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BELFOREST.

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BELFOREST.

A

TALE OF ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“MARY POWELL,” AND “THE LADIES OF BEVER HOLLOW.”

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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BELFOREST.

CHAPTER I.

TRESELLIS.

“FRANK! Mrs. Homer has two hundred a year!” cried Mrs. Weir, the next time she and her son were together.

“Then I hope she gives away half of it,” said he. “She may live very well on the other half in Saffery’s lodgings.”

“Nonsense, my dear, no one would do that.”

“There *is* a widow, though, on record, mother, who gave away all that she had.”

“All that she *then* had,” said Mrs. Weir.

“Why, you would rob the example of all its force!”

“We must be guided by probabilities, Frank.”

“The probability is,” said he, sitting down, and leaning towards her, with one of his thoughtful looks, “that the case was exactly as our Saviour stated it to be. Otherwise He would have let it pass. If the poor woman knew that she had just then two mites in her pocket, but that she should have plenty more in the course of the day—there would have been nothing to call attention to in that! It was, just then, *her all*: and she could not well spare it.”

Mrs. Weir knitted in silence a few seconds.

“As for Mrs. Homer’s having two hundred a year,” resumed he, “what is there in that, or what is it to us? If she has no more, she is unwise to think of building. It will go but a little way in brick and mortar.”

“You took me up too short, Frank, and didn’t hear me to the end. Mrs. Homer may probably have more; indeed, she said as much, I think. She may have funded property, she may have a dower; but this two hundred per annum came to her in a singular way, from a deceased lover.”

“Ay?—how was that, mother?” She was quite ready to tell him. He listened to her

with interest, though without apparent surprise.

It was quite easy, he said, to imagine a man becoming deeply attached to so attractive a person as Mrs. Homer. It showed a thoughtful turn of character, to consider and act upon the possibility of sudden death ; and a generous disinterested mind to provide for her whom he intended to make his wife, whether she became so or not.

“But, since you say she says that she could not return his affection,” pursued he, “it was a very happy thing indeed for both parties that the marriage did not take place. Indeed, I think she did wrong and quite unwisely to be drawn to the brink of it.”

“Through the persuasions of her family.”

“Ah, heads of families do very wrongly in these matters sometimes. Did she tell you anything about her actual marriage?”

“Not a word, my dear. When I alluded to it, she covered her eyes with her hand, and said, ‘Excuse me, there are some subjects too tender to approach.’”

“Poor thing, she feels very acutely.”

“Why, yes : one would think she need not

be quite so sensitive by this time. She has changed her mourning, and has very cheerful spirits generally, though always quiet. As for building, which I agree with you in thinking very inexpedient, that was probably only a temporary fancy, before she knew the cost. I don't think we shall hear any more of it. She is going to decline Farmer Benson's land this evening."

"That's a good thing."

"And Mrs. Fownes has told her of a cottage that may suit her."

"That's good too. Where is it?"

"I cannot exactly tell you, but it is called Tresellis. Do you know the name?"

"Not in the least. It sounds well at any rate."

"It is time for you to dress, for the Gre-villes' dinner."

"Yes.—Mother, I wish I were not going. What a farce it is, to dine at this time of day! My real dinner was when you dined—I want nothing more, but a cup of coffee."

"Yes; but, my dear, we read of rich men's feasts in the Bible. They draw people together who would not otherwise meet."

“Yes,” he said slowly, “that was why our Lord sat occasionally at rich men’s tables, even on the Sabbath : it gave Him opportunities of usefulness. And for no other reason do I go to the Grevilles’, for I come back quite spoilt for study. I would rather live, like Mrs. Homer, on bread and fruit. How famous it would be now, if Mr. Greville were to say, ‘My dear friends, we know we have in fact all dined already ; we will just have a little wine and fruit, and enjoy a little chat ; and here’s a twenty-pound cheque which I hand over to Mr. Weir for the good of the parish.’”

“Oh, you absurd, you visionary fellow ! There, go and dress :—I won’t hear any more of such nonsense.”

Mr. Weir fancied he was gaining some hold on the Grevilles, which he might make good use of ; and, therefore, without any more grumbling, he prepared to make a martyr of himself.

It was vexatious to Mrs. Saffery, that, in spite of her venturing on an officious reminder, Mrs. Homer did not write to Farmer Benson that evening ; but remained in a meditative state, reclining on the couch of no repose.

A little past the family bed-time, just when Michael Saffery was at his sleepest, she requested an interview with him. Rubbing his drowsy eyes, he stumbled across the shop and entered her presence, blinking worse than before at the effulgence of her little apartment,

She wanted to inquire about Tresellis—had he ever heard of such a place?—Oh yes, he knew the name, though he seldom had occasion to hear it—it was Mr. Binks's cottage—it had long been shut up, and he should think must be greatly out of repair—he supposed it might be had for a mere song. Mr. Oldsmith had the key: it was in his hands altogether, because he had married Mr. Binks's only daughter:—old Mr. Binks was dead. So, with this information for her guide, Mrs. Homer applied next morning to Mr. Oldsmith for the key, and, he not being at home, it was given her by Mrs. Oldsmith, who, moreover, offered to send a boy with her to unlock the door and open the shutters. Finally it was agreed that the boy should be sent in advance; and he started off at a pace that promised to keep him well ahead; though, happening to start a squirrel

by the way, he was led off his path by the chase, and did not reach Tresellis much before Mrs. Homer.

Mrs. Oldsmith assured her it was a sweet retirement, and that it was named after some charming place in Cornwall, where her father had been in service during his youth.

“Is it very lonely?”

“Well, ma’am, it certainly stands quite alone-like, but I never thought of it as lonesome. You see, there were my father and two brothers in the house : and father had a gun.”

This made all the difference, Mrs. Homer thought ; and as she took her way along the rutty, winding lane, between steep gravelly banks, that led to Tresellis, she weighed romance *versus* thieves and murderers somewhat anxiously.

She reached it at length. There was no other cottage in the lane—it stood where the road made a little curve, and was nestled in that curve, with a patch of very green grass before it, and a green pond beside it, shaded by two or three willows. The garden was very small, but prettily laid out ; as if a landscape gardener had determined to show how much might

be made of a little plot by artistic arrangement of a few simple elements. But it was weedy and seedy; the gate hung on one hinge; the trellised porch was rotting; the rose-tree trailed over it had sent forth long straggling shoots.

The boy had already opened the door, and Mrs. Homer, on entering, was aware of a peculiar odour arising from damp. When he threw open the windows, however, this passed off; and she found there were two parlours on different levels, a small kitchen and scullery, and three bedrooms. It wanted whitewashing, papering, and what Mrs. Oldsmith called "the 'and of taste;" but it did not need substantial repair, and it was undeniably romantic. It was meagrely furnished. The rent was thirty pounds. There were some scattered cottages beyond it; so that Tresellis was not quite as lonely as it looked.

Yes, Mrs. Homer thought it would do. She considered the difference that crimson drugget and muslin drapery, and books, gold fish, and a harp would make; and felt that this might be the retreat for which she was looking out. With more haste than she had taken any

measure yet, she returned to Mr. Oldsmith's, and engaged Tresellis for a year, with the privilege of continuing in occupation as long as she pleased.

"And your references, ma'am?" said Mr. Oldsmith.

"Oh!" said she, smiling, "you may ask the Safferys, or Mrs. Weir, or my solicitors, Messrs. Root and Branche, of Lincoln's Inn, if you are in any doubt about me."

"Oh, ma'am, the names you have mentioned are quite sufficient," said Mr. Oldsmith. "Nobody could desire eligibler references than Mrs. Weir and Mrs. Saffery."

"On second thoughts," said she, "perhaps you had better not trouble Mrs. Weir. It will only cost you a penny, you know, to write to Messrs. Root and Branche."

"Just so; oh, no, ma'am, I wouldn't think of doubting a lady like you. By quarter-day you shall find the house in tenantable repair."

Mrs. Homer returned and told what an important step she had taken, to Mrs. Saffery, who seemed rather dubious about its expedience.

“Why, ma’am,” said she, “I never named Tresellis to you, because I felt sure it wouldn’t do. It’s such a gnatty little place.”

“Natty? that’s in its favour, surely,” said Mrs. Homer. “I want a natty little place, and I fancy Tresellis will be one when I have fitted it up.”

“I said gnatty, ma’am, because of the gnats over the pond and under the trees; but to be sure, the gnats will soon be over for the season. And to think of going into Tresellis before Christmas! Why, ma’am, that lane in winter is a complete squash; and the walls are very thin.”

“Mrs. Oldsmith told me she had spent her happiest hours there.”

“Ah, but she was brought up different from you, ma’am, and she was young, and she had a sweetheart, and her parents were alive that are now dead, and—

“ ‘Tis distance lends enchantment to the view,’ ”

said Mrs. Saffery, with a prodigious effort of memory.

Mrs. Homer looked a little discomfited; but after a pause said—

“We each know our own requirements best, Mrs. Saffery. *I* am seeking for repose.”

And she shut herself into her little parlour, to write for the evening post. Nussy had listened to the above little dialogue with rather anxious interest. She pictured to herself Tre-sellis fitted up with elegance, as the abode of refined seclusion, but her mother's discouragements made her fearful lest Mrs. Homer should have made an unfortunate mistake. Still, she thought it would be very charming for some accidental wanderer, Mr. Antony, for instance, in straying down Quagmarsh Lane, to hear the vibrating tones of the harp, and to catch the gleam of the darting gold fish through the open latticed window.

“She's been and written to Farmer Benson, at last,” said Mr. Saffery under his breath at supper-time, when he came in from sorting the letters. “And there's a pretty fat packet going to Miss Crowe, at Ipswich.”

“That's her sister, according to Miss Antony,” said Mrs. Saffery. “Quite right to tell her all about it.”

“How nice it would be for Mrs. Early to have charge of the house,” said Nussy.

“Tush, child ; she won’t put any one into it before she goes in. Saffery, do you know anybody that lives at Ipswich ?”

“Not a soul ; I knew a man once that lived at Sandwich.”

“Why, that isn’t a bit to the purpose.”

“How do I know what the purpose is ? you haven’t told me. I suppose you want somebody to rake at the ashes of the late Mr. Homer, like as I am this moment raking at the ashes of the fire.”

“Hush, Saffery : the walls are thin. Miss Antony said she was quite respectable—”

“And it’s astonishing to me that that don’t satisfy you. It’s something wonderful, the curiosity of women.”

“It’s not curiosity, it’s interest—”

“Oh, gammon,” said he, laughing.

Here the shop-bell tinkled, and he went to answer it. Mr. Oldsmith, under pretence of wanting some stamps, had come to inquire about Mrs. Homer ; so Mr. Saffery, having signified to him by nods and winks and knowing smiles that she was barely out of hearing, told him under his breath all he could think of that would set his mind at

rest,—that she paid reg'lar, was quite the lady, attended the Sunday school, visited Mrs. Weir and Mrs. Fownes, had been known from girlhood by Miss Antony, sister of Mr. Antony the noted artist, whose pictures went to the exhibitions,—that the quality of her table-linen and the marks on her spoons showed she had been accustomed to good style—that her father had retired from the army, her mother had kept a boarding-school. “Oh, you may depend upon her, she's safe, safe as the Bank ; her solicitors are Messrs. Root and Branche, Lincoln's Inn.”

And what did it all amount to? Why, to as much or as little as the references we are accustomed to accept every day ; testimonials worth nothing at all. A vouches for B to C. Does C know anything of A ? Nothing at all. “But two heads are better than one” says the adage ; and “Oh, he was recommended by A,” is better than having no reference to quote, even though A's recommendation should prove valueless.

The decisive step once taken, Mrs. Homer became as busy as she had hitherto been inert. Roberto and the pony-chair were again in

requisition, that she might go to the next town to look at the paper-hangers' pattern-books; for there were none in Belforest; and she brought home little scraps of those she fancied, and took them to Tresellis, and stuck them against the walls with pins, and considered their appearance at various distances, and got Mr. Oldsmith to go and look at them, and asked his opinion. It was all in his day's work, Mr. Oldsmith thought, but it took him a good deal of what would otherwise have been his work for the day.

Often she might be seen pensively leaning her head on her hand, with a pencil and small piece of paper before her, to subserve her purpose in making out a list of "must wants," and "may wants."

Nessy was now scarcely ever without some nice book in reading. Mr. Weir lent her the lives of Oberlin, and Neff, and Sarah Martin; also Moffat's Africa, and Longfellow's smaller poems, including the Psalm of Life, and the Children of the Lord's Supper. She racked her brains with vain conjectures as to what Edith's parting monosyllable could have been: nothing could be made of it; but one thing

was pretty sure, that Mrs. Homer and Miss Antony were not cordial towards one another. Perhaps they had had differences at school: what a pity to remember them now!

CHAPTER II.

CANONS OF CRITICISM.

THE first time Nessy saw Mr. Antony was through the shop-window when he came to post his letters the morning after his arrival at Daisylands. He was unaccompanied by his sister, and he came into the post-office to speak a kind word to the Safferys, and to beg a few minutes' rest, looking so worn and weak that it pained them to see him.

"You mustn't sit down in the shop, sir; you must step into the parlour," said Mrs. Saffery, cordially. "Dear me! you *are* pulled down! Any one can see you've had a bad illness."

"Oh! that's gone and past," said he, in his old, cheerful way. "There's no good in thinking of yesterday's pain or of yesterday's dinner. Well, Miss Saffery, there's your grand performance, I see. Still up to the eyes in oil and varnish?"

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“ Oh, no, sir ! ”

“ Got to the end of your paints, I suppose.”

“ No, sir ; I’ve had other things to do. Besides which, I came to a stand.”

“ Artists and authors are very much given to that, Nussy ; you must not think your case peculiar. They come to the end of their ideas for a time, or stick fast in some difficulty. Then their best plan is to do as you have done—turn their attention to something else. After a while their minds are replenished from one source and another ; they accumulate new ideas almost insensibly ; and when they take up their work again, they resume it quite naturally and easily. They are all the better for their rest.”

“ That is very encouraging, sir.”

“ But I dare say you have been doing something or other since I was here, haven’t you ? ”

“ Oh, yes, sir ! but nothing to show.”

“ Oh, very well ; if you don’t want a friend’s remarks—”

“ But I should like them very much, sir, since you are so kind,” said Nussy, running off for her little collection of unfinished attempts.

While she was gone, Mrs. Homer began to play Martin Luther's Hymn in pretty good time. Mr. Antony listened to it with pleasure and a little sadness.

"So you've a musical lodger," said he, when Nussy returned.

"Mrs. Homer, sir. I so love to hear her play."

"Her harp has a very pleasant tone. Now we shall see what we shall see. Halloa! Why you've been trying your hand at the scene I'm going to paint! Are you going to cut me out, and make me second fiddle?"

"No, sir," said Nussy, laughing; "it would be difficult to do that; but you know I was one of the party when you first attempted it, and we were all very happy and comfortable together, and I had pleasant recollections of the place, so I just made that scrawl as a remembrance."

"Yes," said he, after a pause; "we *were* all very happy and comfortable together, as you remark; and you have got the general effect pretty well in, though I mean to do something a deal better."

"Oh, of course, sir."

“Why of course? I suppose this little bandy-legged man in the foreground is intended for me. With your leave, I’ll touch myself up.”

“I’m sure I beg your pardon, sir.”

“Beg pardon of my hat, too, while you’re about it. Why, this hat, supposing it on the same scale with myself, is half a yard high! There, I’ve touched myself up and lowered my crest. Go on and prosper. You are doing very well.”

“If I had a pattern or two—” said Nussy.

“Let nature be your pattern. However, I’ll lend you a little thing or two.”

“Oh, thank you, sir!”

“Don’t waste any more time in drawing ladies in crinolines.”

“It *was* foolish, I know.”

“Quite time misspent. Spoils your eye for the line of beauty. You recollect about that?”

“Oh, yes, sir! and the basketful of angels!”

He had forgotten the passing joke, and, having now rested himself, wished her good-bye. Going through the shop, he passed Mrs. Homer. Her eyes being gravely cast down, he took a good look at her.

On his return to the farm, he said, mischievously—

“ Well, Edith, I’ve seen Mrs. Homer.”

“ Sorry for it,” said Edith, who was deep in a book.

“ And heard her play the harp.”

“ Do you mean she played to *you* ? ” cried Edith, dropping her book.

“ No, I don’t,” replied he, laughing. “ I only heard it through the wall.”

“ Oh ! *I* know what sort of a player she is.”

“ She seemed to me to play very nicely. I could have listened for ever ! ”

“ Stuff ! ”

She picked up her book, and presently said, with feigned unconcern—

“ Did you think her pretty ? ”

“ More than pretty. Her downcast eyelids reminded me of the Mater Dolorosa at Dulwich.”

“ Where did you see her, pray ? ”

“ In passing, in Mrs. Saffery’s shop. How you dislike that little woman, Edith ! ”

“ I hope I do. Her life is an acted lie.”

“ Rather a coarse word from a lady’s mouth.”

“ A true one, though, Leo.”

“ Perhaps she’ll call upon you.”

“ No, I don’t think she will.”

“ Shall you cut her, if you casually meet ?”

“ How can I ? We exchanged cold civilities the other day. In fact, she asked me, in her hollow way, to have bread and fruit, knowing there was no fruit in the house.”

“ That’s gratuitous, Edith. I should say she had been civil *without* being cold, unless as concerning cold victuals.”

“ Well, you know my reasons for objecting to her,” said Edith, starting up and exchanging her book for some needlework ; “ if you don’t think they’re valid, I can’t help it.”

“ Are you going to peach to anybody while you’re here ?”

“ Why now, Leonard, how can you ask such an absurd question ? Who is there to peach to ? if that word is elegant enough for the elegant Mr. Antony !”

“ Oh, there are plenty of people to peach to, if that’s the only question. ‘ Where there’s a will, there’s a way.’ There are Mrs. Saffery and Nussy, to begin with.”

“ I should not think of speaking on such subjects to a child. And Mrs. Saffery is nobody to me.”

“Just so. As much a nobody as Mrs. Homer is to me.”

Edith seemed relieved by this remark.

“Do you seriously think,” said she, presently, “that it is my duty to keep it secret?”

“Duty here or duty there,” replied Mr. Antony, “it is surely not your duty to make it public. What call have you to interfere? What good would it do? You would simply be officious. It must be a very trying and almost impossible thing, I am well aware, for a woman to keep to herself a scandal concerning her neighbour.”

“Nonsense, Leo.”

“But, under the circumstances, it would be commendable to rise superior to the temptation. However, I’ll bet you anything you like that you’ll tell, before the month’s end.”

“Done! A pair of gloves! Two pair!”

“No, no,” said he, laughing, “one pair will be quite enough. What book have you got hold of?”

“Joanna Baillie’s plays. They are so delightful!”

“Don’t they contain a singular amount of swearing, for a lady?”

“They do,” said Edith reluctantly, “but it was more the custom, I suppose, then, and she was a young, inexperienced writer, and thought it needful to make her men seem manly.”

“So it was; only there are different ways. Nussy Saffery thinks she makes a landscape figure manly by clapping a tall hat on his head.”

Here Mr. Antony had a fit^s of yawning, which Edith knew proceeded from weakness; so she hastened to procure him some refreshment.

“I think,” said he, “if I had a second glass of wine, I might manage to crawl to the hutted knoll.”

“No, not to-day.”

“I think I shall try.”

“I shall hide your hat. Leonard, there’s going to be a harvest-feast next week—a regular harvest-home! Are we not in luck’s way?”

“Seemingly. Perhaps I shall pick up some little bits *à la* Teniers or Ostade.”

“Not Ostade, please. Mrs. Benson is going to make gigantic preparations—to boil plum-puddings in the copper, and bake pies in milk-

pans, and roast enormous pieces of beef. But first they will have a short service in the church, which will be decorated with corn-sheaves and bunches of grapes. Pretty, isn't it?"

"That depends. Grapes seem rather bacchanalian."

"Trophies of plenty and thankfulness—first-fruits, dedicated to the Lord. I like the idea. If you would interest yourself in it, you might improve the effect."

"No, thank you! Let the cobbler stick to his last. They would not thank me for meddling."

This harvest-feast was the grand event of the year to hospitable Mrs. Benson, who came out in great force on such occasions; and the farmer dearly loved to get a few of the gentry to grace the solemnities, like Polixenes and Camillo at the old shepherd's sheep-shearing. Thus, on the present occasion, he invited the Safferys, and he got Mr. and Mrs. Weir to promise to look in, and thought it hard that the pretty widow who had lately tried him so much by her indecision, should be left out.

"You see, old woman," said he to Mrs. Benson, "she's not minded for dinner-company

and that, and, if she were, I don't know as the gentry would ask her; but she may enjoy looking on at a harmless merry-making for all that; so if I come across her, she shall at least have the refusal."

And he did come across her; and Mrs. Homer, with one of her sweetest smiles, told him she should be happy to come, just as a looker-on.

As for Mrs. Weir, she had heard so much of Mrs. Benson as a manager, and so much of the domestic arrangements at Daisylands, that she promised herself great pleasure in looking well over the premises.

The intervening time passed busily and pleasantly enough. Mr. Antony, with Edith's assistance, managed to pitch his easel on what he chose to call "the hutted knoll," and to begin his picture, she taking care to be not very far away from him, and to be ready either to lay his palette or supply him with refreshment. We need not ask how the farmer and his wife were employed; they had their hands full, and so had their underlings. Mr. Weir was preparing a harvest sermon, and getting the school children perfect in the harvest hymn. Mrs. Homer was looking after Tresellis.

It was wonderful how quickly Mr. Antony's health improved under the advantages of country air and diet, with a picture in hand to which he was resolved to give the nicest finish. Edith, too, began to find imagination and fancy revive under such favourable auspices, and in her solitary rambles she speedily framed the outline of a simple little tale, which she had ample opportunity for committing to paper while her brother was painting. Within a stone's throw of one another, and scarcely exchanging a syllable, the sense of each other's nearness made them seem excellent companions.

When Sunday morning came, Edith was sorry that Mr. Antony meant to remain at home, reading or idling; but, as this was nothing new, she did not contest it, but took her own way across the hilly field in the direction of the church chime of three bells. Afterwards, during their early dinner, she said—

“You should have been at church this morning, Leo. There was such a nice, hearty, simple service; and I could hear the rooks cawing through the open door all the time. What do you think the text was?”

“How can I possibly guess?”

“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.”*

“Humph! That was a satisfactory hearing to the congregation, I suppose. You seem to have been pleased to hear it.”

“It was very impressive in Mr. Weir’s hands. He showed how we *might* be saved more clearly than I ever heard done before; he made it seem so simple, that it was the height of ingratitude not to avail ourselves of such attainable means.”

“So it is, no doubt.”

“Why don’t we, then?”

“Why don’t we what?”

“Avail ourselves of those means.”

“My dear child, you are perfectly welcome. I don’t know that any one hinders you.”

“Sometimes I think we are living too much for this world. I feel a want.”

“Who does not? Do you think your case peculiar?”

“Even if everything were to go straight—if you were always to sell your pictures, and I my books—that would not be sufficient to make us happy.”

* Jer. viii. 20.

“ I believe you,” said Mr. Antony, moodily.

“ And then, as to fame :—why, if we had ever so much of it, that would not satisfy.”

“ Very likely not.”

“ And even the—the affections.”

“ You may as well leave them alone.”

“ Mr. Weir did not, though. He said, ‘ Mad and foolish are they who despise the affections in religion, *for through them the Spirit speaks.*’ That was rather nice, I think, Leonard ? ”

“ I dare say—”

“ He said, ‘ *Silly* people can never really be believers ; and believers can never be silly people.’ ”

“ Humph. That sounds deeper, I believe, than it is.”

“ Or take it the other way, Leo, that it is deeper than it sounds. That good little Nesity Saffery gives up all her time between breakfast and church to the Sunday-school. Mrs. Homer has a class, too, but I don’t believe she can do much.”

“ Edith, you uncharitable toad ! ”

“ How can she teach when she never would learn ? She cared for nothing except accomplishments, and would never be at the pains of

acquiring more than a smattering of them : so Mrs. Crowe, finding she was no good at teaching or learning, used to let her be the ornamental member of the establishment, and sit up in the parlour to receive visitors."

"And a very necessary thing to do, too. Somebody must have done it if she hadn't, and very likely not so well."

"Oh yes, her soft voice and sweet smiles were very successful ; but she let her mother and sister have all the fag. And then, when that carpet-manufacturer, Mr. Brunt, came forward, she didn't care a bit for him ; but she was willing to marry him, because she would then live at her ease and do nothing."

"Just like you women," grumbled Mr. Antony. "I don't believe it to be at all a remarkable case."

"And then he died and left her two hundred a year. That was a very striking proof of attachment. I suppose he had dressed her up in imaginary excellences, and fancied her face to be the index of her mind."

This cut two ways ; so Mr. Antony made no answer ; nor did they have much more to say to each other during dinner ; and after it, Edith

established herself on the broad, low window-seat, where there were some half-dozen books she was very fond of dipping into. It was rather a curious collection for Farmer Benson to have, and he had bought it at a sale, for the sake of a book on gardening, included in the lot. There were Thomson's Seasons, Walton's Angler, an odd volume of Joanna Baillie's plays, Nathan Drake's Winter Nights, and Hazlitt's Essays, including the pretty one on painting, which Edith thought worth transcribing, though her brother said, "Pshaw!" Together with these, were a pictorial Bible in folio, with excruciating illustrations, that had been taken at the door in numbers, and afterwards bound in calf and covered with green baize; and Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Dying. Sharing the white-painted window-seat with these volumes, was a large scarlet geranium in a pot; so that not much room was left for Edith; but yet she did squeeze herself in, till she looked, Leonard said, like a reel in a bottle. After musing over a delectable sentence or two, she heard the triple chime begin, and started up, saying—

“Well, I suppose I must eat my peach alone.”

“What *do* you mean?” said Mr. Antony, waking up.

“That I must go to church again by myself.”

“Where’s the ‘must’?”

“Will you go with me, then?”

“No, Edith; I really am not strong enough.”

“Poor fellow, I wish you were; perhaps you may be next Sunday.”

And she took her solitary way across the hilly field, wishing dear Leo would not continually find himself so very tired on Sundays, and that she knew some way of making the day of rest less irksome to him. “Somehow, men seem to find it more difficult to get through than we do,” thought she. “Why should they, I wonder?”

CHAPTER III.

ART TROUBLES.

As about this time, Nessy tasted of the cup of mortification. Finding the artistic power once more at work, she spent every spare half hour on a grand composition (in small) wherein the old background of the village-green was enlivened with so many figures that it looked like a fair. There you had the butcher with his tray, the baker with his cart, the muffin-boy with his bell, a broad-wheeled wagon, with Farmer Benson's name painted on it, a waggoner with long, slashy whip, children playing, geese in wild dismay at the barking of a little dog, chickens pecking, and a cock crowing.

"Full of life," Mr. Saffery pronounced it; and Nessy, half ashamed, half elated, let him place it, unfinished as it was, behind the counter, where everybody was safe to see it.

And many a hard stare, and many an "Oh,

my!" did it excite. And, if the voice of the common herd be what Victor Hugo says it is, Nessy had good reason to be content, without caring for the select Areopagus—said Areopagus represented on the present occasion by the two Miss Grevilles and their rude friends the Miss Balfours, who came scudding into the post-office to escape a sudden shower, and immediately began to look about for something to talk and laugh about. The shop, it should be said, was, for the moment, empty, Nessy having gone into the parlour.

"Why, there's a picture!" cried Miss Adeliza Balfour. "*What* a thing! Sophy, Emily, do come and look!"

"H—ish," said Miss Greville, warningly; but they did not hear, or did not heed.

"Well, I never!—Did *you*?" in rather a lower voice. "'Aim highly, fall nobly!'—Just look at the trees!—*And* the geese, *and* the dog, *and* the cock!"

Here Mrs. Saffery coming in, and seeing their heads clustered together, said, "That's our Nessy's doing, young ladies."

"Oh, indeed!" said Miss Adeliza, with a sudden change in her voice for which

Nessy hated her. "A first attempt, I suppose?"

"Oh, dear, no, ma'am!" said Mrs. Saffery, with motherly pride. "Nessy's done a many things, and got very good prices for some of them. She mostly sells her picture."

"The proof of a good picture is the selling," said Miss Adeliza, with mock gravity. "That pig was drawn from nature, I suppose."

"Well, ma'am, Nessy doesn't exactly get her things to sit for their likenesses."

"Doesn't have the pig into the parlour," said Miss Gussy, *sotto voce*, which made Emily Greville give her a little nudge.

"But she views things attentive like, and puts them down on little scraps of paper. I can't explain nor tell how she does it. I couldn't do a picture like that, now, if it was ever so."

"Nor I," said Miss Adeliza, with a gravity which put her companions into difficulties in suppressing their laughter.

"Do you say your daughter sells her performances?" said Miss Gussy Balfour, thinking she would have her turn in chaffing the poor woman. "Pray, now, what may be the value she sets on this one?—Ten pounds?"

“Ten pounds, ma’am?” repeated Mrs. Saffery, opening her eyes very wide.

“Fifteen, then?”

“Nessy would be very glad to take fifteen shillings, ma’am, I’ll be bound to say, ready-money; but if you wish to know, I’ll ask—”

“No, no!” cried Miss Balfour, in real earnest, as Mrs. Saffery took a step or two towards the parlour, “that would be quite below the picture’s merits, and quite above my power to offer; for I spend all my ready money in—charity!”

This sally nearly caused her companions to explode; but it was cut short by the unexpected entrance of Nessy, who, with cheeks as red as carmine, abruptly took up her picture, and, looking neither right nor left, walked straight out of the shop with it.

The moment she had done so, she was sorry, but it could not be helped; nor was there anything really deserving regret. The young ladies instantly felt the full force of the situation, though Mrs. Saffery did not; and after an awkward pause, Emily Greville said, “I believe it has left off raining now—good morning,

Mrs. Saffery"—and stepped out into the bright, falling drops.

"Emily, you'll catch your death, you imprudent girl!" cried her sister, picking her way after her.

"Why, it is raining quite fast," cried Miss Adeliza, in urgent remonstrance, "and I've only this little parasol."

"Let us run in here, then," said Emily, darting into the baker's.

"What was that move for, Emily?" said Sophia.

"To get away from the Safferys, said Emily. "Miss Saffery was in the parlour, and must have heard every word Adeliza said."

"Oh, she could not, I'm convinced," said Miss Adeliza. "Besides, how was I to know?"

"And listeners never hear any good of themselves," added Miss Gussy; "and what Addy said might do her good—take down her pride a little."

"I really said *nothing*," said Addy. "Now, *did* I?"

"Remember her coming in, looking so red, and carrying off her picture," said Emily.

“Like a little tragedy-queen,” said Miss Gussy, laughing. “I *was* so amused!”

“Only, Mr. Weir says we should never hurt another person’s feelings.”

“Well, I didn’t mean—I hadn’t the least idea—”

“Really, Emily, I think you have said enough about it,” said Sophia. “And it does not rain now.”

Meanwhile, Mrs. Saffery went into the parlour, and said, “Nessy, what made you carry off the picture in that way?”

“Because they were making fun of it, mother, before you came in.”

“Making fun of it? Why, what fun was there to make?”

“They made fun of the geese, and the chickens, and even the trees,” said Nessy, with swelling heart; “and, directly you came in, they changed their tone.”

“Well, if that’s manners, I don’t know what manners is!” said Mrs. Saffery. “I couldn’t have believed it of the Miss Grevilles.”

“It wasn’t the Miss Grevilles, mother, it was their friends, those rude Miss Balfours.”

“Oh, as for those Miss Balfours, I don’t care

a pin for them. They don't belong to Belforest, and let them like it or lump it. I'll answer for them they can't either of them do a picture like this—they haven't the brains ; and I shall just set it in the window, where they may see it again, if they like, and very likely you'll get a bespeak for it in the course of the afternoon."

"No, mamma, please don't !"

"But indeed I *shall* please," said Mrs. Saffery, pouncing on it. "Here comes Mr. Antony—we'll hear what *he* says about it."

"Don't let Mr. Antony see it"—

But Mrs. Saffery would have her way ; and accosted him in her blandest tones, with—

"Good morning, sir ! I'm glad to see you looking so very much better.—Why, you've got a little colour in your cheeks, and you step ever so much stronger, and I do believe you're growing fat."

"Spare my blushes, Mrs. Saffery."

"Well, sir, I'm only saying what I think ; and I think it will do you good to sit down and take a little rest in our parlour—and Nessy's doing something I want you to see, sir."

“Oh, let me see it then, by all means.”

He sat down, took the sketch in his hand, and looked as grave as a judge; though his eyes smiled a little. His opinion was expressed in a couple of words.

“Too crowded.”

“I was afraid so,” said Nessy softly.

“Well now, that was what Saffery liked it for,” said her mother. “He said it was full of life.”

“No repose,” said the artist succinctly.

“Like our hard couch,” said Nessy, laughing a little.

“You see, sir,” said Mrs. Saffery, “we cannot see these things from the same point of elevation commanded by yourself. You see over the whole artistical world, if I may say so—”

“You may, but you will not say true.”

“While we only view this small green. When I say ‘green,’ I mean the people that belong to it.”

“Very just.”

“And these people, sir, being mostly of our own sort, some of them rather below us in attainments, though they may be better off—these people are our little world, sir, Nessy’s

artistical world ; and it is more an object for her to give satisfaction to it (which she does), than to your great world, sir, which she couldn't satisfy after all."

"I see."

"Don't you think so, yourself, sir ?"

"No, I don't."

"What *do* you think, sir ?"

"I think it better to take one step in the right direction, than a hundred in the wrong. I think it better to please one good judge than a hundred and fifty-four who are no judges."

"Just what I think," said Nussy.

"Why now, Nussy, what's the good of your thinking so ?" said her mother. "You please Farmer Benson and such as him, and they pay you nice little sums and carry off your pictures. If you aspire to please the Miss Balfours, you'll never do it, nor ever see the colour of their money."

"No, I don't call the Miss Balfours good judges," said Nussy. "I don't care to please them."

"Who do you care to please, then ?"

After a little pause, she said frankly,

"Mr. Antony, and Miss Antony."

“But,” said Mr. Antony, smiling, “if the course I prescribe to you renders your pictures less pleasing to those who are accustomed to buy them,—spoils your market, in short,—where are you then?”

“Can that happen, sir? If I become a better painter, can my pictures be worse?”

“I’ll give you an example. Did you ever hear of Wilkie?”

They did not remember to have done so.

