, bitterly.

'Heaven knows you wrong me,' was the reply.

'Then why have you never come to see me? Why have you never yet kept one of the appointments you made?'

'Because I was afraid,' he answered. 'Because I dreaded what you might say; because, knowing what I have brought upon you, I did not dare face my work. You were always stronger and better than I, Andrew. Don't be hard upon me now.'

'I do not want to be hard,' said the other in a softer voice; 'but I want my own. Give me back the money you got from me under the false pretence of desiring to flee from temptation; and I will never trouble you with the sight of me or my ruined fortunes again. Give it to me—or at least as much of it as you have left, and let us part in peace. I owe you no ill-will. Looking in your face, Anthony, which is changed almost as much as my own, I can say, "God forgive you!"'

'Ay, but I cannot forgive myself,' Anthony replied, and there ensued a pause.

'I can well understand,' began Andrew, at length, 'that you must have spent a considerable portion of that thousand pounds, and I ask nothing from you except the balance which may remain. I want to get away from England. I want to begin my life anew. What is the matter with you?' he suddenly added, turning sharply round upon Anthony. 'Whatever else you may say, don't tell me that money is *all* spent. If you have wasted my poor inheritance on *her*—if you have been playing with my only chance for the future, I cannot forgive you, and I won't—so now let us understand one another.'

And he drew himself up erect and defiant, while Anthony only murmured:—

'Oh, why did you come here? I cannot say what I want to say to you now. I cannot tell you everything—you do not know how I am situated.'

'Is *she* here?' Andrew Hardell inquired.

'Yes,' was the reply.

'I thought as much,' the younger man said bitterly.

'You would not have me desert her *now?*' asked Anthony.

'Pshaw,' exclaimed his former friend impatiently; and he walked to one of the windows, where Anthony followed him.

'Andrew—dear old fellow!' he began, laying a hand on his shoulder, 'for the sake of the times gone by, listen patiently to me now. I have not been so bad as I seem. I have not been a deliberate sinner; I did not mean to harm him, or you, or her, or anybody—only I could not help myself. I have commenced believing in fate—it was to be—I could not help it. The meeting with them—our unfortunate journey north—oh!' he added, passionately, 'you have never known what it is to be tossed to and fro, as within sight of land, yet unable to touch it—you have never known what it is to love——'

'Love!' interrupted Andrew, scornfully.

'Yes, love,' repeated the other; 'such love as may not be written in the domestic annals, but which is strong as death for all that. I tried to leave her, and I could not; if I could leave her now I would not. She has no one in the world but me. Consider how desolate a woman is who has given up everything on earth for the sake of a man. You would not have me be so base, so cruel?'

'What I would have you do, Anthony, is neither here nor there,' answered the other, shortly, 'for unless you are marvellously changed, the road you wish to travel is that you will

pursue. I may have my thoughts about you, as I have my opinions concerning her—but I would rather keep both to myself. What I want to know is this—Do you intend to give me back that thousand pounds, or any portion of it? In one word: —"Yes"—or—"No."'

'Yes, *and* no,' was the rapid reply. 'I cannot pay back your money—but I can return an equivalent for it. I have something to propose for your good and my own—only it is impossible for me to speak of it here—in this cold dreary room, where we are liable to interruption at any minute. I will meet you in London—I promise faithfully I will, at any place you may appoint, and I will then explain myself fully, and tell you all my difficulties.'

'Now, look here,' said Andrew Hardell, and he faced about swiftly and sternly, 'I won't be deceived any more by you. I have had trouble enough in obtaining this interview, and we do not part until I understand very clearly indeed what you mean to do in the future. You have been living in sin with my money. With your sin you have brought more wrong and suffering upon me than you can ever mend.'

'Yes,' interrupted the other; 'but remember also that I held my tongue when a word from me would have proved fatal —that I went into Court determined to perjure myself rather than utter that word.'

'There spake Delilah,' exclaimed Andrew after a second's silence, during the continuance of which he fought with his rage and subdued it. 'Never a man would have imagined such a sentence, unless a woman had inspired him. Go on, Anthony— you do credit to your instructress. And so it was generous of you not to hang the man to whom you owed money? What a convenient way that would have been of paying old debts, and yet you refrained from taking advantage of it. I did not quite understand the extent of my danger and my obligation till now——'

'How you will misunderstand me!' exclaimed Anthony.

'Do I?' was the reply; 'and yet your meaning seemed intelligible enough; however, let us drop the past, and talk only of the future. Am I to have any portion of that money back, or is it all gone?'

'It is not gone, but I cannot return it to you,' said the other. 'Oh, Andrew!' he added, 'have you never thought about *me* in all this matter? Never considered how it might be with *us?* Never wondered how it would be with me burdened as I am; tied to a woman I might not marry openly in England, and yet whom I could not cast off?'

'To be perfectly candid,' said Andrew Hardell, 'I never have. I felt quite satisfied you or she would find a way out of the difficulty somehow; and the fact is, I imagined, after what had occurred, she would go back to her friends, and you settle down to your work.'

'How little you know of her,' exclaimed Anthony.

'My opportunities for observation have been more limited than yours,' was the reply.

'I wish you would not sneer—it does not suit you. In the old days you never sneered.'

'These are not the old days, and I am not the man you knew then,' was the reply.

'Yes, you are; only you will not believe in me now,' said the other. 'I am sorry I did not go to see you when you wanted me. Many a time I have passed the end of the street where you are stopping, and thought, "Yes, I will call and see him," but my courage failed. I am living at a place close by Cannon Street. It is strange, is it not, how very near together two people may be in London without knowing it.'

'And what on earth are you living off Cannon Street for?' asked Andrew. Then suddenly light dawned upon his mind. 'You are going to marry her,' he said; and Anthony nodded.

'When you have married her, what do you mean to do?' he inquired.

'Go abroad,' was the reply.

'Where abroad?'

'Australia.'

'And you have taken your passage?'

'Yes; and the vessel sails this day week.'

'And what about your curacy?'

'You can take that.'

'I?—are you mad? There is not a rector in England would have me! There is not a bishop would license me!'

'True; but you might take my curacy for all that.'

'With your name?'

'Yes; the whole thing as it stands. It would suit you—it never could have suited me. You want clerical work—I hate it. You like the poor—I detest them. After all, it is only changing your Christian name. Nobody knows me there. The whole matter was arranged by correspondence, and very little of that; besides, our handwriting is sufficiently similar. You take my papers, and my name, and my curacy, and there is an end of the matter.'

'So this was your notable scheme—this was the way in which

you meant to give me back value for my money,' said Andrew Hardell, after a pause.

'Yes; it is the best plan I can think of for both,' answered the other.

'Then I will go, lest you think of something better still,' retorted Andrew, and he took his hat and went down the stairs and out of the house without a word of farewell—perfectly regardless of Anthony's entreaties for him to stop.

'I will call upon you to-morrow,' his former friend shouted over the banisters, but Andrew went on unheeding.

'A notable scheme,' he repeated to himself, 'and worthy of its author.' And yet there must have been something in the scheme that riveted his attention, for he thought of it, and of little else, all the way back to London; and when he arrived at Shoreditch, instead of at once proceeding straight to his hotel, he inquired the way to Essex Marsh, and amused himself for a considerable period in walking about that agreeable parish, during the course of which tour he saw as much misery, dirt, and ignorance, as the heart of the most zealous believer in the rottenness of all existing institutions could desire to behold.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FIRST STEP.

It is a less difficult matter to change a man's opinions than to describe the process by which his opinions were changed—that is, we find it easier to employ arguments and to suggest plans that shall alter the whole aspect of a life, than to discover why our arguments produced such results.

We play at will on the human instrument, but we cannot tell why one especial string shall vibrate longer than another. We run up and down the gamut, striking notes which awaken some answering music.

The secrets of that sort of thorough bass are beyond our learning, and yet by the merest instinct we compose our love-songs, our triumphal marches, our sorrowful melodies, our lawless romances, in strict accordance with its laws.

There is something in us beyond knowledge which comprehends why this shall produce discord and that harmony; which

says to us confidently, this shall touch and that strike him, without being able to tell the why or the wherefore of the result compassed.

We may make a man weep, but we cannot analyze why his tears flow. It is not for us to understand the subtle mechanism of another's humanity, when we cannot comprehend our own—to say why he who was bent upon one path, enters another, while we are wandering through strange and devious wilds ourselves.

Have we never said vehemently nay, and then gradually become reconciled to yea? Is there a reader that glances over these pages who has not at some time or other vowed 'I will not—nothing shall induce me'—only to the end, as it seems to us, that he might afterwards declare, 'I will—perhaps after all it is best?'

To two things men, as they learn this world's wisdom, yield implicit obedience, *viz.* necessity and inclination—to the first because they must, to the second because the season of life in which suffering seems heroic, and mere duty the thing to be considered, is happily of very short duration—and for these reasons, if we assume generally that people are influenced by argument just so far as argument seems expedient or pleasant, we shall perhaps not be far wrong in our conclusions.

At all events, it would be difficult to account on any other grounds for the fact, that although Andrew Hardell left Hertford, declaring to himself the proposal made by his former friend was wrong and inexcusable, he left Essex Marsh shaken in his opinion.

'After all,' he considered, 'if things had only been different I should have made a better curate for these people than he; and it does seem strange and hard that, having nothing else to live for, I should not be permitted to labour amongst the poor and needy. Certainly, could I have chosen my lot, it would have been amongst them.'

For the missionary spirit was strong in the man, that love of grappling with difficulties and surmounting obstacles, which does not exactly proceed from a religious spirit, but rather is born of an adventurous, enterprising, speculative turn of mind.

The easy life of a country clergyman had never seemed an enviable one to Andrew Hardell.

He had always longed for a wider field, for a more extended sphere of labour. That desire also to undertake any work save the work lying close at hand, which is so curiously distinctive a feature of modern men and women, was no more foreign to him

than it is to ninety-nine people out of a hundred at the present moment.

'Behold,' says Humanity, 'there is the field where I would dig, and sow, and reap plenteously—where I could labour with all my strength;' and the speaker looks forth beyond the level pastures and the pleasant valleys which he owns, to some far-away stretch of upland, where others perhaps are longing for the green meadows and the rippling brooks of the despised possession.

It had always been thus with Andrew Hardell. Whenever he read of the spiritual destitution of great cities, of the ignorance, the vice, the heathenism, the misery of their poorer inhabitants, he had thought to himself—

'They have not got the right sort of men amongst these people. I could influence, I could improve, I could convert them.' It had been the idea of his life, that a vast tract of unexplored usefulness lay in towns, ready to yield its treasures to any one stout of heart and strong of purpose; and in his day-dreams there had not been wanting visions of ultimate worldly aggrandizement rewarding any one who should faithfully take such a labour in hand, and carry it through to a successful issue.

Even in the Church fancy will occasionally sketch delusive pictures of fame and greatness and wealth; and so it may have been that from out the squalor of a City curacy, from out the dirt, and sin, and wretchedness of miserable homes, and districts full of disease, and vice, and sorrow, there arose, as a suitable termination to the work and the success, a crozier and a palace, the one to be wielded, and the other inhabited, by the patient, earnest labourer, of whom in the future all men should speak well.

Of course these dreams and fancies were now at an end, and yet out of their very wreck there arose a desperate desire to be placed in some position where he might retrieve the past by work, where he might hide his head till the scandal concerning him was forgotten, till men had ceased to remember the whole circumstances of the case, and only cared to recollect he had been tried and acquitted.

Lying awake in the darkness that night, after he returned from Hertford, the man who had suffered so terribly took heed to himself and his position, and for the first time since the hour when he was lodged in Kirkcudbright jail, saw something which he should like to have, which seemed to hold a grain of hope within it for the future, if only he dare put forth his hand and pluck what was within his reach—

If he dare: but he dared not. It was tempting, and the boughs hung low truly; nevertheless, the fruit was forbidden him to eat, and he might not taste it. There was nothing left for him save to go abroad, and to strive to earn his living painfully in a strange land.

And then he began again to consider how hard all this was—how his friend should have been permitted to take his money, his fair fame, the entire hope and purpose of his life, away from him.

He could never marry—he could never hold up his head again amongst his fellows—he could never make a name and a happy home for himself on this side the grave, and all because of an accidental blow, struck not in passion, but in self-defence.

'Lord, was it just?' he cried in his agony, and then next moment it came to him like a revelation that he had not trusted first or last in any help but his own, that he had not depended on the power and justice of the Almighty, but instead in the strength of his own will, on the extent of his own cleverness.

He had never looked at the matter from this point of view before, never once. Not when he was toiling over Criffel, not when he stood alone on the sea-shore, not when he was destroying the evidence against him, not when the terrors of the law were arrayed before him, not when he became aware two men possessed knowledge of a secret sufficient to hang him, not even then had he understood where his first mistake lay.

He had asked himself in his loneliness, in his terror, in his mortal agony, what other course he could have pursued, and the answer his heart always returned previously was, 'None, no other course lay open for him;' but now—now when it was all over and done with, he knew that, had he committed his way unto the Lord Whose justice he questioned, some way would have been made clear unto him.

'God pardon me,' he thought, 'for I have striven to be wiser than my Maker;' and he buried his face in his hands, beholding his error when it was too late.

And then he decided to put aside the new temptation which had been presented to him. 'I will not add lie to lie, and deception to deception. I will not preach the word of my Master from behind a mask, nor stand before His altar a hypocrite. If need be I will work my passage out to Australia, and get my bread there honestly in the sweat of my brow.'

Strong in which intention he went forth the next morning to see how he best might carry out his plan.

To his surprise, however, he found that it would be no easy matter for him to reach even the colonies without money.

Captains would have nothing to say to a man who did not know the difference between one rope and another; Government did not desire to send out sickly clerks to a new land, but rather able-bodied labourers.

'You had much better ask your friends to do something for you in England,' said one shipowner, not unkindly. 'Gentlemen with soft hands and a university education are not wanted in the colonies; if you have quarrelled with your relations, take my advice and make the matter up again.' And so at length, foot-sore and weary of walking through the interminable London streets over the 'stony-hearted' pavements, Andrew Hardell, in utter despair as to his future, returned to his hotel, where he found Anthony awaiting his arrival.

'Come to my rooms,' said that individual, 'I want to speak to you quietly; only hear what I wish to say, and then decide; it cannot do you any harm to listen to me, at any rate;' and he was so urgent that at length Andrew yielded reluctantly to his request, and accompanied him to Oxford Court, where, on the third floor of one of the houses facing St Swithin's Church, Anthony bade him feel himself at home.

'It is not much of a place,' said the host, 'but it is quiet—pull your chair up to the fire—will you have tea?—that is right, I thought you could not feel malice against me for ever. How like the old times this is. I wish they were the old times come back.'

'It is of no use wishing,' returned Andrew, sententiously.

'Certainly not. If wishes were horses, etcetera,' answered Anthony. 'But now, old fellow, I want to talk to you seriously about your own and my future. You want your money back, and I cannot give it to you, because I must marry Laura, and once married to her, it is a thing impossible for me to remain in England. I have deceived you many a time, but I am not going to deceive you any more. When I got that money from you in Dumfries, or at least your order for it, I know I did as base an act as man could imagine, but I always meant to pay you back, and pay you five times over—I did indeed.'

'Intentions, unhappily, were the only coin of which you were ever liberal towards others,' remarked Andrew.

'Well, perhaps so,' said the other, 'but there was one intention of mine sound and true as any coin just issued from the Mint—that of repaying the most generous friend man ever possessed. I was mad in those days, Andrew—looking back, I say deliberately and before God, I was possessed. If I could return to that time with my present knowledge, I swear to you I would

flee from temptation as I once sped to it, but now that is all too late. I am what I am, and she is what she is—there is no return for either of us—for either her or me.'

'You think you must marry her?'

'Andrew!' The word was uttered in a tone of the keenest reproach.

'I repeat my question,' said the younger man firmly. 'Do you think you are bound to marry her? Do you consider you are bound to make her any reparation? Why cannot you separate now—you to go to the work you voluntarily selected—she to return to her friends, or else to live in retirement? You are flinging away your best chances of happiness, Anthony; think whether the sacrifice be necessary before you complete it.'

'It is necessary, and I mean to make it,' answered Anthony; 'I will not forsake her now, though I have been often tempted to do so; though she has tried me almost beyond what I could bear, I will not leave her; and as for the Church, how would it be possible for me to enter it?—I who have lived in sin with another man's wife, and been virtually that man's murderer also.'

There was a long silence—then, with the teaching of the hills, with the solemn command of the Lord, which can be heard in solitude, upon him, Andrew Hardell arose, and stretching out his hand to his friend, said—

'Let there be peace between us.'

'There has never been anything but peace between you and me so far as I am concerned,' answered Anthony. 'You were angry with me yesterday, but it was only for the time; I knew when I came up to-day you would not refuse to shake hands with me again—and so I came to tell you what I meant to do in the future—what I should honestly propose for you as best in the present—may I go on?' he added, as Andrew made no reply; and Andrew said—

'Go on.'

'First, then, I want all that remains of your thousand pounds to take my wife and myself abroad. Once in Australia, she has an uncle there to whom I mean to apply. I look on your money simply as a loan to be repaid, and it shall be repaid, please God, with interest and compound interest added. In the mean time there is the curacy you have often envied my possession of—take it without fear and without any qualms of conscience—you will work it far better than I could have done; you will speak glad tidings to the poor, which would have fallen spiritless from my lips; you will be their friend, their guide, their helper. For years there has not been an efficient clergyman in the parish; the

people have been born—they have lived—they have begotten children—they have died in a state of heathenism; the district to which you would have to attend is one of the poorest and most wretched in London; you would have to do missionary work there—you would have to labour like an apostle—you would have to earn your bread hardly, and so late take rest. Is there no charm for you in the idea of a charge like this? Can you tell me, with destitution and misery asking for your help at home, that there is any sin in giving up your project of going abroad, and taking my place here?'

'But the deception,' Andrew murmured.

'Suppose I took the situation,' Anthony answered, 'would there be no deception in that? My heart is not in the work; it never was—it never could be. I believe it is necessary for the work to be done. I believe at the same time I never could do it. You have a secret in your life,—so have I; you have a story,—so have I. Is either of us bound to publish that secret—that story—to the world? Take my place, at any rate, for a year; at the end of that time I will send you home money enough to join me abroad. You might as well be in the wilds of America as in that parish in Essex Marsh, where the work you ought to do lies. You will pass out of men's minds and be forgotten; you will do your duty and be happy, and I—I shall not be quite miserable about you.'

And so the pair talked on, hour after hour, into the night. So at length Anthony won from his friend the confidence of old: how he had written to Madge, freeing her from her engagement, and telling her that he would not trust himself even to say 'Good-bye.'

'Wherein I think you were wrong,' said Anthony, gravely. 'Though you never loved Madge Forster, she would have made you an admirable and devoted wife.'

'I do love Madge with all my heart and soul, but I could not now ask any woman to become my wife,' answered Andrew, virtuously.

'Pray to Heaven you may always think so,' retorted the other; 'for having given up Madge, that is about the worst danger you will find to guard against. It would be nothing marrying a woman who knew, even a little; but to marry a woman who does not know—that is the only thing I really dread happening to you in the future.'

'Ah, you need not dread that,' said Andrew. 'When I parted from Madge, I parted also with all thought of marriage.'

'Well, celibacy is not an evil, if a man could only persuade himself into the belief. It is a good in a clergyman.'

'I imagine so,' said Andrew.

'I am sure of it,' persisted Anthony.

'And Madge will very likely marry well,' remarked Andrew, with a sigh.

'Not improbably; there is a far-away cousin, even now, who has already more than a cousin's admiration for her,—Mr Forster is ill, past hope of recovery, and these relations are—or were—down at Langmore, comforting Madge. Dear Madge, she asked me if you were never coming back to England. I think you were wrong, and a brute, to leave her, Andrew, for after all she loved you, and you might have told her the whole story, without hearing a word of reproach, or anything excepting "Poor Andrew!"'

'Poor, indeed,' repeated the other, 'but poorer if he could take such advantage of a woman's love and generosity. No, marriage and I have shaken hands and bidden one another an eternal adieu;' and the man leaned forward a little in his chair and shaded his face from view as he spoke.

After that night the friends met often, and, each time they parted, Andrew's opposition to the plan proposed grew fainter.

'Exhaust the matter, and where is the deception?' said Anthony. 'Your name is Hardell,—your initial is A, like mine. If you have sinned, it has been through me. You can work better than I. There is no man living who has not some skeleton, and yours is as little appalling as most; you shall not be compelled to wear the mask for long. I declare to you my first care shall be to send you back enough money to leave England, if you wish. You will be secluded, useful, content. Believe me, I am not quite selfish in wishing you to fill my post; it will be good for you and for the people, and you will thank me for my advice yet.'

Whether these words were true or not, it will be the purpose of this story to show. Only one thing can be certainly stated now, *viz.*, that Andrew Hardell followed the advice, and in due time entered upon his duties as curate of All Saints', in the parish of Essex Marsh.

When he got there, he perhaps felt he had not been wholly wrong in listening to the voice of the charmer, for there were sick who wanted a physician, poor who needed relief, sinners who required comfort, reprobates who were living equally without God and without hope.

And there were memories too, in his heart, which softened and purified it—memories unconnected with himself.

In the dull light of the winter's morning he had beheld Anthony Hardell and Laura Challerson plight their troth; he had seen the worn, haggard face of the bridegroom, and the discontented countenance of the bride. He had seen these sinners joined together for better for worse; he had accompanied his friend on board ship, and listened to him, saying—

'Good-bye, old fellow; it was not thus we thought once to part, but no doubt it will all be for the best in the long run;' and then he watched from the shore the man's face growing graver and graver, and the last look he had of Anthony Hardell was standing by the vessel's side, waving a handkerchief, while the little boat which bore Andrew back to shore bounded over the waves.

With all her canvas spread, the ship sailed down the river, and stood out to sea, and the shores of England never seemed so fair to Andrew Hardell as when he gazed after the vessel—which appeared to get smaller and smaller, till at length it grew a mere speck on the horizon—and thought of the man who a few months before had started in life with such fair prospects, and who was now leaving his own country, perhaps to return to it no more.

CHAPTER XV.

ANDREW HARDELL'S NEW HOME.

The events which most materially influence a man's life—that make or mar the whole of his existence—usually occur in a hurry.

The accident which cripples is over before he has time to realize how it happened—the woman who blesses or curses the remaining years, wins his heart before he comprehends that a thief with fair face and bewitching eyes and soft voice has any ulterior designs upon it—the bank which held all his worldly wealth breaks without even a preliminary whisper as to its intentions—the trusted friend turns out false and faithless before the smile that accompanied his 'Good-bye' has quite faded from recollection—the sickness which prostrates—the pecuniary loss which compels eating the bread of carefulness—the swift calamity—the sudden

fever—all these things come without announcement, without ceremony.

They need no voice to announce their advent, but cross the threshold and stand on the hearth, and are from thenceforward tenants of the man's heart, memories in his life, links of one connected chain; they take up their abode before he has time to remonstrate—before he can stretch forth his hands and cry, 'Ye shall not enter—I will close my doors and avert this peril, and refuse to permit you to become a part and parcel of my life.'

And then there is a short time of struggle, during which the man wrestles with his fate, and feels by reason of that very struggle half indifferent to it. Afterwards—after the accident—the heart-wound, the failure, the treachery, is what tries us all. It is not the passage through fire or through water which tests a man's courage, but rather when every feather has been scorched off the wings of hope and imagination—when the other bank is reached, and the shivering wayfarer looks back on the fair land of promise into which he may return in the future never more—then there comes the real trial of strength.

Shall he be faint-hearted, and go sighing and melancholy along the rest of his road, or shall he make the best of the country where he finds himself, plant a little garden in the midst of the barren waste, gather unto himself something like a home, sow the unpromising-looking soil with seed that shall spring up and return a hundredfold, and in the days even of his dejection consider and provide against the famine that otherwise shall surely fall upon his later years, and leave him without a single green thing wherewith to gladden his sight and refresh his soul?

By many more men and women than most people imagine, this point has at some time or other of their lives to be decided.

Is a fortune lost—shall the temper be from thenceforth soured, a trial to men and gods? Is a lover faithless—shall the forsaken one brood her life away thinking of his treachery? Does death carry off on his pale horse one who was as the apple of an eye—as a jewel in a casket—shall the survivor sit in the shadow of the valley—in the gloom of the grave for evermore? Does a blight fall on the first promise of youth—shall man walk from thenceforth only through fields where the corn is mildewed, through orchards where the fruit cankers ere it ripens—shall there be no more gladness for him in heaven or in earth, in the summer sunshine, in the sound of many waters, in the rushing of the breeze—shall there come to him no hour more, O Lord, when the blight shall be removed, and the flowers of his life bud forth once again, once again if it be but to perish—shall he not

stand in the light and feel the warm glow of happiness—shall there arrive to him in the future no present so full of joy that the past may fade away into a mere memory, and the scroll, where the words of that olden story were once traced in such ineffaceable letters, be rolled up and laid aside at last?

In the dreary November weather—when the fogs hung heavy over Essex Marsh—when in the Vicarage-house damp rose from the floors, and exuded from the walls, drawn thence by unwonted fires kindled in the library, Andrew Hardell—now known to all whom it might concern as the Rev. Anthony Hardell—had ample leisure for considering his position, and deciding how he should for the future walk through life—with a sad countenance or the reverse—in a state of antagonism towards God and man—or accepting what God had sent him without murmuring, and striving to do his duty in that state of existence in which, wisely or not, he had elected to spend the remainder of his days.

For a time there was a beating against the bars—a fluttering of the wings—a passionate cry for liberty—a protest against the justice of his sentence—a wild despair at the thought of what might have been—a natural horror at the loneliness of the road he beheld stretching away—a recoiling from the falseness of his position, from the waste of strength, and talent, and energy, which such a position involved—but after a time he calmed down, and taking matters more quietly, resolved to bear his troubles like a man.

For a while, after Anthony's departure, there set in the same sort of reaction as had ensued after his first gift of the thousand pounds.

At Dumfries he had asked himself, was the result obtained worth the price paid for it? In London, with a perfectly new light revealing his friend in his true character—a man strong for evil, weak for good—he decided quite deliberately that the result was not worth the price, and that all the money he had lent, or rather given, his friend, was not likely to benefit Anthony in the least.

When once the thousand pounds were spent, in fact, he could not conceive what was to become of the voluntary exile.

Work he knew he would not, and what he should find to do in a strange country, and amongst a strange people, baffled Andrew's imagination.

But whatever the result of the step might prove to Anthony and to himself, Andrew, the longer he reflected on the matter, felt more and more that not merely was it now irreparable, but that it had always been non-preventable.

When his money passed into Anthony's hands, all the king's horses and all the king's men would not have availed to get it back again.

Certainly the borrower condescended to explain why it was impossible for him to meet Andrew's views, but the explanation, when weighed and sifted, simply amounted to this, *viz.*, that Anthony had determined to keep what he had got.

And then, being of an amiable temperament, having really a liking for his friend, and being in his own opinion unselfish and thoughtful to a degree, he kindly marked out a course which should at once provide Andrew with bread and cheese, and make his own mind perfectly easy concerning the matter.

It was the same thing we so often observe with children enacted between two grown-up people.

'I don't want that—you may have it, and I will take this,' says the juvenile autocrat to its less imperious fellow.

So, almost under the guise of a gift to another, the speaker secures what he desires for himself, and with a serene conscience eats his plum-cake, whilst his sub. has to be content with more modest fare, and swallow it thankfully into the bargain.

'I don't want the East-end curacy, you can take that,' suggested Anthony Hardell, a mere child of a larger growth, to his friend, 'and I will spend your money, and gratify my own inclinations.'

Twist the matter how he would, Andrew Hardell, once the spell of his old companion's presence was removed, could make nothing more of it than this:

He had wanted the money, and he had got it. He had resolved to marry Laura Challerson, and he knew he could not, without outraging all social decency, marry her in England after what had happened.

All through the affair, he (Andrew) had been a mere cat's-paw employed, with apologies and regrets it is true, but employed none the less certainly for all that, to get Anthony's chestnuts out of the fire; and now Anthony was off to Australia with his chestnuts, and Andrew, sitting in the Vicarage library, considered all these things, and knowing he had been duped, and overpersuaded, and beguiled, and deceived through the very best part of his nature, still refrained from anger, and only said to himself, as he looked out at the dreary November day, typical of a succession of dreary days which he should have to rise up and face morning after morning,

'What am I that I should judge him? God keep me from judging any man hardly throughout all the years to come.'

And so the man's character began to be formed, the instrument fashioned for the work it had to do.

It is only the story of one life I have undertaken to tell, and if it should seem to some readers that undue time is being occupied in striving to explain the direction Andrew Hardell's thoughts took at this juncture, I would entreat them to remember that the whole universe is made up of the stories of single lives, and that in, perhaps, the most exciting and sensational story of any human being's existence which was ever written, after the wind, and the earthquake, and the fire, came a still small voice, which told Elijah what his God expected him to do.

Hitherto, his Master's work had seemed to Andrew Hardell easy, and his yoke light; but now the first thing asked of him, as he entered into the vineyard, was utter self-abnegation.

In another name he was to labour. If he preached with the tongue of an angel, if he brought wandering souls home, if he bound up the bruised heart, and supported the fainting spirit, he should reap no honour from men—none might ever know but God only.

For Andrew Hardell, to all human intents, was dead, his place in the world was empty, and he might never occupy it more. He had as really left England, as though he, instead of Anthony, were traversing the ocean. Of his own free will he had as truly destroyed his individuality, as though the earth were piled above his grave.

He had chosen that night when he stood on Dervorgilla's Bridge, to cast aside all old ties, and to cut himself adrift from all former associations, and behold, this was the result.

In the Vicarage he sat alone, a solitary man, without a name, without a friend; and how lonely the house in Essex Marsh seemed to him after the snug comfort of Langmore, only those who have ever known what it is to possess a true home, and then to be cast out therefrom, can understand.

A more wretched habitation than that Vicarage could indeed, perhaps, scarcely be imagined.

It stood a little apart from the churchyard, and was surrounded by a plantation of funereal trees, which did indeed serve to screen the graves from view, but that also shut out light and air as well.

A high brick wall guarded its front from profane observation, and between this wall and the principal door was a grass-plot, which looked as though afflicted with some fearful disease that produced black, and brown, and grey patches all over its surface.

In the centre of this grass-plot were an arbutus and a mulberry tree, the latter of which never bore any fruit, and had only leaves on it for about three months in the year.

Underneath the arbutus was a sun-dial, bearing the true inscription, 'I only count sunny hours,' for in these latter days it never counted any at all.

Over the hall-door porch hung stray branches of jessamine; at the back of the house was a small damp garden, surrounded by the trees previously mentioned; and concealed from view by a straggling hedge of half-dead laurel bushes, was a plot of ground where the new curate discovered a broken cucumber-frame, the remains of an ancient hot-bed, a root of parsley, a few cabbages, and a plant of rue.

At the extremity of this cheerful-looking piece of ground stood an old tool-house with the roof fallen in, and there were the lattice-work remains of a former poultry-yard, where were piled dust and ashes, oyster-shells, broken bottles, and pieces of crockery.

There were no stables attached to the Vicarage, although there was a tradition in the parish that a clergyman, antecedent to Mr Trelwyn, had kept a carriage and pair, and seen a 'sight of fine company.'

Within, the house was no more cheerful than without. The visitor entered through a dark, low, square hall, from which doors opened into dining, drawing, and morning room.

In this latter apartment, Mrs Trelwyn and her daughters had apparently lived, for the paper in the drawing-room was literally peeling off, and whenever the door was unclosed, a faint, mouldy smell wandered out into the hall.

The library, situated at one end of the house, was reached by traversing a corridor, and then ascending a few steps.

Andrew found it a dark, dull room—dark by reason of the fir trees growing outside the windows, and dull because it commanded a view of nothing save the kitchen-garden before described; but he chose it for his living apartment, partly because of the books with which its walls were lined, and partly because the furniture it contained was in better order, and more substantial, than that in any other room in the house.

'It is many a day since there was a fire here,' remarked the woman, who, with her husband, had been left in charge of the house. 'I never saw Mr Trelwyn in this room but once in my life—sitting I mean—that was the night before Mr Charles was married, when the young ladies were trimming their dresses in the parlour.

'He came up here—it was in the month of August—and I think he must have felt the beginning of his illness on him then, for when Mrs Trelwyn sent me with a message about something or other she had forgotten, he was sitting in the chair by the window, looking like a very ghost. I lived cook with them for ten years before I married, and after that, whenever they wanted me, I used to come over and help. They were a nice family, though they were never liked in the parish, and for that matter not one of them liked the place; it was not fit for them.'

Which was quite true. To the Trelwyns, Essex Marsh had always seemed as uncongenial, as they seemed to the people by whom they were surrounded. To say that Mr and Mrs Trelwyn detested the place, would be, perhaps, to use too mild a word concerning their feelings.

There was more than simple detestation in their souls concerning it—disappointment, anger, hopelessness, humiliation, privation, all were concentrated in Essex Marsh. They had taken the living as a mere stepping-stone to riches, and honour, and happiness, and worldly advancement, and behold, they were left on that stone for the rest of their existence.

'A beggarly living,' Mr Trelwyn was wont to declare—'if I had only known he had intended to plant me down here for life a pauper in the midst of paupers, I would have flung his gift back to him, and branded him as the ungrateful time-server he was.'

All which remarks, delivered at great length, and with a vehemence of enunciation never attained to by Mr Trelwyn in the pulpit, had reference to a deceased bishop, whose memory the Vicar abused with a consistent fury that would have been amusing had it not also sounded painfully pathetic.

'If I had trusted God as I trusted him,' sometimes finished Mr Trelwyn, unconsciously paraphrasing the remark of a very different man; 'if I had trusted God as I trusted him, I should long since have been very differently situated. Why, look here, sir,' he one day informed a brother clergyman who came to visit him, 'the curate who succeeded me at Thorpe Regis, a man without talent, family, or influence, was presented to the living of Crashlaw—a poor thing certainly—only one hundred and twenty pounds a year; but, mark you, he met down there a nobleman who took a fancy to him, and what was the consequence? why, he got him the living of Bedbury, and that poor curate who came to Thorpe Regis when I left it, is now Rector of Bedbury, Canon of Westminster, and may, for aught we can tell, some day be Archbishop of Canterbury. And yet there are some people who do not believe in Providence. Unhappily, I believed in a bishop,

and this is the result. If I had to begin my life again, I should make a very different thing of it. Well, the end is not yet—that is one comfort.'

Which, being interpreted, meant—not that Mr Trelwyn now expected his own merits to be ever recognized in this world, but that he hoped when the bishop's affairs came to be finally settled up in the next, that the heavenly auditors would remember how he stranded an old friend in Essex Marsh, and refuse in consequence to pass his lordship to the realms of bliss.

Nor, to do her justice, was Mrs Trelwyn one whit less vehement than her husband in bemoaning their unfortunate position.

'For herself,' she said, 'of course she did not care; it was on her poor girls' account she felt the cruelty of their position. Parents did care for their children's degradation. If my poor mother were alive,' Mrs Trelwyn frequently informed her friends, 'it would break her heart to see me doing a servant's work,' by which expression the lady only intended her acquaintance to understand that when her husband and girls were out of the room she sometimes had to put coals on the fire for herself.

Had Mrs Trelwyn been really servant in the Vicarage, the wretched house must have become even more miserable than it was—for a worse manager, and an untidier woman, the Home Counties could not have produced.

She was one of those dreadful people whose persons and homes are kept orderly and presentable merely by means of lady's-maids, footmen, parlour-maids, and so forth, and when once these accessories were removed, she and her belongings fell into a state of dilapidation which was only faintly shadowed forth by the neglected kitchen-garden and the useless dial.

She had been a pretty, ladylike-looking girl when Mr Trelwyn married her, and now she was a faded, dowdyish woman, with but one object left in life, *viz.*, to get her daughters married—well, if she could—but, if she could not, then ill.

'There is nothing for them *but* marriage, Henry,' she observed to her husband, which was true, only, unhappily, it chanced that men would not see the matter in the same light; and abroad, as at home, the young ladies remained unsought and unwooed, while regretfully Mrs Trelwyn thought of a little love affair of Henrietta's which she had nipped in the bud years, and years, and years before.

'The man is now an alderman, and though it would have been a dreadful thing, still it would have been better than this,' she considered, knowing that the wares were getting heavy, and that she was nearly tired of hawking them about.

Had that impossible idea of his concerning beginning life afresh been practicable, Mr Trelwyn should certainly, as a first step in the right direction, have changed his wife; and yet if there were one portion of his career on which at the time he had piqued himself, it was on the fact of securing Lord Mayfort's niece, and getting the lady's family to sanction the match.

'Oh! he's a fellow certain to rise,' said that excessively easy-going nobleman when Lady Mayfort told him she felt confident there was something between Henrietta and the curate. 'He is sure to get on, and considering Etty has *not* a fortune, and that she *has* her father's relations, I do not think she can do better. He will get a good living some day, and——'

'But of course you do not intend to give him one,' interrupted Lady Mayfort, thinking not merely of her own children, but also of her own brothers and nephews.

'Decidedly not; he has his own friends, and more especially the Bishop of Southwark. He is certain to get on; a man of his appearance and abilities must get on.'

And so the engagement was sanctioned, and Mr Trelwyn married Miss Burnton, and there was a very grand wedding, at which the honourable young ladies from the Hall assisted, and the school children strewed the path with flowers, and the bells were rung, and the guests were afterwards entertained at a splendid breakfast, and the bride's presents were wonderfully beautiful and unsuitable—so said Mrs Lance, the spouse of Mr Trelwyn's rector—'*for a poor curate's wife*,' and the settlements on which Lord Mayfort, in his capacity of unclehood, duly insisted, were perfectly correct and satisfactory; and although his lordship declared, laughingly, 'you need not look to me for a living, Trelwyn,' still Trelwyn already in imagination beheld the face of one of the family rectories, and started with his bride on their honeymoon, firmly believing his fortune was made, and that he need not trouble himself for ever after about anything.

When, however, he returned from his honeymoon, he found there were many things likely to trouble him. First, the means that had sufficed for a bachelor living in lodgings seemed lamentably insufficient when a wife had to be supported also; a wife, further, who did not know beef from mutton till it was cooked, who was utterly at the mercy of her servants, and who had not received even a rudimentary education in the matter of arithmetic. Second, the Mayforts were away, but a living had just fallen in, and still my lord made no movement to give it to him.

'I will run up to town to see him, Etty,' said the Rev. Henry Trelwyn; and he went up to town, where Lord Mayfort laughed

at him for leaving his bride so soon, and laughed still more when his visitor mentioned the living.

'My dear fellow,' he answered, 'I told you not to look to me for a living.'

'I know you did, but——' pleaded the curate.

'Mr Trelwyn, do not take what I am going to say in bad part,' commenced his lordship; 'but the fact is, you must never look to me for anything. Of course I was glad to do what lay in my power for Etty—an unfortunate match that of her mother's—poor little girl, left without anybody belonging to her before she was ten years old. I had her at the Hall, and so forth, but I cannot continue that through another generation. I have children of my own growing up, and there are my brothers and my wife's brothers, and the Lord only knows who besides to provide for. I gave you fair warning, Trelwyn; do not say I led you astray; but if I can help you I will. Isn't there some bishop fellow on whom you have a claim?—we'll ask him down to the Hall, and remind him of it.'

Having received which cheering promise, the Rev. Henry Trelwyn turned his steps homewards, while Lord Mayfort remarked to his wife, 'with that fellow's face and figure, and birth, and manner, he ought to have done better than Etty. He might have married an heiress and ten thousand a year.'

Failing the heiress, Mr Trelwyn soon found his position unpleasant. Mrs Lance, a vulgar, bustling, clever, intriguing woman, began to fancy Mrs Trelwyn gave herself airs, that Trelwyn himself thought he was better than her husband.

'They presume on the Hall,' said the Rector's lady, severely; and the Hall being rather a sore point with the Rector, he hearkened unto the voice of the woman.

Deene Hall lay just outside the parish of Wraysdale, and until Mr Trelwyn's arrival there had been no connection or acquaintance between the rector of the one village and the great proprietor of the next.

'What would you have me do, my dear?' asked the Rector.

'Dismiss him,' was the prompt reply, 'and get some one more suitable—some one whose wife, if he have one, will get up for breakfast, and wear clothes less costly than silks and satins, and feathers, and real lace.'

The true fact of the matter being that poor Mrs Trelwyn was wearing out her most inimitable *trousseau*, and airing her very best dresses—dresses she could never hope to replace with any one-half so good—in utter unconsciousness that in doing this she was committing a sin against the ruling powers.

'But, my dear,' ventured Mr Lance, 'where shall I again get a curate so suitable, so perfect a gentleman, so desirable in every way? Only think of that Irishman they had at Deenefells, who when his vicar asked him to a five o'clock dinner, observed to his wife, during a pause in the conversation—

'"Laura, my dear, I wonder whether any of your ancestors ever dined by daylight."'

'I'd have Laura'd her,' remarked Mrs Lance, fiercely.

'Or that other,' persisted the Rector, 'who said he did not object to visiting the very poor, but Mr Goodwin must excuse him mixing with the middle classes. It is not an easy matter to find a curate to one's mind,' finished Mr Lance.

'Fiddle-de-dee!' was his wife's vigorous comment; 'there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it; and for that matter, Samuel (Mr Lance's godfather and godmother had conferred upon him this desirable scriptural name), for that matter, Samuel, why should we have a curate at all? Now that you have no pupils—(here Mr Lance sighed; it was through his wife he had lost them)—and that I am able to visit so much, why need we incur the expense?'

Why indeed. There had been a blessed time of comparative peace in the Rev. Samuel's life, when his wife was unable to visit, but she was now strong again, and like a war-horse smelt the battle afar.

Poor Mr Lance would rather have had the worst curate who ever considered himself superior to his rector, tramping about the parish, than his wife; but the wife could not be got rid of, though the curate might.

'Certainly Mr Trelwyn is expensive,' the Rector began.

'Expensive! I should think so, indeed, and *useless*,' capped his wife. 'One half his time gadding about among his fine friends, and when he is in the parish, off dining at some place, never to be found if he is wanted. I have not the least doubt but that he went to London to see Lord Mayfort about that vacant living, and if he gets it, will he consider you, do you imagine? He will leave you just as soon as ever he can.'

'Well, my dear, we could scarcely expect him to do otherwise,' mildly suggested the Rector.

'Then why should we consider him? If he be but lately married, he has married into a family that will take good care no one belonging to it wants for anything the Church can give. He will be well seen to. I wish we were as certain of promotion.'

And thus the curate's fate was sealed. He did not, as has been seen, get the family living, but in lieu thereof he received

notice from his rector, and removed in due time from Wraysdale to that other parish, whence his successor was promoted to great honours.

Worse than this also, he was removed from the neighbourhood of Deene Hall, and the advantages of residing near his wife's connections, who had given him a social standing at Wraysdale difficult for a man of limited means to acquire elsewhere.

Nevertheless, Lord Mayfort did not quite lose sight of his relation. Sometimes he and his wife were invited to stay at the Hall, and once also Lady Mayfort asked them to spend three days at the great town-house in Berkeley Square, on which occasion Mr Trelwyn met the Bishop of Southwark, and found an opportunity of reminding that worthy prelate of the old friendship which had subsisted between Mr Trelwyn's father and the bishop in days gone by.

There was even something in these reminiscences concerning the bishop's previous life having been preserved by the courage and coolness of the Cornish gentleman when both were lads together, and it may be assumed that his lordship was not quite ungrateful for the boon of existence, since, when bidding Mr Trelwyn good-bye, he added in his best manner—

'These things, my dear young friend, are not, I need scarcely tell you, always quite in my own power; but the very first opportunity which presents itself, your father's son—the son of my dear dead friend—shall not be forgotten.'

From this time Henry Trelwyn trusted in a bishop.

Three years passed by, and still his lordship gave no sign. Men died, and other men filled their shoes, but not even a pair of slippers was found amongst all the clerical property likely to fit the son of the bishop's dead friend.

To all appeals there came one unvarying reply.

'The very first time my hands are free, your interests shall be attended to.'

And with this, for another year, Mr Trelwyn had to be satisfied.

Meanwhile he was deeply in debt—his expenses were increasing—he was the father of four children—and the Mayforts seemed disinclined to cultivate much further the pleasure of their acquaintance.

At the Hall, Mr Trelwyn, indeed, was usually sure of a tolerably cordial welcome, but Mrs Trelwyn's worn face and dowdyish attire found small favour in the eyes of her aunt.

'I have no patience with her,' said that amiable lady; 'she might manage so much better; and, besides, if we begin to encourage them now, we shall have all those children continually

here. We have done our duty towards Henrietta, and no one can expect us to do more than our duty.'

Thus in the most natural way in the world the Trelwyns sank into the position of 'poor relations,' and remained there, until one day, six years after their marriage, a letter arrived from a certain Dean Jeffries, stating that, on the recommendation of his much-esteemed friend the Bishop of Southwark, he had great pleasure in offering Mr Trelwyn the living of All Saints', Essex Marsh.

By the same post came also a lengthy epistle from the bishop, setting forth that although the living in question was not in every respect all he had hoped to be able to procure for the son of his old friend, still he trusted it would ultimately prove the stepping-stone to something much more desirable.

With fees, &c., the income might be reckoned at about 500*l.* per annum; there was a good house, and the duty was not heavy.

Full of gratitude, Henry Trelwyn hurried up to town to thank both his patrons; and when, after notice given and the time fulfilled, he and his wife moved into their new home, it was in the firm belief that now fortune really meant to shine upon them, and that Henry's face, figure, manners, and abilities had at length found a sphere where they might raise him to eminence.

He borrowed money to pay off his debts—the Mayforts once more invited them to dinner in Berkeley Square—the merchants resident in Essex Marsh and the adjacent localities were very attentive to Mrs Trelwyn, and acknowledged the superior address and attainments of her husband.

There was great happiness for a time at the Vicarage, until Mr Trelwyn discovered that the actual income on which he could depend was not quite three hundred a year, and that he had simply been given the living because the Bishop of Southwark had bestowed a rectory, in a really desirable neighbourhood, worth a thousand a year, exclusive of fees, upon the brother-in-law of Dean Jeffries.

Year by year the merchants, whose wealth had swelled the Easter offerings at All Saints', and added another hundred to Mr Trelwyn's income, left the parish, and emigrated—some farther north, some to the extreme west, some to a better world—till at length, as Mr Trelwyn piteously informed his patron, there was not a man left above the rank of a clerk.

Once again the Bishop of Southwark promised, and once again he delayed to perform—delayed so long, in fact, that he died; and then another prelate was appointed, who knew nothing

whatever of Mr Trelwyn, save by repute, which spoke of his debts, his pride, his discontent, his uselessness.

People blamed him for his extravagance, and yet the man did not indulge in a single personal luxury.

Scandal itself could not accuse him of a solitary vice, save that of poverty. Let him strive as he might, he could not keep the wolf from the door; and but for a most opportune legacy, which arrived just when his only son was old enough to go to College, he could not have afforded to send him to Oxford, or to start him in the world.

When in the after-time Andrew Hardell came to know the man who had commenced life with such fair hopes, with such good chances of success, he pitied him as he had perhaps never pitied any one previously.

Well he knew Essex Marsh by the period Mr Trelwyn returned from abroad—well he knew its misery, its depressing air, its utter want of congenial society, its banishment—as it seemed to him—from the world; and if he found it hard to work there—if he who desired solitude—who had craved for a sphere of labour amongst the poor, the wretched, and the criminal—felt at times as though the stagnation of his existence would kill him—how must it, he thought, have affected the stately gentleman, who still in his old age retained something of the presence and beauty of his youth—who was handsome to the last—whose manners were courtly and ceremonious even when doing the poor honours of his miserable home, and who looked, when he stood up in the reading-desk, like one who, travelling towards St James', had lost his way, and wandered by mistake into one of the poorest and meanest of London's purlieus.

That Mr Trelwyn had utterly neglected his parish, it is, perhaps, scarcely necessary to state; that his son, his former curate, had neglected it still more, Andrew speedily discovered.

The sick had died unvisited—marriage was an almost unknown institution—the dead were buried elsewhere, and already small rows of cottages had crept up to, and were encroaching on, the graveyard—the congregation consisted of a few school children, half-a-dozen old men and women who came for the sake of the doles some pious merchant of the city of London had in former days left to perpetuate his memory—and a sprinkling of small shopkeepers, together with a select number of clerks, whose wives on Sunday bloomed forth into a splendour of apparel that astounded the curate's country imagination.

There was not a man resident in the parish to whom Andrew could apply for a sovereign when sickness or distress came upon

a family. Nevertheless, he did not despair; he went about his work, and he heeded neither rudeness nor contumely, both of which he received in the discharge of his duty.

It was the evenings which tried him most, the long lonely evenings when he was too tired to read or to write—when he sickened for the sound of a friendly voice—for the tones of Madge's piano, for the old, old home which had been his, and which he had voluntarily renounced for ever.

The first fortnight he spent in that dull unhealthy parsonage, he thought must kill him; but at the end of that time there arrived a visitor who taught him companionship in his position might be more trying than solitude, conversation than silence.

Not that the Rev. George Trelwyn was by any means a disagreeable man; on the contrary he was considered one of the pleasantest individuals imaginable, and Andrew found no reason to contradict this popular opinion concerning him.

Nevertheless, his visitor tried him. He had thought in his folly that when he 'tholed his assize' at Dumfries, his ordeal was over.

'Alas!' he considered, while on the morning of George Trelwyn's arrival they stood together within the altar-rails of All Saints' Church, Andrew reading the commandments in an audible voice, and his Vicar's son listening—'my "Life's Assize" is only now beginning.'

CHAPTER XVI.

TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

'You are not at all like the person I expected to see.' Thus the Rev. George Trelwyn commenced making things pleasant for his father's new curate. 'An old college friend of yours (Hargrave) told me you were such a merry fellow, and now you look as though you had lived in Essex Marsh for a quarter of a century, and as if you had never laughed since you were born.'

'It is nine years since I saw Hargrave,' was the reply, 'and I imagine nine years does not usually make people gayer; besides, I have been ill, and that trial was——'

'A trial to you,' finished George Trelwyn, quickly; in reply to which the Curate nodded.

He knew it was about that trial the Vicar's son had come to speak to him—knew perfectly well it was to ascertain something about that peculiarly agreeable circumstance in his life he was thus early in his ministration honoured with Mr Trelwyn's company.

'Only arrived in town at twelve last night,' that gentleman had been good enough to explain, 'and thought I would walk over and ask for a share of your breakfast; my father, in fact, wanted me to see you—don't apologize for your fare, there's a good fellow—I knew Essex Marsh before you ever heard of it, and venison and game never, to my knowledge, found their way into the parish;' and so he ran on talking glibly and kindly enough, but all the time Andrew felt convinced he had come to find out something. Well, let him if he could. As he had pitted his strength against that of the Procurator Fiscal and the Advocate Depute, so now he girt up his loins to encounter this fresh enemy. 'You and the other Hardell were always great chums, were you not?' asked Mr Trelwyn; then, without waiting for a reply, he went on, 'Yes, you must have felt that trial deeply. It was a disastrous verdict for your friend.'

'It was an unfair one, I think,' said the Curate. 'Andrew Hardell was either innocent or guilty, and a verdict like that of "Not Proven," simply saves a man from one sort of punishment to doom him to another. It has ruined his prospects and blasted his life, at any rate.'

'And yet you know there is but one opinion about the matter—that he was confoundedly lucky—if I may say so without wounding your friendly susceptibilities.'

'Certainly you may. I have heard the same opinion expressed over and over again, but then it has been expressed by people who believed him guilty *because* they thought there was something in that story about him and Mrs Challerson. Now, I knew Andrew Hardell as well as any man living, and I would stake my life that he never spoke a word of love to the woman. It was not merely that he had no affection for her, he really entertained a dislike towards Mrs Challerson.'

'Of course that to a certain extent alters the position of affairs, but still the fact remains that Mr Challerson was jealous.'

'I cannot precisely see what that proves.'

'Well, it does not exactly prove anything, but it leads to the presumption that the pair had a row, and that your friend somehow cut short Mr Challerson's career.'

'Kenneth Challerson had an awful temper,' remarked the

Curate, deliberately; 'if Andrew Hardell had any hand in his death, he must have killed him in self-defence.'

'Then why did he not say so openly?'

'I cannot tell. I believe him to have been perfectly incapable of murdering Mr Challerson, and that the Advocate Depute and the other officials thought so too is proved by their willingness to accept the plea of "Culpable Homicide" if he liked.'

'What is culpable homicide?'

'I do not know—it is something Scotch—something which does not cost a man his life, or render him liable to very long imprisonment.'

'Then he could have got off that way?'

'Certainly—the prosecution felt their case doubtful from the first.'

'And yet the jury did not acquit.'

'No; had the trial taken place in England he would have been acquitted. In Scotland, however, if the majority of the jury happen to have any moral doubt in the matter of a prisoner's guilt or innocence, they bring in that verdict of "Not Proven;" which, while it saves a man from the gallows, leaves him with a stain on his character for life.'

'Then you consider your friend's character done for?'

'Decidedly. Where in England could he ever have got a curacy? in what capacity could he have earned his living?'

'There would have been a prejudice against a man with such a remarkably unpleasant story in his life, no doubt,' answered Mr Trelwyn; 'and yet it is a pity, for they say he was an uncommonly clever fellow.'

'His cleverness will not stand him in much stead now, I fear,' remarked the Curate, a little bitterly.

'It is luggage easily carried by the owner, nevertheless,' said George Trelwyn, dryly. 'For my part I may safely say I followed every detail of that trial with the most intense interest, and when it was terminated, I confess I breathed freely at the escape of a very unfortunate and clever man.'

'Then you did not consider him innocent?'

'No,' was the reply, 'nor did anybody. Every one believed Mr Challerson was killed by your friend, and we all felt we should have liked your friend better, though we might have admired him less, had he told us the precise circumstances under which he dealt that blow.'

'If he ever did deal it,' amended the Curate.

'Come, Mr Hardell,' was the reply, 'let us be frank with one another. Of course, as you say, you believe your friend to

have been incapable of murdering any one, but yet you know Mr Challerson was actually killed, and that as a consequence the judge and jury heard much conflicting evidence concerning Mr Andrew Hardell's disposal both of his time and his apparel, and you may have formed a shrewd opinion of your own, based upon that evidence, as to his actual guilt or innocence. With that opinion I have no desire to intermeddle. I come here simply to satisfy my father about a point upon which he is anxious to obtain information. You will not mind my asking you a single question?'

'What is the question?' inquired the Curate, quickly.

'Well, you know the stuff bishops are made of,' was the reply; 'they are men who either never had any store of wild oats to sow, or else who gathered in the product years before we were thought of—men, in any case, who look sternly on what they call vice, or what some other people style pleasant sins. Now, in the course of Mr Andrew Hardell's trial, there occurred one or two passages which caused our bishop to consider—excuse me if I seem personal and disagreeable—that there might be another side to the affair, one not brought out in evidence. He did not arrive at this conclusion by reason of his own cleverness, but some chancellor or somebody of the kind put him up to it, and said conclusion was backed by a few stories that reached his reverend ears about Mrs Challerson.'

'You have not yet stated what the conclusion was at which his lordship arrived,' suggested the Curate, as Mr Trelwyn paused. 'Did he believe I murdered Mr Challerson, and then eloped with his wife?'

'No; he did not think you murdered Mr Challerson,' was the reply, 'but he did—seeing that human nature may not be quite a sealed book even to a bishop—consider it possible that you might have gone off with the lady.'

'And you wish me to deny this charge?'

'I wish you to give me authority to contradict it if you can,' Mr Trelwyn answered.

'There never was anything between me and Mrs Challerson,' replied the man who had suffered because of her so severely. 'She never left her home to go with me, or to join me anywhere.'

'Upon your honour?'

'Upon my soul!' and George Trelwyn felt that the sentence meant more than could have been conveyed by any mere words of conventional affirmation.

'And you do not know where she is at present?—pardon me if I seem impertinent—but I was sent here to ask these questions.'

'I understand that. No, I cannot tell you anything about Mrs Challerson's movements further than that she has left the country.'

'With your friend?' George Trelwyn eagerly inquired.

'Do you mean with Andrew Hardell?' asked the Curate, speaking his own name slowly and distinctly.

'Have you many other friends in the same predicament?' said Mr Trelwyn, lightly.

'No; she has not gone with him,' was the answer. 'She has left England with the man she married. I know his name, but I cannot tell it to you, Mr Trelwyn.'

'And you suspected something of this kind all along?'

'I suspected. I did not know.'

'But why not speak out now? why not clear your friend's character from the stain which has been put upon it?'

'Could I clear Andrew Hardell?' asked the other. 'Have you not said the world's opinion is against him—that the world considers him "lucky?" Can he stand his trial over again? Can he undo the past? What I know, he knew; and knowing, he elected to make no move in the matter. If you do not mind, Mr Trelwyn, I should like to drop the subject. For reasons which I cannot fully explain to you, it is an intensely painful one to me.'

'As you please,' answered the other; 'and yet if it were possible for you to clear your friend from the one suspicion which attaches to him, I think you might do much to remove the other stain left by the charge of murder.'

For a moment the Curate looked straight in the face of the man who made this remark.

It was a good, frank, manly, shrewd face, and just for that instant, just for about the length of time it took to lift his eyes and drop them again, Andrew Hardell considered within himself whether it might not be best for him to make a clean breast of the matter, to tell this honest young fellow who he was, and what he was, and then to leave it with him to decide whether he should go or stay, whether he should work where he was, or else even now take ship for some far-away country, where none would care to ask concerning either his suffering or his sin.

But, next minute, the impulse was gone, and he answered steadily,

'I can but repeat what I said before. Had Andrew Hardell wished to make public any of the circumstances at which I have hinted, he could have done so. He had reasons, however, for his silence, and the same reasons bind me to silence. I would rather

not say anything more about the matter. As solemnly as I can assure you, I declare I never entertained the slightest affection for Mrs Challerson; and, were she living at this moment in the next street, I would go a mile round to avoid meeting her. Is that sufficient, or can I say anything more to satisfy you?'

'It is sufficient, and I am satisfied,' cried George Trelwyn; and the pair shortly after this conversation went over together to All Saints' Church, where Andrew Hardell made the observation to himself chronicled at the end of the last chapter, and preached a sermon which set the Vicar's son thinking.

Leaning back in his chair within the altar-rails, he speculated about this new curate; and changing his original intention, went back with him to the Vicarage after church.

'You have evening service, have you not?' he asked; and Mr Hardell assenting, he went on.

'Otherwise, I was going to ask you to come up to Clapton, and dine with us. My father-in-law has a respect for the clergy, which, considering how poor some of us are, and how rich he is, appears to me wonderful. It is a good trait in his character, though I sometimes fear it has its roots far away down in evil soil. Are you anything of a geologist? Can you tell me what formation denotes gold? I have a fancy there must be an analogous human formation; for I observe that, in the hands of some men, everything, even piety, turns into the precious metal.'

'Quartz is the formation you mean,' Mr Hardell answered; 'and the only thing against your theory is that the gold must have been fused during some volcanic convulsion, whereas it is in men's hardest stage that they gather unto themselves this world's treasure.'

'My friend, you have not been long in London,' replied George Trelwyn. 'You do not know the state of boil and bubble into which these men get in this great caldron, where they splash and fret themselves for threescore years and ten. Whenever I weary of the country (and my living is not one of the liveliest in England), I like to come up to town, and stay with my respected father-in-law for a day or two. Believe me, I return home satisfied. I conceive Giles whistling for want of thought a more enviable man than Crœsus; and I arrive at the conclusion that Sir Hubert Hardell, your relative, whom, at times, I consider a bore, is an interesting and instructive companion in comparison to the man who, while his heart is in stocks and shares, in debentures and quarter per cents., still lifts his head peering into circles above him, crying out the while, "See, I have half-a-million of money. Will you let me in? Will you have me at the price?"'

Mr Hardell laughed at this, but he did not answer; in truth, he did not very well know what answer to make.

Was this man, whom he had never till that day seen before, taking him into his confidence, or was it only a way he had of showing that the matrimonial chain galled him; that, although it had been well gilded, the iron was eating into the flesh, nevertheless?

Why was it that George Trelwyn, instead of repairing with all convenient speed from Essex Marsh to the trim lawns and well-kept gardens that overlooked the Lea, should elect to return with him to the Vicarage, and partake of cold boiled beef and ale procured from the nearest public-house?

To ascertain this reason why, perhaps, Mr Hardell began.

'I do not apologize for the fare; though, had I known you intended honouring me with a visit, I should have—'

'Don't grow ceremonious, Hardell,' entreated his visitor. 'It does not sit easily upon your grave simplicity. Further, if I did not like your fare, I should not take it. Up at The Pines, they do the apostolic business on a cold luncheon, with only one footman and one butler to hand round the viands; and, while the edibles are being washed down with port, and claret, and champagne, the heads of the family improve the occasion by entertaining us with reminiscences of the sermon. If your morsel be dry,' added Mr Trelwyn, 'there is at all events quietness; whereas the stalled ox is led forth at The Pines with a great noise, and an appalling flourish of trumpets.'

Once, again, Andrew Hardell laughed; only this time he answered:—

'No doubt, however, you only like the dry morsel as a fine lady likes simplicity, merely because it so seldom falls to your lot. If one course and beer from the "Greyhound" were your ordinary daily refreshment, the stalled ox and the foreign vintage might seem pleasant in your eyes.'

'Do they in yours?' asked Mr Trelwyn.

'Not particularly; but, then, I am different.'

In what way?'

'I am a poor curate; I am not a rector; I did not marry an heiress. The loaves and fishes are not for me.'

'I offered you share of them, at all events, up at Clapton, only your evening service interfered to prevent your enjoyment of them. Will you come to-morrow evening? do—and I will stay in town, though I intended leaving by the night train. Or, if you prefer it, will you dine with me at my club? No; and still no. Mr Hardell, have you sought Essex Marsh as a hermitage?

Do you intend literally here to try the herb-diet, and seclusion from your fellows?'

'You have put my intention into better words for me than I ever hoped to put it in for myself,' was the reply. 'I cannot do my duty to the poor here, and visit the rich elsewhere; I cannot comfort Lazarus at the gate, and then pass in and feast with Dives. I have chosen my work, and I mean to do it, so help me God!'

'Well, you are a very different individual from the Mr Hardell I expected to see,' was all the remark Mr Trelwyn made on this speech.

'I regret your disappointment,' said the Curate, deprecatingly.

'I did not say I was disappointed, so far as my memory serves me,' the visitor replied. 'We have talked a great deal about you, and naturally one draws a mental picture of the person one is going to see: my picture was incorrect,—that is all; whether it were more flattering or less so, I am not going to tell you; only when, on my return to Yorkshire, I try to answer Sir Hubert's questions concerning his kinsman, my replies will, I imagine, astonish him.'

'In what way?'

'In all ways. It is an article of faith, I believe, in the worthy baronet to ignore his relations in the flesh, but to be well acquainted with them in the spirit; and, to be candid, it seems to me Sir Hubert confounded the peculiarities of his two kinsmen, and imagined Anthony to be unstable and superficial, whereas—'

'Excuse my interrupting you,' the other said, hurriedly, 'but you spoke of two kinsmen. I was not aware—'

'Nor are most people,' answered Mr Trelwyn, 'that Andrew Hardell is also a branch of the ancient Hardell tree. You stare —clearly you regard my statement as incorrect; but Sir Hubert, who knows everything, I believe, excepting his own relations, assures me that at some remote period of English history after the Heptarchy, and anterior to the Georges, a certain Andrew Hardell, a younger son of the younger branch of the Hardell family, which said branch settled in Somersetshire, married a yeoman's daughter, and brought thereby eternal disgrace on the name of Hardell. His family renounced him—that, in the Hardell annals, was nothing irregular—but something which was singular in the family history then occurred—the man took to work. He adopted, with his wife, the occupation of his wife's family, he laboured, he delved, he dug, he saw to the sheep-shearing and the ingathering; he left some property behind him, and an only son, from whom, after many generations intervening, springs your friend with the quarrelsome propensities. The degree of relationship existing

between the Dumfries hero and the baronet is too remote for any but a genealogist to trace. However, some one has traced it; and, alas! for the infirmity of human nature, the only time I ever heard Sir Hubert recognize the connection was after the "Not Proven" verdict.'

'They could not hang one of *us*, Mr Trelwyn,' he observed. 'It would neither have been decent nor safe on such evidence.'

And, with a strange expression in his eyes, George Trelwyn pushed away his chair from the table, and looked at his father's curate, who had risen during the course of the foregoing speech, and walked to the window.

We cannot tell what shall touch us, we have no means of knowing the manner of weapon that shall smite our vulnerable point.

Assuredly had any person told Andrew Hardell fate meant to deal him a blow by proving that he came of gentle people, and that blue blood flowed in his veins, he would have scoffed at the assertion, and yet now in a moment that blow was dealt.

All his life long, ever since he knew anything of the distinctions of rank, it had troubled him—unconsciously, perhaps, but none the less surely—that he was not as other men with whom he was acquainted; that he had no lineage to look back upon; no family name to uphold.

Vaguely it had occurred to him in the old day-dreams, to which reference has previously been made, that if at some future period he came to be a great preacher, a man well considered, a person of repute, he should still be but the first of his name, the foundation-stone of a building that had yet to be erected.

And now—now, in a moment, the only drawback, as it used to appear to him, was removed; only, alas! that he might more keenly feel how surely the greenness had departed from his fields, and the water from his wells, for ever and for ever.

For ever and for ever! O Lord our God, Thou who knowest! is there aught so terrible in life, any trouble so great in existence, as this consciousness of *something* in the past which can never be recalled, or made less bitter in the future? this certainty that every hour to come shall be coloured by the transactions of a moment which is irrevocable, and that there may come no opportunity of making a better thing of life for evermore.

Dimly, vaguely George Trelwyn comprehended what was passing through the mind of the man whose acquaintance he had only made that day. Instinctively almost he who had started in life after committing one error, grasped the secret of his fellow

who was setting out on the long journey of existence cumbered by another.

At which stage of their intercourse knowledge had dawned upon him the visitor could not have told, but conviction, he always remembered, arrived when his host walked towards the window and looked out on the melancholy plantation, thinking over what he had just heard, *viz.*, that he was a Hardell of Hardell Court, and the descendant of a great House, and proud; albeit only the son of a Somersetshire yeoman.

'It is time for me to be going,' said the Rev. George Trelwyn, as Mr Hardell turned from his contemplation of the fir-trees and his own position, to the exigencies of every-day politeness. 'I will come and look you up, if you have no objection, next time I visit London; and when you can get some one to take your duty, you had better run down to Yorkshire and cultivate Sir Hubert. We have a large house, and my wife will be delighted to see you. And I will tell the bishop to-morrow, he may make his apostolic mind easy concerning Mrs Challerson, and also concerning the souls of the people in Essex Marsh, for that you will avoid the one and save the other if you can. Believe me, Mr Hardell, your cause is quite safe in my hands, as safe as I feel the welfare of my father's parishioners to be in yours.'

And with that the Yorkshire rector put on his coat, shook hands with Mr Hardell, and walked out of the hall door.

When he had got a little distance from the Vicarage he stopped, and pulling a case out of his pocket, drew from it a cigar. Then he struck a match meditatively, and, applying it to his cigar, puffed away till the latter was fairly alight, when he resumed his homeward walk, muttering to himself—

'It is no business of mine, thank God. His secret shall not ooze out through me.'

Next day he had an interview with the bishop, and thoroughly satisfied that benign prelate of Mr Hardell's moral excellence.

'My own impression of the matter is, that if Mrs Challerson had been as good as he, there would have been no trial, and no scandal,' he finished; whereupon the bishop said:

'My dear young friend, you relieve me of a load. These women are——'

'True descendants of Eve, my lord,' finished George Trelwyn; in answer to which his lordship opined Adam was not altogether without blame in that matter either.

'He is the making also of a very good preacher,' Mr Trelwyn good-naturedly went on to say; but his lordship, who was not

famous as a speaker, shook his white head at this, and remarked, 'eloquence was oftentimes a snare.'