“He painted pretty little domestic things—‘Blindman’s Buff,’ ‘The Cut Finger,’ ‘The Blind Fiddler,’ and so forth—‘full of life,’ as Mr. Saffery said. But it was common life. ‘How true to Nature!’ people said. But it was vulgar nature. He held the mirror up to Nature; there you saw her, with her red elbows, and her thick ancles, and her rough hair; he did not idealize her at all, gave her no smart bonnet, no crinoline. He was popular; his pictures sold well. After many years, when he came to understand and feel what high art was, he completely changed his style; he still stuck to Nature, but idealized it. He didn’t hold the looking-glass before her any more, but he painted her picture; softened her features

and complexion ; improved her dress. Then people said, ‘How Wilkie’s style is changed ! how he’s gone off !’ No ; he hadn’t gone off : he had gone on. He had gone on where they couldn’t follow him. D’ye see ? ”

“Yes, sir, I see very plainly,” struck in Mrs. Saffery rapidly, lest Nussy should answer for herself, “and my voice is quite for Wilkie’s *first* style ; it so being as you say. Why, here has Nussy nearly laid by money enough to subscribe to the Arts Union—”

“Ah, the Art Union !” repeated Mr. Antony. “The Low Art Union, Mrs. Saffery. The subscribers seldom or never lay out their money on high art pictures. They like something full of life ; common life. ‘The Expected Sneeze’—‘Blowing out the Rushlight’—‘The Nasty Medicine’—such things as those are what they want for *their* money ; and as their money is very acceptable to poor artists, their patronage lowers the tone of art.”

“I see, sir—There’s the shop-bell,” said Mrs. Saffery, leaving him.

“And to you, Nussy—Miss Saffery—my advice is, get some good general principles, when occasion offers, to apply to practice as

you find the opportunity. They won't hamper you ; they'll help you. Sir Joshua says, 'their service is perfect freedom.' It is so with *all* good rules ; no matter of what sort. They are no trouble ; they come naturally, just as it is natural for you to write from left to right. Habit is second nature. You know, for example, the line of beauty. You have shown it in this little dog. He is full of pretty curves. The geese, on the contrary, are angular and awkward—you meant them to be so ; the contrast is good. This tree is touched in very nicely indeed. I don't think you know how well you have done it. You've got the right touch. On the whole, I consider the composition too crowded, but never mind ; let your next be less so."

"Shall I burn this, sir?"

"Burn it? By no means! What in the world are you thinking of? Are you in want of paper to light your fire? I'll send you one of my sister's novels."

Nessy said that if he did, she should certainly read it instead of burning it.

"Read it first, and burn it afterwards. 'I have whitewashed my ceiling,' said a bad artist

to his friend, 'and am now going to paint upon it.' 'It's a pity,' said his friend, 'that you did not paint it first, and whitewash it afterwards.'"

"I am sure, sir, Miss Antony cannot be a bad writer."

"No, she writes very prettily, very nicely. Instead of burning this, finish it off, and get fifteen shillings for it. I wouldn't do much more to it, if I were you. And then try something simpler: something with one or two figures."

As he walked homeward, across the hilly field, he wondered why he felt so much more cheerful. It was because he had been making another person happy, and doing her good; though that person was only a little girl at a village post-office.

"Leonard!" exclaimed Edith in dismay, just as they had finished their dinner, "here comes Mr. Weir."

"Oh, he can't be coming to see *us*!"

"He is, though! He has passed the other door."

The little knocker sounded. They both listened with suspended breath.

“Is Mr. Antony at home?”

“Yes, sir.”

And the next moment he was shown in, and shaking hands with each.

“I only learnt just now,” said he cheerfully, “that Mrs. Benson had an invalid lodger, so I thought I would take advantage of my position, and come to offer any service in my power. You know, a shepherd’s business is to look after his sheep.”

“A sickly sheep infects the flock,” said Mr. Antony; “so I wonder you like to have anything to do with me.”

“Oh! I don’t suppose your sickness is catching. Brain-work, probably. We don’t work our brains too hard here,” laughing.

“Well, there *was* something the matter with my brain, I fancy—I’ve a curious head, rather. But I’m all right now, thank you.”

“It seems to me that I saw you the other day sketching.”

“Yes. I saw you.”

“I was rather surprised at the point of view you had chosen.”

“Well, it would not strike any one but an artist, perhaps; but some good painting may

be made of it. Are you interested in painting?"

"Very much so, in a blind uneducated sort of way."

Then Mr. Antony showed him his pictures; and we may be sure that when two intelligent men fell to talking in this unpremeditated sort of way, they said many nice things. Edith thought they did, and was extremely happy. One thing led to another, till Mr. Weir had seen all the contents of Mr. Antony's portfolio.

"Do *you* draw?" said he to Edith.

"Edith writes," said Mr. Antony.

"Leonard! how *can* you?" said she quickly.

"Why, you know you do."

"That was such an atrocious treachery on your brother's part," said Mr. Weir, "that I shall take no notice of it. Of course we know that ladies never write, never play, never sing."

At which they all laughed.

"What do you think of our painted window, Mr. Antony?"

Leonard hastily said he had not seen it.

"No? oh, then you weren't at church on

Sunday. Did not feel well enough. I know that feeling exactly. I had it last summer. Used to feel so *down*, when they all went there without me! Mrs. Hemans's sonnet used to come into my mind—

“ ‘How many blessed groups this hour are bending
Through England's primrose-meadow paths their way ;
Toward spire and tower, 'mid shadowy elms ascending,
Whence the sweet chimes proclaim the hallowed day.’

You know the lines, Miss Antony ?”

“ Yes,” said Edith, “ and admire them very much.”

“ What is the subject of the painted window ?” said Mr. Antony.

“ It is a memorial window, put up by Mr. Greville. The subject is the Crucifixion. The colours are much too vivid, I think ; and I do not like the way in which the subject is treated. The cross is much too high. You are aware, I suppose, that it would only have been a few feet from the ground. The popular conceptions, based on the ignorance of the monks, who were unacquainted with details, are in some respects erroneous. Perhaps you have seen Dr. Hanna's lecture on the physical cause of the death of our Lord ?”

“No.”

“It would interest you, even if he did not carry you entirely with him. It would interest any thinker.”

“I should like to see it.”

“Yes, I really think you would. Not as a book of general reading, you know, in the midst of secular surroundings, but in some lonely, still hour. On a solitary Sunday morning, for instance. I don’t know that I can immediately lay my hand on it; but at any rate you shall have it before next Sunday.”

“Thank you, thank you.”

And then Mr. Weir turned to Edith to talk to her of other things; asked her whether she cared for wild-flowers; told her of a bank near the hilly field where he had just counted twenty-eight different specimens; spoke of the peculiarities of soil and produce as compared with other districts, and took leave before either of them could, by any possibility, find his visit tedious.

They were flattered by the attention. People are generally pleased to find they are not overlooked. They praised his cordial, intelligent

manner. They did not say a word about the proffered book. Edith wondered whether Leonard would read it; he was not given to the study of such deeply serious subjects.

CHAPTER IV.

AUTHORSHIP.

“EDITH! you look as if you were going to cut off somebody’s head,” said her brother.

“What’s the matter?”

“I’ve got my story all into a mess.”

“Hand it over to me, old girl.”

“No.”

“Read it to me, then. I know you prefer that, because you correct blunders and skip weak places by the way. Let us have a mouthful of fire; draw the sofa close to it, snuff the candles, and commence proceedings. I’ll lend you my ears.”

“Well, that sounds rather inviting.”

So, when all these arrangements were made, Edith, with a little diffidence, which the sound of her own voice speedily dispelled, began to read, Mr. Antony having conveniently disposed of himself on the sofa, with his heels on the same level with his head.

We shall spare our readers the plot of the story, but it opened with the miseries of a little Italian boy, Angelo by name, who went about the streets with a couple of white mice, and was severely beaten by his master, an ogre residing on Saffron Hill, if he failed to carry home a certain sum of money. Angelo, unable to obtain it of a compassionate public, committed a small theft; was carried to a police-office, his master was had up, iniquitous details were revealed, compassion for the orphan boy excited, &c. &c. &c. Before Edith had read many pages, Mr. Antony said—

“Carlo Pierotti.”

“No, quite different,” said Edith. “Not Carlo Pierotti at all, you’ll see.”

Carlo Pierotti was a boy of whom Mr. Antony bought casts, and whose portrait Mr. Antony had painted.

Before Edith had proceeded much farther, Mr. Antony again said—

“Carlo Pierotti.”

“Why now, Leonard, how can you say so? This boy is not in the least like Carlo Pierotti. Carlo has parents, Angelo has not. Carlo comes from Lucca, Angelo from Como. Carlo

is a good boy ; Angelo has had no opportunity of being good as yet : one sells casts ; the other exhibits mice ; there are no two points of resemblance.”

“Carlo Pierotti.”

“In what respect Carlo Pierotti ? They are both poor Italians—there is no other resemblance. If I am to draw characters different in every possible respect from any character that has yet existed, I may as well give up authorship at once,” said Edith, desperately.

“Granted.”

“If I am to draw entirely from imagination, and not in the least from observation, I know I must stop short.”

“Certainly.”

“What am I to do, then ?”

“Give general resemblances without individual details.”

“Bad art, Leo ! Give general resemblances *with* individual details. Hazlitt says so.”

“And Sir Joshua says the other.”

“Well, I think Hazlitt, in this instance, is the best guide.”

“Then you must expect me to make my best bow to Carlo Pierotti.”

“Leo, I’ll tell you something that will strike you dumb.”

“Now, then.”

“I had imagined and put together the outline of this part of my story before we knew Carlo Pierotti.”

“Oh, then, I must look over the police cases.”

“How hard, how almost impossible it is to get a man to acknowledge himself in the wrong.”

“Almost as hard as to get an authoress to acknowledge you have detected the type of one of her characters.”

“Say author, and I’ll overlook the injustice. If true of female writers, it is of men.”

“That’s not a *sequitur*, but I will let it pass. Go on.”

“No, let us have this out. Was there not a certain Zeuxis, who made a study from half-a-dozen reigning belles of Greece, for his famous picture of Helen? Would it have been fair of his friends to scoff and say, ‘Aspasia’s nose—Chloe’s mouth—Persis’s eyes . . . there is not a bit of originality here?’”

“No; because he combined. Invention is originality of combination: it *can* be nothing more.”

“Very well ; and *I* have combined. I have made no slavish copies. That would be bad art. I don't think it was good art for Raffaele to introduce his own portrait into the School of Athens : any more than it would be (to compare great things with small) for me to introduce my own likeness in this story.”

“Well said, Edith. I am glad Raffaele has given us his head, all the same. Now go on with your story.”

So she went on ; and he enjoyed it ; and she saw he enjoyed it, and was very happy. At length she paused.

“Go on,” said Mr. Antony.

“That's all,” said Edith.

“All ? Nonsense !”

“That's where I have stopped.”

“Why, you have left off in the most interesting part !”

“I don't know what to say next. Can you help me ?”

“Not in the least. Make something of that fellow with the paper collar and false moustache.”

“I can't.”

“Set the house on fire.”

“If Mrs. Benson overhears us, she will think we are in earnest, like the waiter who overheard Mademoiselle de Scuderi and her brother discussing a plot.”

“Well, lock it up, and wait till something occurs to you. I dare say you won’t be aground long.”

Edith took his advice, simply because she could not do better for herself. And, next morning, before breakfast, there she was, scribbling again, as fast as her pen could fly over the paper.

Oh for the power of Mary Russell Mitford, to describe Farmer Benson’s harvest home! The farmer’s wedding-day was so close at hand, that it had been decided to wait for it, and make the feast answer two purposes: not that this arrangement had anything to do with economy, for the boards were to groan under an extra allowance of good cheer. Planks were laid upon tressels in the big barn, which was large enough for a playhouse: these planks, representing tables, were covered with new white calico, representing tablecloths. From the lofty roof were suspended hoops covered with tin foil supporting circles of candles in nozzles:

these represented chandeliers. Heaps of evergreens were brought in by the cow-boys, which Edith and Nessay Saffery helped to tie up : and basins filled with huge bouquets of gay flowers were placed at intervals down the tables. Then they arranged the salt-cellars, the knives and forks, the mugs, the piles of plates ; and peeped now and then into the kitchen and bakehouse, whence savoury smells were already emitted. Then the three church-bells began to clamour with unusual spirit ; but Mrs. Benson and her helps (one of whom was Mrs. Early) were far too busy to obey the summons. Edith and Nessay, however, answered the call with alacrity, for Nessay had to marshal the children, and Edith wished to witness her proceedings ; and, to their surprise and joy, Mr. Antony presently came after them ; accounting for his doing so, by saying he thought he might pick up some happy effect. Edith hoped his church-going might be the happy effect of Mr. Weir's pleasant visit.

Everybody in holiday clothes, of course, and with holiday faces. Dr. Fownes read prayers : the service was very short and hearty : the singing of the loudest. Then Mr. Weir gave

a very cheery sermon, which lasted just fifteen minutes. "And long enough too," Mr. Antony afterwards said; "if a man couldn't come to the point in a quarter of an hour, there was no hope of him."

"Leo, was it not a very nice sermon?"

"Very; he didn't beat out his gold-leaf too thin. He had something to say, and he said it."

And now the triple chime is at work again, and Sunday groups are moving towards the cricket-field, where the Belforest Eleven are intending to beat the next parish. As good luck will have it, (or has it been the farmer's forethought?) Punch and Judy make their appearance, and take up an advantageous position on the village green, to the great delight of a numerous audience. There is also a scramble for nuts and apples.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Farmer Benson must be understood to be in the state of the old shepherd's wife in "The Winter's Tale,"

"Her face o' fire with labour,"

now here, now there, looking into this and that saucepan; giving an additional baste or two to the beef—keeping a sharp eye to the

kitchen-chimney lest the soot should catch fire—fancying she smells the pies burning in the oven—lifting the lid of the copper, at the imminent risk of scalding, to see that the pudding water has not boiled away; verifying in a hundred ways the good old adage that a mistress's eye is worth two pair of hands; aye, and that a mistress's hands, when she knows how to use them, are worth two pair belonging to any one else; and that a mistress's tongue can wax loud, shrill, and sharp, when she has a multiplicity of orders to give to subordinates who have willing hands but no heads.

“Here comes Mrs. Wier along with the young widow across the hilly field,” said Mrs. Early, glancing through the kitchen window. “Folks do say that Mrs. Homer—”

“Mrs. Early, there's a coal in the dripping-pan!” shouted Mrs. Benson. “Do mind the meat, and leave the company to take care of themselves. The ladies can perambulate the garden if they come so early.”

Everybody had dined as usual at one o'clock—everybody, that is, except Mrs. Benson and her coadjutors, who had made a scrambling-day

of it, getting a bite and a sup when they could or when they wanted : the banquet, whether to be viewed as late dinner or early supper, was to be at "four punctual," and yet here were the ladies dropping in at three.

"Just like quality," Mrs. Benson grumbled to herself; "never considering how a body was to dress herself, and to be in three places at once—dressing-room, parlour, and kitchen."

"You must look to the saucepans yourself, now, Mrs. Early, and mind no harm comes to anything. I must slip on my silk gown, and will look in on you again by and by."

Meeting Edith on the stairs, she said with a troubled look, "Them ladies have come sooner than wanted; you don't know them, miss, do you, so as to be able to take them for five minutes off my hands?"

"I know one of them," said Edith; and sooner than let her good-natured hostess be in a strait, she went out to meet them as they came down the broad straight gravel path, with its wide margins of turf, soft and even as green velvet.

Mrs. Weir and Mrs. Homer had not seen much of one another lately; for Mrs. Weir had been very busy with the shoe club, and

Mrs. Homer with Tresellis ; but it suited them both to cross the hilly field together. When they saw Edith coming up the walk, Mrs. Homer said, with a little effort, "This is Miss Antony, ma'am," and stepped forward to meet her with outstretched hand and propitiatory smiles. Edith scarcely touched her hand, and greeted her rather coldly ; perceiving which, Mrs. Homer instantly shrank back, but then renewed her courtesies with quiet pleading sweetness, as much as to say,—"*Do* be friends with me ; if you spurn me like a worm, you know that, such is my nature, I cannot turn again."

Edith, addressing herself in a matter-of-fact way to Mrs. Weir, said,—

"I am sure, ma'am, you will excuse Mrs. Benson for a few minutes ; she has been very busy to-day, and is now dressing. Will you let me show you the dairy ? she will be ready in a few minutes."

"I should like to see the dairy very much," said Mrs. Weir ; "and the cheese-room, and the bees, and in fact everything ; but I hope Mrs. Benson will not hurry herself on my account, for I know how busy she must be."

Edith, therefore, did the honours of the farm ; and being well up in the details, which, being quite new to her, she had taken much interest in, she was able to tell Mrs. Weir everything so fully, and in such a pleasant, animated way, that the old lady was quite delighted with her. Mrs. Homer, meanwhile, smiled sweetly, and rather absently, and feigned an interest she did not feel.

“This churn, now,” said Mrs. Weir, “is quite different from the one that was most approved when I was a girl. But there are so many improvements now. I have heard of a machine for milking cows ; I suppose Mr. Benson has not adopted it.”

Edith smiled, and said he preferred milkmaids, and she hoped he always would.

“There is a machine, too, for laundry-work, called a dolly,” said Mrs. Weir ; “but I believe a live Dolly or Jenny is better. It is found to tear the clothes.”

The sight of the apple-room, the pear-bin, and the cheese-closet revived Mrs. Weir’s recollections of her juvenile visits to her grandfather, and she became garrulous, and, to Edith, very entertaining, in her descriptions of his open-

housekeeping; especially at Christmas and Easter. And thus, as they slowly passed from one place to another, the time did not at all drag, till Mrs. Benson came out to them, glorious in a large-patterned black poplin, and with a superb cap. Her apologies for her delay were declared quite unnecessary; and then the round was repeated, that she might do the honours herself, and give Mrs. Weir many details that Edith could not be expected to know. Then it would have been more simple for Edith and Mrs. Homer to fall back and entertain one another, but this did not seem to answer. Edith asked coldly—

“Have you heard from Miss Crowe lately?”

“Not very lately—at least—oh, yes; I had a letter from her this morning.”

“She is quite well, I hope?”

“Quite, thank you.”

And then neither seemed able to think of anything else to say.

“Are you going to remain here some time?” resumed Mrs. Homer at length.

“I hardly know. It depends on my brother’s health in some measure.”

“Ah, yes—yes, indeed.”

Here they were joined by Mr. Weir, and it was surprising what a difference he speedily made. Soon they were all three in continuous and cheerful conversation : the ladies exchanging remarks with him, however, rather than with each other.

“Mrs. Benson,” said he presently ; “your guests are all on the other side of the hedge, but they won’t come in till the clock strikes.”

“Ah, that’s always their notion of manners, sir,” said she laughing ; “and it’s convenient, too, so I don’t gainsay it.”

At this moment, the clock struck four ; and, precisely as the fourth stroke was sounded, the white swing-gate solemnly opened, and men, women, and boys walked in, in orderly procession. Mrs. Homer and Edith were amused at this quaint way of marshalling themselves, and joined in the only unconstrained laugh they had yet shared. A little in the rear of the procession, as if to show that they did not belong to it, came Mr. Saffery and Nussy ; Mrs. Saffery remaining at home. Mr. Saffery’s hair had been cut even too closely, and his face seemed to have been washed with a double

allowance of soap. There was a complacent smile, almost amounting to a smirk, on his shining face; while Nussy, in a clear muslin with a little purple sprig, that did not prevent the general effect from being white, and with mauve ribbons to her white straw-bonnet, looked a nice, comely, artless country-girl, as she was. There were other lookers-on—the Oldsmiths, the Browns, the Whites, and several of their class. The guests took their seats; solemn silence prevailed; Mr. Weir said grace—his voice was not very distinctly heard at the lower end of the banquet-hall; but Mr. Saffery, seeing the lads, when their plates were filled, hesitate to begin, said, “Come, boys, fall to; the curate has said grace, though we know his voice is none of the loudest.”

None of the loudest, indeed!—It could be very well heard to the remotest corners of the church, by people who were not asleep or inattentive. But that’s neither here nor there. Soon, amid the clatter of knives, forks, plates, and dishes, such a chatter and clamour ensued, among persons no longer afraid of hearing their own voices, that it did indeed require the vigorous lungs of Farmer Benson himself

to be heard far down the table. As for Mrs. Benson—

“This day, she was both pantler, butler, cook,
Both dame and servant ; welcomed all, served all ;
Would sing her song and dance her turn, now here,
At upper end o’ the table, now i’ the middle,”

seeing that every one got served to their liking. And oh, the loads of meat and pudding that worthy labourers will get through, when made welcome to do so at another man’s cost ! How was it they could sing afterwards ? how was it they could dance ? For sing and dance they did, Farmer and Mrs. Benson taking the lead in each . . . first, singing a duet about Hodge and Kate, with a great deal of *tol-de-roodle* at the end of each verse, the farmer snapping his fingers like castanets, and then, when decks were cleared, and a professional fiddler began a country dance, Mr. and Mrs. Benson led off with hands across and down the middle ; at which point Mr. Weir hinted to his mother, who had laughed till she was exhausted, that it was growing dark and late, whereon she and Mrs. Homer retired under his protection.

One grand event of the evening remains untold. Mr. Antony, who had added much

to the general mirth by various sallies, asked Nussy if she would dance with him. She coloured, and looked at her father.

“Yes, Nussy, by all means, since Mr. Antony is good enough to ask you,” said Mr. Saffery; “and I wish I were enough of a gentleman to offer my hand to Miss Antony.”

Edith assured him she preferred looking on; and when they had worked their way down to the end, Nussy’s modest aspirations were fully satisfied, and she gladly returned with her father, by the bright light of the hunter’s moon.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER THE HARVEST HOME.

“How surprised I was, Leo, to see you dancing!” said Edith, as they sat at their quiet supper,

‘To sound, far off, of village merriment.’

“I was surprised at myself,” said Mr. Antony; “and I’m sure I surprised Nussy. It was almost equal to the performance of the grasshopper in the fable, when they

“Admired the wondrous leaps he made,
And one and all pronounced him mad.”

But only think of Farmer Benson’s steps! and his wife’s little curtseyings! Pity one can’t paint motion.”

“I had no idea so much amusement could be extracted out of a harvest-supper,” said Edith. “While that stolid fellow was singing a ballad as long as ‘Chevy Chase,’ some boys got up a psalm in a different key, and went

straight through it, so that you at the same time heard,

“ ‘I cannot eat
But little meat,’

and,

“ ‘Come, let us all with one accord.’ ”

“ Mr. Weir’s riddles, propounded so sedately at intervals, were first-rate.”

“ Such wretched ones! I think he must have made them.”

“ Of course.”

“ Hark, they are breaking up now. I see dusky groups wending over the hilly field. What a splendid moon!”

The succeeding quiet seemed, by contrast, more profound. Mr. Antony was very fond of what he called “listening to the silence,” and chewing the cud of sweet and bitter thoughts. The stillness was now only broken by the occasional click of plates being washed up, or a word or two exchanged in very tired voices in the kitchen and scullery.

All at once Edith exclaimed, “That man has stolen my only sensation!”

Mr. Antony looked round in astonishment, and said—

“Are you taking leave of your senses?”

“No, but it is enough to drive me out of them, or out of patience at any rate. Here is a review of a new story in the *Athenæum*, and it contains the only little sensational incident I had intended for myself.”

“The man cannot have stolen what he has never seen, and you have never published.”

“No; only I’m forestalled. Oh, Leo! isn’t it hard?”

“Such things are continually occurring. People duplicate inventions every day. Astronomers in different countries claim to be the first discoverers of the same star. Best way, not to contest it. Look out for another star;—plenty left.”

“You are talking in your sleep, I think, Leo.”

“No, I heard and understood what you said. Man has cribbed your sensation incident. Don’t have any sensation.”

“But then what will the publishers say?” rejoined Edith, dolefully. “Don’t you read sensation books yourself?”

“Only to abuse them. Don’t go into that line. It won’t fit you, any more than Mrs. Benson’s cap. Sensation cap decidedly. Elicited several whispered criticisms and murmurs

of ‘Oh, my!’ Whether laudatory or not deponent sayeth not. Don’t try on the sensation cap, it won’t fit.”

“Well, a nightcap will be more to the purpose at this time of night. I hear a general locking up.”

“I hope there’s a cream-bowl duly set on the hearth for Lob-lie-by-the-fire. But—

‘The old belief has passed away.’

We cannot now even invent a nursery ballad equal to ‘Little boy blue, come blow your horn.’ Mark the imagery of the next line, ‘The sheep in the meadow, the cows in the corn.’ What a pastoral! High time the little boy should sound the alarm. But why blue? and with what? Blue with cold, or simply in a blue jacket? There we find one of those questions which will never be answered.”

“Well, good night.”

“Blake was the last who did anything good in that line—

“ ‘Little lamb, who made you ?

Little lamb, who made you ?’

but who made our really old ballads? who made their tunes? who built our old abbeys? Echo answers who? And such is fame!”

“ Good night ! ”

Let us look in on the Safferys, eating bread and cheese.

“ Danced with Mr. Antony ? ” repeats the astonished Mrs. Saffery. “ Well, what next, I wonder ? Why, that he’ll feel himself very stiff to-morrow morning, maybe. He that can’t walk to church.”

“ Oh, no, I don’t think he’ll be stiff,” said Nussy, laughing. “ He seemed to think it very good fun.”

“ Don’t let this set you up, Nussy.”

“ Oh, no, mother. There’s nothing to set me up, only it was very pleasant. There was nobody else he could dance with, and I’m glad there was not.”

“ In boots, too,” mused Mrs. Saffery. “ Well, they were all in boots, of course. And I believe ladies dance in satin boots now. Leastways, I saw a white satin boot in a bootmaker’s window, last time I was in Oxford Street.”

“ And a harlequin parasol over an umbrella-shop, maybe, last time you was in Seven Dials,” said Mr. Saffery ; “ but ladies don’t go about with harlequin parasols.”

“ Mrs. Homer had some bread and butter,

and went straight up to bed directly she came in," said Mrs. Saffery. "She came back ever so much sooner than you did. I think she got bad news this morning in that Ipswich letter. She had her handkerchief at her eyes when I went in about dinner; and she has seemed dull ever since."

"Oh no, she was not dull at Daisylands," said Nussy. "I don't mean that she danced."

"Danced? I should think not. Who ever heard of a widow dancing? Even if she ever did at other times."

"Maybe her sister doesn't like her going to Tresellis," said Mr. Saffery.

"Very natural she shouldn't, if she knew what sort of a place it is," said Mrs. Saffery. "All squampy like down in that hollow. Why, the cottage was built over a pond. And don't you remember Sally Lund falling in up to her arm-pits in that old well that had been covered in?"

"Sally Lund didn't ought to be going out through the gap in the paling at that time o' night," said Mr. Saffery. "It was a dispensation."

Proceed we now to Mrs. Weir's parlour, where

Mr. and Mrs. Weir are laughing over the details of the harvest-supper. Mrs. Weir goes on to say—

“Frank, I like that Miss Antony—a nice, pleasant, unaffected girl; but how cold she was to Mrs. Homer! They were old schoolfellows, it seems, and Mrs. Homer went up to her in her engaging way, with all the cordiality imaginable; but Miss Antony was as glum as possible, and would hardly notice her.”

“Some old school-pique perhaps,” said Mr. Weir. “It is a pity women should foster little grudges against one another.”

“Just as if men didn’t do the same!” cried his mother. “It’s human nature.”

“Did you speak to Mrs. Homer about the clothing-club?”

“Yes; she was so sorry she had not her purse about her, she will send her mite to-morrow.”

“Oh, there is no hurry; only she has professed herself so desirous to do good in some way, and there have been no collections lately, and she does not pay anything for her seat at church; so that I dare say she will be glad to subscribe something liberal: and we are rather in want of funds just now.”

Next morning, soon after breakfast, a carefully-sealed envelope was brought him, which, on opening, disclosed a small folded paper, inscribed, "From a Cheerful Giver. Prov. xix. 17," and contained two half-crowns.

"You look rather dissatisfied, Frank," said Mrs. Weir, laughing.

"Well, I *did* hope there might have been gold," said he, "if only a half-sovereign. Because, you see, she really has given nothing to our poor people yet; and she is spending so much on herself in mere pleasure at Tre-sellis."

"Be just before you are generous. House-keeping is expensive, and perhaps her bills cover her quarterly receipts."

"Yes, mother; but when that is the case, she need not buy Bohemian glasses and things. I'm afraid the little lady is rather selfish,—I often observe," added he, after a pause, "that when people put these effusive prefixes to their subscriptions the donations are extremely small. 'From One who knows what Trial is— one-and-six.' 'From a poor Dust, who wants but little here below, nor wants that little long —sevenpence halfpenny.'"

“It all depends on whether the poor dust has much gold-dust,” said Mrs. Weir.

“Just so: that makes all the difference. But, if you went to the root of the matter, I believe you would often find these anonymous gentry were ashamed to put their names to donations so disproportioned to their means. Mrs. Homer had better have just written, ‘With kind regards,’ and no more about it.”

On Saturday evening, Mr. Antony received a paper parcel, “With the Rev. Francis Weir’s kind regards,” and found it to contain Dr. Hanna’s book, “On the Last Day of Our Lord’s Passion.” He said, “Oh!” and not another word. Edith made no remark. Next morning, when she had gone to church, he settled himself comfortably, and read it straight through. There were three hundred and forty-three pages in it, but he skipped nothing; he read right on, taking it all in, in his strong, rapid way, without often pausing to think, weigh, and cavil, but stowing all its contents somewhere in his mind, whence he could fetch them at any time. You might have catechised him on that book afterwards, supposing him minded to answer you, and not found him wanting. I

am not giving the book undue value; it is unequally written, and sometimes takes things for granted which might be better only supposed likely or highly probable. But its merit is great; it is vivid and hearty, and all on one subject, though comprising many others. Had the book contained detached sermons, however excellent, they would probably have set Mr. Antony to sleep.

When they were dining, Edith said, expressively, "I feel as if my morning had been well spent."

"So do I," said her brother.

"Have you read any of that book?"

"I have read it all."

"I should like to look into it, when you have done with it."

"You are welcome to it. I have done with it now."

"You did not like it, I suppose?"

"I liked it very much."

In the afternoon, he went to church with her. After church, he took a solitary walk. In the course of that walk, he met Mr. Weir, returning from administering the sacrament to a dying person, and they extended their walk

together. How much resulted to him from that quiet day ! It made no outward show.

“Will you believe,” wrote Lacordaire, “that I am every day becoming a Christian ? The progressive change which has taken place in my opinions is a singular thing.”

So might Leonard Antony have written, months afterwards, only he did not. The progressive change in him was as quiet as the change of the seasons. He took several long walks with Mr. Weir, in the course of which we may be sure they were not silent ; and Mrs. Weir would gladly have seen more of Edith, but for her having made out that she was not cordial with Mrs. Homer ; and Mrs. Weir had no mind to take her up at the expense of the other. If they did not accord, she need not bring them together ; and besides, she was now becoming very busy in parish business.

Mrs. Weir was curious to see Tresellis, but Mrs. Homer implored her not to do so till it was in company trim ; and it was becoming more so every day. Having good taste in the arrangement of furniture, she was really making a pretty place of her new home ; and her purchases were chiefly inexpensive ; only, we all

know how things mount up, and how ‘many a little makes a mickle.’ A few days’ gardening set the little garden in order; but then she must have a garden seat, and a flower-stand, and a wire fence; and the trellis must be repaired and painted. Bridget Elia proved long ago that it is pleasant to stint ourselves in one thing, in order to lay out money on another; and the Safferys themselves did not live more plainly than Mrs. Homer did, now that she was husbanding her resources for the sake of Tresellis.

To crown all, she engaged Mrs. Early to occupy the house till she found a suitable servant; and this suitable servant did not seem very likely to turn up, seeing that she was to understand something of French cookery, and undertake most of the house-work, and “get up a few fine things” and most of the heavy washing, and be always fit to answer the door, and only go occasionally to church, and seldom have a holiday, and receive six pounds a-year. It seemed rather an amusement to Mrs. Homer, to have interviews with all the girls out of place, and ask them no end of questions; and she smiled so blandly, and

brought out her requirements so lingeringly, that, generally speaking, it was not till the girls got out of her little parlour into the open air, that they were able to put things together, and find that they were to do more than they were inclined for. And yet some of them thought her such a nice lady, that they kept hovering and hankering, till some old mother or grandmother peremptorily insisted on their declining the situation. All this was in favour of Mrs. Early, who did not mind loneliness a bit, was too old and stiff to think herself equal to much church, and was highly pleased to have a kitchen to herself and no scolding. Mrs. Homer was not at all tender on the subject of kitchen-stuff; she only stipulated that *her* house should not be made Mrs. Early's "Pantehnicon."

And now the bright, cheerful month of October, with its twenty fine days, was drawing to a close, and the paths were strewn with dead leaves, though as yet they were not much missed. But it was becoming unsafe to sit out of doors, and the days were fast shortening; so that Mr. Antony, having made a careful study for his picture, looked forward with

pleasure to painting it up at his leisure during the winter, and giving it the nicest finish. Edith, too, had written out her story in the rough, and actually introduced some rather exciting little scenes in it; so that the good girl began to reckon her chickens before they were hatched, and to weigh the separate advantages of selling the copyright and getting a publisher to undertake all the expenses and share with her the profits. Meanwhile, she had before her the task of making a fair copy, which she knew would in fact be a labour of love. The last Sunday but one of her happy month at Belforest, Nessy came to her in haste, to say that Mrs. Homer had the face-ache, and could not take her class—would Miss Antony undertake it? Edith brightened at the idea; and, getting some leading hints from Nessy by the way, gladly undertook the charge. The novelty of Mr. Weir's little prayer and address affected her: she set to work with zeal, and soon inspirited her scholars, who, under Mrs. Homer's management, had become sadly careless and inattentive. So pleased was she with her office, that she readily undertook it again in the afternoon. By the week's end she had

made friends with all her pupils, and visited most of them in their homes. Mrs. Homer by this time was sick of her Sunday teaching, which obliged her to get up earlier than she liked even in warm weather; and now the mornings were rather cold: therefore she was heartily glad to avail herself of Miss Antony's offered services as her substitute another Sunday, to the great satisfaction of Mr. Weir, who found in Edith exactly the kind of school-teacher he wanted.