'Not oftentimes, surely, my lord,' remarked Mr Trelwyn, who had a certain sense of humour; '*some*times let us admit.'

On the strength of this the pair laughed decorously; and George Trelwyn went back to Yorkshire, where he wrote to his mother:

'Notwithstanding the Sir Hubert connection, it would be an undesirable match for Etty. As a curate Mr Hardell is admirable, as a brother-in-law there might be objections, therefore Etty had better defer her visit to England for the present.'

All of which goes to prove that though a man may not object to countenancing a friend who is 'under a cloud,' it is quite another thing to court an alliance with him.

Further, the Rev. George Trelwyn, having some sense of delicacy left, was not sorry to be able conscientiously to negative the proposition of Lord Mayfort's niece, that, if Mr Hardell were presentable, George should ask him to Yorkshire, and invite dear Etty to return to England at the same time.

'No, my beloved mother,' thought the Rector, as he stamped his seal on the letter which carried a death-blow to Mrs Trelwyn's motherly hopes and schemes; 'No, one matrimonial mistake is enough in a family—and Etty, if I can manage it, shall either marry suitably, or not at all.'

From which it may be inferred that the marriage of George, only son of the Rev. Henry Trelwyn, Vicar of All Saints', Essex Marsh, with Catherine, eldest daughter of Charles Creaff, Esquire, The Pines, River Road, Upper Clapton, had not proved peculiarly felicitous.

In truth the marriage was, as George once remarked to his father, 'a clerical error.'

'Ay, my son, but it has gone to press,' retorted Mr Trelwyn, senior, and the pair remained silent, oppressed by the ghastliness of the jest.

'And yet, George,' added the sire, 'I do not see anything better, or indeed anything else, that you could have done.'

'Swept a crossing,' suggested the son. 'Anything rather than be under obligations to Mr Creaff.'

'There are two sides to the question,' answered Mr Trelwyn; 'men like Mr Creaff make money for those who can spend it;' which certainly was a way of looking at the matter that had never occurred to Mr Creaff.

'I would rather have been a ploughman,' began George Trelwyn in reply; but his father silenced him with, 'Tut, George,

you would not relish twelve hours a day in the clay any more than I should; and though the Creaff yoke may not be light, it is preferable to having to ask credit from one's butcher. You know where your shoe pinches; but you do not know how much less it pinches than that worn by many a cleverer man.'

All of which was so undeniably true, that the young man ashamedly hung his head, and refrained from answering.

'After all,' recommenced Mr Trelwyn, senior, 'if you are fond of your wife——'

'But I am not fond of my wife,' said the young man, defiantly.

'If that be the case, have at least the decency to appear fond of her,' advised Mr Trelwyn; and his son followed his counsel.

The clerical error was stereotyped, and no good purpose could be compassed by calling public attention to it.

A more courteous husband could not have been found in England than George Trelwyn.

He humoured his wife, and my lady liked humouring to the top of her bent. He waited on her hand and foot, and the servants said, 'How fond he must be of her.'

He looked after the household, and the children she neglected. The cook told him the things which were wanting in the larder, and the nurse came to 'the master' when her eldest charge was taken with scarlatina.

'There never was such a man,' the domestics declared; and they worshipped him, whilst they would not move a step beyond their duty for the languid fine lady, who lay on the sofa all day, and regretted 'her papa's house, and her papa's carriage, and the pleasant society she had been accustomed to at home.'

When birth marries money—when blood allies itself to bone—birth or money, blood or bone, must get the best of the bargain.

As a rule, no doubt pedigree asserts itself against industry—a long line of ancestors gives itself airs over three per cents.—but there are exceptions, and when birth gets shoved to the wall by Mammon, God help birth.

Mammon is never content unless the victim feels the flint and the stones every hour—out of pure self-glorification Mammon likes squeezing the creature it has bought, up against the social barrier, in order that society may know the value of the purchase it has made.

'Look at me,' says Mammon exultingly, 'I have three hundred thousand pounds, and this man, the nephew of my lord So-and-So, has married my daughter.'

And thus, morally, a hundred times a year the nephew of my

lord is shoved amongst the thorns or pitched into the dust, while Mammon's carriage rolls by, the observed of all observers.

'Curses on money and the men who own it!' exclaims the victim, coming forth from the hedge, or picking himself up from the road—but Mammon drives on none the less serenely, thinking the while—

'If it hurt him, what matter; only consider what we have suffered at *their* hands in times gone by.'

In the Trelwyn blood there was, unhappily, so little capacity for self-assertion, that bone had at every turn of the transaction the best of the bargain.

At The Pines, George was trotted out like a captive prince, to swell the glory of the conquering Creaff. Did he ask a blessing, Mr Creaff murmured Amen in a tone which implied that he knew who had purchased the Yorkshire living, and who had consequently a vested interest in the prayers of the clergyman of that parish.

Did George casually mention the name of some great man whom he knew in the North, Mr Creaff whispered to his neighbour—

'My son-in-law, rector of So-and-So—mother was a niece of Lord Mayfort.'

Did he perpetrate a joke—and even in that awfully dull mansion jests were sometimes born—Mr Creaff would repeat it next day in the City, adding the information,

'Bought him the living; started him, you know—clever fellow—must make his way—great favourite with the Archbishop—stays at the Palace.'

Did any one inquire who George was the son of—in other words, what his father had to bequeath—Mr Creaff confessed 'Mr Trelwyn had no fortune—of course, whatever trifle there might be in the family must go to the girls'—but 'money don't signify to me,' the owner of The Pines and marriageable daughters would proceed—'the happiness of my children here and hereafter is what I consider—and the young fellow comes of respectable people, is related to Lord Mayfort—and I could afford to give my child a handsome fortune, and so they do very well—very well indeed. If Cissy have not every other luxury to which she has been accustomed, she has, at all events, a devoted husband and the best society.'

Which latter item must certainly have proved a novelty to Miss Cissy.

The match had been made up by Mrs Trelwyn. Mothers will

fall into these mistakes, which seems marvellous, considering that they, at least, ought to know better.

But Mrs Trelwyn had married for love, and felt the bitterness of poverty; facts that might certainly go far to excuse her seeking the antipodes of her own experience for her son.

She made him marry for money, and try whether wealth could render a man happy.

She asked Miss Creaff to the house (Mr Creaff had been an old parishioner)—she threw the young people together, and Miss Creaff exhibited her best side to her clerical adorer.

George rode with the damsel—he frequented her father's house—he was made much of by the Creaffs, male and female—he was lured from branch to branch, till one fatal day arrived when, in answer to his unimpassioned 'Will you?' the maiden responded, nothing loth, 'I will.'

The Creaffs affected the clerical element.

Wise in their generation, and having a certain vague conviction that a bank-book, no matter how heavy a balance it may show on the left-hand page, will neither unlock the gates of heaven hereafter, nor yet ensure ingress into 'genteel society' here, it was tacitly decided in the family that 'the girls must marry well.'

Marrying well, with them, did not signify mating with so many thousands per annum and vegetating in City society, with only a civic ball or an entertainment at the Mansion House to vary the proceedings.

The Creaffs had lived long enough to know that the Egyptian Hall was not the end of all earthly aspirations, and that an alderman's gown might clothe the person of a man who had not the slightest chance of ever being invited to eat bread and salt on equal terms with any of the great people after whose favour the soul of the Creaff family longed exceedingly.

They knew that even in English society, other gods than Gog and Magog, big as they are, and splendidly lodged as they appear, reign supreme.

There were not wanting those who declared that the Creaffs gave themselves airs, that they carried their heads too high, considering the little shop where Mr Creaff's parents laid the foundation of their son's large fortune; but, after all, when these charges came fairly to be investigated, they simply amounted to this, that, whilst not utterly forsaking old acquaintances, the Creaffs favoured new ones; and that Mr Creaff affected a sort of society which found little favour in the eyes of City magnates; that, although he so far conformed to the prejudices of his class

as to invite no man in business to his house who was not supposed to be worth a round sum of money, he yet asked other people who had no right according to civic ideas to visit at The Pines.

People who were not the sort of young fellows old Samuel Creaff, deceased, would have liked to see coming dangling after his daughters; people who seemed to regard the wealth and pomp of such an establishment as The Pines as matters of course, though everybody knew that they were poor as Job during the period when he was passing through whatever institution answered in those days to our Bankruptcy Court, and that they could not make a settlement on a wife; 'no,' naïvely concluded the City magnates, 'not if it were ever so.'

Possibly Mr Creaff thought, if one of his daughters married the Rev. George Trelwyn, the others might mate higher. Certain it is, when he purchased the Yorkshire living, and presented that piece of preferment as a marriage gift to his son-in-law, he duly informed all whom the news might concern that there was remarkably good society in the parish.

'Sir Hubert Hardell resides within a mile of the Rectory, and Lady Collington has a magnificent seat there also.' Thus the worthy owner of The Pines would run on through the names of those grandees who were hereafter to become the bosom friends of his first-born, Cissy; and when eventually the Rev. George Trelwyn left Essex Marsh to take up his abode at Lulswade, two of his wife's sisters accompanied her, in order that they might at once be made free of that social heaven wherein Mr Creaff had so prudently laid up treasure for his offspring.

That the society, however, even of Sir Hubert Hardell and Lady Collington bored Mrs Trelwyn and the Miss Creaffs it would be useless to deny. They were as much out of their element at Hardell Court as George Trelwyn was out of his at The Pines. A stately dinner-party could ill atone to them for the delights of city and suburban balls, where every one knew who they were, and paid court to them accordingly.

'I thought it tiresome enough having to go and stay at Essex Marsh from Saturday till Monday, while George had charge there,' young Mrs Trelwyn remarked to her sisters; 'but I can only say I wish papa had never bought him this living; I would rather live in Essex Marsh, within a drive of one's own friends, than be cast away in a place like this. Besides, the country is so tiresome, without horses and carriages and plenty of visitors. It is absurd only having that pony affair; and George is so ridiculous, he will not live at all in the style I had a right to ex-

pect he would, considering my fortune, and that everything he has was given to him by papa.'

'My dear,' said the Rev. George Trelwyn, when his wife made this complaint to him, 'when you get your fortune we can talk about how it shall be spent. Meantime, as your father only allows you a hundred a year, which you spend in dress, and as I have no money of my own, beyond what I get from my living, I am resolved to keep within our income. I have seen enough of debt, and too much, even to risk burdening myself with it.'

The result of which prudent determination was that Mr Trelwyn won the heart of his father-in-law and lost that of his wife.

She spent the entire of her time in a series of repinings, and never seemed perfectly happy except when she was staying at The Pines, and talking to her old acquaintances of all the grand people at whose houses she visited in Yorkshire.

As for her husband, his sojourn at the Clapton mansion was always of the briefest. He would run up to town on business one day, and leave it the next. Even when he brought his wife to London he never remained at The Pines for any length of time; and if it were possible for him to avoid having a meal in the house during his stay he availed himself of the opportunity.

He had arrived in Essex Marsh charged with Mr Creaff's cards and an invitation to dinner for Mr Hardell; but he omitted to deliver the first, and he only repeated the last as has already been stated.

'I do not see,' he thought to himself, 'what good it can prove to any man being "taken up" by those people at The Pines. I only know I wish I never had seen one of them. I wish they had been out of the parish before we came into it. Even were everything about this Mr Hardell perfectly straightforward—which it is not—he would be far happier sticking to his ale and cold beef than feeding like a stalled ox on the fat of the land at Clapton.'

'You gave Mr Hardell my message, George?' blandly suggested Mr Creaff, when the entire family were assembled together in the drawing-room waiting the butler's solemn announcement of dinner being ready.

'I asked him to come back with me, sir,' was the somewhat evasive reply; 'but he has evening service, and further does not seem a very sociable sort of individual. He told me in so many words, in fact, that he did not intend to visit——'

'Not visit!' repeated Mr Creaff, astonished.

'Not visit!' echoed the ladies in chorus.

'Is he Puseyite?' inquired Mr Creaff, after a pause.

(High Church and Ritualism were expressions not much in vogue at this period.)

'I should think not,' answered Mr Trelwyn.

'Has he any leaning towards celibacy?' asked Mrs Creaff.

'A very strong leaning, I imagine,' replied her son-in-law.

At which juncture, dinner being announced, further inquiry was cut short; and although Mr Creaff tried to resume it over dessert, the result was not satisfactory.

'Depend upon it,' remarked Mr Creaff to his wife, when he and that lady sought the tremendously upholstered chamber where after the fatigues of the day they were wont to court—not in vain—nature's sweet restorer; 'Depend upon it, George does not want that Mr Hardell to come here. I wonder what his reason can be for trying to keep him back.'

'You had better go and see for yourself, had you not?' suggested Mrs Creaff; the result of which sage piece of advice being that, on the Tuesday following, Mr Creaff called at the Vicarage—and found the Curate 'not at home.'

'He is hardly ever in the house, sir,' explained the woman in answer to inquiries. 'He is always about the parish, from early morning till late at night.'

Mr Creaff left his card, which attention was followed up on the Wednesday by a note from Mrs Creaff (really written by Miss Laura Creaff), requesting the pleasure of Mr Hardell's company to dinner, quite in a friendly way.

In reply, Mr Hardell expressed his obligations for Mr and Mrs Creaff's kindness, but regretted his inability to avail himself of their cordial invitation.

'There is something curious in this, my dear,' remarked Mr Creaff. 'We will drive over to All Saints' and hear him preach.'

Accordingly, on the Sunday following, the Creaff carriage made its appearance in Essex Marsh, and just as Mr Hardell was uttering the words, 'When the wicked man,' the whole Creaff family swept up the aisle, and entered the Vicar's pew.

CHAPTER XVII.

ONLY A LETTER.

Had one of the stone cherubim that surmounted the columns of All Saints' Church taken wing and flown down upon the reading-desk, his appearance there could not have produced a greater sensation than was excited by the arrival of Mr Creaff and family in the Rector's pew.

There were, indeed, legends in the parish of great people (men who afterwards rode in their carriages, and were made Lord Mayors of London, and a 9th of November show) having sat in the square box dedicated to the churchwardens, and gravely handed round the collection-plates in those days departed when there was anybody to give—any other than mere recipients in All Saints'.

On the front of the organ-loft appeared a dingy inscription setting forth that in the year of grace seventeen hundred and ninety-nine, Septimus Taylor, Esq., had, at his sole cost, repaired the gallery and improved the organ; whilst around the church several other chronicles of by-gone piety and love of approbation were to be discovered, certifying that various parishioners of by-gone times had bestowed painted windows, carvings, doles of bread, doles of pence, doles of special services on the parish of All Saints', Essex Marsh.

Curious monuments were there too in the church, ornamented with singular inscriptions in the Latin tongue, which lost to the uninitiated both in beauty and holiness by translation into our vulgar Saxon.

As, for example, when one unacquainted with the olden language paused before the tomb of Dame Alice Bridget Havering, a marvellous structure ornamented with a large figure praying, and about twenty smaller figures praying behind; the inscription traced on the marble, and guarded by bloated cherubs that looked as though they had suffered much from water on the brain, seemed something wonderful and sacred when viewed through the light of an utterly unintelligible tongue.

Like a criticism, the epitaph seemed grand by reason of its vagueness, till at length some one passed by, who, taking the trouble to decipher the old letters, discovered that they merely set forth how Dame Alice Bridget Havering had been a true wife to John Havering; that she had borne him thirteen

children, all of whom she suckled (evidently the cares of maternity were eschewed by indifferent mothers in those days, as in our own); and that she died in the year of our Lord 1678.

All these things—almost illegible inscriptions, battered columns, disfigured monuments, ancient epitaphs, brasses covered by matting, chronicles withered by age — had kept Andrew Hardell's mind from utter despair during the first weeks of his ministry.

Given unto him a perfectly new church, without a tradition or a memory, and the man must have gone melancholy mad from sheer lack of mental company; but at All Saints' the dead were with him always; the staid men, the sober apprentices, the managing wives, the fruitful vines.

Regularly to his imagination Dame Alice Bridget Havering and her thirteen children came up the aisle, and assumed their proper position in the chancel. Now he fancied a son had married, and brought home a shy young wife;—anon that a daughter was engaged, and entered bashfully through the red baize door, followed by the well-to-do young merchant who was soon to wed her in that self-same church.

Old! why the church had the dirt and the grime of three centuries on it.

Interesting! well it is true the dust of neither king nor kaiser mouldered inside its walls; but yet men had lived, sorrowed, died within sight of its old grey tower.

There was the mist of antiquity floating about it, and if no ivy clomb around its walls, if no clinging branch stole on from buttress to loop-hole, and from loop-hole to window, still Andrew could imagine the eyes that had looked on the old moss-covered stones, eager and impatient; he could picture to himself the impetuous passion of youth that must have swept across the churchyard paths, the quiet endurance of middle age, the thankfulness for the prospect of rest at last, which had come with the 'evil days' of age, and brought peace at the sun's setting.

He had the first quality of a successful preacher, this man whose life's story it falls to me to chronicle; for he possessed imagination, and in his lonely study he was wont almost unconsciously to put himself in another person's place, and consider what he should do, had he only Jack Styles' abilities and Jack Styles' pay.

Should he be honest if he were the parent of Jack Styles, and recommended to the tender mercies of the parish after forty-five years' hard work, wet or dry, hail or sunshine?

If he were Mrs Tom Oakes, should he ever be able to look

as happy as that estimable matron? who informed him, while she stood in the sloppy road, with the wet penetrating her thin worn shoes, and the wind making sport of her ragged garments—

'If you will count up, sir, you will find I have been a wife forty-eight years come boxing-day; and I have never yet known what it was to want a crust—no, sir.'

Further, had he been one of the urchins who played at hop-scotch, marbles, and other such games of skill, with drunken parents at home, with hard words and scoffing looks abroad, could he have kept honest, held himself aloof from thieves and pick-pockets, and an intimate acquaintance with the 'presiding magistrate?' or—and this question presented itself oftener to his mind, perhaps, than any other—had he been one of those dragged-up, slip-shod, over-worked, hardly-used girls whom he saw, servants to people almost as poor as themselves, would he, could he, have remained honest as they were?

Rather, instead of wondering at the wretched vice, at the flaunting finery of Shoreditch, he marvelled how any son or daughter, reared in Essex Marsh, refrained from repairing thither, from rushing to replenish the ranks of the swell-mob, and the frail sisterhood; in whose lives there was, at any rate, the semblance of prosperity, instead of the bare nakedness of their most miserable existences.

He spent his days in the midst of that which we are told should be thrust away out of sight, although even in the most fashionable parts of London its waves are washing up against the shore of 'genteel' society. He lived amongst those who were not picturesquely but abjectly poor; who were not interesting; who would not have been hopeful subjects for prison chaplains or for district visitors to work upon; but who were, nevertheless, objects of painful anxiety to Andrew Hardell.

The coarse oath, the ribald jest, the debased humanity, the mere animal intelligence,—these things seemed strange to the man who had come from the green fields and spreading woods to the midst of brick and mortar; but so also was the enormous amount of work performed uncomplainingly, and the equally large amount of distress and suffering borne unmurmuringly.

Here was no false shepherd come to labour among a flock he despised. If many of his sheep were black, it was his business to understand the why and the wherefore of their being so.

But for that sudden blow in the darkness, but for that awful day's walk over Criffel and beside the Solway, but for that

'tholing his assize' at Dumfries, but for that 'Not Proven' verdict, God knows what sort of parson the man might have made.

Perhaps he might have been as others, negligent, self-conscious, thinking of his own advancement; indifferent to, or indignant at, the misery and the poverty and the dreary monotony of life which were round and about him.

But as it was, he merged his own individuality in the mass of wretchedness which encompassed him.

Save when he was utterly down-hearted and cowardly, he felt himself God's messenger, sent to succour and to help; further, over and above, and beyond all things, he had, as I have said, God's best gift—imagination—to help him on his way.

For no man, and I speak this reverently, can do God's work unless he have, to a certain extent, God's faculty of knowing all things—of estimating the extent of a man's repentance—of a boy's temptation—of a woman's belief—of a girl's ignorance.

And as there is nothing so divine in the ministry—and I may add, so rare—as knowledge of humanity, Andrew Hardell seemed to the people in Essex Marsh a man almost to be worshipped.

Out of the fulness of his heart he spake unto them—and heart answered unto heart as deep answers unto deep.

Something of all this Mr Creaff, looking up at the young preacher out of the corner of the Rector's pew, comprehended.

His sermon—addressed not to the laces, and silks, and feathers of the Creaff party, but to the rags, and poverty, and sorrow of the free seats—was not as the sermon of an ordinary preacher.

There was a passion in it, which we rarely hear in any voice which speaks to us, once or twice, or thrice a week, as the case may be.

With his hands knitted together over the pulpit cushions, it was the old cry of 'let us reason together,' that we have all of us heard from so many an indifferent preacher, only rendered, oh! how differently.

He did not preach to Dives, but to Lazarus; not to the men whom Caiaphas would have delighted to honour, but to Mary Magdalene, to publicans, and to sinners.

In his manner there was nothing which implied 'I, who am not as other men, who am holier than any of you whom I address, command you by virtue of my own sanctity, and the sanctity of my office, to smite your breasts and say—God be merciful to me,

a sinner!'—nay, rather the whole tenor of his sermon was, 'I, who am a sinner, plead with you—let us find rest together.'

For his text he took a part of that verse in Chronicles, which recites the truth repeated so often in Holy Writ: 'We are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers;' and when he began, Mr Creaff crossed his legs, and settled himself in the corner of the square pew, and looked up at the preacher critically and benignly.

Had his thoughts been verbally conveyed to Andrew, he would have understood that Mr Creaff was mentally saying, 'Do not be afraid of me, though I do live at The Pines, and am a great man in the City, and have done you the honour of driving all this way and bringing my family to hear you preach, still I really am not a formidable person. I like to encourage young people, and I will listen to you most patiently, and make every allowance for your youth and inexperience.'

As for Mrs Creaff, she put her feet on one of the high stools, covered with faded carpeting, that still lay about the floor of the Vicar's pew, drew her well-wadded velvet mantle closely around her, put a cough-lozenge in her mouth, and then ensconced her hands comfortably in her muff; whilst the Miss Creaffs sniffed one at her smelling salts, and the other at a small silver-topped bottle of eau de Cologne, from whence she plentifully sprinkled her handkerchief, and diffused a pleasant perfume which reached the senses of Andrew Hardell, and made him feel for a moment sick and faint, as olden memories came wafting towards him with the scent—olden memories floating from a shore which he might never retread.

He had a knack of beginning his sermons very quietly—of leading rather than compelling his hearers' attention, which threw Mr Creaff a little astray, in the first instance, as to his abilities

Like a good rider mounted on a good steed, he did not force his eloquence beyond, or even up to, its full pace at starting.

He had his subject well in hand from the moment he opened his mouth, but he went gently at first. He seemed to try the ground he was going on, and only when he was sure of it, to give the rein to his speech.

It was, as he proceeded—as he warmed to his work—as he let loose what was in him, and spoke out the things which his heart burned to express, that Mr Creaff, changing his patronizing attitude, looked round the church to see what effect the sermon was producing.

He beheld men leaning forward with their eyes fixed on the preacher—women with careworn, pinched, haggard faces, regard-

ing him as the women of old may have regarded those apostles who stood still and addressed the multitude—and then he, Mr Creaff himself, felt that this man whom he had come so confidently to make acquaintance with, would not be easy of access. Instinctively he understood that here was a very different individual to the Rev. George Trelwyn—an individual, in fact, whom he had perhaps better let alone than strive to propitiate in the vestry, after service.

And yet there was an indescribable tenderness and sorrow in his voice, at times, which reassured Mr Creaff, and which kept him during the entire service alternating in his mind the sentences —'I will; I will not.'

As a girl who plucks the leaves of a flower, muttering 'He loves me, he loves me not,' is influenced by the verdict of the last leaf she drops on the ground, so Mr Creaff was decided as to his course by the inexpressible mournfulness of the words with which Andrew Hardell finished his sermon.

'There may be,' he said, 'there are, those to whom the idea of our being strangers and sojourners seems sad and terrible.

'To the young man in the pride of his strength, to the rich man in the full enjoyment of his wealth, to the child happy in parents and friends, to the girl conscious of loving and being beloved, to the mother surrounded by sons and by daughters, to the statesman for whose word a nation listens, to the author in the full zenith of his fame—it may seem well-nigh incredible that in this world, which seems to hold so much of joy and promise, he is but as a stranger passing through.

'And yet, friends, even to the happiest and to the most prosperous, there comes a time when it is a comfort to know we are merely travellers, journeying on to a better land. When the wine has been drunk, and the cup is empty; when strength is turned to weakness, and riches fail to satisfy; when loved ones though not lost are gone before; when the voice of popular applause is heard only like the echo of a far-away cry; when every earthly hope has forsaken us and lingers behind to greet some fresh wayfarer; when either the flowers of our youth are withered or else the frost has nipped their buds before ever they could mature and open into bloom—then we are glad to remember the word of our God, and to be sure that "our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding." Let us pray that when the time of our sojourning here is over, we may enter into the promised land, where no man shall ever feel himself a stranger.

'And to the end that ye may pray aright, hear what is written: —"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may

have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." '

'I think,' said Mr Creaff to his wife, after the family had covered their faces for the orthodox period, and were visible to the vulgar gaze once more, 'I think I shall go into the vestry and speak to him there; you can wait for me?' which Mrs Creaff and her daughters did, greatly to the disappointment of various members of the congregation, who had made up their minds to have a good stare at the ladies' dresses as they swept down the aisle.

Meanwhile Mr Creaff proceeded to the vestry door, and tapped for admission.

'Come in,' Andrew said, thinking it was the clerk; and Mr Creaff entering surprised the Curate, sitting in a very weary attitude beside the old oak table, with his head supported by his hands, and his whole appearance indicative of either mental or bodily exhaustion.

'I fear,' began Mr Creaff, 'I have intruded at an unfortunate time, but having failed to see you when I called at the Vicarage, I thought——'

'To make sure of me here,' finished the Curate. 'You are very kind, and you do me a great deal of honour by coming to see me at all. Mr Creaff, I presume.'

'My name is Creaff,' confessed that gentleman, not without pride mingling amidst his humility; 'and now, Mr Hardell, I am only a plain man, and I dare say I may seem abrupt, but I want just to tell you we do not like the idea of your being so near us, and yet an utter stranger. We know what Essex Marsh is, we know what a task you have set yourself, and we are quite satisfied that even an occasional change would prove most beneficial to your health and spirits. We will not stand on ceremony with you. Come when you feel inclined, and take share of our dinner. Ours is not a grand place, as places go, but we will do our best to make you comfortable at The Pines, if you will only give us the chance of trying to do so.'

At this point Mr Creaff paused, first because he was out of breath; and secondly, because he did not well know what more to say.

'Thank you,' Mr Hardell replied, 'you are very kind.'

'I wish you would give me an opportunity of being kind,' said Mr Creaff, in his best manner.

'But the fact is,' pursued the Curate, as though his visitor had not spoken, 'that I am not a visiting man. I have my work to do here, and pleasure would interfere with it. I feel your

goodness sensibly, and I regret that it is impossible for me to avail myself of it.'

'I will not urge the question upon you now,' answered Mr Creaff, noticing how wearily the Curate stood leaning against his chair; 'for I fear you are ill.'

'It is nothing,' the young man said, hurriedly, 'only last night I had a letter containing bad news, which has shaken me. Thank you. Yes. I shall be better soon. Good-bye.'

And he held out his hand, which Mr Creaff shook heartily, after which ceremony the rich man drove home to Clapton, revolving Mr Hardell and Mr Hardell's prospects in his mind; while the poor man walked back to the Vicarage, where he took out the letter to which he had referred, and read it over and over again.

It was only a letter, only a few lines traced by a woman's hand, and yet it had possessed power to soften him, and make his sermon what it was.

It was only a letter, and yet it had been written with many tears, penned after the conquest of many a scruple, indited in opposition to the wishes of a very loving parent.

She had knelt beside her father's chair, asking him to send him—Andrew Hardell—a line, if it were only one.

'For he must be so lonely, papa, wherever he is,' she said, with her hands clasped, and her eyes raised beseechingly to his; 'and, perhaps, he might be happier if he thought, if he knew, we had not quite forgotten him, and if he were sure that, no matter what other people may fancy, we *know* he is innocent. Oh! papa, papa,' and at this point the fair face drooped, and the words grew more indistinct; whilst all her father could say in reply was, 'My child, my poor, dear Madge.'

And so she carried her point, and wrote two simple letters, one to Anthony, enclosing another to Andrew Hardell; and from that pleasant Somersetshire home, where were always flowers, birds, sunshine, warmth, cheerfulness, there came to the lonely man in Essex Marsh an epistle which brought the dead past before him, clothed with beauty and grace and vitality once more.

The letter had, as he told him, Mr Creaff, brought him bad news, and he was correct in saying so, for he did not know how to use his news aright.

She believed him innocent, and he lacked courage to tell her he was guilty, how it came about.

For the second time he refused to avail himself of the opportunity offered; and the chances offered to a man in the course of

his life are not so many that he can afford to consecutively cast two of them away with impunity.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW MADGE TOOK IT.

'My dear Andrew' (this was the letter to which the curate of All Saints' referred when he spoke to Mr Creaff of having received bad news)—

'My dear Andrew,—When you read this you will be far from us all; and it is perhaps because you will be so far away that I wish so much to write to you.

'I want to say that in spite of that *cruel*, *cruel* verdict, we *know* you were innocent, and that we are only sorry you should think so poorly of us as to imagine the verdict of *any* jury—more especially of a *prejudiced Scotch jury*—could shake our faith in you. We think you have been shamefully treated. I wish poor papa could have gone straight off to Scotland, as he intended—*things might have been very different.*

'Anthony, no doubt, meant very well, but you know he is not *like papa.*

'Of course I feel how noble it was of you relieving me from *all* engagements; it was *unselfish and generous like yourself*, but I feel myself engaged all the same, and please do not think me bold for saying this. I do not want to be released; I would rather be engaged to you all my life long, than be married to any other person.

'When you read this in the *bush*, where you said you were going, you will perhaps be glad to know *I* am not changed. *Nothing* could change *me.* If they had brought you in guilty a hundred times over, *I* should not have believed them, and I am grieved beyond expression that you should have taken that most *unfair* verdict so much to heart, as to leave England in consequence.

'There is no one who knows you that would attach the *least* importance to it, and papa thinks with me it is a *great pity* you went away.

'However, *I* have no doubt but that you decided as you did

for some good reason, only you surely might have come to bid us good-bye. When you have time, do please write one line to tell us how you are getting on. Papa's dear love.

'Your affectionate

'MADGE FORSTER.

'P.S.—I enclose this to Anthony, who will, no doubt, know your address. I hope he is getting on well in his new curacy. We thought him *so strange* when he came to see us last. Poor papa has been *very* sadly, but is a little better again. We have been obliged to get a curate, a Mr Lensbett, who has a wife and six children. Mrs Lensbett does not like my attending to the school, so I have almost given it up, and she thinks me too young to visit, so she goes amongst the poor people now, and they do not like her.

'My aunt and cousins were down from London while papa was so ill, but they are gone back now, and I miss them. With every one away it is dull at Langmore, but it is wrong for me to grumble : good-bye.'

'Too young, my darling, too young!' thought Andrew Hardell, as he read this letter over and over. 'Ay, too young to be tied to a man with a secret hanging over him ; but young enough, thank God, spite of your generous heart and your trustful temperament, or rather in consequence of them, to make fresh ties, to be yet the happy mother of another man's children. Oh, Madge! oh, Madge! my pearl amongst women, why did you write? why did you trouble yourself about an outcast like myself?'

'Because she loves you,' Anthony Hardell would have answered had he been at his friend's elbow ; 'because through all the years to come, let them be long, let them be short, you will never find another who shall believe in you so implicitly, worship you so fervently, as Madge Forster, whom you are already casting away, just as the great sea continually casts its best and fairest from its bosom on the sand.'

But there was no Anthony to whisper this truism, and had there been, it is doubtful whether his warning would have much availed, since Andrew, ignorant of the true meaning of the word 'love' himself, would have failed to recognize its exact importance in the life of another.

He could preach of sin, and he could preach of sorrow, of the soul's long remorse, of the heart's continued tribulation ; he could discourse concerning temptation, and he could enter fully and completely into the feelings of those who had made a 'great mis-

take' of life, who had ignorantly steered the bark containing all their worldly belongings on a sunken reef, and hopelessly shattered the vessel that bore for freight all the treasures of their existence.

But with all, he failed quite to understand what the meaning of the word 'love' is; he had no idea of the effect its presence may produce, of the blank its absence may entail on the whole of a human career.

So far as this knowledge was concerned, he was as one born blind.

He had mistaken (and the Lord help the man who makes such a mistake, or the woman who is deluded thereby) that longing for home; that dream of sweet domestic life; that delight in the presence of a fair, calm, sympathetic woman, which is common to all men who have never known the love of mother or sister, or the repose of the paternal hearth, or the joy of returning to the old room and the old haunts at Midsummer and Christmas holidays; for love, and Madge had believed in his mistake. Alas! for Madge.

As though any love, unselfish though it might be, could have left the country without whispering, 'God bless you, Madge, mine own,' and hearing, 'I am yours, Andrew, wherever you may go.'

There is a good deal written now-a-days, and believed, concerning hearts torn asunder and marriages marred; about quarrels never made up, and misunderstandings never explained; but my own belief of the matter is that when a man and a woman love simply and wholly, it is impossible for kisses not to follow quarrels, for explanations to fail after misunderstandings; that it would be as hard for the mother to forget her sucking child, as for a man to forsake the woman who has crept into his life to satisfy it.

But Madge had never satisfied Andrew Hardell's life, therefore Andrew Hardell had never known what it is to love.

Some faint glimmering, perhaps, of all this came for the first time into his mind as he sat over the fire reading Madge's letter, which (for her) was vehement.

He had known her hitherto but as the quiet light of a quiet home, but as a good, sweet girl, who went about her round of tranquil duties happy in herself, her father, her friends, and her lover, with no thought that life should in the future ever hold for her anything better or worse than a marriage with Andrew Hardell, and the death, at the end of ever so long a time, of her parent, who was never till death to be parted from them.

Even her letters to him whilst he was lying in Kirkcudbright

jail and waiting for his assize at Dumfries, had been too tender, too utterly confiding, to tranquillize the mind of a man who knew that she was writing in utter ignorance of facts.

It had been as though one sick unto death of some terrible malady were tended by a nurse—loving indeed—but still persistently blind to the fatal return of his attack.

She was so certain of his innocence that Andrew had believed she would recoil from him with horror if she knew of his guilt; but now, sitting over the fire in All Saints' Vicarage, there came to him a sort of comprehension that the same nature which was so slow to credit the existence of evil, might also be very pitiful towards it—that the charity which was so incredulous of wrong, was rather a symptom of strength than of weakness—rather an evidence of purity and faith than of any want of toleration towards those who had fallen and were repenting.

'If I had only taken courage at first,' he thought, 'and confessed boldly, what might I not have been spared? I might then have left it to her to decide, and abided by her decision, for I think she would have had me, spite of all—but as it is, so it must be. It is too late, Madge! too late!'

And there fell a shadow on his soul as he muttered these words to himself—a shadow which returned to fall with a deeper and a denser blackness over his spirit, when, after the years, he and Madge met again once more.

'She shall make fresh ties for herself; she shall be free to forget me. Not by a word will I strive to stand between her and the light of a happy married life. For me the darkness, and the loneliness, and the desolation; for her, the sunshine, the voices of friends, and the laughter of children.'

And then he began to pity his sad case, as it is in the nature of such men to do, so long as no other self stands nearer to them than their own.

He thought how hard it was that he should be an exile in such an inhospitable region—an exile through no fault of his own—working under a feigned name, debarred from all society, making a reputation which he could never enjoy, magnanimously resigning a wife who would always have welcomed his return with a smile; whilst other men,—men who really had sinned—*vide*, for example, Anthony Hardell,—were enjoying life, and flourishing like green bay-trees.

Although he did not confess so much to himself, there was a sense of injustice, moreover, in his heart, when he compared the present darkness of his own life with the future sunshine that he decided was to flood that of Madge Forster.

How, when the months and the years had passed away, he scoffed at the memory of his own words; how he despised himself as he recalled them; how he jeered, in very bitterness of spirit, when he recollected the utter want of all self-knowledge that he had evinced—all this I shall, in the course of this Life's Assize, have to chronicle.

Weak and blind in the future he knew himself to have been that Sunday afternoon when the contrast between his present loneliness and his former happiness proved too much for his equanimity.

Weak and blind! and he thought himself so strong and so far-seeing.

As a god he judged between her and him, settled the events of the years which were to come for her and for him, wove the web of her life full of golden threads, picking out all the darker shades for the warp and the woof of his own existence.

'She shall be free,' he decided, 'no woman's lot shall ever be linked with mine;' and he folded up the letter and put it away tenderly, as we place our dead gently in their coffins, and decided not to answer the note, but to let himself drift out of her memory, and be forgotten, as grass dropped from a child's grasp drifts down the stream, and spite of the eager hands stretched forth to repossess it, floats away out of sight and out of memory to the far-off sea.

With respect to the other letter, that to Anthony, which enclosed his own, there was a greater difficulty. To answer it was, of course, impossible, and yet not to vouchsafe any reply seemed so utterly discourteous that Andrew found it difficult to reconcile himself to such a course.

Over and over again he read that letter also, which ran as follows:—

'Dear Mr Hardell—

'If you know where Andrew is, will you forward the enclosed to him. We feel he has left England so miserable that, although he begged us to forget him, and to refrain from writing, we cannot do either.

'Had he gone away for his own happiness, for his own advancement, we might have found it easier; but papa and I both feel he has been so *cruelly* treated, that we long to tell him nothing can change his old friends at Langmore, and that we are as sorry for him as he can possibly be for himself.

'Papa hoped to have heard from you before this, but I suppose you are so busy in your parish that you have little leisure for

letter-writing. It must be very hard work for you, having the sole charge of so large a parish. Papa begs me to say he trusts you will take care of your health, for without health a clergyman's sphere of usefulness is limited. I am sure papa feels this now, for he is not able to visit his people at all. It seems hard for him to have to sit at home and hear of their sickness and trouble, without going to help them—he who was always so much among them.

'When the winter is past, perhaps he may get stronger again. I wish he could manage with help only on Sundays. I often think I am a better curate among the poor people than Mr Lensbett, or his wife either; but then I cannot marry, and baptize, and bury, though I *can* visit, spite of anything Mrs Lensbett may say. There is such a *nice* curacy vacant near us—Henford Royal—do you remember it? It is worth 100*l*. a year, papa desires me to tell you, and there is a beautiful house, with lovely gardens, which the rector keeps up.

'Would you not try for it? Mr Lensbett did—but the rector, who is a canon of St Paul's, or some other cathedral, would not have a curate with so many children, which of course made Mr Lensbett very angry. Papa thinks you might get it without difficulty, and sends you the rector's address.

'With papa's kindest regards, dear Mr Hardell,

'Yours sincerely,

'MADGE FORSTER.'

'So short a time absent and changes already,' Andrew Hardell considered to himself as he laid down the letter: 'a strong-minded woman careering about quiet Langmore, with a brood of noisy children disturbing the peacefulness of the parish.

'Tracts and a lecture to the sick, no doubt, instead of jellies and Madge Forster. Sickness in the old Vicarage-house, and a stranger in the pulpit.

'And so Henford Royal is vacant. Would she like Anthony to be near them, I wonder? It often struck me he quite appreciated Madge's merits; but there, pooh! he never could be near any woman without admiring her, and as for the Vicar, he never had an ulterior thought on any subject in his life. Shall I say I am ill, and get some one to answer the letter for me? No, it would only begin a series of complications. Better be rude than wicked; better let the poor tender little one think herself forgotten and neglected, than bruise her spirit and break her heart by re-opening the question.

'She will soon get over it,' he decided; 'she will probably

marry the new curate of Henford Royal, and live in the beautiful house with the lovely gardens, whilst I stay on in Essex Marsh.'

And then he grew irritable at the idea of the prospective curate, as he had grown irritable when Anthony spoke to him of the present cousin, who was staying at Langmore during his kinsman's illness.

It does not require a person to be very desperately in love in order to feel jealous. There are some natures that can discern a rival on the very farther bounds of possibility, and the same mental constitution which is capable of plumbing the depths of its own misery is somewhat apt to exaggerate the happiness likely to be enjoyed by another human being.

But whilst Andrew Hardell thus sat brooding over the future, and outlining its probable features to himself, there was one picture which he failed to see—a girl making a hero of him in her own soul, resolutely refusing to admit any fresh lover into her heart, spending the best years of her life grieving concerning one who had almost forgotten her, hoping from day to day and from month to month for tidings from him, and all the while thinking of him but as 'poor Andrew, who had been so hardly done by at Dumfries, and who had taken the matter so much to heart as to flee from all his English friends, without even going through the English ceremony of saying good-bye.'

He did not know, he could not tell, how Madge's face flushed, how Madge's hand trembled, at sight of each letter which came to the Vicarage,

Men who have formed a 'theory' concerning women rarely do understand these matters. 'Nothing,' says Fullom, and he says it wisely, 'is so destructive to human progress as a theory,' and nothing certainly is so detrimental to a knowledge of a woman's ways and modes of thought as any abstract idea of her methods of procedure founded upon even the closest observation of the sex.

What one woman does, we may be quite sure another woman will not do.

If we assume that a woman will prove erratic or inconsistent, our surmise will probably be correct—but then we cannot tell wherein she shall be either erratic or inconsistent, wherefore our theory fails, as all theories do when exposed to the glare of common sense.

For no theory can govern feeling—and it is by the feelings either of ourselves or of somebody else that we are influenced at the most important periods of our lives.

At all events the days and the months went by, and to Lang

more there came no acknowledgment of the Vicar's kindness, no word even of Andrew's remembrance.

'My dear,' said the Vicar at last to Madge, when he saw her light step becoming slower, her face paler—'my dear, depend upon it there was something more in that business than we shall ever know; be sure Andrew acted only honestly in releasing you from your engagement.'

'But Anthony, papa—why does he not write—why did he never thank you for telling him about Hensford Royal? The letter must have miscarried. Will you let me send to him again?'

'No, Madge—no, my child, you must not do that—you must not even for your lover lay aside all dignity. If he had wished to write, he could have written; if Anthony were not cognizant of some error, and some shortcoming—something, in fact, which excused the Scottish verdict—he would have written, be sure of that. I wish, Madge, you could lay that olden story by like a tale that is told, and think of some one else—your cousin Herbert, for instance, whose letters, I am sure, are frequent enough to satisfy even you.'

But Madge shook her head at this. 'One word from Andrew, papa.'

'My darling—my darling, do not waste your life wandering after a shadow,' he pleaded, piteously; 'if there were no valid reasons to be urged against him, he could have claimed you long ere this—he could at least have come to bid us good-bye, ere he departed for a strange land. And Anthony's silence confirms my worst apprehensions.'

'What apprehensions, papa?' she asked, as he paused.

'You are but young, Madge, and yet the young must learn the truth some time. I used to think it was Anthony who cared unduly for Mrs Challerson, but now I fear it was Andrew, and that he has left the country with her. Madge, love, have I been too abrupt? Look up, pet, and forgive me for seeming hard and cruel.'

Then she looked up at him with a pale, horrified face—with the face of one to whom knowledge of evil was a new and painful possession, while with the bitterness of its taste still in her mouth—with a portion of the very apple still between her teeth, she said firmly—

'I shall never believe that Andrew Hardell cared for Mrs Challerson, or for any other woman excepting myself, till he tells me so with his own lips. Till he does so, I shall trust him as I should trust you.'

CHAPTER XIX.

A LITTLE EVENING.

Christmas time came round—that time when most of all a lonely man feels London desolate and solitary. With memories of other Christmases floating around him, Andrew Hardell could not fail to experience a sinking of heart and a depression of spirit, when he thought of the chop and 'quiet' evening which were in store for him. Only a year, and the hopes of his life blighted—only a year, and the plans and the projects and the aspirations of his existence wholly changed.

Only a year before, and he walked among men with unabashed front, he met his fellows without dread, society was pleasant to him. He looked over the future, and behold its face was fair, the places where God had appointed his lot appeared pleasant, and the earth was full of happiness, and all things seemed good before him.

And now? Well, if ever there were a spot calculated to cure a man of morbid regrets, of useless repinings, it was Essex Marsh.

The man who in his own study felt himself hardly done by, and wretched beyond endurance, had but to put on his hat and walk twenty yards from his own door, to meet some form of misery that said, in its gaunt hunger, in its squalid abasement, in its physical suffering, in its moral degradation, mutely it might be, but still in a language the meaning of which he felt to his inmost soul—

'Stand by—for the depth, and the height, and the vastness of my sorrow overshadows yours.'

'What am I, O God, and what my griefs,' the man would mutter to himself, 'compared with this?

'Lord, I am Thy servant, deal with me as Thou wilt, only enable me to do Thy work amongst these people, and to forget myself in helping them.'

And the prayer did not return to him empty. He asked and he received, and what he gave to God's suffering creatures God returned to him in his hour of need.

To his imagination there was something very wonderful about the great stir and excitement which precedes the actual arrival of Christmas time in London.

The decking of the village church, the bestowal of the Squire's

bounty, had been all the dissipation in which Langmore indulged at Christmas-tide.

Sometimes, indeed, at Great Langmore, the nearest town where beef and mutton were to be procured, some butcher, more adventurous than his fellow-tradesmen, would purchase a few yards of ribbon, and ornament therewith his sirloins and his 'prime pieces,' whilst branches of holly and sprigs of mistletoe decorated his shop and gave occasion for various jests suited to the capacities and tastes of his customers. But, after all, what are a few yards of ribbon and a bush of holly?

Nothing. What would any single shop in London be, but for the other shops in its neighbourhood?

It is the miles of ribbon, the forests of holly, the hundreds of thousands of blazing gas-jets, the millions who have to be fed, the flocks of geese, the droves of oxen, the tons of fruit, the never-ending, perpetually commencing, display of Christmas fare and Christmas deckings, which makes mid-winter what it is in Babylon, the busiest, brightest, most genial time of all the year—busiest, friend, though you and I may have no part in all the bustle; brightest, though it seem dark to you and me; most genial, though we may have no pleasant associations with it nor memory of its having been ever merry unto us.

The world was not made for two or three people alone in it, and if you would know what Christmas time is to the hundreds and thousands and millions, walk as Andrew Hardell did through the streets and see for yourself.

See what the one English feast of the year is to your fellows—see how the anxious housekeeper counts over her shillings, to ascertain if she can afford that bottle of raisin wine, which is meant to be the crowning elegance of her feast, the grapes at three guineas a pound to her expected guests.

Walk into Leadenhall and watch the critical examination of joints; behold the turkeys viewed afar off admiringly, but as things too great to inspire any other feeling than that of admiration and respect; observe the selection of plums, currants, and 'peel,' and be not deceived by the brusque appearance of 'mere shopping,' which is only assumed to cover a trembling delight in the occupation, and a longing to have the coveted articles safe in the basket carried either by self or lord.

While for those who are in a goose-club, what triumph! what a fussing about sage and onions! what haggling with costermongers in Hoxton concerning apples—'for sarce, mum'—which discriminative suggestion of course at once settles the matter in his favour! what a delight the stuffing of the goose and

the mixing of the pudding! what a pride to discourse of the beautiful way in which the creature cooked, and to relate how Miss Jenkins, the superior milliner, who honoured the festivities, declared 'that if she had the skin, she didn't care who had the rest, skin browned like that, Mrs Wakefield!' What a delight to send bits of the pudding, wrapped up first in fair white paper, and subsequently in brown, for friends to taste, and to hear afterwards—

'That was a most lovely pudden', ma'am. If not intruding too much, may I make so free as to ask where you get your peel, and how many eggs you put in?' and so forth, and so forth. For though Christmas in a festive sense may mean very little to you, or to many more who are careless of the delights of plum-pudding and mince-pies, and indifferent to the charms of turkey, yet it signifies to the masses who are able to scrape together any money at all, just the material pleasure of the one dinner of the year.

Concerning which it may be here remarked, that in order to understand the pleasures derivable from that 'one dinner of the year,' a man must understand also the fact of having only one dinner in the year.

'A joint, with gravy!' Only think of the mashing down of potatoes in the rich fluid, and be sure that no *gourmand* ever relished the greatest delicacy of the season as that said joint—with gravy, mark you—is relished by *pater* and *mater familias*, and those other members of the family connection who have been formally invited to do justice to that 'Christmas cheer—which comes but once a year.'

In Essex Marsh Andrew Hardell first came practically face to face with Christmas as a culinary rather than a religious festival.

Secondary there, were cards and mottoes, evergreens and religious services, to mince-meat and plum-pudding.

Did he visit Mrs Duke—wife of Duke, clerk in Montgomery, Blogg, and Company's great house in Friday Street—he found Mrs Duke's first floor denuded of furniture, and a cleaning—in regard to which the spring cleaning was nothing—going on, preparatory to having a few friends on Christmas Day.

Did he in despair cross the way, there was Mrs Jones deploring her husband was not with a firm 'as was a firm like them Montgomerys, that gave a turkey to each of their clerks at Christmas.'

'Not but me and Jones can have a turkey, and be beholden to nobody,' this desirable lady would add; 'only, in course, with

a growing family, and only a hundred a year, a turkey's a turkey—added to which, I hear Mr Duke has a five-pound note besides.'

Driven from Mrs Jones, the Curate would betake himself to Mrs Smith, a widow with an only son—who forthwith began to bewail her fate, and recall with unbecoming and unnecessary tears the memory of her Ezekiel, who would never sit down to table at Christmas without a cod's head and shoulders, a sucking pig, a turkey, a goose, a sirloin, mince-pies, and a plum-pudding.

'He used to say, poor dear fellow,' proceeded the widow, 'that no year were lucky in which he did not taste 'em all.'

'And the year of his death, ma'am?' inquired Mr Hardell, with interest.

'We couldn't have no mince-pies, sir,' was the solemn reply. 'I was ill, and my sister had married, and we had no one but a dratchel of a servant, and I said, 'We can't have no mince-pies, 'Zekiel, I ain't fit for the chopping.'

'"Then," he says, "we won't have no luck this year." But we had plenty. First, the bank in which our savings were, broke; then he got bronchitis and died; then there was a trouble about his insurance, because he had not said his mother died of a lung complaint—and oh! dear, there was luck enough, such as it was, and no end of trouble.'

'I should think, Mrs Smith,' suggested the Curate, 'that you never fail to make mince-pies for Christmas now.'

'No, sir,' she replied, quite simply; 'but somehow Charlie don't seem to get a bit further forward. He had eighty pounds three years ago, and he has only eighty-five now.'

'I should make a double quantity of mince-meat,' suggested Mr Hardell; in answer to which the widow said gravely, that she thought it would not be amiss, and asked leave, seeing the Curate had neither mother nor sister, to send him round some to the Vicarage, an offer which Mr Hardell refused with more promptness than politeness, beating an ignominious retreat from the habitation of Ezekiel Smith's buxom relict.

'I was thinking of asking him to come over and take a bite with us and your uncle Matthew,' observed Mrs Smith to her only son on his return home, 'but he went off in such a hurry, I had no time to think of what I should say.'

'No, mother, don't,' entreated her son, who had a much clearer idea both of what his parent wished and of social distinctions than that worthy lady. 'Mr Hardell don't want to dine with such as us. He is very kind and affable, but—'

'But he don't seem to have kith or kin belonging to him,' finished Mrs Smith, indignantly; 'a poor curate living all alone

in that dull house, with nobody but that ignorant creature to get him a mouthful of victuals.'

'Well, mother, I suppose it is his own choice living there,' replied the lad, 'for everybody knows he is related to a baronet, and might marry one of the Miss Creaffs any day he liked.'

'Related to a baronet! are you sure, Charlie?'

'Sure as sure, mother;' which piece of information Mrs Smith retailed to the Dukes and the Joneses, and the rest of her acquaintances, who, notwithstanding their Christmas preparations, had still leisure to spare for any gossip about the new curate.

'He will perhaps be going to his own people for Christmas,' remarked Mrs Duke; but Mrs Jones was laden with later intelligence.

'He is going to have a party himself at the Vicarage, and who's to be there do you think? Oh! such high and mighty folk—all the beggars and tramps he can lay hand on. I wonder what Mr Trelwyn will say when he comes to hear of such doings?'

'It is well he has got the money to throw away. I am sure I did not know he was so overburdened with wealth.'

'Well, they do say Mr Creaff has given him a handsome subscription, and a few other gentlemen have sent him enough to make up. Stuff and nonsense I call it; if they knew as much of the poor as I do, they would not make such a fuss about them.'

'Indeed, you may well say so, Mrs Jones;' and then the trio branched off into reminiscences concerning Joanna, the wife of Thomas Styles, and John Day, the improvident carpenter, and Marianne, daughter of Henry and Susanna Stokes, whose ways, in her capacity of nursemaid to Mrs Duke's many olive branches, were ways of slyness, and past describing or finding out.

Women were these with means to pay their bills and provide themselves with beer regularly three times a day, which they drank; women who purchased their dresses from a tally-man, and arrayed themselves gorgeously out of money which ought to have been put away for a rainy day; women selfish, prosperous, bounceable, who naturally had no sympathy with or pity for Mrs Brooks struggling to earn a bare livelihood, and Mr Tetley existing on 'errands' and a weekly allowance from the workhouse.

Had Mr Hardell asked *them* to a party now on Christmas Eve or Boxing Day, it would have been something near the mark; but to provide beef and ale and plum-pudding for outcasts and paupers, the thing was not decent—it was not Christian, if you came to that, and nothing except Mr Hardell's youth and inexperience could be pleaded in excuse.

'Not that he looks young, Lord knows,' finished Mrs Duke. 'I am sure he might have had all the cares of a family, let alone a parish, on him the last fifteen years, if one went by his face. But I will say this for him, he don't shirk his work; he ain't above his business. It is a pity, of course, that he should be took in with them Brookses and Tetleys, and such like, but they do tell me gentlefolks have a fancy now-a-days for dirt and rags. Every one to their taste, and it is no business of mine.'

For which very reason, perhaps, all the women in the parish made it the occupation of their lives to ascertain who was invited to the Vicarage, and of what the entertainment was to consist.

The shopkeepers and their wives of course applauded the idea, for numerous were the joints of beef and large the parcels of groceries ordered in by Mr Hardell for his guests.

'And all cash on the nail,' remarked Mr Wilson, butcher, sharpening his knife approvingly the while.

'Those that has money give to them can afford to pay,' observed Mrs Duke in disparagement.

'Those as has money given sometimes keeps the money for themselves, ma'am. I have known instances, but I ain't a going to mention no names'—which was cruelly cutting and satirical, for there had been a terrible period in Mrs Duke's career when butcher, and baker, and grocer, went unpaid in order to satisfy the demands of a draper, with whom her weekly instalments had fallen behind, and now Duke himself called and settled the bills in person, showing thereby a lack of confidence that wounded his wife in her tenderest feelings.

'Well, if I was a clergyman, I would try and get somebody to keep me company on Christmas Day better nor tramps and beggars,' she said, ignoring Mr Wilson's innuendo.

'Well, I think if I was a gentleman, I would like to fill the stomachs of some poor creatures that have been empty all the year,' answered the butcher; 'and I never felt happier in my life than I did when Mr Hardell comes in and says, 'I want you to get me some prime joints, Mr Wilson,' says he, 'for I am going to have company on Christmas Day.'

'"A large party, sir?" I asked; and then he says, "Rather; about a hundred."

'Well, I stared at him, for I had never heard of a hundred people being inside the Vicarage before; and then he laughed in his quiet way, and said, "It is not exactly a state dinner party; I am only going to have old people, and those who have no means of keeping Christmas at home. Mr Creaff has very kindly collected enough money to give a hundred men and women a

thoroughly good dinner, so I have sent out my invitations, and now I want you to help me cater for them."'

Which was all so correctly repeated that Mr Wilson's version of the affair may be taken by the reader as true.

Passing from houses where preparations were being made for keeping Christmas in 'thoroughly British style' to wretched homes where the old and the feeble, the desolate and the poor, were struggling to keep soul and body together, and looking forward to no feast, but, rather, the accustomed fast on Christmas Day, he was seized with a great longing to be a host for once.

Over his own slender resources he cast his eyes, in order to ascertain how many he could honestly feed; and, while he was in the midst of this calculation, he ran, in Throgmorton Street, up against Mr Creaff, who saluted him with, 'Well met: you have saved my writing you a note. We want you to dine with us on the twenty-fifth. Only ourselves—a family party, you know.'

'Thank you—but, in the first place, please remember I do not visit; in the second, I am going to have a few friends myself.'

'A few friends,' repeated Mr Creaff; forgetting, in his amazement and curiosity, that this repetition of his companion's phrase was scarcely well-bred. 'I am not aware—that is, I thought——'

'And rightly, that I have no friends in London, in the ordinary acceptation of the word,' said Andrew, finishing the sentence for him; 'but the fact is,' and then the Curate, brim-full of his project, told Mr Creaff exactly what the fact was. 'Of course I can't have many; I am not rich enough,' he added.

'Could you call upon me, at my office, in a couple of hours' time?' asked Mr Creaff, abruptly. 'I want to speak to you, and I am busy now;' and on Andrew's promising to do so, he walked off without making any further allusion either to his own or the Curate's Christmas party.

When, however, Mr Hardell entered the office in Winchester Street, Mr Creaff tossed him over a cheque, to which a piece of paper was pinned.

'There,' he said, 'is what I have got towards your merry-making. Will that be enough?—if not, say the word—you shall have as much more to-morrow.'

Andrew looked at the cheque, and then at Mr Creaff, feeling, perhaps, what we have all felt at some time or other of our lives—guilty, when, after having condemned money and money-making, we suddenly discover what wealth and the possession thereof can do.

Involuntarily almost the Curate stretched out his hand, because for the moment he could not utter a word of thanks, which Mr Creaff perceiving, said, 'There, then, don't say a sentence about it. I could have got ten times as much had it been necessary. Now I hope you will have a pleasant party; and I shall expect you to dinner, not on Christmas, but New Year's Day. You see, if you are to do good in the world, it is as well not to live quite out of all society.'

To which the Curate could answer nothing, except that he would come. There was truth in what Mr Creaff said; and, besides, he had sold his right to decline the other's hospitality.

'For a bit of silver, for a morsel of food, neither of which is to benefit yourself, you have bartered away your liberty,' George Trelwyn exclaimed laughingly when he called at the Vicarage on Christmas Eve. 'Well, it is best so, believe me, Hardell,' he proceeded. 'The Creaffs would soon have begun to talk—to wonder—to speculate; and it is never wise to acquire a reputation for eccentricity. I mean to stay after service, and help you with your dinner-party to-morrow. How do you purpose getting through the evening?'

'I thought of reading to them,' Andrew answered.

'Reading! My dear fellow, if you had the tongues of men and of angels, you would never be able to amuse your guests with anything out of a book. Let them sing. I know as much about the poor as anybody, and I assure you that next to eating and drinking the greatest pleasure they know is that of being asked to "oblige the company." Of course I shall have to be at Clapton in time for the family feed at seven; but I am yours till then, and I will pitch the key, and relieve you from all anxiety as to how to get through the evening.'

The next afternoon, at four o'clock, the guests began to arrive, 'painfully punctual,' as the Curate remarked, all dressed in the best garments they owned or could borrow for the occasion.

Here and there amongst the company attempts at finery were even noticeable, in the shape of bright flowers in the caps of the women, and brilliant scarfs about the necks of the men; but these things only made the subdued apparel of the rest of their companions more noticeable.

Cotton dresses from which the colour had long time been washed; faded cobourgs and rusty merino gowns, patched and darned, scanty in the skirts, old-fashioned in the make; coats white at the seams, worn at the collars, frayed at the wrists; such were the garments—more touching than rags and tatters—in which Andrew Hardell's visitors came clad.

According to promise, Mr Trelwyn was there to help the host.

'Mr Creaff is not quite satisfied about your orthodoxy,' remarked that gentleman. 'He thinks you ought to have had afternoon service, or, to speak more correctly, he thought you ought to have had afternoon service, until I explained to him the nature of the domestic life in Essex Marsh—not that he ought to have required any information on the subject, for I feel quite confident he once dined at the same hours, and led altogether much the same sort of existence as some of your parishioners do now. Prosperity is the real water of oblivion,' added Mr Trelwyn; 'there is no sponge like wealth for washing out unpleasant and inconvenient memories.'

'There were not thirty people in the church this morning besides charity children, as you saw for yourself,' the Curate replied.

'Which shows very bad management on your part,' replied the other. 'You should have bribed your guests to come to church for the sake of the entertainment afterwards. That is modern Christianity. As Mr Creaff justly remarks, the multitude heard the Word before they were fed with loaves and fishes. I hope you will lay all this to heart, and remember for the future that no one who does not come to hear you preach is to have roast beef and plum-pudding.'

'I am afraid the people in Essex Marsh are not to be bribed any more than they are to be driven,' Andrew answered; 'and if they do not wish to come to church for the sake of what they hear there, I imagine they could scarcely be induced to do so for any worldly advantage less certain than an annuity. My way may be a wrong one, but, with your father's permission, I should like to try it for a time. I want to lead, not to drive. I want to be the Eastern shepherd, instead of the English one. I desire to go first, entreating them to follow me: "He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice,"' added Andrew in a lower tone.

'They are but a sorry flock,' Mr Trelwyn said, thoughtfully, looking out at the window on the guests, who were now beginning to arrive. 'Without meaning any disparagement to you, Hardell, they remind me of a drove made up of the odd ones out of other hundreds. Where the ninety and nines may be I cannot tell, but surely here are the single lost sheep coming trooping home to you all together.'

'It is very pitiful,' Andrew remarked.

'God knows it is,' was the reply. 'How pitiful they fortunately have no idea. Though I have no taste for their society

myself, I often think of what that fellow said, "I am sure it is very kind of the poor to be so patient as they are." Only think, if they were not patient, what the upshot would be to us.'

'And should we not deserve it?' the Curate asked.

'Humph—there are two sides to that question. You would not, at all events. But now the business of the day begins. I hope your cooks will not expect us to entertain them for half an hour before dinner. No, thank goodness; here comes Myles to know how soon he may dish up—at once, Myles. Excuse my giving orders, Hardell—and how are you, Mrs Brooks?—you do not remember me, very likely.'

'Master George, sir—I am sure I didn't expect to see you, sir: your good lady quite well? Dear, sir, I remember you when you used to be going to school of a morning across what was fields, which is now all built over with workmen's houses.'

'And I remember you, Mrs Brooks, and your pretty daughter. Where is she now—married well, I hope?'

'She is dead, sir: eh, if she had been living, I should have had a snug little place of my own, instead of——'

'Now, Mrs Brooks, I shall not allow you to talk of anything sad to-day,' interrupted Mr Trelwyn. 'Where should you like to sit? I think I must have you near me—Mr Tetley, we are old friends. Come where I can attend to you.' And so he got them all seated, or rather crammed, in their places, and then, at Andrew's request, he asked a blessing, which was responded to in many cases by a somewhat too audible Amen.

'You see your dinners, my friends,' Andrew said. 'We have nothing else to offer you except plum-pudding, so I hope you will do justice to the beef.'

See their dinners! You could tell by the half shy, half wistful looks they directed towards the joints, that they had not seen, let alone tasted, such a dinner for many and many a year. Yet there was no unseemly haste, no unmannerly eagerness evinced to commence the meal.

No gentleman and no lady in the land could have behaved with more perfect courtesy and good-breeding than those 'paupers,' as Mrs Duke had called them, who were come from court, and alley, and lane, to accept the food provided for them by charity.

On the contrary, they were just a trifle too courteous for Andrew's satisfaction. Not one of them would touch his food till the whole of his neighbours were served likewise, and their host was about to ask some of them if the meat were not to their fancy, when a look from George Trelwyn stopped him.

'They will begin right enough presently,' that gentleman came round and whispered; 'it is only *their manners;*' and that it was only their manners was proved by the mode in which, whenever the last person was helped, the beef disappeared.

Joints of meat, tureens of gravy, pecks of potatoes, gallons of ale, vanished as if by magic, whilst a solemn silence prevailed, broken only by the clatter of knives and forks, and an occasional remark from Mr Trelwyn or Mr Hardell.

With the pudding ensued, however, a livelier mood. There were sixpences in the various round globes that the waiters carried aloft in triumph, and finally set down with vehemence on the table; while blue flame played around the holly sprigs, and elicited little screams of delight from the women, and quieter expressions of approval from the men.

Over the searching for those sixpences there was immense merriment, and George Trelwyn laughed till his sides ached to hear the old people joking each other about marrying and giving in marriage, whilst the more juvenile members of the party, ladies of from forty to fifty or thereabouts, looked conscious when the treasure, which they subsequently strove to hide, revealed itself amongst a mass of suet, currants, candied peel, and other delicacies of the season.

At last even this diversion came to an end, and then oranges, apples, and a few other unconsidered trifles being put upon the table, Mr Trelwyn produced his contribution to the evening's festivities in the shape of a dozen of port, which the company had the pleasure of seeing opened, a fact which was remembered and reported abroad subsequently with enormous satisfaction.

'May I beg of you to fill your glasses,' Mr Trelwyn commenced; 'I have a few words I want to say to you.' Whereupon the glasses were filled, while the ladies folded and refolded their handkerchiefs, and the gentlemen laid their hands out flat upon their knees, in an expectant silence.

'My friends,' the Rector began, 'I am here to-night neither as host nor guest, but simply as an assistant. In that capacity you may resent my standing up to propose a toast, which, however, I am certain you will drink with all the honours.

'I have not known Mr Anthony Hardell long it is true, but I feel, and I want now to express publicly what I feel, namely, that he is doing in this parish that which I failed to do, that which even were I back here again I should fail without his help to achieve.

'I want to say all this to you, and to be here to-night, that you might understand there was no antagonism between us—

that you might not begin to compare notes and imagine there was any real difference between the old system and the new. Mr Hardell is now doing that work in Essex Marsh which my father and I have always felt ought to be performed, though we have not, I honestly say, seen how to carry it out; and I ask you to help him in it as far as you can, for you have got a man amongst you now who is indeed, so far as his energy, his unselfishness, his zeal for the Master he serves, and his talent go, one in a thousand. I ask you to drink, on this Christmas Day, the health of the Rev. Anthony Hardell, your host and my friend.'

Then as with one accord they all rose and passed the word, 'The Reverend Anthony Hardell! Your good health, sir!' The Reverend Anthony Hardell! Andrew felt his breath coming a little short and thick.

It was not his health which was being drunk, it was that of another man. He was sowing where he might never reap; he was garnering where he might never enjoy; he was planting where others must come in and gather the fruit. He had sold his identity—his—oh, Lord! what was it? If any man or woman there knew him for what he really was—a man only half acquitted of murder—how would it be then?

Would they have even said, 'God help you,' where now they said, 'God bless?'

When a man is dizzy, when he turns faint in a moment, and the room reels round, and objects pass before him as though a train were sweeping by,—how much he sees and considers, even before one standing by his side perceives there is anything the matter.

And it was thus with Andrew Hardell. In that moment, the past, the present, and the future seemed rushing one faster than another before his mental vision; and it was with difficulty he steadied himself sufficiently to say—

'I cannot thank you enough for the honour you have done me. I can only say I am grateful; and that I will try to deserve all the kind words which Mr Trelwyn has spoken of me to-night.'

Whereupon, 'brayvos' and hurrahs from the men, led on by Mr Trelwyn, and more timid applause from the women, completed the ceremony of the evening; after which George Trelwyn publicly, and in his capacity of having been the last person to do anything, requested Mr Tetley to favour the company with a song—

'I remember one you used to sing,' he added, when Mr Tetley modestly disclaimed being the possessor of a voice, or an ear, or anything,—'a thing with a first-rate chorus—

'Ty dum ti-tidy dum ty—
Dum ti tidy—dee—'

trolled out the Rev. George, in a fine tenor, at sound of which the old man fired up, and saying—

'It are many a year, but still I will try my best,' broke forth into song—

'It was in the city of Cork,
When I was a dashing young man,
That I met with a fair, buxom lass,
Which her name it was Polly M'Cann.
With my dum ti-tee-tiddy dum ty
Dum ti-ty-tiddy tum tee—'

'Chorus, ladies and gentlemen, if *you* please.'