Hardly a day now passed without his having snatches of intercourse with her or her brother; often with both. He took unfeigned, lively pleasure in the progress of the picture; and Mr. Antony was gratified at the interest shewn in his work by an intellectual though unprofessional sympathizer. Here was a subject on which he could lay down the law and command his listener's attention; just as, in the pulpit, and often in their walks, Mr. Weir commanded *his*. When just deference on either side is thus paid, intercourse is sure to be profitable as well as pleasant: very different from that of persons always trying to strike in, with an "I beg your pardon, but . . ." and then go off at a tangent.

Very calmly happy was Mr. Antony during the latter half of his stay in the country : and it was pleasant to have the use of many books he had never so much as heard of till Mr. Weir mentioned them. Some of these were secular, others not. Edith, too, had plenty of books lent her that suited her taste ; so that when candles were lighted, they were as quiet as mice, and enjoyed the long evenings. They generally got pretty close to each other, but back to back, with the candles close between them, that the light might fall full on the open pages and not in their eyes ; so that their heads almost knocked ; and Mrs. Benson smiled sometimes when she came in, at their way of making themselves comfortable. Mr. Antony looked into the kitchen when she was making a pudding : he took up a piece of dough, and moulded it into a little man, “as natural as life,” she delightedly exclaimed ; and thenceforth that little model occupied an honourable position in her china closet with glass doors.

Mrs. Homer took possession of Tresellis, a day or two before the Antonys returned to London : and during their last evening walk, which was not, in fact, later than five o'clock.

they chanced to find themselves in the lane which passed her gate, and heard the mellow sound of her harp.

“A pretty little place,” said Edith, eyeing it wistfully. “How happy you and I could be there, Leo!”

“We should be bored to death,” was his answer. “There is not a window in the cottage large enough to admit a broad light for painting; and the aspect is bad. Daisylands for my money, with no bother about housekeeping.”

“Lodgings certainly have their great conveniences,” Edith admitted.

And so they wished good-bye to the few friends they had made—to Mr. Weir, and to cordial Farmer Benson and his wife; and the kind, pleasant Safferys. Nessy’s regret at their departure was undisguised.

“Oh, what a dull winter we are going to have!” said she. “Mrs. Homer is gone, and we no longer see her pretty face and hear her pretty music. You are going, Miss Antony, just as the children are getting used to you, and Mr. Weir calls you his best teacher! Do you think you shall ever return? *When* do you think you shall?”

“ ‘When shepherds pipe on oaten straws,
And merry larks are ploughmen’s clocks,’ ”

said Mr. Antony. “Depend on it, we shall look you up in the spring.”

With this she was obliged to be content. They shook hands all round, and she and her mother watched them out of sight.

Arrived on the railway-platform, where the engine was already fuming and fussing, they took their tickets, saw to their luggage, and speedily found themselves sole occupants of a nice, clean, second-class carriage. Edith then clapped her hands at her brother, and said—

“A pair of Houbigant’s best, if you please, Mr. Leo! Mouse-colour, number seven!”

He looked at her a moment in surprise : then burst out laughing.

CHAPTER VI.

A QUIET WINTER.

So now I have housed all my troops very comfortably in winter-quarters. Mr. Antony has his picture to paint, Edith has her story to write out, Nesity has prizes to prepare for her class, Mrs. Homer has Tresellis to enjoy, Mr. Weir has his parish to attend to, Mrs. Weir has her clothing-club, Dr. Fownes is counting over his old sermons, and tearing up the least good ones, Mrs. Fownes is deep in the calculated demands for coals and blankets : everybody is as well and as prosperous as they are likely to be ; and why should not I leave them so ? True, they have not married, they have not made love, they have not come into large fortunes ; but “ what’s the odds, so you’re happy ? ”

Not an elegant expression ? Oh, I am quite too old a story-maker to mind being told

that. I make a story as a bird builds its nest—

“ A little straw, a little stick,
A little mud to make it thick,
Some little bits of wool and feather,
Can't be so hard to put together.”

So thinks Mrs. Cuckoo, who never builds a nest or a story.

“ But when she comes herself to try,
She'll find the task as hard as I.”

Hard, that is, if it be not a labour of love, which, however, it is. Very sorry should I be not to tell you what is going to happen to these good people. Prepare, however, for a quiet winter. A winter of no events, which, therefore, I shall briefly pass over. Winter is, with many, the happiest, cosiest time of all the year, boasting nice rainy days when visitors are sure not to interrupt one in the midst of a general turning out of closets and drawers; it has its long, uninterrupted evenings; it has also its field-sports, for those who like them—its snow, ice, and skating. How, then, did Mrs. Homer welcome peaceful winter in? She began by having a succession of girls on trial, at five pounds a year; to be raised to six if they

stayed over the first month, which none of them did. And we are bold to think this was partly owing to Mrs. Early, who did not want them. Mrs. Homer soon found herself obliged to hire a boy to go on errands; his name was Richard Arnold, familiarly known as Dick, but she thought Arnold a lovely name, and called him by it. He was speedily fitted with a suit richly embellished with buttons, and threatened with its sequestration if he did not keep his hands clean, which he did for three days.

Mrs. Homer now sat up to receive visitors. And the visitors who called were Mrs. Fownes, Mr. and Mrs. Weir, Mr. Bush (the medical man) and his wife, and a Miss Hornblower, of whom nothing as yet has been said, because there was nothing to say. This Miss Hornblower turned out to be rather a nuisance to Mrs. Homer, whose position in some respects resembled her own. Miss Hornblower had a small income, lived in a small cottage, and frequently changed her domestics. She was of a very inquisitive turn, and asked so many questions, that Mrs. Homer thought her ill-bred (which she was), and resolved not to be too intimate with her. But to what purpose?

The first girl who came to Mrs. Homer on trial, and whom she parted with for being so very inquisitive—meddling with her keys, her boxes, and her letter-case—went straight from her to Miss Hornblower, with whom she stayed a fortnight. By the time Miss Hornblower had heard all the gossip she had to impart, a second of Mrs. Homer's experimentalists was ready for her, and so on through the whole succession; till Mrs. Homer was so annoyed at it, that, keeping no company and requiring nothing for herself, as she said, but a little bread and fruit (or, as Mrs. Early said, but plain roast and boiled), she determined to dispense with a parlour-maid altogether, during the winter.

“Just like Mrs. Homer,” Mrs. Saffery observed with a little malice, after a really nice, respectable young woman, whom she had recommended to apply for the situation, had been to and from Tresellis in a pouring rain, and returned to her in disappointment, saying the lady would not want a parlour-maid till the spring. “Just like Mrs. Homer,” observed Mrs. Saffery in the bosom of her family, “looking about for a housekeeper, lady's-maid, and general servant, who understands French cookery; and

then putting up with an old woman, and a boy that cleans knives."

"Why, my dear, what of that?" said Mr. Saffery. "You must always have your fling at Mrs. Homer."

"I know I daren't say a word before *you*, Saffery; and all I meant to say was, that it was just of a piece with her wanting vanille and tomatos, and then dining off sprats."

Mr. Saffery could not help according a smile to this parallel, and the smile appeased his wife.

Seeing Tresellis on a bright, sunny afternoon, everybody who called there said how pretty it was, and how tastefully fitted up, which, of course, much pleased Mrs. Homer. There was the pretty little gate, and the neat pebbled walk, and the pretty door glazed with crown glass, and the nice little passage (Mrs. Homer called it the hall) which, to be sure, was rather narrow; and the chubby-cheeked little boy in green and gold, and the pretty little sitting-room, with its blue and white draperies, and the harp near the window. Mr. Bush declared it reminded him of—

"In my cottage near a wood,"

and of that other sweet ballad—

“ In front of a cottage with woodbine grown o’er,
Sweet Lucy sat twirling her wheel.”

To which Mrs. Homer responded—

“ Ah, yes!—yes, indeed!” and softly sighed.

Mr. Weir asked her what she meant her resources to be when she was snowed up. She said books: she could always be happy with a book. Seeing him look around for anything approaching to a bookcase, she said that she meant to subscribe to two good libraries in London, and have a box down every fortnight.

“ *Two?* ”

“ Yes—English and foreign.”

This carried a very impressive sound with it.

Before they left her, she pleaded with them to fix an early day for taking an early tea with her, and going home early. She should like it so much! She should be so disappointed if they would not! So an evening was named, when there would be a moon.

The evening came, but not the moon. Of course, Quagmarsh Lane was not lighted by gas; it was dark as pitch. Mrs. Weir’s fly was nearly overturned into a ditch; and she told

her son, with some acerbity, that nothing should induce her to go to Tresellis again on a dark night.

The tea-party was rather slow. Mrs. Homer dispensed very nice tea, but she was so long making it, and so long pouring it out, that it was a lengthy affair. There was thin bread and butter, and a dish of fruit; but Mrs. Weir did not eat fruit, so she returned home hungry.

“I don’t think, Frank,” said she, afterwards, “that there is much good in young people dragging out old people on dark, cold nights, up ruddy lanes. I don’t think they’ve a right to expect it. And apples and pears, Frank! and a bunch of grapes! What could the poor thing be thinking of? People of my age don’t eat hard apples. I can’t think how she will get through the winter.”

Mrs. Homer got through the winter by the aid of novels. It turned out a very wet season; nobody stirred out who could stay in; the lanes were ankle-deep in mud and water; and Mrs. Homer, feeding on the contents of two circulating-libraries, one French, one English, by a good fire, was as snug as a squirrel in its nest with plenty of nuts.

Arnold's chief employment was to trudge to and from the station in all weathers with ponderous parcels of books; but he made amends to himself in many ways on the road—looking in on his mother and talking grand to his younger brothers, and playing with all the boys he met. He had plenty of scolding from Mrs. Early, whom he remorselessly kept waiting for flour, eggs, or sugar, when she was wanting to make the pudding; but if she scolded him one minute, she petted him the next, so he did not mind her at all.

Mrs. Homer had the face-ache one damp Sunday, so she sent an excuse for not attending her class; and, having done it once, she did it twice, and then wrote Mr. Weir a pretty note, saying she was always such a susceptible creature in the winter, that she was reluctantly compelled to give up her Sunday-school attendance altogether. After this, she fell into the habit of never attending morning service, and very irregularly in the afternoon, which vexed Mr. Weir. Now and then, tired of her studies, she enlivened herself by a brisk walk, and called on Mrs. Weir, so fresh and animated that she received the heartiest welcome, and

left a pleasing impression behind her when she went away. Mr. Weir, however, thought she was leading a completely self-indulgent life, and asked, "When she dies, who will miss her? Probably she has a long life before her, and is it to be thus frittered away? I wish she had even one, though *but* one, useful purpose."

One day, Mrs. Fownes called on Mrs. Weir, evidently with something on her mind. After making two or three false starts, she began at length to tell her that she had had a long talk with Mrs. Greville, who was becoming anxious about Emily. She did not like the way she was going on, so different from other young persons, fancying this was not right, and that was not right, and withdrawing from so many innocent pleasures that were natural to young people. She would not dance on Christmas-night, alleging that she had received the Holy Communion in the morning, and she was always reading serious books, and making little flannel-petticoats and knitting socks and comforters for the poor; and she thought it was all traceable to Mr. Weir.

"I said how nice I thought it of her," continued Mrs. Fownes; "but I could not make

any impression. Mrs. Greville, you know, has lived in the world all her life, and there is nothing she so shrinks from as being serious."

"Oh! I know all about it, and understand her exactly," said Mrs. Weir, nodding her head complacently; "I've been such a thorough worldling myself. Till Frank converted me, I really thought of nothing but the affairs of this life."

"Mrs. Greville is afraid of his converting her daughters," said Mrs. Fownes, reluctantly; "and more than that, she is afraid that the youngest— In short, though she minced the matter, there is no reason why I should, for she evidently is afraid lest an attachment should spring up between them."

"Between my son and her daughter?" cried Mrs. Weir. "Not the least chance of it, my dear madam! Not the remotest chance of it! My son has no thought in that quarter, I can assure you. My son is difficult to please; he is a singular young man; it is not every pretty girl that would suit him, I can tell you, even with a pretty fortune. My son doesn't care for money. He is *too* disinterested, I tell him. He would rather marry a girl without a fortune

than with one. He has no notion of being beholden to a wife. Mrs. Greville need not give herself the *least* uneasiness. I think she has been rather premature in warning my son off."

"But I assure you—"

"My dear Mrs. Fownes, not another word, let me beg of you. If I have a little bit of pride left, it is concerning my son. You don't know a mother's feelings—I own mine are very sensitive. Why, if Frank had chosen, he might have had—but it is not worth noticing. He will not make any pretensions to either of the Miss Grevilles. He is quite above anything of the kind."

"I am sure he is all that is honourable," said Mrs. Fownes, "and so I told her; and she does every justice to his merits; only, you see, he *has* unsettled Emily, and they are desirous it should go no farther; so that Mrs. Greville wants you to understand—this is quite *entre nous*, you know—that there must be a little change—a little withdrawal—a little more distance put between the young people—not that he wants any reminder, I'm sure."

"I should think not," said Mrs. Weir, indig-

nantly. "My Frank want a reminder! When Frank thinks it worth his while to propose to any young lady, I don't think you will find him refused."

"Well, I'm sure I hope not—in any but this quarter;—and, as you say, he won't need a reminder. It has not been at all a pleasant thing for me to speak about this, only Mrs. Greville so exacted it of my friendship; and I thought I might perhaps save the young people sorrow in the end."

"There's no sorrow to save in this instance," said Mrs. Weir, "unless on Miss Emily's part. My son has no thought of her, and has given her no encouragement."

Mrs. Fownes went away with the unpleasant consciousness of having given offence and pain; and Mrs. Homer, coming in at the same instant, afforded a happy diversion to Mrs. Weir's thoughts. She pressed her to spend the afternoon with her, which she did, and they were uncommonly chatty.

"Are you tired of Tresellis yet, Mrs. Homer?" said Mr. Weir, when he came in.

"Oh, no!" said she, "I so enjoy it!"

"Perhaps you are writing a book."

“Oh, no!—no, indeed,” with her sweet smile.

“You study, then?”

“A little” (pensively).

“May it be permitted to ask the favourite course of a lady’s studies?”

“Well—I like studying characters.”

“So do I. You read history, then?”

“Not exactly a regular course—”

“You would find a regular course very interesting, though, and very profitable. You have plenty of time—”

“Frank always thinks women have plenty of time,” said Mrs. Weir, coming to the rescue. “He never can fancy we have employments that have nothing to do with books.”

Mr. Weir persevered in sifting her till he made out that she was not reading history at all, except as used for the framework of novels. He told her how enervating he thought her course of reading, unqualified by any of a more substantial sort, or by any of the active duties of life: and though he put it very strongly, and spoke very plainly, she did not show any resentment, but only replied, “Ah, yes—yes—indeed, I’m a sad, weak, erring creature.” He

reproached himself, afterwards, for having been almost uncivil, and thought how sweetly she had taken it; but yet he could not have the satisfaction of thinking he had done her any good.

“You are not afraid, in that lonely cottage of yours?” he said, as she stepped out into the dusk.

She smiled, and shook her head. “I’ve no fears.”

Yet that very night she had a horrible panic. There were no shutters to any of the casemented windows upstairs; and she was undressing very leisurely, with only a white curtain between her and the dark, when a gruff, hollow voice outside, seemingly in the cherry-tree that grew close to the cottage, pronounced some cabalistic words.

Two steps seemed to convey Mrs. Homer to Mrs. Early’s door, which she shook violently.

“Mrs. Early, Mrs. Early! There’s some one in the tree outside my window!”

“My goodness gracious!” cried Mrs. Early, scrambling something on, and coming forth in extraordinary guise.

“Do go and look out,” said Mrs. Homer.

Mrs. Early took a furtive peep behind the white curtain, without offering to open the lattice.

“There’s nothing, ma’am,” she was beginning to say ;—when again the hollow voice resounded close beneath ; and this time its utterance was distinguishable. It growled—

“You’ve got a candle !!”

“Deary me,” said Mrs. Early, laughing, “’tis only Tom Arnold.” Then, opening the case-ment, she called out—

“Tom, whatever are you about, making such a noise under Mrs. Homer’s window ? This isn’t Dick’s room, it’s missis’s. Go your ways.”

Tom, seemingly surprised and ashamed, said he didn’t know the lady was at Tresellis—he’d walked over from Croydon, and, hearing Dick was in the cottage, had meant to jeer him a bit for sleeping with a light.

So the matter was satisfactorily explained ; but Mrs. Homer’s nerves, previously excited by a sensation tale, did not immediately recover from the shock. And one or two burglarie taking place, about this time, in the county, though not in the village, her feeling of secu-

rity was quite gone. She got a little dog that not only yap-yapped at every visitor, but at rats and mice, and at the moon, and at the distant railway-whistle, so that it occasioned her constant alarm : and one night, when Arnold was supposed to be in his bed, Arnold proved to be out of it. This showed him to be unworthy of trust ; and another time, when a mysterious click click, as if of a centre-bit, was heard outside, Mrs. Early declared she trembled like a leaf ; so *she* did not seem much of a bulwark. Then Mrs. Homer declared she really could not go on so any longer ; it made her wretched—she must look out for a more efficient servant : and Mrs. Early began to cry, and to say she had always given satisfaction before—nobody had ever complained of her ; but Mrs. Homer bestirred herself, and made inquiries, and at length secured “a daughter of the plough,” strong enough to hold her own against a grenadier, let alone a cowardly burglar ; and she was blithe and good-humoured, and used to a lone house and hard work, and a pretty good cook. So Esther Sprague was engaged, and poor Mrs. Early was most reluctantly obliged to turn out of her snug quarters.

Having saved every penny of her wages, however, she was not immediately in want.

Next, Mrs. Homer invited a companion to stay with her—a Miss Stone, who looked as if she had swallowed the poker, and who was chiefly characterised by a great talent for silence. Miss Stone went to church, and Miss Stone took solitary walks, and Miss Stone did quantities of knitting, netting, and crotchet; and nobody knew who she was, whence she came, nor anything about her. She seemed a perfect nonentity: glad to have her board and lodging in return for abating Mrs. Homer's fears. Perhaps, when they were shut in for the night, she read novels too: otherwise she must have been in want of a little change.

Now, when the rains gave place to clear, cold, frosty weather, a change for the better was apparent in Mrs. Homer. She had read sensation books to satiety—had exhausted the libraries. On the first dry, bright Sunday afternoon, she went to church, and paid marked attention to the service and sermon. Something in the latter appeared to touch her: a tear strayed down her cheek, which was quietly wiped away. From this time, her attendance

was regular, morning and afternoon, though she did not resume her school teaching. Her demeanour was serious, almost devout: she not unfrequently shed tears, but never made a display of them. Mr. Weir did not know what to make of it; he betrayed no observance of it; but, always prone to hope the best, he trusted that some good thing was at length about to be manifest in her.

CHAPTER VII.

PEARLY DROPS.

“How Mrs. Homer did cry, this morning!” said Mrs. Weir. “While she was stealing her handkerchief so quietly out of her pocket, the bright drops caught the light as they fell. You must have touched some very tender chord.”

“I had no thought of touching her at all,” said Mr. Weir. “In preaching on ‘Wives, be obedient to your husbands,’ I had an eye to women who had husbands to obey. If what I said touched her at all, I’m afraid it must have been with some too late remorse.”

“That is the severest thing I ever heard you say, Frank.”

“How was it severe, mother? She has no husband to disobey now, so if she ever were guilty in that way, it must be past reparation.”

“I’ll answer for it, that poor little woman

never committed a fault past reparation. Her feelings are very tender, and you brought up tender recollections."

"Well, I used to think her *not* very sensitive, but she has seemed more so lately. I wish she would take a class again. Miss Saffery does wonders, but she and Susan Potter are the only regular teachers now. I must speak rather strongly to the Grevilles."

"Better not, Frank!"

"Why not?" said he in surprise.

"Mrs. Greville will not like it—Mrs. Greville does not like it."

"How do you know?" said he, closing the door and returning to her.

"Mrs. Fownes says so."

"Mrs. Fownes? Has Mrs. Greville told her so?"

"Yes."

"Did she tell her to tell you?"

"I believe so."

"Mrs. Greville should have told me herself," said Mr. Weir, rather hurt. "I don't like round-about messages."

"Mrs. Greville seems afraid—lest in short, that you and Miss Emily should like one another."

“ I *do* like her, and she likes me, I believe, in a kind, open sort of way ; but, mother, Mrs. Greville could not be so mistaken, surely, as to think we should ever want to marry one another ? ”

“ There’s no knowing what mistakes mothers will make, when their children are concerned,” said Mrs. Weir. “ You and I know very well there is no danger, but we cannot prevent her having silly fancies, so our only course is, not to give them any foundation. Forewarned is forearmed.”

“ Just so, mother.” And he left her, thinking how tiresome unfounded fancies were. His mother thought, “ If he would look a little nearer home, and see whether he could not be happy with Mrs. Homer and her two hundred a year, I don’t believe she would say him nay ; and they might get on very comfortably together.” But, like a prudent woman, she kept her thoughts to herself.

Mr. Weir obtained Dr. Fownes’s consent to his delivering a course of Lent lectures. There had been no Lent lectures at Belforest for many a year ; and Dr. Fownes had been wont to excuse his idleness in this respect by saying

that if people would not come to week-day prayers without having their ears tickled, they did not deserve to be indulged. But he was getting in years now, and very shaky; the thought of death was daily growing a more personal matter to him; he felt that his working days were nearly over, and, not having a particle of jealousy, was glad that his active young curate should take every legitimate means of benefiting not only his flock but himself. Perhaps there was not a more teachable hearer of Mr. Weir's Lent lectures on spiritual-mindedness than the calm old rector; and the sight of his earnest, attentive face, as he leant his head a little forward to catch every word, had its influence on the attention of others; for, without any excitement, there could not be a more reverential set of listeners. Of course it was deeply gratifying to Mrs. Weir to see her son so appreciated by his rector, and this reacted on her manner to Mrs. Fownes, and this again on Mrs. Fownes's manner towards her, so that there was a sweet, sympathetic link connecting them all in one. Mrs. Homer constantly used tablets. Nussy envied her the power of doing so, but doubted if it

were quite right, and contented herself with listening with concentrated and almost painful attention to every syllable, and writing down all she could carry away, as soon as she had leisure, in the old ledger. This strained effort brought on her headaches again, but she succeeded in not letting them excite notice.

There were two dressmakers, "the Misses Brown," always in great request on account of their good work, obliging manners, and moderate charges. They lived in an infinitesimally little cottage, with a little strip of garden, hardly broader than a sash-ribbon, dividing it from the road; and this little border was always as gay with geraniums, larkspurs, sweet williams, nemophilas, or whatever happened to be in season, as border could be. Very pleasant was it to see these two Miss Browns, the neatest of the neat, one slim and pale, the other round and rosy-cheeked, accompanying their mother to church. Mr. Weir lent them books, which they read at their dinner-hour, and for half an hour before they went to bed, and he tried to get them to help in the Sunday-school, but without success. They said that they worked so very hard all the week, that they wanted the

Sabbath for a real day of rest ; and this rest consisted in lying in bed an hour later in the morning, and a walk in the afternoon. But, somehow or other, they managed matters so as to take it in turn to hear these Lent lectures ; and the result was, that Carry Brown, the youngest, offered her services in the Sunday-school, which were gladly accepted. She proved an efficient help.

Some people contrive to tell you very commonplace truths in very fine words, arranged in very long sentences. This was not Mr. Weir's custom. He mastered a subject by hard thinking, not forgetting to ask God's blessing on his thoughts ; and then he gave the substance of what he had thought out in the plainest, most forcible words he could use. And so they were remembered.

He never hunted about for a simile because he thought a simile would be ornamental, and pegged it down as a naturalist claps down a butterfly with a pin stuck through it ; but, in speaking with all his heart of something he had studied with all his head, metaphors came to him like the sweet scents on summer airs, and use them he must.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Early was getting very low in the world. She now occupied a poor room in one of the meanest of the Providence Cottages, where her crazy four-post bed took up the greater part of the floor, and, husband her savings as she would, they were nearly spent. She came to Nussy, with her pitiful face, and said—

“Miss Saffery, could you get Mrs. Saffery to give me a little turn, do you think, in the way of charing or washing? I’m not very strong, but I’m willing.”

“Well,” said Nussy, “you see we always have Mrs. Jones, who has eight children, and her husband is out of work now.”

“Ah, I don’t want to take a morsel of bread out of Mrs. Jones’s mouth,” said Mrs. Early; “but *my* mouth hasn’t had a bit of meat in it this many a day!”

Nussy, touched with quick pity, went to the little box in which she kept her savings for the Art Union, which had not lately been augmented, and brought thence a half-sovereign, saying—

“Will you like to take this? I’ll lend it you, if you like, till you can comfortably return it.”

“Bless your heart,” said poor Mrs. Early, with tears starting into her eyes, “you don’t know how it will ease me, for rent *must* be paid, you know, and I can’t get anybody to take any of my old things, and I don’t want ’em seized; so that I really am that stinted, that I can scarce keep body and soul together. I always knew and said you were good, from a child. Can you spare it, Miss Saffery?”

“Oh, yes,” said Nesy.

“Then the Lord’s blessing be on you,” said the widow. “He *will* bless you, I’m sure. I’ll pay it back, Miss Saffery, as soon as ever I can, and if I never should be able—”

“Oh, I dare say you will, some of these days,” cried Nesy, lightly. “Do go and buy a little bit of meat, it will do you good.”

“I *will* go and buy a little bit of meat, and bless you for it,” said she, gratefully.

Now, it came to pass, that Mrs. Saffery, in making up the money for an account, that day, was short of change, and knowing very well what Nesy had had by her, she asked her for half a sovereign.

Nesy reddened, and said she could lend her

a sovereign and a few shillings, but she had not a half-sovereign.

“Why, you had one the other day,” said Mrs. Saffery. “What have you done with it?”

Nessy reluctantly said, “I gave it to Mrs. Early.”

“Gave it to Mrs. Early?” cried Mrs. Saffery, in great amaze; “how, in the name of wonder, came you to do that?”

Nessy was always very much discomfited when her mother spoke sharply to her, and she hesitated, almost stammered, as she replied,

“I lent it to her . . . that is, for as long as she wanted. She’s so very much in want.”

“In want? with her lodging choke-full of furniture?” retorted Mrs. Saffery. “Don’t tell me such nonsense as that. What hinders her going out to work? She can work, or she can nurse, or she can chare.”

“She would gladly, only she can’t get anybody to have her.”

“Stuff and nonsense; I don’t believe she has tried. She is set up with her grand notions, and pretences of having known better times, till she is above applying for parish relief, or

doing something for her livelihood, and prefers sponging upon you. You'll never see your half-sovereign again, take my word for it."

"She came here to know if you could give her any washing or charing," said Nessy.

"Oh, as for that, she knows as well as you do that I always have Mrs. Jones. Her washing wouldn't do for me. She couldn't keep a good place when she had one, or she would be still at Tresellis. Now, mind, Nessy, you don't go fooling away any more of your money in this way; if you do, it will be against my orders. You are saving it for a purpose, and have no call to break into it."

Nessy smothered a sigh. The money in her little box had all been earned by herself, and she had fondly believed herself the irresponsible mistress of it; but she never disputed her mother's will. I wish more young people resembled her in this respect; though I think she had done well to relieve Mrs. Early.

Mrs. Saffery went off to see after her dinner; and Nessy was standing behind the counter, with one hand resting on it, in not very cheerful reverie, when a fine-looking young man, sun-burnt and freckled, came hastily into the

post-office, and said to her in some agitation,

“Can you tell me where Mrs. Early lives?”

“Why—are you George Early?” exclaimed Nussy.

“Yes, I am,” replied he. “How come you to know me? I don’t think I know *you*, unless—Can you be Nussy Saffery?”

“Yes,” said Nussy.

“Where’s my mother?” rejoined he; “surely no harm—?”

“She was here just now,” said Nussy; “she is quite well. Oh, how glad she will be that you have come back! She lives in the last house in Providence Cottages.”

“I don’t know Providence Cottages.”

“They have been built since you went away. I’ll show you, if you like.”

He nodded; for he could not speak just then, being under the influence of strong feeling. He followed Nussy, who first walked fast, then ran, and then flew along the narrow, ill-kept lane, on one side of which were Providence Cottages.

“What a nasty place,” was the only sentence he uttered.

Nessy drummed on the door with her closed hand, and, without waiting for permission, hastily entered the room, in which Mrs. Early was preparing to cook half a pound of beef-steak.

“Mrs. Early,” she exclaimed, out of breath, “here’s a visitor!”

“Oh!—it *can’t* be George?” shrieked the poor mother. Nessy thought she never should forget that pitiful cry.

“Yes, it’s my very own self,” said George, hugging her. “My dear, old, blessed mother!”

Nessy thought she had better withdraw quietly, but Mrs. Early was so hysterical that George, with an imploring look, said,

“Please don’t go. I don’t know what in the world to do—”

“I shall be—better presently—you darling boy,” sobbed Mrs. Early, clasping his hand convulsively. “People die of—joy sometimes—and if I die, it—will only be that.”

Tears here came to her relief; and George began to cry too, and yet be ashamed that Nessy should see him. She said cheerfully,

“I don’t think you’ll die this time, Mrs. Early. You’ll have to cook dinner for two

instead of one. Good-bye; I wish you joy."

And as she retreated, she heard Mrs. Early say,

"George, if it hadn't been for that girl—"

She ran home: her own feelings her sufficient recompense.

It was a grand piece of news to have the first telling of.

"George Early?" exclaimed Mrs. Saffery breathlessly. "Do you really mean George Early? Well, I never! To think of *his* turning up at last, to find his mother gone down so. Enough to prick his heart, if he has one."

"He cried," said Nussy.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Saffery, a little touched. "Men's tears don't come easy. I dare say he was sorry he'd neglected her so long, and brought her within an inch of the parish. What account does he give of himself?"

"I have not heard a word; I left them together. Mrs. Early was crying as if her heart would break."

"Dear, how very sad," said Mrs. Saffery. "She was always so wrapped up in him. I

hope he's not come home to be a drain upon her; he ought to keep *her* now. Does he look respectable-like, as if he'd made money?"

"He was very well dressed," said Nesity; "something like a gentleman-sailor, I should think."

"Is he good-looking?"

"Yes, very; only very much tanned."

"Oh, that will go off. Dear me, it's a pity he didn't send word he was coming."

Mr. Saffery coming in, it was all gone over again. And with great glee did Mr. Saffery tell every one it could possibly concern—

"George Early's come home!"

In fact, he made it a duty to cross the green and impart the fact to the landlord of the Swan; and while he was absent, George Early came into the post-office. He held out his hand to Nesity in a frank, manly way, as if they were on an equal footing, and said—

"My mother has told me how good you have been to her, Miss Saffery, so you will please to accept her son's thanks."

"Oh, it was nothing," said Nesity, shyly.

"I think quite differently," said he. "You were kind to her when everybody else neglected

her. She has quite worn herself out, now, and is lying down on the bed, so I've left her for a little; and now, what do you think I'm going to do? I've not made a large fortune, but I've come into a nice lot of money, and my one purpose is to set my mother up nicely. She shall not remain twenty-four hours where she is, if I can help it. I shall look about for some suitable place for her directly; but, meantime, I want to get a silk gown made up for her. I've got it with me, and I want it made up ready for Sunday. Can you direct me to a milliner?"

Mrs. Early in a silk gown! Nussy could hardly help betraying her amused surprise; but he looked so sure of its being the right thing, and so pleased with himself for having provided it, that she could not but enter into his feelings.

"There are the Miss Browns," said she, "across the green; but their hands are generally full, and whether—"

Whether they would like to make for Mrs. Early, was her doubt, but she did not like to hurt him by expressing it.

George, however, had no misgivings. "All

right," said he, "I bought it at Portsmouth. Good shops there, of course, sailors being so free with their ready-money. I hope I've chosen a good silk" (beginning to open the paper). "I've had precious trouble in taking care of it, because they said good silks always creased. I knew she wouldn't like anything but black, so I've bought black; otherwise I should have preferred green, with a crimson shawl."

"It's very nice silk, indeed," said Nussy.

Here they were joined by Mrs. Saffery, who, having first viewed him through the glass door, and received a favourable impression of his exterior, came forth dressed in her blandest smiles, with—

"Who would have thought of *your* dropping in on us, Mr. Early? I hope I see you well, sir!"

And then Mr. Saffery came in from the Swan, with—

"Why, bless my heart, Mr. Early, I never was more surprised in my life! Here have we been thinking your bones were bleaching in the desert, and in you walk upon us! Made your fortune, sir, and come home to settle, I suppose?"

“Well, I certainly haven’t come home with an empty purse,” said George, complacently. “My chief and I only landed this morning, and he has run up to report himself to the Geographical Society, and I came straight on here, as soon as I’d bought a dress for my mother.”

“Is this silk for Mrs. Early?” said Mrs. Saffery, feeling it. “What a sweet thing!”

“And you’ve a famous string of adventures to tell us, no doubt,” pursued Mr. Saffery; “enough to outlast a winter’s night and bring us to the small hours?”

“Why, yes, I’ve a pretty good yarn to spin,” says George. “You see, we’ve been where no other has ever been before us, unless the ‘black fellows.’ Went right across the continent, sir, and came out t’other side! I was the first, riding in advance, to perceive the sea, so may, in fact, be called the discoverer of the Indian Ocean, though of course my chief gets the credit of it. I pulled up my horse, bawled out ‘The sea! the sea!’ and oh, if you’d seen the fellows running!”

“Extraordinary!” said Mr. Saffery, immensely edified.

“And then,” pursued George excitedly, using a good deal of action, “the first thing we did was to give three cheers. And then we ran and washed our hands and faces in the sea, and tasted it, to be quite sure it was it, and no mistake. Our chief cut his initials on a tree; and we fell to, and cleared a plot of ground around one of the largest trees, and hoisted the Union Jack at the top of it, and stripped off the lowest branches, and took possession of the country in the name of the Queen. We buried a tin case under the tree, with written particulars inside. Then we fell to gathering shells; there’s one of them” (pulling it out of his trousers pocket, and slapping it down on the counter), “and did enjoy ourselves!”

They all handled and examined the shell with interest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DISCOVERER OF THE INDIAN OCEAN.

“Did you see any cannibawls?” inquired Mr. Saffery.

“No,” said George; “the natives are not cannibalaceous. They’ll eat worms and snakes, and anything like that; but don’t make victuals of the human subject. Coming home, however, we passed some islands where they are fond of human-flesh meat, whether white or black, but missionarizing is proving a great check to that.”

Mrs. Saffery continued testing the silk between her thumb and fingers, and thinking it much too good for Mrs. Early.

“We met natives occasionally,” continued George, “sometimes hostile, sometimes friendly, and glad enough we were of the latter, for they helped us to food and water, where we should never have found it; and, times oft,

we were driven to appease our appetites with nardoo seeds, which allay hunger, but afford no sustenance whatever, no more than the husks which the swine did eat."

"Ah; I was thinking of that parable just now," remarked Mrs. Saffery.

George did not feel the allusion very complimentary, and said—

"I've never been a prodigal, Mrs. Saffery; and I've been working as hard for my mother abroad as I could have done at home, and encountered a precious number more hardships. I wonder what people here would think of lying night after night on the bare ground, after scooping out a little hollow for their hips! To say nothing of hostile natives shying a boomerang at you from time to time."

"What may a boomerang be, now, pray?" said Mr. Saffery.

"A boomerang," said George, "is shaped on the model of the bent human arm; and the curiosity of it is, that if it does not hit the mark, it returns to the hand that sent it, like an obedient slave to its master. I see you don't believe this—if Miss Saffery will oblige me with a card and a pair of scissors, I'll show

you the principle of it. Thank you—there, this will do, small as it is; of course it does not carry weight enough to go far—See!”

They saw, and wondered; and tried it themselves, and were satisfied.

“Yes,” said George complacently; “it isn’t the most comfortable thing in the world to find one’s self knocked over by a heavy instrument of that make, sent from a surprising distance, with unerring aim. However, we had fire-arms, the report of which sent them to the right about without need for bloodshed; and those who were friendly were rewarded with beads. But I must be off now, with this dress—”

“Mrs. Early will want something less likely to spoil than this, for morning wear, I should say, Mr. Early,” said Mrs. Saffery.

“Aye, that she will,” said he heartily. “Have you anything to show me, that will suit?”

She immediately took down some pieces of print, rather to Nussy’s discomfort, and actually persuaded him to buy two dress-lengths, and a pretty black and white checked shawl.

“So now my good mother will be pretty

well fitted out," said he, "when I've got her a bonnet."

"Shall we send the parcel, sir?"

"Oh dear, no!" said he laughing. "I shall carry it right across to Miss Brown."

Directly he was gone, Mrs. Saffery vented her spleen in sundry little outbursts like this—

"The idea of having to say 'sir,' to the like of George Early! And his mother must be 'madamed,' no doubt. She that was borrowing ten shillings of you, this very morning! I hope she may remember to pay it. When folks come unexpectedly into money, they often have short memories for those that helped them at a pinch. The idea of Mrs. Early, with her black hands and black face, in a black silk gown! Hooh! . . ."

This hurt Nussy, but she knew her mother would recover her temper by and by, though she was cross with herself just now because she had recently been unfeeling to Mrs. Early.

Mrs. Saffery began to rake the kitchen-fire between the two lower bars with much *fracas*, and to hit the large coals at top with asperity; while Nussy continued behind the counter, and watched George Early across the green. She

was interested in knowing whether the Misses Brown would make for Mrs. Early, and thought that if they excused themselves under the plea of having their hands full, which they often might do with truth, his visit there would be short. Instead of which, he went in, and remained at least twenty minutes, and when he came out, he stood lingering and chatting with the two sisters, on the best of terms, and his merry laugh could be heard across the green. Priscilla, the short sister, withdrew first; Carry remained; her light, neat figure, in its mazarin blue merino dress, and little white collar, advantageously seen against the dark background of the doorway. George briskly proceeded to the baker's and the grocer's, and came out with a fancy loaf in a paper bag, and a pound of tea and a pound of loaf-sugar, and he went to the "Swan," and ordered a dozen of Scotch ale, and he went back to the baker's for a shilling plum-cake, and he fell in with an itinerant fishmonger and bought a lobster. All these things, except the ale, he carried home openly and in broad daylight himself, nothing ashamed—a man who had crossed Australia from sea to sea was not likely

to mind carrying an armful of parcels along the whole range of Providence Cottages; and many a speaking smile did he exchange with people standing at their doors. It was well that those who had been accustomed to think him neglectful of his mother should see him thus busying himself to replenish her with every comfort money could procure; and he was speedily invested with a high character for filial piety.

When Job was in distress, only three friends came to condole with him, and their words were as goads. When Job's afflictions were removed, friends flocked about him from far and near, and each man brought him a piece of money. Nussy was the only one, that morning, to whom Mrs. Early had poured out her complaint, not in vain. Now that George Early had returned, and was buying heaps of things and paying for them in ready-money, neighbours crowded the narrow doorway with felicitations, so that when he returned with his purchases, they were obliged to turn out to make way for him. And then they left the mother and son alone.

George had exactly suited his mother's taste,

and consulted his mother's feelings. That he should come back to her in the sight of them all, laden with the bread, the tea, the sugar, the plum-cake, the lobster, rejoiced her very heart. The silk gown, to be made up by the Miss Browns, was the crown of all. No sense of unfitness troubled good widow Early. It was fit, she thought and felt, that he should express his unchilled love in this form, and fit that she should walk in silk attire beside him, a proud and happy mother, to church, to offer humble and hearty thanks for her lost sheep found.

We will drop a veil over their supper, and conclude it enjoyed. George slept at the Swan; but in the morning, he began to look about for a new home for his mother. And, opening the subject to his host of the Swan, whom he had already captivated by his wonderful stories, his landlord told him that Mr. Oldsmith had just finished a new house which would fit him to a T.

In fact, Mr. Oldsmith, charmed at getting Tresellis off his hands, and stimulated by the frequent inquiries made during the summer by the Antonys, Mr. Weir, and Mrs. Homer, for

lodgings, had taken it into his head that Belforest was going to be a rising place, and that it would be a good speculation to run up another house or two. During the autumn, therefore, and up to the time of the frost, he kept his men at work, and actually succeeded in roofing in, before Christmas, a frightful little red-brick house, with narrow door in the middle, opening into a narrow passage, on each side of which was a small square parlour, with kitchen and scullery at the back, and three small bedrooms on the upper floor. True, the walls had not yet been papered, nor the grates set; the garden was only productive of shavings and saw-dust, and the door-posts were sacrilegiously scribbled by the hand of some shameless boy with "Knock and ring"—"House bell"—"Office bell"—"Servants' bell," &c.; but these were trifles to George Early, who saw nothing but what he wanted, and no deficiencies but such as it would be an amusement to supply. Therefore, he engaged the house out of hand of Mr. Oldsmith, and triumphantly carried the news of what he had done to his mother, whose feelings on the occasion were ecstatic. For had she not

fruitlessly preferred her humble request to Mr. Oldsmith to let her keep the house open till it was let? and now she was going to occupy it as tenant. Surely we may allow her heart to swell with gratified feeling.

“You must have somebody to clean it down, mother!”

“Oh no, my boy; let me do it every bit myself.”

Then he said he must go and see if his chief had sent him a letter. But, before he crossed the green to the post-office, he left one of his mother's gowns, carefully done up in an old newspaper, with the Miss Browns, for a pattern; and took the opportunity of consulting them about a bonnet, which, he told them, was to be a very handsome one—just such a bonnet as they would like to fit their own mother with, on returning to her after long absence. On entering into details, the Misses Brown found that his idea of a suitable bonnet was of a very different kind from anything that Mrs. Brown would have consented to wear under any circumstances: they therefore begged him to trust to their judgment, and they would do their very best for him.

After which, they fell into general conversation of a lively cast, quite remote from dressmaking, and separated in about half-an-hour, mutually pleased.

Michael Saffery is stamping letters for the out-going post ; and as he does so, he mutters—

“ Pill-box in that envelope—maybe containing a live slug for some insect fancier. I’ve known Mr. Greville send such things. This envelope’s unfastened—this one’s torn—this, again, contains a coin of some sort, and yet hasn’t been registered : when will people use their reason, I wonder ? Here’s a sharp instrument—what a shame ! ‘ Patric Blarney, oppst the church, Co. Cork ’—I wonder if that will reach him.—Some work for the clerks at the blind-letter office in the next—‘ Marey Wite, Obern Onion ’—Holborn Union, maybe. Here again—‘ Garge Gray, Ride, Oiley White ’—That’s only blind o’ one eye, like.”

Nor are these addresses to be considered incredible, since some of them are verified in “ Her Majesty’s Mails ; ” and from the same authentic source we learn that the sorter at the Central Office has actually pored over an envelope with this address—

“Coneyach lunentic a siliam,”

and made it out to be intended for Colney Hatch. In like manner,

“Haspedellar-such,”

has been found to do duty, occasionally, for Ashby-de-la-Zouch.

By the time Mr. Saffery had made up the London bag, the little mail-cart came for it, and brought the morning mail from London. These would, in due course, be stamped and sent round by the postman; but some impatient privileged individuals now and then came to the office to get their letters as soon as they were sorted, though this was not strictly allowable.

“Here’s one for Mr. George Early,” remarked Mr. Saffery. “Oh! he’s coming across for it now.”

Accordingly, George Early came in, with a cheerful,

“Good morning, Mr. Saffery. Any epistle from my chief?”

“Here’s a letter for you, Mr. Early, directed ‘Belforest.’”

“Ay, that was all the direction I could give

him, you know. Henceforward, I shall be able to have my letters addressed 'Australian Villa, Belforest.'"

"Indeed? And where may Australian Villa be?" said Mr. Saffery.

"Oldsmith's house—the new one he's building. Hum, hum, hum;" and George ran through his letter.

"Oh, I'm to be off again," said he, starting up, "but only for a day or two. Sir Roderick Murchison is going to give a *soirée*, and my chief is to be big lion, and I little one. No end of grand people there. Ha, ha! for once in a way it will be pleasant. Celebrated people, too—M'Clintock and Livingstone. We had something of this sort at the governor's before we came over. But nothing comes up to London. I wonder if I'm to do duty in white kids and silk socks. Shouldn't wonder!"

"I dare say we can fit you, Mr. Early," said Mrs. Saffery, pulling out a drawer containing two or three pairs of very yellow white gloves.

"No, no, I'll wait till I get to town; my chief will tell me all about it. Mustn't cut him out, you know; and it may not be a dress party after all. He seems likely to get a gold

medal; and, perhaps, I shall have a watch. However, we won't reckon our chickens before they are hatched. I must run home and tell my mother, and start by the 1.30 train."

And he smiled at them, one after the other, as he spoke, secure of general sympathy.

"Set him up for a conceited young prig," said Mrs. Saffery, contemptuously, when he was out of hearing. "Talking in that consequential way of 'my chief,' when the better word would be 'my master.'"

"I don't know that, my dear," said Mr. Saffery. "The head of the expedition was a Scotchman, and would naturally be called The Chief; and hence all the inferior members of it would call him my, or our, chief, in speaking of him in mixed company. It does not appear that George Early's connexion with him had anything of the nature of servitude. I take it, they all went out on their own hook, independent explorers, agreeing for general convenience to submit to one as their leader."

"He was the chief's travelling-servant, and nothing more or less," said Mrs. Saffery, who knew no more of the matter than her husband, but made up by bold assertion for lack of

knowledge. It will be seen that she has not yet recovered the tone of her fine mind, is still captious, and contradictory. What a pity! she will cross herself more than anybody else by it.

Mrs. Saffery was expiring with curiosity to see what an old figure Mrs. Early would make of herself on Sunday, and determined to witness *La Glorieuse Entrée*; meanwhile, Mrs. Early, in her simplicity, little guessing the envy and enmity of which she was the subject, came, as soon as George had started, to return Nussy's half-sovereign with heartfelt thanks, and to receive her congratulations. She looked ten years younger already: the puckers and wrinkles of care and want had disappeared.

"So, Mrs. Early," said Mrs. Saffery, taking the whip-hand of her, and still very high and mighty, "your son's come back to you at last."

"Praise the Lord, he has," said Mrs. Early, thankfully; "it was my nightly prayer that he might."

"Prayer? Yes, but you ought to have had more faith. Nobody but you thought he would die in the desert."

"It was nobody's concern so much as mine," said Mrs. Early; "and, where we've staked

most, we tremble most. But there! he's been preserved, and like unto my fear, so is my rejoicing."

"Quite right that it should be so," said Mrs. Saffery. "And now, you'll go and forget all that's gone and past."

"No, I don't think I shall ever forget it," said Mrs. Early. "I don't ought to. If a great piece of flesh was torn off us with hot pincers, the wound might heal, but we should never forget it. But the Lord has made all things equal. I'm quite unworthy to be the mother of such a boy."

"Oh, I don't see that at all, Mrs. Early," patronizingly.

"*I* do, though. Isn't he a beauty?"

"Your son? Well, he's a fine-grown, comely young man. The whites of his eyes are so clear."

Mrs. Early laughed, and said she supposed that was the only beauty of his that she had overlooked.

"And now," said she, confidentially, "I want to fit myself with a pair of gloves—not Berlin, but kid; for I mustn't go about without gloves now, and beaver won't do for Sundays."

“I should recommend you, Mrs. Early, a pair of beaver for week-days, and kid for Sundays. You’ll have nothing to do now, I suppose, but sit up with your hands before you.”

“Oh! that would never suit *me*,” said Mrs. Early. “My boy has taken a house—‘Australian Villa’ he means to call it; and I’m going to begin by scrubbing it right down from top to bottom. I shall sweep it down this afternoon, and begin scouring at six o’clock to-morrow morning. Then there will be the windows to clean.”

The idea of Mrs. Early the wealthy scrubbing her own floors and cleaning her own windows relieved Mrs. Saffery’s heart of that lingering black drop which, in some form or other, infects every heart till it is well wrung out of it. She now saw the bright, sympathetic side of things, and wound up with a downright gossip, which sent Mrs. Early away with a light heart.

When George returned, he found his mother had indeed made a wonderful clearance. She had cleaned down the house, had the grates set, ordered in coals, arranged her kitchen-battery in a brilliant state of lustre, changed

her old four-poster for a convenient iron bedstead, and received a few shillings for her old carpets, which, when in painful want of money, she could not sell.

As for George, he had been to Shoolbred's, in Tottenham Court Road, where, as he told her, he might have bought everything a house could want; and, having told the gentleman who served him how much he meant to lay out, he had had the benefit of that gentleman's selection, which proved a very good one. So here was a porter's truck full of packages coming from the station, and the luggage-van charged with more unwieldy articles, and Mrs. Early had to sign the porter's book three times in one day.

If she were happy in-doors, George was equally so without, superintending the painting the name of his cottage outside. A formidable error was in the first instance committed by the journeyman, who inserted two "l's" in "Australian." And there was the garden to be railed in, and a knocker and scraper to be supplied. But George did not like to see his mother go about in that old, shabby dress; so he found it necessary to step over to the Miss

Browns, to ask, quite confidentially, how soon one of the print dresses would be finished ; and then, after binding them down to promise it should be completed out of hand, he thought it incumbent on him to go back and beg them not to overwork themselves. He should never forgive himself if either of them were ill in consequence. And they gaily assured him there was no danger of it ; and they wished all their customers were equally considerate. Still the bonnet remained a very weighty question, because it was to be a surprise, and they had not the circumference of Mrs. Early's head. But George engaged to get this by stealth ; and he did so, and the Misses Brown were very merry upon it ; and, in short, about one thing or another, he contrived to look in on them once or twice every day.

CHAPTER IX.

LA GLORIEUSE ENTRÉE.

How Mrs. Early contrived to look so eminently neat and respectable in that bonnet with the glistening, quivering black currants in the cap-front, can only be accounted for by the fact that Miss Caroline Brown was good-natured enough to be her lady's-maid on the occasion. Not content with bringing Mrs. Early's outfit on Saturday evening, and trying it on, she ran across, next morning, to give the finishing touch to the toilette, and start the old lady with the comfortable assurance that she was "all right behind." Leaning heavily on her son's arm with one hand, and grasping her new umbrella with the other, she was prevailed on by George to put her folded pocket-handkerchief in her pocket, and to let him carry her prayer-book. In this style and state, they proceeded to church, he smiling complacently at

every one who looked at him, and disarming ridicule by his evident disposition to back his old mother against all England. That Mrs. Early did not take in much of the sermon may be easily understood : the unusual tightness of her gloves, and rustling of her dress, prevented her having much attention to spare for Mr. Weir ; but a general emotion of thankfulness and unworthiness pervaded her inner nature, and doubtless rendered her attendance in the sanctuary acceptable.

Somehow, George had picked up more information and better manners in the course of his wanderings than his mother had ever had it in her power to impart : probably from his constant association with thorough gentlemen during that long exploring expedition. Certain it is, his manner was quite well-bred and self-possessed when Mr. Greville spoke to him going from church ; nor was he at all eager to lionize himself, though he civilly answered questions. Altogether, Mr. Greville was surprised to find him such a well-behaved young man, and rather tantalized at his not volunteering some details of Sir Roderick's *soirée*, nor adding anything piquant to the anecdotes

that were already creeping into the newspapers. Mr. Greville told him patronizingly to come over to the Abbey some forenoon, and he would hear what he had to say. George bowed like a gentleman born, and replied, "Sir, you do me honour."

The next thing to be done, was to give a tea-party. George proposed it to his mother as she carved the veal pie, and she was pleased, yet rather fluttered at the suggestion. Who should they ask? Why, the Safferys, to be sure, and those pretty girls the Miss Browns, and their mother, if she ever went out; and Mr. and Mrs. Oldsmith. With themselves, that would make ten, and perhaps that was as many as their parlour would hold; certainly, they could not muster more than ten chairs all the house through; and they had only six cups and saucers; but they could buy, borrow, or beg.

The undertaking seemed tremendous, but Mrs. Early trusted that some who were invited would decline, and so it proved. Nussy gladly accepted, and Mr. Saffery would look in for an hour; but Mrs. Saffery could not leave the house, and had no disposition to be on visiting

terms with Mrs. Early. Mrs. Brown, again, never went out; but her daughters gladly promised to come, and so did Mrs. Oldsmith. Mrs. Early's experiences under Mrs. Weir and Mrs. Homer now came into play. She knew how gentlefolks had things, and without carrying imitation too far, she managed the details of the feast pretty well. And there was a good deal of talking and laughing; and George had some adventures to relate that made them very serious; and he traced the course of the expedition on a map he had hung up against the wall; and he produced his little collection of curiosities, and had something interesting to tell of each. Mrs. Early sat in silent transport, as she saw him fixing every one's attention. Nor was Mr. Saffery at all a bad hand at drawing him out, asking him most extraordinary questions that had not the least connexion. Mr. Saffery returned early to his official duties, but Nussy remained to walk home with the Miss Browns. They were afraid of keeping their mother up late; but it was quite dark when they took leave, and George insisted on seeing them to their homes. They all walked merrily to the Browns' door, but

Nessy then told George she would not trouble him, and ran off across the green.

After this, the Misses Brown came to the conclusion that they must requite the hospitality of Mrs. Early by a counter-invitation to her and her son. This led to another pleasant evening, in which Nessy was the only other participant, by reason of the smallness of the room. And they all agreed that the party was all the pleasanter for being so select; and George was more entertaining than ever; and Nessy took a strange idea into her head, that he was on the very brink of falling in love with Miss Carry Brown.

After this outburst of dissipation, things subsided pretty much into their usual course, George always finding something to do in or about the house, or running up to town to see his chief, or looking in on the Miss Browns to ask them confidentially how they thought his mother's bonnet was wearing, and whether it wanted doing up yet.

It appeared that he did not mean to lead this idle life long; his services had met with the attention of the Colonial Government, and he was promised some appointment when there

should be an opening ; but, meanwhile, he was taking rest and refreshment, saying he needed it and had earned it. He had between two and three hundred pounds in hand, which he meant to devote to the benefit of his mother ; and as his expected appointment would recall him to Australia, and he was quite sure she would never screw her courage to the point of accompanying him there, he thought it the best way to provide for her in her own line at home, by fitting up her cottage so as to enable her to let lodgings. This was a very congenial mode of life to Mrs. Early ; the only drawback was the prospect of his going away ; and whenever she began to be out of spirits about that, he used to say—

“Come along with me, then. You’ll get over the sea-sickness in a few weeks, and you won’t be very frightened at being out of sight of land when you are used to it, and you won’t mind sea-serpents, and flying-fish, and water-spouts, and whirlpools, or icebergs, or coral-reefs, as long as I am with you.”

But this catalogue of terrors always sufficed, and she would shake her head, and say—

“No, my boy ; you are young, and able to

cope with flying-serpents and such like ; but I'm getting older every day, and too glad to have my head under a roof of my own to wish to change it for a ship."

Mr. Antony, having finished what he called his job-work, and received a very acceptable cheque for the same, had filled up the winter by painting two charming little pictures, with very little trouble to himself, or, at any rate, with such love and zest, that he was unconscious of any toil. They were done "at the first intention," so to say—painted in at once, so thinly that you might see the cross lines of the canvas through the paint. He called one "The Blackberry Gatherers." It represented the same glade he had painted to order, taken from another point of view, with a group of children blackberrying, whom he had sketched on the spot. The other was "The Mendicant"—the tall old man who had sat to him at Mr. Saffery's, soliciting relief at a cottage-door. The searching look of the housewife, the intense pity in the face of a girl looking over her shoulder, were both suggested by the Safferys. These pictures were no sooner seen than sold. He sent them to the early exhi-

bition at the British Institution, and each had a little yellow ticket in the corner the first day. "Two sixties!" He felt himself a prosperous man, and began to talk of a visit to Rome. He had a commission, however, which put it out of the question for the present; but he agreed with Edith that it would be very pleasant to spend Easter at Belforest, and she wrote to Mrs. Benson to ask if she could take them in. Mrs. Benson was glad to have them again, and promised they should find everything ready.

And now it was Passion-week, and Mr. Weir's lectures had become more and more spiritual and practical, and he had made a good many feel that—

"Life is real, life is earnest,
And this world is not its goal,"

nor is time to be desultorily spent in vague dreams, and idle talks, and profitless readings, and useless workings; but that every one has a mission of kindness and usefulness and self-training to fulfil, even in the trivial round and common task. And then he crowned the course by a set of very short addresses during Passion-week, scarcely extending over a quarter

of an hour, each illustrating some portion of our Lord's sufferings, and closing them with practical application. The Antonys could not come down till the Thursday, so they lost the greater part of the course.

On the Wednesday Mr. Oldsmith, who, it may be remembered, had the letting of Tressellis, came to Mr. Saffery, and said, with a curious sort of smile on his face—

“Weren't you a guarantee to me about Mrs. Homer when she took the cottage?”

“Guarantee? no!” returned Mr. Saffery, in quick alarm. “I never guarantee anybody. I said you'd better write to Messrs. Root and Branche.”

“I know you said you were quite sure she was safe.”

“Isn't she, then? She paid here quite regular.”

“And so she's paid me, ten days or so after the quarter. Only, if she hadn't, we might have whistled for our money. Her husband's alive and abroad.”

“Alive? Mr. Homer alive?” ejaculated Mr. Saffery, in profound astonishment. “Why then, she's no widow.”

“No more than you.”

Nessy, who had come into the shop, turned very pale.

“Mr. Homer’s a scamp, then, I reckon,” said Mr. Saffery. “To think of our making such a mistake!”

“Mistake? ’Twas deceit! Didn’t she wear a widow’s cap?”

“Only a little while,” said Mr. Saffery, reluctant to give up his favourite.

Mr. Oldsmith laughed sardonically as he repeated, “Only a little while!”

“How did you find it out?” said Mr. Saffery.

“Well,” said Mr. Oldsmith, “I thought, from the first, your guarantee wasn’t worth much, and that I must keep my eye upon her; only, as long as her things were in the house, I had security for my rent. But then she might move them off any night, with the railway so near. So towards quarter-day I got fidgetty; and when we went to dine with the old folks at Christmas—*my* father and mother, you know—I said what I was doubtful about, and how I knew nothing about my tenant but that she came from Ipswich. ‘Oh!’ says my sister

Kate, 'a schoolfellow of mine has married an ironmonger at Ipswich.' 'Then do you write to her,' says I, 'and ask if she can tell you anything about Mrs. Homer.' So Kate said she would, but, however, we are not a very writing family, and I suppose she forgot it. Meantime, my rent was received, so I cared no more about it. This morning, however, I got a letter from Kate, and she says, 'Mrs. Smith writes word that Mrs. Homer was a Miss Crowe; her sister keeps a school here. Captain Homer is abroad.'"

"A captain, is he?" said Mr. Saffery. "Well, it's curious. Look you, the captain may have died abroad."

"But she says, 'he *is* abroad.'"

"Depend on it, he's a scamp, then," said Mr. Saffery, "and she considers him as good as buried."

"*That's* no excuse for taking us in," said Mr. Oldsmith.

"How should this friend of your sister's know whether he's dead or alive?" persisted Mr. Saffery. "Most likely her intelligence is not very recent. 'He *was* alive, and *is* dead.' *That's* how it will turn out to be, most likely."

“I see you are determined he shall be very dead indeed,” said Mr. Oldsmith, laughing, and turning away.

“Are you going to take any steps?”

“Steps? no! There are no steps to take, as she doesn’t owe me money.”

“Well, it’s an odd thing—unpleasant, I may say,” observed Mr. Saffery. “But really I can’t remember that Mrs. Homer ever said she was a widow. Did she, Nessy?”

“No,” said Nessy.

“Of course,” said Mr. Oldsmith, “she wouldn’t go about saying, ‘I am a widow, thou art a widow, she is a widow;’ her cap said that!”

There was no getting over the cap.

Nessy felt this deception very much. It was the first acted falsehood she had ever known perpetrated; and she was habitually, and on principle, a truth-loving girl. She could not take refuge in her father’s repudiation of the report as a calumny: she had no doubt that, since the ironmonger’s wife said it, Captain Homer was alive. Then why should Mrs. Homer pretend he was dead? Nessy was afraid that the question could not be satisfac-

torily answered : she shrank from hearing her mother's remarks when she learnt the truth from Mr. Saffery, and she found something to do in the upper part of the house till it might be supposed the news had been told.

That same day, Miss Hornblower called on Mrs. Weir, evidently with something noteworthy to communicate. Hurrying over preliminaries, she said,

“My dear Mrs. Weir, I have come to consult you on rather an awkward affair. I subscribe to Mudie's Library, and have down a box of books once a month. Yesterday evening I received a fresh set ; and when I was shut in for the night, I sat down to enjoy a good novel. I had scarcely established myself comfortably before the fire, with my feet on the fender, and the lamp at my side, when, from between the leaves of the book, out dropped a little note without an envelope. I opened it, thinking it might somehow belong to myself ; instead of which, I read to myself (here it is) as follows :—

“Tristan d'Acunha, *Jan.* 3, 18—.

“I should hope that by this time your romance has spent itself, and you are in a

better disposition to face realities. None of us are perfect—certainly I am not. I have been very ill; and partly with vexation about you. Much the best way will be to let bygones be bygones, and for you at once to rejoin your affectionate husband (for I don't pretend to be indifferent about you),

CHARLES HOMER."

"Homer! O dear! we ought not to have read this letter!" cried Mrs. Weir, in great trouble.

"You haven't read it, and I read it quite by chance, quite involuntarily," said Miss Hornblower, triumphantly. "So you see what she is! The date of this letter shows she must recently have received it."

"But—dear me, what an extraordinary thing! how very strange! how unfortunate for such a letter to have got into the book!"

"Do you call it unfortunate? I think it quite the reverse. She deserves to be exposed."

"Poor young thing! We don't know how she may have been tried. It is not a kind letter. Very likely he is a tyrannical man. What are you going to do with the letter?"

Miss Hornblower looked staggered by this inquiry, as if she had intended to preserve it among her archives.

“It would serve her right,” said she, “to return it in an envelope, with these words: ‘You are Found Out.’”

“Oh no, oh no!” said Mrs. Weir; “I could not bear such a thing. You must not be so severe. You do not even know the letter is for her.”

“Yes, I do,” said Miss Hornblower hastily; “for the envelope dropped afterwards. Here it is—see, it has the Belforest post-mark. ‘Mrs. Homer, Belforest, Surrey, England.’”

“I could almost wish you had replaced the letter in the envelope, fastened it, and posted it again.”

“I can do that now, if you think I had better. Only it will have the Belforest stamp. She will know it has been read here.”

“No, she won’t know it has been read.”

“I should think few would have had the opportunity without availing themselves of it,” said Miss Hornblower. “Nobody, I think.”

They paused. Mr. Weir came in.

“Frank,” said his mother quickly, “Mrs. Homer’s husband is alive!”

He coloured up to the temples. Mrs. Weir saw it, and instantly drew her inference from it.

“Has she just learnt it?” said he. “What a shock!”

“She has known him to be alive all the time,” said Miss Hornblower.

“We *suppose* so,” said Mrs. Weir, checking her. “We know nothing.”

“Only that her husband, Captain Homer, is alive now, in Tristan d’Acunha. Judge for yourself.”

She handed him the note.

“Oh, we must not read this!” exclaimed he, directly his eye rested on it. “How *could* you?” with strong reproach.

“How could I do otherwise?” said Miss Hornblower, in hot self-defence. “I couldn’t help it; it fell out of a book.”

“That did not oblige you to read it. Well, the mischief is done now.”

“Frank, what do you think of it?” said his mother, as he turned away.

“I don’t know yet what I think of it.”

“Stay, my dear—don’t go. We want to know what to do with this note.”

“Why, return it, to be sure !” said he indignantly. “Return it, now you have stolen its secret.”

“But how ? by post ? She will take it for granted it has been read, and will torment herself in fruitless guesses as to who is the anonymous sender.”

“That’s true. The true, the honest way, is the only right way. You are blaming her with all your hearts at this moment for having concealed something, which was more her own affair, poor creature, than yours ; and will *you* use concealment ? You must return her the letter yourselves ; and tell her kindly, but truly, how you came by it.”

“Oh, *I* can’t take it,” cried Miss Hornblower with a little shriek. “I wouldn’t face her for the world. Do *you* take it, Mrs. Weir.”

“I could no more walk to Tresellis than I could fly,” said Mrs. Weir. “You forget my ankle.”

“Give it me, I will take it,” said Mr. Weir, in a short, quick voice. As he put it in his

pocket-book, Miss Hornblower could not forbear saying—

“I must call it a very sinful thing. I’ve no patience with her.”

He replied, “Our Lord had mercy on a woman which was a sinner.”

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

MR. ANTONY was summoned from home for twenty-four hours, to attend the funeral of a relative he had never seen; and as he knew Edith was longing to be at Daisylands, he advised her to go down there at once, promising to join her as soon as he could. She resolved to act on this suggestion.

He therefore put her into a railway-carriage, and went to find himself a seat in another train. Edith was congratulating herself on being placed in an empty carriage, when, just at the last moment, a porter unlocked the door, and put in a lady, on whom he turned the key, and, the next instant they were off.

No sooner did the travelling companions exchange glances, than they exclaimed, "Miss

Crowe!" "Edith!" and immediately kissed one another.

"Why, how unexpected this is!" said Miss Crowe, "and how pleasant! What a time it is since we saw each other last! How curious that we should be put into the same carriage! I'm going to Belforest, to see Eugenia."

"I'm going to Belforest, too," said Edith.

"Oh, you know the place, do you?"

"Yes, we spent a month there last autumn, and liked it so much that we are going there again for Easter week."

"You know all about Eugenia, then."

"I can't say I do. She passed for a widow at Belforest."

"Do you mean she wore weeds?"

"Yes."

"That was too bad," said Miss Crowe reddening. "I could not have thought it of her, though I know her pretty well. What heaps of stories she must have told."

Edith was on the verge of laughing, but Miss Crowe saw it, and said,

"It is no laughing matter. Do tell me how she went on. I want to know all about her."

"She went on very quietly," said Edith.

“Everybody seemed to like her. She had put up in very small lodgings at the post-office.”

“Because she was short of money.”

“What, with her two hundred a-year?”

“She had never thought of saving, and had very little in hand. I hoped Root and Branche would be a little behindhand with her quarterage, but they are quite allies of hers, and she can have her own way with them. You know they were Mr. Brunt’s solicitors and are in her interest—they don’t care for the Crowes; I think they are influenced by her pretty face.”

“It *is* a pretty face,” said Edith heartily. “I used to sit looking at it in church, and admiring that soft Madonna look, till it made me forget the sermon.”

“Oh, I’m sick of that soft Madonna look!” said Miss Crowe, with such vehemence that Edith could not help laughing. “I’ve regretted sometimes being so plain, and thought how nice it would be to be as pretty as Eugenia; but since I’ve seen the results of her good looks, I’ve been content to be as I am. First, her beauty made her spoilt as a child; then my mother continued to spoil her for my father’s sake. Her

sitting up to receive visitors did not lessen her vanity, though the sly little thing used to look so unconscious that mamma was quite taken in by it. *You* know how provoked I used to be sometimes !”

Edith laughed and nodded.

“When we gave our annual dance,” pursued Miss Crowe, excitedly, “*you* know what a fight there used to be among the boys, who should secure Eugenia for a partner. The little Queen of Beauty looked so demure all the while ; but *I* knew the vain little thoughts that were swelling that little heart. *I* know what girls are ! I’ve a kind of intuition that enables me to know, without any telling, the really vain from the really modest,—the really pious from the hypocritical shamers,—the really clever from the merely superficial. Now, cannot I ?”

“You certainly have great perception of character,” said Edith.

“And some knowledge of the various treatments that different characters require,” said Miss Crowe. “Why, you might as well bestow the same proportions of heat, light, and moisture, on different species of plants, as apply the same régime to all the girls of one school. I

don't want to praise myself, but I believe that if I had had the training of Eugenia from the first, I could have made a very different girl of her. I could have made her as good as *you*, Edith."

Here the deafening noise of a passing train compelled a short silence.

"I can't think," resumed she, "how Eugenia came to take a house at Belforest. I can well understand her going there for a few weeks, while she was short of money, till she got her dividends: it was near London, and out of the way of observation; but there must have been some powerful attraction, one would think."

"I don't know of any," said Edith. "A very good young clergyman and his mother were very kind to her, and she used to be a good deal with them, but I believe she saw no other society."

"An unmarried clergyman?"

"Oh, yes."

"Why, I call that wicked!" cried Miss Crowe, exasperated. "The young man might have fallen in love with those nasty Madonna looks; and where would she have been then? You think me very violent against Eugenia,"

she added, calming herself, "but the more I love her, the more I'm provoked with her; and I don't think she loves me at all."

"Oh, yes, she does—she must."

"No."

And her throat swelled, and tears shone in her eyes.

"Go on about her," said she, presently.

"There is not much to say. She lived very quietly, and was certainly liked."

"How did she employ herself? how did she fill up her time? Not in needle-work, *I* know."

"I think she read a good deal."

"Novels."

"And she had her harp. And she taught in the Sunday-school."