In response to which, the assembled multitude commenced, as though it were a part of some religious ceremonial—

'Dum ti-tee-tiddy dum ty
Dum ti-ty-tiddy tum tee,'

ending with a prolonged howl on the tee—that was considered clearly the vocal achievement of the song.

When it was concluded, the Rector said, 'Thank you, Mr Tetley,—name your man to follow.'

'Well, sir—meaning no offence —I call upon you.'

For a moment George Trelwyn looked put out—but such accidents will occur in the best regulated families. With a consideration which raised him in Andrew Hardell's estimation, he at once answered—

'I am not certain whether, as a clergyman, I ought to sing to you anything except a hymn this evening; but as I am amongst old friends, I will e'en give you an old song about the country where my lot is now cast!' Whereupon, he pulled a chair towards him, and setting one foot upon it began, in that rich, full voice, which needed no accompaniment—which could troll out a drinking, and shout out a hunting song, as well as join in an anthem—

'Mr Simpkins lived at Leeds,
And he had a wife beside,
Who, as she's fond of exercis
She often wished to ride.
She asked him for a horse,
He yielded to her folly,
"For," says he, "I am always mollified
By you, my dearest Molly."
Fol de rol de ree.

'This horse he stood on six legs,
And that I'll prove to you,
He lifted up his fore legs,
And still he stood on two.
Down tumbled Mrs Simpkins,
Her loving spouse averred
"My lamb's as dead as mutton,
For she cannot speak a word."
Fol de rol de ree.

'They put her in a coffin,
And he bid them nail her fast,
And in funeral array
To the village church they passed.
"Stop, stop!" cried Mr Simpkins,
"We'll follow at our leisure,
For why, my dearest neighbours,
Make a labour of a pleasure?"
Fol de rol de ree.

'At night the resurrection man,
He came the corpse to raise,
And with his axe he broke the lid,
And on the fair did gaze.
The noise awoke the lady,
"In heaven's name," said she,
"What are you with that axe about?"
"Ax about," said he.
Fol de rol de ree.

'She ran away—he after her,
And to the stable hied,
Where she found her spouse caressing
The horse she used to ride.
When in came Neighbour Horner,
Said he, "I'll buy that beast,
If you think he'll do for my wife
As he's done for the deceased."
Fol de rol de ree.

'"I thank you, Neighbour Horner,
I will not take your pelf,
Nor think to sell a beast
Which's of service to myself;
For though he killed my first wife,
I'm very little vexed,
And as I mean to wed again,
I'll keep him for the next.'
Fol de rol de ree.

'"You dog," cried Mrs Simpkins,
And seized him by the hair,
"Deny your lawful wife, sir,
You scoundrel, if you dare.

I'm neither dead nor buried,
  And you cannot marry two,
You thought to bury me,
  But I'll live to bury you.''
            Fol de rol de ree.' *

'And in fact, gentlemen and ladies,' finished George Trelwyn, 'they made it up, and lived happily ever after—but, as there are several other verses, and as I have an engagement for this evening, I will leave the rest to your imaginations. Good night, Mrs Brooks. Good night, Mr Tetley;' and, with a shake hands to two or three in his neighbourhood, and a sweeping bow to the remainder of the company, he was gone.

As for the rest of the evening, what need to speak further of it? And the events thereof—the songs which were sung—the jokes which were made—the roars of laughter which ensued—the stories that were told, not written in the archives of Essex Marsh?

To the last day of his life, think you, will Andrew Hardell ever forget the pathetic, old-world melodies which were sung that night in quavering voices by women well-nigh starved, and almost broken-hearted?

Love songs—parts and parcels of the indestructible past—plaintive ditties learnt in former days, under far different circumstances—airs the tenderest, linked to sweet words, were all that night produced from memory's most sacred recesses, in order to do honour to Andrew Hardell's feast.

And when, at last, a grey-headed man arose, and said they must not intrude longer—the 'virtue' of what he had done, the full pleasure he had been able to give, seemed to come home at last to the heart of the lonely man; and, as he shook hands with each guest passing out of the Vicarage door, he thanked God who had sent him there, even under a feigned name, to do His work.

What though they had neither prayed nor listened to preaching. He knew that night there would be a feeling of thanksgiving arise to the Great White Throne.

'And the tones of rejoicing shall be as precious unto the Lord as the sobs of sorrow,' he thought to himself, as he lit a cigar, and walked out to smoke, and collect his ideas a little before he went to bed.

On and on he walked—past the Dukes' house, where high revelry was being held—past the Jones' and the Smiths'—past a reformatory—past an almshouse—and the bright stars shone

* The above song is, as stated by Mr Trelwyn, an old ballad, written probably about the beginning of this century.

down on Essex Marsh; and he wondered, in his own soul, whether they were looking down the same on Langmore Parsonage; and, if so, what they saw there.

What did they see? Do you ask that question, as he did?

Only a girl on her knees—praying for the happiness and the prosperity of a man who was to be to her neither lover nor husband ever more—while the stars shone down upon the earth.

CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER EVENING.

When Mr Creaff asked his son-in-law how the 'poor people had enjoyed themselves,' that gentleman answered, 'Very much indeed: the beef was juicy, the pudding rich, and the ale sound.' 'They ate as though they ne'er should eat again,' finished the clergyman; but fortunately Mr Creaff had not an idea what he was parodying.

'Mr Hardell purposed reading to them,' Mr Creaff said, continuing the subject.

'That part of the performance had not commenced when I came away,' Mr Trelwyn replied. 'They were singing.'

'Indeed,' exclaimed Mr Creaff, who had not an idea but that in his son-in-law's sentence the word psalms was implied, as well as on his own part understood. 'It is wonderful to consider how enduring are the lessons learnt in childhood. Doubtless some of those poor creatures have never sung a hymn of praise since they left the charity school, where they were instructed in all they know of good, until to-night. How I should have liked to hear them——'

'I don't think you would,' reflected Mr Trelwyn; but he remained discreetly silent.

'And did they seem grateful?' Mr Creaff resumed.

'Very grateful,' his son-in-law answered. 'Hardell told them all of your great kindness in the matter; he said that however willing, it would have been impossible for him to ask them to dinner, and that they must consider you as the actual giver of the feast, though he apparently was their host.'

'That is what the old boy wants,' thought George Trelwyn,

and apparently he was right, for the 'old boy' said, after swallowing a glass of port,—

'Really, Mr Hardell is too conscientious; he makes too much of my poor help. Honour should only be given where honour is due.'

'That is precisely his opinion,' Mr Trelwyn struck in, 'and therefore he declines to take any merit to himself.'

'But the idea was his entirely,' Mr Creaff remonstrated.

'And the carrying out yours,' finished George.

'Really, associating with that young man is doing my son-in-law a world of good,' Mr Creaff considered.

'If that do not stick a feather in Hardell's cap, I'm mistaken,' said the clergyman to himself.

'With his talents he is thrown away in such a place as that,' Mr Creaff remarked. 'I wish I was a bishop for his sake.'

'If you were an archbishop,' Mr Trelwyn replied, 'I do not think you would get him away from Essex Marsh while he is in his present working humour.'

'You think, then, his energy will not continue?'

'I think it cannot continue,' was the reply; 'there are physical limits which men cannot pass without suffering for their audacity. Hardell will try to pass those limits, and be beaten, and when his capacity for work goes, then very probably his desire for working may go likewise, or at least be modified considerably.'

'Has he any constitutional tendency to disease?' asked Mrs Creaff; 'do you imagine he is consumptive?'

'No,' answered Mr Trelwyn, 'I do not.'

'Then why do you think he will be ill?' the lady inquired.

'Because I am sure he works too hard,' was the reply; whereupon Mrs Creaff said, 'Oh!' not comprehending.

For in those days, people not having taken too much out of themselves, or seen much of the evil consequences of people who did take too much out of themselves, were ignorant of, or at all events blind to, the evils that we now know follow the man who is over-eager to make money, or to gain fame, or to acquire knowledge.

Even in the days of which I write, the social pulse beat slower than is the case at present.

The race was only beginning then, and there were but few who had entered themselves for it.

In years gone by, men and women entertained a very different idea of the curse of labour, to that we understand by 'In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou,' etc., and so forth.

Folks comfortably-off looked down on Hodge and Sally, considering them a sort of scapegoat, intended by Providence to carry Eve's sin out into the wilderness of labour, and expiate it there for the comfort of the whole human race; but we know better now; you and I, my brother, who, running a swifter race than Hodge or Sally ever dreamt of in the good old days departed, pant and struggle on to find the reward—what? a bare competency in early life: a struggling manhood,—and if we live to reach it, a premature old age, haunted by the spectres, paralysis, softening of the brain, or sudden death.

Well, it were cowardly to lament, for our way is the way appointed, whether the pace be rapid or slow, whether we tread it in carriages or plod it wearily afoot.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to help speculating about the different life which once obtained, ere the battle became so fierce, and the race so swift, and the work so hard, and the day so long.

And if it be vain to avoid looking back, it is equally hard to avert one's eyes occasionally from the probable future.

How will it be with the men and women who are to follow us?

If we have to get thirty-six hours' work into twenty-four, will they have to cram forty-eight hours' into the same period? Will they look back regretfully and say, 'Would the easy, idle life of '68 were here again! what times our worthy ancestors must have had! They thought they worked hard. Pshaw, they should see us!'

But, God knows, friends of the next generation, we do not want to see you, if your fight be any fiercer, your race any more breathless, than ours.

Our battle has been hard enough, our pace mad enough, for us. If the need for you to fight be stronger than ours, if the race you run be any swifter, then we say better for us to be lying under your feet, than swelling your ranks; better the churchyard, yew, and cypress, than the laurel-wreath and the crown of roses, won in such a field.

As for Mr and Mrs Creaff, they had no more accurate conception of the meaning of work, than was entertained by their carriage horses, or the butler who condescended to take charge of the Clapton cellar.

Even in their Essex Marsh days, labour had not come to them in the form of a curse. The traditional basket of stockings, and pile of children's clothing, did not fall to Mrs Creaff's lot; while for Mr Creaff, his father had lived before him, and left a sufficient sum when he gave up the ghost, to ensure, with ordinary prudence

and decent management, wealth and consideration to the man who came after.

They had lived quietly enough in Essex Marsh for many years, until, in fact, the young people began to grow up, and wax impatient of that unfashionable district; but Mrs Creaff always had her servants and Mr Creaff his clerks; they had not risen at unduly early hours, and so late taken wearied rest; they were of the second generation, and there is perhaps no generation—even at the present day—which has less comprehension of labour and sorrow, of non-success and the long hope deferred, than the sons and daughters of a clever, fortunate, and successful man.

They come into the world with their bed made for them, and they put fine linen on the bed and rich hangings, and rejoice that they have done so much better than their fathers. To them life is a trained steed, which they are proud of riding well. 'Look at us cantering along the pleasant paths of existence,' they seem to say; and we do look, only to consider that, given an unbroken colt and a stiff country, there would soon be an end, not merely of their easy seat, but of their offensive style of horsemanship too.

It was the most delightful thing possible to hear Mr Creaff exhort a lad on his first appearance in the City office. To those of his clerks who knew the formula, it always seemed as though the worthy principal were aspiring to aldermanic honours, and training himself for that style of oratory which produces so great a sensation at the Mansion House and Guildhall.

'Be a good boy,' he was wont to say. 'Keep your time punctually, be attentive in business hours, and prudent out of them, and though you commence without any salary now, you may ultimately pay larger salaries than any of these gentlemen receive. The road to riches is in England a public highway; remember, every man has a right to travel it. There, don't forget what I have said, and Mr——, just explain his duties to him.'

From which speech it will be clearly seen that Mr Creaff thought if a man did not get on it was a man's own fault, for he was apt to forget a fact his clerks often tittered over in private, *viz.*, that the road to ruin is quite as free to the general public as the way to success, and that to many it proves easier walking. Anyhow, one thing is certain; none of Mr Creaff's *employés* 'got on' very well in the world, and each new youth who entered the office was sneered at as the coming millionaire—as the Rothschild who was to verify the soundness of his employer's statement, and cast a reflected lustre on the house of Creaff for ever.

There can be no doubt, however, but that Mr Creaff thought

he worked hard, and whenever the first breath of spring came, Mrs Creaff was wont to declare that they must try to get out of town; poor Mr C. was so done up with anxiety and close application to business.

To obviate the bad effects likely to ensue from Mr Creaff driving into town at eleven, and returning to Clapton at four; from a biscuit and glass of sherry at twelve, and a more substantial luncheon at two; from reading 'The Times' at breakfast, and discussing politics with the City men who dropped in; from inquiring of his clerks whether such and such orders had been executed, and letters written, and money received, and money paid; the entire Creaff household found it necessary to go down to Brighton in November, to Scarborough in the early summer, and abroad at a later period of the year.

That any one had ever such tremendous responsibilities and commercial anxieties as her Mr C., Mrs Creaff never believed, and therefore it seemed simply absurd to the good lady to say that a mere curate could be in the slightest danger of injuring his health with over-work. It was as ridiculous as supposing that any one of Mr C.'s clerks could fall ill from a similar cause. He had nothing to do but visit—walk about and visit. And write a sermon? Yes, that of course; but he could easily manage the sermon in an evening; and then, as for preaching, why it was nothing more than reading for a few hours.

'He cannot have as much to do as you, George, even,' Mrs Creaff once hazarded, 'for you, of course, have a position to keep up, and must drive long distances and meet desirable people. I remember when your father was in Essex Marsh, he had not a thing to do from morning till night. That was in our time of course.'

'I fear my father did not find much to do at any time,' was the reply, 'and I know that although the work was there lying ready to my hand, I did not do it; but Mr Hardell is a different man to either of us, and he has not only found the work but performs it.'

'He certainly preaches well,' Mrs Creaff observed. 'Not that I have anything, George, to say against your sermons when you take pains with them.'

'My dear madam, I am inexpressibly honoured.'

'All I hope,' chimed in Miss Creaff, 'is that you won't turn the young man's head among you. There is papa praising his disinterestedness, and you, mamma, his preaching, and George everything about him. For my part, I think that he may be very

well to live among poor people, but that he is quite unsuited for any superior position.'

'Poor Hardell!' ejaculated the Rev. George.

'Yes, mock if you like, George,' said the young lady, 'but I am not apt to take up an opinion hastily or erroneously, and Mr Hardell strikes me as being singularly *gauche* and underbred.'

From which it will be seen that Andrew had committed the great sin of not bowing down before the Miss Creaffs and worshipping them. He had not tied himself to their bonnet-strings, or grown confused when they fastened their eyes on him in church.

When the whole party walked home with him after service to the Vicarage, he did not feel, as the last silk dress rustled through the porch, that Eden was opening before him; on the contrary, he often very heartily wished Mr Creaff, and Mrs Creaff, and the young ladies, together with their men-servants and the cattle in their carriage, very heartily at Jericho—or Clapton.

If Madge Forster had failed to touch his heart, it was not likely any of the female Creaffs should make havoc there; and though George Trelwyn often laughingly bade him 'beware,' it was not because that gentleman really thought he stood in any danger.

'Wait till you are a bishop, and then you can marry for love,' the elder man advised; 'if you cannot do that, never marry at all.'

Whereupon the other answered—

'I never shall marry.'

Which determination George Trelwyn confided in due time to Mrs Creaff, who straightway, with all a woman's fondness for making converts, thought it would be only kind to save him from Popery, and show him the error of his ways.

That any man could be so blinded as to prefer 'a lonely life, that was to say, a life unblessed by one of the Miss Creaffs, or other young woman of the same stamp, seemed to Mrs Creaff incredible.

'Depend upon it,' she said, 'he has been crossed in love;' and George Trelwyn answered, 'Very likely.'

From all of which it will be seen that Andrew Hardell usurped more of the conversation in, and a larger portion of the thoughts of, Mr Creaff's family circle than might—considering he was 'only a curate'—at first be quite intelligible.

But then, as has been already intimated, Mr Creaff was dis-

posed to look upon the black uniform with favour. His first venture in that line had been fortunate, had secured him a footing on that stepping-stone between trade and birth whereon it had been his ambition for years to stand; and now, supposing that by means of Mr Hardell he could cross right over into the pleasant land whereof his dreams were very lovely—what then?

On the one hand, he beheld Mr Hardell a man connected with some of the best blood in England—and yet, on the other, poor enough to consider mating with one of the demoiselles Creaff promotion—a gentleman, yet simpler in his tastes, habits, and manners than any City stock-broker or second-rate merchant with whom Mr Creaff was acquainted—a man gifted beyond other men with powers of eloquence, with talents far above the average, who might some day be addressed as 'my lord,' and wear lawn sleeves and a preposterous apron.

It is always as well to bear in mind, that when the Creaffs were thinking of, or talking about, Andrew Hardell, they believed they were really thinking of and talking about Anthony. Given double the talents, the modesty and the shrinking from society, together with the knowledge that he was the son of Hardell, yeoman, who had stood his trial for murder, and been acquitted upon the ground of 'not proven,' and the result would have been probably very different.

They would have said his talents were given to him to push his way in the world, that his modesty was only becoming to his station though unusual in it, and that he merely shrank from society because no doubt he felt himself unfitted to mix in it; whilst as for the murder, 'Very sad indeed—but of course there can be only one opinion about it and him. He should have emigrated, and not placed us all in this extremely painful position. Of course we cannot attend his church or receive his ministrations with any pleasure or profit. The bishop should really interfere, and his vicar ought to have known better.'

But then you see, my friends, the Creaffs were labouring under a delusion, as perhaps many of you are labouring likewise at this present moment.

If you only could be certain that the cabman with a flower in his button-hole, with whom you have been squabbling for ten minutes over sixpence, were next heir to the great Robinson Jones' property, would you not press the disputed coin on his acceptance, and all in a flurry beg him to come in and have a glass of wine? You would remark that the butler, whom (under present circumstances) you propose to call as a witness to the ruffianly language of 10,970, could see to his horse for a moment. You

would ask him tenderly if he had never thought of giving up cab-driving, and earning his living in a mode more consonant with his rank. You would remark to the wife of your bosom what a sad thing it was to see So-and-So perched up aloft like the cherub who sees after poor Jack, and you would go to bed feeling amiable and disinterested, and altogether in as goody and maudlin a frame of mind as if you had given an unusual fifty pounds to an hospital, or had a beggar in on Christmas Day to regale with a mince-pie and a lump of beef.

And, on the other side, if you only knew that the man whose salt you are eating had something against him, would not your laugh be less hearty, your next acceptation of his invitation more tardy.

You are good enough and kindly enough, for the men and the women amongst whom we live and move and have our being are not all mercenary, or ungenerous, or uncharitable, but you are acted upon by external influences like your neighbours, and that is perhaps the very reason why you like to read what I, and such as I, can tell you about your own human nature, which you share in common with Mr Creaff, though your vanities and weaknesses and ambitions may lead you into different channels from those he selected.

Once upon a time, not many years ago, there were two men living in the same neighbourhood with the author, both, it might have been presumed, well-to-do, since they respectively occupied large houses, and maintained establishments in proportion to their apparent means.

The one was a member of the Society of Friends, but the other, judging from his dress, belonged to the outer and more worldly world.

It was the privilege of the author often to encounter these men in an omnibus by which they habitually travelled, when food for speculation was supplied by the manner in which the 'Friend' always insisted on sitting next his acquaintance, slipping his arm through his, whispering commercial secrets into his ear, and making himself generally obnoxious to the other occupants of the mournful conveyance.

David and Jonathan's friendship was as nothing compared to that of the two City men, until one day when the worldly man failed. He was bankrupt, or made a composition, or did some thing equally open to censure, and from thenceforth he had not merely to bear the loss of money, but also to feel the absence of fulsome greeting—of prolonged hand-shakes—of confidential murmurings.

The man lies wounded, having fallen among thieves, or having made a false step or two himself. Pass him by, O Christians, stride over him—let him alone—ye are as gods knowing good from evil. You have eaten of the tree, why should you not show your power of discrimination? The world is given us to make the best of. Make the best by worshipping gold and rank. Why not? Long live Mammon and Genesis! Why not ask every man to your table you think can advance your interests, or who is one of the limited 'washed'? Why not consult him about your sons, and give him your daughters in marriage, and if you find he has been deceiving you, let it be but ever so little, you can turn round and say—

'Friend, if I had only known what a black sheep you really were, you never should have entered my fold: begone!'

The thing is easy enough, and frequently enough practised. Lazarus goes to a rich man's house, and being a creature possessed of good manners, and having a decent coat on his back, is entertained sumptuously, till his poverty is comprehended, when, politely—for this is a polite age, if it have no other virtue—Dives gives him to 'understand, and so forth,' after which the poor beggar limps away, without even crumbs to satisfy him.

All which is *à propos* to Mr Creaff and Mr Hardell—the latter of whom, in due time, put in an appearance at The Pines on New Year's Eve—and was introduced to a select dinner company, consisting, including himself, of eighteen persons.

At first—for the young man was unaccustomed to even fourth-rate fashion and the vagaries thereof—Mr Hardell felt shy and uncomfortable when he found himself ushered into an immense room filled with people amongst whom he at first experienced trouble in recognizing a familiar face.

For Mr Creaff, who considered a white waistcoat as well as a white tie the 'orthodox thing,' looked to him strange and unaccustomed, whilst Mrs and the Miss Creaffs looked to him even more singular in their 'reception dresses.'

In those days—the days before crinolines or our present limp dresses—women arrayed themselves in flounces, and wore clouds of drapery calculated to charm the mind and captivate the hearts of their male admirers.

Likewise they wore wreaths—if not of roses, at all events of any other flower which chanced to be either available or becoming. They twined their plaits with leaves, and swam about rooms as mermaids might have done, had those creatures ever visited London, and put their bodies under the control of a fashionable *modiste*, and their hair into the hands of an equally fashionable

coiffeur. Women had a 'pull' then over the sterner sex they may never hope for while they go about in clock-cases, and make themselves sights in tight dresses and short skirts; and the influence of that mass of drapery, of those plaits, of those flowers, of those fluttering fans, was felt by Andrew Hardell, who slunk into a corner, where he was joined by Mr Trelwyn, who discoursed to him wittily, if lightly, of the guests and their costume; of the men and the women, of their *raison d'être*—at all events at Clapton.

With that singular want of tact which seems indigenous with an accurate knowledge of the state of the money market, Mr Creaff at once introduced Andrew Hardell to Mr This, That, and So-forth, who wondered in the innermost recesses of their minds who the Rev. Anthony Hardell might be, of whom their host made so much unnecessary fuss.

For in those days Andrew was not much to look at. He was living frugally and working hard. He was leading just the sort of existence likely to prove injurious to a man of his constitution and previous habits. His long sojourn in Kirkcudbright jail, the agony he had suffered both before and during the course of his trial, the blow to all his plans, and hopes, and prospects, which the Scotch verdict dealt, had changed him, not less physically than mentally; and Mr Creaff's guests might well be excused marvelling what their host could see in that grave, silent man—whose manners were ungenial, whose appearance was unquestionably commonplace, who looked dreadfully out of health, and who never followed up an introduction with a single remark—to induce him to try and draw the Curate into the circle grouped about the fire-place, and vainly essay to make him talk.

But when, after a time, they beheld him standing apart with George Trelwyn, chatting and laughing, they began to think that perhaps he might be somebody, which impression was confirmed by Mr Creaff's whispered remarks of—'man of immense talent; enormous power of work; belongs to a good old Somersetshire family; nearly related to Sir Hugh Hardell; may be a baronet some day.'

Further, the merchant produced an immense sensation by adding—'He was an intimate friend of that other Hardell who stood his trial at Dumfries this autumn for the murder of Mr Challerson.'

'God bless me, you don't say so!' exclaimed a little pudgy man, who faced round at once to examine the Curate critically.

'Yes; but we never mention the matter to him,' said Mr

Creaff, impressively. 'I believe that trial cost him as much anxiety as it did the prisoner, for their affection and attachment was something unprecedented—quite a Damon and whatever you call him affair. The other Hardell must have been an unprincipled scoundrel, and no doubt richly deserved hanging, but the jury let him off, and he has now left the country.'

'I remember being greatly interested in that case at the time,' remarked a gentleman who had not previously spoken, 'and my impression was certainly in favour of the prisoner's innocence. It was not proved at all satisfactorily that there had been any attachment between him and Mrs Challerson, and——'

'There can be no reasonable doubt entertained, however,' interrupted Mr Creaff, 'that he and Mrs Challerson went abroad together; in fact, even this Mr Hardell admitted to my son-in-law that he knew the lady had left the country, though he refused to say where she was gone.'

'That alters the case,' said Andrew's advocate, thoughtfully; 'if they have really gone away together, the presumption is that Mr Challerson had cause for his jealousy.'

'I feel confident he had cause, and good cause too, and that he lost his life in consequence.'

'Well,' replied the other, 'I can only say, at the time when that trial was pending I chanced to be one of several guests staying at Lord Surrey's, and we used to discuss the matter from every possible point; in fact, we took sides, and grew almost to hate each other, so stormy were our arguments. After the verdict, however, most of my opponents came round to my opinion, that morally the man was innocent; and talking on the subject with a very clever Scotch lawyer, he told me that he quite believed something was kept back in the evidence concerning Mrs Challerson that would have exonerated the prisoner from blame. In fact, he intimated to me that the general impression in Scotland is, that your friend there was Mrs Challerson's lover.'

'Absurd!' exclaimed Mr Creaff, a little angrily.

'I confess, since I have seen him, I think the idea ridiculous, also,' was the answer.

'I, too, have a Scotch friend,' here interposed Mr Butler, a solicitor; 'he is a barrister in the Temple, but he keeps up a close correspondence with his old acquaintances in Edinburgh, and he tells me the prevailing idea north of the Tweed is, that cross-examination failed to elicit evidence which would certainly have convicted the prisoner. It was a very curious case alto-

gether, and the more curious because no one believes the murder to have been deliberate; and every person felt certain, even to the very last, that the prisoner would plead guilty to culpable homicide, which could not have done him half so much harm as the "Not Proven" verdict. It was thought at the time that the other Hardell gave his evidence in a most unsatisfactory manner, but of course he did not want to put the rope round his friend's neck, and the position could not have been a pleasant one for him. He fainted dead away after he left the witness-box. Curious trial; I should like to have heard it.'

At this juncture dinner was announced, and Mr Creaff led off with a lady about twenty stone weight, attired in a French white moire-antique dress, trimmed in a nice quiet style with cerise-coloured velvet. Every woman round the table, in fact, seemed to have taken as much trouble to disfigure herself as it was possible to do. Heads laden with flowers, dresses covered with trimmings, fingers sparkling with rings, arms barely visible for bracelets—that was the style of things which obtained at The Pines, and the pleasing effect it produced on men like George Trelwyn and Andrew Hardell may readily be imagined.

'I do not believe they have left a trinket at home,' the former had remarked in the drawing-room. 'If only one were over-dressed it would not matter so much; but behold them all, pearls and rubies, and amethysts and solid gold! And it is to see their squaws thus arrayed, and to come to such gatherings as this, that men toil and scheme, and go up by omnibus every day, and live and move and have their being in the City. Give me rather the "modest chop," and the traditional pot of beer, and people who can talk of something else than "shop" on the one side of the house, and babies and servants on the other. There are some decent fellows here to-night, but you will see the gloom of the dinner and the age of the wine damp their conversational ardour. Men cannot talk to one another with a fat woman or a silent girl intervening. I wish they would have the female element separately. There, I knew you would have to take her down, and I wish you joy of your companion.'

Those were the days of heavy dinners, of huge turbots, of saddles of mutton, of prime turkeys, of indigestible puddings. The 'banquet' style of repast was not then dreamed of, and in the hospitable formula of the time, you 'saw your dinner,' which indeed was inevitable unless you were stone blind.

It was not any easier to talk at that period of the world's history, when the eye wandered over joints, and poultry, and an epergne filled with all sorts of eatables, than it is now to plunge

into the conversational abyss amongst flowers, six oranges, almonds and raisins, and an expanse of plates with nothing on them—but suddenly, and to the surprise of every one around the board, Andrew Hardell essayed that feat.

He did it in desperation. All of a sudden, spite of the wax lights, spite of the jewels, spite of the servants, spite of the men and the women about him to his right and to his left and over the way, there had come upon him a vision of that road to New Abbey, of the pelting rain, of the body lying stiff and stark by the wayside.

Afterwards he remembered well enough that it was a bracelet worn by his neighbour which set his mind off on that unwelcome journey.

It was a curious sort of bracelet—a twisted thing of gold, with two snakes' heads rearing themselves up—studded all over with precious stones; and he had often beheld a similar pleasing ornament on Mrs Challerson's wrist in the days that were but recent, and yet that seemed to him so far away.

Backwards and forwards his mind shifted from the gloomy road to the evening at Dumfries when he heard his fate decided. He was away from the room and the assembled company—he was wandering beside the Solway—he was sitting alone in his cell at Kirkcudbright, when suddenly he lifted his eyes and found those of a man opposite fixed curiously upon him.

Then he drank off his wine, which had stood untasted beside him, and when the butler filled the glass again he again lifted and emptied it. After that he struck into the conversation, if such it could be called, and talked; and thereupon whatever mental flint there was in the room, striking against his steel, produced fire, and the ladies, unaccustomed to such proceedings, looked at each other, and Mr Creaff, who really was better than his surroundings, listened, delighted to find that at length his social *beau idéal* was partially realized.

For with some trouble he had picked a few intellectual men to meet his son-in-law and Andrew Hardell; and at one period of the evening he had feared his attempt was going to prove a failure. Each person who could talk was afraid to break through the decorous dulness, the subdued commonplaces that were considered the 'correct thing' at The Pines; and though George Trelwyn tried a few light remarks, yet they produced little or no effect, as a weak voice—sweet though it may be—dies away and is lost in a large and lofty room.

When, however, in sheer desperation—not at the conventional stupidity, but in order to escape from his own miserable me-

mories—Andrew Hardell took the leap, others followed his lead, and he found himself talking, arguing, repeating anecdotes, to his own subsequent amazement, and to the infinite pleasure of his host.

'What a shame for you not to go more into society,' Mr Creaff remarked, as they went into the drawing-room, where were assembled young men and maidens, who had come to dance the old year out and the new year in. 'I shall never take "no" from you again;' whilst even over tea and coffee the conversation was continued and kept up, though the dancers whirled round and round, and occasionally, to Andrew's unaccustomed senses, the room seemed turning round likewise.

Just at the stroke of twelve, Mr Creaff flung wide the hall-door, and the guests trooped down to welcome the new year's entrance.

'May the new year be a happy one to us all,' cried out George Trelwyn, in his cheery voice.

'Amen,' answered Andrew Hardell, but as he spoke there was not a creature present, save Mr Trelwyn, who guessed what the past year had wrought for him.

And under the starlight he walked home, muttering to himself—

'It won't do—it will not. I must never go out to meet my fellow-creatures on equal terms again.'

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW A LARK DIED.

Days grew into weeks, weeks counted themselves by months, and still Andrew Hardell adhered to the resolution he made on New Year's Eve, when pacing, under the starlight, home.

For a man situated as he was he felt there could be no safety save in obscurity. Not for him the way over the mountain peak, over the green hill top, but rather the monotonous lowland path through the plains of life, the route where the track of his footsteps would attract no notice from his fellows.

For others the gay promenade, the brilliantly-lighted thoroughfares, the friendly greeting, the attention of the passers-by, but for him the back streets and the most obscure alleys, the narrow

lanes, and the quiet courts, where there were none to ask him who he was or whence he came.

All that in the earlier days he had dreamed of achieving could never now, he felt, be won by him with safety. If he climbed high, it would only be that his fall might be the greater; if he let men grasp his hand in cordial friendship, he should only he knew feel their averted heads and cold looks all the more keenly at a future period; if he grew famous as a preacher, nothing could save him from being thrust forth from his office with obloquy when the past became revealed.

For the second time in his career, he had chosen and chosen wrongly. As at New Abbey, he decided to put his trust in his own skill, in his own cleverness, so in London he had blindly adopted a plan which contained within itself every element of failure.

'Better to have earned my bread in the sweat of my brow,' he often thought, 'than to be the living lie I am. Better anything than this wretched, desolate, lonely existence.'

And then he would chide himself for murmuring, feeling he ought to be thankful God had given him bread to eat, and a roof to cover him, and His work to do—the work he had always longed for. Yes, but then he had not bargained to perform it in utter solitude.

To Mr Creaff, the Curate was an utter enigma. That any man—more especially one who had to make his way in the world—should voluntarily exile himself from the social delights of The Pines, was to the owner thereof a standing miracle.

'Even in a pounds, shillings, and pence view, I do not understand it,' remarked Mr Creaff to his wife; and Mrs Creaff, from the depths of an arm-chair, and the exciting perusal of a religious novel, professed herself unable to assist her husband's comprehension.

'I will make one more trial,' continued that gentleman, 'and then, if he persist in his determination, let him alone.'

'I should not make any more trials,' said Mrs Creaff, 'and I should let him alone now.'

But Mr Creaff was not to be deterred from his purpose, and accordingly he once again pressed the hospitalities of The Pines on Andrew Hardell's acceptance, only again to be assured by the Curate of his deep regret at seeming so ungracious and unsociable, 'but he could not mix in society.'

'It unfits me for what I have to do,' went on Mr Hardell, 'and my work with me is paramount.'

'It won't do,' said Mr Creaff, unconsciously repeating the

very words Andrew had uttered as he walked home, with the quiet stars looking down upon him; 'it will not do. No man was ever intended to lead the life of a hermit, whether in Essex Marsh or in any place else, but you may try the experiment.'

For which gracious permission, delivered whilst Mr Creaff stood in the Curate's library, brushing his hat meditatively with his hand, Andrew Hardell felt himself, as in duty bound, truly grateful, and he went on trying his experiment until, at last, even Mr Creaff thought he must find it answer.

As for the Miss Creaffs, they attributed the Curate's conduct to an utter absence of all good taste and all grateful feeling. Mrs Creaff was rather rejoiced than otherwise, for she did not care about people who talked well, who shot conversationally beyond her and her acquaintance; further, she could not avoid being pleased that the Sunday-morning drives to Essex Marsh were discontinued; she disliked taking the carriage and horses into such a low neighbourhood, and there can be no question but that with all her piety Mrs Creaff thought there was very little use in going to church unless people in her own rank were there to see her.

To what end stiff silks and the latest Parisian bonnets, if not one appreciative and discriminating soul were within the building? What good purpose could it serve to take all the girls to Essex Marsh, when clearly Mr Hardell did not want to marry even one of them? And when that was settled—supposing he did—would he be a desirable husband?

Mrs Creaff opined not—spite of the Sir Hubert connection, the talents her husband spoke of so highly, and the possibility of his making his way up in the Church—the lady decided that she knew many young men she, in her maternal capacity, would welcome much more warmly than Andrew Hardell.

She had never felt quite at her ease with George Trelwyn, and she looked upon the Curate's conversational cleverness as rather an aggravated form of a very bad and dangerous disease, with which in a milder form her son-in-law was afflicted.

'Those sort of people,' observed Mrs Creaff—and by those sort of people, it may be here remarked, the lady meant men and women possessed of any minds at all—'have a way of saying most annoying things;' and as if to prove the truth of this assertion, George Trelwyn, out of pure mischief, started the idea that pride was the sole reason why Andrew Hardell refused to visit.

'Not having anything to be proud of myself'—(this was one of Mr Trelwyn's frequent statements which vexed Mrs Creaff's

spirit, because if he had nothing to be proud of, why should they, the Creaffs, have been desirous of the alliance?)—'not having anything to be proud of myself, I cannot comprehend the feeling; but you may depend upon it, all the Hardells are alike. High and mighty, both to their equals and to those a little below them—they are courtesy itself to the poor. I am quite sure Sir Hubert Hardell's manner is much more genial to his groom than it is to me, and there can be little doubt but that Hardell in Essex Marsh has a higher respect for, and appreciation of, ladies who take in mangling, and gentlemen who sell chickweed, than you, sir, entertain for the banker of Israel himself.'

I wish, George,' remonstrated Mr Creaff, 'you would refrain from scoffing at people who are worthy both of respect and admiration.'

'I assure you,' was the reply, 'no one can have a higher appreciation of wealth, and the ability to acquire wealth, than I. Have I not said a hundred times over—if not from the pulpit, at least in private—"Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," for money is the god of this world, and a banker's ledger is the temporal Book of Life. Well is it for him, and happy shall he be, to whose credit there shall appear shekels of gold and shekels of silver, for the people shall praise his name, and his horn shall be exalted.'

'George, you are profane,' said Mr Creaff.

'I hope not,' his son-in-law answered; and there ensued an awkward pause, which was broken by Mrs Trelwyn saying that she wondered what Mr Hardell had to be proud of.

'A good deal,' her husband replied. 'For one thing, he has reason to be proud of having formed a resolution and kept to it.'

'I do not see any especial merit in that,' observed Mrs Creaff. 'He would not have formed the resolution had he not wished to lead a hermit's life. For my part, I cannot think people ought to be praised for doing what they like.'

'And who is the happy individual that can do what he likes?'

'Why, Mr Hardell for one,' answered Mrs Creaff, in a tone which clearly implied that had she spoken all her thoughts she would have added, 'And you for another.'

But did Andrew Hardell like his life? Oh! ye men and women who read this story, out of the length, and breadth, and depth of your own human experiences—answer.

Does the poor wretch doomed to the treadmill enjoy his labours? Does the clerk, compelled to trudge into the City every day, whether the sun be shining or a November fog wraps St Paul's round with a wet mantle of mist, consider his lot a

more enviable one than that of the young fellow who has his hacks and his hunters, his yacht, his hounds, his town house, his country seat, and leisure to enjoy the pleasantness of the land wherein his lot has been cast? Does the girl-governess, slaving away, hour after hour and year after year, feel that hers is a happier fate than has been assigned to the fashionable young ladies who have nothing to do, save to look pretty and amuse themselves? When carriages roll past, and fair equestrians, squired by devoted cavaliers, canter under the shade of arching trees, or gallop over the green sward by the road-side, is it to be supposed that those who go afoot in all cases thank Heaven they have been preserved from the temptations of wealth, from the pomps and vanities of this wicked world? And, in like manner, when a man is so placed that, as was the case with Andrew Hardell, he is debarred from all hope of home, of wife, of child, of friends, of even ordinary social intercourse, it cannot be expected he shall contemplate the, to him, barren plains of life with unvarying equanimity—that he shall not have his dark hours when the sun is obscured and the moon gives no light, when in silence and solitude he wrestles with the despair of his own heart, and feels that the anguish he has to bear all alone is more than he can bear.

To understand the utter hopelessness of such a life as Andrew Hardell's, a man must almost have past through a similar experience himself.

Had there been any chance of his position improving as time went by, had there been any given term at the end of which his probation must terminate, he could have endured it better; but so far as he was able to see, nothing, except death, could deliver him.

If he left Essex Marsh and went abroad, he must still be either a hypocrite or solitary amongst his fellows. He had elected to play a game without counting the cost—and here was the result. Better all they could have done to him. Better the long imprisonment. Better the incredulity of counsel and judge. Better, he sometimes thought in his despair, even the sea of upturned faces, and the swift leap from time into eternity, than this living death—this hopeless, loneless, friendless existence.

'Lord, I accept,' he was wont sometimes to murmur when his anguish overpowered him, 'but as Thou hast given me this burden, give me also the strength to endure it;' and then he would go out amongst the outcast and the miserable, and feel that strength had come to him and would be continued to the end.

The changing seasons brought with them but little variety to

Essex Marsh. There the approach of spring was heralded not by buds peeping up in the woods or nestling in the hedgerows, but by bundles of early rhubarb and bunches of young onions in the costermongers' barrows.

Into mean, narrow, foul-smelling streets and lanes the summer sun poured his beams, while the full glory of flowers and foliage was represented by fuchsias and geraniums in pots, which were carried about in baskets on men's heads, and bartered not for money as a rule, but for old clothes and shoes. Birds there were in Essex Marsh that had never of their own free will come thither —birds in cages, that pined and broke their hearts for longing memories of the trees and fields they were never to see more.

To Andrew Hardell, with his own personal and peculiar recollections, there was something unutterably sad in the songs of those poor prisoners; and one lark in especial, who was wont to stand looking up at the sky and singing fit to burst his throat, filled his soul with a mournful compassion of which I could give no adequate description.

His way led him continually past the bird—a new comer into the neighbourhood—and his eyes never fell upon it that he did not think of those who, by the waters of Babylon, sat down and wept, hanging their harps upon the willows, and refusing to sing the songs of their rejoicing, in captivity, and in a strange land.

At last he could bear the strain no longer, and bought the lark.

'Not,' said the owner thereof, 'that I want any money from you for it, sir, for you are heartily welcome to it; but since you are so kind—thank you, sir—and I am sure I hope it will do well with you; and shall Johnny take it round to the house, sir?'

'No,' he answered. 'If Johnny will carry it out for me to the foot-bridge across the Lea at Upper Clapton, I will meet him there at four o'clock, and give him sixpence for himself.'

'I am sure, sir, there is no need for that, after paying so handsome, too,' on hearing which speech Johnny's face fell.

'Oh! but this is a different matter altogether,' Mr Hardell answered, whereat the boy's heart rejoiced within him.

'Whatever can he be a-going to do with it?' the woman marvelled, when once her visitor's back was turned. 'I wonder if he's intending to make a present of it to Miss Creaff.'

'And I wonder,' added Johnny, 'if he's a-going bird-catching;' but neither mother nor son ever knew what Mr Hardell wanted with the lark, for once arrived at the bridge, he took the cage from the boy, gave him his sixpence, and crossed over the Lea.

It was a lovely summer's afternoon, with scarcely a breath of

air stirring; before him were the green marshlands stretching off towards the pleasant lanes round Walthamstow and Snaresbrook; on the Lea pleasure boats were flitting up and down; seated on the banks were those eternal anglers who fish there at all times of the day and at all seasons of the year; on the Middlesex side the heights of Clapton rose, covered with trees and dotted with houses —'The Pines' amongst them—he could see a black dog in the water swimming about after a stick which his master had thrown in. For a moment Andrew Hardell stood still, looking at all these things, and his heart drank in the peace of the scene and the glory of the summer's day; then he turned and went on till he had left all behind—the gleaming river and the painted boats, the dog, the anglers, the bridge, and the idlers on the banks. Once he was well into the Marshes, he left the regular path and walked over the grass, which seemed elastic under his tread, and when he was away from every one, utterly alone, he lay down upon the sward, and looked at the lark before giving the bird its liberty.

There were the poor accessories of its prison-house—the bit of turf, in lieu of the wide expanse of meadow and corn-field, of upland and valley; the cup for water, the chopped meat, and in the bottom of its cage stood the lark itself, gazing with bright, intelligent eyes on the man whose thoughts had travelled back to Kirkcudbright jail, and the days and weeks he had passed there, longing to be free, if it were only for a moment, recalling, with a sickening despair, the beauty of land and water, of hill and dale.

Slowly he undid the fastening, and opened the door, but the bird made no effort to escape; then he took it in his hand, and felt the poor little heart beating with fear, fluttering in a very access of terror.

Though now, when it was his own, he felt almost loth to part with the bird, he still slowly unclosed his fingers, and left it free to depart. For a moment the creature stood quiet, with the warm summer air stirring its feathers. In the first days of its captivity it had fluttered up and down its little cage, and beaten and bruised itself against the wires, but it had got stupid with imprisonment, and could not immediately comprehend that this meant freedom.

Even this Andrew recollected he had felt when he passed forth into the darkness at Dumfries; and moved by the same subtle sympathy which had already brought him so far from Essex Marsh, in order to set a captive free, not amongst bricks and mortar, but in the midst of fields and nature, he would have kissed the bird, but that as he stooped his head to do so, the lark spread his wings and soared up—up—higher and higher still—pouring out such a song as Andrew Hardell thought he had never heard before—full

of such passionate notes, such ecstatic trills, such rejoicing melody, as brought tears into the eyes of the listener.

But suddenly the song ceased, and the bird came fluttering down again. With an instant comprehension the man rose to his feet, and watched the feeble, uncertain reeling flight, during which the lark beat the air with his wings, as one drowning might strike the waters.

It tried to rise again, it strove to fly across from side to side, but, spite of all it could do, sank lower and lower, till at length Andrew, following to where it fell, found it dead on the ground.

Gone to him seemed the glory of the summer's day—gone the beauty of tree, and water, and distance with the purple tint lying upon it—gone the feeling, half of delight, half of sorrow, with which he had listened to the bird's song.

He had thought to make the creature so happy, and behold its first flight back into freedom had killed it; he had meant to change its song, which always previously seemed to him like a lamentation, into one of rejoicing, and it might never pour forth another note of melody again.

He made a resting-place for it in the middle of a little tuft of grass, and after a time turned his steps slowly homeward, dimly comprehending that there was a fitness about the little tragedy, and that even for him there might come before he died, if only for a moment, such a rapturous sense of freedom, such a tumult of happiness as had prompted the lark's song, and filled its heart with such a passion of rejoicing that it broke in trying to express.

CHAPTER XXII.

COMPREHENSION.

Winter was almost gone—the second winter of Andrew Hardell's residence in Essex Marsh—when news came to the Vicarage that Mr Trelwyn proposed returning to England. It was his son who brought the tidings, which of course he communicated in his own airy fashion.

'As to what my respected parent designs with regard to the future of this delightful parish, I have not the remotest idea,' he finished, 'whether he intends to do the whole of the duty, or rather neglect the whole of the duty, himself, or not, it is impos-

sible for me even to conjecture. The whole of his letter is mysterious and non-explanatory. He wants the house done up—papered, painted, and beautified, inside and out; he desires that the garden be put into order, and all sorts of seeds that will certainly never come up, sown. He requests that the jessamine be trained over the porch, and that the well-being of the sun-dial be attended to likewise. He suggests further that the condition of the library be seen to, and his books properly arranged, as he considers he has some very valuable works amongst them; not I am sure that he can know that from ever having perused their contents—in short, Hardell, there are so many things to be done, and so short a time to do them in, that I am fairly puzzled. At first I was undecided as to whether he had come into a fortune or gone mad, but as in the former case he would never return to Essex Marsh, I am compelled to conclude he is insane. Oh! another thing he particularly requests, is that you will not consider it necessary to leave the house; in this matter, however, you will of course please yourself. For my part, I do not care to be poisoned with the smell of paint, but tastes differ. I certainly should like to know what the reason may be for this sudden amount of energy.'

'Perhaps one of your sisters is about to be married, and that Mr Trelwyn desires the wedding should take place from here.'

'My dear fellow, that remark proves first you are given to sentimentality, and secondly that you have never seen my parents. They detest Essex Marsh, and my mother is one of those practical people who, if a marriage were impending, would sacrifice the victims on the horns of the nearest and most convenient altar.'

'In that case, then, perhaps Mr Trelwyn is going to effect an exchange.'

'You are right. I wonder the idea never occurred to me. An exchange must be the brilliant project which he has conceived, and if such prove to be the fact, and that he succeed in his object, it may make some difference to you. The new comer may be an energetic individual, inclined to dispense with assistance, or he may have a son, or a son-in-law, or a pet curate ready to his hand. If you leave here, Hardell, either through choice or necessity, promise me one thing—that you will come and help me.'

'I cannot,' was the reply; 'there is no man living with whom I could work so heartily as yourself, or whose friendship I prize so highly as yours; but it cannot be.'

'Why?' asked George Trelwyn.

'Do not you know?'

'I may guess, though I fail to see the reasonableness of your objection.'

'Then you have not guessed the true cause of my objection,' said Andrew, hurriedly, and the words seemed forced from him by a power beyond his own control; 'and yet I am sure I am not mistaken, for I have read, or at all events thought I read, a comprehension of my position in your eyes a hundred times. No, I am not going to tell you anything, because so long as I do not tell you, all you suspect is only suspicion; but we know, you and I, that you have not used your knowledge to crush me. I thank you from my soul.'

And the Curate seized George Trelwyn's hand, and wrung it, while the other answered—

'What I suspect, what I have always suspected, is as safe with me as with yourself; but if you would only let me help you, only do something to enable you to get from under this cloud. You make me wretched, Hardell. Before God I pity you, as I never pitied any other human being before—often and often after leaving you in this desolate wretched house, I have felt that I must turn back and tell you I know your secret, and that you should give up your lonely life, and face the light, even if the light brought sorrow with it.'

'Do not let us talk about the matter any more,' Andrew Hardell said, gently. 'I cannot bear it. There is nothing to be done—nothing which you or any other human being can do that can make a better thing of my life now. I did not think the life would be so hard to live; but we must live whatever life is appointed for us, and bear the burden as best we are able.'

'But why bear it at all?' George Trelwyn persisted.

'That was settled before you and I ever met,' was the reply, 'and there is nothing but bearing now left to me.'

'But do you mean to say that no friend standing beside and backing you up, no inquiry, no explanation of circumstances—'

'I mean all that and more,' Andrew Hardell answered. 'I mean that every trouble I have borne and still have to bear, has been brought on me through over-confidence in myself, through too great a belief in my own abilities, in being too sure of getting out of trouble for myself.'

'Ah!' said George Trelwyn, inquiringly.

'If I had only left things as they were—had I only been content and had faith that God would not forsake, I need not have been standing here to-day, a nameless, friendless man.'

'Not friendless,' interrupted the other, kindly.

'Yes, so far as this, that I dare not drag a friend into my

sorrow with me—that I must stand alone, and live alone, and work alone, and die alone.'

'Are you quite certain,' asked George Trelwyn, 'that you are not now erring through over-confidence in your capability of doing all this? Do you not think it would be better if you told me the whole story right through from beginning to end, and gave me the chance of both advising and helping you?'

'I do not,' was the reply.

'You know best,' said the other, 'or at least you believe you know best, and I cannot press you on to a confidence which might certainly prove both useless and distasteful to you; yet still remember what I say, if the day ever come, no matter at how distant a date, when you have cause to change your opinion, when you want just that sort of help which some time or other every man requires, and may claim from his fellow, come to me. You have not travelled far into your life yet, and you cannot tell at what precise point in the journey you may need assistance. Will you promise?'

'Yes,' answered Andrew; 'I promise that if ever I want any help from man I will ask it from you first, before applying to any other.'

'You say that, my dear friend, because you never expect to need it from any one; but your promise is binding all the same,' George Trelwyn answered; and then the subject was dropped, and the pair went on to speak about the best manner of having the Vicarage put into thorough and immediate order.

'If you will undertake the whole business,' said George Trelwyn, 'I shall feel most grateful. You will manage it a great deal better than I could, and for about one-half the money; and as the old gentleman has probably not got any bird actually in his hand as yet, it may be well, considering the funds are to be provided by myself, to proceed, at first, economically. I imagine, from his letter, that he only purposes returning to England, at least with the light you have thrown on the matter I should think so; however, he will doubtless condescend ere long to communicate his views and projects more fully. So you had better have in the whitewashers at once, and get the worst of the mess over.'

Which commission Andrew very thankfully accepted. To be able to give employment was his ideal of present happiness; and ere long he soon had the house in sufficiently good order to meet with Mr Trelwyn's approval on his return.

'You have done it admirably, sir,' said the gentleman, 'and I thank you; but this is not the only obligation you have placed me under. Never was a parish better managed than you have

managed mine during my absence. My only regret is, that if I effect the exchange I am contemplating, I shall be unable to retain your services. If the income permitted, I should esteem it a privilege to do so.'

On the strength of which the Curate ventured to ask him when he thought the affair would be settled. 'Pardon me, if I seem impertinent,' he apologized; 'but I have no private means, and——'

'I will tell you all about it,' answered Mr Trelwyn, with something of his son's frankness; and there and then he did tell Andrew how he had met abroad a clergyman, rector of a little living down in the West of England, who was desirous of moving nearer to London.

'He is a bachelor, a bookworm, and a bigot,' explained Mr Trelwyn. 'For all of which reasons he does not get on particularly well with any of the county gentry or their wives. He considers matrimony a folly; religion an affair of long services and mortifying the flesh; and he views balls and archery meetings, and all such amusements, as below the dignity of man, to say nothing of man having an immortal soul. Hearing all this, I said, "My dear sir, I have girls who like society, and a living I wish to exchange. Supposing you bring your books up to Essex Marsh—as you say you would prefer any cave in London to a palace in the country; and if I think well of your location, I will move my family there. I cannot live in London, and yet, under present circumstances, it is difficult for me to manage to live out of it. Will you think the matter over, and come to some decision about it on your return to England?"

'That is the exact position of affairs at the present moment,' finished Mr Trelwyn, 'and whenever I hear anything more about the affair I shall not fail to tell you.'

And, indeed, reticence being the last thing of which the Trelwyn family could be accused, Andrew had no cause to complain of lack of confidence. Every letter Mr Trelwyn received on the subject was exhibited to the Curate; every time he saw the West of England rector's lawyers he communicated the gist of the whole interview to Andrew Hardell.

'I am quite sure he will want to keep you on,' said Mr Trelwyn one day; 'but whether you will care to stay is quite another matter. To give the—I mean,' added Mr Trelwyn, hastily correcting the very easy sentence he had been about to utter—'I mean, to give him his due, he is a gentleman; and as he and you are sure to have the same views about marriage and so forth, you might, perhaps stable your horses together. At all events, you

might, I think, do worse than try how you would like it for a time—and you know the place and the people, and so forth, and seem to have got attached to the parish.'

Had he? Andrew could have enlightened Mr Trelwyn on this point, but he did not care to do so; and that gentleman wandered on to ask:—

'By the way, have you ever heard anything about that unfortunate friend of yours who got himself into trouble? What is he doing, and where is he?'

'Abroad, some place,' was the answer, after a moment's pause, which Andrew needed in order to steady his voice, 'but where I do not know. I have never heard from him since he left England.'

'What made me ask you is, that a person I was talking to just before my return to England told me he had met him in the Strand, that he could not for the moment recollect who he was, though he remembered his face perfectly, and that when he turned to follow and speak to him, he was out of sight.'

'I think he must have been mistaken,' Andrew answered. 'At least, I was not aware of his return.'

'Sad thing for a man entering life,' said Mr Trelwyn, meditatively. 'Such utter shipwreck to his prospects. He was engaged to be married, also, to his Vicar's daughter, was he not? And that reminds me Mr Forster must be dead, for I see an old college chum of mine has got his living—not much of a thing, to be sure, but the man married an heiress, and has some property of his own besides, so it does not much signify to him. Rather a pretty place, is it not? Somebody told me so, but I am sure I now forget who.'

'Yes, it is a very pretty place,' the Curate answered; and then feeling that just then he could endure the probe no longer, unconsciously though it was used, he made some excuse to leave the room, and seizing his hat, went out for a cheerful walk through the streets and lanes of Essex Marsh.

Too much news had come upon him too suddenly. He felt as if he were suffocating—as if he must be quiet and utterly alone for a time; and so, because he really had no other refuge, nowhere else to go, he went, after pacing over filthy pavements, and through swarms of children, to the sexton, from whom he got the keys of the church.

It was a wet, wretched day in the early spring, and the blackened, dreary gravestones and dilapidated monuments looked to his eyes more sad and pitiful than ever. It seemed to him in a vague sort of way a hard thing that the dead should be lying in

such an unlovely spot—that the long sleep should have to be taken in so desolate a bed—and his thoughts flew back to Langmore, and the grave where he knew Mr Forster must have been buried; and still in that dull, stupid, dreamy state in which strong impressions nevertheless frequently take hold of us, he hoped that when his time came, he should not be buried in any town churchyard, but left to take his rest where flowers might grow, and the birds sing near the place where he was laid.

But, as I have said, all this was then vague and shadowy—he was too much agitated to be able to think connectedly on any subject, and it was not until he had sat for a long time on the steps leading up to the communion rails, with his head buried in his hands, and his mind wandering hither and thither, that he could quite understand what had come to him.

When, however, he came to analyze the matter, he found that the whole business amounted to this—he had been seen and recognized; by whom he feared to ask: Mr Forster was dead, and Madge no doubt far away from Langmore.

He could not endure to think of it; when he pictured the dear old home tenanted by strangers, the familiar room filled with people who had neither part nor parcel in the cherished memories of his soul, the man's heart felt almost as though it was breaking. In recollection he paced once more the garden walks, he trod each room, he lingered by the seat Madge had herself occupied, he touched the flowers her hands had arranged, he recalled her pretty figure, as she glided in and out of the old-fashioned parlour, always busy, always useful—always doing something in her quiet way to make those about her happy; and then he thought of the old-fashioned arm-chair, whose occupant was gone for ever, of the dear home with no Madge in it, of all the love and all the trust she had given him, of her tenderness neglected, her faith unwatered, her letter unanswered, her affection disregarded.

'I ought to have made some reply to that letter,' he murmured, and then he bowed his head on his hands, and wept silently.

For the man was lonely and desolate beyond description, and his heart went out towards the girl who was, for aught he knew to the contrary, as lonely and desolate as himself.

Afterwards, when from the eminence of experience he reviewed the events of his life—as one standing on a hill can see the windings of the road by which he has ascended thither—Andrew Hardell knew that the day on which he heard of Mr Forster's death, on which he sat in the church and thought of that old home—home no longer—home never more to be—was, after a fashion, the second turning-point in his existence.

He was not aware of the fact then, but when the changes which were on that day all to come, had become realities—when the chances, that were still problematical, had woven and shaped themselves into important portions of his career—he understood from the hour when he heard of the events recently enacted at Langmore, there came to him a full comprehension that the stream of his own life could not flow on for ever as it had done—that all the wreckers, all the rapids, all the flowers on the banks, all the green meadows, were not surely past; that he must encounter fresh troubles, be exposed to new temptations, have to struggle and suffer yet more fiercely before the end.

Vaguely, it is true, but yet surely, knowledge came to him, that no man while he has still breath in his body may say:—'My life is behind. I exist, certainly, but the drama has been acted on my stage, and can never be performed there again!'

How we must go forward, whether we will or no—to live in fresh places, to see new people, to form new friendships, to love and be loved, to hate and be hated, to wrong and be wronged, to repent and to forgive.

While we believe we are walking on of our own free choice—that we are selecting our lots—necessity is driving us all the time, and scoffing to think that we, with the bits in our mouths, and the world's collar on our necks, and the reins firmly grasped in other hands, can cheat ourselves into the delusion that we are perfectly free agents, that we are going our own way, even when the whip of the taskmaster is laid upon us.

This man, whose story has been so far told, had elected to lead a certain life, to follow a stated course; so far he believed he had proceeded in strict accordance with the plan thus sketched out, and that, excepting in dining once at The Pines, and becoming somewhat friendly with George Trelwyn, he had never once stepped aside from the path previously determined upon; and yet, as I have before said, when in after years he came to review the events of his existence, he found he had but been walking on to meet his fate—to be taught what love really meant—not such love as he felt, through all time, for Madge Forster—but that love which fills a man's heart with sunshine and darkens it with despair, that love which has never yet been described, though poets and romancers have written about it, and which never will be described, though a thousand and a thousand poets and romancers yet unborn make the attempt.

And the sluggish stream of his life at Essex Marsh was along bearing him forward to troubled pools, where he was to fathom the very depths of human remorse, not such remorse as he had felt

for a blow struck at random, but passionate remorse, which stretched him as on a rack, and made all the sorrows of his previous experience seem poor and tame by comparison with what he then endured.

Vaguely, dimly he felt these shadows coming towards him, as he sat in the church, while the darkness closed around him, and the day drew to a close. Thinking of the changes which had occurred, the comprehension dawned upon him that change must ultimately be the order of his future life.

Already the existence to which he once fancied time could bring no alteration was passing away, the old actors were about to depart as former actors had departed before them, and though he could see neither the faces nor the forms of those who were to take their place, he could hear their footsteps sounding down the corridors, at the end of which he stood.

They were coming to him—coming with the weal and the woe, the joy and the sorrow of his life.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHANGE.

Some persons are peculiarly fortunate in the friends they meet with. Give to them the roughest and most unlikely road, they yet manage to pick up pleasant companions, friends by the way, and all this without apparently any desire or effort on their own part, without that seeking for sympathy and that wish for intimate association frequently noticeable in the manners of those who are yet left to plod along in solitude, or whose society is merely tolerated on account of the worldly goods they possess.

Why this should be so we cannot tell. We simply see the fact; and though we cry 'Unjust, Unfair,' not all our profound remarks and exhaustive observations can alter it. There is reason in the roasting of eggs, though our own limited knowledge both of cookery and chemistry may prevent our accepting the axiom; and in like manner there is some principle of eternal justice—if we could only find out what it is—underlying the popularity that we grudgingly admit is achieved by those men and women who are, in our impartial opinion, greatly overrated.

Nice, quiet, domesticated girls, as the commendatory phrase-

goes, as well as beautiful, fashionable, accomplished belles, go to their graves without a chance of changing their state, unless, indeed, they like to accept some perfectly objectionable individual; and while they stand wondering what it all means, up comes some woman too undesirable to be thought even worthy of jealousy, who yet strews the macadamized roads of her life with broken hearts, and regards them as of no more consequence than the bad 'metal' with which we repair our highways.

Most estimable men, mothers' darlings—and 'braves' in the eyes of their admiring squaws—make few friends, get little help when evil days fall upon them, receive scant pity while limping along foot-sore and weary, and it is not to be wondered at if they sometimes curse not only their own evil fate but also the objectionable young man ahead, who has been doing ill all the days of his life, and yet to whom men are ever ready to stretch out a cordial hand—for whom there is at morning and noontide, and when the evening is closing, the cheery smile, the shouted welcome, the friendly grasp which shall send him on his way lighter-hearted.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, it does seem hard, but the hardness is only in seeming, most likely, after all. Far as he went astray, the prodigal son was evidently a much more agreeable young man than his prudent brother; and no doubt that father, of whose pathetic welcome few can read quite steadily, recognized not merely the fact of the lost being found, and the dead being alive, but also the circumstance that, taking him as a whole, he was a more desirable companion than the other who had remained with him always.

There are little differences of manner, feeling, intellect, hard to describe and yet easy to feel, which tend to make one man more esteemed than his neighbour, but if you inquire too closely what these differences are, and why they should exist, we are at once carried from the land of reality into that of speculation.

The greatest satirist, the wisest humorist, the finest novelist of our time, in some one of his works promulgates the idea that the world is but a looking-glass which reflects back whatever face we turn to it—and this theory is no doubt correct to a certain extent—only, friends, there are mirrors and mirrors—the flattering one wherein Beauty and Wealth beholds herself reflected, and the three-cornered bit of glass that serves Bill Jones's purpose, and is about all the gilding and quicksilver likely ever to come in his way.

After all, this is what people complain of; not that their own faces are ugly and distorted, but that the world's looking-glass

is untrue, that it is unequal and given to favouritism—to making gods of men not according to their deserts, but its own fancy—to taking up one and casting down another, with the utmost indifference to individual opinions, and disregard of individual feelings.

Which preamble is merely intended to make intelligible the fact that Andrew Hardell found his lot under Mr Dayntree no more irksome than his sole charge had been. As a rule, perhaps, the lots of curates do not fall in pleasant places; it is the three-cornered bit of bad glass that the world thinks good enough for them; but with Andrew Hardell the case proved different.

The mirror life held towards him was good, and though the face it reflected might not be a happy one, he still had enough sense left to refrain from making its expression more wretched, by frown, or scowl, or sneer.

He accepted—nay, more, he was grateful, and accordingly he and Mr Dayntree—the dreaded new Vicar—got on admirably together, so admirably that the latter begged Mr Hardell not to think of leaving the Vicarage for the present.

'There are no desirable lodgings in Essex Marsh,' remarked Mr Dayntree, 'and the house is large enough for two unmarried men, who have no thought save how best to serve God,' to which remark Andrew, as in duty bound, listened with humility. If his new Vicar had singular ideas on the subject of serving God, it was not for him to express his opinions. If the whole duty of man in Mr Dayntree's eyes consisted in an austere life and daily services, it would have been mere presumption on the part of his Curate to correct his convictions.

Providing Andrew did what he desired, he left him at liberty to do anything else he might consider necessary. There was no vexatious interference on the one side; no rearing of his head against constituted authorities on the other. The one man knew himself to be a master without rendering the yoke galling; the other acknowledged himself to be a servant, without any sacrifice of independence, without effecting any compromise either with pride or principle.

He had been before like one left in charge of a house, who when the master returns waits for orders. The master had come and the orders were at first given, till Mr Dayntree found there was no need for him to exert his authority. The servant met him more than half way,—did more than he should ever have dreamt of desiring, not by way of proving himself wiser than his Vicar, but simply because he tried to anticipate his wishes,—and to an indolent man, to a book-worm, to one who loved the discussion

of curious points of doctrine, the searching after rare volumes the comparing of different readings, Andrew's parochial help was invaluable.

It left him conscientious leisure for everything his soul delighted in, but the strain told on Andrew, who fell into bad health, and spite of change and medical advice, became, after eighteen months' trial of Essex Marsh under Dayntree, feeble, purposeless, physically incompetent.

'This won't do, Hardell,' said Mr Dayntree, one morning when the Curate came back from church, looking pale and worn and haggard, 'you will kill yourself if you remain here much longer; I have felt so satisfied on this point for some time past, that I looked about to see what we could do, and the result is this'·

Andrew Hardell took the letter his Vicar handed to him as a finish to the foregoing sentence, and read it over once, twice, thrice, before he perfectly guessed its meaning.

'Did you do this, sir?' at last he broke out. 'Oh! do not think me ungrateful if I say I cannot take it. I would rather stay among my poor people, and do God's work here, even if it be His will that I must die, than go away from Essex Marsh.'

Then Mr Dayntree took his Curate to task, and rated him soundly; told him, though in more Christian language and better rounded periods than mine, that his life and his health were not exactly his own, to make ducks and drakes of; that no man had a right virtually to commit suicide, when strength might be preserved and existence prolonged by change of labour and of scene.

Long the Vicar talked, and hard Andrew pleaded. Had Essex Marsh been Eden, and he Adam, the man could not have prayed more fervently to be permitted to stay in it.

'Were you dissatisfied with me, sir,' he finished, 'of course I could only be sorry and go, but as you are merely sending me away for what you falsely consider my own good, I must beg you to let me remain—unless, indeed, you are dissatisfied.'

'You have said it,' Mr Dayntree retorted. 'I am dreadfully dissatisfied with you, and this is merely a polite ruse of mine, in order to make our parting mutually agreeable. You need not laugh,' he added, noticing that a very ghost of a smile flitted round Andrew's mouth; 'you are not strong enough for my work. I have had your energy, and now, like all other employers, I decline your weakness. Seriously,' he added, suddenly changing his tone, and laying his hand on Andrew's arm, 'you must go; you must leave this work, or it will be too much for you. I have been to blame. I ought either to have done more myself, or had some one to help you. Now I tell you what, if you are so devotedly

attached to rags, and misery, and wretchedness, and the other concomitants of this wretched parish, as to feel broken-hearted at the idea of leaving it, you shall accept this offer for three months, and if at the end of that time you want to come back, well and good; if not, well and good still. Only go—not for a few days, as you have been doing, but for weeks, months, and try whether breathing a different air, leading a different life, mixing among different people, will make you stronger and happier.'

'But if you could only imagine the horror I feel of anything like a public life,' Andrew still remonstrated.

'You should have thought of that before entering the Church,' was the reply; 'and besides, what publicity can there be at St Mark's-by-the-Sea?'

'It is a fashionable watering-place.'

'That is information to me,' Mr Dayntree answered, 'and I thought I knew St Mark's pretty well, too. It is a quiet, stupid little town, excepting in the season, when it is thronged, not with the beautiful and the gay, but with cockneys, who take lodgings on the Esplanade, and drive all round the neighbourhood with about a dozen children packed into a carriage drawn by one horse. If not exactly a tea-and-shrimp paradise, it is only a single step higher in the social scale.

'St Mark's-by-the-Sea,' said George Trelwyn, when shortly afterwards Mr Hardell informed him of his destination. 'Oh! don't I know it well. Not a bad sort of place, to my thinking, when it is not the Snob, and Snobbess, and Snobbling season. We used to be packed off there when we were children, and it seems to me but yesterday that we squirted peas in among the respectabilities of the place, who sat in front of open windows, devouring bread-and-butter and swallowing weak tea, at five o'clock. I know old Thompson always tries to get away in what is considered the height of the season. You are a lucky fellow, and it will do you all the good in the world, and I will come down and look you up.'

'It is a quiet spot, then?'

'Quiet!' George Trelwyn repeated 'my dear fellow, life in Essex Marsh is the wildest dissipation in comparison with what you will find in St Mark's. You get the morning's papers there about ten P.M., and your letters are delivered once a day at three in the afternoon. You order your dinners a week beforehand, and if you eat too much one day, have to feast with Duke Humphrey the next. Yet, withal, I like St Mark's,' finished George Trelwyn; 'dear to me are the memories connected with its fishy shore, with its sandy walks, its low cliffs, its uncivilized people, its tradesmen, who believe in nothing save the squire and dissent;

its shops where, with scarcely one customer a day, you wait an hour to be served; its station, two miles out of the town, its green balconied houses, its picturesque old-fashionedness. So you really are going to St Mark's,—ah! me—ah! me.'

'And why—ah! me?'

'Because I was in love there, and a charm will hang round the broken vase, as Mr Moore says, even though the young woman, with wonderful sense and foresight, declined to have anything to say to your humble servant. I am inclined to think she was right and I was wrong; that we should have made a miserable pair (she has since married a man without an idea beyond "flowers and feathers," from which useful articles he draws his living); but still, when I think of those moonlight walks, those tender conversations—the baggage led me on, remember—something very like sentiment stirs within me. It was not the love, it was not the girl; but it was the time,' concluded George Trelwyn; 'the golden, hopeful time of one's existence, and for the dear sake of that blessed period, I never have remembered, or shall remember, St Mark's save with affection. Go, then, Hardell, and remember my advice,—take it easy, and don't fall in love.'

'There is no danger of that,' the Curate replied.

'Humph!' ejaculated George Trelwyn; 'you are going out into the temptations of a wicked world, my son, and it is my duty to warn you.'

After that the pair parted, and in due time Andrew went down to St Mark's, where, if the expression be not too strong concerning a man whose life was spoilt, he enjoyed himself thoroughly.

He delighted in the blue sea shimmering in the sunshine, in the low, green hills, sloping down to the very water's edge, in the long walks through country lanes and quiet fields, in the easier work, in the more appreciative congregation.

He felt pleased and happy, because, while he had taken something more on, he had still left nothing behind. He was only out for his holiday; the poor in Essex Marsh were his poor still; the Vicarage had not ceased to be his home; the church, where he had so often preached, was soon to be filled with his voice again. He had not left Essex Marsh. Oh, no! he was only resting and gaining strength to resume harder work than ever. He would be with them—his friends; those who were dependent upon him for thought and for kindness long before Christmas—and meantime he was doing good, some good, he trusted, at St Mark's. Curates, as a rule, did not like St Mark's, because there was 'no

society;' but then he did not want society, and accordingly, as I have said, he thoroughly enjoyed his holiday, and returned at the expiration of the three months to Essex Marsh, perfectly strong in his own estimation, and more capable of hard work than ever.

But before the spring had well set in, his health broke up again, and this time the doctors told him he must choose between Essex Marsh and life—between working in some other place and losing the power of working altogether.

Somehow, during the course of those walks by the sea-shore, those solitary rambles through the lanes and across the fields, life had grown sweeter to him; existence seemed a gift better worth treasuring than he had believed it to be in Essex Marsh. Removed from the midst of bricks and mortar, from amongst squalor, and sin, and misery, the man's soul had taken courage enough to ask itself whether any lot appointed by God could be regarded as altogether hopeless—whether it were quite possible, or even quite right, for a man utterly to ignore self, to merge his own identity in the sufferings of his fellows, and because there was a darkened chamber in his own memory, and plenty of rooms with closely-drawn blinds in the world, refuse to go out into the sunshine, and take what joy there still remained in the glittering dewdrops, in the drooping branches, in the ripening corn, in the flowers and fruits, in the rippling streams, in the restless ocean, in the carolling of birds, and the hundred sweet sights and sounds which make God's fair earth so beautiful exceedingly.

He had been morbid, and His Father's gift of 'being' seemed valueless in his eyes; but now he clung to life, and when Mr Dayntree told him he must leave Essex Marsh, and never return to it, even for an occasional visit, he only sighed, and said—

'I suppose I shall find work to do wherever I am, and I will try to believe that wherever I find myself, there my Master means me to be, and will appoint my task.'

Once again Mr Dayntree wrote to his friend at St Mark's-by-the-Sea, but this time that desirable curacy was not vacant.

'There is a poor thing a few miles from here, however, going a-begging,' added the Rector; 'and if Mr Hardell merely wants rest and change, it might answer his purpose to take it. A curate is required for Eclin, where the clergyman is non-resident. Eclin is an outlying village in the parish of Great Garton. There are not a dozen Protestants in it—there is no suitable house for a curate—the pay is miserable, there is no society whatever—there is only one gentleman's place in the neighbourhood—but the air is good, and the country around pretty. It is six miles from here,

five from a station, and three from the sea. If Mr Hardell thinks of it at all, he had better write to the Rev. Samuel Waymer, Garton.'

To Andrew's then fancy, no description could have proved more alluring than that contained in the above letter—peace, green fields, freedom from the presence of his fellow-creatures—the absence of wealth in the parish—the humble home, some poor cottage which he could beautify with flowers, and which should seem in keeping with his lot—men who earned their bread in the sweat of their brow alone, to talk to—pure air, green fields, long quiet solitary walks in the bright summer weather. A hunger and thirst to leave the room where he spent most of his time, grew upon him. He felt if he could but get away, health might once again be his. In his weakness he thought of the strength such a change might give him, and he panted with impatience till the matter was settled, and he on his way to Eclin.

Just as much as he had formerly lamented leaving Essex Marsh, so now in precise proportion he desired to bid it farewell; and when in the spring weather he crawled along the familiar streets to say 'Good-bye and may God bless you' to the people he had lived among and worked for, his only sigh was not that he himself must leave, but that he could not take them all away with him into the country too.

And thus it chanced that on a fine April afternoon he found himself at the St Mark's railway station, inquiring for a conveyance to take him on to Eclin.

While an obliging porter went to order him one from the inn, Andrew stood at the door of the booking-office looking with a certain curiosity at a phaeton drawn by a pair of grey ponies, in which sat a young lady, who had evidently come there to meet some one.

Presently an elderly gentleman appeared and took his place beside the girl. A groom jumped into the seat behind, and in less time than the sentence has taken me to write, the greys were mere specks in the distance.

'A nice pair,' remarked Mr Hardell to the station-master, who had bowed the conveyance off.

'Yes,' was the reply, 'and driven by a nice young lady too, Miss Alton, of Eclin.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

FEMININE.

When the new curate arrived at Eclin, he found that Mr Thompson had accurately described the extent of its accommodation.

There was not a good house in the village. Previous curates had lodged with a Mrs Pryce, who kept *the* shop of the neighbourhood, where she retailed cheese and bacon, tea, eggs, lard, soap, candles, cheap print dresses, needles, cotton, stationery, stamps, sweetmeats, news, and a variety of other articles, too numerous and miscellaneous to mention.

For all these groceries, meats, and other necessaries and elegancies of life, she charged about three hundred per cent. too much; but then she threw the news in gratuitously, and there was nothing, literally nothing—from the number of letters sent up to the Hall, and the different handwritings thereon, to the amount her lodger for the time being ate, or failed to eat, during the day—which was not canvassed in Mrs Pryce's shop between the lady and her admiring customers.

'If you believe me, my dear,' said the widow to Miss Lucy Marland, lady's-maid at the Hall, about a month after Andrew had taken up his abode in the sitting-room, with bed-room opening off it, that Mrs Pryce kept as a sort of city of refuge for curates stranded at Eclin—'if you believe me, my dear, he does not eat enough to satisfy a bird, let alone a Christian; and I am sure he looks perfectly ghostly, as the saying is; and he sleeps with his window that wide open I had to speak about it, and tell him that if so be any thieves was to know it might be dangerous. "Thank you, Mrs Pryce," he says, "but I think if any thieves were about they would not try to steal me—so long as they could get at your cheese and bacon," and then he told me he must soon be leaving me, and that he hoped no one would rob the house before he did so. There's another on' em going. I wonder if ever Eclin will have the same curate again for six months at one time!'

'He bain't a-going to leave,' contradicted a man who came in at this juncture for half a pound of cheese.

'But I tell you he said them identical words to me,' the widow persisted. '"I must soon be leaving you, Mrs Pryce;" and I said, "Sir, I am truly sorry to hear it, for you are as quiet and kind a gentleman as ever I had in my house." "It is very

good of you to say that," he made answer, "for I am afraid I have given you a great deal of trouble; but the fact is, the place don't quite suit my health." And then I said it did not agree with everybody, though some enjoyed their health in it very well. So that is plain enough, I should think, Mr Rogers.'

'It is plain enough that he is leaving his present lodgings, Mrs Pryce, ma'am—but as for leaving Eclin, don't you never go for to believe it. He has taken the cottage where Job Dowlett lived, and is going to start housekeeping on his own account, ma'am,' and Mr Rogers, as if to emphasize the termination of his astounding intelligence, nipped a bit off the slice of cheese Mrs Pryce had cut for him, and putting it into his mouth, swallowed it as some people swallow pills.

'Well, I never!' exclaimed Miss Marland, whilst for once in her life Mrs Pryce remained dumb. She could not very well eat her own words on the spot, and declare it was impossible for the individual who could think of taking Job Dowlett's cottage to be a gentleman, and yet such was her unbiassed opinion.

Why, Job Dowlett had only been a poor labourer, and his cottage had but three rooms in it, and the door opened right into the kitchen, and the place altogether, to sum up Mrs Pryce's mental reverie, was not fit to lodge a dog. In imagination already she beheld her own superior apartments vacant, her easy-chair covered with a brilliant-patterned chintz, tenantless, her drawing-room lodgerless, herself desolate, robbed of her right, her perquisite, the spoil of her bow and her arrow, her spear and her sword. And that he should have so deceived her! that he should have deluded one who had never been deluded before! that he should have made it competent even for a creature like Peter Rogers to enlighten her. Mrs Pryce felt this to be the bitterest drop in her already bitter cup, as she stood there silently trying to swallow her vexation and disgust.

And all the time Andrew Hardell was thinking how admirably he had broken the ice, and how quietly she had taken the news—and rejoicing in his soul that he plucked up courage enough to make the communication, for he was afraid of Mrs Pryce, as other curates had been before him; and while he hated her, and her lodgings, and her cheese and bacon, he yet hesitated, and put off from hour to hour imparting the news that he meant to go—that he intended to try housekeeping for himself.

'He can't be meaning to marry,' remarked the widow at last; 'not a letter in a lady's hand-writing has come to him since he has been in my house; and he has not got a likeness, nor anything—not even a lock of hair among his clothes.'

'No, he ain't a-going to be married,' acquiesced Mr Rogers; 'leastways, I think not, for Mrs Coles is to do for him—cook his victuals, and such like, and clean the house.'

'I don't think they will often have heard anything like this up at the Hall,' said Mrs Pryce to Miss Marland, scornfully—and that young person agreed to the widow's proposition, remarking she did not fancy anything like it had ever been heard anywhere by any one.

'He must be mad,' was her exhaustive conclusion, at which conclusion Mrs Pryce jumped with unchristian haste.

'He is certainly odd,' she said; 'though of course I should not like it known as I had made the remark. He is either out of his mind or else he has got something on it; I used to think he had been crossed in love; but then he does not write poetry and cut the table with his penknife, like Mr Sandly, who was in love with the young lady at St Mark's. He has got a way of sitting with his head on his hand, or else of pretending to be reading, holding a book, while all the time he is looking far away at I am sure I don't know what; and if I go into the room quietly—as I usually do, for I detest making a noise beyond everything—he'll turn and look at me so startled like—just for all the world like somebody afraid.'

'Happen he is of you,' suggested Mr Rogers, who had his own reasons for disliking the turn Mrs Pryce's conversation was taking; 'it is not every man that can face a widow, and a handsome one too, Mrs Pryce, ma'am, in her own house.'

'Am I to take that as a compliment, Mr Rogers?' inquired the widow.

'How could you take it as anything else?' simpered Miss Marland; and under cover of this last happy suggestion, Mr Rogers, who was in the bricklaying and general repairing line, beat his retreat.

'Depend upon it there is going to be building,' was Mrs Pryce's dark surmise; 'he means to alter the cottage, and Rogers is engaged for the job.'

'At that rate your rooms will not be empty at present,' remarked the maid, which observation elicited a tap on the cheek from Mrs Pryce, and an entreaty not to be satirical.

'Though I certainly shall not put up my bills yet awhile, my dear,' added the widow, 'for everybody knows what Peter Rogers is.'

If, however, Mrs Pryce built her hopes of a long series of regular payments on her idea that Mr Rogers was about to take trowel in hand for the Curate's benefit, those hopes, like others

she had entertained in her lifetime, bloomed only to fade, for before another fortnight Mr Hardell and his few belongings were housed in the cottage, which had formerly been tenanted by Job Dowlett, labourer.

'He certainly behaved handsome,' remarked Mrs Pryce; 'he paid me a full quarter's rent, and gave a sovereign to the girl, though the impudent hussy tried to impose upon me by saying it was only a shilling: and he made me a present of as handsome a Prayer-book as you would wish to see; and altogether, except that I fear he has made a mistake for his own comfort, I have not a word to say against the gentleman.'

Which it was very kind of Mrs Pryce to say, and all the kinder because in her heart of hearts she hated Andrew Hardell, who had managed to make a mortal enemy of her.

And though the brave man says, and says truly, that he does not fear mortal enemies, there is yet nothing of which even a brave man may with greater reason stand in dread, more especially when that mortal enemy takes the form of a low, grasping, cunning woman.

Mrs Pryce had hoped—since the decease of Mr Pryce—her hopes had, indeed, been neither few nor far between, but from the hour when she first set eyes on Andrew Hardell she decided that if it were in the power of a widow to marry him she would do it.

He was in bad health, and she catered for him—made him up little dishes which he never relished, and puddings that he rarely touched. He was lonely, and the widow proposed—if not too great a liberty on her part—that he should sometimes bring his book down-stairs, and take a bit of supper in her own parlour; if the evening were damp, there was always a fire lighted against his return; if he were in lower spirits than usual, the widow herself waited upon and would have consoled him had Andrew seemed open to consolation from her.

With other curates the whole of this performance had been gone through, and there were not wanting among the young fry who came to Eclin 'for a spell,' those who, after having eaten the widow's good things, drank hot brandy-and-water in the widow's parlour, flirted with the widow, ay, and even kissed her, went away rejoicing, when herself and her house and Eclin had all served their turn.

But Mr Hardell was a man of a different stamp. He was 'one,' as Mrs Pryce remarked in a moment of unguarded confidence to Miss Marland, 'with whom any feeling would be serious.' And the widow, who, in addition to other articles, kept a very

small circulating library for the benefit of the farmers' daughters in the neighbourhood, felt, as she spoke, like one of the heroines so truthfully portrayed by that vague creature a 'popular novelist,'—on the point of inspiring a 'serious' feeling.

'He has not a single relative in the world—he told me so himself,' soliloquized Mrs Pryce, and she would fain have been that nearer and dearer still. They could leave Eclin and the 'shop,' and it was by no means an impossibility that Mrs Pryce might on another stage appear as a lady of high degree.

Did not the army officers, when they were staying at the Hall, make a pretence of wanting mourning envelopes or a stick of sealing-wax, or six postage stamps, in order merely to have an excuse for a chat, and had she not heard Miss Alton herself once say, 'Now, Colonel Desmond, I will not allow you to flirt with Mrs Pryce. We are all so fond of her here, we cannot afford to lose her,' a gracefully-turned sentence on the part of Miss Alton, but still she need not have ridden her horse up so close to the door, and taken the Colonel off so sharp, when everybody knew Miss Alton herself to be the greatest flirt in England.

And if the army officers, why not a poor curate, who was, after all, only a servant to other people, and consequently situated 'very different' (pecuniarily) from Mrs Pryce—why should he not take notice of her still handsome face and well-laced figure? For if you come to that, who in Eclin could stand beside her. Not Miss Alton, certainly, for all her beautiful hair, and airs and graces—not Miss Alton, though she was the Squire's daughter —not Miss Alton, even if she did live at the Hall, and dress herself in different clothing five or six times a day, and ride about now with this gentleman, and now with that—

And because she firmly believed Miss Alton to be a long way behind herself in point of attractiveness, Mrs Pryce was condescending to that young lady; and Miss Alton, when she had no officers to ride over the country with, and no visitors to entertain at the Hall, was wont to find out she wanted tapes, or needles, or stamps, also, and amuse herself during the process of purchasing at the widow's expense.

Thus it came about that not only to Miss Alton's maid, but to the mistress herself—Mrs Pryce discoursed concerning Andrew Hardell.

'So delicate,' finished the widow, 'and to think of his going to that damp cottage, after this well-aired house, it was enough to give him his death.'

'Poor dear creature,' remarked Miss Alton, 'he perhaps only fled from one fate to meet a worse. If he dies, remember, Mrs

Pryce, I shall always consider you drove him to desperation and Job Dowlett's cottage,' and a pair of saucy eyes were lifted to the widow's face.

'If you believe me, Miss, I don't think he has ever cared for anybody.'

'Good gracious, how interesting!'

'I feel sure he has not a thought beside the poor and his Bible.'

'He must be an agreeable companion,' commented Miss Alton; 'I do wish papa would make haste home, that we might have him up at the Hall.'

'Yes,' considered the widow, as Miss Alton drove off—'and if you do get him up at the Hall, you will pay him out, that is all I know, and that is the worst I wish him.'

As a commentary upon which remark, it may here be observed that Miss Alton took Dowlett's cottage on her way home, and drove slowly past it, noticing, as she did so, the changes and improvements Mr Hardell had already effected.

'Whenever papa comes home, he shall send him over plenty of plants and cuttings,' reflected Miss Alton—having formed which resolution, the young lady whipped her horses on a little and drove back to the Hall in a curious and exhilarated state of mind.

For Joy Alton was not in the least like Madge Forster. But that they were women, you would have declared they could not have a thing in common. Being women, however, there came one thing in common to them—sorrow.

Ay, for all her beauty, for all her wealth, and for all her gaiety, there came that to Joy Alton, and when the evil days arrived, and the sorrowful hours were upon her, Mrs Pryce remembering—rejoiced.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE HOUR AND THE WOMAN.

If Mr Hardell were the first curate who ever dreamed of taking a house at Eclin, he was likewise the first who thought of retaining that desirable curacy for a longer period than six months.

Half a year had indeed been the maximum duration of any clerical stay at Eclin. Curates put in there as vessels touch at

ports, where they never purpose remaining; but the pay was so low, and the place altogether so utterly out of the world, that men got away from it as fast as they decently could, thanking heaven for the chance of leaving Mrs Pryce and her close rooms and her motherly attentions behind.

There was nothing about Eclin, indeed, to recommend it to 'clergymen and others.' The population was utterly uninteresting and unintelligent; the church, though old, was not picturesque; the country around was in the summer time pretty, but no stretch of imagination could have discovered any beauty in it when once the crops were off the ground, and the trees bare, and the fields and the roads sloppy. There was no society—for Mr Alton spent so much of his time in London, that if a curate were asked once in a month to dinner at the Hall, he might consider himself lucky; altogether, when men who had been at Eclin came to exchange clerical confidences, each found that his fellow entertained a similar opinion of the place to his own. 'It was the dullest hole out,' the faster spirits declared; while even more sedate individuals affirmed 'they did not believe the man existed who could stay in Eclin for more than six months.'

As for Andrew Hardell, however, he pitched his tent there, meaning to remain. Thankful was he to have found such a home—thankful for that very quietness and monotony, from which he would once have given anything to escape.

His ambitious dreams, where were they?—his hopes of fame, of wealth, of usefulness, where? Ah! friends, when he thrust that accursed garment, which could have told such a tale against him, down the fissure of the rock, and piled the sand, and the shells, and the pebbles, on the top, he passed of his own free will—by his own blind act—into that earthly hell over the portals whereof it is written that they who enter there leave hope behind.

'Ay, but I can be resigned,' he thought, walking through the bean-fields, and looking at the summer glory of wood, and flower, and foliage, 'and thank God still for his mercies'—for the man was humble, and his spirit broken. He had not done much good for himself with all his cleverness—by his mad fight against circumstances—and he was content now to find the bark of his life moored in so quiet a nook, and to do his duty if he could, even when there was no great work for him to perform, no war for him to wage, no gigantic suffering for him to try and comfort, no depths of vice for him to gauge, no dragon of wickedness for him to fight and conquer.

Calmly the stream of existence seemed to flow through Eclin by comparison with the rush and turmoil of the sad foul river

that had borne men's lives away with it in Essex Marsh. True, he beheld physical suffering, for was not the clerk's wife dying by inches of the most cruel disease humanity knows? Tragedy also was acted out in a very poor cottage, where news coming home suddenly that a lad who, after a quarrel with his sweetheart went off and enlisted, had shot his sergeant, the mother was seized with mortal illness, and died within a few days, resolutely refusing to see the girl who was the cause, she said, of all this misery; and the hardness of the human heart was exemplified by two brothers, who, living within half a mile of each other, had not spoken for twenty years, because their father, dying without a will, his little freehold descended to the eldest, who offered a hundred pounds as compensation to the younger, which offer was rejected with scornful and opprobrious words.

But the suffering, the tragedy, the feud, were individual, not general: there were no men and no women in that parish who had never known what it was to have a youthful feeling—a sufficient meal—one hour free from anxiety—who had never been children, never gathered king-cups and daisies, never gone a-blackberrying, never felt what a blessing the summer sun brought with it, never feasted their eyes on the apple-blossoms, and never been spoken to in more kindly accents than those of policeman X or the parish guardians.

There was poverty, there was pain, there was sin, there was remorse, there was sorrow, but none of these were like unto the poverty, pain, sin, remorse, and sorrow, the Curate had beheld in Essex Marsh. Often and often he thought with what mad delight the poor little wretches, the wicked, clever, miserable, hungry street Arabs would have revelled in those green fields he beheld stretching away in the distance. In fancy he saw them rolling on the grass, and gathering great bunches of wild flowers; and while he thought and fancied, fresh problems of the meaning of existence came into his mind asking for solution.

Where was the balance between child and child? to go no farther. What did God give to the street Arab in lieu of all the home blessings, of all the country sights and sounds, wherewith the well-behaved decently-dressed boys and girls in Eclin were surrounded?

Andrew could not tell—he only felt dimly and vaguely that, spite of the rags, and the filth, and the hunger, and the temptation, there might be a balance—and he knew, for his nature held in it a strong strain of Bohemianism, that he loved the Ishmaelites with their sharp weird faces, their quicker intelligence, their more impulsive temperaments, their awful experiences of priv-

ation, and sin, and sorrow, better than the chubby, stupid, commonplace, well-fed, bobbing and bowing children who, after a full breakfast on the Sunday mornings, were wont to stand up before him in the school-room, and go through their 'questions,' and read their verses in the most exemplary manner.

Further, he commenced to understand that repose, without the experience of previous turmoil, simply means, to ninety-nine people out of a hundred, stagnation. The life about him was peaceful enough in all conscience, but it was the peace of a pool that has no sparkling stream or rushing river to replenish it, and no outlet by which the waters may find their way on to a deeper ocean.

There were lives he came to comprehend—like the miser's gold—lives, lived after a fashion, it is true, but yet, because of their manner of being lived, comparatively useless. The whole of Eclin was an experience to him, as the entire of existence ought to be to a man who feels that, having a soul to be saved himself, the salvation of some other soul may be dependent on him.

Behold this man whom we have followed so far, located in a labourer's cottage, trying to solve these problems. Behold him happier in his poor small house, than he had ever thought to be either in the Vicarage at Essex Marsh, or in Mrs Pryce's superior lodgings. For was not the climbing rose-tree he planted against the wall at Eclin, after a fashion, his own? Did he not hope to reap where he had sown? was it not on the cards, or, at least, possibly on the cards, that he might live there for years and years—live there and die there where no other curate living or dead had remained? And if all this were within the bounds of probability, why should he not plant his own vine and his own fig-tree, and eat of the grapes of the one, and the fruit of the other, during the course of the many bright summer days to come?

So he planted and beautified—he furnished—simply, it is true, but still he gathered household gods around him, and the feeling of a home grew faster than the wistaria and the magnolia—God help him!

Quickly under his hand the poor cottage became a snug habitation—small, it is true—but still, large enough for him, where, amid his books and flowers, he sometimes forgot the trouble of his life, and felt day by day the health he had lost stealing back into his frame.

And by degrees there came something else stealing into his heart likewise, something which for months and months he refused to acknowledge for an inmate. He grew happier, and yet he failed to understand why—he went about his work with a lighter spirit,

and yet he could not have told what had lifted the burden off his soul; he had always loved flowers, always rejoiced at the changing seasons, always looked on the face of nature with a comprehending eye—but now suddenly there came to him a new sense and understanding of beauty, and he marvelled how it was that even in his old days at Langmore he had never perfectly grasped the loveliness of a branch covered with clustering roses—never fully experienced the peace of the summer twilight—never felt that the quietness of night was like a cool hand laid on a fevered forehead—never knew that there was grace and music in all things, from the waving of the meadow-sweet in the balmy south wind, to the rustle of a woman's dress over the newly-cut grass.

God help him! I have said, for the man was in love—hopelessly, senselessly. God help him, for the girl he loved was a very different girl indeed from Madge Forster; and this might be the reason perhaps why, having cared so little for the one, he took so deep a plunge after the other, and went head and ears into that great sea, the depths of which no man plumbs more than once—while others fathom never.

Why did he fall in love with Joy Alton? at this point the reader naturally inquires—naturally, but unreasonably, since love being one of those things for which there can be given neither rhyme nor sense, is one of the subjects beyond a novelist's ken.

He loved her, and there is an end of it—or rather, there is the beginning of his life's story; but there is an end of the argument.

For, look you, Mister, or Madam, or Miss, who reads these unexciting pages—suppose you pass a jeweller's shop and see bracelets, and rings, and necklaces, and brooches, set out to the best advantage, then and there you take your choice—it may be one, it may be none; you say—'I would, or I would not.' If you would not, you pass by, and no memory lingers; but if you say you would—let the thing be never so rich or never so rare—you have a memory of it afterwards.

There was something which just struck your fancy, and though it might be no other man's fancy—or though it might be the desire of other eyes as well—you can never quite forget it—no, not even when your sight might fail to see a diamond flashed before it—when your poor hand was too weak to hold the trinket—when the individual for whom you wanted all this finery has passed out of your life, as you are fleeting away out of the lives of your fellows.

Ah! friends—dear friends—believe me *the* woman, or *the* man, is just that trinket to all born unto sorrow. We may not get the

trinket—the woman or the man may, according to the world's reading, be nothing to us; and yet, brethren—for I am preaching to you as no parson dare preach—he or she may be all our world, all our life, all our past, present, future, nevertheless.

And who may ignore this great trouble of our humanity—this terrible power of loving which is in us—who? Ah! Lord—Andrew Hardell did not fail to recognize it in the days when, through Thy mercy and his own sorrow, he became more truly useful in Thy cause.

And when he touched that chord—that string which saintly fingers so rarely awaken, save to draw discord from it—the hearers sat mute, listening earnestly; for though many felt he was speaking of things the like of which they had never fully experienced, still they vaguely comprehended that if God were good enough such matters might yet be within their own knowledge, to raise them, through a more perfect comprehension of their humanity, to a more thorough understanding of subjects still beyond their ken.

It all came about as both Anthony Hardell and George Trelwyn had prophesied. Here was no man to live loveless through the years—to remain for ever indifferent to the beauty of a woman's face—to the witchery of a woman's smile—to the grace and graciousness of a woman bent on pleasing.

He had fancied himself secure—thought no future flame could scorch him—simply because he had been engaged to Madge Forster. He called what he had felt for her 'love.' Heaven save the mark! and had he married her, and been kept by Heaven's mercy from seeing any other capable of teaching him the difference, he might have gone on till the end of the chapter ignorant of all the ecstasy of happiness he passed through in those summer days at Eclin.

To be with her, to hear the sound of her voice, to listen to her singing, to behold the bright fair face bent decorously over her Prayer-book in church—to catch even a glimpse of her in the distance, to walk beside her over the grass, or follow her gliding footsteps through the woods—these things were happiness, but he asked himself no further question concerning them—while, if Joy knew or thought she knew all about it, she only laughed to herself and triumphed, for the girl regarded men's hearts but as toys, and did not believe there was such a thing in the world as profound attachment.

Unless, indeed, it might be such an attachment as her father felt for her and she for him—that was very different, she remarked, to the 'tear' and 'dear,' and 'eye' and 'sigh' affair.

'Why, I have reams of poetry,' she was wont to declare, 'written by men who said they were dying for love of me, and yet the wretches went off and married some one else—even you were faithless like the rest,' she observed to Colonel Desmond, who was staying at the Hall with his pretty wife.

'Because you were heartless, fair ladye,' answered the Colonel, with a profound bow, whereupon Miss Alton blushed a little, and Mrs Desmond laughed, perfectly unconscious of the depth, and length, and breadth of the wound Joy Alton had dealt him, in the days when he, instead of Andrew Hardell, was cavalier-in-chief.

To the end of his life the Curate never forgot the first day when he spoke to Miss Alton. It was a bright summer's morning, and he had just received a note from Mr Alton asking him to dine at the Hall quietly the next day. Should he go, or should he not, that was the problem for him to solve. Visiting at Eclin was a different matter altogether to visiting in London. Besides, to decline would look so odd, since he could not now plead excess of work, or any incongruity between the social and the clerical life in the parish where his work now lay.

Dives did not feast himself in purple and fine linen while Lazarus lay starving outside. On the contrary, beef-tea, and jellies, and all the good things doctors usually order for people who cannot eat a mouthful, found their way from the Hall to any home where sickness might be, while Miss Alton herself was wont to carry grapes in a little dainty basket to those whose lips were parched and dry, more especially to one girl dying of consumption, who was kept alive literally from day to day by the thoughtfulness of the Lady of the Hall.

So, though there were rich and poor, Andrew beheld no gulf fixed between them. He had plenty of leisure, and occasionally time hung rather heavy on his hands. Further—and this, perhaps, was the real secret of the matter—that story which had clouded his life was growing an olden one now; between him and that night on the New Abbey Road, and his day beside the Solway, Kirkcudbright jail, and the Court-house at Dumfries, the merciful mists of years were gathering, and as in the winter nights, though we may know that the snow through which we have come home is lying piled outside, still we are able to forget its chilling cold, and turn to the warmth and brightness of our own fireside, so this man, without exactly ignoring the trouble which lay behind, had yet begun to think of it less frequently, was commencing to understand that the time comes in all experiences when even sorrows must be weaned, in order that other

work may be found for a human being than the task of nursing a grief which should be dead.

But still he was doubtful and hesitating as to what answer he should return, when crossing the village green he encountered Miss Alton, who stopped and accosted him without the slightest embarrassment.

'It seems absurd for us not to speak to each other,' she said, 'now that you really have made up your mind to remain at Eelm. Hitherto we have regarded our clergymen as a flock of wild geese—I beg your pardon—as migratory birds, which, while we were looking upon them, departed.'

'I have no intention of migrating,' he answered.

'Not even when the leaves go, and the frosts and snows come?'

'Not even then.'

'How charming,' she exclaimed, 'and you are coming to dine with us to-morrow.'

'I hope to have that pleasure,' the Curate replied. He had been uncertain the moment before, but now—well-a-day—well-a-day—it was the first act in the olden drama over again—that only drama which the performers play for their own amusement, and not for the pleasure of the spectators.

So she passed on and left him—passed on with her bright fair hair, with her great child's eyes, with her pure pink-and-white complexion, with her pouting lips, with her sunny smile, with her round, graceful figure, with her cool, simple, floating dress, with her soft, sweet voice, that for all it was so soft and sweet, had within it a sound of mockery and raillery, passed on in her youth and her beauty, and straight away the man set up an idol for himself, and worshipped it none the less devoutly because unconsciously.

As for Joy Alton, she thought no more of that poor curate when she parted from him in the bright summer's morning on the village green, than of the veriest stranger who ever crossed her path, save so far as this, she imagined there might be some amusement in 'drawing him out.'

All men, she averred, were agreeable till they grew serious, by which phrase she meant that so long as a man never tried to cross a certain line, she liked him. 'Of course,' she declared to Colonel Desmond, 'when once you begin to talk about marriage, and giving in marriage, all our pleasant acquaintanceship is at an end: that is the worst of your sex, you are always so dreadfully in earnest.'

'And even to you there will come—' he began, but she put her fingers in her ears, and refused to listen.

'If I were Mr Alton, I should not allow it,' he persisted.

'Papa does not care what I do, so long as I do not marry,' she answered; and then she began to cry, for she had liked Colonel Desmond very much, and spent many a happy hour riding about the country with him, and he had been plain-spoken, and her very good friend, and she told him how sorry she was; and the pair parted without an angry word; and when he married, as he did shortly after, she only said softly to herself, 'Men were deceivers ever,' and flirted in her own peculiar fashion, worse than formerly, satisfied that no man since the beginning of time broke his heart for the sake of any woman.

She was an only child. After years, during which the Hall lacked an heir, this girl came into the world, and when she came her mother departed from it.

As the poor lady lay dying, they asked her what the child just born should be called, and she answered in that moment of supreme anguish—with the death-dews on her forehead, with her dim eyes closing on all earth's pleasures and vanities, with her steps on the very threshold of that unknown land whither we are all bound—'Joy.'

So the girl came by her name, and though it seemed but a mockery then, yet as the years went by, and she grew strong, and beautiful, and gay, with a face like an angel, and a voice like a bird, her father often thought his dead wife must have been gifted with some prophetic knowledge, for if ever a woman had a sunny temper and a joyous nature, that woman was Joy Alton, with whom Andrew Hardell fell in love.

Think of it—had all his past been but as a bad dream, and he truly what he seemed?—think of it still.

He, a poor curate, with no possession save a few chairs and tables; she, daughter of Mr Alton, of the Hall, an heiress, a beauty, young, accomplished, clever, heartless, and yet not exactly heartless—she only broke men's hearts as children pull the legs and wings off flies; she was ignorant, she did not think it hurt them much; she did not believe in love herself, either in a fine frenzy or in patient endurance. Her nature was like her name, more joyous than sympathetic, and she lacked that faculty which enables one human being to enter into the sorrows of another, to understand something of what lost treasures, of what fair dead bodies, of what ghostly memories, may be lying at the bottom of the sea, the depths of which he has never actually sounded.

Her life had been too happy, too prosperous; trouble had not brushed her by; she was a little queen in her own dominion,

surrounded by devoted and obsequious subjects; she thought it was good of her to find pleasure in the lot God had appointed for her; she was not cross or high and mighty like other young ladies; she was not proud; she would sit down in the poorest cottage and talk to the most discontented of old women with the same smile on her lips that her admirers were wont to rave about.

Her father's sister, who resided at the Hall, and matronized its young mistress, could find no fault with Joy, save that she was 'trivial;' but here the worthy lady must have used a wrong word to express her sense of what was wanting in her niece's nature, for Joy was not 'trivial,' though she talked clever and sometimes rather impertinent nonsense both to men and women.

As for Mr Alton, he beheld his daughter's close acquaintance with the Curate, yet felt no alarm. He had perfect confidence in his daughter, and he had seen, moreover, too many flirtations carried on and dropped to entertain the slightest uneasiness with regard to Mr Hardell.

It is true that he did not like the character his daughter was acquiring for breaking hearts without remorse, smiling gaily all the while; but as, whenever he expostulated with her, she either assured him no man had a heart to break, or else declared she would marry the next she met, he at length let her alone, glad perhaps to find she was not desirous of marrying, and leaving him solitary, he whose life was wrapped up in her, and to whom she often said, 'I want no one else to love me but you, papa, and I will never leave you unless you drive me to do so, by long sermons, and propriety lectures taken out of aunt's good books.

So the Curate came and went, dining often at the Hall, walking oftener with Miss Alton and her aunt, meeting her continually amongst the poor, seeing her more quiet than any one had ever seen her before, more tender, more sweet, more loveable, than it would be easy for me to tell.

And thus, as I have said, there came for him a fresh beauty in nature, a fresh interest and happiness in life, and the man who was so keen in detecting the secret springs of others' actions, never paused to ask what was the meaning of it all, whither he was drifting, how it must end.

He basked in the sunshine, and he never thought of the night—he said to himself in the morning, 'I shall see Miss Alton to-day,' and if he did not see her, he was restless in the evening, longing for another sun to rise which should not set before he beheld her. He watched for her to come into church—when she went to London, or to stay with friends, he counted

the hours till she should return—and yet still he never took his heart to task, and sifted the matter to the bottom.

Afterwards he knew he had been afraid to do so—afraid as one is to open one's eyes and dispel a pleasant dream—afraid as a criminal may be to realize the morrow when he must go forth to meet his doom—but the hour came when the information he had declined to go to meet came to seek him, and it came in this wise. It was a winter's night, and he stood in the recess of a window listening to Miss Alton singing.

She sang beautifully, yet for a woman called 'Joy' hers was the saddest voice that can well be conceived. It was the only thing sad about her, a tone and a cadence when she sat at the piano warbling her ballads that often brought tears into eyes where tears were rare visitors.

All the day long, and for days before that, Andrew Hardell had been anxious and low-spirited.

There were visitors at the Hall, and he saw little of Miss Alton in consequence. He beheld her walking, riding, chatting with others, and a sense of his own loneliness oppressed him.

What was he to any one—what right had he to expect any one to think of him? Even at dinner he did not now sit near her. One higher in the Church occupied his seat, and talked to her as he had been wont to talk. But still she did not quite forget her old friends, for she came up to him when the gentlemen joined the ladies, and asked if he were ill, and feared his neighbour at dinner had bored him.

'I did the best I could for you,' she said with a smile, 'but these things are sometimes, like circumstances, beyond our own control;' and then she left him and sat down, by request, to sing, while he took up his position where he could watch her quietly, watch her and the group gathered around her at the piano.

It was a moonlight night, and, half-concealed by the heavy curtain, he stood, now looking at Miss Alton, now at the leafless trees and the bare earth, which but a few months before had seemed so beautiful. Ay, and something seemed going from out his life, as the summer glory had faded away off the landscape, for he felt wretched; he was mad with love, though he would not own it; he was racked with jealousy, though he could not define his sensations.

And still she sang on—on—and the moon sailed higher and higher into the heavens. Ballad after ballad, air after air, till at length some one petitioned for a particular song, which the girl seemed reluctant to sing.

'Well, to please every one, then,' she said at length; and this was the end of it:

> '"We both are human, we both have a heart,
> Why stand we ever thus coldly apart—
> Alone—alone?"'

and the music died away in a sort of moan, that seemed to have a sob in it.

Alone—alone!—it was all clear to the man in a moment; the hour and the woman had come, and he knew he was in love at last.

He could not bear it; he stole out of the room, and went away into the night, feeling more desolate and more lonely than when, in the first chapter of this story, he stood on Dervorgilla's Bridge, looking at the moonlight dancing over the waters of the Nith.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DESOLATE.

He must go! that was his thought as he wandered on through the night. He must go, and leave behind him everything which was bright, and fair, and beautiful, and to be desired in his poor, dark, narrow life. That was the third night (he thought of all this stupidly, and without connection of any kind, as he paced along); this was the third memorable night in his experience, and the other two came and associated themselves inseparably with it while he walked.

As a couple of men may join a third, and travel the same road with him, so those nights now re-appeared, and took each an arm of this. Gleaming lights seen through crimson curtains, a confused group of men and women in evening dress, a voice rising and falling, pathetic in its tones, beseeching in its entreaty; these things lay behind, while side by side with the long country-lane bordered by beech-trees and evergreen oak and holly, he beheld the dark avenue on the way to New Abbey and the Nith—with Dumfries, to right and left—flowing onwards to the Solway. He must go—where the Nith flowed away from all human habitation to the lonely, restless sea. He must go—from

the light, from the music, from the hope, from the sound of women's voices, from the love of women's hearts, out into the silent night. He must go: not for him the white, circling arms, and the half-coy kiss, the love of wife, the prattle of children, the fulness of happiness, the rounded perfection of which existence is capable even here.

Not for him. He knew what it all meant now—knew, that is, after a fashion; knew just what life might once have held for him, and what it could never honestly hold now; knew the great mystery of our being, comprehension of which comes to some early, to some late, to some never; knew that no man holds the key of his own life; knew that it is a woman who has the power to imprison or to give liberty; to cloud with gloom the whole of the fairest human experiences, or to flood with sunshine the darkest places of a man's nature.

He must go; for the hour had come, and he loved. Grasping this truth; seizing with one hand the uncertain future, and with the other the certain past, he wondered in a sort of dream how he, ignorant of the trouble, and the bliss, and the despair of loving, had ever been able to preach so as to touch the souls of men.

'As though any one who has not fathomed the heart can reach the soul,' he said to himself in after days. 'As though this were not the very lesson of our Lord's coming; except a man understand his fellow's humanity he cannot hope to save it.'

He had thought of his craft so exclusively and so long, that even in the first encounter with his grief he could not quite shake off all memory of his priesthood. Like one who in delirium while speaking of foreign and incongruous subjects touches every now and then a remembered and familiar chord, so Andrew Hardell's mind, roaming that night through strange and unwonted paths, returned occasionally to the beaten road of his daily life, and marvelled how this fresh experience would affect his future influence when he came to speak in the years to come of loving and being beloved, of giving up everything most dear for the sake of God and a man's principles.

Behold, reader! this is not a novel of a stirring incident, or of rapid action following upon swift events; rather, it is the story of one human being's feelings photographed even whilst they were fleeting by.

For the man overnight was not the same man next morning. 'I must go,' was his mental cry, wandering through the quiet lanes.

'I may stay,' he considered next morning. The idol was

dear to him, though she might never know of her worshipper, and he could not endure to tear himself away from the sight and the sound, the occasional presence and the constant 'I may behold her,' of the woman he loved.

Into his poor home he carried this great jewel of price, and made an altar for it where he worshipped. Dear to him was it as a poet's first dream. What if the hope were hopeless—still the love was his. What if he saw no happy end to the story—the story remained part of his existence for all that. What if life without her held nothing for him—without her he now knew it had held less than nothing; it had not been living, and if one be in the flesh it is better to experience pain than to remain mute; better the acute suffering than the dead body; better to shriek aloud in the extremity of anguish than to lack sensation.

Ah! well-a-day, it had come to this; come to this after the years, or, perhaps, because of them. Spite of his convictions; spite of his resolves; spite of his poverty; spite of his antecedents—he loved Joy Alton, and might have gone on loving her to the end, without an incident to break the monotony of such a story; but that one evening in the early spring, when they were standing together by a flower-stand at the Hall, Joy gathered for him a rose-bud he admired, and as she gave, and he took it, their eyes met, and the secret so long concealed on the one side, so little suspected on the other, was plain to both at last.

But for an instant the dark lashes were raised,—next moment they veiled averted eyes, whilst her cheek flushed scarlet: he loved her—she loved him. There was misery enough being conceived then for both of them if they could only have foreseen it.

And then, though there was no word spoken, no sign made, he *knew* he must go; he did not think, he did not hesitate, he *knew*. He was bound, in honour, in honesty, in chivalry, to step out of her path, and give the sunshine of a happier love a chance of flooding the future years of her life with beams of gladness. The sight of her had grown needful to him almost as the air he breathed, but he must walk out of his fool's paradise, and re-enter the life he ought never to have left. Into this he had drifted, as we all drift when we leave the safe track across this world's waters: when we abandon the preconceived plan, just because the fresh course seems pleasanter and easier.

To his Maker the old, sad story was no secret, and for this reason he had been able to serve his Maker honestly and with all his heart; but to men he was a deception and a fraud, and as such he had no right to mix amongst them, upon equal terms.

He had been brave and bold in destroying the actual evidence

against him, but he could be neither brave nor bold now that there remained that moral evidence of 'Not Proven,' which no act of his could blot out of his past, or hide away from the sight of men in the future.

With the old agony fresh upon him—keener, sharper even it might be than when he climbed Criffel, and 'tholed his assize' at Dumfries; with a consciousness that all he had ever suffered over this business was as nothing to what he should still have to endure; with a sense of loneliness and bitter desolation upon him, such as he had not experienced when he staggered out from the crowded Courthouse, and crept away from the sight of his fellows; when he stood looking at the reflection of his haggard face in the mirror; when he loitered under the trees, and hearkened to the voice of the singers floating down to him; when he leaned over Dervorgilla's Bridge, and watched the Nith flowing on, with the moonlight dancing in its waters; when he passed the Commercial Hotel, and walked away into the darkness all alone—with a sharper agony, I say, with a keener sense of desolation than he ever before experienced, the man looked round his home that night and acknowledged that he must leave it.

It was but a poor, bare, narrow home, yet he had been happy there. O Lord, how happy, Thou and he alone knew! It was a mean, small house, filled with but few household goods, graced with but scant domestic treasures; yet it had been his home for all that,—his quiet home to which he was wont to bring back thoughts of *her;* dreams—tender dreams,—the tracery of a story, pitiful, yet exceeding beautiful—the memory of a face that wore sweet smiles for him.

Well, it was over. He sat down and wrote to Mr Dayntree, saying that as his health was now completely re-established, he should be glad to return to a more active sphere of labour, and requesting that gentleman to let him know if he heard of anything to suit. When he had finished the letter, he penned another to George Trelwyn, stating the same fact, though in somewhat fuller and different language.

As to his Vicar, Andrew thought it best to give him notice of his intention to leave by word of mouth. He had experienced some kindness from Mr Waymer, and it seemed to him that it would be better to go over to Garton, and have a talk about the matter, rather than attempt to open up the subject by letter.

Having done and resolved so much, he turned his chair towards the fire, and thought—thought as he had not done for many and many a day previously—of all that verdict had meant for him: of the virtual abnegation of self he had made when he

changed names and places with Anthony Hardell, and went out, with a worse brand than that of criminal upon him, into the world.

Concerning the murder of Kenneth Challerson there might have been two opinions, but concerning the fact of his feigned name, his long course of deception, there could be but one judgment. He had voluntarily chosen a path, and then refused to abide the consequences of having selected it. From first to last —from his first awful night at New Abbey, when he lay awake in the darkness, picturing *it* stretched out by the road-side, to the evening when he sat by the fire at Eclin, his life had been one long mistake.

Better, averted looks and eager whisperings, than friendship proffered in ignorance—hands outstretched under a misconception. Better to have been known as a sort of moral ticket-of-leave man, against whom all respectable doors were closed, than, having gained employment and friends under false pretences, to live in dread of chance recognition, of the domiciliary visits of that vigilant detective, public opinion, of being ousted from the place where his weary feet had found rest, and driven back into the wilderness with the cry—'You are a deception and a lie,' sounding in his ears.

He had thought of all this vaguely—he had dreamt of it,—he had wakened in the night with the agony of discovery and disgrace on him; and yet he never before beheld his actual position as he beheld it that evening. And this is just one of those things which people, as a rule, fail to understand, and judge uncharitably of their fellows accordingly. They cannot comprehend that a man should ever remain blind to facts which are palpable enough to them. They forget it is the spectator who sees the whole of the play, and grasps its meaning. They forget it is not he whose hand is upraised in battle, who is charging straight down on the enemy, that can best see the danger menacing him to right and left. They say he *must* have known, he *must* have been conscious, unmindful of the fact that if he had but known he would have held aloof from the danger, and kept his feet from the flowery edge of that precipice over which he was ultimately dashed to pieces.

Ah, friends, if it were matter of necessity for us all to know whither our steps were tending, the exact positions where, at any given period we stand, there would be but few stories written, but few crimes perpetrated, but few sins to be repented of.

We are human, we are impulsive, we are weak, we are sinful; the mists of mortality blind us, the imperfections of our nature cramp us; our best light is darkness, our best aspirations but as

the feeble outstretching of powerless hands, our highest resolves but as feathers dancing in the breeze. We would walk straight, but our wavering feet refuse to carry us whither we desire; we would cleave to the right and keep our garments unspotted in the sight of our Father which is in heaven, but the mud and the mire, the sin and the sorrow, of that world in the midst of which he has set us, soil the purity of those robes we thought to preserve unsullied, and we pass into the presence chamber of our Maker, weeping, 'O God, Thou knowest, and it is Thou alone who dost.'

The most dangerous thief is not him against whose coming we draw bar and bolt, load our revolvers, and unchain our dogs. They are not those who, knowing what they mean, comprehend that we know it too; rather it is the man whom we trust, and who trusting himself, drifts; who means to replace, who intends no evil; who takes—who does not steal; who has no knowledge of himself, and yet to whom we say in the hour of his bitterest extremity, 'But you must have known,' when all the time the poor wretch did not know any more than ourselves.

Given, that once a human being treading a dangerous path realizes his position, he becomes a villain. 'And if he do not realize his position?'—the sagacious reader remarks at this point, 'He is a fool;' which observation is so exhaustive, that the argument may here be closed.

Suppose that Andrew Hardell were a fool, wiser men have been fools before him; suppose he were a criminal, he was made of the stuff out of which our more dangerous criminals are moulded. He had called himself courageous when he lay in Kirkcudbright jail, but now he knew himself for what he was, a coward first and last—a coward when he fled from the dead—a coward when he toiled that summer's day through gorse and heather to his hiding-place beside the Solway—a coward when he answered Procurator Fiscal and Sheriff Substitute—a coward when he stuck to his falsehood before Lords Craigie and Glanlorn—a coward when he wrote to Madge and relieved her and himself from their mutual engagement—a coward when he resolved to leave England without speaking a word of farewell to those who had been stanch to him—without clasping hands with the tried friends and the faithful mistress—a coward when he yielded to Anthony's persuasions and donned—an impostor—God's livery—a coward when, knowing he loved a woman he might never marry, he still, spite of his sense and his reason, remained where he could catch still a glimpse, and still another, of the one face which was to be to him from thenceforth the face of an angel, far removed as though already she were in heaven.

But now he would be a coward no longer; for her sake, ah! for hers—he would thrust the fruit from his touch—the goblet from his lips. For her sake! Behold, friends, the divinity of love; how it hath power even to redeem our poor humanity—give strength to the weak, and decision to the wavering—sight to the blind, and swiftness to the lame. It can extinguish our selfishness, and refine our dross—it can make pain sweet, because by suffering it we can spare pain to her we love—it can render the lonely stony road smooth and endurable, because by traversing it we can spare the dear feet we wot of weariness—the dear heart woe.

For her sake—when that sentence once becomes a part and parcel of a man's life, he has grasped the idea of a higher existence. For her sake—has no part or parcel in the story of a gross grovelling love. 'For my sake' it is, when the man thinks of his own fancy or folly, and his own fancy or folly only—for her sake, he says, when he comes to understand that there is a love on earth so pure, even in its passion, it would pass through fire to keep the object of its affection for ever from the knowledge of sorrow.

For her sake—for her dear sake, he felt strong enough to go. For her sake, he became kin with all who had ever loved—and as he sate by the hearth, thinking in the flickering firelight, he marvelled whether Madge had ever cared for him as he cared for this girl, and if so, how it was now with her.

While he thought, a great longing came upon him, a longing to see Madge once more—to know how it fared with his old child-wife, where she was, how she bore the changes and chances that had come to him since they last parted, a longing to talk to her freely and openly, perhaps to tell her all. He felt that night it would have done him good to search her out, and talk to her in the hour of his trouble, as a man can never talk to a man, nor to the woman nearest and dearest, but only to a woman whom he trusts, yet does not fear.

But he stifled the feeling almost before it came into existence. For her sake, he might never, he thought, clasp a woman's hand in friendship again.

By reason of the knowledge which had come to him that day, he understood it would not do for Madge and himself to meet; if Madge had loved him as he now felt sure was the case—

He had chosen, and he must abide; he had elected, and no fresh plan could be substituted.

Dark lay the long road before him, but it must be traversed—the night was coming on—the night which followed so short a day—but yet the watches must be kept, and the hours counted—

till—till what ?—should no dawn break for him in this world for ever ?

And the man covered his face and wept.

CHAPTER XXVII.

'FAREWELL, MY DEAR.'

The news that Mr Hardell intended leaving fell upon Eclin like a thunderbolt. It was canvassed at the 'Green Man,' it was discussed over Mrs Pryce's counter, it was mentioned in whispers in the church porch, it was talked of by the farmers as they wended their way across the green wheat fields home :—

'After going and living by hisself,' said one.

'And planting that sight of trees,' remarked another.

'And staying among us so long,' observed a third.

'Visiting at the Hall, too,' supplied a fourth.

'Ah! my dear,' Mrs Pryce darkly stated, 'that was the very reason. Mr Alton, poor gentleman, never saw till the last what was going on to my knowledge.' And being pressed to state what had to her knowledge gone on, Mrs Pryce reluctantly stated, 'not to be repeated for worlds, you know,' that Mr Hardell had been caught kissing Miss Alton, by Miss Alton's papa, and that Mr Alton had threatened to report him to the bishop, and have the 'gownd' stripped from off his back.

'Which is all a pack of lies together, Mrs Pryce, ma'am,' suggested one of her auditors; 'and whoever told you such a story ought to be ashamed of hisself. It is not ten minutes since I saw the Squire and Mr Hardell shaking hands, quite familiar, over Mr Hardell's garden gate.'

Which statement was quite true; the Squire and Mr Hardell had been indulging in a long conversation, whereof the result proved that prolonged shake-hands already mentioned. Mr Alton had called to remonstrate, for the twentieth time, against the Curate's leaving, and to state that if deficient salary were, as he had reason to believe, the cause of Mr Hardell's decision, he would gladly add an extra fifty to the honorarium.

Then Andrew felt he must say or do something, and accordingly he first said : 'Would you mind walking in for a moment, Mr Alton ? I have something to tell you,' and when he had got the Squire into his sanctum, he added :—

'Mine is a splendid home, is it not, Mr Alton?'

'Comfortable—excessively snug—wonder how you have done it,' answered the visitor, politely.

'Let us waive conventionalities,' said the Curate, 'and simply look at facts: you ask me why I have elected to leave Eclin, and you offer—generously—to increase my salary. In reply, I ask you first to look at this poor cottage—at those bare walls—you know what such things mean to any man.'

'I can understand that you look forward to promotion to a comfortable living,' replied the Squire.

'No, Mr Alton, I do not—whatever my dreams may once have been, they are prosaic enough now—the opportunity to earn my bread—the ability to serve my Master, these things are all I can expect—and these things ought to be sufficient for God's servants—but—I am speaking to you as I never expected to speak to any man, these things were not sufficient for me.'

'What would have been sufficient?' asked Mr Alton, though already he half apprehended the answer which was coming.

'A wife—my wife—the woman I should have striven to gain, but that something wider than the widest sea lay between us. I love your daughter, Mr Alton,' the Curate added fiercely, 'and you now know why, if you offered me five hundred a year instead of fifty, I could not remain in Eclin.'

'You have not told me this with any hope of gaining my consent, I trust,' said the Squire.

'Decidedly not,' was the reply; 'had there been the slightest chance of your consent, or rather had it been within the bounds of possibility that I could ever ask your consent, I should not have made up my mind to leave Eclin. It is a trial for me to leave it—over and above the feeling I have—for—for her; the place has been a home, more of a home than any I ever expected to know again. This poor room seems small and scanty to you, Mr Alton, but to me it has often seemed, by reason of its peacefulness, as the antechamber of heaven itself. I am going away not of my own free will—but by reason of the inexorable necessity; and I have told you all this because, perhaps, it was honest to tell, and because, also, it has been a relief to me to do so.'

There ensued a pause—then Mr Alton said: 'Doesn't my daughter know—or—suspect?'

'I am afraid so, and that is the fear which drives me away. While I could keep all knowledge from her, what did my wretched secret matter? It hurt no one but myself, and it was such—happiness—to be with her—I would not have had her know it,' he went on vehemently, 'I would never have had her troubled by

pity or regret—I should never have spoken, never have told her—I never did—and yet I think she knows—and so I am going.'

'I trust Joy has nothing to reproach herself with in this matter,' Mr Alton began; 'sometimes people have mistaken her manner and imagined——'

'Miss Alton has never led me astray,' Andrew eagerly interrupted; 'I have not mistaken her manner. I never regarded her but as one as far beyond my reach as though she were a queen seated on her throne, and I a beggar by the wayside; only when the beggar comes to understand that though his tongue be silent, his face may tell tales, he rises, and weary and worn though he be, takes himself away from all chance of giving offence or causing sorrow.'

'I am very much concerned about all this,' the Squire said, with a disturbed look, 'and I am very sorry for you.'

'Nay,' Andrew returned, 'do not let my trouble grieve you: I shall not leave here with a broken heart—I shall only carry away with me a fairer, brighter memory than ever found a resting-place in my heart before—knowledge of such a feeling was what my life wanted, and it is better for our knowledge to be perfected in sorrow than for us not to know at all. When she—is—happily married, as I pray she will marry some one worthy of her, and suitable in every respect—I shall still think about this happy time—just as I think of it now, and bless her for the gleam of sunshine she poured across a path that for years and years had been dark to me as night.'

'Why should such darkness have fallen to your lot?' asked Mr Alton. 'It is not natural for a man of your age to have experienced such heavy trouble as you seem to point at.'

'Trouble is of no age,' Andrew answered; 'a man is never either too young or too old to get into a mess from which he cannot hope to extricate himself.'

Afterwards recalling this conversation, the Curate and the Squire both knew that these words might almost have been spoken prophetically, but that any future meaning lay hidden in them, never occurred to either while they stood together by the window, looking at the clustering roses that peeped in through the open casement and filled the small room with fragrance.

'Are you in debt?' Mr Alton at length asked abruptly.

'I do not owe a sovereign in the world,' Andrew answered.

'Have you made a foolish marriage?'

'I never have been and I never shall be married to any one,' the Curate replied.

'Have you got into any entanglement out of which money could help you?'

'No,' Andrew said simply; and there was another silence which Mr Alton broke by remarking:—

'Then if you are clear of all these things, what do you mean by having got into a mess, out of which you can never hope to extricate yourself?'

'I was speaking generally, not individually,' Andrew answered; 'but individually I have experienced a trouble, the shadow of which can never pass away from my life, and which must of necessity keep me for ever a poor lonely man. And now, Mr Alton, I have been frank with you—frank, not merely because I feel deeply the kindness you have shown me since I came here, but also because hope and I parted in sorrow many a day ago. Had it not been for this, I might, even as I am, have dared to look up and to look forward.'

He said this steadily, so steadily and determinedly that Mr Alton turned and scrutinized him uneasily.

Interpreting his expression rightly, Andrew went on—

'You need not be uneasy—I am going. Had I not utterly purposed leaving—had even an idea of venturing further been lurking in my mind, I should not have told you what I have; you may set your mind at rest. I would not stay here, now, even if you asked me to do so.'

Which sentence, of course, ended the matter, and rendering all further inquiry and discussion useless, Mr Alton shortly after took his leave, and it was when Andrew accompanied him to the garden gate that the hand-shaking, duly reported in Mrs Pryce's shop, took place.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW COULD HE GO?

Much exercised in spirit, Mr Alton, after his interview with Andrew Hardell, slowly wended his way back to the Hall. When men have once passed the age at which feminine sugar-plums seem desirable articles of food, they fail, as a rule, to see the beauty or to recognize the utility of a flirt's nature—indeed, it may fairly be questioned whether at any age a man admires a

flirt, unless he be in love with her himself; but then, as men usually entertain a *tendresse* for those women who lay themselves out to please, *that* argument falls to the ground, and need not be pursued here.

That fathers, however, whether stern or demonstrative—whether strict or indulgent—prefer the absence of any flirting tendencies in their daughters, is undeniable. Even if the mother fail to see the full enormity of Agatha's proceedings—if, in fact, she be foolish enough to imagine Agatha, by encouraging a score of suitors, is treading a path which cannot fail to conduct her to wealth, happiness, and a good settlement, the male author of that young lady's being always realizes the full enormity of her transgressions, and frequently even remonstrates with her on the subject.

The fact is, men have the same objection to see their daughters playing at fast and loose with devoted suitors, as they have to see their children pulling the legs and wings off flies. There is an amusement and a fascination to the darlings in both cases, no doubt—but to dispassionate observers there seems a trifling amount of cruelty likewise; further, the whole business of flirting cannot but suggest to the male mind the danger that is reported to lurk in trusting children and fools with edge tools. Of course harm may happen neither to the lady nor her admirers—they may all come off sound and with never a scratch upon them; but then, on the other hand, one may receive a mortal wound—such things have occurred ere now, and for this reason, if for no other, paterfamilias would prefer Agatha to lay down her sword and other munitions of war, and, accepting some honest man, forget the questionable conquests—the dearly-purchased admiration of her early youth.

Further, as a rule, men want their daughters to marry quite as much, or more, than mothers do.

With the latter the desire for their daughters to settle well originates quite as much in their wish for the articles they have with considerable difficulty, and after an amount of exertion no one but themselves can realize, brought to perfection, to go off well in the matrimonial market. They wish, also, that their girls should 'settle' as rapidly as the maidens of their next-door neighbour; so that when Mrs Brown announces the impending marriage of her first-born, Mrs Smith can reply, with modest pride, 'I am so glad, dear; and now I may tell you Araminta is engaged, and that the wedding will take place in June.'

With Mr Smith the feeling is, however, slightly different; knowing more of the world, perhaps, than his wife, though that

worthy lady, of course, never could be induced to think so—aware that much of a woman's happiness depends on her marrying young and marrying suitably—conscious, spite of Mrs Smith's expressed belief that she could have done much better than accept him—her life has proved both very easy and very desirable, he feels naturally anxious that whilst a girl's chance remains—whilst she is young, pretty, and attractive enough to pick and choose, she should make her choice, and abide by it—that she should not ruin her prospects by a dozen objectless flirtations—that she should prefer being the love, comfort, wife of some honest man, rather than the cruel mistress of a hundred sighing suitors, or the belle of a whole shire. Prospectively, the man beholds her a faded, wrinkled, lonely old maid, or else the bride of some one for whom she does not care a straw, whom she has taken as the man in the story took the gnarled and crooked stick at the end of his ramble through the wood, where he had beheld straight young saplings and smooth branches—all of which he passed by, thinking he should meet with something better, and then when he came to that, with something better still.

All this Mr Alton thought about as he walked leisurely back to the house. With all his heart and with all his soul he had long wished Joy married, and now he wished more devoutly than ever that she might meet some one she could fancy, so that her slaughter amongst male hearts might cease. He did not blame her, indeed, for how could she help being attractive? the very qualities which made him love her so much won for her also that different kind of love—one demonstration of which he was even then lamenting. No, Joy could not help it, but none the less—nay, rather all the more—he hoped she would soon marry.

He was sick of it, as a brave man may grow sick at the sight of useless carnage. He knew he should regret the day which took his child away from him; and yet, seeing what havoc she was making with her own life and the lives of others, he longed for a day to be fixed that should end it all, and change Miss Alton into Mrs Somebody, who could not be asked in marriage any more.

This affair of Andrew's seemed indeed the last drop in his cup. The very hopelessness of the man's love, his honesty in confessing it, the strength and righteousness of his resolution, the very despair of his repressed manner, had all affected Mr. Alton as no mere love-tale had ever touched him before. He liked the Curate, and the Curate had been happy at Eclin, and he might have remained there but for this unhappy attachment.

Had Andrew ever dreamed of prosecuting his suit, the Squire might have prefixed a different adjective—presumptuous, for in-

stance; but as matters stood, there was no fault to be found with this poor and humble lover. He acknowledged the hopelessness of the whole thing, and he was going—voluntarily, and as the result of a deliberate resolve.

'No one could have acted more fairly and more honestly. Yes, it is very sad,' Mr Alton acknowledged, recalling the worn face, the troubled yet steadfast manner, the plain, unvarnished story of the man whose life the Squire felt could never contain another love like that he entertained for Joy.

'I will take her away,' the Squire decided, carefully resolved, now the harm was all done and the steed stolen, on locking the stable door. 'I will take her away. We can go abroad for a time. We will reside more in London, and Joy shall mix much in society. Perhaps she may see some one she could care for,' sighed the Squire, never dreaming in his innocence that she had seen some one for whom she cared a great deal, and that she was fretting herself ill at thought of his departure.

She wanted to learn for certain why he was going. She was resolved that if she could keep him at Eclin, he should not leave it; she had never known what it was to be disappointed in her life, and now—now when something more valuable, as it seemed to her, than life, was at stake, should she let herself be thwarted?

No. Joy, who had never found any of her sweet fancies crossed, came down the next morning after Mr Alton's interview with Andrew Hardell, looking so bewitchingly lovely, and dressed in such exquisite taste, that the Squire, who was accustomed to be accurately frank with his daughter—painfully straightforward as is the fashion of such men—allowed her to examine and cross-examine him to such good effect, that, spite of his good intentions and firm resolves never to let Joy into the secret, she wormed out of him what had been indeed the talk of the village, *viz.*, that Andrew was going away for love of her,—and because he knew such love to be as hopeless as dishonourable.

Then the young lady set her brains to work to think how she could keep Andrew near the Hall. Even if they were distant, she knew she should not feel him utterly lost so long as he remained at Eclin. She comprehended that whilst he stayed within sight of the nest, he could scarcely forget the bird, who must some day return thither. After that Continental tour which her father proposed, if she could only come back and find Andrew still in his old home,—who knew? He might have a good living presented to him, and be able to speak what she was certain he felt.

'If he would only ask me now,' Miss Alton considered. 'We

need not be married, and I could get papa to consent in time; but if he go away without saying anything, we may never meet again—never.'

And Joy, who had always previously needed but to wish and to have, grew almost angry with Andrew for his reticence and his intense stupidity in wanting to go away. If she could only prevent his carrying out that intention, the position, Joy felt, might not prove quite hopeless, and accordingly one day as she and her father walked together up and down the terrace, she began demurely—

'As we are leaving so soon, papa, do you not think Mr Hardell might just as well keep on his curacy? It seems a pity for him to leave a place where he says he has been comfortable, and where he is so much liked, merely because of this piece of folly, which he will soon get over.'

'My dear Joy,' answered her father, who never suspected how her heart was fluttering as she uttered the foregoing hypocritical sentence, 'we cannot remain away for ever; and this "folly," as you call it, might re-commence on our return—if, indeed, it ceased during your absence. You must remember this is not a mere affair of "loving and riding away." Mr Hardell is not a man to take an impression easily, and his unfortunate attachment has affected him seriously. It is not merely far better for him to leave Eclin—it is essential he should do so. He will be happier and safer away from you; and whilst he does remain near us, I wish, Joy, you would not walk so much into the village. He cannot avoid meeting you, and you ought not to render his leaving any harder than it must naturally be. I have been frank with you over this business, and you should remember you are not a child, and be considerate accordingly.'

'I will try to be,' Joy agreed—'I will, indeed.' But though she said this with outward quietness, once she was in her own room, and had locked and double-locked the door, she flung herself on a couch, and wept as if her heart would break.

'I wish I had courage to tell papa,' she sobbed; 'but I have been such a hypocrite all through. Oh! I wish—I wish—' and the thing she wished was that Mr Hardell would speak to her. 'I should not mind confessing, if he would only do his part; and I could manage to get papa's consent in time—I know I could.'

She was having her turn then. She had made many a strong heart ache; and now when the pain came she felt she could not endure it. If the man loved her, why did he not speak? Was he a fool, to go away and make no sign? Was he a coward, to

leave without even making a struggle to win her? Why did he not try to see her? Why did he not come to the Hall?

'If I were a man and loved a woman, I would soon let her know it,' Joy mentally exclaimed; and considering she was but a woman, she had certainly done her best to acquaint Mr Hardell with the fact that she felt more than a preference for him.

All of which Mr Alton failed to see.