"Oh, what teaching it must have been," said Miss Crowe, turning up her eyes. "I should like just to have heard her questions! Did you?"

"No; but Mr. Weir really prized her assistance; and was sorry when she gave up attending."

"A good thing for him, maybe, that she did," said Miss Crowe, gloomily.

Edith wanted to know more; so she presently resumed the conversation with—

“It was a singular proof of attachment in Mr. Brunt, his leaving her that annuity.”

“Very singular,” said Miss Crowe, “at his time of life. Shows the power of a pretty face, even over men of mature years.”

“Beauty is a power; and I think it must be meant to be one. You see, Mrs. Homer is more than pretty;—she has such expression.”

“Yes, her face expresses things she does not in the least feel.”

“Were you satisfied with her marriage with Captain Homer?”

“Satisfied? Anything but that. I could not bear it. I did not want her to marry into the army. We knew too well the trials poor papa’s narrow means entailed on us: and I knew Eugenia had no management.”

“How did she meet him?”

“At the end of Mary Beaufort’s last half, she invited Eugenia to stay with her. The Beau-forts lived in a garrison town. I did not much like Eugenia’s going, but she laughed at my objections, and you know, after my mother’s death, no one had any control over her. She was of age, with two hundred a year for her sole and separate use, whether single or

married. How much good she might have done with that money! But she spent it all on herself, and, to go to the Beauforts, she provided a very gay outfit. They were dressy people, and went out a great deal. I believe Eugenia and Mary were sufficiently admired; for Eugenia's letters were ecstatic; and at the end of three weeks, she wrote to me that she was engaged to Captain Homer. I stormed—implored—but quite in vain. She said she knew best what was for her happiness; and since I was so against her marriage, she supposed I did not want to be present at it. I had a good cry; and wrote that though protesting against it, I wished to be present. She would not be married from home, however, because of the school; and the marriage was to take place before the holidays; so I could only leave the girls for a few hours, under charge of Miss Stone."

"What was Captain Homer like?" inquired Edith, with interest.

"Well, it's difficult to see what a man's like, when he's all over moustache. There was a tall column of scarlet and gold, and a cropped black head at the top of it, and so much

beard and whisker that I declare I doubt if I should know the man, if I met him in the street. However," she continued, "he was Eugenia's husband, whom she promised to love, cherish, and obey, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health. And how has she performed it? In less than six weeks, they separated. She had expected, I believe, the continued gaiety of a garrison life, instead of which, he had to take command of a small detachment ordered to relieve the soldiers at Tristan d'Acunha. And she refused to go."

"That was very bad of her," said Edith. "I don't know much of Tristan d'Acunha; but I suppose it is very hot. Still, many officers leave their wives behind."

"There would have been nothing in that, nothing at all," said Miss Crowe. "For my part, I should have preferred Eugenia's being left behind with us, and for us to have the opportunity of forgetting the captain altogether. And it might have been so, with such a very little management! Instead of which, they must get mutually dissatisfied, and have a desperate quarrel, and each say things that the

other could not forgive—she accusing him of wanting her money, and he repaying her with abuse of her selfishness and romance. Even then, she would have done better to come quietly back to me ; but she scouted the idea, called Crowsnest a dungeon, a desert, and what not, and accused me of interested motives. When she came to that pass, I ceased to have anything to do with her. I thought she might be wretched her own way—for wretched she would and must be.”

Miss Crowe here put her handkerchief to her eyes, and cried. Edith, to console her, said—

“I don’t think you need suppose her wretched. She seemed very composed and even-spirited. I don’t think she feels things as you do.”

“I know,” sobbed Miss Crowe, “that I’ve a very hot temper, and I do all I can to control it. I don’t think you ever saw me give way to it much.”

“Never, never !”

“I’m fond of young people, and like to make them happy, but not by spoiling them. Where there’s no order, there’s no law ; where there’s

no law, there's no safety; and where there's no safety, there's no happiness. I don't think that the young ladies of Crowsnest, generally speaking, find it a dungeon."

"Why, we used to call it 'our other home!'" said Edith. "And at one time it was my only one."

Miss Crowe looked pleased, and remained silent a little while.

"As for Tristan d'Acunha," resumed she, presently, "Eugenia certainly said truly, that she should be buried alive there. But, for *her* to allege that, when her head is stuffed full of novels, and disinterested sacrifices, and love in a cottage—the world forgetting, by the world forgot!—is inconsistent enough. Tristan d'Acunha lies about fifteen hundred miles from the Cape, and about the same distance from St. Helena."

"That does sound very isolated, certainly," said Edith.

"The only habitable patch of land," continued Miss Crowe, exactly as if she were repeating a geography lesson, "is a narrow plain or shelf, formed from the *débris* of the vast, overhanging cliffs, about four miles long,

and from a mile to a mile and a half broad. The rest of the island is about nine thousand feet high, and nearly inaccessible."

"Dear me, I should not like such a place at all!" exclaimed Edith. "I don't think you can wonder Mrs. Homer does not like to go to it."

"Other people are obliged to go to it, and remain on it," said Miss Crowe; "and I suppose they have their feelings as well as Eugenia."

"I wonder Government can keep up such a place."

"In time of war, if our enemies got possession of it, they might make our position at St. Helena and the Cape very perilous."

"I see. Dear me, one reads about such stations without caring about them in the least; but it makes all the difference if some one we care for is there."

"Just so," said Miss Crowe, "and Captain Homer is there."

"How many people live on the island?"

"About a hundred; chiefly the descendants of a score or so of soldiers and their wives, who were left there, many years ago, and seemed at

one time to be pretty nearly forgotten. Rather an awkward thing, too, to be forgotten at Tristan d'Acunha, for it depends for its supplies of food and clothing from the whale ships, and sometimes they have been reduced to great extremities. Some of the young people would gladly get away, and see something of the world, if they could but carry their property with them, consisting chiefly of live stock. And many fine young men have gone forth from them as sailors. There are, however, two 'old salts' on the island, who declare they will stick by it to the last: one of them served under Nelson. There are large families of grown-up daughters; the female population much exceeds the male. They are moral, and, indeed, eminently religious."

"Ah, then," said Edith, "I believe I could be happy there — happy if Leo were with me."

Here they stopped at a station, and two gentlemen were put into their carriage, which prevented any more personal conversation. Edith transported herself in reverie to Tristan d'Acunha, and fancied herself training the girls, enlivening the old people, scrambling up

the rocks, gazing over the wide, wide sea, making beautiful collections of ferns, sea-weeds, and shells, and reading Shakspeare, like Gertrude of Wyoming, in some retired nook.

When they reached Belforest, Miss Crowe asked her the way to Tresellis; and Edith offered to be her pioneer. "Are you going to stay here?" said she.

"I don't know that Eugenia will offer me a bed," said Miss Crowe, "for she has been anything but sisterly. I have only had three letters from her in six months; and when I was very ill, in the Christmas holidays, and wanted her to come and nurse me, she excused herself, under plea of being 'such a silly creature about infection.' And this at the very time she was declaring she didn't care how soon she laid down her weary, weary life! Bosh!"

"Was your illness infectious, then?"

"We had had scarlet fever in the house, and I had overtaxed my strength in nursing the girls. But I had no fever; Eugenia and I had it when we were children. People take it a second, and even a third, time occasionally; but too rarely to be quoted as warnings by any but cowards. Eugenia's last letter, however,

was kind, and on the strength of it I am coming to see her; but I am not at all sure of my reception. I have heard from Captain Homer lately. He writes a good letter, and he wants to make it up with her, and to persuade her to go out to him. I don't believe she will, though."

"I think she should," said Edith; "but yet there are many excuses for her, if she cannot make up her mind to such complete isolation."

They were now threading Quagmire Lane.

"I should think she must be tolerably isolated at the end of such a lane as this," said Miss Crowe, as she picked her way through the mud. "Few visitors, I should think, would wade through this clay to call on her, unless the young clergyman, in seven league boots. She told me what a delightful preacher he was, and I was pleased to find she could call any preacher delightful; but my pleasure is dashed, now that I find she has been passing herself off as a widow. What would Captain Homer say to that, I wonder? He *might* say, 'the wish was father to the thought.' Do you remember Miss Stone?"

“The half-boarder? Oh, yes,” said Edith. “A silent, stupid girl.”

“After you left, she became a paid teacher. She was a tolerable drudge; but she got conceited, fancied herself worth a better salary, and went away. This winter she has been staying with Eugenia.”

“A very good arrangement, if Mrs. Homer can put up with so stolid a companion,” said Edith. “Miss Stone must have been glad of a home, and Mrs. Homer would have found Tresellis very lonely without any one to share her seclusion.”

“Jemima Stone is such a perfect nonentity,” said Miss Crowe, “that I think Eugenia must have selected her because she knew she would be not the least restraint. ‘Speak when you’re spoken to, do as you’re bid,’ is the whole duty of woman, in Miss Stone’s opinion. But, dear me, will this long lane never have a turning? I think, as the Irishman said of the rope he was hauling in, ‘the end must be cut off.’”

But at this instant they came in view of the picturesque gables of Tresellis.

“And now I will wish you good-bye,” said Edith, “for you cannot miss your way.”

“She may be out, or she may deny herself,” said Miss Crowe, nervously. “Do go with me to the gate, and see whether I am admitted.”

“But she may see me from the window, and will think it so odd.”

“Stay here, then, a minute or two, behind the hedge. If I do not join you in five minutes, conclude that I have gone in.”

CHAPTER XI.

EUGENIA.

MR. WEIR started on his uncomfortable mission in no very pleasant frame of mind. The very basis of his character was truth; he read it inscribed on every page of the Gospel; he adored the Master who emphatically called Himself *the Truth*; he saw, in every newspaper he took up, the foundations of society sapped by its infraction;—in every broken treaty, in every quarrel about boundaries, in every breach of peace, in frauds on the revenue, in contractors' cheats, in clerks' embezzlements, in forged wills, in the law-courts, the police-courts, the criminal-courts—everywhere he saw sin and sorrow that might have been avoided, had mothers taught, and children learnt, the truth.

When will the altars of that trumpery idol, Society, with her painted cheeks and tinsel frippery, be forsaken for the pure white pedestal

of her who hides in no remote solitude, difficult of access, but utters her voice in the streets, cries in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates, and in the city, saying, "Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil"? But the father of lies is believed sooner than she is.

So at least, thought Mr. Weir; and when he read of celestial personages in pure white garments, whiter than any fuller on earth can white them, cinctured with a band of fine gold, that golden thread, to him, was the girdle of truth, which confines within just limits, and strengthens while it binds.

Arrived at Tresellis, he sent in his name, and was admitted. Mrs. Homer was illuminating a book-marker. Miss Stone was at either knitting, netting, or crochet, and speedily disappeared. Mrs. Homer welcomed him with her sweet smile, and said it was quite a privilege to see him in her little nest. He went at once into the matter in hand, and said with a constrained air—

“I come on rather an unpleasant mission. A lady who subscribes to Mudie’s Library, has found a letter of yours, which you may have used as a marker, in a book she has just received from town.”

“A Belforest lady? has she read it?” said Mrs. Homer, quickly.

“Yes.”

He gave her the note. Directly she saw what it was, she coloured violently—painfully, and was quite unable to look up or speak.

“It was unpardonable of her to read it,” said he, pitying her.

“It was;” she replied in a low voice. “Have—*you* read it?”

“Oh, no! but I know your secret; it was told me abruptly. Why did you deceive us so?” said he very gently, very kindly.

She burst into tears.

“I never said—” she faltered.

“Nay, an acted falsehood is just the same as if spoken.”

“For protection—so young!” she sobbed.

“Yes, you were very young—you were unprotected,” said he compassionately. “But permit me to speak for once like a friend—an

old friend ; may I ? How came you to be so unprotected ? Was it in any degree your own fault ?

“Partly.”

“Are not you sorry ?”

“Yes.”

“Why, now we are coming to the heart of the matter,” said he cheerfully. “I have long seen you had something on your mind. And here it is. You have done something you are sorry for—you wish you could set it straight ; let me see if I cannot help you.”

She dried her eyes, and gave him an April smile.

“Yes, you have done very wrong,” said he, quickly ; “and if a good Providence had not been watching over you, and others, it might have been the occasion of great sin—great sorrow. Thank God, this day, on your knees, that it has not been so. He is your great, your best Friend ; you have offended Him—you must tell Him you are sorry, and ask Him to pardon you ; then He will make all things even yet work together for good.”

“Pray for me—”

“I will, if you will pray for yourself. Will you?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t rise from your knees till you feel you *have* prayed. It need not take you long ; I am exacting no penance. I am trying to set you right with the only Friend who can keep you right. When you are right with Him, you will be right with your husband. God bless you.”

He quitted her, and opening the house door for himself, nearly ran against Miss Crowe. She said,

“I beg your pardon ; is Mrs. Homer at home ?”

“Yes,” he replied ; “she—”

Seeing him hesitate, and scarcely make way for her, Miss Crowe said abruptly,

“I’m her sister !”

On which he immediately made way for her with a low bow, and walked out, while she walked in. Entering the parlour thus unannounced, there she found Mrs. Homer, drowned in tears.

“Eugenia !” said she, abruptly.

“Oh, Marianne ! why have you come ?”

said Mrs. Homer, with a start, and then relapsing into grief.

“Time enough I should come, I think ;” said Miss Crowe, planting herself in a chair as if she meant to take root in it. “Things seem to be going on strangely.”

“I don’t know what you mean by strange, nor why it is time ‘for you to come,” said Mrs. Homer, drying her tears, and beginning to stand at bay. “What *do* you mean ?”

“Certainly, Eugenia, I can’t think it very respectable for you in this out-of-the-way place, to be receiving *tête-à-tête* visits from an unmarried young clergyman, who supposes you to be a widow.”

“He doesn’t !” said Mrs. Homer, colouring scarlet ; “and he never called without his mother before ; and Miss Stone has but just gone out of the room ; so *now* am I respectable ?” And she cried afresh.

“Well, all I can say is, it seems very curious, meeting him going out of the house all in a flurry, and finding you crying like a scolded child—”

“Marianne !”

“It’s no good Marianning me, Eugenia ; the

fact was so, and what would Captain Homer have thought of it? He'd have collared him, maybe."

"Oh, Marianne! how *can* you talk in that dreadful way? Have pity on my feelings—"

"No, Eugenia, because you have no pity on your husband. And wearing that black gown, too! Faugh! Who are you in mourning for, pray? And how came you to wear a widow's cap?"

Mrs. Homer was, for the moment, struck dumb, but the traitor colour rose in her cheeks. She turned away her face; buried it in her handkerchief, and murmured,

"Oh, the meanness of the world!"

"Ay, the world is very mean, and so are the persons who compose it," said Miss Crowe. "The world has been mean enough to make its remarks on you already, and will proceed to very unpleasant constructions if you don't take care what you are about. Oh! Eugenia, why *must* I talk in this manner? You know I love you," said Miss Crowe, beginning to cry, "and you don't return it in the least."

"Marianne, you say such cruel, cruel things ;

I really feel so ill that I must go and lie down—”

“Do stop, Eugenia, just a moment—am I to go or stay? Here have I come this long journey, the moment I was at liberty, entirely on your account; though you would not come near me at Christmas, and are you going to take me in or not?”

“If you had but written me a line—(my head is splitting)—if you had given me the shortest notice, instead of bursting in upon me in this agitating way—”

“I see!—You don’t wish to have me.”

“Miss Stone has my only spare room—”

“Ah, Eugenia! time has been when you and I have shared the same little bed, and not found it too small; and when I have lain on the floor beside you, when you were tossing with fever—”

Mrs. Homer put her arm round her sister’s neck, and kissed her two or three times. Miss Crowe returned the caress with emotion.

“You were always a dreadful plague, you tiresome thing,” said she; “and why won’t you be a good child for once, and make us all happy?”

“ Oh ! Marianne, you can't think how I long, how I yearn to do so ; but really at this moment you don't understand me—I had an agitating surprise just before you came in, and I've had no time to recover. . . . I believe I'm going to faint—A glass of wine, please—”

She changed colour, and looked so unmistakably ill, that Miss Crowe, in alarm, pulled the bell, and then held her in her arms. Arnold answered the summons so instantaneously as to provoke suspicion that his ear had been recently at the key-hole. He looked hard at Miss Crowe, who eyed him with severity.

“ Call Miss Stone,” said she.

Miss Stone came in, looking all surprise at seeing Miss Crowe, and was beginning a little set speech, when she was cut short with—

“ Get Mrs. Homer a glass of wine.”

“ I believe I'd better go up to my room,” said Mrs. Homer, faintly. “ Your arm, Jemima.”

Miss Stone's arm on one side, and Miss Crowe's on the other, met across her waist, and they supported her up the narrow little staircase, Miss Crowe convinced that, “ if she

would make an effort," this faintness might be thrown off.

But her lips were blue, and her cheeks were white, and her arms were limp, and her hands were cold—so there could be no mistake.

They put her in bed, and they tucked her in, and Miss Stone went for hot bottles; and Miss Crowe looked with contempt and provocation at the graceful white net draperies of the little canopy-bed, and the flounced toilette, clear muslin over pink, and the draped looking-glass with wax-lights, and the couch, and the ottoman, and the table loaded with novels.

Mrs. Homer's faintness, instead of decreasing, became worse; and she was as nearly insensible as she could be, without going off into a dead faint. Everything that affection and energy could do for her was done by Miss Crowe; and when she recovered a little, the tears oozed through her closed eyelashes, and she softly whispered (her sister's face being close to her own), "Don't leave me, dear. I think I'm going to be very ill. Don't go away."

"I won't leave you, dear," said Miss Crowe, kissing her.

Later in the day, Miss Crowe said to Miss Stone, with a troubled air, "Do send that buttoned boy for the doctor."

Mr. Weir, on quitting Tresellis, not exactly *hors de lui-même*, but certainly under excitement, came unexpectedly upon Edith, outside the gate.

"You here?" said he, in surprise, and he held out his hand to her.

"I have but just come down," said Edith, in explanation. "We are going to spend our Easter at Daisylands."

"I am very glad of it. Were you going to call on Mrs. Homer?"

"No! I only walked down the lane with Miss Crowe."

"That is well, because I do not think Mrs. Homer is quite prepared just now for visitors. Miss Crowe was the lady, I suppose, who went in as I came out. She called herself Mrs. Homer's sister."

"Yes, she is," said Edith.

"You know her very well, then?"

"Oh, yes! I went to school at Miss Crowe's."

"Oh, indeed!"

“Is she gone in? Is she going to remain?”

“She went in, and seems to be staying.”

“Then I need not wait,” said Edith; and she began to walk away.

Mr. Weir accompanied her. “The sisters are not at all alike,” said he.

“No,” said Edith. “Eugenia is so pretty, and Miss Crowe is rather plain. But I never think of her plainness: there is something so sterling about her—only she is rather blunt.”

“She does not make her young ladies blunt, I hope.”

“No,” said Edith, smiling. “I am not aware that she does. But she is a great stickler for truth. She says Truth and Honesty are twins: one is equal to the other.”

“I am of her mind. Is she come to stay?”

“That is as Mrs. Homer wills, I believe. At the utmost, she can only remain a few days.”

“Well, I hope she will remain as long as she can, for it will be an advantage to Mrs. Homer to have a female relative with her in her present position.”

Edith gave him a look, as much as to say, “You know, then, what her position is?”

At least, he read it so, and answered, "I know about Captain Homer."

"Oh, I am so glad you do," said Edith.

"I know the bare fact of his existence, but no more. Stay, I think I heard he was at Tristan d'Acunha. Is that true?"

"Yes, he commands a detachment there."

"What an out-of-the-way spot! Does he expect his wife to join him?"

"I am told he wishes it. He has written to Miss Crowe about it."

"Poor Mrs. Homer!" said Mr. Weir, with strong pity. "Such monotonous isolation, under such a burning sun! I doubt if her health would stand it."

"You think not?"

"Well, I think she may be very fairly excused for feeling rather discouraged. I was reading about the island lately, in the Bishop of Capetown's *Visitation Journal*. It is of volcanic origin, and has the crater of an extinct volcano at the summit."

"Dear me, I should not like to live on a volcano at all," said Edith.

He smiled and said, "The British Islands are volcanic." Presently he resumed, "It will

be a matter of some interest, some anxiety, to await Mrs. Homer's decision. As a question of duty, she should go. She should not have voluntarily linked her fate to another, and have shrunk from the very first trial exacted of her. Soldiers are always expecting to be sent to scenes of danger. In general, the contest among their wives is, *not to be left behind*. Esquiros says, 'they share the soldier's dangers, hardships, privations—everything except the glory.' Dangers come to us at home, dodge them as we may. English people have lived for years at Tristan d'Acunha, in content and health. Solitary it undoubtedly is; but there is no crime."

Reaching the end of the lane, where their roads parted, he said, "I hope you and my mother will make acquaintance, Miss Antony."

She said she should be very happy. As she passed the post-office, she met Nussy's anxious eyes, and went in.

"Well, Miss Saffery, here we are again," said she. "We are going to spend the week at Daisylands."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Nussy. "I saw you

pass the green, about an hour ago, with a stranger."

"Miss Crowe, Mrs. Homer's sister. We came down in the same carriage, and I showed her the way to Tresellis."

"Oh! then you know—"

"Know what?" said Edith.

"About Mrs. Homer," said Nessy.

"About her not being a widow? Oh, I knew that last summer. I always knew it."

"Did you? Oh, I'm so glad!"

"Why?"

"Because it shows she was not a deceiver, as my mamma thinks she was. I'm sure she never said she was a widow, in my hearing."

"I am afraid she lent herself to a deceit," said Edith. "Indeed, I am quite sure she did. But happily we are not called on to sit in judgment on our neighbour's thoughts, words, or works—"

" 'Let each give credit to his neighbour's share,
But analyse his own with utmost care.' "

"I wonder if Mr. Weir knows about it," said Nessy.

"I can tell you. He does."

"Oh, that's a relief! I could not bear that he should be misled."

“He thinks she has done wrong, but he pities her.”

“He has given us a course of such delightful Lent lectures, Miss Antony.”

“I wish I had been here to hear them.”

“There’s Dick Arnold stopping Mr. Bush in his chaise,” said Nussy, looking out; “and Mr. Bush is turning about and going down Quagmire Lane. Can Mrs. Homer be ill?”

“I should hope not,” said Edith.

“Oh, Miss Antony! do you know that George Early is come back?”

“Yes; I saw it in the *Times*. He has been going the round of the scientific *soirées*. Curious! Not a bit of a gentleman, I suppose?”

“He is, and yet he is not,” said Nussy. “I can’t explain what I mean. You would never miss anything in him—you would not miss anything in his manner that ought to be there. At least, I believe you would not; but perhaps that is only my ignorance.”

“He must have plenty to tell.”

“Oh, plenty. And he is so good to his mother; they live so happily.”

Mr. Weir returned to his mother with what she called his thoughtful, tired look. She had

been vexing herself in his absence by settling that he had certainly become attached to Mrs. Homer—that vivid, sudden colouring up had betrayed it. And she, silly mother, had been doing what she could to add fuel to the flame, by talking frequently of her, praising her, and inviting her to the house.

“Well?” she said.

“Well, mother, it was a painful scene. She felt it very sadly.”

“How could she have been so stupid as to use such a note for a marker?”

“We never entered upon that. I just told her what had happened, and gave her the note. She coloured; oh, so painfully! cheek, brow, throat, one universal blush. I spoke very plainly to her about her deception. She said she was so young,—she wanted protection. I showed her that was no excuse.”

“No, indeed!” ejaculated Mrs. Weir. “Where was the protection to you and other young men?”

“My dear mother,” said he, smiling a little; “I was quite safe.”

“May I really believe it, Frank? I am so glad!”

“Yes, you may be, because it might have

been otherwise ; but I am quite safe. I've no personal feeling in the matter."

Mrs. Weir was very much relieved, and able to take some interest in Mrs. Homer's story as a matter of enlightened curiosity.

"What did she say for herself, my dear?"

"She said nothing : I liked her the better for it. She did not try to exculpate herself. She admitted she had herself partly to blame for the separation. I said, 'Are you sorry?' She said, 'Yes,' and cried bitterly."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Weir.

"But oh, mother! if she rejoins her husband, it will be in such a desolate island; its nearest neighbour is St. Helena, fifteen hundred miles off."

"St. Helena? why, that's where Buonaparte was. Oh, I couldn't undertake that, if I had twenty husbands there," said Mrs. Weir.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CREATURE.

MR. BUSH, returning from Tresellis, reported Mrs. Homer suffering from a severe nervous attack, and teased his wife by calling her "the interesting invalid." Mrs. Bush, who was in Miss Hornblower's confidence, did not know what right such a "creature" had to be interesting, and was not at all surprised to hear of her nervous attack. She officiously informed Mrs. Weir of it, and as Mrs. Weir has already shown herself to be anything but a terrific old lady, we are not to be surprised at her finding, after morning service, that her ankle would permit her to call at Tresellis. She found Mrs. Homer surrounded

"With everything that pretty is,"

reclining on a couch, very pale, and heavy-eyed. A little colour rose into her cheeks as she met Mrs. Weir with a culprit's deprecating look ;

seeing which, Mrs. Weir took her by the hand, and said—"Don't leave the sofa—you really must not," so kindly, that the tears came into Mrs. Homer's eyes.

"You are very kind—to come," she said, in broken accents.

"Why, you know we all take interest in you," said Mrs. Weir; "so what is there in it? Frank has so many things and people to attend to, that we never expect—but *I* have always thought with interest about you from the first, looking on you, you know, as a widow indeed;" (here Mrs. Homer turned very red) "but that turns out to have been a *ruse* of your not very wise little head."

"Oh, you kind, *kind* friend!"

"Yes, I am that, I know," said Mrs. Weir, smiling a little; "because you have done a wrong thing, and deserve a good scolding; but *who from?* Why, from Captain Homer, of course, and I hope he'll give you a good trimming when he catches you."

Miss Crowe, who had sat quite silent hitherto, now said, "Eugenia has determined on quite the right course—the course of duty." Here Eugenia began to cry.

“Then she will be happy; I know she will,” said Mrs. Weir, laying her hand on Mrs. Homer’s; “we are always happy in giving ourselves unreservedly to our duty, though we don’t expect to be so at the time. And the difficulties that appear to surround it, often prove to have no existence but in our fancies. Not that I have always known or felt this, or acted upon it. No, no! there never was a more selfish, worldly toad than I was, till my dear boy brought me to a better way of thinking. So don’t think yourself the worst person in Belforest, my dear; for I’ll venture to say you can’t have been as bad as I was; and now you’re going to be quite good, are you not?”

“I’ll try” (rather sentimentally).

“That’s right; and how are you going to try?”

“She means to give up Tresellis,” said Miss Crowe, afraid of her hesitating, “and to—”

“Nothing is fixed yet,” interrupted Mrs. Homer. “I’m too much overcome just now, by—recent events;—you must not want to tie me down, Marianne, and say everything is settled because it is not so.”

“Why, now, Eugenia, did not you say—”

“What do you say to a little drive?” said Mrs. Weir. “My ankle is not very strong yet, and a fly is coming for me presently. Will it not revive you to take a little turn with me round the lanes?”

Mrs. Homer could not help looking pleased at the idea; but then—oh, what must become of the invalidism? She let herself be waited upon and dressed by her sister and Miss Stone, dropping her arms in a limp sort of way, and declining her head like a lily on its broken stalk; but she suffered herself to be put into the fly, and immense was Miss Crowe’s satisfaction when she saw it drive off.

“And now we can have a nice, quiet, confidential talk,” said Mrs. Weir, in a motherly way; “and though I would never have forced your confidence, yet since the subject has come before us, do let me hear all about it, and not go away with any wrong ideas in my stupid old head.”

“Oh, I do think you are the kindest, the *very* kindest person in the world,” said Mrs. Homer. “Mr. Weir’s words were like swords.”

“Were they? Well, he does not usually

speak so sharply : but, you see, he wounds to heal : he reprovcs in order to correct. It's his office, my dear, but, luckily, it is not mine."

"I feel as if I could tell *you* everything," said Mrs. Homer ; and then she began from the very beginning : and it was curious, when she came to tell her story her own way, what an air of utterly fictitious romance she threw about it, partly from her deceiving herself, and partly because she wanted to seem a heroine to others. Mrs. Weir, with all her disposition to see the best side of things, could not evade a certain feeling of dissatisfaction, and contented herself with no more committing interjection than "humph !" And when Mrs. Homer ended her long, plaintive monologue with—

"And now, what *am* I to do ?" she said—

"I think the best answer is summed up in your husband's own words—let bygones be bygones. If he is willing to make peace, do not be backward in accepting it. You loved him once, or thought you did."

"Oh, I love him better than all the world, *now!*"

"Prove to him you do, then. Don't let him

think you love yourself, your own way, your own indulgences, better than you love him. What's the good of money? Why, to supply our wants, and make us happy, and useful to others. I don't know of any other good in it. Now, the only good of your money, surely, is to secure your happiness, not to destroy it—and what happiness can it secure you? Has it made you happy here, all by yourself?"

"You may think me wrong to say so, dear Mrs. Weir, but I really was *very* happy and comfortable all this winter, at Tresellis—very happy, till Mr. Weir spoke daggers from the pulpit."

"Well, I really never noticed my son to be severe—and I never sleep under *his* sermons. I'm quite sure he was guiltless of *intending* any personal application, and if he hit the mark, it must have been because your own conscience, my young friend, was tender."

"That *was* it, that *was* it," said Mrs. Homer. "He quite pierced me; because he seemed to allude to my declining to go to my sister at Christmas; and I really was afraid of infection, and did not think she much cared to have me. I'm such a *poor* creature in a sick room."

“Well, with a husband at St. What-d’ye-call-him, and a sister ill in bed at home, I do wonder a little at your being so happy and comfortable at Tresellis,” said Mrs. Weir, with good-humoured irony. Mrs. Homer felt ashamed, and did not know what to say.

“Marianne and I were never much of companions,” said she presently. “She is all roughness, and I am all softness; she is all for the real; I, for the beau-ideal.”

“Well, but when the beau who was your ideal turned up,” said Mrs. Weir, “you were not ready to keep your promise to him, ‘for better for worse.’”

“Oh, I was so *désillusionnée*! he proved so different from what he seemed!”

“It is always so, when we deal with ideals. I dare say he is, at least, a brave officer and well-bred man.”

“Oh, a great deal more than that. Only it was so dreadfully mercenary of him to want me to cash that bill for him. And then when I told him so, if a look could have killed me, it would.”

“Pooh, pooh, you would have done better to have paid the bill first, and remonstrated good-

humouredly afterwards. No man, I think, will endure to be told by his wife that he has married her for her money. And it is not at all likely to have been the case. You, with your attractions, my dear, did not want money to make people like you."

"Well—no—I hope not. I think Charles really loved me."

"Go off to him, then, as fast as you can, by the next ship: and leave your good sister to manage matters for you."

"Oh, what a place it is to go to!"—

"There I agree with you! there I feel for you!" said Mrs. Weir heartily. "It is a sacrifice. But what is a woman's life but a sacrifice?"

Directly Mrs. Homer saw her case in that light, she saw that there would be credit in being jolly under the circumstances.

"Oh, yes, it has come to that, now—go I must," said she, folding her hands, and looking up with her Madonna expression. "I lay my life at his feet—the remnant of it, for most likely it won't be long."

"Oh yes, very likely it will," said Mrs. Weir, consolingly. "It's wonderful what young peo-

ple will go through, and you've gone through nothing yet, my dear."

"I'm quite passive, henceforth, in the hands of fate—let him spurn me if he will."

"Oh, he'll be too much of a gentleman for that. Pray is he tall or short?"

"His height is perfect—very little under six feet. And such splendid eyes! With a look he could kill. And so dreadfully acute! I used to say to him, 'Charles, your words are swords.'"

"Hem! Well, he will count the days till he sees you."

"But what outfit to provide? what ship to go out in?"

"Oh! all these things are easily settled. They will tell you at any outfitter's what you will want, and you may see a list of ships in the *Times* any day."

"But to go out alone—unprotected—to an unknown land—cast among strangers—this poor, poor, foolish heart!—I, so inexperienced, so young!"

"Why, you're one or two and twenty, are not you? Oh! I don't call that so very young. A woman may do anything respectable at that age."

This cut Mrs. Homer off from one of her favourite appeals for commiseration ; and, just at that moment, she had an opportunity of pensively bowing to Miss Hornblower, who was looking hard into the fly, hardly able to believe her eyes.

“ Miss Hornblower can scarcely understand how you can forgive her,” said Mrs. Weir ; “ but you are quite right.”

“ Forgive ? What have I to forgive her for ? ” said Mrs. Homer.

“ Oh ! I thought you knew it was she who read your letter.”

“ Not till this moment. I never asked.”

“ That was very generous of you.”

Now, in fact, she had been too preoccupied and humiliated to think of it ; but it was pleasant to be thus told she was generous. Nor would it do to owe Miss Hornblower a grudge now, since she had accepted the praise of having forgiven her.

On the whole, her mind, though in a very sore, humiliated, agitated state, was relieved of a load that had oppressed it ever since she last saw her husband. She was no longer wilful, she was no longer carrying on a deceit, and

she could not help a secret joy that it was so.

They reached Tresellis in silence ; and as she took leave of Mrs. Weir, she ventured to kiss her, saying, "You are my real, true friend ; and I so wanted one ! I shall always have reason to be glad of the accident that brought us together. I owe a debt of gratitude to —Taurus."

When Mrs. Weir, who was not without her sense of humour, repeated this last little bit of finery to her son, he burst out laughing.

"Ah ! it is no laughing matter, Frank," said she. "The poor thing has been on the brink of a great wrong, and is now anxious to do right."

"I don't know what you call brink," said he. "She *did* wrong ; but since you say she is now determined to do right, that is the best reparation she can make for it. Does she seem to mind it much ?"

"She is determined to go through with her sacrifice—for it is one, and declares that she loves the captain better than all the world ; but I fear he has a trying temper. She says his words are swords."

“ Ah ! that’s bad.”

“ But she said *you* had spoken daggers to her.”

“ Oh ! then it’s only her *façon de parler*,” said Mr. Weir, laughing. “ If his swords are no more than my daggers, I don’t think they’ll kill her. When does she mean to sail ? ”

“ By the first opportunity ; but she does not know about the ships.”

“ There are always plenty of advertisements ; ” and he took up the *Times*.

“ Why, here is one—the *Ariadne*,” cried he, presently. “ ‘ Cape of Good Hope. The *Ariadne*, Cape Royal Mail Steamer, leaves Southampton on the 4th’—that’s to-morrow week. No time to lose, if she means to go by it. I’ll just run down and tell her, mother.”

“ It is nearly dinner-time, my dear.”

“ I won’t keep you waiting.”

And away he hurried. He found Mrs. Homer languidly occupying a large easy-chair, and using her smelling-bottle ; but she rose and welcomed him with a sweet smile. Miss Crowe looked at him with a more favourable eye than when he had stood in the doorway.

“ I must not stay a minute,” said he, “ or I

shall be late for dinner ; but I thought you would like to know that the *Ariadne* mail-steamer sails from Southampton on the 4th."

"Dear, that will do exactly," cried Miss Crowe. "You had better take your passage at once, hadn't you, Eugenia?"

"You all seem in a great hurry to get rid of me," said Mrs. Homer, sinking back into her seat, and putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

"You must not judge of us by our seeming," said Mr. Weir. "I can assure you, for my own part, that I shall be very sorry to lose you. Though you have not been here long, you will be missed."

She still shed tears.

"You were very kind and useful in the school when we were in difficulties, and I hope and am persuaded you will be useful wherever you are. All the loss will be ours ; but you are going to one who is ill and longing to see you, and to new and interesting scenes. Why, you will be quite the queen of the little island."

This suggestion was not displeasing or without its consolation.

“I think I’ve shown here that I don’t mind isolation,” said she, tremulously. “Who has come near me? I’ve been as lonely here as I could be at Tristan d’Acunha. Solitude has no terrors for me. And the islanders are clothed and Christian. With my harp, a book, and a little bread and fruit, I could be not unhappy anywhere.”

“*That’s* well,” said Mr. Weir, cheerily, while Miss Crowe muttered, “I doubt how the harp will bear carrying through the surf; and there will be no circulating-library.”

“Privations I accept,” said Mrs. Homer; “dangers I look for; but unkindness I hope, I trust to be spared.”

“Oh, yes!—

“‘Birds in their little nests agree,’

so will you.”

“It is a venture—a problem. But I have said I would go, and I shall not depart from my word. Think of me sometimes.”

“Oh, yes! we’ll think of you.”

“Dear me, so many young ladies undertake the voyage for mere pleasure,” said Miss Crowe.

“Not to land on a rock nine thousand feet high,” said Mrs. Homer quickly, “and with only a hundred inhabitants.”

“It is a trial; don’t let us affect to make light of it,” said Mr. Weir. “You will depend much on books; you must take out a small, well-chosen collection. With your leave, I will add a few to it.”

“Oh, thanks, thanks!”

“And Sir Edward Seaward’s narrative shall be among them. It is a fiction, but you will not like it the worse for that.”

“I shall be grateful for every alleviation,” said she. “I complain no more, but I pretend not to composure. I shall please others, let that suffice. I shall please *you*, Marianne.”

“If you mean I shall be glad to get rid of you, you know I shall not, Eugenia. But I own I shall be glad to see you in the path of duty.”

“In another little week, then, I shall sail. You may write to the ship-brokers, or whatever you call them. I’ve nailed my colours to the mast. *Ariadne*, is the vessel called? It will have another *Ariadne* on board, on her way to Patmos.”

“Do talk of what you understand, Eugenia,” cried Miss Crowe, who was well up in mythology, and who caught the sudden smile that brightened Mr. Weir’s face, though he sedulously endeavoured to suppress it. “Ariadne’s lover ran away from her, not she from him, and the island was Naxos.”

“My mother will scold me, with reason, if I don’t hasten home,” said Mr. Weir. “I have heavy duty this week, and we are on the eve of a solemn and affecting commemoration. You will be at church to-morrow, I hope? I am glad you are going to be with us on Easter Sunday. Such a joyous celebration! Who can be sorrowful, or repining, or unloving, on bright Easter morning?”

“I hope to be at church,” she sadly said. “It will be an affecting service to me; perhaps the last I shall ever attend in my own country.”

A tear of genuine feeling shone in her eye. Mr. Weir respected it, and took leave kindly. Miss Crowe, too, was softened, and with much subdued abruptness made inquiries and received directions concerning the steps that were to be taken preparatory to this momentous journey.

CHAPTER XIII.

BRIGHT EASTER MORNING.

EITHER the holy influence of the season, or of Mr. Weir's previous ministrations, or Mrs. Weir's healing kindness, or some better, higher influence yet, was at work in Eugenia's heart, and producing in it something more of a hopeful change than it had ever hitherto experienced.

She could not, for shame, forget or neglect her promise to Mr. Weir, when he had said he would pray for her if she would pray for herself. When she tried to do so, nothing would come at first but sighs and tears ; but presently she found herself forming thoughts and wishes into words of entreaty and confession, and she did not desist till she felt that she had indeed prayed.

“ The morning mists have passed away,
But still the face of heaven is grey.”

Mrs. Homer felt as if she would give the world to be free for a time from Miss Crowe's incessant talking and haranguing; but when she remembered how soon they were to part, and how long their separation might prove, she had not the heart to complain. Miss Stone was to have left her at Easter, but now Miss Stone might as well remain a few days more, and make herself useful.

Good Friday was very quietly, reverentially spent; and many tears fell from Mrs. Homer's eyes behind her black veil. On Saturday the sisters started early for London. When they returned in the evening, the berth was secured, the outfit bespoke, and Miss Crowe had made the acquaintance of a good old missionary and his wife, who were going out in the same ship, and who readily engaged to take Mrs. Homer under their protection. Many searchings of heart exercised the sisters in their silent journey back.

"This is a day on which all should be glad, even those who are parting," said Miss Crowe, as they met at breakfast on Easter Sunday; "and I do assure you, Eugenia, that I shall go home with a far lighter heart than I expected to do."

“You never would trust me,” said Mrs. Homer. “I have scarcely ever had fair play. It was always, ‘Oh, I’m sure Eugenia can’t do that,’ till I got into the way of thinking I could not, and need not. However, Marianne, I have been here eight months and have got into no money troubles, though you know I had very little to begin with.”

“My dear child, the discipline has been very good for you, and I’m glad that it has not been wholly thrown away.—Jemima, I see you have not left off sucking your tongue.”

These two paragons of meekness took their respective snubbings without a word. It was, indeed, habitual to Miss Crowe to be on the look out for defects; and she was especially sharp on Miss Stone just now, firstly, because she felt hurt at her taking up with, or being taken up by, Mrs. Homer, and quitting herself; secondly, to keep down her pride, which had betrayed itself in the avowal that she aspired to an engagement as private governess, for which Miss Crowe assured her she was wholly unfit. And, in the event of Jemima’s being brought to see her own deficiencies, and to know her proper level, Miss Crowe thought of

taking her on again, at a slight increase of salary.

Behold, then, these three very different characters starting for church, in tolerable harmony. There has been a great practising of Easter hymns in the school-room, where Nessy has been very busy; and the children have new bonnets and spring nosegays—crocuses, and a few early primroses. The service was joyous and animating, and Mr. Weir preached on “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” and bade his hearers not seek for living sources of interest, living strength and support, in the perishing things of this life, else they would prove to have gone for water to broken cisterns. The serious, sorrowful expression of Mrs. Homer, so different from her studied attention of old, was so marked, that Edith could not but notice it; and her frank, honest nature was drawn towards her old schoolfellow by it, though she did not know how stedfastly she had turned into a new path. There was a full attendance at the sacramental table; and afterwards, when cheerful family parties poured into the churchyard, many hearty greetings were exchanged.

The Grevilles in full force, with sundry Easter guests, made quite a showy train; and conspicuous among them was a tall, military-looking man, bearded and moustached, who was doing himself the honour of escorting Miss Emily Greville. He looked fixedly at Mrs. Homer, as if to catch her attention. Catching her eye at length, she started a little, coloured, and bowed. Instantly his hat was raised; he hoped she was very well—hoped she had good accounts of Captain Homer.

“Not very good; he has been ill. I am going out to him in a few days.”

“Going out? is it possible?” exclaimed the major.

For Major Johnson it was, who was in her husband's regiment, and whom she had frequently met in the garrison town where she had married. And now, had an *éclaircissement* not already taken place, how abruptly it would now have been made, to her utter disgrace, in the presence of all the little Belforest world! Instead of which, looks of surprise and respect attended her, as she exchanged these few words with the major, then bent with quiet dignity, and passed on. Her

heart beat fast all the way home, and she cut short Miss Crowe's remarks on the sermon somewhat curtly, with "Please, Marianne, don't talk to me."

Marianne, hurt, fell apart, and demanded the text of Miss Stone, who unfortunately boggled.

Mrs. Homer, running up to her room, and locking herself in, sat down and relieved herself by one or two deep sighs, mentally exclaiming, "What an escape! Even if Marianne and Edith had kept my secret, and if the letter had not betrayed it, I should now have been found out. I think I must have sunk to the earth, penetrated with shame; instead of which, I was able to preserve my self-respect. I am very, *very* thankful." And she clasped her hands tightly together. She did not know that detection had reached her through yet another source—Mr. Oldsmith.

Mrs. Weir sent a pressing message to Mrs. Homer and her sister to drink tea with her; not including Miss Stone, who was accustomed to be ignored. They went, and had a very delightful visit; Mr. Weir improving their last meeting to the utmost. All his high-minded,

soul-strengthening words, all his mother's kindly hopes and homely counsels, were treasured by tearful Mrs. Homer; while Miss Crowe, appreciating their value, was thankful Eugenia had fallen among such true friends.

"And you must write, my dear, and let us know how you are, and how you get on."

"May I? Oh, I shall like it so much!"

"Of course you may, and we shall be much gratified at your doing so. We shall continue to take interest in you, great interest."

"And she is going out with such nice people," said Miss Crowe. "Dr. Vanderburg is quite an old apostle, and his wife a thorough 'good creature.' They will be quite parents to Eugenia."

"Oh, how *can* you say so, Marianne, of people you only saw for half an hour?" remonstrated Mrs. Homer. She resisted having her bitter pill gilded in this way.

"When a thing is disagreeable," she said, presently, "one must do it, and not mind it, if it needs to be done. But it is no good to pretend to us that it is what it is not."

"I quite agree with you," said Mr. Weir. "It is a bad rule, in any case, to pretend that anything is what it is not."

Directly he saw her vivid blush, he was sorry for what he had said, for he had been guiltless of intending any painful application. They all started for the evening service together, and the sisters sat with Mrs. Weir, which was not without its impression on the congregation. As they came out of church, Edith and Mr. Antony waited for them, and Edith shook hands with Miss Crowe and Mrs. Homer, and introduced her brother to them. They all walked a little way down the lane together; Arnold in advance with a lantern, Miss Crowe and Mr. Antony following, and Mrs. Homer and Edith bringing up the rear. Mrs. Homer said—

“Edith, I think you may be interested in knowing that I am going out to join my husband.”

“Are you?” cried Edith. “Oh, I am so glad.”

“You are like every one else then,” said Mrs. Homer, rather bitterly. “No one affects to regret me.”

“Consider how little I see of you already,” said Edith. “Why, I could not have seen less of you than I have done, since I left school, if you had been in the West Indies. It was

your marriage that altered your domestic relations. When you 'turned your twenty-one shillings into a guinea,' your twenty-one friends submitted to it on the understanding that you had found in one what compensated for the many. And I trust you will find it so."

"Oh! I trust that I shall, but my future is very, very dark."

"So is every one's future," said Edith. "We all equally need the same protection, every minute, though we are not conscious of needing it. But, indeed, dear Eugenia, I feel for you very much, and admire you too, now you are going to do your best. I own I was very cross with you when I found you were deceiving people."

"For pity's sake, don't say anything more about that; forget it if you can. I don't know what possessed me to do such a silly thing. I seemed to find relief and pleasure at the time, in fancying I had severed every tie between us. And now I am going away, little knowing what awaits me. But Mr. Weir has so clearly pointed out my duty, that I mean to pursue it, at whatever cost."

"What an excellent man he is!"

“Oh, you’ve no idea—You *can* have no idea of the friend he has been to me!”

Edith’s too vivid imagination immediately conjured up a friendship, cemented by so many interesting interviews, that it gave her a little pang.

“Captain Homer will be your best friend henceforth,” said she; “but you must not forget the friends who are thinking of you at home.”

“Oh, Edith, do write to me sometimes. I shall pine so for home news, and I know Marianne won’t write, or if she does, it will only be preaching. Do write.”

“I will very gladly write occasionally, if you wish me to do so,” said Edith; “only what shall I write about?”

“Oh, anything, everything. Your letters will lie at the Cape till they can be brought over to us; perhaps we shall not have letters more than once or twice a year!”

“That does sound lonely; but think how lonely Captain Homer must be all by himself, whereas you will have him.”

“Oh, men have so many resources!”

“We have our needles,” said Edith, laughing.

“And they have their cigars. They can hunt, shoot, fish.”

“And you can teach the children to sing. Your Sunday-school teaching has been nice training for you.”

“Oh, I’m such a poor creature !”

By the time they reached Tresellis, they were quite cordial. Mrs. Homer insisted on their going in, and remaining to supper. The little rooms looked so pretty, lighted up, to persons entering them from the dark, that Edith expressed herself charmed with them. “Just such a cottage as would suit us, Leo !”

“I wish you would take it off my hands, then,” said Mrs. Homer. But this was not in their power.

As this was the last *soirée* Mrs. Homer would give, everything the house afforded that could be put on the table made its appearance ; and she gaily pressed and smiled, and did the honours so pleasantly, that an agreeable evening closed the happy, well-spent day. As Mr. Antony returned home with his sister, he remarked—

“You may say what you will, Edith ; but

Mrs. Homer is the most charming little person I have seen for a long time."

"Oh, you may say what you like *now*," said Edith.

"And pray, why '*now*,' with that marked emphasis, as opposed to '*then*'?"

"All the difference between widow and wife."

"But I knew her to be wife then, so I was as safe as I am now."

"But she was playing a false part, and I despised and disliked her for it. She is doing right now, so I am friends with her, and wish her well."

"What a martinet Miss Crowe is!"

"It has grown upon her, but I am very fond of her. She is really a good woman."

"That Miss Stone looks as if she were always sucking a lump of sugar."

"She is a lump, herself," said Edith. "Even Miss Crowe could never make anything of her."

The next day was a busy one at Tresellis. Arnold was despatched for Mr. Oldsmith, who obeyed the summons in anxiety, having gathered that something unusual was on foot. Indeed,

Arnold had already volunteered to two or three parties the information that Mrs. Homer was preparing to leave.

“Mr. Oldsmith,” said Mrs. Homer, “I am going to join my husband, who is on foreign service.”

“Dear me, ma’am, then you’re not a widow?”
—(oh, the fox !)

“I am not. We must make some arrangement about the house and furniture. If you are inclined to take it off my hands for a moderate consideration, I shall be glad ; otherwise, I am prepared to pay my rent to the year’s end, and perhaps the house may let furnished.”

Mr. Oldsmith hummed and hawed, and did not want to disoblige a lady, nor yet to encumber himself with things he did not want. The end of it was, that he took some of the planned furniture ; and the rest was to be packed in cases and sent to Miss Crowe. In consideration of what she had done for the house, he took off a quarter’s rent. Before he left her, Mrs. Homer paid him what she owed, and took his receipt.

Miss Stone was meanwhile packing books

and nicknacks ; and Miss Crowe, on her knees before a large trunk, was packing her sister's apparel and table-linen. Opening a crushed bandbox, what should she find in it but *the* widow's cap, which Eugenia had always forgotten to burn ! Viewing it with intense disgust, she took it up with the fire-tongs, and carried it down to the parlour, where Mrs. Homer was sitting thoughtfully before the fire.

“Eugenia, make way—I'm going to have a conflagration.”

Mrs. Homer looked round, and, directly she saw what it was, started up, snatched the cap from between the tongs, and thrust it into the fire herself, holding it down with the poker, lest the sparks should fly up the chimney. As soon as the deed was done, they joined in an irrepressible fit of laughter, though Mrs. Homer was considerably annoyed. To divert her thoughts from the subject, she left Miss Crowe to complete her packing, and went into the village, to pay her few bills. Wherever Marianne was, she must take the lead ; and Marianne might therefore as well take the trouble. And she knew that Marianne would be, in some measure, repaid for that trouble, by

having the opportunity of observing how her marks had washed out, her handkerchiefs were getting thin, her hems were beginning to fray, &c.

Miss Stone, as half-boarder to Miss Crowe, had originally requited her for gratuitous instruction by looking after the young ladies' wardrobes. She was quite in her element, therefore, making such little repairs as Miss Crowe found wanting: and they were thus engaged, when Esther came to say that Mrs. Weir was below.

“Go down, Jemima, and say Mrs. Homer is gone into the village,” said Miss Crowe. “You need say nothing about me.” For Eugenia's properties were scattered like hay, and she did not think it right to leave them.

Mrs. Weir told Miss Stone that, having a weak ancle, she should be glad of a little rest; so Miss Stone continued talking with her some little time, which appeared longer than it was to Miss Crowe, who determined at length to see what was going on. For this purpose, she descended into the parlour, and found Miss Stone, with intense gratification, pocketing twelve shillings!—the proceeds of a set of

crochet d'oyleys she had just disposed of to Mrs. Weir. The idea of turning a morning-visitor to account in this way, almost petrified Miss Crowe. She simply ejaculated—"Well, Jemima!" in an under-tone. But oh, the depth of expression in that "Well, Jemima!" Miss Stone looked stolid and uncomprehending. It was something for her, on the point of losing a comfortable home, to pocket twelve shillings: and Miss Crowe might "Well, Jemima!" her if she would; she had no real authority over her now. As for the old lady, she was nodding and smiling over her bargain, and wrapping it up in a crumpled piece of whitey-brown paper; and she deliberately forced the parcel into her capacious pocket as soon as she had greeted Miss Crowe.

"I wished to see your sister," said she, "because, as Dick Arnold will now be out of place, I think he will do very well to pull Dr. Fownes's wheel-chair. As for Esther, she is, from what I have heard Mrs. Homer say, so valuable a servant, that I shall be glad to engage her myself, as my Mary is going to be married. You are all at sixes and sevens, I see. You won't have any more comfort in

the house, now the dust is set flying; and rooms always look forlorn when the furniture is displaced. So, as soon as your packing is done, come and spend your evening with us. Miss Stone, too, if she likes."

"Miss Stone never goes out, thank you," said Miss Crowe; "her position is rather undefined, but she is *not* adapted for society. If Eugenia is inclined, I shall be most happy to wait on you."

Then, after a little more chat, Mrs. Weir started homewards, observing the ground was now in her favour. Then Miss Crowe turned on the doomed Miss Stone, with—

"Well, I'm sure, Jemima! What next, I wonder? The idea of asking a morning visitor to buy your d'oyleys! *You* aspire to be a private governess, indeed!"

Miss Stone, in a thick voice, replied,

"She was admiring them when I came in. And I said she might have them. And she said, 'How much?' And I said, 'A shilling each.' I've my living to get, Miss Crowe."

"Yes, Jemima, and I think you must regret by this time having thrown yourself out of a living at *my* house. Now, I'll tell you what.

You're an orphan girl, and I've known you a good while. Friendship's thicker than water, and I don't think badly of you. I make you, therefore, this offer: Return to your duties; I need not recapitulate them, you know what they are. Make yourself generally useful in the school, and keep your eye on everything when my back's turned: I can't be in two places at once. Be faithful and diligent; and I'll raise your salary five pounds."

"And I'll take it, and thank you, Miss Crowe!" said Jemima.

CHAPTER XIV.

LEAVE-TAKING.

ARNOLD, being one of those lively geniuses who always find some mischief for their idle hands to do, and being, moreover, addicted to romantic literature, had allowed the romances which lay about at Tresellis to absorb a considerable portion of that time which he should have devoted before breakfast to rubbing the tables. Therefore, being well up in fiction, and thinking Mrs. Homer more of a heroine than any other lady who came under his observation, he endued her not only with heroic attributes, but with a romantic history; and having obtained only a partial and broken version of facts, he thought it expedient to piece them together with fragments of his own fancy. Thus, when the "tea-grocer" asked him what was going on at Tresellis, he, with many nods and grimaces, stated oracularly that

mistress's husband had come to life again ; and on being asked, had she then falsely supposed him dead? he did not say Yes in so many words, but nodded his head like a China mandarin. "He could tell an' if he would"—only he wouldn't—what cryings and faintings and satirical fits there had been ; and now she was going all round the world after him.

These hints, though received with dubious credit, were circulated and slightly distorted ; so that many versions of Mrs. Homer's story were afloat, all of them romantic, and none to her discredit. Moreover, Mr. Oldsmith had hastened to inform Mr. Saffery that she had been quite the lady, and he had had pleasure in obliging her ; so that when Mrs. Homer went round to pay her bills, it gratified her to find herself everywhere the object of respectful sympathy. Of course she could not guess how it came about, and would never have suspected Arnold of having a hand in it. Of all others, Nussy was the most relieved at this recovery of her popularity, and most sorry she was going away. She said, "I'm so glad, ma'am," and then stopped short, and coloured, adding, "and so sorry too."

“Life is a mingled web of joy and woe, Miss Saffery,” said Mrs. Homer; and her expressive smile gave it the force of a new axiom.

“Wherever you go, ma’am, I hope joy will go with you,” said Mr. Saffery, her partizan to the last: and, as she passed out of sight, he looked attentively after her, and muttered—

“As pretty a little woman as ever stepped on shoeleather.”

“And not a bit like me, Saffery,” said his wife, mischievously.

“My dear, comparisons are odious. Mrs. Homer would have been no help in the posting and drapery line; but it was very pleasant to see her flit in and out, and to enjoy a little good music on Sunday evenings through the wall.”

“I’ll tell you how you used to enjoy it, my good man—by going to sleep!”

After a pause, he remarked—

“I’ve an impression that we are going to have a bad season.”

“Then I wish you’d keep such impressions to yourself, Saffery.”

“Why, papa,” said Nesity, “you said, so last year, the very day that Mr. Weir and Mrs. Homer came after the cottage.”

“Did I? Then my bad impressions are good omens, and you ought to be glad of them. But look you here. Tresellis will be to be let; Mrs. Early has rooms to let: the Bensons have taken to letting: so we’ve many rivals in the field.”

“Did you catch the name of the place Mrs. Homer’s going to, Saffery?” said his wife.

“Not I,” replied Mr. Saffery; “it’s not a posting-place. Fancy a place that’s neither postaceous nor railwayaceous.”

“A dismal look-out indeed,” said Mr. Antony, who came in for stamps, and heard the last three or four words. “Where is that benighted place?”

“Where Mrs. Homer’s going to, sir. The name slipped off her tongue like a plate off a shelf that has no rim to it.”

“Oh, Tristan d’Acunha! It’s an island off the Cape of Good Hope.”

“Then I should say they’d be better of a submarine telegraph, sir.”

“Why, the place has but a hundred souls! I don’t think they’ve much call for a post.”

“No more, perhaps, than the Scotch had

before Mr. Palmer's mails came in, sir. I've heard my grandfather tell of the Edinburgh mail-bag coming to London with only one letter in it."

"Your grandfather could tell some curious tales, I dare say, Mr. Saffery."

"Sir, I've heard him tell how the mails used to be entrusted to a set of raw boys, who would call at every pot-house for beer, and frequently get robbed of their bags. Sometimes, sir, villains would tie a string across a street through which the post would pass, and trip up the horse, and the boy would pitch over his head, while they ran away with his bags. And then he would go back and report his loss. It was Mr. Palmer, sir, who remedied that, in the year my father was born, which was 1783. Mr. Palmer, sir, started the mail-coaches, with guards properly armed and accoutred; and my grandfather, sir, was one of the guards. Sir," said Mr. Saffery, with fine professional animation, "he looked noble, in his scarlet coat and gilt buttons, with his blunderbuss and horn, on which he could play no end of tunes. To hear that horn, on a dark night, coming over Hounslow Heath, blowing defiance to the highway-

men to the tune of 'Nancy Dawson,' was enough to cow the most impudent."

"No doubt," said Mr. Anthony. "Fine institution."

"Very, sir. My grandfather was a fine, powerful-built man, conspicuous for pluck and probity; and came to be looked on as quite a public character. Country bankers used to trust him with money-parcels, the amount of which would surprise you. He used to carry public news all down the road by word of mouth to people on the look-out for him; and thus the news of a victory, an election, a race, or, may be, the death of some royal personage, was spread far and wide. When I was a little boy, sir, I have been carried on my mother's knee, inside one of the mail-coaches going in procession to Lombard Street on the King's birthday; and very handsome looked my grandfather in his new scarlet coat, with a nosegay in his button-hole. But, sir, begging your pardon, I'm detaining you; and I must stamp the letters."

Mr. Antony took his stamps and walked off, thinking whether an effective little picture might not be made of "A Mail-coach attacked

by Highwaymen on Bagshot Heath." It might be a sensation picture under proper treatment.

Mrs. Weir, retracing her way from Tresellis, fell in with Edith, and chatted with her down the lane; and finding she was now quite cordial with Mrs. Homer, she invited her and her brother to join her little tea-party, which Edith gladly accepted. Perhaps it was because Mrs. Homer's caps were packed, that she wore nothing on her head this evening. She looked so like the Eugenia of school-days that Edith warmed to her at once; and Mr. Antony furtively studied the contour of her head, and found it perfectly Grecian. Mr. Weir missed he did not know what, and when his mother afterwards told him it was the cap, he gave a long-drawn "Oh!" and said, "That explains. She does not look half as well without it."

It was a pleasant evening. As they were at tea, Mr. Weir said,

"I went over to the Abbey to-day. There I met your Major Johnson, Mrs. Homer."

"Pray don't call him my Major," said she quickly. "May I ask what he said?"

"Well, he said so many things—about artil-

lery, and engineering, and the ventilation of barracks, and recruiting, and—ever so many things besides. But I know what you mean. You mean, did he speak about Captain Homer? He did: he said he was a good officer; and that his brother-officers thought him a lucky fellow to secure such a wife; but that they . . .”

“Go on, please.”

“That they thought you were down upon him rather too quickly, and hardly gave him fair play.”

“There, Eugenia!” said Miss Crowe.

“Marianne, please don’t,” said Mrs. Homer, imploringly.

“But he said he admired your resolution very much now: it argued a higher cast of character than he had supposed you possessed.”

Mrs. Homer could not resist saying, “There, Marianne!” in her sister’s tone; at which they all laughed; and then Mr. Weir began to ask Miss Crowe about her system, and whether she aimed at making her young ladies professors, and qualifying them for diplomas.

“No, indeed,” Miss Crowe said. “I’ve no notion of making them what nature never

intended them to be. A sound, plain English education—a Christian education—for the basis, and accomplishments for the decoration of the structure. That's my system."

"And a very good one, too. When accomplishments take the first place, and solid acquirements the second, it reminds me of Mrs. Raffarty's mounting her Grecian portico to the top of her Italian verandah. One of our greatest logicians has lately said that, as rude times, with their physical perils, despised a womanish man, so civilization would err if it attempted to produce mannish women."

"Oh, so just," said Mrs. Homer softly.

Miss Crowe immediately took the remark as a personality, and said,

"I don't know what the term mannish is intended to express; but unless a woman is self-possessed, and brave, and resolute, and has presence of mind, and industry, and judgment, I think her a poor creature."

"She may be all that," said Mr. Weir, "and yet a very woman."

"Oh, yes!" said Mr. Antony. "Her cultivation cannot be carried too far; but it must be the cultivation proper to her gentler character.

We don't want ladies to be jockeys, or swimmers, or skaters, or to kill game in a *battue*, though pretty women have been so mistaken as to seek notoriety in all these ways."

"Charles wanted to teach me to shoot at a mark, but I would not," said Mrs. Homer.

"And were frightened out of your wits at Tresellis," said Miss Crowe.

Then they began to speculate on the capabilities of Tristan d'Acunha, and Mr. Weir said that peaches and apricots were naturalized there, so that she would have her favourite repast of bread and fruit within reach.

"Oh," said she, "I shall be very happy when I get there, I've no doubt; only just now, you know, it's like tearing the limpet from the rock.—A little Eden, where there's no sin."

"I said there was no crime," said Mr. Weir; "but you will find no inhabited island without sin; and sin is crime's mother."

"Ah, yes—yes, indeed."

"My fondest dream used to be of a desert island," said Mr. Antony. "I thought, if I had been Robinson Crusoe, I should never have wanted to come away."

"Nor I, if you and I had been like Ambrose

and Eleanor," said Edith; "or Prospero and Miranda."

"I own," said Mr. Weir, laughing, "I should prefer Caprera—an island in sight of land."

"Or, better still," said Mr. Antony, "the island of Barataria, which had no water round it."

This led to a good deal of amusing talk about "Don Quixote;" and Mr. Weir said he thought the sentimental characters might as well have been omitted; on which Mr. Antony exclaimed, "What, Dorothea and Cardenio?" and declared he could not spare them on any account. And he went on to speak of Inglis's pretty little romance, "Wanderings in the Footsteps of Don Quixote," which Mr. Weir had never met with.

"If I knew a little Spanish," he said, "I should much like an autumn ramble among the cork trees of the Sierra Morena."

"The illusion would be dispelled," said Mr. Weir; and they fell into desultory talk about illusion and reality, and the influence of imagination on happiness and misery, and the distinction between imagination and fancy; all of which delighted Edith exceedingly; but

the other ladies were preoccupied with more personal interests. Miss Crowe at length reminded her sister that they had yet a great deal to do ; so then Mrs. Homer took her last leave of Mrs. Weir, and received her parting kiss and good wishes with tearful eyes. The Antonys and Mr. Weir walked with them to the gate of Tresellis ; and then farewells were spoken by the cold light of a March moon.

Mrs. Homer cried a little, before she came down from her room ; but after that, she never gave way. Meanwhile, her late companions were talking of her as they pursued their way ; and Mr. Antony declared that Captain Homer would be a brute if he did not do his best to make her happy.

Mr. Weir was silent and thoughtful on his return home. The silence was broken by his mother's abruptly saying, "Yes, I do indeed hope the poor thing may do well and be happy. With all her pretty, winning ways, it is right she should be under her husband's eye."

"I believe you were rather afraid of her pretty, winning ways," said Mr. Weir smiling.

"Well, Frank, I was."

“No danger to me from them, mother, from first to last. She is not of the type that would affect my peace.”

“What is the type?”

“Something more open, fresh, and cheerful; more intellectual, and rather more passably up in the ‘ologies.’ I should not like a wife of mine to confound Naxos with Patmos. One may be amused at it in a stranger.”

“Oh! you are referring to her mental acquirements. You are a better judge than I am. She is a well-bred, interesting little woman; and, to my mind, completely pretty.”

“Not so pretty as Miss Antony.”

The moment he had said so, he was sorry for it; for he knew that his mother would thence infer that he was falling in love with Edith, and would always be watching, and drawing wrong conclusions. However, he let it pass, and would gladly have changed the conversation, but could not think of one word to say. Mrs. Weir was equally silent.

Next day, the deportation began. Nussy was almost all the morning behind the counter, watching the end of the Tresellis lane across the green, and pensively following with her

eyes the cart and barrow, laden with packages for the station. Last of all, she saw Mrs. Homer and Miss Crowe, with Miss Stone a step or two in the rear, walking briskly, as if afraid of losing the train. Mrs. Homer looked once all round the green, as if to take it in in one last, comprehensive glance. She could not see Nussy, but Nussy felt for the moment as if their eyes had met, and wistfully looked after her till she passed out of sight. The rest of the day was rather a dull one to Nussy.

Miss Hornblower and Mrs. Bush considered Belforest the safer for Mrs. Homer's departure; and themselves rescued from the contaminating influence of bad example. It was not without complacency that Miss Hornblower (knowing some of the details) considered herself the triumphant cause of Mrs. Homer's "decamping," within a week from the betrayal of her secret. She walked up the lane that afternoon, to see how Tresellis looked, deserted. Doors and windows stood open; the entrance was littered with wisps of straw, crumpled brown paper, and ends of cord. The rooms were carpetless and curtainless, chairs and tables piled in the middle of the rooms, in preparation

for a general scouring; the harp, the gold fish, the books, the net draperies, the white over pink, all vanished :—

“Nè più il palagio appar, nè pur le sue
Vestigia, nè dir puossi, egli qui fue.”

However, that is putting it rather strongly.

Tell me, ye British mothers, what was the reason that, during the remainder of this holiday week, Mrs. Weir took no more steps towards intimacy with the Antonys? True, she could not help seeing Edith, who, after drinking tea with her, thought it her duty to call; and seeing her, we may be sure she did not treat her coldly, for, indeed, it would have been difficult for any but a flint to meet Edith's warmhearted cordiality with frigidity; but, though Mrs. Weir certainly liked her, and pitied the young girl when she ingenuously told her that she had not an elderly female relative in the world, and often felt the want of one, yet Mr. Weir's mother did not say, “Look upon me as an aunt, my dear.”

No: she remained perfectly inert; impassive; she was fond of young faces and cheerful voices, but just now, she did not draw them about her. She let things take their course.

The brother and sister were always cheerful and contented together : they had only come into the country for a few days' relaxation ; and they were returning to London, having had it. On the last morning of their stay, Edith again called on Mrs. Weir, to show her a note she had received from Miss Crowe. It was dated Southampton, and she said she had accompanied Eugenia on board, had satisfied herself that she would have everything comfortable, and had left her in charge of the good old missionary and his wife, who had promised to be as careful of her as if she were their daughter. "So now I have seen the last of her," added Miss Crowe, "and have had a good cry, after watching the ship weigh anchor. But I return home with a much lighter heart than if Eugenia had persisted in remaining at Tresellis, neglectful of her duties."

Mrs. Weir and Edith had a serious, interesting conversation after this ; and something pricked Mrs. Weir's heart for having left undone something or other she ought to have done. But she would not attend to it. She was going to London herself, for a few hours, by a later train. They parted in a very friendly manner

but not like persons who expected to see any more of each other.

Mrs. Weir was a coward in travelling, and never ventured without some efficient protector—generally her son. It was inconvenient to Frank to leave home to-day, and she regretted that she had not put herself under the Antonys' protection, and trusted to a safe return.

Arrived on the platform, to her surprise she saw Mr. Antony and Edith on it. They had missed the first train, owing to Edith's visit to Mrs. Weir. Mrs. Weir expressed her regret, but then said, "Frank, my dear, you need not go. I shall be quite safe with Mr. and Miss Antony." This was a good hearing to Frank, and in a few moments the plan was arranged. Edith had already taken her seat; Mr. Antony was about to do so, and already in the carriage, when, finding Mrs. Weir, who was heavy and had no spring in her, was about to follow, he leant forward, holding out both his hands, to help her in. At the same moment, a porter put his hand on her shoulder—a tremendous concussion took place—screams and cries were heard—and Mr. Antony was thrown forward on the ground.