That his daughter, who had refused so many desirable offers—who had said 'No!' to men handsome and wealthy and well-born—should have conceived an affection for this man, who did not possess apparently one quality likely to win favour in a lady's eyes, was a catastrophe the reality of which never entered his mind, and he had no object in warning Joy to keep out of the Curate's path beyond his desire to spare Mr Hardell useless pain.

That his daughter was merciless in her triumphs he knew by long experience; that she lacked also the capacity to comprehend the amount of pain she inflicted he was beginning to fear.

'She must have given him encouragement.' The Squire always, when reflecting upon the subject, came back to that point; for, as I have said, he was well acquainted with Joy's flirting propensities, and had known many of the consequences those propensities entailed, and he felt most earnestly thankful when, one day meeting Mr Hardell, that gentleman said—

'It is all settled about my leaving, Mr Alton, and I go next week. My old Vicar has very kindly asked me to return to him "till I get something better;" and Essex Marsh is just fitted for me and I for it.'

'I need not say that I am sorry,' the Squire replied; 'both because you are going, and because of the reason that has influenced your decision. If at any time or in any way I can serve you, pray remember it will be a pleasure to me to do so. And,' he added, seeing a wistful look in the Curate's eyes, 'will you not spend your last evening at the Hall; I am certain my daughter would like it, and we dine at seven?'

That night Joy came down arrayed for conquest. Never before had Andrew felt how far removed she was from him, as when he saw her in all her youth and beauty gliding about the large drawing-room, sitting at the head of her father's table, dressed as even on great occasions he had never seen her tricked out before.

Mr Alton noticed her attire with manifest disapproval. It was just one of the things he felt she ought not to have done, and he said aloud before the Curate, 'Why, Joy, how does it happen you have treated us to so much finery?'

'Finery—oh, my dress!' Joy answered, carelessly, but blushing, nevertheless. 'It will be out of fashion before we come back again, and I thought you might as well have the benefit of seeing it once again.'

How that dinner passed over, Andrew never afterwards could tell. He ate and he drank—he spoke and he listened, like one in a dream, with some terrible dread haunting the dreamer.

After dinner, when the ladies had retired, Mr Alton discoursed with what indifference he might upon the leading topics of the day—upon the news contained in that morning's 'Times'; but to Andrew it sounded as though his voice came from a long distance—he seemed to hear as a man under water might catch the sentences of those on shore.

Altogether that evening was a failure, and Mr Alton felt it. He had meant to be kind to Andrew, to prove how he grieved for, and admired, and liked him; but he understood now the wound was too green for the patient to be able to bear such a trial with equanimity—that he had better have left the man to pass his last evening alone in the house he had made into something almost like home during the happy time when he was walking through his fool's paradise, never dreaming that a waking and a parting must ensue.

Yes; his well-intentioned hospitality proved to have been but mistaken kindness, and he was not sorry when, after coffee had been served in the drawing-room, Andrew rose to go.

A few minutes after, he had bidden them all good-bye. He had shaken hands once again with Mr Alton, who accompanied him to the hall door, and was walking in the twilight, with a suffocating feeling in his throat and a mist before his eyes, straight away from Heaven.

Bitter enough were his thoughts as he left the house which contained everything that now seemed dear, or precious, or to be desired in life.

'Never again,' he reflected, 'never again, most likely, should he set eyes on her more; never again behold her face,—which was *the* face in all the world to him.' She had liked him a little; strange as it seemed even to his comprehension, he felt certain she had done so; and given the chances that other men possessed, he believed he might have won her; but now she would forget him naturally; he would drift out of her life even when a little time had gone; she would scarcely remember him as a casual acquaintance. She had not seemed to be grieved at his leaving; she had touched his hand, and hoped he would be happy at Essex Marsh, and come to see them sometimes, and that was all—no,

not quite all: she smiled, and her smile then—her sunny, careless smile—was worse than a frown could have been.

'How could she smile when he was going;—going, as she must have known, all for love of her. How heartless women were—how cold—how thoughtless. How utterly——'

But the sentence never was finished, for just as he arrived at that point in his condemnation of the fairer and weaker part of creation, there was a rustling of the bushes close at hand, he heard his own name softly uttered, and next moment Joy appeared from a side path and stood beside him.

'Come with me for a moment,' she said, and the pair walked a few steps aside from the main avenue, and stood sheltered by the trees from observation, had there been any one at hand to observe.

'I could not let you go,' Joy began, and there was a 'music of tears' in her voice, 'without telling you how sorry I am,—how I shall always remember, always for ever, so true and kind a friend. Must it be so?—must you go?'

He knew well enough what she meant—knew that had he only said, 'Joy, I love you,' she would have promised then and there to be his wife. For a minute his purpose wavered—for a minute, one wild minute, he longed to take her in his arms, and whisper, 'No, I will never leave you, unless you bid me do so!' for a minute—during which the agony and temptation of a lifetime seemed battling together—he could not speak, but stood silent, fighting with himself.

Then he said, and his voice sounded harsh, by reason of the very restraint he was putting on his words and feelings—

'It must be so—I must go.'

It was her last venture, and it had failed. With something between a sob and a moan, she turned and flitted away through the gathering darkness—while Andrew, stretching out his arms after the retreating figure, cried aloud, as though she could hear him—

'Farewell, my dear—farewell for ever!'

He had heard her sing those words in the days departed, and he used them now as we are all apt to employ some remembered sentences when our minds are too much anguished to shape thoughts into sentences for themselves.

And she went sobbing through the darkness—knowing she had done more than most women would have ventured, only to find her love, for some inscrutable reason, rejected.

'What can it mean?' she asked herself, in a perfect passion

of despair, 'If he love me at all—how could he go?—how could he?'

CHAPTER XXIX.

MADGE.

How could he go? Ah, he knew how for very love of her, how because she was dearer to him than any human being had ever been before, or might ever be again, he felt constrained to leave her and pass on his way lonely and broken-hearted.

He thought himself honest and self-denying, when without a real pang he parted from Madge Forster, but now he understood the difference; comprehended that had he loved Madge as he loved this girl, he could not have gone without some explanation. And then also it came to him that if the attachment he felt for the dear sweet face of her who made home so pleasant at Langmore, had been anything resembling the wild, passionate devotion he entertained for Joy Alton, his life must have proved different.

'I could have told her,' he thought, 'and she would have understood and been merciful—but, oh! my God, how I deceived myself, and wronged that angel.'

And thus, whilst he walked through the night, though Joy Alton was the key-note of his meditations, the real theme of every emotion he experienced, still, as in some fantastic musical arrangement we occasionally hear a second air running through the accompaniment while subordinate to the principal melody, one portion of his mind always seemed reverting to Madge Forster, whilst the other brooded over the love, and the hope, and the joy he had renounced when he let the girl who was so womanly as almost in her love for him to have forgotten her womanhood, flit away from him, ignorant that his heart was breaking because he worshipped her as he had never thought to worship anything save his God.

As some women never understand how devotedly they have been loved till their turn comes, and they experience the sleepless nights and the heart-breaking days that ensue when they meet with the arbiter of their fate; so this man had always, till he was in love himself, failed to realize all Madge might have and did suffer, when the lover of her youth—the man to whom she

was engaged, around whom every hope of her future life clung, left her—as he now saw she must have thought—without any sufficient reason—without even the clasped hand and the lingering kiss, and the close embrace, and the tearful farewell — 'for ever.'

'I have sinned,' Andrew Hardell said to his own soul, 'against that girl through ignorance ;' and he felt very bitter both towards himself and the life which had left him so senselessly ignorant as unwittingly to injure any woman's prospects, while, thinking of Joy Alton, he walked home to the house he was to leave on the morrow.

'I only hope she has married ere this, well and happily ;' and then in a stupid sort of way he fell to calculating how old Madge was, and thinking how changed she must be from the little girl he remembered flitting hither and thither about the parsonage grounds at Langmore.

It was quite dark when he reached the village, so dark that at first he did not notice a man who stood leaning over his gate, waiting apparently for the Curate's return ; indeed, it was not until the stranger, stepping a little aside, said interrogatively,

'Mr Hardell, I believe ?' that Andrew became aware of his presence.

'My name is Hardell,' the Curate replied.

'I called earlier in the evening,' the other explained ; 'but your servant told me you were gone out to dinner, and further, that you were leaving Eclin to-morrow morning. Under the circumstances, as I have come all the way from London to see you, I thought you would pardon my returning even at an unseasonable hour. I want to have five minutes' conversation with you particularly.'

'Will you walk in ?' Andrew answered, a great dread as to what his visitor might have to say filling his heart. The years had made no difference to him in this respect, in his fear and horror of having the old wound touched ; and on the special night of which I am speaking, the past had been very present with him—that past that had made such a shipwreck of his life.

'May I inquire your name ?' he added, as they entered his little sitting-room. 'I do not recollect ever having had the pleasure of seeing you before ;' and while he spoke he removed the shade from his lamp, and looked fixedly at his visitor, who in turn looked curiously at him.

'I am Herbert Spencer,' was the reply ; 'but as you are not in the least degree likely to know who Herbert Spencer is, I may add that the late Mr Forster, of Langmore, and my mother, were

half-brother and sister, and I am therefore cousin to Miss Forster, whom you may, perhaps, remember."

'I remember her perfectly,' the Curate answered; 'for I spent many a happy day in Langmore Vicarage.'

'You heard, doubtless, of Mr Forster's death?' the other proceeded, taking, at the same time, the seat Andrew offered.

'Yes,' Mr Hardell replied. 'I was very sorry to hear so good a man was lost to the world. My late Vicar in Essex Marsh told me about it.'

There was a visible constraint in his host's manner that disconcerted the visitor, and made what he had come so far to say not easy of utterance; and accordingly, after Mr Hardell's last set speech, there ensued an awkward silence, which was at length broken by the Curate's saying,

Miss Forster is well, I trust?'

'Quite well, thank you,' her cousin replied, then went on desperately—'Mr Hardell, I have come from London to speak to you confidentially on a subject which lies very near to my heart. You knew Madge before I ever knew her—you must have been acquainted with all the circumstances of her most unhappy engagement to your friend, Mr Andrew Hardell—also with the fact that he left England after having released her from her engagement, without either personal farewell or the slightest explanation of his conduct. I believe Miss Forster wrote to you, enclosing a letter for him, which she requested you to forward, but as she never received a reply from you, I am inclined to suppose the packet miscarried.'

'No,' the Curate answered. 'I received her letter, but I judged my best and kindest course was not to answer it. I thought it my duty to leave the matter as my friend had left it. I considered she was more likely soon to forget a man who was never worthy of her, if all channels of communication were closed entirely. I may have been wrong in my judgment, but I acted for the best; and I hope it has turned out as I hoped it might, and that she has long since forgotten my unhappy friend, and formed another attachment.'

'She has not,' Herbert Spencer said eagerly, 'and that is the very point on which I wished to speak to you. She has spent all these years faithful to the memory—for it can be little more than the memory—of a man who, I am satisfied, never cared for her. Not merely is she still fond of him, but the very chivalry of her nature, the very pity which most women feel, I suppose, for a man who has been in any way unfortunate makes her cling so strongly to the recollection of her attachment, that it seems

impossible for the idea of any other love being substituted entering her mind.'

'Some one does love and would win her, then?' Andrew questioned. 'Is it you?'

'I wanted to marry her years ago,' the other answered; and hearing this, Mr Hardell rose and walked up and down the room. He could not understand why all this had come upon him then—why, when his own strength was taxed almost beyond what it could bear, he should be called upon to carry another burden; but he was called upon to do so—to endure the old racking agony of having his frightful past made manifest to his understanding—of mentally beholding the tragedy enacted beneath the arching trees played out once more before his eyes. It all surged up before him as he paced the limits of his small apartment—the night passed at New Abbey—the walk over Criffel—the awful day spent in wandering beside the Solway—the weeks dragged on in Kirkcudbright jail—the journey up to Dumfries—the forty-eight hours he spent in confinement there—the crowded Court-house—the weary trial—the alternations of hope and despair—the time when, in the dim light, he sat waiting to hear his fate—the stupid sort of non-comprehension with which he listened to the accursed verdict that stamped him socially, though not criminally, for life as a murderer—these things, which he sometimes deluded himself into believing were dead and buried, arose like ghosts, and came trooping out of the darkness of the weary, weary past into the present of the man who had suffered so much and tried so hard to cast aside all earthly considerations, and remember only the Master to whose service he was consecrated.

At that moment his way was very dark to him. He had just cast aside all chance of a love that might even yet have flooded his life with sunshine—and in a moment he was called upon to contemplate the desolation wrought in another existence, which he now understood had been, through his act and by his deed, passed in almost a more utter desolation—in even a more sickening hopelessness than his own.

Now he beheld which way in the past his duty had lain, and wherein from the very first his error consisted; and even then it crossed his mind that perhaps it might still be his duty to go straight off next day to Madge, and tell her all, and if she, knowing all, were still willing to link her lot to his—marry her.

'Marry her!' a jibing spirit seemed to shriek in his ear, as this idea occurred to him. 'What have you to give her? Where is the heart that knew no other love; that might have been content itself, and made her content also—ignorant of the power

and the might of an absorbing passion; innocent of all consciousness of that idolatry which no man can feel twice, and which some men feel never? Better let the girl wed this man who can offer her at least an unsullied name, and a heart in which she will find no rival, than link her future to that of one whose life is a lie, who is liable at any moment to be cast from even the poor position he occupies, and branded as a murderer and an impostor.'

Pleasant thoughts these for him, as he paced up and down, with head bent down, and hands clasped behind his back, while Herbert Spencer sat watching him, marvelling much at his host's manner, and wondering what was to come next.

Then suddenly the Curate stood still beside the table, and said—

'She is in love with an ideal, and you wish that ideal destroyed. How am I to help you?'

'By telling me something of the reasons which induced Andrew Hardell to leave her and England as he did.'

'That would not assist your object,' the other answered. 'Even were I disposed to gratify your—I will not say curiosity—but desire for information, all I could tell would not advance your suit one iota. But this may. I assure you, that Andrew Hardell was never worthy of the love Madge Forster gave him; that he never loved her as she deserved to be loved; that had he done so he could not have left her without explanation; and that the affection she alone should have owned, is given elsewhere.'

'To Mrs Challerson—ah! I always thought that the true solution of the enigma,' said Herbert, eagerly.

'I deny your right to cross-examine me,' Andrew replied: he had never felt himself such a liar and impostor as at that moment; he had never so winced over the torture as then, when he was questioned on Madge's behalf by Madge's lover: 'but what I have told you is literally the truth, and if any assurance of mine could convince Madge that in losing her lover she really experienced a gain, I would entreat you to carry it to her; but she would doubt me and my assurance, naturally——'

'She went over to hear you preach in Essex Marsh,' the other suggested, 'but you were absent.'

'The place did not suit my health, and I was often absent,' the Curate answered; whilst his heart almost stood still, thinking what a narrow escape that was, and yet almost wishing Madge had seen and known him worthless, and so cast the dream of her life away; 'but it could serve no good purpose for me to see Miss Forster,' he went on; 'the interview could not fail to be

painful, and it would be impossible for me to tell her more than I have told you. The man was not worth remembering,' he finished, almost fiercely. 'He was a coward, and his whole life has been a deception and a lie.'

'You go farther than I should have ventured to do,' Herbert said, surprised and startled at this sudden vehemence, 'and yet you are, or were, at one time, his friend.'

'True, and if you wish to hear the worst of any man, come to his friends to learn it,' Andrew answered bitterly. 'Nevertheless, sir, what I tell you is the fact—Andrew Hardell deceived himself as well as others—therein lies his sole excuse. Were I to tell you the whole story through from first to last as I know it, you might pity, but you would also despise, him, and you would know for yourself what I now tell you, that it is impossible he should ever let any innocent girl join her lot to his. Were he standing here this moment he would repeat my words as solemnly as I do myself. And now, if we have done with a painful subject, I will order supper—that is, supposing my poor larder can furnish such a thing—I can give you a bed also, if you are disposed to be satisfied with humble quarters.'

'Thank you,' Herbert replied, 'but I must get back to St Mark's to-night, as I want to return to London by the first express to-morrow.'

'You will have bread and salt with me, however,' Andrew suggested, almost nervously.

'If not troubling you too much, for you have confirmed my own impression, and dealt more frankly by me than I had any right to expect.'

'Have I, really?' the Curate answered; and there was a quiet sarcasm in his tone which Mr Spencer thought of often in the after-days; and further, he considered within himself, as he drove back after supper to St Mark's, that Mr Anthony Hardell had really told him nothing which he desired to know.

'There is a mystery also about that gentleman's life, or I am greatly mistaken,' decided Mr Spencer next morning, while he thought over the interview, as the express hurried him back to town; 'and he bears Mr Andrew Hardell no good will, I am confident. Yet his is a nice face—the face of a man who has suffered. What a tangle the whole affair is—and oh, Madge, my darling, how I wish you were out of it, and belonged to me—me only. And if I only could prove Mr Andrew Hardell to have been, as his friend says, unworthy of so much devotion, I think I might have a chance—my love.'

Thinking of these things, Mr Spencer walked briskly from

the station up to his office, at the door of which he met a friend.

'I am so glad to see you,' observed the latter. 'I have not a minute to spare, as I want to catch the Portsmouth train; but such a curious thing has happened. You remember talking to me once about a man called Hardell, who rather stood in your way with a certain fair lady. Well, I met an old college chum of mine last night, just back from India, who told me he married that very man to a widow in St Swithin's Church, before he went to a chaplaincy at a station near Madras. Make your game, my dear boy, therefore, and ask me to the breakfast. Good-bye.'

'One word,' Herbert entreated. 'Can I see that clergyman?'

'Certainly, as often as you like, when I return. Are you not grateful? Good-bye, once more.'

CHAPTER XXX.

AT ST SWITHIN'S.

When a man is satisfied himself concerning conclusions, he is not apt to be over-fastidious or hypercritical about premises, and therefore it will hardly surprise any one that Herbert Spencer walked back to his home, on the evening succeeding the events narrated in the previous chapter, perfectly satisfied in his own mind as to facts following:—

First—That Mr Anthony Hardell was quite right in his estimate of Mr Andrew Hardell's character.

Second—That Andrew had married Mrs Challerson; and

Third—That his way was now clear with regard to Madge.

For all of which reasons he informed his mother that he meant to walk round and see Madge, who filled the enviable post of governess to the Miss Chillings, whose parents, together with their numerous offspring, resided in Brunswick Square.

For it had come to this. Madge was too true to accept the shelter of any home under false pretences, and as she knew it was only in the light of her future daughter-in-law that Mrs Spencer would have heartily welcomed her continued stay, she elected—when the first grief was overpast, and her sorrow had grown calm—to take up her abode with strangers, rather than remain in a house where a love was offered she could not return,

and where she felt that her aunt was constantly marvelling at the perverted taste which made her refuse to become Herbert's wife.

Since a better man than Herbert Spencer probably never breathed—and it naturally enough seemed singular to his mother that, remembering the length, and breadth, and depth of his love —recollecting his devotion through the years—Madge could remain obdurate, worshipping an abstraction, faithful to the memory of an ideal which had never existed save in her own devoted imagination.

As for the man himself, he had hope, and he had patience. He loved her so devotedly that he could afford to wait, and yet as time went by—time which wrought no apparent change in her sentiments and determination—he often grew sick at heart, remembering how the best years of both were passing away—years that might have been full of happiness to one at least, and to both he hoped.

'Only marry me, dear,' he once said, 'and the love will come.'

'Ah! Herbert,' she gently answered, 'I would not deal so falsely with any good man as to marry him till the love had come.'

'And when will that be?' he pleaded.

'When I forget him,' she replied; 'and as that can never be, forget me, Herbert—for my sake try to do so.'

He knew her better, however, than she knew herself; and he felt so satisfied, could she once see her idol as others viewed him, that she would set herself to fight against and overcome her unreturned affection, that he at length determined to seek out the only man who could, as he believed, throw any light on the subject.

Little enough he had learned from the Curate, but backed as that little was by his friend's communication, he felt that he might once again speak to Madge concerning the unworthiness of her lover; and full of this purpose, he walked over to Brunswick Square, and asked Mrs Chilling if Miss Forster might walk back with him to see his mother, who was laid up with an attack of neuralgia.

Vulgar was Mrs Chilling—but spite of that fact—nay, rather perhaps in consequence of it—the good soul was very womanly. She liked Madge, and she liked Herbert, who made no secret about his love for his pretty cousin, and in her heart of hearts the City lady wished Mr Spencer God-speed, and considered that Madge must be nothing better than a simpleton to go on 'governessing,' 'when she might have a home of her own, my dear, and a devoted husband into the bargain,' for all of which reasons she accorded

more liberty to Miss Forster, and more opportunities of love-making to Herbert, than austere matrons are usually disposed to grant; and Madge often, consequently, walked up to Camden Town with Herbert, who fed himself for days on the prospect of feeling the dear hand resting on his arm, and hearing the dear voice sounding in his ear, even although that voice conveyed nothing save reprehension of his suit, and another earnestly expressed desire that he could fancy some one else and marry her.

'I will never marry any one else, Madge,' he answered, on the especial evening in question, 'and until you do, I shall still hope.'

'Ah! Herbert, do not talk so,' she entreated; but the little hand clasped his arm, touched perhaps by his faithfulness and persistency. Even if a woman have no love for a man, she is rarely insensible to his constancy.

'But, my dearest, if I can prove to you that Mr Hardell was never worth your love.'

'I should be sorry, but I should love him still,' she murmured.

'If he were married,' Herbert suggested; but she remained silent.

'If I can show you that, whilst you were spending the best years of your life grieving over and being faithful to him, he was the husband of another—what then, Madge?'

'I should not believe it,' she answered. 'I will never believe Andrew Hardell to have been other than unfortunate till I hear him say so. Oh! Herbert, you cannot know what love really is, or you would not torture me as you do.'

'Perhaps not,' he answered; 'and yet—oh! Madge,' he broke out passionately, 'what are you made of that even for my love's sake you will not love me,—that you will persist in clinging to the memory of a man who years—and years—and years ago, married Mrs Challerson.'

'I am sure that is not true,' Madge replied: then softening her assertion, she continued, 'you are mistaken, Herbert, you have been misinformed.'

'If I have, then,' he said, 'it is upon the authority of the clergyman who married them.'

'Where?' she asked.

'At St Swithin's,' he replied.

'And that is——?' she suggested.

'In Cannon Street, City.'

'Herbert, I wish you would take me back again,' she began, after a short pause. 'I am not well. I do not think I should like to walk so far as your mother's to-night.'

Without a word he obeyed, and they began to retrace their steps; then he ventured—

'Are you angry, dearest?'

'No—oh! no.'

'Are you vexed with me?

'No, Herbert; only you do not comprehend.'

'My love, teach me to do so.'

'I wish I could. But you did not know him, and you only judge by what people have said, and you cannot understand all I have thought about it, and—and—how much he was to me.'

'I would forgive him that,' answered Herbert, 'if you did not care so much for him now.'

'And you believe any idle story?'

'Indeed, Madge, now you are unjust. I do not believe any idle story—but I cannot discredit what I heard from so reliable a source.'

'But you ought not to credit mere hearsay,' she persisted.

'Well, dear, I will have seen before I ask you to believe anything again.'

'I should not believe even if you had seen,' she retorted. 'I should say you were mistaken.'

With which purely feminine observation the argument closed, for Herbert thought, and thought rightly, she was in no mood to listen to argument patiently.

He knew too well the might of the power he held in his hands to feel other than angry at the precipitancy which had induced him to use it till he could at the same time produce proofs likely to satisfy Madge's scepticism.

'I will have a copy of the certificate before this time to-morrow night,' he determined; but he said nothing of this resolution to Madge, only bade her tenderly farewell, after entreating her pardon if he had caused pain.

'For I would not distress you intentionally, darling,' he said, 'and you know that.'

'Yes, Herbert, I am certain of it,' she answered; but her tone sounded a little constrained, and the man walked back to his home vexed and wounded. He began to hate this Hardell, and with reason—yet he did not hate the Curate one half so bitterly as Andrew hated himself. The troubles of his wretched life were only beginning: could he but have understood the fact—and this contempt for himself—this detestation for the part he had acted, were but faint indications of the contempt and detestation with which he should look back on his own conduct in the years to come.

Of all this, however, Herbert was happily ignorant, when the following day he walked into St Swithin's Church, informed that the clerk was already there.

'He is in the vestry with a lady,' the sextoness stated; and before he saw her face, Herbert guessed who the lady was.

'Have you found it, Madge?' he whispered, drawing close to where she stood; and the pity he felt for her at that moment was great enough to swallow up all sense of triumph at the victory he had, as he believed, achieved.

'Yes,' she answered quietly. 'Look!' And, at her bidding, he did so, to learn that it was Anthony, not Andrew, Hardell and Laura Challerson who had been married in the dull November weather in that old City church hard by—London Stone.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SLIGHTLY SPECULATIVE.

For a moment Herbert Spencer stood silent; then he said, in a low, deprecating voice—

'I beg your pardon.'

'There is no necessity for you to do so,' she answered; and a happiness shone out of her eyes as she spoke the words, which made Herbert's heart ache.

'You are ready to leave, I suppose?' he remarked; and when she replied in the affirmative, he paid the clerk and followed her down the aisle—thinking—ah! well, it does not matter much now of what he thought as he walked out of the church.

Without uttering a word, he offered Madge his arm, and the two paced slowly up Cannon Street, towards St Paul's. Over and over again he tried to address some indifferent remark to his companion, but the words would not form themselves on his tongue. He had been so sure, and behold the result of his certainty only proved a trump-card dealt into Andrew Hardell's hand.

To say that he hated Andrew Hardell at that moment, would convey but a faint and inadequate idea of his state of mind. The man, and his life, and his motives, were a greater mystery to him than ever; and he pondered over the subject, till at length Madge, pitying his mortification, said softly—

'Dear Herbert, I know you believed it.'

'You may be certain of that, Madge, or I should never have mentioned the matter to you, but I ought not to have repeated such a statement on mere hearsay.'

'I cannot wonder at your crediting the story, for you did not know him.'

'Neither did you,' Herbert thought, but he wisely refrained from uttering the remark, and merely answered—

'There is no fear of your judging any one harshly, Madge.'

'I do not think one human being has any right to judge another at all,' she replied.

'You were not thinking of me, Madge, when you said that, were you?' he asked; and she answered, 'No; oh! no; but every one, even those who knew him best, and who should have known him better, misjudged Andrew Hardell.'

'I hope you are not mistaken in your estimate of him,' he said, a little bitterly.

'Ah! Herbert, do not tell fibs. You know you hope nothing of the kind; you hope I am utterly mistaken, and that I shall yet see him as you think he is.'

'My dear, you are wrong,' he answered; 'for myself I might hope this, but not for you. All I trust and pray is, that however the thing may be, you will see the truth before it be too late.'

'Too late for what, Herbert?' she asked.

'For you and me,' the man said, and there was a tone in his voice which made her quiver. Had she been wrong all through in this blind clinging to an absent idol? Was she wasting another life beside her own, mourning over, sorrowing for, expecting back, a man who had through the years never made a sign? Was it a mistake altogether? was the whole affair not a mere fancy of her girlhood—a piece of romance which she might have forgotten long and long before, had friends remained silent, and had she not taken Andrew's part, and stuck to it with all a woman's romance, with all a woman's obstinacy?

Which estimate of human character, of human motives, is right I wonder—a man or a woman's—the judgment of him, who reaches his conclusion by means of facts, or the unalterable opinion of her, who, soaring above all ordinary testimony, perches on her pinnacle solely with the aid of fancy.

A woman loving a man and judging him, takes pretty much the same view of his actions as he does himself; but can the view be quite depended on in either case? Is it not as usual for a woman looking at a beloved object to perform that feat through coloured glass, as for the beloved object to soften down

in self-examination the harsher features of his own career; but ordinarily there is just as much difference between male and female judgments as there is between a photograph and a crayon drawing. The one takes facts as they are, and dealing with them accordingly, produces a likeness, true it may be, yet still cold and stern; while the latter flatters, and softens, and makes the face more as God would have it, than as man has worn it.

And this idealization of those they love is the curse of women, while it proves the salvation of men. It is cruel work for a woman to wake from her dream and find her idol—which she clothed with all sweet fantasies—only flesh and blood; but unconsciously almost, the man, finding his flesh and blood so habited, tries to make himself more worthy of the tender fancies affection has woven around his hard prosaic life.

But when women do not love, what then? the reader suggests. Ah! then, as a rule, their portraits are harder and harsher than photographs and nature as well. Jeffreys himself was not a sterner or more unfair judge than our darlings can be on occasion. Sentimentally they listen to the lightest words of one culprit, while they refuse to hearken to even the weightiest evidence offered in favour of another. Had Andrew Hardell returned and tried with any tale to win Madge's favour, she would have hearkened eagerly whilst he spoke, and so Herbert Spencer felt: had one risen from the dead to persuade her of his faithlessness, she would not have believed.

Which is all, as we are so often told, attributable to the charming amiability and constancy of her sex. Therefore, dear reader, let us thank God who made another sex, for it would be a bad world this—a worse world, and harder to live in than it is —if judgment, like kissing, invariably went by favour.

And further: if in this age of women's rights one may venture to mention even parenthetically men's wrongs, there is another fault beyond that of partiality to be found with the divine sex—namely, that they are so much more faithful to a fancy than to a fact—to a memory than to a presence. For my own part, were I young, sentimental, and in love, I would, with my present experience of feminine angels, at once place the ocean between myself and the object of my adoration; certain that for ever I should then remain to her the lover of her imagination, instead of merging, as the years went by, into a prosaic individual, the 'papa' and 'bread-winner' of the house who did not fully do his duty in either one capacity or the other.

Angelina Jane might think of me as she chose, but it should never be as the particular old party who objected to seeing my

latest blessing's cradle in the drawing-room, or who grumbled at La Mode's bill. Nay, rather, with the billows rolling between us, my darling should contrast my luxuriant moustache with the stubbly beard grown by the husband who prosaically provides bread for her and the young ravens; she should think of my glossy curls when she contemplates the grey hair of paterfamilias poring over the weekly bills; and when I came to lay my head in my coffin, imagination should still have it all her own way, without even the intervention of an insurance policy to soften the blow and help pay for the mourning in which, were I her husband, the love of my youth would look so interesting, and bewail her loss so pathetically.

Life is a strange thing, philosophers remark; but in my opinion it would not be strange at all were there no women in it. The whole affair of existence might not then indeed be peculiarly interesting or exciting, but it would at least be intelligible, whereas now every attempt to solve the mystery thereof only plunges one into a deeper abyss of speculation, into a more maddening attempt to reach the recesses of the feminine mind, into a wilder wonder as to what law, if any, governs love,—into a more intense state of astonishment, as to why any man should waste his life, pining for the sweetest smile a woman could bestow upon him, and why any woman should waste years and years fretting for a man to whom she had been but as the breeze passing idly by—as the foam left by the retreating billow on the sand of the sea-shore.

Which the intelligent reader will remark has nothing to do with Madge Forster; but, on the contrary, it has much.

Like the rest of her sex, she had made a fetish for herself, and worshipped it in silence and solitude. She had her treasures that might have been with advantage thrust into the fire. Andrew's letters; a page of his first sermon; a marked copy of Longfellow's poems; a few ferns he had gathered one day when they took a long walk together; a ring he bought for her when they were engaged; a lock of his hair, and a few other such valuables, which she kept locked up in her desk, and looked at almost every night of her life.

But after that visit to St Swithin's, whenever she bowed herself down in the house of her Rimmon, and whenever she spread out before her the memorials she possessed, there appeared before her mental fancy another form, which suggested to her different ideas. Here on the one hand was her temporal Baal, to whom she had offered everything her life held dear—her youth, which had passed away, her love, her future, her hopes of a home of her

own. She had cried to her idol through the years, and no sound returned to her. She had kept herself for him, and no assurance came—'I, too, have been faithful.' She had wearied her own heart with conjecture, her own soul with unavailing grief, and still he came not—the lover of her long ago—to whose memory she meant to remain faithful for ever.

And on the other hand stood Herbert Spencer, who had been faithful to her, even as she had been faithful to Andrew Hardell, who was tender, loving, true; whose hardest reproach had never proved keener than the words I have quoted—'I hope it may not be too late.'

Right well she knew what he meant; namely, that he trusted light would come to her before the summer flowers were faded, before the autumn fruits were gathered; before winter frosts and snow had fallen on their heads and their hearts; he hoped she would cease pining for a shadow, and take the substance he had to offer in lieu of a love he felt was hopeless as that of the bereaved queen who watched for the re-animation of her husband's corpse.

'Too late!' She thought of those words often, with a great pity and a great tenderness welling in upon her heart. If she might never be happy herself, she might at least make Herbert so. But she could not do this, so long as she believed it possible for the poor wanderer to return and claim her love and pity.

'Supposing he came back and found me married,' she was wont to think, when Herbert's love and constancy almost woke an answering echo in her breast. 'It would break his heart.'

Wherein, of course, she was utterly wrong, only she was not aware of the fact; and so the months slipped by, and Madge was nearly two years older than on the morning she and Herbert stood together looking at the register in St Swithin's church, when one Friday her cousin came and said—

'Madge, Mr Anthony Hardell is to preach next Sunday evening at St Martin the Martyr's. Should you like to hear him? If so, I will call for you a little before six.'

'How good you are!' she said—'I should like to hear him greatly. Where is he now, Herbert, do you know? I mean where is his own place?'

'That I cannot tell you,' he answered. 'I went down to Essex Marsh a little while since, but found he had left there nearly a year—got some preferment, the sexton thought, but did not know for certain.'

'I should like to see him again greatly,' she remarked.

'Well, you shall then, if you are ready in good time,' Herbert

replied. 'I dare say the place will be crowded, for I hear he is wonderfully clever, and has lately been going about a good deal preaching charity and special sermons.'

'I certainly am astonished to hear it,' Madge said, thoughtfully, 'for we never considered him anything remarkable at Langmore. Had it been Andrew, now——'

'Oh! confound Andrew,' mentally exclaimed Mr Spencer; but he was sensible enough merely to observe that it appeared the Rev. Anthony Hardell had not been an exception to the general rule of no prophet being without honour save in his own country and among his own people. 'I am quite certain,' Herbert finished, 'he would never have been asked to preach at St Martin's had he not been something out of the common. But you will be able to judge for yourself if we get there early enough on Sunday evening; and perhaps, Madge,' added the man, suggestively, yet with an almost pitiful pleading in his voice, 'you might even get a chance of speaking to him—that is, if you wish to do so.'

'I do wish, and will try,' she said; and for the first time in all their long acquaintance Madge returned the kiss Herbert had been in the habit—half as cousin, half as lover—of giving her at parting.

He did not attach much importance to that circumstance then, regarding it as an evidence more of gratitude than of love, more as accorded to anything which seemed even a link between herself and Andrew Hardell than as a token of affection for the man who loved her as Andrew Hardell had never done.

But Madge knew it was nothing of the sort which had influenced her. She felt the very strength of her own love was at length compelling a comprehension of his—that the extent of her own sorrow had enabled her to plumb the depth of his grief.

She had begun to feel—lonely and desolate as she was—that a grief, like a child, may be nursed too long—to consider that one man might deserve affection and gratitude as well as another; and there was a half-formed feeling in her mind, that if Herbert asked her again to marry him she would not say 'No,' but try to be his faithful wife and friend to the end of the chapter.

Whereupon, though the light touch of her lips conveyed but little meaning then to the mind of the man who had loved her so long and so hopelessly, he was glad afterwards to remember he had received that kiss, and she to recollect it had been given.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AT LAST.

Meantime, as a cart-horse, after his fortnight's run in some meadow where he has been barely able to make off a poor living, —so close have other teeth besides his own eaten down the blades of grass,—returns to his drawing of bricks, and his endless collar-work over heavy country roads and the greasy London stones, Andrew Hardell, his time of rest and repose over, had come back once more to Essex Marsh, to the familiar place where he made his first start in that new life which commenced when all the links binding him to the old were broken—to the familiar faces he had learnt to regard as those of friends in the days following that period when he voluntarily cut himself adrift from all former ties —from all the hands which might have been outstretched to help him—from all these who, had he but taken heart and told his story fairly from beginning to end, would have believed, pitied, and lamented too.

But he did not return to Essex Marsh quite the same man—neither was his daily toil just what it once appeared. As the horse—meagre though his food may have been, and short his run —must take back to his dark stable and to his allotted task some memory of those weeks of freedom when harness and whip were as things lying in the dim past, so the Curate brought with him from Eclin, memories that tinged the grey clouds of his life with golden sunshine—sweet thoughts which were his dear companions while he walked the familiar lanes—fancies that turned themselves into realities in his dreams.

He had loved, and they were separated; by his own act and his own deed; for he knew that, had he but told Joy what he told her father, not a hundred fathers would have hindered her marrying him. But it was something even to have loved: the very pain of his wound he felt more endurable than the apathy in which he had existed before. He had some one now beside himself to think of—some one, though he might never be husband to her, to deny himself for.

He was more human than before he went to Eclin—his sympathies were extended—his powers for usefulness greater. It did not seem to him now—as it had once almost done, when he beheld misery and penury, pale-faced wives and sickly children —that if men were not to wed, or women marry, or sons and

daughters to be born, a good thing would have come to pass. Nay, rather now, when in the twilight he beheld a couple standing at that point in the railings round the churchyard where a few old trees made a shade over the foot-path—or saw a lingering farewell taken beneath the Vicarage wall—the man understood here was some portion of compensation which he would, in his ignorance, have cut out of these lives, had not experience taught him better.

The keener, however, his human sympathy became, so in precise proportion grew at times his impatience with his own lot. What! were these people, whose love-making he beheld, whose banns he published, whom he joined together for life, to have homes, wives, children, and he—he stand outside in the cold for ever? If their homes were poor—if the wives turned out slatterns—if the children were dragged up—still their lives held a promise once, and he knew enough both of the men and the women to be aware it was their own faults if that promise were never even partially fulfilled.

But for him, whose very education made him understand more fully the loss he had sustained, and feel more keenly the length, and breadth, and depth of his loneliness—was there never to break a morrow when he, too, should take one to his heart and hold her there? never an evening when he should return to other than a desolate hearth, with no voice save that of silence to greet him—nothing save the dropping of the cinders to break the stillness of the room?

Sometimes it seems to me that in trying to write this story, which has proved no easy task, I have been like one beating the air—as one spending his strength for nought. How is it possible I, with only a few poor words at command, should ever be able to make my readers understand such utter mental isolation—the position of a man who, with every capacity for the enjoyment of domestic happiness—with naturally a keen relish for society—with a nature capable of loving passionately—ay, with even the power of winning love in return—had yet voluntarily to renounce marriage, home ties, the charms of companionship, the solace of friendship?

Shall the young understand me—who have their lives before them—all before—with the broad plains of possibility stretching away in the future, bounded only by the sunlit hills of achievement? Shall the middle-aged—who have grasped happiness, and, it may be, rent the gaudy-coloured robe which floats around her—who have found thorns amongst their roses, sorrows amid their joys? Shall the old—who have seen friends depart—who have

lost children—who have buried the loves of the long ago—who have learnt to care more for the cosy seat by the fireside, and the daily trickle of petty gossip, and the dinner duly served, and the stroll in the warm sunshine, than to hear of the aspirations and disappointments of those who stand where once they stood? Shall those who are the light of happy, cheerful homes, comprehend this story—or even those who are struggling to gain such homes? No. By all these this tale of 'A Life's Assize,' tholed by a man in his youth and prime, will be cast aside unheeded; and but for the one here and there—for the man whose ship has, like Andrew Hardell's, been wrecked almost before leaving port, and for that other who sits, it may be, lonely amongst his fellows by reason of some secret which he has carried for years within his breast—which possibly he may carry in silence to his grave—the story might as well have been left untold—the recital of those long solitary years spared.

But, for the one or two I will go on to the end, believing that some heart in its desolation will answer to his heart, as deep calleth unto deep.

So—preaching, praying, visiting, reading, working — time went by. If he had not forgotten Joy, he had, at all events, schooled himself to think of her as of one passed out of his life, when suddenly there came to him news.

The Altons were back in London, and Mr Alton had lost forty thousand pounds by the collapse of the London and Newcastle Gas Company.

It was Mr Creaff who communicated these tidings to Andrew Hardell. Mr Creaff, standing on a wretched November day before the fire in his office, and talking to Andrew, who sat in that gentleman's own especial arm-chair—an uncomfortable chair with arms too tight for any ordinary occupant, and a wretched cane-bottomed seat. But it was not of the chair, or the office, or Mr Creaff, that Andrew Hardell thought as he looked at his authority and listened, while the other went on—

'Yes—of course you knew Alton when you were down at Eclin—fine place there, I am told. He never asked me to it, though. Was not above meddling in City dirt, but liked to wash his hands of it before returning to pastoral innocence, as his friend Grey used to observe.

'Did I know him?—Yes, indeed, and even took upon myself to recommend caution—for which advice I got snubbed, of course. He did not scout me yesterday, though, I can tell you. He said, "I wish, Mr Creaff, I had listened to your warning. That villain

Grey is off, and the London and Newcastle must be wound up, and I am in for forty thousand pounds."'

'What was the London and Newcastle?' Andrew inquired, faintly; 'a railway?'

'No—a Gas Company. It was got up by a lot of fellows—some rogues, some fools—for the purpose of supplying London with gas made at the pit's mouth. They proposed laying pipes along the railway to the metropolis, and intended ultimately, I believe, to light all England in the same manner.'

'What an absurd idea!' Andrew exclaimed.

'Not at all,' Mr Creaff replied; 'it was not an absurd idea, but there were practical difficulties, not the least amongst them being to find a market for their coke. The idea was just so good, and the prospectus so admirably drawn up, and the board of directors so unexceptionable, and the London gas so bad, and the London gas companies so independent, and their prices so exorbitant, and the metropolitan antagonism against them consequently so great, that the shares were bought up eagerly. And had Grey sold out four months ago, he and Alton might have made, instead of losing, their fortunes.'

'Who was Grey?' inquired the Curate.

'A gentleman of most unfortunate antecedents, whom it always pleased Mr Alton to regard as a fair representative of commercial honesty. A perfect scamp—a cad—a stag——'

'I beg your pardon,' said Mr Hardell, interrupting. 'A what?'

'Supposing,' explained Mr Creaff, 'that you saw the prospectus of some company advertised in to-day's "Times," and that, although you had not a penny in the world, you still sent in asking for an allotment of say fifty shares. Supposing you begged, borrowed, or stole enough money to pay the deposit on those shares—twenty-five pounds, let us assume for the sake of illustration—and then, when they went up a quarter, sold them. Supposing you made this sort of thing your business—that you went into every company likely to rise even an eighth, and that at length you were fortunate, like Mr Grey, and got a capitalist to back you, and that you and he worked together, he taking the bulk of the risk, and you a considerable portion of the profit; supposing, in fact, you were buying on nothing and selling what could not honestly be said ever to have belonged to you—you would be a "stag." Do you understand me?'

'I think so; but it does not appear to me that this was exactly the sort of business in which I should have expected a man

like Mr Alton to engage.' The Curate said this hesitatingly, and Mr Creaff noticed that hesitation.

'It is a singular fact,' he answered, 'that men like Mr Alton, who despise trade and every thing and person connected with it, always, if they embark in business at all, ship themselves on board some disreputable craft. and place their characters and their property at the mercy of some worthless vagabond. It is like a man who denounces threepenny points, staking all he is worth on *rouge et noir*, or like those clergymen who most rigorously denounce Popery at home, attending service at every cathedral abroad. I took it upon me once to warn Alton about Grey, but he treated the matter in such a high and mighty style, that I determined, whether he sank or swam, never to tell him there was a leak in his boat again.

'"When a tool has served our turn we lay it aside, Mr Creaff," he said.

'"You may damage yourself for life with it first, though," I replied, "and if you do not live to regret having anything to do with Grey, my name is not Creaff. Why, before he turned 'stag' he was jackal to a bill discounter, and——"

'"Really, Mr Creaff, the narrative of Mr Grey's antecedents has not the slightest interest for me," he remarked, and so the subject ended; but yesterday, as I told you, he said, "I wish I had attended to your warning—it would have been forty thousand pounds in my pocket."'

'Poor Mr Alton,' said the Curate, *sotto voce*.

'Yes, I am sorry for him too,' exclaimed Mr Creaff, 'though he did give himself airs over people as good as he any day. If a man despise the City, why don't he stay out of it; if he think a merchant a lower order of creation, why don't he keep himself undefiled from trade. The best of the matter is,' proceeded Mr Creaff, 'that a lawyer, who knows the whole of them, told me last night that Grey had proposed for Miss Alton, and been almost kicked out of doors by her father in consequence. They say, shortly after there was a drop in the Gas Company's shares, and that Grey immediately tried to sell those he held in order to keep himself square while letting in Mr Alton. Failing to get rid of them, and seeing quite well what was coming, he realized every other marketable share he possessed and slipped off to the Continent, where he will enjoy himself no doubt immensely, while his money lasts. Meantime Alton is altogether in a bad way; he is liable for all this money; his estate is strictly entailed, so that Miss Alton, instead of being an heiress, will have nothing, or next to nothing; not that I believe it will matter much to her,

for Graham,—you remember meeting Graham at our house, don't you—clever fellow—talked well when once started,—says she's dying.'

What Andrew Hardell did, or tried to do, after that, always remained to him like the memory of a bad dream. He retained a faint recollection of feeling he must get out of the office, of groping his way to the door, of having his hand on the lock, and being detained and led back by Mr Creaff, who put him in a chair, and poured out wine and made him swallow it, and ran on with a series of broken sentences:—'Forgive me, Hardell, on my word I had not an idea; would have bitten my tongue out first. Very likely there is no truth in it. And this loss makes your chance better than ever; more especially now that you are two lives nearer the Somersetshire property. Do not take it so to heart. I dare say the young lady is only fretting about you. You shall ask me to the wedding yet, and there is not a man living will be better pleased to see you married than I.'

'No man will ever see me married,' Andrew answered; and he bent his head till the other could not see his face, and there was silence for a moment.

'The heart knoweth its own bitterness,' and Mr Creaff instinctively felt that there was some awful sorrow in this man's breast, with which a stranger might no more intermeddle than he dare touch an equally intense joy.

'Can *I* do anything for you in the matter?' he asked at last.

'Yes,' Andrew replied; 'keep my secret.' And then the two shook hands, and the Curate went out into the foggy streets, and walked back to Essex Marsh, and tried for a day or two to go about his work as usual, and think that, whether Joy were living or dying, it was his bounden duty to keep away from her.

But he could not do it; and so, one morning, almost against his will, he found himself sitting *vis-à-vis* to Mr Alton, and telling that gentleman he had heard of his daughter's illness, and that he could not rest without calling to inquire how she was.

'She is very ill,' was the reply, and Mr Alton's voice trembled a little; 'too ill to see even an old friend, or I would ask you to wait. The doctors give me great hopes though; they say there is no ground for real anxiety—but then, you know, I cannot help being anxious.' A statement Mr Hardell could well have confirmed on his own account.

'And you—are you still at Essex Marsh?' Mr Alton proceeded.

'Yes, I am still in that aristocratic parish,' the Curate replied.

'But you like the place, do you not?'

'As much as I shall ever like any place,' was the reply.

'You are not married?' This was interrogative, and Andrew shook his head in reply.

'Ah! you will marry some day, and forget all about that,' Mr Alton remarked.

'You are very kind to hope so,' the other said, with a little mock humility of tone and manner which, however, Mr Alton did not notice.

'I have gone through much trouble myself since we parted,' that gentleman said, as if to change the subject. And then he went on to tell Andrew all about his loss, and how it would compel him to give up his house in London, and insure his life heavily, and remain entirely at Eclin. Habit is strong, and although they had been so long separated, and for such sufficient reasons, Mr Alton could not help dropping into familiar conversation with the man he had once regarded as so much a friend.

'I am very glad to have seen you again,' he said, as the Curate rose to depart; 'come and dine with me at my club some day—will you on Wednesday next?—thank you.'

But before Wednesday arrived, Mr Alton appeared in Essex Marsh. Andrew found him waiting his return one afternoon, when he came in from parish work, and could not help noticing how pale and haggard his visitor looked.

'Miss Alton is not worse, I trust?' he exclaimed.

'No,' was the reply. 'I have come to speak to you about yourself. Do you remember that day at Eclin when you told me the reason you had decided to leave?'

'I am never likely to forget it.'

'If you were at Eclin now, would the same reason still influence you?'

'It would. Spite of all I have suffered since, I should leave.'

'Then I am to conclude your feelings have undergone no change?'

'Mr Alton,' the Curate said, steadily, 'if, in the kindness of your heart, you have come here to-day to speak of some preferment you can get for me in your neighbourhood, supposing only I have conquered my folly, I tell you fairly I must not take it. There is no chance for me, but keeping away. Were I to be with Miss Alton, I could not help speaking some day, and then you would reproach me, and with reason——'

'I should not. I want you to speak now,' Mr Alton answered. 'I need not tell you I had different views for Joy—that it has all been a great blow to me—that even this terrible loss has made it seem more necessary and desirable for her to marry a rich man,

if she marry at all. But still my child is dearer to me than any worldly considerations, and I say again, if you have formed no fresh engagement, if you are in the same mind as you were in then, I will place no obstacle in the way, and you shall be as much my son, as Joy is my daughter.'

'Had he forgotten, or had he purposely ignored, all which was said at that interview?' Andrew thought, and for a moment he opened his lips to ask the question, but ere he could form it into words Mr Alton spoke again.

'Have you contracted any other attachment,' he said, impatiently, 'or got into any entanglement which should prevent your marriage?'

'No,' Andrew answered, 'but—Miss—Alton?'

'I suspect you know all about Miss Alton much better than I,' her father exclaimed, impatiently. 'When I told her you had called, she said nothing, and made no remark about you till last night, when she asked, if you came again, to be allowed to see you. She was very low and weak, and I do believe thought she was dying, for she asked my forgiveness, and said, if she might only live, she would try to get over it, and be a comfort to me, if —if—I would—not ask her to marry any one else. It—seems—hard——' Mr Alton was going on, when he broke down fairly, and turned away to hide the tears he could not keep back.

Then in a moment the resolution of years was swept away—the temptation was too strong to be overcome; the full tide of happiness came, wave after wave, flooding Andrew Hardell's soul with a rapture which obliterated every old landmark of sorrow, every beacon he had lit to warn himself off the rocks where danger lay hidden.

He forgot—not his position—but his resolves. Had the time not come when they might be set at nought? Had he not suffered, had he not endured, had he not laboured, had he not kept his life darkened, and the fires of his heart unlit?—and should he now—after the years, when the dear arms were stretched out towards him once more, when even her father bade him take her —refuse?

'Oh! God,' he half prayed, 'is it not enough?'

'Give her to me—only give her,' he cried, laying his hand on Mr Alton's arm. And Mr Alton, turning at sound of that exultant consent, beheld, as it seemed to him, a different man standing there, with the firelight flickering over his face—a man from whom the weight of years appeared lifted, for whom life held a hope once more.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

COMING EVENTS.

If a man make a mistake once in his life he is pretty nearly certain—opportunity occurring—to fall into a similar error again. For instance, supposing him to be of a speculative turn of mind, he is never satisfied with one burning of his fingers; the moment occasion presents itself of making a spoon or losing a horn, he goes straight away and performs the latter feat. Past experience, whether of his own or any one else's, is useless to him; for although the garb in which the present appear may be but the very thinnest and most transparent disguise of the past, he is willing to believe the face different—the old lying deceiver true.

And in like manner the individual who matrimonially makes one unhappy choice, will as a rule, if his first wife obligingly die and leave him free to wed again—wed again foolishly. It is the same with persons who fail to keep their situations, their appointments, their engagements, their tempers, their words; to the end the fool remains a fool, and the rogue a rogue; the thief incapable of deserving trust, the liar of speaking the truth. Even in this world, that 'still,' which is perhaps the most awful denunciation contained in the New Testament, is fulfilled in men's daily lives. As therein it is stated that the unjust shall continue unchanged, so here we find that what a man is in youth he proves in age; the taint is never eradicated, the plague-spot never removed.

And because people do not change; and because they have a fancy for following old paths which lead to trouble, Andrew Hardell,—who had felt, one might have thought, enough of the evil consequences of concealment and living in falsehood—spite of his vows, resolutions, and experience, engaged himself to Joy Alton, and so began for himself just the same series of troubles as he had prepared that night when under the arching trees on the way to New Abbey the pelting rain fell on the face of a dead man, while he who had killed him fled desperately away from the accursed spot.

The words of exultation were scarcely out of his lips before he knew what he had done for himself; before grasping—feebly, it might be, yet still grasping—the full extent of the deceit he should have to practise, his heart grew sick, because of the cheat and the impostor he was. As he had felt that morning when he

beheld the place whence that missing button had been torn from his coat, so he felt standing in the Vicarage library listening to Mr Alton talking of his disappointment, of his natural hope that Joy would have chosen differently.

He made no disguise of his regret, and Andrew never felt offended. He was so wrapped up in the contemplation of his old, old sorrow, that words which might have wounded him under other circumstances, fell almost unheeded on his ear; yet then, as when he sat looking out on Criffel, it was only at his trouble he gazed, not at the best and manliest way out of that trouble.

When through the darkness he carried his wretched secret with him while he hurried along, when he lay seeking forgetfulness in sleep, when he strove to eat in order to deceive his landlady, and joined in the laughter which echoed outside the inn door, it was still competent—difficult it may be—but still competent for him to have retraced his steps, he did precisely the same thing as when he cried out, 'Give her to me, only give her to me!' leaving her father in ignorance of his antecedents.

And although when the hour came that he held Joy to his heart and poured out all the passion, all the mad love he had tried to conceal, all the tenderness he had been keeping back in the depths of his nature, heaven seemed to be a present possession, yet, nevertheless, while he paced homeward towards Essex Marsh, he felt hell had opened for him. And he was right. I can imagine no worse hell than that into which a man voluntarily plunges when he elects to live a lie with those he loves—with the one above all who is dearer to him than the whole world beside.

He knew he had made a mistake. He knew he had taken another false step, and yet he went on. He woke in the night steeped in a cold sweat, and with the voices of his dreams still hissing in his ear. 'Liar,' 'Murderer,' those voices cried; and almost unconsciously he flung his right hand—that hand which dealt the blow—out over the coverlet, feeling as though there were hot blood upon it; God help him!

And still he went on. If in the watches of the night he resolved, come what would, to go when morning broke and reveal everything to Mr Alton; yet when the sun arose, and he heard the birds singing and saw the world still beautiful even for him, he lacked courage to curse over again her life and his. 'It was too late,' he argued, 'too late!' He had said the same thing to himself when he climbed Criffel in the early morning; when he trod the cliffs beyond Colvend; when he lingered in the fairy cove, and swam out into the Solway. He had said it when he lay

down the second night after his encounter with Kenneth Challerson—the turf his bed and the heavens his roof. He had said so when freedom seemed very near, when he sat in the 'Selkirk Arms,' waiting for the time to arrive when the Liverpool steamer should slip—with him on board—quietly down the Dee. He whispered it in Kirkcudbright jail, and through all those awful days which elapsed ere he was removed to Dumfries; and once again he repeated the sentence when the bells clanged and the trumpets blew, and my lords entered the Queen of the South, where Andrew Hardell lay waiting to thole his assize.

And now, after the passage of days, weeks, months, years, during every hour of which almost he had felt the smart of the scourge he prepared for himself amongst the heather and the gorse, he repeated 'too late' again, and wove thongs wherewith to lash himself, out of the silken tresses of a woman's hair.

He had been afraid then of what he might have to encounter —he was afraid now of what he should have to lose.

As he had made up his mind when he was taken off to Kirkcudbright jail to bear anything rather than confess, so now, having almost against his will chosen a given path, he resolved to proceed upon it, let the result prove what it would.

And, after all, why should the past ever be revealed? It was gone, and he changed. For years and years the dead man had been mouldering in his grave. For years no tidings had come from Anthony. For years he had passed for other than himself, and his very personal identity was now so altered that no one was ever likely to tax him with being other than he actually seemed.

Further—and this was perhaps the portion of his argument which Andrew Hardell repeated to himself with the greatest comfort and satisfaction—thrown as he was into intimate association with all sorts and conditions of men, he knew that most human beings have their secrets, great or small, which they carry with them, and which are seldom confided to wife or child, to husband or mother.

The books of no man's life are ever laid fully open for inspection; there are little private entries, blotted paragraphs, erased lines, that can never be perfectly understood save by the creature and his Creator.

There is a time in all existences, when the idea of experience holding some untold story, some hidden tragedy, some unshared grief, to the very end, seems too terrible for imagination to grasp; but, as years pass by, what once appeared impossible becomes first possible, then probable, then certain, then natural; so

natural, in fact, that if any one declared there were no skeleton cupboard in his past, no shadows lurking in the darker corners of his memory, we should simply disbelieve the statement, confident that, hidden within all lives there lurks a mystery, that, fair and serene though the human landscape may be, storms have burst over it and rain descended, and snows fallen and frosts destroyed, where now the sun floods river and mountain, valley and copse.

For all these reasons—and perhaps for another, the most important of all, namely, because he wished to do so—Andrew Hardell went on. If he had his seasons of despondency, to them ensued summer of glad content; and when it was proposed by Mr Alton that he should throw up his curacy at Essex Marsh, and return to Eclin, it really seemed to the man that his cup of joy was full. At Eclin he felt safe—in that quiet corner of the earth he assured himself discovery could never reach, suspicion never touch him. After he and Joy were man and wife, he was to live at the Hall—till—so said Mr Alton, he got a good living. But Andrew disregarded the last clause, for he knew Mr Alton well enough to feel sure that, notwithstanding his losses, he would never desire any increase of good fortune which should take Joy away from him.

Already Mr Alton was planning alterations at the Hall which should make their home more comfortable—already he was beginning to be more reconciled to the match—already one difficulty after another was smoothed away, more especially one great difficulty which had prospectively greatly perplexed Andrew, namely, that of insuring his life; but this condition, after much consideration, his father-in-law elect waived when he found the future bridegroom something more than willing for every present sixpence Joy owned, and every sixpence she might ultimately possess, to be settled on his wife.

Some question of conscience concerning the licence induced Andrew to propose that they should be married by banns; and as Joy was quite willing to do anything her lover wished, and as Mr Alton made no objection, banns of marriage between Anthony Hardell, bachelor, of the parish of Essex Marsh, and Joy Alton, spinster, Eclin, in the parish of Garton, were duly published in their respective churches, and never an one stood up to forbid those two persons being joined together in holy wedlock.

'She was always determined to have him, poor man,' said Mrs Pryce, as she stood in the graveyard after service on the first Sunday morning when the names of the happy couple were recited, 'and now she does not know how to make cackle enough about

getting her wish. Not that it is much of a match for Miss Alton of the Hall, who used to look down on everybody; but she is not so young as she was, and her looks are going. She will be the more suitable for him though, who might be as old as her father for that matter. And to be married by banns too, just as if she were a labourer's daughter! I always thought gentlefolks liked to do things more private like.'

'There is no shame in getting married, though, Mrs Pryce, is there?' asked Mr Rogers, the man who had on a former occasion put, to quote his own expression, a ring in Mrs Pryce's nose; 'at any rate I can remember the time when you did not think there was; and as for our young lady, I am glad she is going to be married and live among us, and, for that matter, so, I can answer for it, is everybody in Eclin, unless it may be yourself.'

To which Mrs Pryce replied, that she wished Miss Alton no harm, she had always been civil to her—and went on her way with a single gossip, to whom she revealed the fact, that she wondered what Mr Alton could be thinking about, to let his daughter marry a beggar. All proving, that while the world stands there will be some one found to say ill-natured things, and to speak disparagingly of the happiness which not merely twenty-one and eighteen, but even maturer age, expect to find in matrimony.

So time went on, and it was the evening but one before the morning fixed for his marriage, when Andrew Hardell received the following note—

'Am I to congratulate you, old fellow, or not? Have you made a clean breast to the lady, and received plenary absolution? Have you given her a practical illustration of the words, "And things are not what they seem," and received an intimation that she is utterly indifferent on the subject? or have you fallen into the common error of thinking it best to let a sleeping dog lie? If the latter, pray take the only advice I ever, so far as I can remember, offered to man—*tell her everything*. You know your secret is safe with me, but for God's sake, Andrew Hardell, do not begin this new life burdened with the weight of a secret which has saddened and stultified your old.

'Forgive me if I have said too much. I should never have forgiven myself if I had said less. Always your friend—

'GEORGE TRELWYN.'

'It is too late,' Andrew muttered to himself as he sat with this letter before him, thinking over his past and his future; and those four words, and those only, he penned on a piece of note-

paper, and returned to the man who had signed himself, 'Always your friend.'

And it *was* too late. He had elected to live a lie, to keep something secret between himself and the woman he loved as he never loved anything before, to curse his life married as he had cursed it single, to thole his grievous assize to the end of the volume, and only let himself be really discharged when God, the great Judge, pronounced at last, 'Not Guilty,' instead of 'Not Proven.'

But the whole of that night he passed walking about his room, sleepless, wretched.

How many more such nights, he wondered, was he to spend in the course of his life. He thought of that night at New Abbey, when the room he occupied seemed too small to hold his misery; he recalled the next, when he lay looking up at the stars, and prayed God he might wake and believe it all a dream; he remembered hazily night after night spent in Kirkcudbright jail; then more vividly he recollected his return to Dumfries, and the wretched cell where he and his wretchedness talked through the darkness together. Across the next, moonlight streamed; in the ear of memory was the sound of flowing water. Once again he stood leaning over Dervorgilla's Bridge, looking out, a free man, on life—he who, but a few hours before, had been in the opinion of my lords Glanlorn and Craigie, the Advocate Depute, and his own counsel, doomed. With one stride thought crossed the waste of intervening years, and he beheld his life as he could and had made it, himself as he might have been and was. Voluntarily he had put fennel into his cup, and never a drop could he ever again touch which should not taste of that herb. In his teeth everything which he most desired should turn as the flesh of the quails ere the Israelites could swallow it. Everything, oh! Lord—fame, success, love—everything his heart had desired, or his soul thirsted for, were his—and yet he found no sweetness or juice in one of them; the fruits he gathered rotted in his hand, the flowers he tended drooped their leaves before he could wreath them into garlands.

A fool he had been, and he must reap according to his folly. A lie he had lived, and a lie to the end he must remain.

So through the night-watches he talked to himself, bearing that misery as he had borne his previous wretchedness—all alone.

'It was too late,' he argued. 'Was not the bride waiting for her bridegroom? How should she, so tender, so loving, ever bear to hear the man to whom she had given her whole heart had

lived a life of deception, in order to avoid man setting the mark of Cain on him?'

He would not tell; he would never tell. He would make that accursed past bury its dead, and try to persuade even himself that he was not identical with the man who had been pushed up by not unkindly hands to hear the verdict of the Scottish jury.

Nevertheless, as the wedding party emerged from Eclin church, the bells—given by Mr Alton—seemed to say,—'Andrew Hardell—Andrew Hardell—Remember New Abbey—Remember New Abbey,' till the glad peal almost drove him mad.

'Remember I will not,' he promised to himself. 'From this hour I swear my life shall be a constant endeavour to forget.'

And there were times when he did forget: when looking into Joy's sweet face, and feeling her soft kisses on his cheek, the present seemed so full of happiness, that the past could find no entrance into his bliss.

It was not all sorrow; there was a period when the river of his life ran smooth and clear between banks of emerald green; when every plant of beauty and of virtue seemed to vie together to adorn the present, and to give promise for the future.

There was not a cloud on the horizon—not even one so large as a man's hand. He passed the quietest of lives: he preached: he attended to his flock: he walked, or drove, or rode, with his wife. In the summer mornings Joy would tap at the library window, praying him to leave his books and join her in a ramble.

There was no decadence of love,—there was no cause for fear; and yet sometimes, when the joy bells were ringing loudest in his heart, its pulses stood still, because a knell likewise sounded amidst their music.

It was too happy for permanence; the river could not flow on thus for ever without encountering rock or sunken tree, and the first trouble against which Andrew Hardell found he should have to contend, was his wife's inordinate pride in, and admiration of, those talents God had given him.

She longed for the world to know more of his gifts. She hid no light of his under a bushel. She insisted that where rectors and bishops gathered together, there, when possible, her husband should repair likewise. An unconscious Delilah, she bound him with green withes, that would, she imagined, make him an easy prey to those modern Philistines, the praises of men and the flatteries of women; but she was ignorant that when he married her he had really shorn the locks wherein lay his actual strength to resist temptation and escape danger. The day he took her to

wife he yielded himself into the power of a woman, and whatever she bade him do, he in a sort of desperation strove to compass.

Against his judgment, be it understood, and yet not so much against it as might have been the case in previous years.

Every grey hair—and grey was already plentiful amongst the brown—lessened the chances of detection.

It was all an old, old story, now; so old that a hundred other stories had occupied men's minds since then, and he felt that he might show himself where people do congregate without fear of recognition; consequently, when his wife urged, he consented; when neighbouring clergymen asked him to preach, he ceased to make excuses; even at the earnest request of his father-in-law he published a sermon, which that gentleman particularly admired—a feat of less consequence, however, than might at first be imagined, since few men or women ever read sermons at all, or pay very much attention to who writes them.

Even in that pleasant, lotus-like life, he felt himself drifting towards a wider sea. Into other hands he had resigned the rudder of his existence, and although he did not feel safe, yet for once it was pleasant to cease to struggle. With the stream he went; whether there were breakers ahead,—whether there were a stormy ocean waiting to ingulf, he knew no more than his child yet unborn. Yet he was happy: happy gliding on thus, while love spread an awning over him, and the waters of contentment rippled around the bow, and lapped the sides of his fairy boat.

What would you have, friends? Is there no mental laudanum, no blessed sedative, think you, which even the wretchedest amongst us may swallow on occasion, and which shall not have the power to lull us for a season into oblivion of past unhappiness, into disregard of what the future may possibly hold in store?

And there is no opiate like happiness for dulling a man's apprehensions. The wretched, prepared for wretchedness, ask themselves continually, 'What next?' But those who are basking in the full sunshine of prosperity cannot believe that God will ever cause the rains of sorrow to beat and the winds of adversity to blow upon them again; unmindful, though perhaps not altogether forgetful, that they have been soaked by the one, and almost shipwrecked by the other, in the dreary winter weather.

Nevertheless, it could not last, and the certainty that it could not, came about in this wise.

On a bright January morning Andrew Hardell was pacing a terrace which lay along one side of the Hall, waiting for news—not for any news from the external world, but for tidings from

an upper chamber, that contained everything the present or the future held for him; and while he walked, pausing now and again to listen for the messenger who came not, the post-boy, seeing him there, brought the letter-bag to him.

Listlessly—for his mind was elsewhere—Andrew drew out the letters, and replacing those intended for Mr Alton or his wife in the bag, opened his own and read, as we sometimes read even an indifferent paragraph in the neswpapers to pass the time.

One after another the letters proved to be just the sort of epistles people who occupy any public position, or who can boast a large acquaintance, receive. There were the conventionally friendly letters, applications from amateur beggars, circulars from tradesmen, notes from brother-professionals, one asking him to preach at St Martin's on the 11th of February, and so forth, till at length Andrew came to an official-looking envelope—official inasmuch as the envelope was large—blue, thick, and very legibly directed, and bore on the seal an imprint setting forth that it came from the offices of St John and Henry, Solicitors, 420, Golden Square, London.

This communication Andrew opened with curiosity, but without dread; as he read, however, his face changed, and for the moment he forgot Joy, forgot her danger, forgot everything save the tidings that letter conveyed.

And yet there was nothing very formidable contained in it—nothing had he been differently situated. Messrs St John and Henry's epistle ran thus:—

'420, Golden Square, London,
'*January* 16, 18—.

'Sir,

'We beg to inform you that owing to the melancholy and sudden death of our client, Graham Frederick Hardell, Esq., of Lovell's Court, Somersetshire, you, as next heir, succeed to that property. The funeral is fixed to take place on the 21st inst., before which time we trust to see you here, or if more convenient we will send a clerk to Eclin to receive your instructions.

'Your obedient servants,
'St John and Henry.'

Here was a nice little kettle of fish all ready to his hand. Anthony beyond the seas, Anthony living, or Anthony dead, the man they wanted; and how should he, impostor though he was, take possession of the dead man's lands, follow the dead man's remains to the grave?

How should he—albeit God knew no man in England so mourned over his decease as Andrew Hardell—how should he, though it was only needful for him to stretch forth his hand to take—how should he, even if not doing so involved the loss of Joy? and then quickly the blood rushed back to his heart, and with a sharp pang he cried almost aloud, 'Would I could change places with him, and that God would take me—me!'

'Anthony!'—it was Mr Alton who spoke at this juncture, laying his hand on Andrew's shoulder. 'I have been looking for you everywhere. It is a girl, and Joy is better than could have been expected.'

Silently Andrew seized his father-in-law's hand, and grasped it; then without a word, still clutching that awful letter, he walked into the house, where he ascended to his own chamber, and after bolting the door, covered his face with his hands, and wept like a child.

Nevertheless he went to London the next day, and had a long talk with Messrs St John and Henry, and called upon the incumbent of St Martin's, and agreed to preach for him that impending sermon, of which mention has been duly made in an earlier chapter. So runs the world away, and so one thread and device in the many-patterned web of life meets and intermingles with other threads and devices, unconscious that the whole fabric is intended to fulfil one perfect design, the result of which can be only guessed at here, till with clearer eyes we are permitted to see perfectly hereafter.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE POPULAR PREACHER.

It was a fine frosty winter's night as Madge and her cousin walked northward to the church of St Martin the Martyr, Ross Place.

Madge had never been there before; but Herbert knew St Martin's well—as a church where 'high' principles obtained; where there was much stained glass, presented by pious parishioners 'in memoriam' of their dead, and of special mercies vouchsafed; where an offertory had been established; where the Bible was placed on a lectern; where the Psalms of the day were sung

by a very good amateur choir, clad in white surplices, where the season of Lent was kept to the sound of chants and hymn-tunes, arranged in the dolefullest of minor keys; where the prayers were recited cathedral-fashion; where there might be beheld a cross embroidered on the altar-cloth; and where it was whispered there were even flower-deckings at Easter.

Mild and harmless were the tendencies of St Martin's in comparison to the ritualistic tendencies of our own day, but people had then been so long accustomed to associate high pews, bare white walls, three-decker pulpits, and a broken-winded clerk, backed by an incompetent organist and the charity children, with the safety of the British Constitution and loyalty to 'Victoria, by the Grace of God, Defender of the Faith,' that a service performed 'decently, and in order,' frightened them more then, than white pelerines, trimmed with imitation Cluny lace, and acolytes arrayed in smocks, fastened round the waist—than the worst taste possible in the combination of colours—the trashiest and most unmeaning decorations—are able to do now.

The churches, set out like a child's play-room—adorned with tawdry bits of finery hung here and there—the altars much resembling the stock toilet-table of a minor theatre—the priests moving awkwardly about in their unwonted and ungraceful garments, the whole religious ceremonial neither simple nor imposing—a poor imitation of the Roman Catholic worship, reminding a spectator of a good piece badly put upon an indifferent stage, and acted by inefficient and inferior players; these things which are now presented for our souls' refreshment were not yet dreamed of in the world's history, and from even such moderately High-church views as those which obtained at St John's, worthy Protestants, blissfully ignorant of the future, prayed God to deliver them; whereupon, as it was well known Mr Hardell's views were not Puseyite, and that, further, he was 'sound' on all old points of faith, and in all minor matters of Church discipline—to say nothing of the fact that he was, though a rather celebrated preacher, 'only a curate'—people were surprised to hear he had been asked to hold forth at Ross Place—just as at the present moment our non-impressionable generation might be a trifle astonished were it placarded upon the hoardings that Mr Spurgeon were going to preach at All Saints' on behalf of the Bishop of London's Fund, or that Mr Mackonochie had accepted a 'call' from the Dissenters in Salvation Valley.

True, even then the professors of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Faith of Protestant England as by law established, were 'marching on' towards those heights of Ritualism they have suc-

cessfully climbed; but worshippers were slow to mark the tendency of the movement, and when anything occurred to open their understandings as to its *raison d'être*, they closed them again as speedily and decorously as might be.

While they walked along, with the bright stars looking down upon them, and the gas-lamps blinking with bleared, uncertain eyes at the passers-by, Herbert talked to Madge about the Rector's 'innovations,' and described to her the various changes he had introduced into what it was the fashion of those days to call the 'simple and beautiful service of the Church of England.'

To the best of her ability Madge listened, in the main agreeing with what he said about the peril of such innovations, though at the same time venturing to remark that she liked a cathedral service.

'But then this is not a cathedral,' Mr Spencer replied.

'I cannot see what difference that makes,' Madge said.

Whereupon Herbert remained silent. For now she put it in such a way, neither did he, only he thought it better not to tell her so.

'I wonder what we shall think of Mr Hardell,' she began after a short pause. 'It puzzles me how he can have made such a reputation, and what has changed him into such a hard-working clergyman. I am unable to account for it all, unless *that* altered him greatly; indeed, I heard it had.'

'That and his marriage, perhaps,' suggested her companion.

'What a dreadful thing it was, and so soon, too,' sighed Madge. 'You do think, Herbert, now do you not, that the other was innocent? that he is perhaps even now suffering in a foreign country for the sin of—this man.'

'I cannot tell, Madge. For God's sake do not try to make me judge in the matter. I confess so far, my theory about him has been all at fault; but the point I cannot reconcile with innocence is you—Oh! Madge, innocent or guilty, I know I could not have gone away without "Good-bye," at any rate.'

'But he was so noble, so unselfish,' murmured Madge; and then next moment she was praying Herbert's forgiveness for the implied slur upon him.

'The words slipped out before I realized their exact meaning,' she said. 'I did not intend to imply you were other than noble and unselfish, but he—he—always thought of his own wishes least, and if he considered it best for me not to see him or hear from him again, he would never consider his own suffering, providing as he imagined I was thereby spared a moment's pain.'

'Madge, darling, I must say something to you again that I

have often ventured to say before. You were but a girl when we first met, but since then you have wasted years of your own and my life nursing a shadow,—grieving over the departure of a dream. We men understand ourselves and each other a great deal better than women ever can do, and I repeat, I am certain as I am I love you better than my life, that Andrew Hardell never, in the true sense of the word, loved you at all, and that had you married him, you would have found that out for yourself ere now. Had he cared for you he could not have acted as he did, and if he came back to-morrow you would soon acknowledge the truth of what I have said. I wish he would come back, or that I knew where I could find him,' Herbert went on passionately, 'for I should prefer having flesh and blood for my rival rather than a memory and an illusion. Once you understood it had been all a mistake—a mistake on his side as well as yours—I should be content to abide the issue, and to wait seven years more for a smile if you bade me, for I could then wait in hope, sure that when the trust which had nourished the plant was destroyed, the plant would soon die also.'

'And I with it, Herbert,' she said, faintly.

'No, dearest,' he answered, taking the hand which rested on his arm, and clasping it; 'you could not die and leave me; you would know then something of what I have suffered, and you might say to yourself—Madge, I think you would,—"If this vacant ground can blossom with no flowers for me, it shall grow some buds of happiness for him;" and I should thank and bless you even for that, Madge, knowing the rest would come in time.'

Then out of 'very pity' Madge's fingers closed on his, for she knew how poor and meagre a thing this was with which he promised to be content; which he declared he was ready to take in lieu of the willing love, the absorbing affection he had once hoped to win, when the girlish fancy came to be forgotten and the image of her first lover grew blurred and indistinct—seen dimly through the mist of years, and remembered only vaguely as one of the many associations of dear, old, bygone times.

They did not after this speak again. Indeed, they were close by the church porch as Herbert finished his sentence, and Madge silently dropped his arm and passed into the building, where already the service had begun.

It was a beautiful edifice, designed by one of those architects who, when erecting a temple to the glory and for the worship of God, seem inspired by their object; who 'dream not of a perishable faith,' but appear to remember that though the foundations of their material work may be in the earth, the pinnacles and

towers of its purpose touch the heavens; and as Madge—who loved everything beautiful—looked around, involuntarily almost, she held her breath, lost in wonder and astonishment as she thought of the great building filled so full of men, who had come to hear Anthony preach—Anthony, of whose eloquence or earnestness she had not thought much when he resided with them at Langmore.

While she glided down the aisle and knelt with her face buried in her hands; while she joined in the service, and sat listening to the Evening Lessons, her thoughts unbidden strayed back to the home which lay now so much farther away than ever, and she could not help reflecting how strange it lay that there should be such a gulf stretching between herself and Anthony, with whom she had once been great friends, with whom she had never quarrelled even in semblance.

'He did not answer my letter,' she thought, while the choristers sang the *Nunc Dimittis*, and the organ swelled and throbbed with passion, and pealed high and loud ere it was subdued and steadied for the *Creed.*

'He did not answer my letter. I wonder if he have, spite of all one hears about him, grown proud and cold. Anthony was never unkind, but much flattery may have made him vain. He was always a little too self-confident, yet I should like to speak to him again; spite of what I know about Mrs Challerson, I should;' and she stood on tip-toe and tried to see away to the extreme end of the chancel, where within the communion-rails the figures of two clergymen were dimly visible.

The distance, however, was too great for her to be able to recognize him.

'And in any case,' she sighed, 'he must be greatly changed. I am. He never would remember me;' wherein she was wrong, for though she was changed, no man who had ever known her sweet face could have quite forgotten it.

Whilst the choir sang that hymn which begins—

'Lord, whatsoe'er my lot may be,'

the preacher ascended the pulpit, and kneeling down, prayed silently, as he was in the habit of praying, that God would strengthen him to do His work—and forgive him his long course of deception, and keep sorrow from the being he loved and had wronged.

If there be such a thing as expiating sins by suffering, Andrew Hardell's might indeed long since have been considered expurgated.

His life had proved one in which even the joy he grasped—the success he achieved—the love he had longed to possess—turned to dust and ashes in his hand—ay, to worse than dust and ashes—to volcanoes, the very existence whereof he alone suspected, and yet that any day—ay, any hour—might break forth into flame.

He had been too happy, as I have said, and already the first mutterings of the coming storm sounded in his ears. Since that morning when he received Messrs St John and Henry's letter, he had rested neither day nor night. For him he felt rest was over. It had been easy enough to refuse taking possession of the property; but to satisfy Mr Alton's curiosity, and that of his wife, was by no means so simple an affair.

From the hour, indeed, when in answer to Mr Alton's question as to how soon he intended journeying to Lovell's Court, he said,—

'Not at all at present, until I know whether a still nearer relation to the late Mr Hardell than myself be living or dead;' he was conscious of an indefinable something in his father-in-law's manner, which filled him with a terrible alarm.

He never paused to consider that under the circumstances Mr Alton had a right to feel offended and surprised at his reticence concerning the name and possible location of that vague relation. He never remembered that people whose own transactions are perfectly transparent, and who do not understand the meaning of the word mystery or concealment, are usually shocked at want of family confidence. He only imagined that Mr Alton suspected *him*, and this idea lent a strangeness to his manner, and a brevity to his replies, little calculated to re-assure those about him. The man was wretched. He never felt safe and content, save when he was writing a sermon, or preaching it. It maddened him even to be with Joy, who would constantly talk about Lovell's Court, and how thankful she felt at the idea of her husband being at length able to assume his proper position in the world.

'Because I am quite certain, dear, that dreadful relation has been dead for a hundred years, and will never return to claim the property. Besides, the lawyers say you are the next heir, and surely they ought to know best.'

If he had never comprehended it before, Andrew Hardell could realize now that state of mind wherein a man shall in very desperation seek an exit from his misery by the help of a few drops of poison or an ounce of lead. If he could only have died—if he could only have seen a way, even through the gates of

the grave, out of his labyrinth of trouble, he would have blessed the malady which came to bring him release.

Not when he trod the subterranean passage beneath Buccleugh Street, and emerged into the light of day, and the presence of the men who were to try him for his life, had he felt anything like the racking agony he endured when he sat listening the while his wife, in her loving foolishness, babbled on about all he should do when he had a great estate, and a devoted tenantry, and attached dependants. In very bitterness of soul he would cry, in those weary night vigils which he now held continually, 'Would to God they had found me guilty, and hung me in front of Dumfries jail. It would all have been over years and years ago,'—for there were others now to suffer with him—others, his wife, his child, the man who had trusted him. And then temptation came and whispered him to take the property, and even if Anthony returned, arrange the matter somehow. But this was just the point at which he felt he could no longer travel his self-elected road. He could not appropriate Anthony's inheritance, although Anthony had robbed him of his poor patrimony. He would wait till tidings should come from that far-off country whither Anthony had journeyed—he would wait for news whether he were living or dead, whether he had sons who might inherit, or whether he had passed away, leaving no memory and no name behind him.

Between Anthony and himself the Curate ascertained there intervened no heir. Death had been busy with the Hardells, and the hint given by George Trelwyn enabled Andrew to trace the relationship which really connected himself and the Hardells of Lovell's Court.

It was all a knotted, tangled, twisted skein, which could never be made smooth for him while time lasted. But he had his work to do, nevertheless, his mission to fulfil, his Master's word to speak; and what mattered it if his own heart were breaking, while he was still left strength and health to proclaim God's saving words to perishing souls.

And this was the man Madge had come to hear; this was he whose voice now sounded through the church, whose first spoken sentence,—'Let us pray,' caused Madge to raise her eyes, and look over the sea of heads with a hungry scrutiny, towards the preacher.

For it was *his* voice,—not Anthony's. His voice,—changed, aged, subdued, modulated,—but his, nevertheless. For a moment she doubted the evidence of her senses; for a second it seemed to her that she must be dreaming; that her fancy was playing

her some cruel trick; but no, as sentence after sentence was uttered, as he gave out his text, as he commenced his address, her suspicion became certainty.

The Rev. Anthony Hardell she had so longed to see—who had never answered her letter, who had spent his life ministering to the poor, who had achieved the doubtful success of a popular preacher, who had compassed the fame of 'being well worth hearing'—was none other than Andrew Hardell, the lover of her youth, the man she had loved with a love and constancy passing the affection and constancy of woman. He had been near her through all those weary years, and never made a sign. And it was thus they met—she but one amidst a thousand drawn thither by the fame of his talent—he all unconscious that amongst the congregation over which his eyes wandered there sat the woman he had deserted in the spring-time of her youth, and who had been faithful to her love and his memory ever since.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FACE TO FACE.

People said it was a magnificent sermon which Mr Hardell preached that Sunday evening; but of her own knowledge, Madge could never have told whether it were good, bad, or indifferent.

She failed to remember the text; she had subsequently only the vaguest memory of what words the preacher uttered; she felt like one drifting over the waters of a strange ocean, and the tones of Andrew's voice conveyed no more to her than the sobbing of a distant storm might to a person tossed upon the billows of the deep.

She was fairly crushed by the extent of her own knowledge. Was it a dream that she sat in St Martin's listening to Andrew Hardell's sermon? or had the years—the long, long years of waiting and watching—of trusting love and faithful expectancy—been a delusion?

How was it—how could it all have come about? What did it mean? Why had he and Anthony changed names? and why, when he was still in the country, had he never made a sign—never, spite of all they were once to each other, striven to see the woman who should have been his wife?

With her fingers loosely linked together, and her eyes fastened on the preacher, Madge sat back in her corner, and puzzled over the enigma presented to her, out of which she could make nothing. Through all the life she had lived lonely for his sake, she had so persistently believed in Andrew's innocence, that now, when a problem came to be solved, the real solution of which could only be arrived at by a conviction of his guilt, she felt stupid and dazzled, as though after long dwelling in a darkened room, where every object was softened and subdued, she had been suddenly taken into the broad sunlight, where, with eyes tortured and half-blinded by the sudden glare, she was told to look on the man she once idolized, and deemed incapable of deceit or falsehood, living a lie—preaching God's word under the cover of another man's name.

And all the time the old love was welling up in her heart for the Andrew she remembered—for the man who had changed into this—changed into one old and worn before his time—oppressed by the burden of a secret, not one in the whole congregation—so he imagined—knew he carried save himself.

Back her thoughts flitted to Langmore, and the old-fashioned Vicarage garden: to the room where she had knelt beside her father, praying him to let her write once more—only once. She was a girl again, with her life before her; and behold in a moment she woke to the knowledge that the best years of her life had been lived and wasted for love of the man who now kept that large congregation still and rapt by the mere power of his eloquence and the force of his earnestness. Sorrows he spoke of—ah! God, had he not experienced them! Temptation—who can talk of this so pitifully, and with such sympathy for the failings of his fellows, as he who has yielded to it? Sin—had the wages thereof not been doled out to him day by day in the form of living death during the months and the years—during every hour of which he had endured his long Assize?

On the world's joys he touched likewise—and who so competent, think you, to prize those joys over-highly, to overrate the sweetness of the cup it is permitted some to quaff, as he who, after long abstinence having grasped the goblet, has found such bitterness mingled with the draught—*his* draught only, mind you—that, had it been possible, he would have flung the goblet aside, and, leaving the wine, full of mad delight, yet thick with sickening lees, he had elected to drink—returned to the water from the brook, his hermit's life, and his hermit's fare?

'In order to comprehend good, it is needful to understand evil.' So, in days past, I heard stated in the pulpit by one who

may yet climb high; and it is equally true that a man can only fully grasp the meaning of the word happiness after he has fathomed the depths of misery and watched through the night—none but God and himself understanding his wretchedness.

Now it was just this quality of comprehension Andrew Hardell's preaching possessed. No one listening to him could avoid feeling that what he talked about he had experienced—that what the auditors had endured, he knew. Vague enough all this might be in the minds of his congregation; but the sympathy—the *rapport*—I use the French word because no English phrase will express my precise meaning—was perfect, nevertheless.

Those whose lines had been cast in pleasant places understood well enough that the preacher was only talking in the present about things which must come to them in the future—things that, let the life be never so long nor so prosperous, should yet become realities ere the golden bowl be broken, and the silver cord loosed.

The man had sinned, the man had suffered. But for that night at New Abbey; but for that 'tholing his assize' at Dumfries; but for the years spent in Essex Marsh; but for the period when he fell in love, and fought against that love; but for the moment when happiness came upon him, as the Scripture says poverty shall, like an armed man, and swept away with its strong hand the resolutions of all the time he had lived, Andrew Hardell could not have been a preacher—could not have fully enforced the doctrine that here man hath no abiding place, that as the grass withereth and the flower fadeth, so he passeth away.

We talk about genius—but yet, after all, what is it till, through suffering, it has learned, in the house of its captivity, to sing a song intelligible to our humanity? In youth it talks in a language we cannot understand—its utterances may be as the words of prophets, as the oracles of old, but they convey no meaning to us. Rather, we scoff at the strange tongue, at the crude ideas, till the hour comes when the fiery tongue of trouble coming upon the man enables him to speak in a language familiar to all comers, and to say, if not in words, at least in sentiment,

'Friends, what you have felt and more, has befallen me; not out of the fulness of my wisdom, but rather from the depth of the sorrow I have sounded, I tell you it is true that, as the sparks fly upward, man is born to trouble.'

This sort of genius—this sort thus developed, Andrew Hardell possessed, and with it he was able to attract and to retain the attention of a congregation. Men abler and more learned might have failed to enlist their sympathies, but of his powers

and his talent, as I have said, Madge could then take no cognizance, and when, after the blessing had been pronounced, Herbert whispered in her ear,

'A splendid sermon, Madge, was it not?' she only answered, mechanically, 'Yes,' and drawing her veil closely over her face, walked down the aisle.

At the door she stopped.

'I must see Mr Hardell,' she said, in a low tone, to her companion. 'I must see him to-night.'

Heaven help her! She beheld the visible form of that vague idealistic love which had been floating through her mind for years, keeping it unsettled, disturbed, weary—vanishing away; and she felt, ere it quite departed, she must lay hands on the hem of its garments, and detain the apparition till she had looked on it once more, face to face.

And she had that feeling, further, which most persons have experienced at some time or other, namely, that if she let Andrew pass away from her, she might search in vain for another opportunity. As in the old Irish legends, he who looks on the *leprechaun* must 'hold him with his eye' till the sprite has revealed where lie the treasures hidden away in ages long ago, or else lose his chance of wealth for ever, so Madge understood that unless she were able to put questions and receive answers, then both might drift far apart once more, leaving the past unexplained, the present incomprehensible.

'I want to speak to the clergyman who preached,' she said to the verger, slipping half-a-crown into his hand, which two-and-sixpence the man opened his hand to receive, looked at furtively, then transferred to his pocket, and remarked that he 'would see.'

'Wait for a minute,' he added, and disappeared, leaving Madge and Herbert standing side by side in the now almost deserted church, looking idly at the empty pews and at the pillars, beginning to appear white and ghostly at the farther end, where the lights were already extinguished.

'Please come this way,' the verger said, and Madge, merely remarking to Herbert, 'You will wait for me,' followed.

As she passed up the aisle, she saw two clergymen standing near the reading-desk, who, having already rallied Mr Hardell about his visitor, cast on her somewhat curious glances when she passed near.

Seeing them there, she understood she should find the preacher alone, nor was she disappointed. One moment more—it was all like a dream—more like a dream than anything she had ever gone through in sleep—and the vestry-door shut behind

her, and, after the best part of her lifetime, he and she met face to face.

'Andrew!'

He did not recognize her at first, and stepped back on the impulse, after the manner of one who has for years been prepared to act physically and mentally on the defensive; but she put aside her veil, and stretched out her hand, and then

'Madge!' he cried, with such an agony in his voice that the sound of her own name thus spoken frightened her.

'I knew you at once,' she said tremulously; 'and I felt I must speak to you for the sake of old times.'

Heaven only knew how she got so simple a sentence out, unless it might be that the dreamlike feeling was still strong upon her, and that the past seemed to her, then, as much a delusion as the figure of the man, who, dropping into a chair, rested his elbows on the table, and, covering his face, groaned aloud.

'Andrew!' her voice began to tremble, and he felt the gentle touch of her hand laid on his shoulder; for the present was becoming an actual presence now, and Madge could not endure the sight of his misery.

These things recalled him.

'Sit down,' he said, rising and giving her his chair; after which he himself drew another towards the other side of the table, and so sat facing her. 'You came to hear Anthony, I suppose—and found me; and now you want to know all about it.'

'I do not want to know anything you wish to keep secret,' she answered; 'only—only I have always pictured your life as so different. I fancied you lonely, in exile—poor possibly, and——'

'And now you come and see me, as you imagine, successful—a man who, having conquered fate by means of a trick and a lie, is prosperous and—happy——'

'You are not happy!' she said gently. 'No one looking in your face could believe that.'

'Suppose I am not happy—what then?' he asked; 'do you think it likely,' he went on impetuously, 'that I, weighed down by the memory of my past—carrying the burden of such a secret about with me in silence, having attained success through means of a false name and a false character—could ever know on this side the grave peace again?'

'What made you take Anthony's name?' she asked.

'I do not know—I cannot tell; who can tell his reasons for any action half an hour after it has become a part and parcel of his life?'

'Why did you not trust us?' she inquired, her voice tremul-

ous with eager pity. 'Oh! you surely knew we always believed you innocent!'

He clasped his hands before him on the table, and looked at her intently for a moment ere he said—

'Madge, are you married?'

'No, Andrew,' and a faint colour stole over her pale face.

'Have you stayed single all these years for my sake, believing in me?'

'I have,' she answered, without a shadow of hesitation. 'I said when I was a girl I never would listen to the story that you cared for Mrs Challerson till I heard you say so with your own lips; and I have kept my word. It cannot matter to us now,' she went on in a sort of proud defiance, for the instinct of her woman's heart was crying that whatever love he might have once felt for her was dead, 'but that is no reason why I should not tell you the truth.'

'Lord, forgive me!' he muttered. 'I am a greater sinner even than I thought. Madge, listen to me; I will tell you the whole story. I never loved Mrs Challerson; I did not love any woman then save you. I went away solely because the shadow of a great crime darkened my life, and I swore to myself that no other human being should ever share the blackness of my future, a future which has proved blacker than even my fancy then painted it.'

'But what could that shadow have mattered to me, when you were innocent and I knew it?'

'Madge, *I was guilty*,' he answered—'Not in intention,' he hurried on, seeing her turn white and shiver, 'but in deed; and since that awful night you may guess—though no one can ever fully know—what my life has been.'

There was dead silence for a few minutes, during the continuance of which the past came and stood before both of them—the past, with its innocence, and its beauty, and its peace, to the one—the past, with its horror, its dread, its long drawn-out agony, its lonely hours, to the other.

Looking at him, Madge gathered something of what was passing in his heart—and all her woman's pity and all her woman's tenderness welling up at that moment, she rose, and, drawing close beside him, said—

'If you had trusted in me, that should have made no difference—I think not—I am sure not; and even now, Andrew, though I am not what I was, though my youth is almost past, and it is not likely you can feel for me the same as in those happy days at Langmore, yet still——'

'Hush, dear!' he interrupted; 'hush! do not of your great goodness say anything now you might wish hereafter unspoken.'

'And why should I wish it unspoken?' she asked—'when'—but something in the expression of his face made her suddenly shrink back into silence.

For a second he could not answer. Once again he beheld the old-fashioned garden at Langmore, with its flowers, its trees, its birds; once again he saw her in her girlish beauty, and felt the warm touch of her hand, which he held tightly clasped in his own; once again he was young, and life was before him, and he had made his choice as to the one who should prove his companion by the way—the sun was bright, and the perfume of the roses and pinks seemed wafted to his senses; and then—then it all cleared away like a mist, and, realizing the full extent of the misery he had wrought for himself and her, he answered—

'I am married.'

Hearing this, she understood how she had spent her strength for naught, and wasted her pity in vain; then she comprehended that she had been, if not a woman scorned, at least a woman forgotten; and she listened like one stupefied by a sudden blow, while he went on—

'I cannot talk to you now; I cannot tell you how it all came about; but let me know where I can see you, and then——'

'No,' she interrupted decidedly; 'it is fitting that it should be in the future as it has been in the past—we must never meet again;' and she was leaving the room, when, a sudden thought striking her, Madge turned towards him once more.

'Does *she* know?' was her question.

'She does not,' he answered.

'God help you!' and then a sob—not hers, but his—stopped the words which would have followed.

'Go away,' Andrew entreated; 'not here—not now.' And she went.

* * * * * *

'Did you learn anything about Andrew Hardell?' Mr Spencer asked, when they were fairly out of the church, and on their way home.

'Yes,' she answered, 'a great deal.' But not all his questioning could elicit any further information; only, when he looked in her face at parting, he saw it was as the face of one who had looked that night upon her dead.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SHADOWS.

Supposing a chemist could discover the secret of that potent charm used by the 'little people' in days gone by, which, rubbed over the eyelids, rendered fairies visible to mortal ken, and that any one amongst us were to assist his sight with the wonderful elixir—I wonder whether he would not be appalled by the sudden comprehension of all the motley company he has had travelling with him for years, unknowing of their very existence.

To me, in life there is nothing more terrible than this, that the secrets of men's existences are rarely held inviolate till eternity. There is a reckoning here without the aid of the eternal books; there is a cloud of witnesses always beside and around, that may seem to superficial observers of as little importance as the dust under their feet, and yet that can come at a moment's notice, clothed and in the flesh, to testify life has been a long, weary lie, stained here with sin and there with wrong, marred and blurred throughout by some false step, the taking of which man has himself almost forgotten till the informers rise up, and the court of the world is held, and the witnesses are called, and ten thousand fingers, to the thinking of the poor culprit, point at him, whilst he seems to hear ten thousand tongues shrieking—'Thou art the man!'

The ghosts of the long ago—laid and buried, as you fancied, years and years since, friends—though your present sight may fail to discern them,—they are travelling with you still, a ghastly company. While you drive in your carriage along life's smoothest turnpike-roads, or pace, footsore and weary, over the flinty by-paths of existence, past events are skipping on beside you, mocking, jeering at your profound self-delusion.

Shall fleet steeds leave them behind? shall liveried servants keep them at bay? shall an unsuccessful existence, drawing to a still more unsuccessful close, be able to purchase their forbearance? Nay, invisible now, they shall be visible some day; voiceless, they shall yet find tongues; despised, they shall rear their head and hiss at you; forgotten, they shall re-appear with more strength than at their first birth; and when the evil day comes, and your power and your energy, and your youth and your hope, have gone, they shall pour the overflowing drop into your cup, they shall mingle fennel with your wine, they shall pile the last

straw on your back, they shall render wealth valueless and life a burden, they shall make poverty more bitter, and add another pain to that which already racks you; they shall break the breaking heart, and make you turn your changed face to the wall, and gather up your feet into your bed, and pray to be delivered from your tormentors by your God, Who alone knows all.

Wherefore, young man, if you would ensure a peaceful old age, be careful of the acts of each day of your youth; for with youth the deeds thereof are not to be left behind. They are detectives, keener and more unerring than ever the hand of sensational novelist depicted; they will dog you from the day you sinned till the hour your trial comes off. You are prosperous, you are great, you are 'beyond the world,' as I have heard people say, meaning the power or the caprice thereof—but you are not beyond the power of events. Whatever you may think now, they are only biding their time; and when you are weak and at their mercy, when the world you fancied you were beyond has leisure to hear their story and scoff at you, they will come forward and tell all the bitter tale. And if you take it one way, you will bluster and bully, and talk loud, and silence society before your face, if you fail to still its tattle behind your back; while if you take it another way, you will bear the scourging silently, and cover up the marks of the lash as best you may, and go home and close your door, and sit there alone with your misery, decently and in order, till you die.

There is many a man talking glibly enough about this cruel war, and the hearths it has left desolate, and the hearts it has broken, who, wearing the sackcloth next his skin, feeling the smart of the iron still eating into his flesh, thinks all the while in his innermost mind it might not be so bad a fate after all to march out in the morning, with the band playing and the colours flying, and to lie at night stiff and stark, with set face upturned to the starlit sky, free from earthly trouble for evermore.

Since, look you, a man can physically, unless he be a coward unfit to live at all, only die once; while mentally it is possible to die a thousand times—as many men do, and will till the world shall have ceased to be.

All of which, at the present time of writing, is merely intended to prove that events had travelled as fast as the Rev. Andrew Hardell, and that he knew it. The visionary company was becoming visible. He had studied life, and knew what it meant. The end, he felt, was drawing nigh; the *dénouement* of his life's plot was hurrying to a climax. Well, well! that weary assize, begun when the evening shadows drew down over the road to

New Abbey, was meant to be for life—so at least Andrew Hardell, sick sometimes of beating against the bars of his captivity, hoped, since he thought God must have understood and planned it so, though he, Andrew, could not comprehend.

Nor can any of us, friends, for is not the whole of life a mystery?—the only actual fact we can grasp through faith being, that for a certainty, 'He who has sown in tears shall reap in joy, and bring his sheaves with him?'

But meantime there were no sheaves for Andrew Hardell—nothing but past events becoming, one by one, tangible.

As he buttoned up his top-coat, and put on his hat, and went out from St Martin the Martyr by a side-door leading not into Ross Place, but a quiet back thoroughfare, he felt almost as though the toils were closing around him. Could he who had preached to others then preach to his own soul? Alas! even while he tried to look up to his God for help and support, there intervened between him and his Creator a vision of the only woman he had ever passionately loved, nursing her child, his child, and singing to it snatches of nursery ballads, whilst with proud fond eyes she glanced now and then at him, Andrew, who had deceived her all through.

He saw the graceful arch of her neck, the coils of her luxuriant hair, the sweet beauty of her face—and the man could have cried aloud in his anguish, for it was more almost than he could bear. Nor in that hour did memory and conscience forget to tell of that other life, of that other woman, sacrificed to him; for he now knew he had discarded Madge not because he loved her too well, but because he loved her too little. It had all been a mistake—first he had lied to himself, and the consequence proved that through all the years to come he was doomed to lie to others.

And as he thought this, he pulled his hat farther over his eyes, and walked on towards his hotel with more rapid steps, as though by accelerating his speed he could deaden the cries of memory.

Even through his misery and the tumult of his soul, however, it seemed to the man that some one was following him—had been following him from the time he left St Martin's; and as he had never quite lost that dread of being pursued which came upon him when he fled through the night back towards Dumfries, and when he retraced his steps only to find IT, still lying motionless where it had fallen, stricken by his hand, Andrew Hardell, after passing along many streets, and still hearing the click of footsteps—persistent footsteps, now hasting, now treading more slowly,

but still never quite ceasing—stood still for a moment, to let his enemy overtake or his fear pass him by.

In a minute a man overtook and passed him by without even a glance, walking steadily on in front. Clearly that man had nothing to do with Andrew Hardell ; and yet, moved, he knew not by what impulse, Andrew Hardell turned, and, without rhyme or reason which he could have stated to himself, walked back along the way he had come.

Almost immediately the man was dogging him again, and once more Andrew stopped to let his fear, now grown into a certainty, overtake or pass him by.

Once more it passed him by, then hesitated, paused, and finally returned to the spot where Andrew still stood—waiting.

'Mr Hardell, could I have a word wi' ye ?'

How many years had passed since he heard that voice, and yet he recognized it in a moment as the voice of a man who could once have hung him.

'Yes, David Johnstoun,' Andrew answered—and he stretched out his hand, and the other grasped it just as they had done on the sands at Dumfries, while the Nith falling over its weir made solemn music under the moonlight.

'Ye're a wonderfu' preacher,' David remarked. 'Ye have a wonderfu' gift.'

You were at St Martin's, then ?'

'Ay, whenever and wherever I could go to hear ye, I have done sae.'

'Then you knew——'

'Not till I went the first time. I have done ever since.'

'Since how long ?'

'Maybe four year—I canna be just sure.'

Four years—think of it, my reader—for four years he had been known, and he never knew.

'And why did you not tell me you were in London ?'

'I thought ye would rather I let ye alone. It was nane so pleasant a time for ye when ye saw me last that ye would want to mind it, and as ye had changed names with him, I thought it would be best, maybe, never to tell ye that ye had not changed out of my memory, and I would not have spoken to ye now only I am in a bit of trouble, and want advice if you will give it to me.'

It all came back to him as though it had occurred but yesterday—a winding walk, lights gleaming from the houses, the river close at hand, the wide sands, the words he had uttered to the man who now paced slowly by his side, and he answered, 'I will give you anything I have to give—help, advice, money——'

'I want no money,' the other interrupted, 'leastways, that is, none of yours—and I would not have ye think I ask for your advice because ye once said ye would help me, but only because I know nobody here I can just exactly trust. I won't take ye out of your way, though. Whichever road ye are going I will walk with you, if I may.'

'Come to my hotel,' Andrew suggested, but his companion negatived this proposition with—

'No, thank you, sir, I would rather not. I can say what I have got to say going along—though I do not much care to talk about business or this world's trials on the Sabbath-day.'

'If we could only keep both out of our thoughts,' the clergyman remarked.

'Ye may say that,' David answered. 'Ye'll have had your own share of trouble since then, I make no doubt.'

'All these years I have just been like a man hanging over a precipice by a single thread, which he knows is fraying, fraying, and *must* eventually fray through.'

'Eh! but it's dreadful,' exclaimed the other. 'I have often wondered what could have made ye take his name. Surely it was an awfu' risk to run.'

'He had taken my good name, my money, my means of earning a living in this country, or of going abroad to earn a living there, and this was what he offered me in exchange,' Andrew answered bitterly and vehemently. 'He told me to take his name and his curacy, and like a fool I did, and have been a cheat, and a liar, and a hypocrite ever since. Look here, Johnstoun,' he went on, 'when I left Dumfries that night, I left it intending to leave England too—to give up my profession, to cut myself adrift from every one who had ever known, who had ever heard of me. I came to London to get the money I had ignorantly lent him back again, but he kept it in order to marry, and take *her* abroad.'

'The wicked Jezebel,' David groaned; 'the shameless, abandoned woman. God pity you, Mr Hardell, it has been hard all through.'

'Yes; but no one, save God, can ever know *how* hard,' the man answered, speaking with a sort of passionate despair. Through all that weary time he had never spoken of his trouble to mortal, and now, though he said, and said truly, no one save God might ever know how bitter had been his trial, still God seemed to him at that moment so far off, and his fellow-man so close at hand, that his grief poured out like a river which, long ice-bound and silent, once released breaks all barriers and rushes on noisily to the sea.

The long, long years of solitude, the seclusion from all society, the drudgery of his work in Essex Marsh, the utter hopelessness of his existence, these things he recalled as one might play a prelude to some mournful air—but when he proceeded to tell how even his wife knew nothing of his real history—how his child might live some day to curse his memory—the man's voice was thick and broken with tears that were dropping down in his heart, though his eyes were dry and aching.

And all the time Joy, seated by her father's hearth, was brooding proudly concerning her absent husband, and marvelling what the congregation at St Martin's would think of the splendid sermon he was sure to preach.

And which he had preached—for the man's genius was perfected through suffering—such suffering as spite of all life's sorrows falls to the lot of few.

'When you tholed your assize in Buccleugh Street,' David remarked at last, 'it was not all over wi' ye.'

'No, it can never be over in this world, now,' Andrew answered, mournfully. 'It has been a mistake all through—from the time I left the dead man on the road without going for assistance, to the hour I married my wife under a false name.'

'Ay, I suppose ye had to do that; but, eh! wasn't it a pity ye did not tell her at first, for ye'll have to do it at last, ye may be very sure.'

'Why?' Andrew asked, hurriedly and sharply.

'Why? oh, man alive, do ye think she won't come at the knowledge of it all some time, and the sooner that some day comes the happier for ye baith, I say.'

Then all at once Andrew Hardell repented his confidence—not because he feared the man betraying him, but because he had changed a shadow into a reality—a ghostly presence into one clothed with flesh and bone and sinew.

The dread of his happier life had been that Joy should know—that Joy should ever suspect, and all at once up rose one to tell him not merely that some day she must know, but that also the sooner the better.

And this to him who would cheerfully have met death rather than that she should even suspect; who could have tholed his Scotch Assize over again and swung by the neck cheerfully till he was dead to save Joy from the shock of seeing him torn down from his pedestal—from beholding that the feet of the idol she had worshipped were only of clay—from comprehending that the man she loved was less honourable than his fellows; that to her he had been a cheat and a liar and an impostor always.

'What is your trouble, David?' Mr Hardell said, after a moment's pause, during which thoughts such as these surged through his breast. He was trying to turn the conversation, and the Scotchman, understanding that thoroughly, answered—

'Ye needn't be fearful of or angry with me, sir. I am not going to tell wife nor child who you are, and it will not bring the day of full retribution any nearer my saying that it must come; only if I were in your place, sir, I would make it come soon, I would not tread this world through with a millstone round my neck if I could get rid of it anyhow.'

It is curious to think how we are constituted. Even in his grief Andrew Hardell noticed that metaphor, and made use of it subsequently in a sermon.

'As for my trouble,' went on David, 'it is not much of a one beside yours, but it is enough for me. When you saw me at Dumfries I had saved a good bit of siller, and after that I married a girl who had some fortune as well, and for a while everything went right. I still stayed on at the "King's Arms," and I also set up a sort of general shop over in Maxwelltown, and we were as comfortable as need be until a far-away cousin of my wife's, who had always lived in London, came down one summer to see his friends. By that time we had a couple of young ones, and though they were but bits of things, still my wife and me never tired of planning what they should be when they grew up. Whenever we heard or read of any great man who had risen from the commonalty, we always looked at one anither as much as to say, "Who knows but yet, mistress, or gudeman," as the case might be——. Well, sir, to cut a long story short, this cousin of Mistress Johnstoun's he was never tired of telling us about London, and the fortunes that were to be made in it. He said if a man had ten pounds clear there to begin the world, he might some day find himself Prime Minister. I'm no sure,' David went on to remark, with strict regard to truth, 'that it was even so much as ten pounds—five, indeed, I think he said was enough for a nest egg.'

'And so I suppose you came to London and lost your money?'

'Begging your pardon, no, sir,' answered Johnstoun, 'leastways that is not what I have to tell you. We talked the matter over a great deal, and after much thought and looking at this side and at that, Mistress Johnstoun and myself and the children came south. Eh! there are people that say the Scotch never turn north again; but my heart has not ceased thinking long for the river and the soft blue hills and the purple of Criffel from that day to this.'

'One man's meat,' thought Andrew, but he held his peace, and the other went on—

'My wife's cousin—that is, to call a man by his name, to say Matthew McPhail—and myself set up a sort of eating and early-breakfast house in Old Street. It paid first-rate; all the carters coming in with hay and straw and roots and vegetables stopped for their cup of tea and coffee and a big whang of bread, and then when they were gone we got the workmen employed in the neighbourhood, and there were dinners and teas, and money, as I have said, seemed to come as if we were coining it, and yet all the while we never seemed to get one bit really more before the world. McPhail did the banking and financial business, as he called it—ordered in the goods, paid the tradespeople sometimes, and just as often, as it appeared to me, did not pay them, on the ground of imposition and so forth. Indeed, I do not think we ever dealt with any house for more than six months together, and then there was always a trouble, and lawyer's letters, and oftentimes summonses and writs, and such other things as no honest man can abide to see coming about his place, let alone into his very house.'

'And what did McPhail do with the money?' asked Mr Hardell.

'I was just coming to that. One Derby-day, McPhail, who lived with us, having been taken bad the night before, could not get up and go out as was his practice; and towards the evening he grew so much worse, that I sent for a doctor, thinking the fellow was light-headed. Well, as the doctor came down I asked what was the matter, if he thought there was any fear of fever or infection. I had the children in my mind then.

'"Oh!" says the doctor, "he won't have anything catching. He has backed the favourite, though, too heavily I am afraid."

'Well, sir, I was that stupid, it did not occur to me what he meant, until I went out and saw a coach-and-four driving along the City Road, coming home from the Derby. The minute I set my eyes on that I turned and went home again, and straight up to McPhail's room.

'"You have something on your mind," I began. "We are partners, and you had better make a clean breast of the matter. I never thought you a betting man, but I know now you have been at this game for a long time, and——"

'"Who has won?" he shouted, interrupting me.

'"Some outside horse," I answered, telling him just what I had heard in the street.

'"And the favourite?"

'"Was nowhere." That was what the men had been saying over their tea, down-stairs, when I passed through, and I repeated that to him as well; but, oh, sir, I shall never forget the way McPhail took it—with a great screech, as if the heart was being torn out of him, and then he fell back like one dead.'

'He must have been badly bitten,' Mr Hardell remarked. In Essex Marsh he had learnt the language of most of the nomad tribes, and the phraseology of the turf came almost natural to the man, although he had never won anything—not even a pair of gloves—on a race in his life.

'Yes, and so was I,' David answered bitterly

'There was he, who had never done a day's real work for years, and there was I, who had risen early and sat up late, who had made myself a servant to servants, and we being still partners equal, it was common ruin he had wrought for us, and I had to face it.'

At which juncture David Johnstoun paused, the memory of his wrongs and his sorrows evidently preventing utterance. It was not himself alone, however, remember, wife and children had suffered likewise—wife and children had worked hard, been out of their beds winter and summer before the 'screech of day,' and put up the shutters only as a preliminary to seek their couches; and behold, they were all, by the act and folly of one man, involved in a common ruin.

'I set at it as well as I could,' Mr Johnstoun resumed. 'He paid his betting people, and I called a meeting of our creditors. I told them just my position—how I had been deceived by a man who wanted to make money too fast; how there was a good business still to the fore; how if they gave me time I would, please the Lord, pay every man his due. I told them more than that; how I had given McPhail a hundred pounds in hard cash to go out of the business, and how he had gone, and that if they liked to trust and depend on me, I would settle to the uttermost farthing.

'So they trusted in me, and I hope I never deceived them; though, so far as this world is concerned, it might have been better for me if I had. If you believe me, I grudged the very 'bus lad his threepence when it has been too far or too wet for me to walk home, so anxious was I to get out of debt. I did the marketing, and my wife the managing; and, eh! what I had lost I saved, and I was more than out of debt; I had fifty pounds before me in the world, when who should walk in one day and pitch off his hat, and begin to serve a customer, just as if nothing had happened, but Matthew McPhail.

'"Haven't you made some mistake?" said I to him in my amazement.

'"Oh! not the least," he answered; "and are not you glad to see me back again?"

'"No, I'm not," I said, "and what is more, I don't intend to have you baek."

'"Oh! that is the way of it, is it?" says he; "and since how long, Johnstoun, my friend, have you been sole master here?"

'"Since I paid the hundred pounds you had in hard cash, and paid the debts you let me in for," I made reply.

'"But you did not gazette the dissolution of partnership; and so, my boy, I am your partner still, and mean to remain your partner till the end of the chapter."'

'What a vagabond!' exclaimed Andrew Hardell.

'I think that,' answered David; 'but other people say "not so—you are to be blamed for your want of caution;" but how was I to know? I had never served an apprenticeship to a lawyer. I knew nothing about the Gazette. I gave him a hundred pounds in sovereigns, golden sovereigns, and painted his name out from over our door, and how could I tell that was all no good at all?'

'What makes you think it was no good?' Andrew asked.

'I have been to my Writer, and he has been to his, and between them they make it out that whatever he likes to do, I am accountable for, and that whatever debt he likes to eontract I must pay, and that whatever money I make, or have made, he is entitled to the half of.'

'Suppose I see my lawyer, and ask his opinion,' suggested Andrew. 'It seems hard, but it may be right. We understand that, don't we, both of us? However, we will not eonclude it to be right till we know.'

'Thank you,' David responded, humbly enough, for London ways and London anxieties had taken a good deal of the Scotch starch out of him. 'It is of no use for the like of me to go to a Writer, for he hands it over to his clerk, and the clerk being only a trifle better than myself, cannot be troubled, and so poor men go to the wall.'

'Ay—in every position and in every case poor men do go to the wall,' said Andrew, with a sort of subdued passion.

'You did not say that in your sermon to-night,' David remarked slyly. 'You said there were angels to guide—angels to uphold—angels to prevent, and——'

'I was only preaching then,' Andrew said, with a certain ashamed modesty—with a certain gratified pride.

'Ah! sir, being a poor man, and in trouble, I hoped you were

telling the truth, and I hope you were still, though it may have been without your knowledge.'

And with this Parthian shot David Johnstoun bade the popular preacher good night, and walked back slowly and meditatingly towards Old Street.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SPECULATIVE.

When Mr Hardell returned to his hotel after parting with David Johnstoun, he wrote a note to his wife, stating that he should be detained in town by business possibly for a day or two, but that he should return to Eclin as soon as possible; which letter Joy reading by the light of her own pleasant fancies, translated to mean that he had at length determined to take possession of the rents and lands of his deceased kinsman; and forthwith she commenced indulging in many a bright day-dream of all the good they would do, of all the happiness they should enjoy—he and she together—when he occupied his suitable position as the owner of a fine estate, and she at last saw him stand on the heights her proud affection had always desired he should attain.

'I only hope it may be so, my dear,' said Mr Alton, in answer to a remark from his daughter that she felt certain 'Anthony must be intending to bring a delightful surprise back with him;' but his tone was dubious, and his face grave, for there had grown up a distrust which he could not have explained, and which he would not have dared to analyze, concerning the matter of his son-in-law's inheritance.

It is true that he had not the remotest suspicion of the actual state of the case—facts which lie close at hand are generally overlooked in favour of conjectures that have to be sought farther a-field—but he was growing daily and hourly anxious with that sort of sickening anxiety which listens for the footfall of some great and undefined sorrow.

He looked back over every circumstance of Andrew's life since he came to Eclin, and found nothing there to re-assure his confidence.

The man had confessed to a secret in his life—after marriage as well as before he had courted privacy—of his own free will

Mr Alton knew he would never even have preached in a strange church, or accompanied his wife to a dinner-party, or invited a visitor within their doors. Where other men had old College friends whom they were glad to welcome, he had not even an acquaintance besides George Trelwyn, and him he scarcely seemed to feel an acquisition to their home circle.

All of this might of course have arisen from eccentricity; there have been people ere now that preferred their own company to any other—and who shall say altogether without reason, considering the company many are forced to keep? but then he had confessed to a mystery, and Mr Alton racked his brain to imagine what that mystery might be.

As a rule, he connected it with the Dumfries trial. The world—which hinted dark things from time to time about his son-in-law—had never felt quite satisfied concerning Mrs Challerson—indeed, had indicated so much, that on one occasion Mr Alton felt it necessary to question Andrew on the subject.

'I have never seen her save once since that trial,' he answered, with that sort of desperate resolution which he had trained himself to maintain under fire.

'And there was no truth in the rumours which were and are afloat concerning you both?'

'On my word, No.'

'And your friend—Andrew Hardell?' Mr Alton persisted.

'Cared no more for her than I.'

'Then the unhappy husband had no cause for jealousy?'

'I will not say that,' the other answered. 'There was a person, I have reason now to believe, from whom he should have protected his wife; but that person was neither Andrew Hardell nor myself. Had his name been mentioned in Court, it is just possible the Scotch verdict might have been different, and Andrew Hardell's life too.'

'What sort of a man was Andrew Hardell?' Mr Alton asked.

'He was weak, and he thought himself strong; he was young, and he thought himself clever. He had lived amongst people who made the most of the abilities he possessed; and the world had never taught him a lesson till it turned him out of Dumfries Court-house a ruined man.'

'Where is he now?'

'That is best known to himself,' was the reply.

'Do you never hear from him?'

'He would not be likely to write to me.'

And so the conversation dropped; and Mr Alton felt com-

paratively satisfied, until the question of succession again threw an apple of discord into that once happy household.

'Are you waiting for tidings from Andrew Hardell?' Mr Alton asked suddenly one morning, the idea of such a possibility having just occurred to him.

Andrew Hardell, standing by a window looking out over the park, winced as though Mr Alton had stabbed him.

It was a moment before he could steady his voice to answer, but then he said 'No' in a tone which stopped further inquiry.

For all these reasons, and many more too apparently trivial to enumerate, Mr Alton felt that if his son-in-law were really remaining in town for the purpose of making arrangements to take possession of his inheritance, an almost unendurable load would be lifted off his mind; but then, on the other hand, he could not conjecture what news could have been communicated on the Sunday.

'We cannot tell anything about it until his return,' he remarked, feeling at the same time it was quite possible they might be able to tell just as little when he did return.

Wherein he chanced to be mistaken—the beginning of the end was at hand; and in such cases the beginning is usually very near the end.

Meanwhile, unknowing of his wife's hopes, of his father-in-law's doubts, Andrew Hardell went next day to see his solicitors, who advised him in the first instance to see whether no compromise could be made with Mr McPhail.

'He has clearly the law on his side,' the partner, who chanced to be in, remarked.

'And——' suggested Mr Hardell.

'With such a blackguard the law is everything,' finished the man he addressed.

'Then,' observed Mr Hardell, 'you will excuse my saying I do not think much of the law.'

'I have yet to make the acquaintance of any one who does,' said the solicitor, blandly, 'unless it may be we who live by it.'

Whereat Mr Hardell looked somewhat shocked. People who have been living an ideal life—leading an existence which may be typical of a future life, but which in no respect represents the actual and prosaic life men and women who are in the world must expect to meet—are always shocked and astonished when they come in contact with reality, verbal or otherwise.

Mr Hardell believed, perhaps because he knew practically so little of life, that those whose experience hold no memory either of great sin or of great sorrow, should have no thought of deceit,

no idea, however vague, of double-dealing. His own career had been one long course of deception ; but all the more on this very account he loved truth and right with a sort of fanatical devotion, and it had always been inexplicable to him why it was that law and justice were not convertible terms.

'You see,' proceeded the lawyer, 'this person in whom you are interested made a great mistake, and people have to pay for making mistakes. Before handing that hundred pounds over to McPhail he should have consulted his solicitor, and had the affair properly managed. So far as McPhail is concerned, my own opinion is that the fact of his having accepted one hundred pounds would, if it can be proved, prevent his taking any further money out of the business: but he can ruin the business if he like, because Johnstoun would be answerable for any debts he might choose to contract in the name of the firm. If he is not to be bought out a second time, the only thing Johnstoun can do is to go through the Bankruptcy Court. This would dissolve the partnership at once; and my belief is that it would be far and away the best course for him to adopt.'

'But is it not a dreadful thing for a man to be placed in such a dilemma?' said Mr Hardell.

'Certainly. On the other hand, he has none to thank for his trouble but himself. If a man choose to be so stupid, he must take the consequences. Bankruptcy is not a pleasant alternative, certainly; but it is better than being saddled with a partner like McPhail. It would be worth while to spend another hundred pounds in buying McPhail out; but failing his willingness to be bought out, Johnstoun ought to get rid of him by means of bankruptcy.'

'Then there is absolutely no way in which he could compel McPhail to dissolve partnership?'

'None whatever.'

Having received which information, Andrew was turning to leave the office, when Mr St John inquired,—

'Whether he had come to any decision about taking possession of his property?'

'Not yet; not until I hear whether a nearer claimant be living or dead.'

'And what steps are you taking to ascertain his whereabouts?'

'I have advertised in the Australian papers.'

'He is in Australia, then?'

'He was there some years back. Where he may be now I have no idea.'

Mr St John leaned back in his chair, and placing the palms

of his hands together, sat silent for a minute. Then he began,—

'Mr Hardell, considering that you have done us the honour to say we shall have the conduct of your affairs, I do not think you are treating us exactly fairly. Our firm has acted for the Hardell family for fifty years at all events. We have every important document belonging to them in our possession. We have had the fullest confidence placed in us, and yet we can in no way find the slightest clue as to whom this individual may be that has, you assert, a prior claim upon the estate. You refuse to tell us who he is or whence he comes—where he was born—of whom he was born. There can be no good reason for that secrecy, for if he return he will certainly have to produce proofs, and good proofs, to support his claim, and we do not like the distrust which causes you to refuse the information we certainly have some right to request.'

'It is no distrust,' Andrew broke in. 'It only is that I am putting off the telling of a disagreeable story as long as may be.'

'Can it be put off indefinitely?' asked the other.

'No,' was the reply; 'it could, but for this accursed inheritance—' And the man's voice trembled with passionate misery as he spoke.

'Had you an elder brother?' inquired the lawyer, after a pause. 'Was there any secret marriage? Had your father any previous wife but the one we are cognizant of?'

'Not to my knowledge,' Andrew answered.

'Then where does this other Hardell come from? We can find no trace of him in the family pedigree. Unless there were some secret marriage, there can be no one with claims so good as your own. Failing your son, the estates would pass to the other Hardell, who, as supposed, murdered Mr Challerson; but his claim is very remote indeed in comparison with yours. It cannot be that you are waiting to hear from him.'

'No; I am not waiting to hear from him,' Andrew replied. 'And all I can tell you now is, that I can take no steps further in the matter till I have seen the person to whom I allude. It will rest with him whether I take possession of the property or not. In any event, however, the moment he return I will give you my fullest confidence, no matter whether he decide to blast my life for the second time or to make me the only recompense for past treachery I desire.'

'You think it, then, possible an arrangement may be come to?' said Mr St John.

'With any other man I should say it was certain.'

'You know him well?' the lawyer suggested.

'Too well,' was the answer. And this significant sentence ended the conversation; for Mr Hardell rose immediately, and left the office, as was his wont, with only a brief 'Good morning.'

He had never yet shaken hands with either of the partners, which omission they at first set down to arrogance, but subsequently connected with that remarkable mystery which seemed only to deepen as time went on.

Mr St John had said truly that he and his partner did not like the continuance of that mystery.

Over and above the natural curiosity which they felt to know who the strange claimant might be, they objected to being kept in the dark, both on professional and personal grounds; nor was that objection lessened by the statement of Mr Alton, who declared that even he was ignorant of the actual state of affairs.

Indeed, Mr St John had made up his mind to tell their client that they must either be put in possession of every circumstance of the case, or decline to act for him. When the conversation commenced on the day in question, the lawyer intended making the foregoing observation before its close, but something in Mr Hardell's manner prevented his doing so.

'I am confident the man is wretched,' he said to Mr Henry, at a later period of the day; 'and I feel glad now I did not say what I told you I should. Can it be that he is illegitimate, and knows it, or can he have been changed by his nurse? It is natural that, if such were the case, he would try to effect some compromise, more especially if he could keep the facts from his wife's knowledge. He is miserable enough, at any rate, to satisfy his bitterest enemy, if he have one.'

'We shall know more about it in time, I presume,' said Mr Henry, philosophically; 'that is, if the Australian fellow ever turn up, which I do not believe he ever will. My opinion is and has always been that Mr Hardell is mad, on this point at all events. Mark my words, he will end his days in a lunatic asylum. Think how odd he is—never shaking hands—never asking a question about the property—never speaking a sentence on general topics. He has got softening of the brain, or something of that kind, coming on, you may depend upon it.'

'No,' Mr St John answered, reflectingly, 'he is not mad, unless it be with some grief he has elected to keep to himself. I wonder if *he* murdered Kenneth Challerson, and left another man to suffer in his stead. I will write down to Scotland by to-night's post, and get a report of that trial *in extenso*.'

'You seem most wonderfully interested in the matter,' said Mr Henry, a little sarcastically.

'So would you be if you had heard the way in which he spoke of his inheritance as accursed,' answered the other.

'Mad as a March hare,' remarked Mr Henry; 'you may depend I am right.'

'Time will prove,' replied Mr St John, strong in the strength of his own newly-formed convictions. 'All I can say now is, I believe there is some awful sorrow, or some terrible disgrace, at the bottom of the whole thing; and I only wish he would tell us what it is, that we might help him, if possible.'

That, however, was the very thing Andrew Hardell never meant to do, so long as he could escape it by any means. He intended, when Anthony returned, to take these men into his confidence, and make them parties to whatever arrangement might be come to between the rightful owner and himself; but so long as he could put off the evil hour, he argued there was no use in allowing it to strike.

Desperately he clung to the belief that if he agreed to give Anthony the bulk of the rent-roll, Anthony would let him enter into possession of the estate, and that thus he could for ever keep the knowledge of his secret from Joy.

It would depend, he thought, to a great extent on whether Anthony had sons. If he had not, then the matter might be arranged, or even if he had, Andrew believed it would be possible to avert discovery still longer by agreeing that Anthony's children should succeed on his death.

He considered he was entitled to ask and to expect such reparation at the hands of the man who had, as he truly said, blasted his life. Anthony owed it to him; and a score of times a-day Andrew Hardell prayed to God that Anthony might see it in the same light.

'He never could be so cruel as to force me to "thole my assize" a second time, with my wife for my judge,' thought Andrew, confidently; forgetful that when he stood up before my lords, in Buccleugh Street, and answered to his name, on trial for his life, Anthony might have saved him altogether by confessing it was he who had been seen about the Heron's Nest wearing Andrew's light-coloured top-coat, and that he had borrowed one friend's money in order to elope with the wife of another.

Whereas Anthony Hardell confessed nothing, and had subsequently rather taken credit to himself for not having put a rope round Andrew's neck.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MR M'PHAIL.

Once out of Golden Square, Mr Hardell turned his face towards Old Street, where, flanked by a second-hand furniture store and an old-metal warehouse, he found David Johnstoun's Caledonian Coffee-shop, and Mr McPhail serving customers with the manner of a man who considered he was conferring a favour on the customer by doing so.

'Your pleasure, sir?' he asked, as Andrew entered.

'I want to see Mr Johnstoun,' was the reply.

'He is engaged at the moment, but I will tell him. What name, please?'

'Hardell—he is expecting me;' at which juncture David himself appeared, and requested his visitor to walk 'ben'—in other words, to enter his little sitting-room at the back of the shop.

Seated there on a very hard sofa, placed opposite a window which commanded a view of a small backyard, where some Cochin fowls were immured, and a blackened wall that formed the rear of an adjacent livery-stable, Andrew told his unwelcome news—adding, however, that if terms could be made with Mr McPhail, he was willing to find the money for buying him off; and that if terms could not be made, he would provide David with the means of starting again on his own account when he had passed through the Bankruptcy Court.

To a man like Johnstoun there was, of course, horror in the very name of bankruptcy. 'He would be disgraced and ruined for ever,' he said; 'his children would be disgraced and ruined after him,' if it could be 'evened' to him that he had been bankrupt. He would do anything rather than get rid of his troubles in that way, even if he was able to pay forty shillings in the pound.

Very patiently Andrew heard him to the end; then he suggested that they should have Mr McPhail in, and moot the question of paying him out for the second time.

'If he refuse to be bought out, or if he ask too high a price,' said Andrew, 'there will be nothing for it except your being voluntarily a bankrupt, for I am greatly mistaken in the man if he will not make you one compulsorily before long.'

'Eh, isn't it too bad, after the way I have worked, to be ruined by a villain like that, who brings his riff-raff here to shame a decent house with their company?'

'I am very sorry for you, Johnstoun,' said Mr Hardell, 'and I will help you to clear yourself of him if it be possible. Let us have him in. I want to get him to admit before me that he had that hundred pounds, because such an admission would prevent his claiming any portion of the estate.'

'It just takes a man to be all ears and eyes to get through this wicked world at all,' groaned David, as he rose to request the pleasure of his partner's company in the parlour.

'Matthew,' he said, in an insinuating tone, which revealed to Andrew the fact that Mr Johnstoun was afraid of Mr McPhail, and that the fellow's bounce and swagger had produced a very sufficient dread in the mind of the man whom he was doing his best to ruin. 'Matthew, could ye jest come this way a minute?'

'What for?' was the reply.

'I want to speak a word wi' ye.'

'And who is going to mind the shop?'

'I will call down Mistress Johnstoun.'

Hearing which, Mr McPhail sniffed contemptuously, and walked towards the back-parlour, where he sat down and improved the time until Johnstoun's return with various original remarks concerning the state of the weather and the morning s news. Right well he understood that it was about the partnership business David wanted that typical word with him; but he understood, likewise, the vantage-ground on which he was placed, and he could, consequently, afford to make himself agreeable before hostilities actually commenced.

After a very few minutes David returned, and having closed the door carefully, drew up a chair to the table, and began:—

'Now, Matthew, I do not want any unpleasantness with you. I know that, although you got that hundred pounds from me on the false pretence of going out of partnership, you have the whip-hand of me still. I know you can ruin me. I know you can pledge my credit, and run us into thousands of pounds of debt if you like.'

'It is you, sir, I suppose, that have convinced him of this?' said McPhail, turning towards Mr Hardell, as Johnstoun paused, and cleared his throat.

'He knew it all before. I have only confirmed his opinion, I believe,' said Andrew, quietly.

'Well, I am greatly obliged to you for your pains,' said the other, 'for I have been trying to convince him for some time past, and failed. I am just as much his partner now as I was three years ago.'

'Spite of the hundred pounds he paid you to go out, and that you accepted?' suggested Andrew, adroitly.

'Spite of the hundred pounds, and everything and anything else you please.'

'Pardon me,' said Mr Hardell, 'but I think you are slightly mistaken. I believe the mere fact of having taken that hundred pounds would hinder your legal right to any share in the profits.'

'That does not matter so long as I am able to contract debts,' was the cool reply.

'True; that is where Mr Johnstoun's difficulty lies. He is not bound to give you money, but he is bound to pay your debts.'

'You have put the case in a nutshell, sir; I intend he shall pay my debts.'

'And supposing he refuse to do so?' asked Andrew.

'He will be compelled; and, for that very reason, he had better agree to stable his horses with mine once more.'

'I do not want to have anything to do with you or your horses or your stables,' Johnstoun interrupted at this point. 'I just want to be quit of you. I have paid you a hundred pounds before to rid me of the sight of you, but I am willing to give you a hundred pounds again if you will only leave me in peace to make an honest penny.'

'You are too liberal,' said Mr McPhail, mockingly.

'If I am, then you have the less cause for complaint,' answered his partner, not without spirit.

At that McPhail broke out, 'You are too liberal with your hundred pounds, you miserable miserly cur. Did you think you would get rid of me at such a beggarly price, and leave me to starve while you fed on the fat of the land, and put aside portions for your daughters, and started your sons in business, and dressed your wife like a lady, and wore a gold chain yourself, as if you were a baillie? I made you, and I mean to stick to you. I took you from a beggarly little hole in Maxwelltown, and showed you how to make your fortune here. And this is my thanks—that you want to throw me over, to send me out into the world with a paltry hundred pounds. Now, if you like to say *twenty* hundred, I'm your man; but I will not take one sixpence less, and so I tell you.'

'Twenty hundred, good Lord!' ejaculated David Johnstoun.

'Yes; and I will be kind with you. I will take a thousand down in cash, and another thousand in approved bills;' here he glanced at Mr Hardell; 'and no one can say that is not liberal, considering the circumstances of the case.'

'Do you mean, Matthew McPhail, that you will not go out

of this business under a score hundred pounds?' asked Johnstoun in amazement.

That is exactly my meaning,' said the other, looking insolently from his partner to Mr Hardell, and from Mr Hardell to his partner, reading consternation on both their faces.

'If such be the case,' Mr Hardell remarked, after a moment's pause, 'we will give you until twelve o'clock to-morrow to reconsider your decision.'

'And pray, sir, who the deuce are you that say you will give this or withhold that?'

'I am Mr Johnstoun's friend; and I have consulted my solicitors in his interest.'

'Oh! you have, have you? and what do your solicitors say in his interest?'

'I have already told Mr Johnstoun, and there can be no necessity to repeat it to you.'

'Yes, there is,' exclaimed Johnstoun, violently. 'They said I could get rid of you by going through the Bankruptcy Court; and I'd go through a worse place than that if I were just sure we'd be parted on the other side.'

'This is your doing, sir, I suppose? said McPhail, turning furiously upon Andrew.

'Yes,' was the reply. 'I have strongly advised Mr Johnstoun to get the partnership dissolved on any terms.'

'I will make you suffer for your interference!' exclaimed McPhail, bringing down his clenched fist on the table, and sealing his assertion with an awful oath. 'Whoever you may be, or whatever you are, you shall rue the day you meddled in affairs that were no call of yours.'

'The gentleman did not interfere till he was asked to interfere,' said David, deprecatingly.

'And as for you,' went on Mr McPhail, unheeding, 'I will give you a turn whether you go through the Court, or stay where you are.'

Having delivered himself of which consolatory sentence, he left the room, banging the door after him.

'You ought not to have said anything about the bankruptcy business,' said Mr Hardell, regretfully.

'What for no?'

'Because he may go and pledge your credit to any extent.'

'It would not be law, it could not,' cried David, in an agony of terror. 'Eh! it was an awful bad day's work for me when I first set eyes on his false face, and listened to his smooth tongue.'

'Never mind, Johnstoun, I shall see you well out of your trouble yet.'

'When I am dead and coffinea, maybe, but never before. Eh! to think of any honest man having to make a thief and a beggar of himself to get rid of a rogue.'

'I believe he will come to terms,' said Mr Hardell; but David only shook his head.

'He'd do anything to spite me,' he answered. 'I am sure it would be a pleasure to him to see me begging my bread.'

'Not if he had to beg bread also, because you were begging it,' Mr Hardell answered; in reply to which David murmured that there was 'something in that.'

'And I will call to-morrow to know how he has decided,' said Mr Hardell, rising.

'Thank you,' David answered simply; and then they shook hands, and Mr Hardell passed out of the shop, where he saw no one save Mrs Johnstoun, McPhail having taken his departure.

Greatly to David's relief, he did not return that night, or the next morning. About noon, however, he walked into the shop dressed in his best clothes, and wearing a gold chain, similar to that the possession of which he had deprecated as extravagance on the part of Johnstoun.

'Well,' he said, 'if you have got that hundred pounds ready, I will take it. There is no fun in pulling against the collar, and I confess you have slipped a collar on me. I dare say I shall be able to repay the kindness some day; but meanwhile I will accept your offer.'

'Then you will come along with me to a Writer, and we will have the thing done right this time. I am just saying, sir,' he added, addressing Mr Hardell, who entered at the moment, 'that as Matthew here has agreed to take my offer, we won't have any mistake now, but put it all proper.'

'You had better come up with me to my solicitors,' said Mr Hardell, 'and they will put the matter in form;' to which suggestion both men agreeing, a cab was called, in which they proceeded to Golden Square, the clergyman and Johnstoun seating themselves inside, while McPhail, declaring he was no fit company for them, mounted beside the driver, and treated both that individual and himself to cigars.