CHAPTER XV.

COLLISION.

IT struck Mrs. Weir like a lightning-flash, that she was the cause of this young man's accident. Edith had precipitated herself after him, and was instantly beside him on her knees, trying to raise him ; but he painfully said, "Oh!—don't!"

The confusion, the agitation were indescribable. Hoarse, angry voices, groans, moans and sobbings—the harassed superintendent everywhere at once ; the porters running to and fro : those who have never seen such a scene ought to be very thankful for their immunity. Meanwhile, a little cluster stood about Mr. Antony. Was the gentleman much hurt ? Did he want to go on in the train ?

"No, no!" said Mrs. Weir, hastily adding in a whisper to her son, "It was owing to me—we ought to nurse him."

“Just like you, mother,” answered he warmly : and he assisted a railway porter to carry Mr. Antony into the waiting-room. There were many other cases to attend to—some of them worse—and half the persons seemed to have lost their self-control and presence of mind, so that it was a sad scene ; and over all rose the shrieking whistle and clanging bell, with the shrill treble of crying babies. Mr. Antony was the only Belforest passenger who was hurt, and he resisted, at first, being carried ; but, on trying to stand, his knee bent under him, and his right arm dangled painfully at his side. Edith supported his arm while he was carried, and then contrived a temporary sling for it. Happily a surgeon was on the platform, but he was so busy that he could not immediately be obtained. Mrs. Weir meanwhile put her hand gently on Edith’s arm, and said—

“ My dear, I was the cause of this ; and you must make my house your home for the present.”

“ Oh, ma’m, how good of you ! ” said Edith, with tears starting into her eyes. “ Will it not be encumbering you too much ? ”

“Not at all. I cannot be comfortable otherwise. My son and I have settled it.”

“You are very, *very* kind.”

Here Mr. Weir came in with the doctor, who speedily pronounced the arm broken, the knee only severely sprained ; but he advised that if his home were in the neighbourhood, he should at once be carried to it. Meanwhile the train, like a wounded leviathan, went snorting on its way ; carrying, oh, how many sufferers with it, who, a quarter of an hour before, had been painless and unconscious of impending evil ! Our business is with an isolated case, and not the worst, for Mr. Antony was not the head of a numerous household, depending on him for subsistence ; but that ill-omened train must speed out of sight, leaving untold the present pains and changed prospects of many of those who are moaning in the different carriages.

The station being a little off the high road, the catastrophe did not immediately draw a crowd of anxious and curious lookers-on, but a few idlers are invariably to be found ; and among them was a boy—Arnold, in short—whom Mr. Weir instantly sent in advance to bespeak Mr. Bush’s attendance : and we know

Arnold's habits sufficiently to be sure that having briskly discharged his errand, he spread horrific reports round the green, of dozens of people being killed, hundreds wounded, and Mr. Antony's arm and leg being broken all to smash. What excited simple wonder and pity among some, filled Nessy with consternation, and she ran out across the green to the little group already collected to witness a procession that looked hardly less sad than a walking funeral, viz. Mr. Antony carried on a light cane couch by two strong porters, with Mr. Weir on one side and Mrs. Weir and Edith on the other. In pain as he was, Mr. Antony caught Nessy's look of wistful pity, and could not help being pleased at it. He was stout-hearted, and regarded the whole affair in the light of "an intense bother:" solacing himself by calculating, even already, how much he would lay his damages at.

Arrived at the cottage, he was immediately carried up into the best bedroom, which had a cheerful little dressing-room attached; and Mrs. Weir settled with the porters, though Edith wanted to do so.

"My dear," said she, "this is my affair; the accident has been wholly owing to me;

and I can make your poor brother no amends for his suffering and confinement.”

“Oh, ma’am, don’t think of that.”

“But I must think of it. Had it not been that I might hear about poor Mrs. Homer, you would not have lost the early train ; so that I have been doubly the cause.—Oh ! here comes Mr. Bush.”

Mr. Bush set the arm and bandaged the knee, and ordered the patient to be kept quiet, and promised to send him a little something ; and then left him in charge of Edith, and went down into the parlour for a chat with Mrs. Weir. He assured her there was no danger at present, nor did he think there was likely to be, unless fever supervened ; he lauded her friendliness in receiving the young man as her guest, which she hastened to explain away the merit of, by showing how she had been doubly the instrument of his hurt ; however, Mr. Bush insisted on it she was very kind ; and then went into the details of the accident to the train, which he said was safe to come before a jury ; and he hoped Mr. Antony and his fellow-sufferers would get handsome damages. Mr. Weir, who had joined the con-

clave, thought that no monetary compensation could diminish suffering, and insisting on it would partake of the nature of revenge, when they might be quite sure the company's servants would not have let the accident happen if they could help it; but Mr. Bush contended that this was quite a mistake. A very fair action would lie against them for culpable carelessness; and would not money be some compensation, however inadequate, to those whose professional engagements were rendered nugatory, and to whom the expense of surgical assistance was not a matter of indifference?

As soon as Mr. Bush had left them, Mr. Weir said,

“Mother, how well Miss Antony behaved; she neither screamed nor fainted; she showed self-control and presence of mind. Except for her white cheeks, no one would have seen what she felt. She did not shed a tear.”

“Not till I said this house should be their home,” said Mrs. Weir, with feeling. “Then tears came into her eyes.”

Mr. Antony, on being left with Edith, asked why he had been brought to Mrs. Weir's, and

seemed troubled about it, till she explained it to him, on which he muttered, "Very kind of her;" and expressed a wish to be left alone. He said it was so new to him to be laid aside, that having any one in attendance worried him. So she put the bell-cord within reach of his left hand, and went down to Mrs. Weir, and he soon turned his solitude to account by going to sleep.

"This is the dreadfullest, disfiguringest railway accident I've heard tell of for a long time," said Mr. Saffery, returning from a visit to the station. "Think of a young lady going up to be bridesmaid at a wedding, having two of her front teeth knocked out."

"That's not near so bad as Mr. Antony's accident," said Nussy. "I think I pity Miss Antony most; her feelings must be dreadful."

"George Early, too, has been giving his friends a deal of trouble," said Mr. Saffery. "He was going up by the train, and, receiving no hurt, went right on up to town, without thinking what effect it might have on his mother and other people, who didn't know how it had fared with him."

“Who do you mean by other friends, Saffery?” said his wife.

“Well, then, if you will have it, I mean the Miss Browns. Carry Brown, I understand, went off in a faint when she heard of the cat-astrope.”

“Dear me, that was rather premature of her,” said Mrs. Saffery, “unless they are engaged.”

“Can people have no feelings till they’re engaged? Well, I never knew that before.”

The faint was one of Dick Arnold’s bold inventions; but poor Caroline had turned very white, and caught hold of a chair, when he burst in on her (having been a frequent emissary to her from Mrs. Homer) with the appalling news. George Early, coming home quite safe by the six o’clock train, highly pleased with an interview he had just had with his chief, was quite surprised at his mother’s excited ejaculations, and remarked, “Oh, it’s safest to travel directly after a collision—the chaps are all extra careful.” But she told him the Browns had been as anxious about him as herself, and had twice sent the girl over to ask if he had returned. This made him serious,

and he said, "Oh, I'll go and show myself after tea;" which he did, after smartening himself a little. Directly he knocked at the door, it was quickly opened by Caroline, who no sooner saw him than she said, "Oh! is it you, Mr. Early?" and turned away in tears. George followed her into the little parlour, with the table strewn with "Magazines des Modes," and said,

"Can those tears be for me, Miss Caroline?"

"Tears of weakness—of gratitude that you are safe," said she, very softly.

"And can you really care for the safety of such an unworthy fellow as I am?"

"Oh, Mr. Early, who could call *you* unworthy?" &c. &c. Such tender things, in fact, were said on both sides, that George speedily found himself asking her whether she could bring herself to link her fate with that of such a wanderer and vagabond as himself; and she smiled shyly and said, "Cain was a vagabond, but you are not; a wanderer you may be, but you have found your way back into the fold."

Then said George, "Oh, but a wanderer and vagabond I am and ever shall be; *don't* say you will have me, Miss Carry, if you don't like to."

And Carry replied, "That's such a very odd way of putting it, Mr. Early. What *can* I say that I haven't said already? I only fear I've said too much."

"No, quite the other way," says George, "I could listen to you for ever; there can never be enough said on so delightful a subject; but *may* I understand, Miss Carry, that you don't behold me with indifference?"

"Why should you call me by so distant a name?" said she; "I am Caroline to my real friends."

"And I am the warmest of them all," cried George Early.

When they became a little calmer, she said,

"Oh, Mr. Early, you may call it weakness if you will; but you must not claim me for your own in my dear mother's lifetime."

"Why, you will make a wicked fellow of me if you talk like that," said he, "and prevent my wishing her length of days. You've a mother, and I've a mother; let us set the two old ladies up together, and pension them handsomely, with your sister to look after them."

"You must be jesting to talk of pensioning handsomely," said Caroline. "I'm sure I don't

know where the handsome pension is to come from."

"Would you call fifty pounds a year handsome?" said George.

"Certainly I should," said she.

"Well, then, look here. You've accepted me, just as I stand in my shoes; at least, so I understand—am I mistaken? If not, give me your hand—that's right, you dear girl! You've accepted me just as I am; and now, hear a piece of news. The government over yonder have given me an appointment in the post-office, worth three hundred a year."

Caroline clasped her hands in transport.

"Now, if you're the girl I take you to be, you'll not mind living with me on two hundred, while we give fifty a-piece to the old ladies."

"Oh, you generous, noble creature! But hear me, George—Mr. Early, I mean."

"No; you mean George."

"It is not merely a question of money, but of affection. I could follow you round the wide, wide world, were myself only concerned; but I cannot go to that far distant land and leave my mother."

George looked hampered.

“I don’t see what’s to be done, then,” said he, “unless she’ll go with us. Perhaps we had better take both the old ladies ; only I know they won’t like it.”

“Oh, no ! my mother will never bear ex—patriating. We women are weak creatures, and cleave to our native shores.”

“Have you ever seen the sea ?” inquired George, abruptly.

“No, never.”

“Then what do you know about its shores ?”

Carry laughed, and called him too bad to make fun of her. Men were always fond of vaunting their superior knowledge. Playful badinage ensued, and serious talk was resumed, terminating in a sort of compromise, that if he would wait for her two years, she would then join her fate to his, circumstances permitting. And from that time they were as happy as an artless pair of engaged young lovers could well be.

Nessy was now always on the watch for tidings of Mr. Antony, which sometimes reached her through one of the female servants, but oftener from Dick Arnold, who was taken on by Mr. Weir as a temporary help,

and who often brought letters to post. Nussy did not mind attacking him with, "Well, how is Mr. Antony? do you know how he is going on? is he thought to be in danger? do you ever see him?" Dick answered these questions more truthfully than was his wont; for Mr. Weir, who had long had his eye upon him as a young scapegrace, had already taken him in hand, and told him that he was neither his slave nor apprentice, and was perfectly welcome to leave his service if he liked; but that *if* he stayed, he must invariably speak the truth, and, in a general way, turn over a new leaf and a clean one. Dick desired to stay with all his heart, especially as he was allowed to continue in buttons, and therefore he sincerely determined to be a reclaimed character if he could.

Dick, then, confessed that he had not yet seen Mr. Antony, but that he had carried up things to his door, and heard his voice inside, cheerful-like. He might have added that he had had a private view of him through the keyhole; but he only observed that they all seemed mighty comfortable, and the ladies made much of him, and Mr. Weir often looked

in on him, and they could be heard talking and laughing. All this was very reassuring to Nussy, who formed many imaginary dialogues and pictures as she mended her father's stockings.

Of course, there was plenty about the accident in the newspapers. A poor man died from the injuries he had received, and there was an inquest, and a great many witnesses were examined, and many letters appeared in the *Times*, signed "One of the Sufferers," "Another Sufferer," &c.; and one, who had received a severe blow on the eye, signed herself, "Black-eyed Susan." Mr. Antony's injuries were reported; he was spoken of as "the unfortunate young gentleman," and "one of our most promising artists;" so, as he said, they advertised him without his having to pay for it.

"I think you are paying for it pretty severely," Edith said.

"No; I might have had the pain without the puffery."

He got her to write, in his name, to a brother-artist to watch his interests, and this friend took care they should not suffer for

want of his attention to them. Mr. Antony had sold three pictures during the winter; he had three commissions on hand, which he was disabled from executing; he laid his damages at five hundred pounds. "Don't I wish I may get it!" said Mr. Antony. "If I do, you and I, Edith, will pay our respects to the Eternal City."

"That will be delightful; but, Leo, it is very delightful to be here."

"Well, they are very kind indeed—as kind as can be; but I am getting awfully tired of lying on this sofa."

"You must bear it a little longer, poor fellow! We all wonder you bear it as well as you do."

"Oh, come, that puts me on my mettle."

"And Mrs. Weir is so very kind. And the household ways are so nice, Leo."

"What do you mean by household ways?"

"Think how long it is since we have had anything like a real home. Mrs. Weir has been asking me all about ourselves, and she seemed glad that papa was a civil engineer, and she took great interest in his disappointment in being forestalled in his great invention,

and was not surprised at its preying on his mind and preventing his recovery, after having been buoyed up so about it. I told her all about his last illness, and about poor mamma, and the way she used to deny herself for the sake of educating you."

Here Mr. Antony sighed.

"And how good you were, after her death, in paying for my schooling, and then providing for me."

"Oh, gammon."

"Mrs. Weir did not think it gammon, for she repeated it all to Mr. Weir afterwards. I went into the room unwittingly, while she was doing so, and there was strong approval on his face. Her back was towards me, and, as a few words told me what her subject was, I slipped out again. It was better, you know, that they should know a little of our antecedents; they quite deserve it."

"Quite so. What about those household ways you were speaking of?"

"Family prayers, morning and evening, is one of them. It is so nice to see the two neat, orderly maids in their clean aprons, come in with their Bibles, and Richard too, though he

is a bit of a fidget. It seemed to me that Mr. Weir must have had an eye to him in the passages he selected ; but he assured me it was not so—they came in the regular course of reading.”

“All the better. People don't like being preached at, prayed at, or read at.”

“Then Mrs. Weir manages her servants so nicely. She seems to me to know everything that is going on in the house, without being vexatiously interfering. She says, ‘If I see my maids doing a thing well, I don't mind their doing it in their own way instead of mine. If I see that their way is not as good as mine, I point it out to them, and make them change it.’ She has a cheerful, kindly way of speaking to them ; manages that they shall not be an entire day indoors ; lets them openly see a relative or friend occasionally, and invites them to stay to tea. She says she knows in twenty-four hours whether a servant will suit her or not. She was sure, from the first, that Mrs. Early would not suit her, only Mr. Weir made such a point of her keeping her on. Alice has been with her four years, and she hopes she will never leave her unless to marry,

as Mary has done. She finds Mrs. Homer's cook a valuable servant."

"Edith, when you have a house of your own, mind you copy Mrs. Weir."

"Ah! I don't believe I ever shall have a house of my own; I don't want one, as long as I may be with you, Leo."

"Fudge.—We'll go to Rome, old girl, some of these days."

"Let us go along the Riviera."

"To find a Doctor Antonio?"

CHAPTER XVI.

HOSPITALITY.

WHEN Edith found herself in the quiet and solitude of her little room the first night under Mrs. Weir's roof, she sat down and clasped her hands in utter amazement and thankfulness at the events of the day. What a peril had been escaped! What friends had been raised up! Where and what should she have been now, had Leo been killed? or had he been excruciatingly mangled like that poor man whose shrieks yet rang in her ears?

"Oh!" thought she; "in the midst of life we are in death. How is it that we feel it so little? Surely we sometimes have glimpses given us of the sufferings God *could* inflict if He were so inclined! What gratitude we owe Him, then, for having spared us!"

On the following evening, Mr. Weir offered to read to Mr. Antony, while Edith sat with

his mother. She begged him not to read too long, nor anything too exciting, which he promised; and, to keep his word, took up a *Cornhill Magazine*. The essay he selected was pleasant reading; but somehow it settled Mr. Antony into a very composing sleep; seeing which, Mr. Weir quietly left him, and joined the ladies.

“Now,” said he, sitting down near Edith, “I want to have a talk with you as an authoress. Do not you remember your brother saying, ‘Edith writes,’ the first time I called on you?”

“Yes, now you recall it to me,” said Edith, “and very abominable of him it was.”

“Why so? Are you at all sore about it? I should have thought it had been rather the other way.”

“I don’t know how it may be with great writers; but, as a small one, I feel it much pleasantest to keep out of sight. There’s nothing more horrible, in a small way, than for some one you scarcely know, and certainly do not care about, to sit down beside you and say, ‘What a sweet thing that last work of yours was!—what a charming talent you possess!’”

“Yes, I think that must be detestable,” said Mr. Weir, laughing; “almost as bad as being praised for one’s sermons, which is an absolute offence against good manners. Some pompous magnate comes up, perhaps, with, ‘What a powerful discourse you have favoured us with, Mr. So-and-so’—the victim bows—‘I assure you I have not heard such a powerful discourse for a long time’—another bow—‘such original thought—such vigorous language’—bow—‘such delivery—such rhetoric—such logic—such spirituality!’ bow, bow, bow, till he comes to the last, which the clergyman can bear no longer!”

“Mr. Greville, Frank?”

“Oh, no, mother; but I’ve been a bystander at such scenes. *Revenons à nous moutons*, Miss Antony. Do you find authorship an entirely safe employment?”

“How safe?” said Edith.

“Do you not live too much in an ideal world?”

“Oh, no! my mental world is real. One must observe realities, observe nature and fact, to write to any purpose. At least, so I find it in my small way.”

“ Well, certainly, if you are an objective writer, that must be the case, and I’m glad to find yours is so healthy a line. But observation and reflection go hand in hand ; otherwise we do not observe to much purpose. And reflection leads to analysis : to the analysis of one’s mind, which assists us in attempting to analyse the minds of others. But self-analysis, pursued too far, becomes morbid. Then again, there is a faculty we have not yet taken into account—imagination. Without imagination, the artist or novelist becomes an uninteresting copyist ; but imagination is a bad master, though a good servant ; and if it enables us at will to transport ourselves into an unreal world, where spring ever reigns, and heroes and heroines are always having piquant dialogues, does not it disincline us very much to take our share in the concerns of every-day life ? ”

“ Really,” said Edith, “ you have conjured up around me such a host of ‘ Gorgons and chimeras dire,’ that I feel almost like the lady surrounded by Comus’s rabble rout. Morbid analysis on one hand, imagination run mad on the other !—I think you little know that I am merely a writer for the young. And in answer

to your question, do I find it unfits me for the duties of common life? I say boldly, No!"

"Well, I am very glad of it, because I am sure you are sincere; and my experience of authoresses has been small. I had formed some crude notions of my own which I wished to rectify."

"Why should any one who has written a tale or two be call authoress?" said Edith. "You do not find an epithet for the young lady who plays, or the young lady who paints."

"Directly people step into print, they have left the mild majesty of private life, and cannot claim its protection."

"They have a right to its protection, though," said Edith. "What! because we seek by interesting to instruct, and by amusing to improve, are we putting ourselves beyond the pale of protection?"

"You are putting yourselves within reach of the claws of criticism, from which there is no protection."

"Very sharp claws they are," said Edith, laughing.

"Oh, you have felt how they scratch! Do you mind it?"

“The first time, it made me cry. But I have since learnt to turn censure and ridicule to some account, and to take unalloyed pleasure in praise.”

“But make you cry? Was it worth crying about?”

“Yes, I think so; because there are certain intelligent serials that one’s friends and acquaintance are sure to see, and to draw their opinions from; therefore it is very trying to be censured by them, because, though you may not admit the justice of the censure, you think that your acquaintance will.”

“I see. Then are the opinions of those acquaintance to be much valued?”

“One cannot help valuing them in some degree,” said Edith. “It would be sufficiently absurd to cease to esteem Mrs. A. or Mrs. B. simply because she thought you had written a poor book.”

“I see. Well, if you lived in this neighbourhood, and I saw you in the distance, coming towards me, I should think, ‘Here comes Miss Antony; she has now launched *Ferdinando* on a sea of troubles, and she is meditating how to bring him out of them again.’”

“Then I’m very glad I don’t live in this neighbourhood,” said Edith, laughing. “That is—”

“That is,—what?”

“I ought not to say I should not like to live in this neighbourhood; for I should like it very much. Only it would not do for Leo; but the more I see of the country, the more I like it. So that, if we could live in it, I would take it, Ferdinando and all.”

After this, Mr. Weir, when he now and then saw her look pensive, would inquire of her, with affected gravity,

“How’s Ferdinando?”

“What a pretty Affghan blanket this is,” she said one day, as she arranged it for Mrs. Weir. “Did you make it?”

“Yes, my dear, under the direction of poor Mrs. Homer. She put in all the pines.”

“One would think,” said Mr. Weir, “from your calling her poor Mrs. Homer, that she had lost her husband, instead of gone to find him.”

“Psyche in search of Cupid,” said Mr. Antony, who had now reached such a stage of convalescence as to come down stairs with his arm in a sling.

“I hope she will not have as many misadventures as Mrs. Tighe’s Psyche,” said Edith.

“Oh, it’s a safe and easy passage enough to the Cape!”

“It’s a safe and easy journey from Belforest to London generally,” said Edith, “but your arm was broken, Leo.”

“Which nobody can deny.”

“Frank,” said Mrs. Weir, “do you think that a woman cannot be justified, under any circumstances, in refusing to accompany her husband where he wants her to go?”

“That’s a difficult question, mother. But, in a general way, I think the best rule is to refuse nothing that Christ appoints us to do. *There’s* the true secret of strength and success.”

“That’s taking very high ground,” said Edith thoughtfully.

“The higher your ground, the farther you see,” said Mr. Antony.

The brother and sister spent three weeks with the Weirs. During that time, Mr. Antony became convalescent, but he was unable to use his right arm, and was therefore fairly entitled

to compensation for being debarred the exercise of his art. Eventually he received three hundred pounds. He and his sister agreed, therefore, that there could not be a better time for them to travel in Italy, since here were the means supplied, and he could use his eyes though not his hand.

During those three weeks, hosts and guests had become mutually attached. Mrs. Weir liked both her visitors, and she was quite aware of a strong attraction between her son and Miss Antony; but she did not think its severance would seriously disturb their happiness—at any rate, in these early days. She did nothing to favour it; she did nothing to blight it; the Antonys would soon go abroad, and Edith was anticipating it with such pleasure, that it was plain she would not leave her heart behind. Mrs. Weir thought her more adapted to Frank, and more pleasant to herself, than any young person she had met with; yet, O ye mothers of England, you will not be surprised that she did not care that Frank should marry her. Did she want wealth—connexion? Frank had objected to Mrs. Homer's two hundred a year, and did not like two interests.

The Grevilles had wealth, and connexion too ; and they liked him, and had drawn him forward, and then suddenly dropped him, repulsed him, so that he was hurt. A daughter-in-law who plumed herself on her advantages of birth or fortune would not be very comfortable to live with. Mrs. Weir turned all these matters very composedly in her mind, as she sat knitting, and seeming to be wholly absorbed in the recapitulation of "drop one, knit one, cast off two."

The country was now very charming, for it was nearly the end of April,

"When merry larks are ploughmen's clocks,"

and Mr. Antony was impatient for Mr. Bush's sanction to his departure. At length it was given, and as the few remaining days of their stay passed by, the intercourse between them all deepened in friendship and interest : though Mr. Weir, like young Edwin in the ballad, "never spoke of love." It seemed to have no place in his thoughts. Life was, to him, an arduous journey they were all engaged in ; and they were encouraged, like Christian and Hopeful, to hold pleasant discourse by the

way ; but the incidents of the road itself were enough to occupy the mind, without straying into Bypath Meadow in search of flowers. Often he spoke with passionate admiration of missionaries who had spent their lives in spreading the gospel, and sealed their testimony by their deaths. Edith's eye kindled and her heart swelled as he dilated on their examples ; but Mrs. Weir was always uncomfortable when he got upon such subjects, and could not bear to hear him say that Belforest afforded hardly sufficient work for a man in his full strength.

In the last week of April, then, Mr. Antony and his sister took leave of their kind friends with affectionate gratitude, the sincerity of which could not be doubted ; and Edith's eyes shone with tears as she kissed Mrs. Weir. But Mrs. Weir did not beg her to write to her, as she had begged Mrs. Homer : it was Mr. Weir who said earnestly, as he detained her hand, " You will write to my mother ? "

" Oh, yes," she said, looking towards Mrs. Weir ; but Mrs. Weir was speaking to Mr. Antony, and charging him to be prudent.

And so they started ; and Mr. Weir accom-

panied them to the station ; and Nessy regretfully saw them cross the green. Edith suddenly ran across to the post-office, and shook hands with her, saying, " Good-bye, Miss Saffery ; " and Nessy was surprised and happy.

They left England in a few days ; and then ensued one of those intermediate passages which occur in the lives of all, and which we are so apt to think dull and profitless. Dull they may be, if we let them be ; profitless they never ought to be ; for how likely is it that they are the preparations for some great joy, great temptation, or great sorrow ?

Is it not often so with regard to great public events ? " The Lord waits, that He may be gracious unto us, in the *pauses* between the different judgments with which He visits the world. Heaven listens, the earth is silent, that the low, faint whisper of the penitent's prayer may be heard. What need, therefore, that we should redouble our prayers and our efforts while yet there is time ; lest the moment should arrive when God has no *leisure*, so to speak, for individual cases amid general chastisements ! "

There was a lull at Belforest, and it was the

precursor of sorrow. To speak first of that which, perhaps, was not the lightest—George Early started for his appointment, after a tender leave-taking of his mother and his promised bride. The young feel sorrow sharply; but their spirits are very buoyant. George was his own man again before he had been many hours at sea. Carry Brown cried heartily the first day, and shed a quiet tear now and then afterwards; but she was hopeful and trustful, and felt sure that they should come together again at the two years' end. Widow Early did not expect to see him any more; but she resigned herself as the old and wayworn do to what is inevitable, and, after a time, regained her pleasure in the substantial comforts with which she was surrounded. If she had lost a son, Carry Brown endeavoured to show her the kindness of a daughter.

Mr. Saffery's health suddenly gave way. Oh, what a new, strange, unwelcome thing illness was in that house! How ominous Mr. Bush's visits were! especially when he brought another doctor; and how petrified poor Michael Saffery was, when he learnt that there would probably be no rest for him but in the grave, and

before the end of many months. Mrs. Saffery was dismayed, incredulous, and angry with them for thinking so unfavourably of her husband.

“And then, as if they could not keep their own counsel, but must go and tell him of it, the gabies!” said she, passionately.

“Mother,” said Nessy, who was crying bitterly, “father insisted on it that they should tell him the truth.”

“And if he did, were they to mind him? There’s his stick, knocking the ground;—run you up, Nessy, and tell him I’m coming. I don’t want him to notice my red eyes. Tell him I’m going to bring him up a little something.”

Just then Mr. Weir entered.

“Oh, sir!” said Nessy, quick as thought, “my father’s very ill, and likely never to be well again. Will you come and see him sometimes?”

“Well, I’m sure, Nessy!” ejaculated Mrs. Saffery, while Mr. Weir said, heartily—

“That I will! When would he like me to see him?”

“I’ll run up, sir, and ask.”

And in two minutes she returned.

“Father says, if you wouldn’t mind seeing him just as he is, he would like to see you now, sir.”

“Show me the way, then,” said Mr. Weir, following her, and leaving Mrs. Saffery confounded at Nesy’s assurance and its success. After a blank pause, she took the beaten egg she had been preparing for him in her hand, and went softly up to see what they were all about. There was Nesy kneeling by the bed, with her face hidden by the bedclothes, and Michael Saffery, with every furrow of care dismissed from his patient face, lying with his hands meekly folded, while Mr. Weir prayed aloud and then pronounced the benediction. Mrs. Saffery stood awkwardly in the doorway, with the egg-flip in her hand.

“And now good-bye for the present, my good friend,” said Mr. Weir, shaking hands with him. “I will look in on you frequently; and mind you don’t scruple to send for me whenever you wish for me. You have a heavy burthen put upon you to bear; but a burthen is easier borne by two than by one, and here are your wife and your daughter who, I can see,

are trying to take some of its weight off you. It gives us an opportunity of seeing what is in them, Mr. Saffery."

"And, sir," said Mr. Saffery, faintly smiling, "it gives us an opportunity of seeing what is in *you*. You're the sick man's friend, sir."

"That is what every faithful minister ought to be."

"Don't think, sir, that I'm anyways rebellious; only it took me sudden-like. I knew I was in very bad pain, I thought it might take long to set me up again; but I no more thought of dying, sir, than I thought of going to France. It gave me a thrill; I don't deny it; but, the moment, sir, that was over, I felt I could say, 'Thy will be done.' Don't cry so, Nussy. Come and kiss me, my dear."

"I wish I could bear it for you, papa."

She spoke quite sincerely, and he felt that she did; but Mrs. Saffery thought her expression of feeling exaggerated. Grief had not elevated her, poor woman, above her ordinary self. She felt the doctors to blame for signing Saffery's death-warrant, and a ministerial visit premature and awkward.

Some seem by nature to have a vocation for nursing; others not. Again, nursing has its separate branches; some have the light step, the pleasant voice, the cheering smile, the dexterous hand, the gentle touch—others are gifted in cookery for the sick. Mrs. Saffery was better at the second than the first; her unaccustomed care stamped a settled frown on her face which, to a sick man, was anything but cheering; and she was too sudden and bustling in her efforts to make him comfortable; but she was excellent at making slops, and he relished and praised them. A person named Porter was deputed by the post-office authorities to act in Mr. Saffery's place during his illness; and he lodged at Mrs. Early's. He was a quiet, well-behaved man, but Nessy did not much like him.

With that quick instinct of affection which supplies the place of experience, she seemed to know by intuition when her father liked to be talked or read to, when to be silent; when to have refreshment, when to try to sleep; how much light, how much air to have in the room; when to interest him in some

little piece of news, and when to talk of death and eternity.

Mrs. Saffery went away, whenever they touched on this theme, saying it gave her the horrors.

CHAPTER XVII.

MINISTRY.

“Wish not, dear friends, my pain away,
Wish me a calm and thankful heart,
With God in all my griefs to stay,
Nor from His loved correction start.”

WHAT a pretty verse that is! It was a great favourite with Nussy; for she was now very familiar with the “Christian Year” and the “Invalid’s Hymn-book.” Mr. Saffery liked her to read a hymn to him the last thing at night; and sometimes she would sit beside him, as he slept during the day, and consider and re-consider one hymn after another, endeavouring to realize to herself how she should feel them in his place. At times, she knew, his placidity forsook him, and he quailed before the terrors of an unknown state. At these times no one could compose him but Mr. Weir, till Nussy found and read to him, in her gentle, lulling voice—

“ O much beloved ! fear not to die,
Lift up to heaven thy tearful eye,
And see, prepared for thee,
A mansion where no sins, no foes,
Shall ever break thy sweet repose
Through all eternity.”

This verse never lost its charm for Michael Saffery. He would also get Nussy to sing the Evening Hymn to him over and over again, and likewise “Rock of ages.”

Mr. Weir, coming in sometimes, and finding her thus singing over her work, thought how she was being spiritualized by affliction, and what treasures the rough waves of tribulation were casting on her mind to enrich it long after the storm should have subsided.

One day she said to him, “Have you heard anything yet of Mrs. Homer, sir?”

“Oh, yes,” said he, “did not you know it? I forgot your interest in her, she having been your inmate. Yes, we have had a letter full of brightness and thankfulness. She had a safe and pleasant voyage to the Cape; and though the good old missionary she went out with belongs to a different denomination from mine, I think he must be a true servant of Christ. He did a great deal more for her than I had

power to do, or even had resolution to attempt. She seems to me to be a changed character. When she reached the Cape, to her surprise and delight she was received and welcomed by her husband, who, not knowing she was coming, was as surprised and delighted as she was."

"Oh, I am very glad!" said Nussy. "I always liked her very much."

"A pretty little woman," placidly observed Mr. Saffery, "as ever stepped on shoe-leather."

Mr. Weir smiled, and seeing the subject gave pleasure to them both, went on.

"It seems that Captain Homer's detachment had been suddenly recalled from the island, and for a very good reason; they had nothing to eat. The whale ships on which they chiefly depended for supplies had neglected to call, and left them in such extremities, that several of the islanders availed themselves of the opportunity of accompanying the soldiers to the Cape. So that's what comes, Mr. Saffery, of living on an island that's neither postiferous nor railwiferous."

"Is Mrs. Homer likely to remain at the Cape, then, sir?" said Nussy.

“For the present, at all events; and she has met with some pleasant society there, and finds Capetown a very pleasant substitute for Tristan d’Acunha. She is amused and interested by the novelty of the place and people; and has a light heart, because she is in the right path.”

After a short pause, he added, “As you know about the deception she practised here, I may as well tell you that she confessed it to her husband. He did not take it up quite as seriously as we did; military men do not trouble themselves like others. I believe he called her ‘a silly puss’ and ‘a vagabond.’”

“I’m very glad, sir, she told him,” said Michael Saffery. “Women, be they ladies or otherways, should have no concealments from their husbands. And if they knew they must tell them everything, it would tendify, I should say, to keep them out of scrapes.”

Mr. Weir, it will be observed, spoke to Nussy as an equal—as a woman. She had shot up, during the last twelve months, into a tall, slight girl, with dark blue eyes and brown hair. Her complexion was colourless; her expression pleasing. She was now a little more than fifteen, and had a thoughtfulness beyond her

years, which made her seem older, and increased reliance in her. Mr. Weir habitually treated those whom he conversed with as equals; he maintained an honest independence in his intercourse with the most self-important, and conversed as friend with friend with Mr. Saffery and Nussy; thus eliciting hidden qualities in both. Mr. Saffery's mind was naturally neither of a deep nor high order; but he had great simplicity of character, and we know how a critical illness ripens and refines, if it be but used aright. He now occasionally uttered thoughts that cost him a good deal of pains to work out, though they were quaintly expressed. Not the least perception of all this had Mrs. Saffery; she, poor woman, occasionally dropped hot tears on her saucepans and flat irons, but she reminded herself that she must not give way; that she had a good deal before her to go through, and must keep herself up; so while Nussy ate less and less, she ate more, and took more stimulants, saying all the while that they went against her, and perhaps they did.