Arrived in Golden Square, Mr Hardell explained the matter, and left its execution in the hands of Mr St John.

'If Johnstoun have not the money available,' he said, 'I shall feel obliged by your paying it and charging the amount to me;' at which the lawyer wondered a little.

'You have great faith, then, in this Mr Johnstoun?' answered Mr St John, in the same *sotto voce* Andrew had used.

'Yes, I have perfect confidence,' Andrew answered; and then, half-regretting he had brought the man there, or come with him, or mixed himself up in his affairs, he bade good day to Mr St John, and having shaken hands with David Johnstoun and wished him well through all his troubles, went away.

'Is that the man was tried for murder at Dumfries?' asked McPhail, as the door closed behind him.

Just for one moment David Johnstoun, taken by surprise, hesitated; then he answered, 'No.'

'That's a lie, if ever there was one,' said McPhail, triumphantly; and Mr St John, looking straight in Johnstoun's face, understood the mystery of their client's life at last.

'It is not a nice thing to be mixed up with,' he considered, standing, after Johnstoun and McPhail were gone, before a blazing fire, on which he had just broken a great lump of coal with the heel of his boot. 'Henry would be wild if he knew it. I think the best thing I can do is to preserve a discreet silence until the real Simon Pure appear.'

From which murmured sentence the reader will gather that already he was much interested in Andrew's fortunes and concerned for his trouble. People often are for those whose trouble is beyond help.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PRESENTIMENTS.

Utterly unconscious that a fresh lion had arisen in his path who might at any moment rend him in pieces, Andrew Hardell returned to Eclin—to the eager inquiries of his wife, to the more constrained questions of his father-in-law, and the crowing and jubilant exultation of his son—'and heir.'

So some one put it when speaking of the child, and Andrew turned aside to hide the bitter smile that curled his lip—the spasm that rent his heart. His heir—yea, truly—but to what? to an heritage of shame, to an estate of woe.

'I should never have married,' the man thought in his misery. 'Even were it competent for me to die to-morrow, I should leave

my wife the widow of a murderer—my boy the son of a man who had stood his trial and been acquitted merely because the crime was not proven. What right had I to come to this quiet country-place, and cause such misery? Oh! Joy—oh! my darling, if dying ten thousand deaths could put things where they were before, I would die them all cheerfully for your sake.'

Which was all very well; but fifty thousand dyings could not have undone the past or mended the future, and Andrew Hardell understood that truth vaguely.

Morally this man had proved from first to last a coward, and just as a person who has been all his life physically a coward may one day have to summon up what poor courage he possesses to go through some frightful operation, so it had come to Andrew's comprehension, slowly but surely, that there was another assize looming in the future, by comparison with which that held before by Lords Glanlorn and Craigie was mere child's play.

He did not know who was to be the prosecutor, or the witnesses, or the judges, or the jury. He only comprehended he was to be put on his trial again, and not this time to be acquitted.

And so, still staving off his wife's questions and his father-in-law's examination, he, taking refuge in the uproarious greeting of his first-born, waited for the events which the future might have to bring.

He had elected to live a lie, and fate had no intention of baulking him of his reward.

In answer to his wife's eager words, he merely said, 'I have seen my lawyers again, love, and we shall very shortly come to some decision in the matter.'

When Mr Alton spoke, he replied, 'You shall soon be satisfied.'

When his son almost kicked himself out of the nurse's arms, Andrew took the child to himself and kissed the dimpled cheeks, and prayed the Almighty that one or other of them might die ere knowledge of his past was communicated to his boy.

The end was drawing very near; he felt that surely. Events were quickening their pace. The skeletons of the past were clothing themselves in flesh and blood. The army of circumstances was forming its rank and file, officered by able generals.

Yes, when he married Joy Alton he had sold himself into the hands of the Philistines; and, lo! they were upon him. Though as yet he was unable to hear the tread of their feet, he knew they were on the march towards him.

One had recognized him, so had another; there was yet a

third witness coming from lands beyond the sea, and, in addition, one morning there arrived this :—

'REVEREND SIR,

'I just write these few lines, which leave me in good health, and I trust will find you in the same, to tell you that McPhail suspects—why, the Lord knows I cannot tell; but he does—and if I was in your place I would not go preaching anywhere in London at present, or make any stir with my name, for he is an ill-conditioned vagabond, and is set to do you a mischief an' it be possible.

'I would not have had you meddle in my concerns could I have foreseen it might cause trouble to you; but what is done may not be undone, and we must just do our best, and hope for the best, with God's help; and I hope no worse will come of it.

'From your
'Faithful and obliged,
'D. JOHNSTOUN.'

Yes, the pitfalls were coming nearer, they were growing more numerous. With a face like ashes, Andrew Hardell tore this letter into tiny morsels, and tossed them into the fire.

'Something has disturbed you,' Joy said, anxiously; 'what is it?'

'Something has disturbed me,' he replied; 'but, my dear little wife, do you come to me with every trouble of your existence? When your head nurse is out of temper, and her sub, Jenkins, has bought a too gaudy ribbon, you never bring your domestic trials to me.'

'Perhaps not,' she answered; 'but if I were in any great sorrow, Anthony, I would take it to you.'

'See you do, then, darling,' he answered; and, stooping, he kissed her forehead; and then, opening a front window leading into the garden, went forth a wretched man.

Wretched! ah, Heaven, is that a word for such misery as his? We want a new language, we should have a fresh form of expression, to describe the depths of sorrow into which Andrew Hardell's soul descended in those winter days which followed the Sunday night he preached in Ross Place.

It seemed to him that night was the culminating point in his life; but perhaps he was mistaken.

A week passed by peacefully, and then there came a request for him to preach a charity sermon at a fashionable West End church, where it was so great an honour and compliment to be

asked to preach that Joy, knowing of it—the request was conveyed in a letter to Mr Alton—clapped her hands delighted.

'They would make you a bishop if you could only be induced to accept preferment,' she cried, clasping her husband round the neck.

'Should you love me any better if I were a bishop?,' he said gently.

'You old grave darling, no; but I am so proud of you, I should like to see you everything a man could be promoted to.'

'And if I am never promoted, Joy?'

'Then I must love you all the more. But you will go and preach before those great people, will you not? Do; please, please—please say yes.'

She had put up her hands in a supplicating attitude; but he gravely caught and held them in his own.

'Joy,' he began, 'it shall be just as you wish. I will preach or I will refrain, according to your desire. Whilst I am here I will for the future speak the words God has taught me to speak—anywhere—in any place, should it be your pleasure. For the future I will offer no opposition. I will be my wife's puppet, and my wife shall be my invisible showman, pulling the wires.'

She moved back a step or two, and looked at him—looked apparently to see if he was joking; but his face was graver and sterner than usual. It was set—contracted with emotion; and instinctively almost she recognized the fact. 'Anthony, Anthony,' she cried, 'do not talk to me like that;' and then she fell into his arms weeping, for there was an awful prescience of coming sorrow afflicting her likewise.

'What is it, my own?' he said, and once again he comforted her. The man's portion was his still—to endure that martyrdom in silence. Time enough to break her heart when the past could be no longer concealed; when the future held no hope of secrecy.

Meanwhile it should all be as she wished, and she wished him to preach before the notables who would be assembled to hear

'You will be advertised in "The Times,"' she said exultingly, and he answered, 'I suppose so;' wondering within himself whether the day might not come when he should be advertised in 'The Times' in a different manner.

He had once figured in the columns of 'Jupiter' in quite another character, and the result of that appearance had quite contented all his longings after notoriety.

But Joy, lacking his experience, was not so easily satisfied. She wished him to preach where great people congregated. She

desired that he should ascend step after step, and be ultimately Bishop, if not Archbishop. Had there been any room for a Pope in the Catholic Church as by law established in England, she would not have failed to fix her eyes on that elevation as her husband's final destination.

'Oh! if he would only listen to me and be more like other people,' she had sometimes sighed, only to reproach herself the moment after. 'If he were more like other people he might be selfish and indifferent, instead of being, as he is, the most loving devoted husband wife ever possessed.'

But now he was going to be like other people, to the extent of availing himself of the opportunities that popularity offered, and Joy's heart throbbed with joyful excitement.

Supposing that horrid relation, whose existence only he seemed to suspect, turned out to be a myth, he would step into a fine property; of course he would immediately be offered some great living. He would then be moved from post to post; and it was quite within the bounds of Joy's fancy that ere she died she might in the palace at Fulham, or amid the stately woods of Addington, remind her husband of all the pleasant things she had prophesied while he was but yet a poor curate possessed of none of this world's treasures.

His fame was spreading—all the worse for him. He would soon be asked to preach before the Queen—he would be sought after by eager crowds—his light would no longer be hidden beneath a bushel. The richest and the best in the land would esteem his society an honour; and still she, Joy, would be his wife—the only woman he had ever loved—the only woman she knew right well he ever would love till he passed to the land of which he had preached so vividly.

Now for one moment, my reader, I must ask you to pause, and just consider this picture and its reverse.

There is the wife full of all sweet, tender, loving fancies, looking forward to his life being one long unbroken course of success, and fame, and usefulness. There was not a cloud even so big as a man's hand to be seen on the horizon. There was no sickness—there was no sorrow in view. They would live together till they were old, and then her husband would leave an honoured name, a world-wide reputation, and an abundance of wealth to their children. Sitting by the firelight she dreamed her dreams. She set her idol on a pedestal—she built her fairy palaces, and behold, here was the position of the man she meant to inhabit them with her.

He stood, he knew, on ground which might at any moment

give way under his feet; which he felt must give way sooner or later. It was a mere question of time,—of when, of how, and by whom. Often, in spite of himself, he could not avoid fancying what the inevitable scene might prove. How would Joy hear it? How would she bear it?

He would never look upon the trouble in her face. He swore that mentally. When the worst came to the worst he would go away, as he ought to have done at first; he would leave the country and take good care that not a trace of his whereabouts remained.

He would fly an outcast into some far-off desert—he would tend sheep in Australia, or cross the prairies, or seek to lose his identity and himself, if that might be, beyond the bounds of civilization, but he would not stay—that he vowed in the solemn watches of the night, when his misery held her vigil and the man and his grief travailed together in their wretchedness.

Sometimes he thought of entreating Joy to leave England and seek a new home in some other land, say Sweden or Norway, where the chances of detection would be lessened; but he felt the impossibility of asking such a sacrifice without assigning a sufficient reason for it, and no reason would have seemed sufficient unless he gave the true.

No; it was of no use trying to evade his destiny. He had sought retirement, and in retirement he had found his fate; he had striven to avoid publicity, and yet publicity was forced upon him. He had fancied the weary, weary years of his mental captivity, superadded to the time passed in Kirkcudbright and Dumfries jails, had changed him past recognition, and yet two people knew, from the mere evidence of their own senses, that he was Andrew Hardell, and none other—the man who had in his cell and in the Court-house before my lords, and his accusers, gathered up his courage to face, if the worst came to the worst, that awful tragedy which often and often he had told himself could not be averted.

And though he hoped against hope, and recalled his fears then in order to fortify his heart against its apprehensions now, still Andrew Hardell, however much he liked to cheat his understanding, knew there must, as certainly as death, come an hour when the disguise would be stripped off, and the cheat exposed, and the story told, and he branded as an impostor before all the world.

So far he had eluded the danger; but it was coming for all that. While he walked past Colvend; when he stood on the heights above the Solway and looked over the calm sea to Cumberland; when the rabbits scudded away at his approach, and the

songs of the birds, and the bleating of the sheep, and the humming of the bees, sounded in his ears; when he descended into the fairy cove and got rid of the evidence of his guilt, and then swam out till he became a mere speck on the water; when he lay down under the quiet stars and saw next morning through the dim grey light the Cumberland mountains standing dark against the eastern sky; when he wended his way on, still on, to Kirkcudbright, all this while, I say, the evidence which had cursed his life was being collected, and the men who were to bring him to his doom were only 'biding their time.'

And as they had bided their time, so events were biding theirs. There would come one day a hand on his shoulder, and a voice in his ear, and then he would understand that the long fight with misfortune was over, and that misfortune had won.

CHAPTER XL.

THE FIRST ATTACK.

On a certain morning in the early part of the earliest springtime, Andrew Hardell sat in the library of the Hall, which was called 'his study,' writing a sermon.

Not a sermon to be preached before the great people referred to in the previous chapter—that was gone and past—but a sermon which he meant to be heard by a still more select audience, for he had taken his resolve. When the time came for his social bankruptcy, as come he knew it must, he determined there should at all events be some assets beyond Faith, Hope, and Charity to be remembered in his favour.

For years he had laboured amongst the wretchedest, the wickedest, the most forlorn. He had done God's work he knew in Essex Marsh, but now he decided to do the world's work for a brief period; not that to him, when the inevitable hour struck, it would matter whether in his day he had tickled the ears of men and pleased their understandings—but for Joy's sake he desired there should be some set-off—that, when men talked of him as culprit and hypocrite, she should be able to remember in her pity,

'Ay, but he loved me, and for my sake he made the fullest use of the talents God gave him.'

Hitherto after a fashion he had put them in a napkin and hidden them in the earth.

Now he meant to put them forth on usury. So that in one sort Joy might not feel hereafter she had married a man who knew no care for her and her child.

It may seem strange, but it is true notwithstanding, that Andrew Hardell's powers seemed never to have been fully put forth until now.

When he wrote his sermon one week he could not tell whether he ever should write another; and hour after hour he put his whole strength into the work.

It was really a continuous 'last song,' though his hearers were unaware of the fact.

Hidden in his own heart he held the knowledge that he felt each Sunday might end the joy and the trouble—the happiness and the grief.

Often when he was preaching he beheld around him a waste of waters—a ship cleaving her way to distant lands—a man desolate for evermore—a woman sitting weeping by a lonely hearth; and with that picture before him, how do you suppose his words poured forth?

There were tears in them, though his audience could not understand the fact—there was the track of blood, though the men who listened could neither see the wound nor grasp that the preacher was feeding them with his own life.

In all human nature there is a vague indefinite comprehension of the agony human nature can have put upon it and still exist; and it was this secret, wrestling misery, in common with his own natural gifts, which attracted people to Andrew Hardell.

Out of the depths he had sounded, he spoke. Out of a vague comprehension of the depths they might have to sound, his hearers around him.

And all the time God Almighty knew, and all the time Andrew Hardell talked to his God as man might speak with man.

To come back to that particular morning in the early springtime, however, when Andrew sat writing his sermon with his heart very much in his work, and a thrill going through his frame as though he had received some promise of better days to come.

There is a spring feeling as there is a spring smell, and the feeling was strong upon Andrew Hardell then.

It was not warm enough to leave off fires, and accordingly logs of wood blazed cheerfully on the hearth, all the while that the bright, cold, early sunshine was streaming into the room. Before him on the table were crocuses and snowdrops, gathered

and placed there by Joy's loving hands; whilst on a little stand in one of the windows pots of primula, cicitis, early violets, gaudy tulips, and gay cineraria were grouped together, softened and half-concealed by moss.

Here to his hand was his paper-knife, his manuscripts duly laid out, the envelope-case ready to his hand, his ink-bottle open, his pen new and of the description he preferred.

Clearly there was a woman in all this, and recognizing the fact, Andrew sighed and shivered.

How would it end? ah! how? In a drawer before him, locked and snugly stored away, was a certain sum of money that he had hoarded and saved against the day he expected to come.

On that hoard he had encroached for the sake of David Johnstoun, but enough, as he knew, remained to land him in another country—to leave Joy virtually a widow—his child utterly an orphan.

'Will it ever come to that?' he thought in one of the pauses of his writing; 'or will it please God to take me first and spare her?'

As though there were any especial reason why Joy should be spared, considering the hundreds and thousands of women who have suffered for making gods to themselves of poor humanity since the beginning of the world.

It was always thus with him—whatsoever he was doing—wherever he was—in whatsoever company he found himself, the thought of Joy mingled.

As behind you, friend, perhaps, while telling your best story, care mounts guard, so sorrow never lost sight of Andrew Hardell altogether, but kept him grimly in view while he wove his web and spun his hank; and in the first strange devices mingled, and out of the latter he failed to keep threads grey and black.

Well, the web and the hank were none the worse for the admixture—only it was not all the better for Andrew Hardell, who toiled resolutely on.

For a moment—only just for the instant—he had forgotten himself and his trouble, when a servant opening the door informed him that a strange person, who would take no denial, desired to see him.

'I am engaged,' Mr Hardell answered, looking at the unfinished manuscript.

'So I told him, sir; but he said his business was pressing; that he would not detain you five minutes, and that if you knew his name was McPhail you would see him.'

'McPhail,' repeated Andrew, thoughtfully; then he said, 'Show him in.'

And while the man went to do his bidding, Andrew braced himself up to meet the inevitable trouble.

Yes, he could not disguise it from himself, the end so long dreaded was coming. Well, let it come.

'Your servant, sir,' said Mr McPhail, entering the room, better dressed, more civil in his demeanour, than Andrew had yet seen him.

'Be seated,' Mr Hardell answered shortly, and Mr McPhail, having complied with the request or command, remained silent for a few seconds.

'You wished to see me on business, I believe?' suggested Mr Hardell.

'I am not aware that I said so,' was the reply.

'Pardon me, I thought you stated you came on business, and that you would not detain me five minutes.'

'No, I said I wanted to see you, and that I would see you if I waited twenty-four hours. That was what I told your flunkey; what your flunkey made out of that on his own account is best known to yourself.'

'I am not rich enough to keep a servant,' Andrew replied, 'and if I were, I do not think any conversation that might pass between you and him could interest me in the least.'

'Perhaps not; but now suppose we get to business. You can have no sort of objection to that, Mr *Anthony* Hardell.'

'That depends entirely upon the business you wish to get done,' Andrew answered.

'Oh, I'm coming to that.'

'Then pray come—my time is valuable,' was the reply.

'There was a period when you had more leisure, suggested the other.

'There was a period probably, Mr McPhail, when you had more to do.'

Straight across the table McPhail looked at him; then he said—

'Yes, there was, you sneaking rascal, and you have cut me out of it. What right had you——'

'If you have come to talk about that matter of yours and Mr Johnstoun's, remember I refuse to enter upon it,' Andrew remarked mildly.

'No, sir, I have not come on David Johnstoun's matter, and *I* decline to enter upon that again. I have come here for only one purpose, and that is to say *you are known*.'

'Known, in what way?' asked Andrew innocently.

On hearing which McPhail laughed uproariously ere he replied—

'Known as the gentleman whose case occupied the judges and jury at Dumfries for just upon a whole day—known as the man whose life hung upon a thread when the jury found the crime "Not Proven"—known as the same who first killed Kenneth Challerson, and then hid your clothes away in some place beside the Solway. How was it? Oh, I know, you stuffed them in the crevice of a rock, and a little shepherd lad found them, button and all missing, a week after the first high tide, and a month after the jury found you guilty in their opinion. Is it a nice thing to have been preaching and visiting and marrying all these years under a false name—the name of a man you have likely as not murdered?'

'Mr McPhail,' said Andrew Hardell, 'you are certainly insane, and I must either ask you to leave the room, or ring for a servant to compel you to do so.'

'Ah, you were able to do your own work for yourself in the days I speak of; but no doubt your dainty wife and your grand relations have changed all your good old-fashioned ways. No, you need not come that dodge,' he added, seeing Andrew's hand clench and his brows contract; 'because I know who you are, if Mrs *Anthony* Hardell and her father do not.'

Hearing this, Andrew rose and walked towards the bell, but his visitor intercepted him—

'The moment you bring a servant into the room,' he said, 'that moment it is all up with you.'

'Stand aside,' was Andrew's reply, and his voice was hoarse with fear and passion. He believed the hour had come at last. Well, he must face it, that was all.

'Stand where you are,' retorted Mr McPhail, who began to think he had, in his desire to bully over and torture his victim, gone too far—gone so far, indeed, as to jeopardize the realization of his own views—'and listen to me. I owe you a grudge; I tell you so frankly, for meddling in affairs which were no concern of yours; but I am willing to excuse that, and even forgive you, now I know you are just as much under Johnstoun's thumb as mine. What good do you suppose it could do me to tell the world you are Andrew Hardell and none other?'

Once again Andrew took a step towards the bell.

'Stop!' went on McPhail; 'I am willing to come to terms. You have a secret you want kept, I am agreeable to help you to do this if you make it worth my while.'

'Sir, this is monstrous!' said the man he addressed; 'how dare you presume to imagine that the affairs of the wretched individual of whom you speak are any concern of mine?'

Hearing this, McPhail fell back incredulous, but still bewildered. Of his own knowledge he could not say that this was really Andrew Hardell.

In his desire to keep all the money he believed was to be made out of the secret in his own hands, he had come to Eclin without the only acquaintance he knew in London (save David Johnstoun) able to identify his prey; and seeing his advantage, Andrew pressed forward and rang the bell.

'You have chosen, then?' said the fellow in a tone of suppressed fury.

'I choose that you shall leave this room,' Mr Hardell answered. 'Show this person out, Jenkins,' he added, addressing the servant who answered his summons.

Just for a moment McPhail hesitated, then he doggedly crossed to the door, where he stopped and turned once again towards Andrew.

That was an awful instant to the wretched man. Would he denounce him? Would he shout out the secret? or would it really come to nothing, and the whole affair have to be gone over again at some not remote period?

'Sir,' he began, after a pause, which seemed to Mr Hardell like an age taken out of eternity; 'let me speak to you quietly for five minutes; I will try not to offend again. I have come far to see you, and it will be hard if you send me away without having been able to say what I want only because I am a bit too free in my speech.'

'You can say anything you like,' returned Andrew, carelessly; but the fellow could see that his hand, moving nervously amongst the papers on his table, shook like a leaf.

'It is a private matter, and if you do not mind speaking to me alone——' suggested McPhail.

'You can close the door, Jenkins,' said Mr Hardell; and again the pair stood facing each other, the one defiant and the other insolent.

'That was pretty well played out,' said the man; 'you may thank the Lord I have my temper pretty well in hand, or your coach would have been upset, that I can tell you. Now, what is the use of the way you are going on? You are as well aware as I am that you are Andrew Hardell, and that I know it; that I can ruin you, and that if you do not make it worth my while to keep quiet I will ruin you. I am acquainted with a fellow

who sat in Dumfries Court-house the whole of that day when nobody would have chanced a sixpence against a pound-note that you would ever get home to die in your bed. I have only to bring him down here and he would identify you in a minute; but what's the use of letting half a score people into the secret? Come now, Mr Hardell, be reasonable, and you won't find me hard to deal with. I want money, and if you give it to me I swear to you that so far as I am concerned you may remain the Reverend Anthony Hardell to the end of your days. What do you say?'

'Have you quite done?' Andrew asked; and though he was 'tholing his assize' once more, his look never quailed, and his voice never shook; 'Have you quite done?'

'For the present, yes.'

'Then leave the room.'

With a muttered curse McPhail turned angrily on his heel, and strode towards the door.

'The next time I come it will not be alone,' he remarked, as he turned the handle; and then Andrew heard his heavy step crossing the hall and the oaken door slam after him.

The attack had begun—it had commenced in an unsuspected quarter; but that did not matter, neither could it affect his decision.

The man meant to fight the battle till he died or was conquered.

CHAPTER XLI.

IDENTIFIED.

To me the courage of those persons who, knowing their lives hold a secret, can yet bring some other individual before the nearest magistrate for having attempted to make a little money by means of threats, has always seemed wonderful, and, in one sense, admirable too.

No doubt, if there be any estate in which a man ought to have a solitary interest, it is that of his own follies, and certainly no other has the smallest right to poach on his manor; but supposing people will interfere, of what sort of stuff can that owner be made who is brave enough to seize the difficulty instantly by

the throat, and scotch the snake ere it has had time to fasten its fangs in him?

What a resolute will—what iron nerves—what a determination to win must be all embodied in an individual whose case is such as I have assumed—ay, and what shameless audacity also.

Nevertheless, it is the best course to adopt, and had Mr Andrew Hardell only been possessed of sufficient courage to send for the one solitary policeman Eclin boasted, and deliver over Mr McPhail into his custody, it might have been better for him. This, however, he did not do. He took in England precisely the same course he had adopted in Scotland. He made no active step to rid himself of an incubus, as he might have done had he pleaded guilty to culpable homicide. He only made up his mind to resist, and resolved that through no act or confession of his should discovery arrive; and that when the day of discovery did come he would flee afar off, as he had sped that night through the darkness away from the dead man.

Consequently he only defied Mr McPhail instead of punishing him; and when the door slammed after his visitor, he unlocked a private drawer, and looked at a small packet containing the money he had saved, just as many a man has ere now regarded the little phial of poison, or the brightly polished pistol, which was to end all earth's cares for him for ever.

Once it came to that, once he opened the roll of notes and thrust them into his purse, and walked with them across the threshold, Andrew knew earth's pleasures were over so far as he was concerned. It was just like giving up one's life. Every man is aware he must die, and yet he strives to defer the hour of his death. This man knew there was something worse than death coming to him, but he would not even in his desperation go one single step to meet the foe.

In the same secret hiding-place, with the money, lay a letter sealed with black wax. Andrew took that up also, and turned it over as he was often wont to do.

It was addressed—

'To my dear wife,' and contained his confession.

At the moment when it became necessary for him to use the money, he intended to leave that letter on his dressing-table, and then go forth a very Ishmael into the wilderness of a new life.

It was all far sadder than preparing for his burial, and his lip trembled as he realized what must have come to pass ere Joy should read that passionate outpouring of a man's grief and a man's remorse.

He put back the money and the letter, locked the drawer, and proceeded with his sermon.

Let the morrow be pregnant with what it will the day's work must have attention, and as Andrew Hardell never could tell which morrow was destined to bring forth trouble for him, he had to work through many a weary day with a heavy aching heart.

And yet the sermon did not suffer; in those days the pulpit was the only place where he could speak of trouble and anguish, of repentance of sin; and perhaps for that very reason his preaching was all the more successful.

Time went by; he preached that sermon and one or two others, and he had begun almost to hope that McPhail's guess was a random shot—a mere guess—when one bright Sunday in March he beheld amongst his congregation in Eclin the man who had so insolently taunted him with being other than he professed.

Beside Mr McPhail sat another stranger, an ill-favoured fellow, doubtless, Andrew conjectured, the 'acquaintance;' who had sat in Dumfries Court-house for the length of a whole day, and heard all the evidence *pro* and *con*, and listened to the foreman when he said, 'Not Proven.'

They had come—it was coming, but he hardened and steeled himself now as he had hardened and steeled himself before Lords Glanlorn and Craigie. Never perhaps had Eclin listened to such passion and such eloquence as he poured forth that day. Even Joy looked up at him in amazement when he closed his sermon-case and proceeded to the end, speaking extempore; whilst the man who sat beside McPhail nudged his neighbour and whispered—

'He's a dreadfu' fine preacher, yon.' In answer to which McPhail maintained an obstinate, but not contradictory silence.

Through the windows came the gleaming sunshine, dancing, leaping—now darting across Joy's face, anon resting on the head of one of the school children; again bringing out into stronger relief the lines and wrinkles that crossed the foreheads and furrowed the cheeks of those who had toiled in heat and cold, in snow, in wet, in the bright summer time, for forty, and fifty, and sixty years.

When he lifted his eyes from his congregation, Andrew could see the trees in the churchyard swayed by the high spring wind, which swept also over the graves, bending the grass as it passed by.

Where should he be when, another spring, the green buds burst in the hedgerows round Eclin? What would have come to pass ere then?

Think of it, friends—only think how the man's heart was breaking; straight before him sat Joy, who had made for him all

the pleasure he ever felt, and all the real agony too. Beside her —his arms folded, his face a little moody—was Mr Alton; while beyond the familiar congregation, under the organ-loft, a little in the shade, were those two men who had come to deprive him of wife and child, and character, and reputation, unless he made terms with them.

And even while he was preaching, Mr Hardell cast all this about in his mind, and decided that he would make terms with them.

He had been brave enough when McPhail came and threatened him, but his courage was gone now—it went whenever he looked upon Joy; perhaps the other man might be doubtful concerning his identity—perhaps there was that chance of escape still; but in any case he would not give up Joy—not yet.

'And now to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost'—it was Andrew who spoke, though his voice when he tried to resume a natural tone sounded even to himself forced and hollow; and a few minutes after the congregation trooped out through the low arched door, the two strangers amongst the number.

'You are sure that is our man?' said McPhail, as they passed out; 'you could swear to him?'

'I think I could,' the other answered, a little doubtfully. 'I should like to see him a bit closer.' And then he paused, for at that juncture a woman in rustling silk swept close up to him, and must have heard his remark.

'Let us go this way,' McPhail suggested; and the pair turned along a path leading towards a stile, which afforded egress to Mr Alton's grounds.

The men did not know this, and the suggestion was purely accidental; but Mrs Pryce's eyes followed them, filled with an expression of hungry curiosity.

'Who can "our man" be?' she thought; and she waited about amongst the tombstones watching the strangers, until Mr Alton and Mr Hardell and his wife came out of the church and took the path leading to the stile likewise.

'Good morning, Mrs Pryce,' said Andrew, as he passed her, raising his hat. He was white as a ghost she perceived, and shivering also. In the field beyond he saw the two men, and Mrs Pryce saw them also.

'Good morning, sir—good morning, ma'am,' answered the widow, with a profound courtesy; 'your good gentleman, ma'am, is not looking so well as we should like to see him.'

Suddenly Joy looked at her husband, and as suddenly he faced round upon Mrs Pryce.

'I am quite well, thank you,' he said coldly, the blood rushing from his heart to his head as he spoke; 'only I am a little tired. I have been too much from home lately, I think.'

And then he laughed and pressed Joy's hand, which was clasped round his arm, against his heart; while Mr Alton walked on in silence, leaving his son-in-law and daughter to the charms of Mrs Pryce's society.

'You should take care of yourself, sir,' remarked Mrs Pryce.

'Thank you very much for the caution, but I am taken care of too well already;' and once again raising his hat—for he was punctilious about such matters towards those not quite so well off in worldly affairs as himself—he bade Mrs Pryce 'Good day,' and walked forward to overtake Mr Alton—and Mr McPhail.

'I wonder who those people are before us?' said Mr Alton, when he caught sight of the pair lounging leisurely along.

'They were in church,' his son-in-law answered. 'They sat quite at the back—under the organ-loft. Probably strangers from St Mark's.'

'What is the matter?' Joy asked at this juncture, feeling the shudder which he was unable always to control. 'Really, Anthony, Mrs Pryce was right, you must be ill.'

'No,' he persisted, 'I am not ill—only a little tired. Besides, this is not the sort of day I like.'

'What sort of day do you like?' asked Mr Alton.

'Oh! either hot or cold—summer or winter. Something decided.'

'Something you know how to deal with, in fact,' summed up the other. 'So do I.'

Which remark silenced Mr Hardell, for he knew his father-in-law had intended this last shot for him.

They walked on quietly for a little while, and then they met Mr McPhail and his friend returning.

Both men touched their hats to Mr Alton, but neither took the smallest notice of Mr Hardell, which Andrew considered ominous.

After a few minutes, Mr McPhail's acquaintance came running after them.

'If you please, sir,' he said, addressing the clergyman, 'could you spare me a minute?'

Of course Andrew said he could; and the pair, having walk-

ed a dozen yards back towards Eclin, stood still, while Joy and her father pursued their way homewards.

'Now,' began Mr Hardell, 'what is it?'

'This, sir. I know who you are, and I can swear to you, but McPhail there thinks I am doubtful; and I will be doubtful, if you make it worth my while.'

'What do you mean?' Mr Hardell demanded.

'I mean this, sir,' answered the other; 'that one fine morning after a night's heavy rain—very early—I was walking the road from New Abbey to Maxwelltown, when just at the place where the trees arch over the roadway, I saw a man lying by the roadside. He was quite dead—stiff and stark. He had a gold chain and gold watch—he had studs in his shirt—he had a gold pencil in his waistcoat pocket—ay, and plenty of money too—and there it all lay, money and watch and man, in the early morning light. I saw I could not do anything for him, so thinking I might just as well have the things as another, I took all he had on him and left him, but by the time I got half-way to Maybe, I took fright. If the things were found on me, I might be thought his murderer.'

'Yes,' Mr Hardell murmured, as the other paused.

'So I pitched the things into a dyke, all except the money, and left the main road and kept to the fields till I got to Maxwelltown, and said nothing to nobody; but when your trial came on, I thought I must hear it and see you, and so I went up into the gallery, and I watched you all the day long, and him too—your friend—and that sight makes me now able to say for a surety you are the man who stood his trial at Dumfries, and escaped hanging just by a miracle.'

There was nothing in all this intended to be offensive, it was a mere *résumé* of facts, and yet it affected Andrew Hardell more keenly than McPhail's taunts—than McPhail's threats.

Twice he opened his mouth to speak, and twice his tongue, dry and parched, refused its office.

'Sir,' said the man, noticing this, 'only make it worth my while, and McPhail shall never be a bit the wiser.'

'See me in London,' Andrew answered; 'be in St Paul's at one o'clock on Tuesday, and we may come to terms:' already in imagination he saw his hoard, saved so carefully—hidden so sedulously—dwindling away.

'Ye won't fail me?' said the fellow.

'On my honour, no;' but still the other lingered.

'What is it?' Andrew inquired.

'Sir, you have just a wonderful gift of preachin'. I never heard anybody like you before.'

'It has been my curse,' answered Mr Hardell, fiercely; and who may say but that, so far as this world went, he was right.

Then the other, marvelling at that bitter exclamation, went his way, whilst Andrew walked slowly home through woods carpeted by primroses, where the early wild hyacinths bloomed as well.

'Who was that man, dear?' Joy asked at luncheon.

'A stranger to me,' her husband answered.

'What did he want?' she persisted; and Andrew Hardell replied, 'Money,' in a tone which made Mr Alton look at him.

'Do you mean to say that man was a beggar?' he inquired.

'I do not know exactly what you might call a beggar,' Andrew answered; 'but during the few minutes we stood there, he confessed to a robbery, and asked me for money.'

'And did you give him any?'

'Not a sixpence,' the other answered; and Mr Alton remained satisfied perforce.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PRIOR CLAIMANT.

There are wet days in May. It is the popular and poetical belief, I am aware, that May only exists to bring forth flowers on which the sun shines brightly.

'The sweetest month in all the year,' say her admirers; possibly, but the most treacherous also. A bright day now—a rainy one to-morrow—a cutting east wind the next—a little frost the morning following.

Clearly May is young, and does not know her own mind, which may account perhaps for people being so fond of, and writing such absurd verses in her praise.

Anyhow then, let the month be what it will usually, there was one especial day in a particular month of May when the heavens were opened at Eclin, when it rained a straight-down even pour that swelled the hawthorn and soiled the June roses, and was good for the grass and the corn, so those learned in such matters declared.

At all events it rained in torrents. So Mr Hardell, standing in Mrs Pryce's shop, remarked to that worthy lady; while she, politely giving him thirty penny stamps in exchange for half-a-crown, observed that the weather was very changeable.

'But you are looking a deal better than you did a couple of months back; indeed, I said that Sunday to Jemima May when I came in from church,—"Mr Hardell looks awful, and I don't think he will be long among us."'

'But you see I am here still,' remarked Andrew, never inquiring *which* Sunday; an omission Mrs Pryce was shrewd enough to notice at the time and remember afterwards.

'And I am sure, sir, I, for one, am most thankful. Eclin does not seem Eclin when you are away from it. Now, sir, are you quite positive there is nothing I can put up for Mrs Hardell. I have just got in some beautiful Berlin wools—all new shades, sir;' and before he could suspect her design, she had the box down on the counter before him, and was exhibiting her wares.

Just at this juncture, with a rattle and a clatter, a fly from the railway station at St Mark's drove up the one principal street Eclin boasted, and stopped at the Post-office.

'Don't get down,' shouted the fare to his coachman, 'I'll inquire,'—and forthwith a man, muffled up to the chin in furs, with a fur cap pulled over his brows, stepped into the Post-office.

Can you tell me, ma'am '—and with unusual politeness for an Englishman, he bowed his head while addressing Mrs Pryce —'can you tell me, ma'am, the nearest way to the Hall?'

'Lord a mercy, yes, sir,' she answered, looking involuntarily towards Mr Hardell, who in his turn looked, as if compulsorily, to the stranger.

'Who do you wish to see at the Hall, sir?' he asked, slowly and painfully.

'God bless me, Andrew—how changed you are!' exclaimed the stranger; and, moved by a sudden impulse, he held forth his hand.

'You mistake,' was the answer, spoken in cold and measured terms; but Mrs Pryce, looking at the speaker, could see an ashen grey overspread his face. 'My name is Anthony, not Andrew. Surely you have not forgotten?'

'I had,' the other replied; 'pardon me.' Simple words enough, but Mrs Pryce noticed the glance exchanged between the two, and formed her conclusions accordingly.

'Are you returning to the Hall!' the new comer asked.

'No; I am going on to St Mark's.'

'And I have just come from it. Then we can return there together?'

'If you will give me a seat.'

'And so,' to quote Mrs Pryce's subsequent account of the transaction, 'without any more to do Mr Hardell walked out into the rain with the strange gentleman, who motioned Andrew to get in first.'

'One moment,' the latter exclaimed, and re-entering Mrs Pryce's shop, he asked her to give him a sheet of paper and an envelope.

'Will you walk into the parlour, sir?' she suggested.

'No, thank you. I only want to write a line to my wife, and I must ask you to send it up as soon as possible.' Having stated which fact, he scribbled in pencil the following note:—

'DEAREST,—I am obliged to go to St Mark's on business—possibly thence to London. Tell your father it concerns the succession. Most probably the matter will be settled one way or other before I see you again.

'Yours, love, ever,

'A. H.'

And then he hastily closed the envelope and handed the missive to Mrs Pryce, and crossed the side-path and jumped into the fly; and drove off in the beating rain as many a man in the old times drove off in the conveyance which was to bear him to Tyburn.

With the bells of St Sepulchre tolling all the while—and there were other bells sad as those of St Sepulchre's sounding in Andrew Hardell's ears as he looked in the face of that false, weak friend who had cursed his life all through.

Urged thereto by a laudable curiosity, Mrs Pryce, so soon as Mr Hardell's back was turned, retreated with his note into her private sanctum, held the adhesive seal over the spout of a kettle already boiling in anticipation of the afternoon dish of tea, opened the paper and read the words it contained, commenting upon them as follows:—

'"Dearest"—couple of babies; old enough, I am sure, to know better. So he had not intended to go to St Mark's till that foreign-looking gentleman came; "possibly thence to London"—it is a strange thing for him to set off for London without even a change of linen. What can he mean—what succession? "Yours, love, ever"—pack of rubbish; "A. H."—A stands for Anthony; yes, "A. H.," and the man who came here to-day called him Andrew. Well, there is some mystery in it all, and I should like to be at the bottom of it, "dearest," that I should.'

Having summed up her desires in which fashion, Mrs Pryce re-sealed the note and sent it duly on to the Hall.

Meantime Andrew and his companion driving to St Mark's mutually seemed to have agreed to defer all mention of the property which had brought Anthony back to England until some more convenient opportunity. By the same mail which took out his advertisements to Australia, Andrew had despatched a letter to Anthony, informing him of the difficulty of his position—of the dilemma in which he was placed. This epistle he forwarded to an agent in Melbourne, requesting him to give it into Mr Hardell's hands should he apply for it.

'You got my letter?' was, therefore, all Andrew asked.

'Yes,' Anthony answered; and by the reply Andrew knew the other had considered the question, and that whatever decision he might have arrived at had been come to long before.

'Have you prospered in Australia?' Andrew asked, while the vehicle jolted over the country roads and the mud splashed upon the window-glass.

Anthony laughed, but his laugh seemed forced and unreal. 'Had I been prosperous, should I not have written to you?' he asked in return.

Hearing this, Andrew surveyed him more attentively. He did not look like a man with whom the world had gone badly; rather it seemed to him that his old friend must have made money and kept it, and spent it on himself. Well, time cannot work miracles; and with a heavy sinking at his heart, Andrew acknowledged mentally that the Anthony Hardell who had gone out to Australia was returned unchanged—just the same selfish, self-indulgent, self-deluding Anthony who had sat on the green hill-side amidst the Southern Highlands and tempted Andrew to his fate.

But spite of all; after the long, long years of martyrdom he could never mean to make him pass through a worse ordeal even than that endured in Dumfries. He must remember the suffering his sin had wrought, and now it lay in his power to make some amends he would gladly do so.

Leaning back in the carriage, he was pursuing some such train of thought, when suddenly Anthony, who had exhausted all ordinary topics of conversation, and had wearied even of piling up evil epithets concerning the weather, suddenly woke him from his reverie by inquiring,—'Why did you not take me to your house?'

If he had discharged a pistol at his ear Andrew could not have been more startled. This cool ignoring of the contents of

his letter filled him with an inexpressible dismay, but he forced himself to answer calmly—

'Because my wife does not know there is such a person in existence—I mean, she is aware there is a nearer claimant than myself; but not that he is Anthony Hardell.'

'Good heavens! You do not mean to say you have not told her yet?' the other exclaimed in a gradual crescendo.

'Did you expect I should tell her?' Andrew inquired: in reply to which his companion, looking out of the window, only muttered, 'Here is a pretty mess.'

Then ensued an awkward silence, that was at length broken by Anthony, who began to speak of his voyage and his life in Australia, with more of the manner of old times than had yet been the case. There might be a difficulty ahead, but he for one had no intention of meeting it half way. No doubt it could be got over somehow, and in the mean time he made himself so pleasant that Andrew's hopes sunk to zero.

Well enough he understood that Anthony meant to keep his own. His misery—his wretched position—the weary years of duplicity—the genius wasted—the life wrecked—what did all these things matter to Anthony, who had suffered none of them himself?

Ay, what indeed? and yet, though Andrew Hardell knew all hope was over, he still, scarcely hearing his companion's easy flow of words, went on clinging to straws—pitching out ropes attached to nothing for his own despairing hands to grasp.

Arrived at St Mark's, they repaired to the principal hotel, which was called the 'Antelope,' and there Anthony ordered dinner at once to be prepared and served in a private room.

Here, however, Andrew interposed—

'The private room, if you please, for I want to speak to you; but no dinner for me, thank you.'

'Why, do you mean to say you will not eat with me?' the other demanded, unmindful of the presence of a waiter who stood listening to the discussion.

'I think it extremely probable I never shall,' Andrew answered; 'but suppose we finish our business first, and then talk about dinner after.'

'Oh! confound business!' exclaimed Anthony, 'why need we speak of it at all?'

'We *must* speak of it, so let there be an end to this,' said the other almost fiercely; whereat Anthony shrugged his shoulders, and merely remarking,

'This is a pleasant welcome back to England,' followed Andrew

into a large bare drawing-room, the windows of which overlooked the sea.

'I want to make one remark before you say a word,' began Anthony, after he had closed the door, coming up to where Andrew stood contemplating the dreary shore, which had been left bare by the retreating tide: 'I hope you are not going to quarrel with me. Remember, it is not my fault that I am heir to this property.'

'You received my letter?' Andrew said.

'Yes, and read it carefully. It was written evidently under the influence of strong excitement. You must know I cannot do what you want.'

'Why not?'

'Why?' repeated Anthony, 'only reflect, my dear fellow, how can I give you up my inheritance? How can I make you myself, or myself you? I am quite willing, nay, wishful, to meet you in any money question.'

'It is not money I want,' interrupted Andrew.

'But,' went on the other desperately, 'as for any different arrangement, I tell you at once it is impossible. Even were I willing, and could do all you wish, my wife would never hear of it.'

'That woman!' exclaimed the Curate, with a sudden fury in his voice.

'Remember she is my wife.'

'Am I ever likely to forget it?' retorted Andrew. 'Can I ever forget; can I ever forgive the wreck my whole life has been made by you both? You took my money; you disguised yourself in my clothes; you turned Challerson's suspicions from your own evil designs on to me, who never wanted to look at her face a second time; it was through your senseless, wicked, shameless folly and sin that I had to lie in jail—that I had to stand my trial—that I only just escaped with life—everything else being gone which could make life valuable; it was through you I was compelled to stay in England, and rot my heart out through desolate years in Essex Marsh; it is through you I have been forced to remain a curate, when otherwise I might have risen and made a name for myself. It was through you I had to marry my wife under a feigned name, and now, when I ask for only one boon in return, when I pray you for the sake of myself, and her, and our boy, when I entreat you, even in the name of the Lord God Almighty, to have mercy on the wretchedest man I verily believe He ever created, you tell me, *she* will not hear of it.'

'Andrew, for Heaven's sake, let us have no more of this; you torture me, I cannot bear it.

'You cannot bear it!' the other answered, and he went on without a break, though his voice was thick by reason of the despair which was mastering and the emotion that was suffocating him. 'You cannot bear it! I torture you! And what have I had to bear? what torture have I not had to endure? I tell you, Anthony Hardell, that I have gone through the torments of hell; that I have suffered such agony as no man could conceive unless he had endured it himself. I have been wretched, sleeping and waking, alone and amongst my fellows; every day I have been bound afresh on the rack, and when I have looked sometimes in my young wife's face, and thought of the villain I was to have married her, I felt as though I must shriek aloud, as if the pain were greater than I could endure in silence, and I have wished often and often that she and I and the boy were all lying under the churchyard sod. I wish it now;' and then with a passionate sob he stopped suddenly, and covering his face with his hands, wept as only a man can weep in his bitterest extremity.

'Oh! Andrew, old friend,' cried Anthony, really touched, 'do try to calm yourself; I will see what can be done. We will talk the matter over when you are not so excited. We will strive to devise some plan.'

'No,' Andrew returned, dashing the tears from his eyes, and looking Anthony in the face; 'no, you will devise no plan; you are lying to me now as you lied to me in the past; you will go and take possession of your property; you will enjoy your newly acquired wealth; you will hope the riches may make the world forget what your wife was once, what she still is for that matter in the sight of God, and there will never a thought of me and my misery disturb your contentment; you will never have before your eyes my broken-hearted wife; my son, to whom I can only leave the heritage of a felon's name.'

'But how can I alter facts now?' asked Anthony, deprecatingly; 'how can I undo your past, or really better your future? I will go to your wife, and tell her the whole story from beginning to end, if you like, excusing nothing, concealing nothing. I will show her how the trouble began; I will not spare myself. You may depend upon it,' he continued, warming with his subject, 'this is the best, and indeed the only course to pursue. She must know it all some time, and really the "all" is nothing so dreadful when the question comes to be exhausted. You killed a man in self-defence, that is the whole case, and you have tried to keep the accident secret ever since, and been miserable because you tried to do so, and succeeded. Come, old fellow, cheer up; you will be happier than ever you were, you will, indeed.'

'Shall I ?' said Andrew, with a bitter smile; 'perhaps so, for I shall not be long here to feel much more pain. You have killed me to-day just as certainly as if you had stabbed me to the heart;' and the man took his hat and walked across the room, and was just going out of the door, when Anthony stopped him.

'You will not do anything rash?' he exclaimed hurriedly. 'You are not going to make away with yourself?' and he laid a detaining hand on his arm, which Andrew flung off contemptuously.

'Fool,' he said, 'do you suppose it is not enough to have taken one life?' and he strode along the broad lobby, and down the wide staircase, and passed out into the rain, and wended his way straight to the railway station.

He could not return home that night, he said to himself; he could never return home any more, and so, as Mrs Pryce said, without even a change of linen, he started for London, and reached the hotel where he generally put up, chilled, wet, fasting, and despairing.

Whilst Anthony?

Oh, he thought it was a disagreeable interview well over, congratulated himself on having made no promise of any sort—not, indeed, that he would have considered such promise binding—assured his own conscience it was the very best thing that could have happened to Andrew, since now he must tell his wife and friends all about the matter, and finally ate a good dinner and drank his wine, and when late in the evening the rain moderated, strolled out and smoked his cigar on the Esplanade. After which he went to bed and slept soundly. Already everything was as Andrew had prophesied. No thought of his trouble clouded the sky of his friend's happiness. On the contrary, when he came carefully to consider the position, he arrived at the conclusion that the Curate had, on the whole, made rather a good thing of life, and owed his having done so to him, Anthony.

'He might have frittered away his best years at Langmore if I had not let him have my berth at Essex Marsh,' thought Anthony, with that happy adaptability to circumstances which had distinguished him through his whole career.

Andrew Hardell had never taken this view of the subject, but there was a certain speciousness and plausibility about it nevertheless, though possibly the victim could not have been made to see it.

As he tossed restlessly through the watches of the weary night, he thought of nothing save Joy—his misery—Anthony's selfishness. He understood a good deal about human nature;

but the very last thing a man ever fully grasps concerning that mystery, is a perfect comprehension of how very much more sorry his friends feel for their own troubles than they can ever feel for his.

Sympathy is all very well, but perhaps the only perfect sympathy on earth is that a person has for himself.

CHAPTER XLIII.

LAWYER AND CLIENT.

The next morning, before Mr Anthony Hardell had opened his eyes, or Mr St John finished reading his letters, Andrew walked into the latter gentleman's office.

'When you are quite at leisure,' he said, pointing to the pile of letters, 'I want to speak to you particularly, and I would rather wait till you are disengaged.'

'Anything fresh about the Australian? The mail came in on Tuesday.'

'Yes; he has come also.'

'You do not mean it?' exclaimed the lawyer, pushing aside his correspondence, and looking at his client with an expression of eager curiosity.

'Indeed I do; and it is all settled. He intends to keep the property.'

'And you——'

'Ah! that is quite another matter.'

'But has he any real claim;—I mean any tangible legal right to the estate?'

'He has the best of all rights,' was the reply. 'He is Anthony Hardell.'

'Then if that be the case, who are you?'

'I think you can guess. I am Andrew Hardell. I am the man who killed Kenneth Challerson by misadventure. I was put on my trial for it at Dumfries. The jury could not make up their minds either to hang or to acquit me, so they brought the verdict in "Not Proven." Almost from that hour till this my life has been one long lie.'

'What an awful thing!' said Mr St John, pityingly; 'but why did you elect to live it?'

'I will tell you presently,' Andrew answered; and he rose and took a turn or two up and down the office to recover his composure, whilst the lawyer looking on, inquired—

'What became of Mrs Challerson?'

'Anthony married her.'

'Then in that you were blameless?'

'Yes; I have been but the scapegoat who had to suffer for another's sins.'

'And is that woman still living?'

'Yes; that is the woman who will be mistress at Lovell's Court.'

'But what could have induced you to take his name, seeing it was an act of utter insanity?'

'You are right; and yet it did not seem so then. If you let me begin at the beginning, and tell you the story right through, you will better understand my position then—my position now;' and without any further preamble Andrew recited the facts I have narrated, concealing nothing, glossing nothing, speaking freely to this man as he had never spoken freely to any man since that night when, standing on Dervorgilla's Bridge, he beheld the moonlight dancing on the Nith, and heard the regular splash of the water as it fell over the weir on its way to the sea.

When he had quite finished, Mr St John remarked simply—

'It is an awful mess. I wish you had taken me into your confidence at first; it would have been easier to lull suspicion then than now.'

'It must all come out now,' Andrew said gloomily.

'I do not quite see that,' answered the lawyer. 'Of course something will depend on the new claimant. In any case, however, there need be no great scandal.'

'Why not?' Andrew asked eagerly.

'Well, I suppose so long as this Mr Anthony Hardell gets the estate he will not mind there being another man bearing his name going loose through the world. I should remain Anthony Hardell, if I were you. I should not even think of leaving the country. As to the expediency of taking Mr Alton into your confidence, that is a matter for after-consideration. Certainly I should not tell Mrs Hardell. If people recognize you and try to trade on your fears, refer them to me for the future. It is a tangle, I confess, but a little time may help to get us out of it. Meanwhile do not hasten matters; and I will think the affair over, and see what can be done.'

'But how am I to manage about the property? Mr Alton is asking me every day concerning the other claimant.'

'I will think that over also—at the moment it seems to me we had better see this Mr Anthony Hardell, and come to some sort of an understanding with him—notably on the subject of that thousand pounds, with the interest which has since accrued. Of course the length of time which has elapsed would bar your claim to it; but still, as he has been out of the country, we might propose to try the question. I may tell you at once we shall decline to act as his solicitors. I do not think Mr Anthony Hardell and ourselves would agree particularly well—but, as I said before, we must see him. When we have seen him, most probably I shall write you a formal letter, setting forth that fact, and stating we now believe your impression to be correct, and that the new comer has a prior claim—that it is of course competent for you to resist his claim, but that if you act on our advice, you will endeavour to effect some compromise. If you had been only frank with us at first the matter would have been comparatively simple; but as it is, we will do our best for you, depend upon it.'

'I do not know what to say to you. I do not know how to thank you,' Andrew exclaimed. 'My heart feels lighter than it has done for many a long day.'

'That is always the case,' answered Mr St John. 'Men shut their own fears up in dark closets, and are frightened to death when they look at them. Once they are compelled to bring them out into the daylight they find they are not so very terrible in the eyes of themselves or other people.'

'But who else would have looked at this skeleton of mine so kindly and christianly as you?'

'So you really think a lawyer may be a Christian after all,' laughed Mr St John. 'My opinion is, and as the world grows wiser I believe it will be the acknowledged, as it is now the actual, opinion of the majority, that there should be a statute of limitation for a man's sins just as there is for his debts.'

'The world judges more harshly, though,' murmured Andrew.

'If a man have courage enough to bear the inevitable nine days' scandal, the world is ready enough to forget all about it, supposing he be sufficiently rich to want nothing from the world. But your difficulty is exceptional—just as your case is exceptional. You are a clergyman, and you have been preaching under false pretences for years. As I understand, you are still in fact only a deacon, and some very awkward questions, it strikes me, might arise from your discharging the offices of a priest. I am not sufficiently up in ecclesiastical law to explain what I feel more fully; but I think for this reason alone, if for no other, the matter should be kept quiet. In the next place, you have prac-

tised a certain deception on your wife and her father, and it is always painful to have to confess to anything of this sort in the domestic circle.'

Andrew sat silent. His mind was going back over the years which were past, and he was wishing, oh! so fervently, he had taken courage that evening in Essex Marsh, and confessed every detail of his life to Mr Alton then.

'It is too late now,' he thought mournfully and bitterly. That had been the cry of Andrew Hardell in every difficulty of his existence. He resolved upon a course and then, because he had so resolved, declared mentally it was too late to adopt any other.

'It is too late now,' he repeated aloud in Mr St John's office, and that gentleman, surprised at the exclamation, which sounded strange in his ears, but which was in reality only the sequence to a long train of thought, inquired, 'Too late for what?'

'Too late to take Mr Alton into my confidence.'

'I think not,' was the reply; 'the only real obstacle to such confidence is that, from what I have seen of him, I fear Mr Alton is about the last man in England to take a lenient view of your conduct. If the worst have to be told, and in all probability it must, you had better get some friend to speak to him. I will, if you like; but I should not hurry the *dénouement*, and if this matter could be kept for ever from Mr Alton's knowledge I think it would be better to do so. The question, therefore, is—can it?'

'I think not,' Andrew replied; 'but one may hope——'

'Come, I am glad to hear you use that word, Mr Hardell,' said the lawyer cheerfully. 'One may hope that it will all come right yet.'

'Hope against hope,' Andrew suggested with a sigh; and yet his face was brighter than Mr St John ever recollected to have seen it.

The previous night he had made up his mind never to return home; and the feeling of happiness he experienced when Mr St John implied that he ought not only to return, but that everything might go on as of old, was almost more than he could bear.

'If my darling only knew all about it, and had forgiven me for love's sake,' he thought, 'I believe the relief would break my heart for very joy.' And almost at that very moment the lawyer was thinking—

'It seems to me that poor fellow is not long for this world; and if it can all be put off for a while, there will be no need for anybody to be one whit the wiser.'

'I never saw such a change in a man in my life in so short a time,' he said, during the afternoon, to his partner, Mr Henry,

when repeating to him the story Andrew had told that morning 'He will be dead within twelve months.'

'The very best thing he could do,' answered Mr Henry, 'though it is a hard case, if his version of it be true.'

'It is true enough,' was the reply. 'I am confident of that.'

'And yet one would hardly accept a prisoner's statement in court as gospel,' said Mr Henry.

'I accept this as such,' was the reply; 'and all the more readily because it makes the whole circumstances of that Dumfries trial intelligible. Well, though Mr Anthony Hardell have come into a fine property, I do not envy him!'

'Pooh! he will not care,' said Mr Henry; and he was quite right. Anthony did not care in the least. When he came to see the lawyers of his late kinsman, he made himself very agreeable to them, spoke kindly of Andrew, considered it was a great pity he had taken that 'Dumfries affair' so much to heart—thought he was a perfect monomaniac in the matter—and mentioned with regret the temper he had shown when he, Anthony, refused to let him have possession of the property.

'The idea was so perfectly preposterous, you know,' he said.

'And yet such things have been, ere now, I believe' observed Mr St John.

'I never heard of them,' answered Anthony, quickly.

'That is quite possible,' argued the lawyer; and then he went on to ask what Mr Hardell intended to do about the thousand pounds.

'Pay it, of course,' replied the new heir. 'If you will let me know the total amount, I will send it to you whenever I receive any of the rents of Lovell's Court.'

'That is fair and liberal enough,' commented Mr Henry.

'I should wish to act more than liberally towards Andrew, if he would allow me,' replied the other; 'and as for your declining to act for me because you are his solicitors, the objection seems to my mind simply absurd. We are not contesting the property. I am certain we shall be as good friends as ever after a little while; and only consider the trouble to me and yourselves of moving all the boxes and papers and documents appertaining to the Hardell family. What have I done to the man to cause all this enmity—done or left undone—excepting refuse to grant an impossible request? Besides, as you assure me he is next of kin—a statement which I confess amazes me profoundly—he or his son will no doubt some day succeed to me, so that really such strict etiquette seems unnecessary.'

'I will speak to our client about it, then,' said Mr St John,

noticing the look of eager satisfaction in his partner's face.

'Thank you. It would, of course, even if he objected, be so much easier for him to get other agents than for me.'

'I shall not put it to him exactly on those grounds,' answered Mr St John, in a tone which decided Anthony that he liked Mr Henry the best of the firm.

'He seems to me rather a nice sort of outspoken fellow,' said Mr Henry, after his departure.

'Does he? Now to me he seems just one of those people who are able to cause more harm in a day than all their neighbours can put right in a lifetime. However, as you appear to wish it, we may as well keep our new client. He will give us plenty of work, I fancy. By-the-by, I omitted to speak to him concerning the necessity for silence concerning Mr Andrew Hardell's antecedents.'

'Quite as well you did not,' Mr Henry replied. 'It is surely high time that play was ended.'

'I do not think so,' was the answer; 'at all events, the option of ending it should lie with Andrew Hardell.'

Anthony, however, when the subject came to be mooted to him, by no means entertained this opinion. He said it was false kindness to assist any longer in such concealment.

'Why, I never can go to see him,' he finished, 'if he persist in calling himself by my name; I should be slipping out Andrew in every sentence.'

'And pray, Mr Hardell, at whose suggestion was it that he first assumed your name? For whose pleasure and benefit did he remain in England whilst you went abroad?'

For a moment Anthony remained silent; then he said—

'Mr St John, do you not think it is generally good policy to let bygones be bygones? For whatever wrong I did I am sorry; and it was in Andrew's interests I spoke about the wisdom of assisting him to strip off his disguise at last.'

'In your own interest, then, I should advise your having no part in the operation,' said Mr St John; 'if any portion of the story be told, all must, remember; and although you say you are very sorry, still public opinion may not take much account of your regret.'

'I think you attach more importance to the affair than it is worth,' Anthony answered, a little confusedly.

'No,' the other answered steadily, 'I do not; and for that reason I would have you spare Andrew Hardell and yourself, if I can persuade you to do so.'

'Oh, I will say nothing about the matter,' he readily pro-

mised; 'only, in that case, I shall be unable to go and see him.'

'I believe I am not overstating facts when I say you are about the last man he would wish to have inside his doors.'

'Well, that is complimentary,' remarked Anthony.

'It is not complimentary,' retorted Mr St John, 'but it is true.'

CHAPTER XLIV.

WHAT WAS THE MATTER?

VERY soon the matter, which it had seemed to Andrew Hardell so impossible to settle, was arranged without any apparent difficulty.

The arrival of the new claimant was announced to Mr Alton. In due time came the promised letter from his lawyers, confirming the opinion he had always expressed, that there was a person living whose title to the property must be considered better than his own. 'No doubt,' said Messrs St John and Henry, 'you could contest the matter if you were so inclined, but we should not advise you to go to law; and indeed, after your positive assertions that you were well aware of the existence of a person with claims superior to your own, we presume you must be quite prepared for his appearance. In the event of his succeeding to the property, there is a small amount of money—about two thousand pounds—which should, as a matter of equity, be handed over to you. Mr Hardell states his willingness to recognize this lien, and will make arrangements for paying it. It would be desirable for us either to see or hear from you as soon as possible, since, if you make no opposition, the new claimant will assume possession at once.'

'You do not intend to contest it, I suppose?' said Mr Alton, after he had read this letter first to himself and then aloud.

'No, sir; why should I? when I was always aware that if the man were living there was a nearer heir than myself.'

'Then who the deuce is the fellow the son of?' asked Mr Alton pettishly.

'I am not a good hand at tracing pedigrees,' Andrew answered. 'I only know that when many direct lives lay between me and this property, I understood from my guardian that there was yet

another relative whose claims were superior to mine. He has lived in Australia for years with either friends or connections, and he has now returned to England to take possession of Lovell's Court.'

'Then there go our chances, exclaimed Joy, regretfully. 'I wish those lawyers had never said a word about the matter.'

'So do I, child,' he remarked, 'heartily.'

'But how in the world did it happen that they were ignorant of this man's existence?' said Mr Alton.

'I think there is only one person in existence who understands the ramifications of the Hardell family, and that is Sir Hubert. Mr Trelwyn has told me facts about my relations of which I was previously utterly ignorant, and he learned them from the baronet.'

'And what connection are you of Sir Hubert?' inquired Joy.

'I have not the remotest idea,' said her husband.

'You provoking man! every one but yourself would have their genealogy at their fingers' ends.'

'But, my dear Joy, what does it matter?'

'What does it matter, indeed!' she repeated. 'Why, much, of course, to me. Here have I been fancying myself for months the wife of the owner of a grand estate six times larger than papa's, where we were to be welcomed by all the tenantry, and where when Master Harry came of age we should have bullocks roasted whole, and ale flowing like water in honour of the event; and then, after it has all come to nothing, you say, "What does it matter?" I declare if I were not the sweetest-tempered woman in all the world, I think it would drive me distracted to be married to a man who cannot even tell me the precise degree of relationship in which he stands to Sir Hubert Hardell.'

And then she rose, and put her arms round his neck and rubbed her bright hair against his locks, which were plentifully streaked with grey, and called him her dear old bear, the while he felt there were tears of disappointment in her eyes, and that she was only doing and saying all these things to hide how keenly she felt the awaking from her day-dream.

'You may yet have to roast the bullock and tap the ale in Harry's honour,' he answered, 'for the new claimant has no children.'

'How do you know that?' asked Mr Alton, quickly

'He told me so the day we drove together into St Mark's.' Andrew had never attempted to conceal the fact of the stranger having journeyed to Eclin to find him.

'Why did you not bring him on here?' said Mr Alton.

'Because I had not the slightest wish for him to come,' was the reply, 'and because I desired when I knew he was alive to see St John with as little delay as possible.'

'I am going to London to-morrow,' remarked Mr Alton, thoughtfully, 'and I think I shall call in Golden Square.'

'I wish you would,' his son-in-law said eagerly, 'and tell them I have not the slightest intention of prosecuting my claims. If there were any likelihood of the two thousand pounds being forthcoming, I should like to settle that large fortune on Joy. With economy the interest may suffice to pay for Harry's fine feathers.'

'What a story-teller you are,' cried Joy; 'it is not I, but papa, who spoils the child; and I do not want the money, and I won't have it.'

'You were crying for the moon a little while ago,' her husband remarked, and I suppose that is the reason you now refuse a slice of earth.

'I was not crying for the moon, sir; I was crying because I had set my heart on going to Lovell's Court, and being welcomed by the tenants, and driving under garlands of flowers, and hearing you make a speech. There, that was all; papa knew I never could bear being disappointed in my life; that was why he let me marry you; but I do not mind now, I do not indeed; and though I cannot understand why you should be so, I am thankful to see you happier and more contented than you were before this man came over.'

'My darling,' the man answered—and Mr Alton could not avoid noticing how his voice quivered—'the suspense was killing me.'

'In what way?' she asked, marvelling.

'I never longed for anything in this world before, except your love, as I longed to possess Lovell's Court.'

'And yet you are not disappointed?' said his father-in-law.

'Yes, I am,' was the answer; 'how sorely, you cannot imagine, but the uncertainty is ended; I know there is no use in harassing myself about the affair any more.'

'It is a strange thing,' observed Mr Alton, 'but I never thought you really wished to become the owner of that place.'

'Then you were mistaken; I could not take the man's inheritance, knowing of his existence; but I declare to you, had the Australian brought news of his death, instead of the heir in person, it would have been the happiest day of my life.'

'Now, I call that excessively wicked,' interposed Joy. 'I am dreadfully disgusted at having all my hopes disappointed, but I could not wish the inopportune creature dead notwithstanding.'

'I am glad the matter is settled, at all events,' said her husband, repeating a former statement in different words.

'Do you know I am afraid I have been misjudging you all through this business?' Mr Alton began, after a slight pause. 'I fancied——'

'You did not misjudge me, I think,' interposed his son-in-law hurriedly; 'at all events I am sure you would never do so intentionally,' and thus the matter ended; and Mr Alton, going to London, called on Messrs St John and Henry, and had a long talk with the elder partner, who having, on consideration, decided to say nothing about Andrew's antecedents, assured him Mr Hardell's conduct throughout the whole affair had been beyond praise.

'But for him this man would never have known he was the next heir. Some few years since there were so many relatives waiting to inherit Lovell's Court, that it is a thousand chances to one a person in Australia might never have known of their decease. The present owner admits this himself, and speaks in the highest terms of your son-in-law's straightforwardness. I must tell you candidly, we were a little nettled at our client's reserve, but we now think he imagined he was acting rightly in withholding some unpleasant particulars until this gentleman's arrival.'

'Then he is a gentleman?' inquired Mr Alton.

'Yes, but a not very straightforward one, I should say,' was the answer. 'We have undertaken his business, and agreed to be his solicitors, and therefore I am scarcely right perhaps in remarking that this Mr Anthony Hardell is not at all to my taste.'

'And is his name Anthony also?' asked Mr Alton.

'Yes, it seems to have been a favourite in the family.'

'How very singular.'

'Not at all; we have to do with a property now in which nine Julias are interested.'

'In what way do you distinguish one from the other?'

'Oh! we add the names of their husbands to those who are married, and the spinsters, happily, have some second appellation, as Julia Louise, Julia Constance, and so forth; in fact, to exhaust the matter, the world is too full of people, and it is impossible to find fresh names for them all. Fresh combinations must be exhausted in another generation, and then lawyers will have to fall back on numerals. There could scarcely be more than ten of the same Christian name in any single family, I should hope, even in another hundred years.'

'This man has no children?' observed Mr Alton.

'No; and has been married many years; so I hope your grandson may have Lovell's Court yet.'

'You seem to take a kindly interest in my son-in-law and grandson,' said Mr Alton, pleased almost, in spite of himself, at the lawyer's altered tone.

'I am immensely interested in your son-in-law, Mr Alton,' answered Mr St John with emphasis; 'all the more, perhaps, because I once did him an injustice.'

'Well, do you know, so did I,' confessed the other.

'I wish you understood him as well as I do now,' said Mr St John, 'I think you would never misjudge him again.'

'I do not believe I shall;' and the man who had laboured under such grievous fears brightened up, and looked younger by ten years than Mr St John remembered him six months before.

'Now, shall I make a clean breast of it, and tell him everything,' thought the lawyer, 'or shall I not?' but even while he was deliberating, Mr Alton, mistaking his silence for a hint that the time of London men is valuable, rose, and saying he feared he had detained him from his business too long, took his departure.

'Another moment and I should have broken the ice,' mused Mr St John; 'but perhaps it is as well;' in which conclusion, notwithstanding his long acquaintance with men and things, he chanced to be mistaken. Since, after all, it is always a comfort to reflect that what will come, every one who had a right to know anything knows it, and that no good-natured friend or sneaking enemy can point a moral to greater advantage, or adorn a tale with more truthful embellishments, than has already been done by yourself—or some one in your confidence.

Yes, it might have been better, but it was not to be, and so Mr Alton returned to Eclin, where already the old gloom was settling down again on Andrew's spirits. He had outlived a great danger; he had, during the last year, avoided shipwreck on more than one sunken rock, but he knew that he should not be able to avert discovery for ever. Just as a man, who is always in front of the battle, can scarcely hope that when the victory is won and the colours are waving triumphantly, he shall be there too, so in like manner Andrew Hardell understood there would come a blow from some unsuspected quarter to end the suspense, and the joy, and the wretchedness for ever.

He had dreamed his dream of fancied security long enough; when any day, any hour, any minute, there might arrive the certainty that the only thing he could do was to pocket what money e possessed and leave that letter on his wife's table, and go forth

as though wife, and child, and honour, and reputation, and fame, had never been for him other than idle words spoken by idler lips.

But, in the mean time, two things essential for the flight he had proposed to himself were dwindling away—money and health. Upon the first Mr McPhail's friend had drawn to a serious extent; whilst regarding the second, no man can spend sleepless nights and anxious days, no man, more especially who has started like Andrew Hardell, with a broken constitution, and fail to feel that the human machine was not intended by its Creator to last for ever.

He could not have said where or how he felt ill. Had any doctor sounded his lungs, he might have declared them to be sound; had he listened to the throbbings of his heart, he would have pronounced that organ free from disease; there was not a complaint he could have carried to a medical man, not a symptom he could have described that would have enabled the most skilful in the land to form a correct diagnosis of his case.

I wonder that no skilful doctor has ever thought it worth his while to investigate how many people die annually, not in consequence of any disease to speak of, but merely because they are tired of life; because out of the turmoil, and the fret, and the maddening excitement, and the sickening suspense, they drop into the grave just as a man, weary of the noise of some great city thoroughfare, turns aside from his fellows into the blessed quiet of an unfrequented court or alley, to walk there all alone.

We cannot tell—they could not tell—why they do it; we and they can only understand that worn out with the business of existence, faint and weary with tramping over life's stony pavements, there comes a time when, leaving all memory of past enjoyments, all hope of pleasures to come, the man or the woman deserts the beaten tracks of life, and craves for nothing better than to be wrapped up under the green turf till the Judgment Day. Travellers who droop by the way, you may remark; soldiers who fall out of rank, and are unworthy of the uniform they wear; but oh! friends, it is not given to every one to bear the scorching heat and the biting cold, the blustering wind and the pelting rain, with sublime equanimity.

It was just this which had come to Andrew Hardell. He felt weary, and there was no place where he might turn aside for rest; he felt worn, and there was no shady place—no pleasant fountain where he could sit, out of the glare of existence, listening to the murmuring of the waters till his nerves were restrung —till the harp of existence was in tune once more

Sometimes—when it was night—he determined to bear this mental agony no longer; to-morrow I must tell Joy all. Often in the morning he thought, before evening I will watch an opportunity and test her love; but he could not do it; many to-morrows passed away, evenings merged into night, and still Joy knew nothing, understood nothing, save that her husband was not looking so well as she could wish.

'I wish you would run up to London and see Dr Small, Anthony,' she said.

'And why should I see Dr Small?' he answered; 'I am quite well.'

'No,' she persisted, 'you are not; you have never looked strong since that dreadful wet day when you went off without a word, or even a pair of dry socks.'

'My dear Joy, what a way of putting things!'

'I shall put things just as I please. You never have been well since. You will go to Dr Small, won't you? and tell me every word he says;' and she put her hands on his shoulder and looked up in his face and kissed him. Oh, the love and the non-comprehension of these women!

'Had you not better go to Dr Small yourself, Joy, and describe my symptoms, and bring down a few bottles of medicine? Apparently you know much more about the state of my health than I do myself;' at which remark she laughed and seemed re-assured. Nevertheless, not very long after that time—but quite unknown to Joy—Andrew knocked at the door of another doctor even more famous than Dr Small.

'What is the matter with you, sir?' inquired the individual he sought.

'I want you to tell me that, please,' Mr Hardell suggested; 'I cannot be both doctor and patient, can I?'

'A great many patients fancy they know more than we doctors,' replied the other, 'but let that pass; describe your symptoms, I am not going to ask you any questions at present.'

'I have no symptoms,' was the answer.

'Then what brings you here?'

'I want to know what ails me.'

'How am I to know what ails you unless you tell me? Look you, sir. I am a doctor, you a clergyman. Suppose a man went to you to confess, and said, I am miserable; and you asked, What makes you miserable? And he replied, I do not know. You would regard him either as a rogue or as a dyspeptic fool. Now, no one comes to me without having some vague idea or fear of disease. What is your idea or fear?'

'I have no fear, and I have no idea,' was the reply. 'I only know that whereas twelve months ago I could walk eight or ten miles, it is a trouble to me to visit even my nearest parishioners. Not long since I could preach without exhaustion in a large building, and now my voice sounds feeble even in our little village church. I sleep well enough; I eat fairly; I do not study much. I take sufficient but not excessive exercise, and yet I am here, without even a reasonable excuse for having come.'

'Let me feel your pulse.'

Andrew stretched out his wrist.

'I want to sound your chest. You need not take off your coat. I suspect your lungs are strong enough.'

'Then what is it?' demanded the patient.

'Your disease is mental, sir,' was the calm reply. 'I do not mean that you are mentally affected; but your body will shortly become diseased if you do not take immediate mental rest. I can do nothing for you. I shall write no prescription. Think your trouble or anxiety over quietly, and come to me again a month hence. I do not want another guinea—indeed, I will not take this; but I do wish to see you again.'

A wish, however, which, in its own small way, like many others on this earth, was destined never to be gratified.

CHAPTER XLV.

IN ALTON WOOD.

The summer was past, and autumn had come once again to tinge with russet and gold, with purple and red, the woods that ran down to the very verge of Eclin village. Bright were the holly berries, scarlet the clusters of the mountain-ash, the rowan tree; dark hung the brown seeds that had succeeded to the white elder-flowers, esteemed by rural maidens a specific for the removal of sun-burn; gleaming through the hedges ran the nightshade, now displaying crimson instead of its former violet and yellow. Nuts were hanging from the filbert-trees—pippins were waiting to be gathered in the cottagers' gardens—hops climbing around the porches were fit for picking—flower-beds were all ablaze with geraniums and calceolarias, whilst in the evenings the scent of double-stocks, late mignonette, and heliotrope filled the

air. Already robins were beginning to sing. Everything, in fact, told that autumn had come, and that Nature was donning her gayest dress, adding every beauty she could group around her, ere bidding farewell to the light and the sunshine—to the loveliness and the verdure—which were so soon to fade away, or be covered from sight until the spring-time of another year by winter's frosts and snows.

For sufficient reasons, so perhaps the reader may think, Andrew Hardell entertained no affection for that season when the leaf begins to turn—when the corn-fields are bare and yellow—when, spite of the gorgeous colouring and the gay flowers, and the wealth and luxuriance of trailing bramble and perfectly-ripened fruit, we feel that the glory of the year is over, that the loveliness of its youth, and the strength of its middle age has departed, and that all the sunshine and beauty on which we gaze are but hectic flushes on a cheek which will soon be white and cold.

Was it not almost autumn when he ascended Criffel, and looked down upon Colvend? Was not the broom yellow then, and the gorse a blaze of gold? Was not the heather still purple, though a trifle faded? and were not the corn-fields where the late stacks still stood, reaped, and only waiting to be gathered?

Ay, truly; and it was autumn also when, from Kirkcudbright jail, he saw the woods on the Tor Hill changing colour from day to day; and all the time he journeyed from Kirkcudbright to Dumfries the late autumn sun streamed across the great expanse of moss and bog through which most of the dreary road ran. Likewise it was dull autumn weather while he lay in the terrible prison in Buccleugh Street, awaiting his trial; and it was one autumn day likewise that my lords Glanlorn and Craigie came by the Edinburgh highway, and were met by a goodly company, which escorted them into Dumfries, the while the bells were ringing in honour of their arrival.

Memory may fall asleep for a time—it generally does, indeed, after the first excitement of some great calamity is overpast—but it wakens again with every sense sharpened, and recalls to the ear and the eye of many and many a sufferer small details of misery formerly overlooked, words which were spoken, events which occurred, things which were beheld, and that yet in the hurry and shock of more important events were then scarce noted.

In Essex Marsh Andrew Hardell—only just escaped from an awful peril—scarcely realizing the effect his past, over which he had possessed so little control, must of necessity have upon the future, that was still to a great extent his to make or to mar—

had not thought of such small details as those I have attempted to describe. It was only, indeed, when years passed by—when, in a word, he realized what the possession of perfect happiness might prove, could he manage but to catch the hem of her garment and compel her to remain with him—that small things—such as the odour of falling leaves, the spectacle of woods gay with changeful colours, the notes of special birds, the mention of familiar names, grey pictures representing the sea-shore, as seen in the uncertainty of early morning light, paintings of men waiting for their trial, or lying in their cells, the sound of familiar melodies—began to affect him.

He had schooled himself, little by little, to endure the chafing of such trifles, but the irritation of the memories they called up was none the less trying for that. In the autumn he had sown, and for ever after the autumn seemed to him seed-time and harvest also. His sheaves, should he ever cease garnering them? Would there ever come to him a spring full of nought save grace and beauty—green leaves—swelling buds—jubilant birds—fields dotted with lambs—orchards full of bloom and promise—woods dotted with white anemones, and primroses, and violets—sparkling streams—clear skies—with not a prevision of winter or thought of autumn to mar the prospect?

Would it ever be so? Dare he hope that in the future an hour might come—even an hour—when he should be able to say 'the worst is passed,' and, clasping Joy's hand, look in her dear eyes, without a mist of sorrow dimming his own?

Through the woods, then, where the bright-eyed squirrels climbed nimbly from branch to branch—where ever and anon the jay's brilliant feathers strewed the ground, and in close proximity the body of a kite was nailed warningly to an adjacent tree—where the monotonous cooing of the wild pigeons half soothed, half wearied the ear—Andrew Hardell, still carrying about with him that 'mind diseased' of which mention was made in the preceding chapter, walked slowly, thinking of many things and persons, more especially of Anthony Hardell, who had in one sense so completely made his life, and in another so completely marred it.

But for him he had never known Joy—but for him he had never understood thoroughly the meaning of the word 'misery.' Upon the very ruins of another man's life Anthony had built the edifice of his own, and now he was lording it away in Somersetshire; he and his wife were asked here, there, everywhere. Lavishly he entertained, lavishly he spent, and yet all the arts of

man seemed incapable of getting that two thousand pounds out of his hands.

First with one excuse, then with another, he put off Mr St John. He must have time, he said; he had only just entered into possession.

'Yes, but the accumulated rentals?' Mr St John suggested.

'Will be required to make the place habitable.'

'This is, however, so essentially a debt of honour——'

'That its repayment must be left to my convenience,' answered Mr Hardell.

'We have a client who will find the amount if you bind yourself to repay him at so much a year.'

'No; it is a matter between me and Andrew, and I cannot bring a stranger into it.'

'Then will you pay a portion, as a mere acknowledgment of the debt?'—in reply to which Anthony said he would think the matter over, and write when he returned to Somersetshire.

But when he returned to Somersetshire Mr Anthony Hardell did not write at all. Letter after letter arrived from his lawyers, but never received an answer. He had time to receive and to pay visits, to see architects concerning the additions he conceived his house required, to go abroad, to join a fishing party in Ireland, but he found no leisure to think of his old friend, whose life had been such a perfect failure through him.

'I intend,' wrote Mr St John to Andrew Hardell—and this letter was received on the morning of that autumn day of which I am writing—'I intend to run over to Lovell's Court, and if I cannot come to some satisfactory understanding with Mr Hardell, throw up the conduct of his business. I am quite disgusted with the whole affair.'

'Always the same,' thought the man who was walking idly through woods the autumnal colours were beautifying. 'Always the same;' and he sighed heavily, for he wanted that money much.

He wanted it for many purposes—to settle on Joy—to put things which had again gone crooked with Mr Alton a little straight — to pay Mr McPhail's friend that quarter's allowance which was now regularly demanded—to replace the fund he had put aside against an evil day, now reduced almost to *nil*. For these and many more things he desired the repayment of that principal and interest it seemed to him he was never to touch even a sovereign of again while he lived. 'After I am dead, perhaps,' he thought, 'Anthony may, for very shame.' And then he sighed,

thinking if he were dead the tangle would be all unloosed—the silk wound—the future of others plain.

He was so occupied with these meditations that he had not noticed a man advancing towards him along one of the grassy paths that led through Alton Wood—indeed, until he was close upon him, Mr Hardell did not perceive the approaching figure, or recognize it as that of Mr McPhail.

'Good morning,' said the stranger, touching his hat.

'Good morning,' answered Andrew, instinctively returning the greeting. 'What a splendid morning!' and then he stopped, suddenly remembering McPhail.

'You know what brings me here, I suppose?' the latter began.

'I can guess,' was the reply.

'Brownson sold me, and you have been keeping him quiet ever since. Now, Mr Andrew Hardell, you must keep me quiet too.'

'I do not understand you,' said Andrew, feeling the whole inquiry was commencing *de novo*.

'Oh! yes,' was the reply, 'you do, for a certainty. I am aware you are Andrew Hardell, and none other; but as I could not quite verify my certainty, I have come down here for that object. Shall I go on, or will you buy me off now?'

For a moment the man he addressed paused; then he said—

'It is not the first time I have been subjected by you to threats of this sort, and if you are determined to persist in them I must refer you to my solicitors.'

'And what if I refuse to be referred to your solicitors?'

'I must in any event refuse the honour of further conversation with you;' and Andrew was moving on, when the other stopped him.

'I do not think,' he said, 'it is quite optional whether you will or not. Had you acted fair with me, had Brownson acted fair, I might not have been so hard; but you have done me once —twice,—once with Johnstoun, once with Brownson; and you cannot expect that I should show mercy for ever.'

'My good fellow, keep your mercy for those that want it,' said Mr Hardell, endeavouring to put him aside, but McPhail held his ground.

'I like that,' he remarked. 'I like it especially, from a man who has Brownson in his pay—who is bribing that blackguard to keep quiet. I put him on the scent—I brought him down here; and then you and he quietly fling me over, and——'

'I shall give you in charge if you molest me further,' remarked Mr Hardell.

'Oh! you will—will you? and I may go to your respectable father-in-law, and ask him if he knows who that precious lot really is to whom he has given his daughter?'

'Yes, you can do so, if you like,' Andrew replied.

'Well, cool as you are, I think I can find a way to bring you to reason. Suppose you give me in charge, as you must if I am lying, and that I call David Johnstoun for a witness, what then?' and he hissed out the last two words, with an almost devilish expression of hate in his face; while Andrew nervously clutched at the lower branches of a sycamore tree, as he answered without even a tremour in his voice—

'Then, Mr McPhail, the game would be quite up, for I should never expect any honest man to perjure himself on my account. You are quite right—I am Andrew Hardell; and having said so much—to repeat your own question, "What then?"'

'Why then, of course,' said McPhail, taken somewhat aback by this coolness, 'Mr Alton would pay any sum of money to keep the matter quiet.'

'You are wrong there, my friend,' was the reply. 'He would not give you one sixpence.'

'But you would,' said the other.

'I have nothing to give;' and after that there ensued a dead silence, which was at length broken by McPhail, who said—

'Mr Hardell, let us act fair and above-board.'

'If you like to act fair and above-board, I cannot have the slightest objection,' was the reply.

'Do not talk like that if we are to do any business together,' exclaimed the man, almost fiercely.

'I have no desire to do any business with you of any kind whatsoever,' said Andrew quietly.

'But I say you shall; is it worth nothing to you to keep the world from knowing who you are—to prevent your wife despising you—your son cursing your memory? I do not want much, sir; I just ask enough to leave England for ever, and land me in a new country with twenty pounds in my pocket. Say a cool hundred and twenty down—and you have seen the last of Matthew McPhail.'

'I would willingly pay that sum and more to be assured I should never look upon your face again; but I have not a hundred pounds in the world or the means of getting it, besides which, surely that sum can be a matter of no importance to you; it is not so many months since you compelled David Johnstoun

to pay four times one hundred pounds, for debts contracted by you, only two days before his bankruptcy.'

'That is true, but all I bought only brought me in eighty pounds; and what was eighty with the Derby coming on?'

'Not much certainly, if you were determined to lose it. To come back to business, however, I have not a hundred pounds, or a hundred pence for that matter, to give you.'

'But Mr Alton——,' ventured the other.

'Mr Alton would quarrel with me, but never patch up a peace with you; so it is useless your looking for assistance to that quarter.'

'I imagine, however, you have friends, who to avoid the scandal——,' began McPhail.

'You certainly know very little of me, when you fail to be aware I have no friends. The day I stood my trial at Dumfries parted me as utterly from them as though I had been swallowed up in the depths of the sea.'

'Would not your wife——'

'If you dare to bring her or her name into this matter, I will choke you like a dog;' and Mr Hardell turned furiously upon his tormentor, as though he desired to anticipate the 'if,' and crush him where he stood.

'Gently, sir, gently,' said McPhail. 'I did not mean to offend,' and he stood for a moment, as though considering. 'You have been paying Brownson; I know that, because he has not done a hand's turn since he came home with me; and now talks of buying a public-house, some place out Barnet way.'

'Yes, I am aware of his intention—in fact, to avoid all mystification, I pay for the house.'

'Then, if you can pay him, why not me?'

'For the simple reason that he has quite exhausted my resources,' Andrew replied.

'But you could borrow, sir. Gentlemen like you can always borrow. It is only a hundred and twenty pounds I ask; and I do not believe another soul worth speaking of besides myself and Brownson suspects who you really are. It is worth the money to be clear of us both; you can bind me up any way you like. I only want to leave the country. I am sick of the whole concern, and I will never mention your name to mortal—I swear it. Although I am stopping in the village—have been for a day or two trying to get speech with you—no one shall hear a word of the matter from me.

'Where are you stopping?' asked Andrew, with what cool-

ness he could muster; for surely this was carrying the war into very close quarters.

'At Mrs Pryce's,' was the reply.

A shudder he could neither prevent nor account for, shook the man as he received this information, but he said, quietly and calmly enough—

'Then here I will see you to-morrow. Give me twenty-four hours to consider your proposition.'

'It is no trap—you will not give me in charge?' asked McPhail, anxiously.

'In charge, man; how could that benefit me?' was Andrew's almost scornful answer. Hearing which McPhail said—not without a certain amount of hesitation—

'Well, I will give you twenty-four hours, and trust you; good day.'

'Good day,' Andrew answered, walking on towards the village, while McPhail pursued his way through the wood, thinking to himself that the matter was as good as settled.

'I shall have the money or an order for it to-morrow,' he considered.

'I will ask St John to pay his passage and give him an order on some Australian house for twenty pounds,' the Curate thought; but even while he was arguing the *pros* and *cons* of such a course, he looked up and suddenly started.

Those who have been unfortunate are generally superstitious, and a great dread seized upon Andrew Hardell's soul and took possession of it, when he beheld the woman he and McPhail had mentioned but a few minutes before, dressed in her very best apparel, approaching the stile leading through Alton Woods to the Hall.

'Allow me to assist you, Mrs Pryce,' said he, and he held out his hand to help the buxom widow over her difficulty; 'these stiles are very awkward for—ladies.'

'Oh, sir, things will be different when you are master here. Mr Alton is a nice affable gentleman, but he does not consider those below him as you do, sir.'

'It is very good of you to think so,' Andrew replied, 'but it is mere partiality on your part; Mr Alton likes his fellow-creatures much better than I ever did, and furthermore, I shall never be the owner of Alton Hall, as you ought to know quite well.'

'Then more is the pity, sir, that is all I have to say, sir;' and the widow, after a profound courtesy, walked briskly on, her silk dress rustling amongst the fallen leaves as she pursued her way.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MR ALTON'S VISITOR.

WHEN Mrs Pryce reached the Hall, she did not go to the Hall door like one who, having a right of entrance, feels no fear to knock and ring, but repaired rather to that side of the mansion which looked out over a wild piece of land called The Wilderness, intersected only by a back road, or rather avenue, that led to the stable-yard.

Before the stable-yard could be reached, however, the visitor arrived at a gate, which afforded ingress to a small court that in its turn led to the kitchens and offices of the Hall.

At an inner door Mrs Pryce rang modestly, and when, in answer to her summons, there appeared a rosy-cheeked girl, a late addition to the establishment, the widow said insinuatingly—

'Is Mrs Margold within, my dear, and could I see her?'

Now, Mrs Margold was the housekeeper, but it was not Mrs Margold the widow wanted to see, for once landed in that lady's snug apartment, Mrs Pryce said—

'Could you manage to get me five minutes' talk with Mr Alton, and nobody be a bit wiser?'

'Lord's sake, Mrs Pryce, what is it? you look like one scared. What has happened?'

'Something has happened, Mrs Margold, about which I can speak to no one but Mr Alton. Is he within?'

'I think so; but is there nothing I can get for you—a glass of wine—a glass of water— a thimbleful of spirits?'

'Let me see Mr Alton, that is all I want,' interrupted Mrs Pryce. 'If you can manage it without Mr Hardell knowing.'

'It is something dreadful, then, Mrs Pryce?'

'I do not know yet what it may be; but I am bound to tell him,' answered the widow, putting her handkerchief to her eyes; whereupon the housekeeper, believing that the sooner Mr Alton was put in possession of the facts, the sooner her natural curiosity would be relieved, left the room in order to ascertain if her master were disengaged, and willing to see Mrs Pryce.

'He is,' she came back to say, 'in the breakfast-room, reading "The Times" newspaper. Miss Joy—(the servants still called her so amongst themselves)—has driven over to St Mark's, and Mr Hardell is gone to Eclin.'

'Mrs Margold,' observed Mrs Pryce, solemnly, pausing on the threshold of the housekeeper's apartment, 'answer me truly, were you ever able to account for that marriage?'

'Do you mean Miss Joy's? No, I never could, though he is a nice civil-spoken gentleman, and a fine preacher.'

'It was witchcraft,' exclaimed Mrs Pryce.

'Heaven be good to us; is it about that you have come to Mr Alton?'

'It is something very like it,' answered Mrs Pryce; and delighted with the impression she had already produced, she hurried along the passage to the room where Mr Alton was awaiting her.

'So you want me on particular business, Mrs Pryce?' he began good-humouredly, pointing to a chair; 'I hope you have come to ask my advice concerning the best mode of investing a thousand pounds. Is that the difficulty?'

'No, sir,' answered Mrs Pryce, and she smoothed out first her bonnet-strings and then the fringe of her shawl.

'I hope you have not seen any one who has persuaded you to marry again?' said Mr Alton. 'I am certain Eclin could never spare you.'

'No, sir,' she again replied; 'I have seen too much of matrimony to wish to try it a second time.'

'I am sorry to hear you say that, Mrs Pryce,' remarked Mr Alton.

'Oh, sir, I hope you may not be far sorrier before I have said one-half of what I have to say;' and the widow put her handkerchief to her eyes, filling Mr Alton's soul the while with a terrible disrest.

'My good Mrs Pryce,' he commenced, soothingly, 'pray calm yourself; if I can be of any assistance to you in your distress, I shall be most happy, only let me know.'

'It's not me, Mr Alton,' she interrupted, 'it's for you and yours I am grieved and heart-broken to-day.'

'My dear woman, what can you mean? Me and mine!' he repeated incredulously.

'You and Miss Joy—you and Miss Joy.'

'Has any accident happened to her; is she ill; have the ponies ran away; has the phaeton been upset?' and he was walking towards the door when the widow begged him to be calm.

'Miss Joy is well in health as far as I know, sir; but oh!'

'Mrs Pryce,' said Mr Alton, after the fashion of a man who had grown impatient of a preface, 'if you have anything to tell

that concerns my daughter or myself, tell it; I can bear anything short of her death, better than suspense.'

'It is a long story, sir,' Mrs Pryce submitted.

'Then the sooner you commence, the sooner it will be ended,' remarked Mr Alton, a little ungraciously.

Mrs Pryce had not read much poetry in her lifetime, except such as assumed the form of valentines; but her thoughts unconsciously paraphrased those of the not unillustrious individual who arrived at the conclusion that 'Ingratitude, thy name is man!'

The day was to be hers, however, she knew, and armed with this conviction, she once more smoothed down her bonnet-strings, and began—

'When Miss Joy—I ask pardon—Mrs Hardell was married, it took us all by surprise.'

'Surely that is a very old story?' suggested Mr Alton, with an assumption of indifference he was far from feeling.

'It is not so long gone but that every one in Eclin can remember the wedding,' retorted the widow.

'True,' said Mr Alton; 'pray proceed.

'We wondered who the gentleman could be that—being only a curate—you were content to take for your daughter's husband, and——'

'Mrs Pryce, whither is all this tending?' interrupted Mr Alton.

'Sir, do you know who he is now?'

'He is, as you have said, my daughter's husband.'

'And what else, sir?'

'The Curate of Eclin.'

'And what else, sir?'

'A most popular preacher.'

'And what else, sir?'

'Next heir to one of the finest properties in Somersetshire; but whither, Mrs Pryce, I ask again, is all this tending?'

'And what else, sir?' She rose as she spoke, and Mr Alton rose too.

'Woman,' he demanded, 'what do you mean?'

'I mean this, sir; did it ever occur to you that your daughter's husband's name was Andrew and not Anthony, and that he had stood his trial for murder at Dumfries?'

Next moment Mrs Pryce rang the bell violently. 'Send Mrs Margold here,' she commanded; 'your master is very ill indeed.'

'You are mistaken, Mrs Pryce,' said Mr Alton, at this juncture, 'it was only a momentary faintness, to which I have latterly been subject. Bring me a glass of water, Jenkins. And now,

Mrs Pryce,' he said, when the man left the room, 'let me thank you for your intelligence and your good intentions, whilst at the same time I beg to tell you that you have been entirely misinformed.'

'I am sure, sir, I am thankful to hear it. Only one day last May—a dreadful wet day it was, for certain—a strange gentleman came into my shop, inquiring his way to the Hall, when Mr Hardell was looking at some wools for Miss Joy—I beg pardon, Mrs Hardell. Of course I looked to Mr Hardell; when all of a sudden the strange gentleman cried out, "Good God! Andrew, how you are changed;" and Mr Hardell made answer, "My name is not Andrew, but Anthony; have you forgotten?"'

'As I told you, Mrs Pryce, a clear case of mistaken identity. Put the tumbler down, Jenkins,' added Mr Alton; 'and I am much obliged, Mrs Margold, but I feel quite well again. I am sorry to have disturbed you.'

'No case of mistaken identity, sir,' said the widow, firmly, when the door closed behind footman and housekeeper; 'there is a gentleman lodging with me at the present moment, sir, if you would only send for him, as would tell you the same story, and more to the back of it—how he murdered the gentleman, and ran away with his wife, and has been preaching under another man's name for years and years, and would have taken another man's property if the law would have let him; and,' rising, 'sir, I am sorry to have given offence, but wrong is wrong, and right is right; and not knowing as you was aware of the facts before, I made so free as to come and tell you, thinking it would be better for you to hear the worst from a friend, though humble, than from a foe.'

'I wish you to leave this house,' was all Mr Alton's answer. 'I believe you are lying; but if you are not lying, I curse you for bringing the news you have. There, if you expected a reward, take it in that sentence, for you will never get any other from me.'

'Sir, I have already had my reward; but thank you all the same.'

'Who has put you on to this, then?' asked Mr Alton; but the woman declining to impart such peculiarly private information, smiled, courtesied, and departed.

'There will be a nice scene there before night,' she considered, as, escaping the housekeeper and Jenkins, she let herself out by the hall-door. 'He had better have married some one in his own walk of life. Murderer or not, I would have been true to him.'

Which was doubtful, as are the tempers and the tongues of women.

Concerning them, who shall prophesy to-day what they may do to-morrow?

Mrs Pryce had at all events wreaked her revenge, and walked home contentedly through the woods, her silk dress rustling amongst the fallen leaves, as it had rustled after she left Andrew Hardell.

Left to himself, Mr Alton marvelled what he should do. Not for one instant did he disbelieve Mrs Pryce's tale. On the contrary, it carried conviction with it. His daughter's husband was Andrew Hardell; the present owner of the Somersetshire property was Anthony Hardell.

Pull it, twist it, look at it as he would, he could put no other construction on the narrative.

'He has deceived me from the beginning,' he thought, 'but he shall deceive me no more.'

All the man's long-suffering patience—all the years he had served God so faithfully—all the time he had struggled against the only real love his life had known—all the tenderness he had lavished on Joy—these things were forgotten. In the scales of worldly justice they were but as a feather's weight when pitted against the sin of concealment now brought home to him.

'He was a murderer,' thought Mr Alton. 'A murderer, he married my child; a murderer, he has lived under my roof. Well, it shall never cover the three of us again. I will tell him I now know all, and then——'

Mr Alton did not even mentally finish his sentence, which, however, meant for Andrew farewell to every hope his poor life yet held—farewell to wife and child and home. The hour was close at hand—the minutes that were bearing it to him hurried along—whilst he, still trusting he might yet keep the enemy at bay a little longer, walked on under the autumnal sky unconscious of its approach.

But how was Mr Alton to compass that final interview?—there was the question—how, without Joy's participation?

She must leave for London, he decided—leave, if possible, before her husband's return. Andrew, he knew, intended walking over to Great Garton, where he had some business to transact with his Rector. When he went to Garton he usually dined with Mr Weymer, returning home about ten or eleven o'clock.

'If he do that to-day,' considered Mr Alton, 'Joy shall be away before his return. I can have no parting interview. She must never look upon his face again.' And he sat in his room

considering how he should most easily bo able to get her away, until his daughter returned, and came into the apartment looking bright and beautiful as ever.

'Oh! papa,' she exclaimed, 'why are you not out? It is such a lovely day—so crisp and clear—and—— But what is the matter?' she added, after an abrupt pause. 'Are you ill? Papa, dear, what is it?'

She was kneeling by his side in a moment, with her arms twined around his neck and her eyes lifted curiously to his face. 'What is it?' she repeated; 'has anything happened?—where is Anthony?—something is wrong with Harry?'

'Your husband has gone down to Garton, and the boy is well,' he answered, with an effort.

'Then what is it, papa?—are you ill?—has any trouble fallen upon you?'

'Yes, my dear,' he said; 'the greatest trouble of my life, not excepting your mother's death, has come to me this day.'

'And can I do nothing?' she asked, her eyes brimfull of tears and her lips quivering with fear and sympathy.

'Yes,' was the reply; 'there is no one who can help me but you.'

'Then surely you know you have but to tell me what to do, and I will do it.'

For a moment he hesitated. She did not comprehend what she was promising; she could not, of course, guess what he demanded at her hands. He was dear to her, but there was another dearer still, and he was a *murderer!* That thought decided him.

'Joy,' he began, 'if I asked a great sacrifice at your hands—if I required almost as marvellous a faith as Isaac must have felt in his father—should you be able to make or to give it?'

'I hope so,' she answered, bravely enough, though her face was deadly pale and her voice subdued almost to a whisper. 'What is it you want me to do—father?'

'Not much at present,' was his answer. 'I only want you to go to London by the first train you can catch—take a letter for me to my solicitor; then go to Mrs Desmond's, and remain with her for the night. Most probably I shall join you to-morrow, and then we must go to Paris together. I want you to ask no questions, and to speak on this subject to no person till I give you permission to do so.'

'Of course Anthony knows?'

'I have not seen him since the news arrived. I will explain everything to him fully on his return.'

She looked at her father uncertainly for a moment, then she said, lying her hand on his shoulder—

'Dear, there is nothing I would not do for you and my husband, so I will go. Only say it is nothing very, very dreadful that has happened.'

'My darling, God only can tell.'

'When did you say you would come?'

'To-morrow, without fail. And, Joy, I do not wish you to take your maid—she would only prove an encumbrance to us.'

'Very well. I will desire her to pack a few things for me.'

'Ring, then. Do not leave me, Joy. I cannot bear you to be out of my sight.' And so she sat beside him, holding his hand in hers, till Jenkins entered to say the carriage Mr Alton had ordered round was ready.

'Are you coming with me to the station?' she inquired.

'Of course. The idea, Joy, of asking such a question.'

'I did not know. You seem so ill—so utterly prostrated. Oh! papa, do not send me away; let me stay with you, and we will all bear this trouble together, whatever it may be.'

'You can only help me to bear it, Joy, by doing as I request.'

'Then I will go. Tell Anthony I could not help it—but of course he will know that. Where is Harry?—I must kiss him before I leave.'

'He is asleep, ma'am,' said the maid, who stood in the hall with her mistress's shawl hung over her arm.

'Then do not wake him,' exclaimed Mr Alton, hurriedly. 'You will see him again in a day or two, Joy. My dear,' he added, laying his hand on her arm as she was about to run up into the nursery, 'pray do as I ask you;' and he hurried her into the carriage, and bade the coachman drive fast in order to catch the afternoon express to London.

Joy did not ask a question as they drove along—she sat silent, leaning back, marvelling what it could all mean. Never once did she connect this trouble with her husband; but she was utterly, hopelessly at a loss to conceive what the grief might be that had fallen so suddenly upon her father.

When the station was reached, however—and she seated in a compartment alone, and Mr Alton standing on the platform counting the moments to her departure—she put her head out of the window, and said softly—

'Papa, do tell me all about it.'

But he only shook his head, with an expression of such wretchedness in his face as brought the tears rolling one by one down Joy's face.

'My dear, do not,' he entreated.

'Do you think Isaac behaved any better?' she asked, trying to smile—but it was the very ghost of a smile.

'Do not jest about it, darling,' he said, as the train moved slowly off, 'but pray God to help us.'

She waved her hand to him in answer, and the next moment he stood alone on the platform watching the express bearing her away.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE HOUR STRIKES.

It was a lovely moonlight night when Andrew Hardell walked back from Garton. The air was, as Joy had said, crisp and pleasant—the ground dry under foot—the woods still, and not a sound to break the silence save the owl's occasional whit, whit, or the scud of a hare or a rabbit through the tangled grass.

Had the man been in robust health, it was just the night and the walk he would thoroughly have enjoyed; but when he told the great London physician of his lack of strength, he had under-rather than over-rated the physical debility which he never employed as an excuse for declining any work save that of preaching in a large church.

His voice had grown weak, and Joy, sorrowfully acknowledging the fact, refrained from asking him to accept the numerous and often flattering invitations he received.

'I wish I had never teased you into accepting them at all,' she often said, contritely; and though her husband laughed at her penitence and her earnestness, he could not avoid wishing mentally the same thing over and over again.

But that was all now past; and supposing he were able to borrow money and get rid of McPhail, might he still not hope for many a quiet day to come?

He had thought the matter over on his way to and from Garton, and decided to ask Mr St John's assistance and advice. One hundred and twenty pounds was a large sum to a man who only possessed a curate's income, and who had already spent all his hardly-saved earnings in procuring the silence of Mr Brownson; but upon the other hand it was not a large amount to pay for

ease of mind, for liberation from that haunting dread which had been dogging his footsteps now for so many a miserable day.

He would go to London during the course of the week and see Mr St John, and he should then at the same time hear whether that gentleman had come to any arrangement with Anthony on the subject of the two thousand pounds.

It had given him a shock to hear McPhail was lodging with Mrs Pryce, and that shock was supplemented by another when, immediately after parting with his persecutor, he met the widow, dressed in her very best Sunday attire, taking the nearest way to the Hall. At the time he thought this an ominous conjuncture of events, but reflection satisfied him McPhail was not the man to risk his prospects by letting another share his secret; and knowing the lady's weak point, he decided that to further his own purposes McPhail had indulged in a little love-making, and possibly proposed a romantic stroll through the woods on that lovely autumn day.

'I only hope she will not throw herself away on the fellow,' thought Andrew; for he was well aware that Mrs Pryce had saved money, and he considered it by no means improbable that McPhail might marry her for the sake of it. 'However, that is no affair of mine. If she choose to take him, let her. Never again will I mix myself up in the affairs of other people—no, not if I live to be as old as Methusaleh.'

And having reached this wise resolve—which like all other wise resolves came too late to be of the slightest benefit to him—he walked steadily though slowly home—through the woods—across the bridge that spanned the streamlet—along the walks which skirted the plantation—to the Hall.

Arrived in front of the house, he looked towards the drawing-room windows—there was no light in them; then he glanced upwards to Joy's dressing-room—the windows of which were dark likewise.

'She is with Harry!' he exclaimed; and then he remembered she would not be with Harry at such an hour unless he were ill; and it was consequently with a feeling almost of apprehension that he said to Jenkins—

'Where is your mistress?'

'Gone to London, sir.'

'Gone to London!' repeated Andrew, in amazement. 'When did she leave?'

'Afternoon express, sir. Master went with her to the station.'

'Then Mr Alton is within?'

'Oh, yes, sir,' answered the man, who beneath his appearance

of well-trained indifference was hiding a perfect volcano of suppressed curiosity. 'He is in the dining-room, sir.'

'Any visitors?'

'No, sir; no visitors at all to-day, sir;' and with brisk alacrity Jenkins received Mr Hardell's light top-coat and hat, and preceded him to the door of the dining-room, which he threw open with more *empressement*, so it seemed to Andrew, than ever.

A bright fire blazed upon the hearth, but the French windows opening on to the terrace were still open, and Mr Alton, before speaking to his son-in-law, desired Jenkins to close them.

'I am astonished to hear Joy has gone to London,' Andrew remarked.

'Yes, it was necessary for her to go. I will tell you all about it presently;' and then Mr Alton remained silent until Jenkins had quite finished closing the windows and pulling down the blinds, and drawing the heavy crimson curtains.

'Will you take coffee, sir?' inquired that useful servant, when he had arranged all these minor details to his satisfaction.

'No; I shall not require anything more to-night, thank you,' answered Andrew; and then the door closed, and father-in-law and son-in-law looked in each other's face.

Only for a moment, however—then both, as if moved by some sudden impulse, averted their eyes.

'He has heard something,' thought the one.

'He knows that **I** have heard,' decided the other.

'Yes, it had come; let the time of suspense seem never so long, the moment of certainty arrives at last. When he lay in Kirkcudbright and Dumfries jail, the days which were to bring my lords Glanlorn and Craigie appeared to creep away; and yet my lords came, nevertheless. When he sat in the Court-house in Buccleugh Street the hours lengthened themselves into centuries, but still the verdict was given, and the cool night-air immediately after fanned his forehead for all that. For years, in like manner, he had been dreading this Assize, and now it was to be held

Let it; he himself would open the Court.

'Why did Joy go to London so suddenly?'

'I sent her,' Mr Alton answered.

'Nothing the matter, I hope?'

'You may hope, Andrew Hardell,' said Mr Alton vehemently, 'but you must also know that everything is the matter.'

'Does *she* know?'

'If I can help it, she never shall. Why do you sit there silent?' the heart-broken father went on; 'have you no word to say in

your own defence? Have you no explanation to offer, no excuse to make? Can you not say it is all a mistake? some frightful delusion? or is it true you killed the man—stood your trial for murder?'

'I stood my trial and was acquitted, otherwise I should not be talking to you here now.'

'But how acquitted? There was not a soul in England believed you to be innocent, and yet if you can only lay your hand on your heart and swear before your Maker you never murdered that man, liar and hypocrite and cheat as I believe you to be, I will go down on my knees and bless you for your words.'

For a moment there was a dead silence, then Andrew Hardell answered—

'Mr Alton, I have been all you say; I have been a liar, a hypocrite, and a cheat, but I can lie and cheat no longer. Kenneth Challerson died by my act; I did not mean to kill him, but I did.'

'And with that same right hand you took my daughter to wife?'

'Even so;' and the man rose, and striding towards one of the windows, tore back the heavy draperies, and dragged up the blind, and unclasped the fastenings, and flung back the sash as though the room were stifling him.

As the world would see him he then beheld himself—an outcast, with the mark of Cain on his forehead.

It was past—let life have what it would of misery for him, it could never behold a second so brimfull of supreme anguish as that.

'Spare me!' he gasped, rather than said, as Mr Alton was recommencing his reproaches. 'I have long foreseen this hour; I have long been striving to steel myself to meet it, but the blow finds me still unprepared. Oh God!' he went on, vehemently, 'how hard it is to believe in the efficacy of repentance as regards the next world, since it avails so little in this. Now I am going, Mr Alton,' he added, more calmly; 'you need not have sent your daughter away, I should never have obtruded myself on her or you again. If the day ever come when you think it well to tell her all you know, give her a letter you will find in the drawer that key opens,' and he laid one on the table; 'I leave the matter to you. I have no excuse to make, I have no story to tell save this: I loved your daughter with a love passing that of man; I shall love her with the same love through time and through eternity.'

Next instant he was gone—without a hat, without his top-

coat, he passed forth into the night. The dream was ended—the happiness gone—the hope blasted. He had known it would come, but he could not tell how.

In the morning he had risen up confident, at night there was nothing left to him; no, not even a shelter where to lay his head. Rushing forth into the moonlight, he sped on, unconscious of distance, unconscious of fatigue, till he found himself once again, after years, on the grey seashore, listening, in the majesty of the night, to the lap, lapping of the waves as they crept in on the shingle.

And once again, worn out mentally and bodily, he lay down on the green earth and forgot for a time, in slumber, his misery and his regret.

When he awoke the next morning, as, bit by bit, the sea washes portions of a wreck upon the beach, so memory by degrees gave to him a comprehension of all he had lost—of everything which had, the night before, gone down into the depths.

He had expected it, and yet when the blow was dealt, he could scarcely endure the pain, but crawled upon his way like one going to his death.

Some miles from where he had slept, he met a boatman, whom he induced to go to the nearest town, not St Mark's, and purchase a covering for his head, having procured which he buttoned up his coat close, so as to hide his white cravat, and making his way to the nearest station, took his ticket for London.

There he went to see Mr St John, who told him he had been unable to come to any arrangement with the new owner of Lovell's Court.

'He is spending money faster than it can come in,' remarked the lawyer; 'he has horses, and carriages, and visitors, and workmen, yet he said he could not possibly afford to repay you in one lump sum. He offered a hundred a year, and I refused it, and threw up the conduct of his affairs, and did a very ill-natured and a very unprofessional thing on my way back into the bargain.'

'I can scarcely credit that,' Andrew remarked, with a weary attempt at a smile.

'Why, as I returned there were some gentlemen in the same compartment with me talking about Mr Anthony Hardell, his hospitality, his extravagance, and his wife, saying what a handsome woman she must have been, and marvelling where in Australia he managed to pick her up.'

'There is a mystery about her,' said one; 'no one seems to know where she was born, or of whom, or from what part of the earth she comes.'

'She has an air of breeding, however,' remarked another.

'And she keeps him well in hand,' observed a third.

All this time I had been sitting quietly in my corner, but at last I said—

'Do you mean to say, gentlemen, that you have not the faintest suspicion as to the antecedents of the fair mistress of Lovell's Court.'

'No,' they chorused; 'if you can enlighten us, pray do.'

'Does any gentleman here present possess a file of "The Times" newspaper?' I inquired.

'Yes,' said one old squire, 'I do.'

'Then,' I remarked, 'if you will take the trouble of examining the reports of trials for September, 18—, more especially one rather remarkable Scotch trial, I think you will be able to form a very shrewd guess as to where Mr Anthony Hardell met with his wife, and why he married her.'

'I wish you had not done that,' murmured Andrew.

'Why not? shall the wicked for ever prosper like a green bay-tree?'

'Yes; what does it matter—what does anything matter?' said Andrew, sadly.

'Why, what has happened?' demanded Mr St John.

'Mr Alton knows everything; and I intend leaving England at once.'

'Nonsense!' exclaimed the lawyer.

'It is not nonsense—I shall return in a day or two, and tell you all about it.'

'Tell me now.'

'No, I should only make a fool of myself. It came suddenly, and I was not prepared—and—well, perhaps it is better as it is.'

How did your wife take it?'

'She has not been told—there, let me go now. I will return in a day or two, indeed I will.'

But days passed and weeks passed, and still Mr St John's client failing to keep his promise, that gentleman made a journey to Eclin on purpose to see Mr Alton.

'Could he give him his son-in-law's address.'

'I know nothing whatever of his whereabouts,' answered Mr Alton, who looked strangely changed and aged since the lawyer had seen him before.

'Do you know anything about him at all, do you think?——' said Mr St John, vehemently; and then he took up his parable, and recited the story of Andrew's life, just as Andrew had repeated it to him. From the night when the dead man's body lay

stiffening on the road, to the hour when Anthony Hardell returned—the lawyer omitted no particular.

'Had I told you this tale instead of another, you would have dealt more mercifully by him?' asked Mr St John; thinking it might have been the way in which the scandal was communicated that had so affected the man he addressed.

'No,' was the answer; 'the facts remain the same, whether glossed over or enlarged upon; and he shall never see my daughter, if I can help it, in this world more.'

'Is not this a matter which your daughter ought to decide for herself?'

'God forbid she should ever be called upon to do so; for the present, mercifully, she is too ill to think at all.'

'Why mercifully?'

'Because by the time she recovers, the force of the blow will have expended itself.'

'You are mistaken on that point, I imagine,' said the lawyer 'but I will return ere long and talk to you again.'

'You need never speak to me on this subject,' was the reply

'Ah! Mr Alton, you will look at it differently some day.'

'No, sir,' answered the old man; 'I shall not. The more I think of it, the worse I think of it. He came and stole my child from me—he won more love from her in a few months than she ever gave to me in all her life; he, a——'

'Do not say that,' interrupted Mr St John, hastily; 'for your daughter's sake, try to look upon his errors as leniently as you can.'

And despairing of doing any more good at that time, the lawyer returned to London, where he inserted an advertisement in the second column of 'The Times,' entreating the Rev. A. H., formerly of E., immediately to communicate with Messrs St John and Henry, Golden Square.

But to this there came no response; only Mr McPhail called, blustering and threatening to explain how shabbily he had been served.

'He made an appointment with me, and I waited for three hours in the woods, and then when I went up to the house, I found my gentleman flown; and he has never returned to Eclin since.'

'Somebody had been beforehand with you, Mr McPhail,' said Mr St John, with a certain feeling of satisfaction. 'The next time you find out a secret, I should advise you not to divulge it to a woman, more especially a widow.'

'Confound that woman and all women, I say,' exclaimed Mr

McPhail; 'so that is the reading of it? Well, I suppose she must have got it out of me when I was drunk, for I will swear she never did when I was sober. I always suspected she had been sweet on the parson, and owed Miss Joy, as she called her, a grudge. When they have all made it up again, I may give him another call; meantime, sir, I should take it very kindly if you would lend me a five-pound note.'

For a moment Mr St John looked in the fellow's face as though astonished at his impudence, then he quietly said—

'Tell me where I can lay my hand on Mr Andrew Hardell, and I will make it ten.'

'Agreed,' said Mr McPhail, and he left the office, where he never returned to claim the promised reward.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ANDREW'S DECISION.

All this while, in a wretched lodging, scarcely a stone's throw from the offices of Messrs St John and Henry, Andrew Hardell lay fighting for his life with death. Now it seemed as though life were having the best of it; now as though death; but by degrees he got better, and began, weak and feeble though he was, to consider his future, and where it should be spent.

That he could not remain in England was certain; that he had scarcely the strength to go abroad was evident, and yet he decided to take the latter step rather than stay in a country now hateful by reason of the pain he had there endured.

It had all come about as he had expected; as he had pictured in his waking hours; as he beheld the sequel in his dreams; in one respect only differing, that whereas he thought he should be strong enough to endure his sentence, he had broken down under it, and was forced once again to face the world with broken health, broken spirits, and a broken heart.

Better it had come sooner; ere physical weakness had bowed him down; ere his hoard was exhausted; and yet no. Fate had granted him a few months more of Joy and domestic bliss, and why should he repine?

Why, indeed? we cannot always be happy; for some it

suffices to remember they have not always been miserable, and that was sufficient for Andrew Hardell then.

If only he had known how Joy bore it; if only he could have been informed with what fable they had quieted her inquiries, he thought his misery might have proved easier to endure.

As it was, however, so it was; the pain must be wrestled with; the future, the terrible, lonely, obscure future, encountered. In days departed he had tried to nerve himself for the condemned cell; the executioner's rough handling; the noose; the gibbet; the sea of upturned faces; the last foot-hold on life; the first swing into space and eternity; all of which failed to be realized, save in uneasy dreams; and now should he flinch and turn coward? should he, after tholing his last assize, and hearing the last sentence mortal could ever pronounce on his case, cringe back to curse her life a second time; to bring disgrace and dishonour once more across the threshold of her home?

No; love had made him weak once, but love made him strong now; for her sake, for the sake of the woman who was dearer to him by far than the girl had ever been, he would go to distant lands, and live there in obscurity till it pleased God to end the struggle.

When the world said hard things of him, it should likewise remember he had possessed enough decency to refuse to brave its censure. Some day perhaps, when he had long been lying in his quiet grave, one gifted with charity and genius might tell his story to her boy, so as to fill his soul with pity instead of his heart with indignation. Only he would go away; he would not yield to the almost uncontrollable impulse which urged him to revisit Eclin, and see her once more, even if afar off.

He had long ago decided—he would abide by that decision; for good or for evil, he would never seek to influence her life again.

But he had no money with which to leave England. The old prosaic difficulty that had changed the whole course of his existence years before was affecting it now. Without money, how could he go anywhere? what could he do?

It was not competent for him to die in England of starvation without causing a scandal.

The world, which had never left him in peace since that night when he heard the hoofs of Kenneth Challerson's horse thundering after him, would not, he knew, now brook that he should cover his face, and turn it to the wall, and draw up his feet into his bed, and go quietly to his grave, without commenting upon the circumstance.

For wherever he died like a beggar—and he felt persuaded it must come to that sooner or later—it ought not to be in England; and accordingly, when the state of his health permitted him to hold a pen, he sat down and wrote a letter to George Trelwyn, asking if he could lend such and such an amount to take him out of the country.

'I may never be able to repay you,' he said, in conclusion. 'I tell you this frankly; but if I can I will; and if not, in any case you will know it has gone to swell those treasures that I hope and believe are laid up for you in the better land.'

Days passed by, and still no letter. Many a man with his experience would have distrusted his friend, and said, 'Ay, he is like all the rest, once you touch his pocket he has done with you for ever;' but Andrew never swerved.

He could not doubt his friend any more than he could have doubted Joy; or—be it spoken most reverently—than he could have doubted his God. And so, though he felt disappointed—though he grew sick by reason of hope deferred—still he never thought but that the letter or George would come.

And at length it did come. One evening—when the snow was on the ground and ice floating about the Thames—there arrived this:—

'Dear Hardell,—I was in Scotland assisting at the last ceremonial of an old parishioner when your letter reached me. Being detained in outlandish regions by stress of weather, I have only been able to return home to-day. It is unnecessary to say I have not two sovereigns of my own before me in the world, and if you have read of the grand smash-up of my esteemed father-in-law, you will understand it was of no manner of use writing to him. But I went to Sir Hubert, your stately relative. I told him I required two hundred and fifty pounds—the result of which interview is that I enclose a banker's draft for said amount, which you can repay or never pay—just as you please. I must, however, saddle my remittance with a request—Do not leave England till you have seen me. Once Christmas is over—which, thanks to the bankruptcy business, I need never spend again at The Laurels—I shall run up to town—to hear your story—to wish you God-speed—or to do anything else you think my ear or tongue ought to find to do. Till then, believe me, as ever,

'Your friend,

'G. Trelwyn.'

His friend as ever! Andrew Hardell sat with the letter be-

fore him conning over this mystery, which has puzzled more heads than his. How is it, he thought, that let a man be what he will, do what he will, he cannot alienate his true friends; whilst his relatives—those of his own blood and his own household—turn from him?

All alone there the man arrived at a true solution of the enigma—no man can drag down his friends; but the merest spider-thread of relationship is sufficient to involve relatives in social ruin. As a burr sticks to a coat, so does the link of blood. George Trelwyn might assist and might forget him; but how could the wife who had lain in his bosom, the son who was hers as well, ever disassociate themselves from his memory, ever, whether he were living or whether he were dead, cease to be part and parcel of Andrew Hardell?—he who stood up and answered to his name before my lords Glanlorn and Craigie to thole his grievous Assize.

Yes, he was a good fellow—a faithful friend—this George Trelwyn; but he had not been tried in the fiery furnace of relationship. It is when you stand by your father, or your sister, or your brother—when you are true in life and in death to the bond whereby nature has linked you together—that a man's courage and a man's love come really to be tested.

'I shall never preach again,' thought Andrew, 'but, oh! if God would only give me back my strength and youth, a clear conscience and my present experience, I think, knowing what I know, I could speak with the tongues of men and angels too!'

Which was but a thought, reader, and not vain-glorious; for this poor hero of mine had sounded the depths of suffering, and learned therein all that God teaches in this world, of mundane wisdom and heavenly love.

Yes, he would wait, as his friend requested, he would look into that frank, fearless face, and clasp that honest hand, and then he would go where none should know him or have heard his story. He would change his name—he would proceed to far-away lands—he would see the wonders of nature, and behold strange scenes and make acquaintance with unaccustomed people.

To him that bank-draft was as the wand of Aladdin. Possessed of it he could go farther than Columbus—see more marvellous islands than those described by Crusoe.

Meanwhile, to what part of the earth should he think of directing his steps? North or south? To the Happy Islands or to Lapland? To New Zealand or Formosa the beautiful? He would send for 'The Times' and look at the ports to which vessels were advertised to sail. He could afford that extrava-

gance now, when two hundred and fifty pounds, instead of about eighteenpence, stood between him and beggary.

Having arrived at which conclusion he rang his bell, and giving the Ganymede who answered it a shilling, desired her to fetch him that day's 'Times.'

As a mere matter of habit, when he opened the paper he looked first at the second column, where staring him in the face he read:—

'The Rev. A. H., late curate of E——, if in England, is requested to communicate immediately with Messrs St John and Henry, Golden Square. Colonial and American papers will please copy.'

'What can St John want with me?' thought Andrew, as his hand dropped the paper. 'Oh! I remember! I promised to call there in a day or two. Well, I will do so before I leave London after Christmas. The day after to-morrow will be Christmas Day. I hope I shall be able to get to Westminster and join in the service.'

CHAPTER XLIX.

CONCLUSION.

There are three sorts of Christmas weather—cold and dull, dull and damp, damp and warm—and they are all disagreeable, though probably not equally so.

For their own purposes the writers and compilers of Christmas annuals have invented the legend, that on Christmas Eve and Day the snow is either falling, or the sun shining cheerily upon a frozen world; but this variety of Christmas weather exists only in print.

There has not been a frosty Christmas in England for years past, and it is perhaps scarcely going too far to say there never will again.

Let this be as it may, however, that especial Christmas Day on which Andrew Hardell decided to go to Westminster Abbey dawned miserably.

A heavy yellow mist hung over every object, and whilst he walked wearily and weakly down Parliament Street the gas lamps blinked at him through the fog which seemed to be taking away

his breath. The weather was in consonance with the man's thoughts, and certainly did not tend to make them more cheerful. He had taken his passage for South America the day before. He had settled his future thus far, so as to interpose one barrier at least against the arguments he knew George Trelwyn would use to induce him to remain in England. Ill though he felt, he tried to believe the sea voyage—the mere fact of everything being settled, of all hope in this world being dead, of further struggle being vain—would restore his health, and enable him to begin existence in a new land with something of his old energy; and even if this were not so—if, as the days went by, and the vessel left mile after mile of sea behind, he found his malady increase and his strength decrease—if, in the midst of a waste of waters, the end he was not afraid to contemplate arrived,—he would at least be permitted to pass away in silence, making no more confusion in the lives of those for whose sake he meant to go forth an exile to a strange country, from which, under any event, he meant to return no more.

Had it been possible he would have avoided that meeting Mr Trelwyn proposed, but, both as a matter of gratitude and friendship, it was inevitable; and besides, it might be, some day George would find an opportunity of telling Joy how devotedly she had been loved to the end.

Once that interview were over, all for him in England would be likewise. His outfit was ordered—the vessel was to sail ere long—and then farewell to the land which had held so much for him of misery—ay, and of happiness too.

Thinking of these things, he walked into the Abbey and down one of the aisles to a seat near the pulpit. Although it still wanted a few minutes to ten o'clock, a large congregation was already assembled; and as Andrew passed down between the rows of seats, a gentleman touched his companion—a lady — and pointed out his presence to her.

'Is not that Mr Hardell?' he whispered, and Madge—for it was she—looking after Andrew pacing slowly down the aisle, recognized him also.

'How frightfully he has changed,' she answered in the same tone; and it was true. His recent illness had worn him to a skeleton, and the hand with which he supported his head was mere skin and bone.

But the service went on, and still through the dim light Madge could see that weary head resting on that feeble hand while the Lessons proper for the day were being read.

With an unspeakable pity her heart went out towards the

man who had once been so much to her. She sate but a little distance behind, and knowing what she knew—comprehending what an awful secret his life held—understanding vaguely, it is true, but nevertheless to some extent, the misery he must have endured—Madge watched his every movement with a sort of fascinated attention.

All through the Litany, whenever she raised her eyes they wandered to the figure kneeling so short a distance off; and as she remembered the days when boy and girl they had gone to church together at Langmore, unbidden tears welled up from the springs of memory.

'What did the responses mean to him?' she marvelled; 'they had been but as Greek to both of them once, but sin and sorrow, suffering and death, were no unmeaning words, no mere figures of speech to either now.'

And still the prayers went on, and the Litany was ended, and the congregation, after one prolonged 'Amen' from the choir, arose from their knees and resumed their seats—took out their handkerchiefs, coughed, produced smelling-salts, and went, in fact, through the usual performance which obtains during the pauses in church worship. There was one man, however, who did not rise with the rest, but remained—his head resting on his folded arms—till his next neighbour touched his shoulder.

There was no response, however, and then the gentleman, seeming to take alarm, moved him gently, and then whispered for help, saying, 'He has fainted.'

In a moment Herbert Spencer was beside him, and with some more assistance they carried him out into the porch, where Madge followed.

'He is not dead?' she said to Herbert in a terrified whisper.

'No, dearest—not dead, but——'

'He will soon be better now,' said a doctor, who had been holding his wrist. 'A case of downright exhaustion. Is he a friend of yours, sir?' he added, addressing Mr Spencer.

'No—of this lady,' and he indicated Madge. 'I know, however, who he is—the Rev. Mr Hardell.'

'Well, the sooner he can be taken home, the better. Do you know where he lives? No? Perhaps by the time a cab is fetched he may be able to tell us;' and acting on this hint, Herbert hurried off to the stand, and brought back a conveyance.

But still Andrew remained unconscious. 'Better examine his pockets for an address,' suggested the doctor, and suiting the

action to the word, he drew forth a letter—George Trelwyn's letter —which was addressed to the Rev. A. Hardell,
30, Blank Street,
Soho.

'I think I ought to go with you,' said the doctor, looking very grave when he read the superscription. 'It strikes me Blank Street is not precisely the place where a man in his state would be likely to receive proper attention;' and as Mr Spencer thankfully accepted this offer, Andrew was placed in the cab, which drove slowly back to the wretched lodgings he had selected as suitable to his means.

'Dear, dear,' said a slatternly woman who admitted them. 'I knew how it would be. I told him he was no more fit to be going about to-day and yesterday than a baby an hour old. He has been ill here for weeks, and a nice handful I have had of it; did not know whether he had a friend in the world, and never could tell from one day to another whether he would live through it; and now here he is brought back in this state, of a Christmas Day of all days, too, when he was just a-going to have a friend or two, though, to be sure,' she added, with an eye to future pecuniary considerations, 'one does not mind what one does for him, he is so quiet and so kind a gentleman. He gave our Tommy half-a-crown this morning for a Christmas-box, and the postman the same.'

'Is he quite alone here, then?' inquired Madge, to whom these remarks were principally addressed.

'Quite, miss; and he has not had a soul to see him, and only one letter since he came.'

'Then, until we can send for his wife, I will remain,' said Madge, decidedly.

'Is he a friend of yours, miss? if I may be so bold.'

'I have known him all my life,' Madge answered; and she followed the woman into the miserable apartment, where he had fought with his trouble and endured his sickness all alone.

Meanwhile Mr Spencer, the doctor, and the cabman had laid Andrew on a sofa, when, some restoratives being applied, he opened his eyes, and inquired feebly where he was.

'Amongst friends,' Mr Spencer answered; and thus answered, Andrew laid his head down wearily again on the pillows they had placed for him.

'He will do better now,' said the doctor 'I will send in a nurse.'

'No,' answered Madge; 'I shall stay with him until his wife comes.'

'You?' repeated her cousin, in astonishment; 'my dear Madge, what are you thinking of?'

'I will tell you, Herbert,' she said, drawing him aside. 'It is not for any love's sake, for that is dead and buried; but because I know how terrible a trouble is behind all this, I must remain till we understand a little more about it.'

'I do not quite comprehend you,' Mr Spencer replied, bewildered. 'Love's sake! You never cared for Anthony Hardell.'

'That is not Anthony Hardell—it is Andrew. I should have told you so before this; but the secret was not quite mine—or at least I fancied it was not.'

'Then this is not the man who married Mrs Challerson?'

'No; but he is married, and we must find out where his wife lives, and bring her to him.'

'What terrible trouble was it you referred to just now?' asked her cousin.

'I may trust you, Herbert?' she answered, after a moment's thought. 'He was not innocent, and he married without ever telling his wife anything about that.'

'I wonder whether they have quarrelled?'

'If they have, they must be reconciled.'

'How are we to find out where she lives?'

'You had better go to Essex Marsh, and see the clergyman there; perhaps he may be able to tell you.'

Acting upon which advice, Herbert started for Essex Marsh, only to meet with disappointment, however. Mr Dayntree had gone to Norfolk, and was not expected back for a fortnight.

'We must wait, then,' Madge said, when she heard this; 'tomorrow, perhaps, he will be stronger, and able to tell me himself.'

The next day Andrew was stronger, but Madge did not moot the subject to him, for unexpected help arrived in the person of George Trelwyn, who had hurried up to London by the early morning express in order to see his friend.

'Know?' he said, in answer to Madge's eager inquiries, 'of course I know, and I shall start off to Eclin without a moment's delay. I do not want to seem impertinent, but as a matter of curiosity I should like to know your name.'

'Madge Forster,' she said simply.

'Bless my soul!' Mr Trelwyn exclaimed; and then Madge knew that her past and Andrew's past were both known to him. 'I will go,' he added, after an instant's pause, 'on my sad errand.

I wish it were some other than I who had to tell Joy Hardell her husband is dying.'

'And do you really think so?' she inquired.

'Sure of it,' he answered; 'as certain as I am that if he could only die at Eclin, it would be the happiest day of his life.'

'But the doctor says he has no actual disease.'

'No, but he is dying, for all that, of a broken heart.'

That same night Mr Trelwyn returned.

'I am going to try to move you to-morrow,' he said to Andrew, who, sitting up in an easy-chair, looked with tired eyes and a faint smile at his friend as he spoke. 'The doctor thinks you will be better in a purer air.'

'Ah!' said the sick man, and there was a little plaintive ring in his voice, 'all places are alike to me now.'

'But you will come to please me?'

'Yes, anywhere to please you;' and he asked no question, but dropped back into the reverie which seemed now utterly to absorb him.

Next morning Mr Trelwyn came with a carriage in which the invalid was able to lie almost at full length; but still Andrew asked no question, or inquired whither they were taking him. The only anxiety he manifested was that Madge should come too.

'I am coming,' Madge murmured in reply. Yes, she was going to meet the wife who had been so much to Andrew, the while Madge, faithful to an idea, had kept single for his sake.

'I know this place,' the sick man suddenly exclaimed, as the carriage turned down a well-remembered street leading to the station, from which he had so often taken train to Eclin; 'where are you going to take me?'

'Back to your own home,' George Trelwyn answered, 'which you ought never to have left. I have seen Mr Alton, and he will meet us at St Mark's. I have seen your wife and told her all.'

'All?' Andrew repeated, interrogatively.

'Yes,' his friend replied, understanding that the dying man meant to ask was she aware of his condition.

'She has been very ill herself,' Mr Trelwyn went on; 'she wanted sadly to return with me last night, but we thought it better not—her father and I.'

'Oh, my poor Joy!' exclaimed her husband, and he never spoke after that till they reached St Mark's.

Profound grief is generally silent—the deeper the cut the less it bleeds, and grief was very silent that day at the Hall.

From the room where the husband and wife met, there came no cry, no sob, no scream; it was all subdued, quiet, peaceful;

and when others went in to find them silent, hand clasped in hand, although there were the traces of tears on Joy's cheeks, still she greeted those who had been the means of bringing them together again, with a thankful smile.

Soon after their arrival Madge wanted to leave, but this Joy would not permit.

'Stay with me,' she pleaded; 'I hope we shall be dear friends for his sake, and for the sake of your own great kindness to him. But for you I might never have seen him again. My poor father meant it all for my good, but—but—I do not think any man ever correctly understands what a woman's love really is.'

To which Madge assented, understanding that Joy was thinking not of the patient and enduring love the woman she addressed had pursued through lonely years, but of that perhaps rarer love that can forgive all wrong, forget all deception, condone all suffering, and remember nothing save the man's own sorrow and the man's remorse.

In the old familiar room he seemed to get a little stronger; looking over the remembered landscapes, his face acquired an expression of peace, to which it had long been a stranger.

With dear friends around from whom there was no longer any confidence withheld, the darkness of the trouble that had shadowed his existence was partially dispelled.

Fear was gone, dread had departed, life was drawing to a close; what though the flame burnt at times with sufficient brightness to cheat the observations of those about him and fill them with false hopes, he knew the end was nigh at hand.

And did he wish it otherwise? I think not. The peace he felt could never have been his had an idea of going back once again into the world entered his mind.

The old perplexities vexed him no more; there was no further defence to make, the dead past lay coffined and buried without the possibility of resurrection so far as he personally was concerned. The fears that had distracted him were dispelled—the hopes, the dreams, the aspirations of his life were gone, even as life itself was going. He should thirst no more for popularity even whilst dreading that awful ghost it was competent he always felt for popularity to raise. He should never fancy men were whispering, 'Yes, that is he who stood his trial at Dumfries.'

He should never see a shadow of regret on his wife's face about that—all her trouble would be now for him.

His whole existence had been one long fever of disappointment, regret, repentance, dread; and now when the fever was

past, and his heart throbbed quietly, should he desire to go through any portion of it again?

No; he was content. For him, as for the lark let loose on Walthamstow Marsh, there could be no more captivity—no restless beating against the bars—no longing for the bright blue sky, and the cool, dewy grass, and the long flight upwards towards the very arch of heaven.

It was all peace; it was all—save for the parting with Joy and her boy—happiness.

It was like rest after toil—like sleep after labour—like joy after sorrow—like sunshine after rain.

He did not suffer much, excepting from extreme weakness; and so the hours stole by, and then the days—and it was the last night of that old year, which had been so eventful an one to him.

They all sat in his room talking—not sorrowfully, but yet quietly, as those often do who know that death may soon be in their midst.

'Come near to me, Joy,' said her husband, when there was a pause and a silence in the apartment.

She was never far distant from him, but at his words she left the window near which she had been standing, and sat down by his side.

'Hark!' he said, suddenly; and some one who was commencing a sentence stopped in the midst.

'They are Garton bells!' exclaimed George Trelwyn, throwing open the window and leaning out into the night to listen.

Yes; through the night came the jubilant ecstasy, the exulting clamour, the pealing changes, greeting the new-comer.

Joy bent her head as the glad chimes rang through the stillness, and the tears she could not check fell silently. Then, moved by some unexplained influence, she turned towards her husband.

But there was to be no New Year for him. He was gone where all the years of time are gathered into eternity.

THE END.

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