One day, as Nussy was going into the Sunday-school, Mr. Weir said compassionately,

“You don’t look very well to-day, Miss Saffery.” She immediately burst into tears. He said, “You are not equal to your class, now that you have so much nursing. Go in to my mother, and let her give you a glass of wine.”

“No, thank you, sir,” said Nessy, drying her tears, and feeling much ashamed of them; “it has been a relief to me to cry, but I ought not to have given way. My father likes me to attend my class, and my mother likes being with him on the only day she has leisure. The class makes a little change for me. I often think of it during the week.”

“Oh, well!”

“Please, sir, will you excuse my asking if you know how Mr. and Miss Antony are getting on? I have often thought of asking you.”

“Oh, they are enjoying themselves extremely, and Mr. Antony is almost well. He said at the end of his last letter, ‘I hope the Safferys are going on well.’ I ought to have told you sooner.”

“Thank you, sir.” And this slight remembrance from her distant friend made Nessy brighter for the rest of the day.

The event came at last that comes to all. Michael Saffery reached his journey's end, thankful that the gates of immortality were about to open to him. He had latterly sunk rapidly, but painlessly. Nessay almost lived in his sight—and lived on the sight of him. His mind grew clearer and brighter to the end. On Mr. Weir's last visit but one to him, he expressed a wish to receive the sacrament.

“ He came again : the place was bright
With something of celestial light ;
A simple altar by the bed
For high communion meetly spread,
Chalice, and plate, and snowy vest ;—
They ate and drank ; then, calmly blest,
All mourners, one with dying breath—
They sat and talked of Jesus' death.”

He passed away quite tranquilly. Much sympathy was felt and expressed for the widow and orphan. Mrs. Saffery's greatest consolation was talking, with streaming eyes, to some of her old gossips, and recounting all the details of poor Saffery's illness ; but Nessay could neither talk, nor, for a time, shed a tear.

When this reached the ears of Mrs. Weir, who had been very kind throughout, calling to inquire, and sending various nice things, she

contrived little occasions for Nessy to come to her, and tried to break the chain of her ideas. But Nessy's grief was too real and deep to be easily alleviated. Whatever her hands might be busied about, the feeling of her heart was—

“ But he is in his grave—and oh,
The difference to me ! ”

Domestic life at the post-office was now spiritless and miserable. There was no longer one mind between mother and daughter, as of old. It was impossible to trace the source of Mrs. Saffery's irritability ; whether she were jealous of Nessy's more zealous attendance on the dying bed than her own ; or of her looking higher than she did for her only consolation ; or of Mr. Saffery's having shown such trust in her as to have his express wish set down in Mr. Weir's handwriting, that Nessy's thirty pounds a year were henceforth to be put at once into her hands, as soon as received, in quarterly payments. All these things together may have contributed to embitter her ; or it may have been only her soreness of heart, which she knew no other refuge from than in cross words and dreary silences.

Her position was not what it had been, for though she still acted as auxiliary in the postal department, it made all the difference whether the principal were her husband or a stranger ; and her little drapery business was not enough to keep her, nor yet to keep her employed, for a better shop of the kind had been opened in the neighbourhood.

Once she spoke sharply to Nesity for not refusing at once to receive her annuity till she was of age, and called her mean. The hot tears started into Nesity's eyes ; but though it had been in her mind to put the whole of her quarterage into her mother's hands and beg her to make use of it, she knew that her father had intended her to have the spending it, and it did seem Quixotic to put this once and altogether out of her power because she was unjustly and unkindly accused of meanness. But how many tears wetted her pillow !

Such precious seed, however, had been sown in her mind, softened by sorrow like garden earth by spring rain, that she knew where to apply for true comfort, and sought it. But it was not yet found.

Mrs. Saffery hated to see her dipping into

her Bible from time to time, in the midst of the day's work, and said it was the best of Sabbath reading, but week-days had their own requirements, and she should beware of anything that might be taken for hypocrisy. So Nessy carried her little Bible out of sight.

Again, Mrs. Saffery had talked of their sleeping together, and letting Nessy's attic to Mr. Porter, but Nessy said imploringly, "Oh, mamma! please not." And Michael Saffery had left his particular injunctions that she was not henceforth to take any single man as lodger, so that she was obliged to give it up. Only, she said, Mr. Porter was in the business, and therefore she was sure Saffery would have made an exception in his favour.

It seemed as if troubles were to thicken. Mrs. Saffery made a terrible blunder, one day, in a money-order for one of the Grevilles, and Mr. Greville, in wrath, wrote to the postmaster-general. Down came a great foolscap letter, "On Her Majesty's Service," and a series of apologies, explanations, and reprimands ensued, and Mrs. Saffery narrowly escaped being turned out of office. After this she was more taciturn to Nessy than ever.

At length the blow fell. It is best to finish this affair at once, though it covered some months. They were sitting one day over their comfortless dinner in dull silence, when Mrs. Saffery suddenly exclaimed—

“Nessy, it’s no use going on any longer. Here’s a piece of news for you: I’m going to be married.”

Nessy’s knife and fork dropped from her hands; her eyes saw only confused, floating specks; and her ears rang with murmurs like the hum of innumerable bees. Something in her look must have struck Mrs. Saffery as strange and dreadful, for she exclaimed, hoarsely—

“Don’t stare like a pig. I could get up and shake you, Nessy!”

Nessy burst into tears.

“Why, what’s the use of crying?” continued Mrs. Saffery, louder and louder. “What’s to be done, I say? The business going to ruin, and I an unprotected widow, and you the poorest help mother *ever* had!”

“Oh, mamma! don’t! don’t!”

“You’re not to call me ‘mamma,’ Nessy. John Porter says it’s ridiculous; and he’s a

sensible, right-judging man. It was all very well in our days of prosperity; but I don't want to be always reminding people of better days, like Mrs. Early."

Still Nussy wept.

"You had better go upstairs into your own room till you've done crying," said her mother.

"I would go out to service—I would give up my thirty pounds, rather than you should do this," sobbed Nussy.

"Very far thirty pounds would go!" said Mrs. Saffery, contemptuously. "You'll know what a little way it will go, even on your selfish pleasures, when you come to try."

Nussy lifted up her hand in mute protest, and let it fall again beside her.

"Oh, you affected, theatrical creature! Wherever could you have got such ways? Of Mrs. Homer, maybe, or Miss Antony."

Nussy here took advantage of her having previously been ordered to her room. She locked herself in, knelt down, and sobbed. She could not pray, she could not think. When her tears were exhausted, she washed her face, put on her bonnet, shawl, and gloves as tidily as she could, and went down stairs

and through the shop. It was just about the time Mr. Porter would return from his dinner, and she hated the thought of seeing him.

“Going to tell tales, I suppose,” said her mother, from behind the counter. Nessy passed out.

“Nessy, come back!”

But Nessy was already outside, and though she heard the call, she did not attend to it. I am not saying she was right.

Directly she was out of sight of the house, her walk became a run. She flew rather than ran to Mrs. Weir's, and rang the bell. At the same instant, the door was opened by Mr. Weir.

“Why, Nessy—Miss Saffery, is it you!” said he, kindly. “Come in. What's the matter?”

“May I speak to you for a minute, sir, please?”

“Certainly. Come in here.”

He showed her into Mrs. Weir's morning-room, where Mrs. Weir's work-basket and work lay about, but where Mrs. Weir was not.

“What's the matter?” repeated he kindly.

“Sir, I've had a dreadful blow. My mother's going to be married.”

“Your mother?” cried he, looking amused the first moment, and truly concerned for her the next.

“I can’t reconcile myself to it, sir;” and Nussy’s tears began to trickle down.

“Yet did she not lament, with loud allew,
As women wont, but with deep sighs and singulfs few.”

“This is a great, a sore trial indeed, to you!”

“Oh, sir! will you go and speak to her?”

He looked rather at a loss.

“That will be an awkward thing. You see, if she has made up her mind, I may only make bad worse.”

“But perhaps she hasn’t made up her mind. She has only just named it to me. Pray forgive me, sir. I know I owe you a hundred apologies for coming to you about it, but it’s a matter of life and death, almost, to me.”

He could suppose that she might feel and think it to be so.

“Well,” said he, after a moment’s consideration, “I’ll go over to her, since you wish it. What is the man’s name?”

“Mr. Porter—John Porter, sir.”

“Ah! the person who succeeded your father.

This is by way of smoothing business affairs, I suspect."

"But oh, what a wretched way! I'd rather do anything. I can't think how my mother can bring herself to it."

"Well, I'll go and inquire a little into it. If it is not too late, I shall advise her very strongly to reconsider it; but it may be that affairs have gone so far that she cannot, in justice to the man, break it off. In that case, you must make the best of it. Remain here a little.—Mother, keep Miss Saffery here till I return, please. I shall not long be gone."

For Mrs. Weir had just come in, and drawn her large work-basket towards her. "What is all this about?" said she to Nussy, when they were left to themselves.

Nussy sighed deeply, and said—

"That my mother is going to be married again, ma'am."

"Married? disgusting! disgraceful!" said the plain-spoken old lady. "Why, your father has not been dead three months, has he? I forget exactly how time goes, but I know strawberries had come in. And what did you ask Mr. Weir to do?"

“To speak to my mother, if he would be so very good,” said Nessy, “and he said he would.”

“Not a bit of use, and so you’ll see,” said Mrs. Weir. “Only troubling my son for nothing. I’m sorry for you, Miss Saffery, very sorry indeed ; but if your mother has allowed herself even to think of such a thing, nothing on earth will turn her. I know the world, and human nature.”

Nessy, who knew neither, awaited the event rather hopefully.

It was an awkward task for the young man. People of the respectable tradesmen class are so much more difficult to speak to on personal affairs than the very poor ; and Nessy’s start had been so sudden, even by her own showing, that he doubted whether she might not have been too hasty.

Reaching the post-office, and observing, to his relief, no one but Mrs. Saffery in it, he asked her for some stamps, and then said—

“I hear, Mrs. Saffery, there is some prospect of your changing your condition.”

“Then Nessy’s been telling of it,” said she, with asperity. “I knew she would ! That girl,

sir, is the grief of my heart. I can't think what has upset her so, ever since her father died. I fear he cockered her too much. One cannot say the least word, but—Why, just for something I chanced to say at dinner, off she flies upstairs, bangs on her bonnet, puts on her best shawl no how, and off to you! I'll be judged by you, whether that's like a dutiful daughter."

"But is the report, then, incorrect?" said he, gently.

"Incorrect?—well, I don't say it's incorrect; only there are such different ways of putting things. Nussy has your ear, sir, and Nussy's young, and knows little of the world's troubles; it's always been our care she *should* know little of them. But she's grown wilful and set up, that's the fact—most young people do at one time or other; and the upshot of it is, sir, that my life's been a misery to me—a misery!" and she burst out crying. "What with the business dropping off, and the reprimand from the Central Office, and Nussy's contrary ways, and all, my life's been a burthen, sir. Talk of my being a widow two months—why, it seems like two years! and I'm so sick of it, that I'm

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glad to be quit of it, and get somebody to help bear my burdens. And we're to be asked in church next Sunday, and if Nussy doesn't like it she may leave it, and set up grand on her thirty pounds a year. It's better, any way, to be subject to a husband than a daughter."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONFLICT.

MRS. SAFFERY'S speech after Nussy's was like Mark Antony's after Brutus's : it reversed all the lights and shadows. Mr. Weir, like Sir Roger de Coverly, thought something might be said on both sides ; but yet he pitied Nussy, and strongly disapproved of Mrs. Saffery's precipitation. That could not be recalled now ; nor was his disapproval likely to be of any consequence to her ; all that remained for him was to say he hoped whatever she had done had been prefaced by praying for direction ; and that young and old could not be expected to see things in the same light ; but he hoped it would make no difference in her feelings to her daughter.

“ Of course it will not, sir,” said Mrs. Saffery. “ I only wish every mother did her duty by her children as I've done by Nussy ; and that

Nessy would do her duty by me as I've done mine by her. High time, I think, the house should have a master, when this is the way she goes on to her mother."

A customer coming in, the dialogue was summarily ended; and Mr. Weir returned to tell Nessy that it seemed quite too late to alter Mrs. Saffery's decision, but that she promised it should make no difference in her kindness to her. "So do you be kind too," continued he; "and remember the first commandment with promise."

"I do remember it, sir," said Nessy, with swelling heart; "and it's because I honour my father that I can't bear my mother to slight his memory."

"Still, she *is* your mother, and I always thought there had been a very strong tie of affection between you. I am quite surprised to find it otherwise."

"There *was*, sir, such a tie," she said, crying.

"Let there be again, then. You *cannot* help yourself, but you may harm yourself very much. Do not make things worse. Try conciliation; practise submission; carry your burden to God. He careth for you."

With this they parted ; and she carried her heavy heart back again. “ Yes,” she thought, “ He indeed careth for me ; no earthly friend does. I *had* one, once.

“ ‘ But he is in his grave—and oh,
The difference to me ! ’ ”

As she re-entered the shop, her mother said—

“ You didn’t get much by that move, Nussy.”

She made no answer, but dejectedly took off her things and sat down to needlework.

A great conflict was going on in Mr. Weir’s mind. Much earlier in the year he had happened to revisit Cambridge, just at the time when a certain devoted missionary explorer had returned from his wanderings, and was preaching a crusade at the universities. His burning words kindled the enthusiasm of some, and were as the very lovely music of an instrument to others—the lay ended, its impression ended too. But a few more thoughtful, and, among them, a knot of college friends with whom Mr. Weir was breakfasting, discussed the subject very earnestly, and one of them said—

“I really cannot see why one or two of us should not go. I’m afraid it is because we cannot make up our minds to the self-denial.”

An awkward pause ensued, and he resumed the question yet more earnestly; but spoilt all by concluding with—

“Don’t be afraid: I’m not going myself.” And so it passed off.

Yet this young man ended by laying down his life in the mission field; and his praise is now in the churches.

His words found an echo in Frank Weir’s heart; and when they met again soon after they had a quiet chat about it.

“Do you know,” said he, “after we parted the other morning, I read a bit of Henry Martyn’s life, and it determined me to seek direction to find what was best to be done, *and to do it.*”

“And did you?” said Mr. Weir.

“Certainly. My main argument is this. We may, it is true, serve God and show our love to Christ in one place as well as another; but here is a field where labour is wanted, and no one else will go, so I will.”

These simple words could not have had more

effect on Mr. Weir had he added to them, "Go thou and do likewise." From that time, the missionary question would allow him no rest—

"I suoi pensieri in lui dormir non ponno"

—but as he knew pretty well how his mother would be shocked if she knew what was on his mind, he was very guarded in approaching it. He began by writing animated accounts of the distinguished lecturer's eloquence, and the enthusiasm it had excited; adding piquant extracts from the shorthand notes he had taken. When he returned to Belforest, he read her these notes in full; and described the traveller in so attractive a manner, that Mrs. Weir's interest in him was secured. Shortly after, in the course of a tour through the provinces, this new Peter the Hermit came to a large market-town in the neighbourhood of Belforest, and all the country round flocked to hear him. Mr. Weir induced his mother to accompany him to the Town Hall: it was crowded to overflowing—the enthusiasm was immense. The Grevilles, in prominent places, saw Mr. Weir vainly looking for a seat for his mother, and kindly made room for her: she was much

pleased at the attention. Mr. Weir went on the platform, and added a unit to the group of clergy already there. When the lecturer came forward, there was a tumultuous welcome. He spoke : you might have heard a pin drop. He spoke for an hour—two hours—no one felt the lapse of time. A fine, invisible link of sympathy seemed to unite their souls to his : he could use them as a skilled musician uses his instrument, and play on them what airs he would. When he ended, there was a deep, universal sigh of too long suspended breath ; and then, oh ! such reiterated applause ! The lecturer was hot and exhausted : but he had to shake hands and exchange greetings with successive shoals of enthusiastic ladies and gentlemen, who triumphed afterwards in having touched his hand.

Mrs. Weir was one of these. As they returned to Belforest in their fly, she quite chuckled at the distinguished man's having not merely touched, but held her hand, and said, "Madam, you do me honour."

"And his smile, Frank, quite illuminated his face. You may say what you will, but *I* call him handsome."

Upon this hint, Frank spake. Very guardedly, very gently, he told her the settled purpose of his soul. She heard him in blank dismay; and then met him with voluble remonstrance. Very momentous, very painful, was that stout battle in the fly. It brought her to tears; and they scalded Frank's heart. But they did not shake his purpose—no, no more than the billows shake the rock.

And now I have explained why Mr. Weir's mind was in a very painful state.

There was plenty of excited talk in the little world of Belforest, when it began to be bruited abroad that Mr. Weir was going to Central Africa, and that Mrs. Saffery was going to marry Mr. Porter. Two incongruous subjects these, of widely different values, yet each in its turn excited strong expressions of feeling. With regard to Mrs. Saffery,—they could not have believed it of her; they had always respected her hitherto, but now she showed what she was; and Mrs. Early, who was very sore at losing her lodger, confided to the Browns that her loss would not be altogether gain to Mrs. Saffery, who little knew what she was undertaking. Nessy excited

pity, but she shrank from hearing it expressed, and bore her grief in isolation.

As for Mr. Weir, the general voice declared that he was throwing himself away. What would the heathen be the better for such a man, who did not even know their language? He was going to the white man's grave, and would be another human sacrifice. He said, "That was as God pleased. His Master had said, 'Whosoever loveth father or mother more than me, cannot be my disciple;' and 'Preach the Gospel throughout the world;' while yet there were thousands of unconverted in and about Jerusalem. Every one of the apostles might have alleged that their first duty lay at home in their own neighbourhood."

And he preached a sermon that carried persuasion and conviction to the minds of many on the text, "And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done."

As he sat with his mother afterwards, she said—

"Frank, I've given up the hope of moving you. I think you mistaken, and you know I think it; but after your sermon of this

evening, my dissuasions are ended. There is one very earnest request I have to make to you, however."

"What is it, my blessed mother? If I can fulfil it, I will. What is it?"

"That you will take out a wife."

He gave a great start.

"This from *you*, mother!"

"I cannot go out with you myself, Frank, though there is scarcely anything I wouldn't do for you. I'm too old, my dear; but it would relieve me of much of my anxiety about you, if I knew you had one who would cheer and assist you in your remote home as only a wife could."

"I have not much time for preliminaries," said he, wistfully; "and how do I know that any one would have me?"

"You can't deceive me by that, Frank. There is one who, I am pretty sure, would have you, and who is not far from your thoughts—Miss Antony."

He coloured, and said, "She is the only one I would ask."

"Ask her, then," said Mrs. Weir, with a little pang; "I'm mistaken if she says you nay."

“But, oh, mother! will it be fair? will it be right to take her out?”

“Really, Frank, if Africa is such a magnet as you make it out to be, I think it may do for her as well as for you.”

“A woman is so different—I shall not in the least mind roughing it in the bush.”

“You, who have never slept in unaired sheets in your life! How often do people talk at random!”

“The climate is so different,” said he laughing.

“I believe you there,” said his mother, shaking her head at him. “No heavy rains, I suppose—no wet seasons—no jungle fevers—no lives lost for want of quinine!”

“It might not do for Miss Antony,” he said, after a thoughtful pause.

“Well, perhaps not. I need not have raised the subject.”

“I don’t say that, mother.”

And all the rest of the evening he was meditative and silent. During the ensuing night, he was wakeful and prayerful. In the morning, he told his mother he was going to London.

“For what?”

“Do not ask till I return.”

She did not need to ask. During the short railway journey, he found the continuous motion favourable to intense thought. Arrived at the terminus, he sprang out, and walked rapidly till he reached Newman Street. It was yet early: all the more likely to find her at home. He remembered the number, found the house, learnt she was within, and sent in his name. The Antonys had the first and third floors of a not very large house. The front drawing-room was Mr. Antony's studio, in all the picturesque litter that artists love; but the small back room appropriated to Edith's use, and to meals, was order itself. As he had asked for her and not for her brother, he was shown into this room, where Edith, still holding his card, was standing at the table awaiting him with pleased expectation.

“This is a very agreeable surprise,” said she, coming forward and holding out her hand. And all the difficulty and awkwardness he had been prepared for disappeared. She was full of the visit to Italy; he let her talk about it

for a time, thinking all the while he might lose his opportunity; and before she had half done with the Catacombs, he said—

“My visit is rather on business this morning.”

Instantly she became all attention.

“Perhaps you have heard of my intended change of life?”

“No,” said she, blushing suddenly. Then she added, “We hear no Belforest news.”

“I am going to join the Church Mission party from Cambridge. I am going to Africa.”

She gave a little start, and looked much concerned.

“Will not that be a great pity?”

“Why?”

“There is so much to do at home.”

“There was much to do in Jerusalem, but the apostles were told to go and preach to all nations.”

“Did not that apply to the apostles only?”

“Twelve men could not go to all nations; it therefore applied to all who were actuated by the same spirit.”

“True: well it seems a great pity.” She gave a little sigh.

“Why?” said Frank.

“That we should lose you.”

“England has many better sons than I.”

“But the little Belforest world—”

“Is so small! I could do a hundred times more good with the same effort. You don't sympathize with me, then?” said he, with disappointment.

“I admire you for it very much,” said Edith. (What a bound his heart gave!) “What made you think I should not? Why, it is just what I should like to do in your place, if I had not a mother.”

“Ah, that is the one sorrowful point,” said he. “It has cost me much pain. But I rather think, I rather hope I have brought my mother to see the subject in some measure as I do.”

“That is more than I should have expected,” said Edith. “In that case, I can only say, and say heartily, ‘Go forward! Go on and prosper.’”

“You encourage and animate me more than I can describe,” said Frank. “Do you really, then, take living interest in the missionary cause?”

“In the spread of Christianity? Why, of course I do! What do you take me for?”

said she gaily. "I only wish I could help it!"

"Oh, Edith, that is exactly the thing I wanted you to say!"

And before she could do more than look her surprise at his calling her by her name, he was pouring out, with all his warmth and persuasiveness, what had so long lain in his heart. Edith's surprise and emotion were extreme; but to say that she felt any umbrage, any pain, would not be the fact. She had often felt that there was no one in the world whom she could feel a stronger interest in than for her brother, except Mr. Weir; but the absolute absurdity of thinking he cared seriously for her, even if she dwelt at all in his memory, had successfully smothered this feeling. It had smouldered, but was not dead; for the first breath of love fanned it into gentle, steady warmth and light.

"So you thought no one could follow that narrow path but yourself," said she, sweetly.

"Oh, Edith! My mother will be happy now."

"But what will Leo say? Oh, I'm afraid he won't hear of it."

"But has he a right over you?"

“The right of affection—a very strong one. Hitherto we have been all in all to one another. I cannot tell you what a good brother he has been ! And to leave him in *this* way, solely for my own—”

“And *my* happiness ? Why, he did not expect to keep you all his life, did he ? Some of these days, if you would have waited for it, he would have left *you*.”

“No, he would always have given me a home.”

“But an altered one. Well, these things are not the result of calculation, are they ? A strong personal feeling comes in like a flood, and carries all before it—”

“Hark, here comes Leo ! I hear his step—
(*Enter Leo.*) Leo, only think ! Mr. Weir is going to Africa.”

“Ha ! Mr. Weir ? What a pleasant surprise this visit is ! I was thinking of you five minutes ago. Will you dine here ?”

“That depends—I don’t know whether you’ll like to have me.”

“*I* shall like it ; I can’t answer for Edith. Perhaps this is scrambling day with us, and she knows there’s nothing to be had.”

“Oh, not quite so,” said Edith; “but I should like just to run away for a minute—”

And on pretence of revising her orders for dinner, she slipped away and ran up to her room. There she tried to arrange her bewildered thoughts, and still her heart's tumultuous beatings. Had she done wrong? had she done right? Would Leo think her wrong? She could not tell—she should know by his first look, and yet she dreaded to meet it. She was very thankful, very happy. She knelt, and laid her head on her arms; her feelings found no words; tears were in her eyes; she brushed them away, fell into a musing fit, lingered too long, heard herself called, and was obliged to go down. When she went in to them, Leo's face was reddened: he said quickly, “Oh Edith, I don't like this at all. I can't have it.”

“Can't you?” said she anxiously, and laying her hand on his arm without looking at him. He took her by the chin, and *would* look full into her eyes.

“Old girl, what has tired you of me?”

“Nothing, Leo. You know I love you better than all the world.”

“Oh, you story-teller!” said he; on which

they all three burst out laughing. But Edith took his hand and began to stroke it, and was going to make some insincere little speech; when he cut it short with—

“After that jolly laugh, heroics are out of the question. *I* can't play the sentimental, nor can you. Here's the thing. Mr. Weir's going to make a martyr of himself. I say, how fine it is. He says his mother doesn't like it. I say domestic obstacles always occur at the outset of a great course. He says she wants him to take out a wife. ‘By all means,’ say I. ‘Would it be fair to the lady?’ he asks. ‘Why not?’ I inquire. And so we go on, smooth as glass, till it slips out that *you* are the lady; and that alters the whole matter.”

“But why should it, Leo?”

“Well, Edith, if *you* have no natural affection, I hope I have.”

Seeing that this cut deeper than he intended, he pulled her hair, and said,

“You silly! do you suppose it a matter of indifference to me that you should go and catch the jungle fever? Let Mr. Weir go and try it for a year first. If it does not attack him, it may not you.”

CHAPTER XIX.

COMPROMISE.

AND thus, for the moment, it was arranged, after infinite debating, *pro* and *con*. And, being all of them considerably on the spring side of thirty, it is wonderful how little foreboding and anxiety troubled them regarding so momentous a future. Mr. Antony began to sketch mischievous pictures of his jolly bachelor life, when there should be no young maiden sister to compel attention to orderly living. Edith's happiness was as yet too tremulous to find expression in playfulness, but the animation of her companions took her out of herself; and Mr. Weir had never been so delightful. Joyousness, while it lasts, is far more brilliant than cheerfulness, and has a thousand amusing, enchanting little sprites in its train.

When Mrs. Weir heard the course things had taken, she was much disappointed. Engaged

beyond recall to Miss Antony, and yet going to leave her behind him, was, in the mother's opinion, a most lame and impotent conclusion. But Frank was so buoyant and lively, and it was such delight to her to see him so, that, considering how short a time they were to be together, she would not embitter it to him. From first to last, in short, she played the part of a judicious, devoted mother.

Always regretting, as we do, the needless expenditure of money, it is matter of regret to us that Frank Weir did not now buy a season ticket, seeing he was for ever on the rail, though this intermediate passage of his life would soon be over. Mrs. Weir so grudged the time consumed in these frequent flights, that she thought the best remedy would be to invite Edith to stay with her; and as Edith would perhaps prefer being accompanied by her brother, she invited them both. Mr. Antony brought her down, but only remained twenty-four hours, as he had a commission picture in hand. Nussy, pensive at her attic-window, saw them cross the green together, and felt a ray of sunshine, for the moment, cheer her forlorn heart. Afterwards, when she saw

Mr. Weir and Edith walking about together, in a way that convinced even her inexperience they were lovers—his eyes so bright with animation, and hers in downcast happiness—she lost the sense of her own isolation in unaffected sympathy with them both. Edith was now anxious to acquire something of the practical habits of a minister's wife; she accompanied Mr. Weir to the cottages, and heard him counsel and comfort the poor people; she was very sedulous in her attendance at the Sunday-school, and here Nesy and she had their first long talk, which led to subsequent little glimpses of Edith and snatches of dialogue with her that brightened Nesy's days.

But Mr. Weir's departure would be a heavy loss to Nesy, as well as to many others; and if it were mourned in lowly dwellings, so in at least one manorial seat, where Emily Greville was sinking in rapid decline. There had been great talk of her marrying the Major in the spring; but the pernicious influences of a London season had undermined her health, and sudden transition from a heated ball-room to the chill night air and a keen east wind had brought on a cold which fixed on her lungs.

Too late the danger was made apparent, and remedies were fruitlessly tried. A milder climate for the winter was prescribed; but it was too evident that she would not live to see another winter. At first they tried to keep her ignorant of her danger; but she knew it by intuition, and so pleaded for the support and comfort of some good minister, that Mr. Weir was admitted to her sick room. He cheered and strengthened the young girl, and enabled her to meet her great change with hopefulness and desire. He administered her last sacrament the week before he sailed.

It was early in November that the mission-party commenced their voyage. Mrs. Weir and the Antonys accompanied Frank on board, and there parted with him. It was a tender, sacred scene. There were a colonial bishop and several clergy with their wives, a school-master, and several emigrants on board, including some reformatory boys. We may take it for granted they would not start without an earnest commendatory service that would sanctify and soften the parting scene. The last thing that caught Mrs. Weir's eyes, dimmed with tears, was the cheerful, unconcerned face

of a boy from the Cambridge Industrial School, eating an orange.

A lady, who was one of the mission-party, and of whom Mrs. Weir had some slight knowledge, wrote to her on the voyage:—"It would please you to see how much at home your son makes himself on board. He and I are the only two who have not been ill, and we have made it our common care to wait on the steerage passengers, many of whom were very down-hearted. It was hard work, but ended in making a very friendly feeling between the two parts of the ship. You would have laughed had you seen him making the bed for some poor man or woman in a dark little cabin, or standing outside the ship-kitchen, begging the black cook for some 'fresh water boil' to make arrowroot, which he can now make quite famously—or helping me across the slippery deck, each of us carrying two cups of arrowroot: he with his pockets filled with a brandy flask, a tumbler, a bottle of raspberry vinegar, and two eggs! In the morning, he is either running for the children's breakfast, or holding one while the nurse dresses the other."*

* Vide Bishop Mackenzie's Life.

“Fancy Frank,” cried Mrs. Weir, amused and delighted; and this domestic little sketch did more to reconcile her to his going out than anything had done yet.

“We should never have known what was in him,” said she. “I never in my life saw him hold a baby in his arms, except at the font; but he always kissed it.”

Mr. Weir reached Capetown in safety, but he did not find Mrs. Homer there, nor did he expect to find her. She had accompanied her husband to India, whence she wrote long, enthusiastic letters to Mrs. Weir and Miss Crowe, full of punkahs and palkees, gariwans and khansamans, dâk-garis and buggies, the Jumma Musjid and the Taj Mahal. Mrs. Weir would make splendid mistakes in retailing scraps of these letters; for instance, she told Mrs. Fownes that Mrs. Homer was very fond of eating khansamans, when she meant chupattees; but as Mrs. Fownes did not know that a khansaman was a steward, it did as well for her as a chupattee. Meanwhile—

“The village seems asleep or dead,
Now Lubin is away.”

One would have thought there had been plenty

of active, energetic, unselfish young curates, ready to step into Mr. Weir's place; and Mr. Weir had made sure of it, or he would have reproached himself for leaving Belforest unprovided. But whatever the young men of England are about, or what they value themselves at, or what they think the main end and aim of the ministry, I don't happen to know, for they all seem just now—at any rate a good many of them—to be hanging back from the church, or writing grumbling, earthly-minded letters in it, to the *Times* and other public organs, because they don't get well-endowed benefices. Dear friends, I wonder if you ever heard of the great Hooker travelling to London on foot, and of the horse which Bishop Jewel gave him, which was a walking-stick; or of godly Mr. Ball of Whitmore, who boasted that he had two dishes of meat to his Sabbath dinner—*i.e.* a dish of hot milk and a dish of cold milk, and that that was enough and enough; or of Bernard Gilpin, whose parish contained fourteen villages, and who laboured among them till he was called the Northern Apostle; or of Robert Walker, who dressed all his fresh meat for the week on

the Sabbath, that the poor who came from afar might dine in his kitchen on the broth ; or of Oberlin, who, when a student, put a slice of dry bread at eight o'clock every evening into a little pan over his reading-lamp, sprinkled it with salt, and poured a little water over it, and then let it stew while he pursued his studies till ten or eleven o'clock, when he ate his supper with appetite ? *These men were all of them long-lived* : and doubtless every one of them will sit down at the marriage-supper of the Lamb. Of course it would be fine to have an army in which every soldier was a general officer, and a navy with an admiral for every sailor, and a church with a bishop for every minister ; but I do not wish to live to see it. My father had a man-servant, who, at the time the Reform Bill was in agitation, was very anxious for it to pass ; and when he was asked why, he said he believed it would make every poor man a gentleman. In one sense, every poor man may be a gentleman ; and it is quite certain that many a thorough gentleman is a poor man.

Poor Dr. Fownes, being hard up for a curate, was obliged, for a time, to resume the duty

himself ; and very feeble work he made of it, every one respecting him for his exertion, and listening with strained attention, in the hope, often disappointed, of catching one word in ten. At length he got a Mr. Lamb, with a voice like a lion ; and Mr. Lamb lodged with Mrs. Early, who was very thankful to have him ; but nobody else was, except Dr. Fownes.

Slowly pass the winter months, and slowly the foreign mails come round ; and the General Post-office seems to have a particular spite against Edith and Mrs. Weir, for they always get their letters after the merchants have had theirs—sometimes too late to answer them by the next mail. Of course it must be fancy ; but it seems as if the sorters set their particular letters on one side, saying to themselves, “ That’s for a lady—no hurry for that.” But when at length they came to hand, how they were treasured ! First, Frank and Co.—for of course he stood first with them—reached the Cape, and were most kindly received by the bishop. Then they embarked for the scene of their labours, which they reached in a thankful and hopeful state of mind. There were dark woods running along the shore, and swelling hills in

the distance. For the first week they all remained at the port town, landing their luggage, &c. After this, they went up the country in waggons drawn by oxen to a town where Mr. Weir for a time had his work assigned him. When we cannot have the work we wish, it is best to undertake cheerfully the work that is set us.

“And Frank is ten thousand times better there,” said Mrs. Weir, “than up among the blacks.”

“I am quite of your opinion, my dear madam,” said Dr. Fownes. “He is doubtless doing far more good among his countrymen there than if directly employed in converting the heathen. How a fine young fellow like him *could* so mistake his vocation! as if we had no spiritual destitution at home!”

At length they heard of his starting for the interior in quest of a proper spot for a settlement. Having heard, by what seemed chance in the course of a ride with the surveyor-general, of a grant of land of three thousand acres, which must be applied for in two or three days, he, at his companion's urgent instance, first applied for it, and then hastened

to survey it. Waggon-roads there were none —scarcely a bridle-path ; but he proceeded on horseback on his journey, with a surveyor and two Kafirs for his companions.

Their way first led up a steep ascent, then down by a narrow footpath to a country broken into eccentric irregularities, where all trace of roads was lost. The descents often resembled steps, and were so precipitous that they were obliged to dismount and lead their horses. Then they came to a green valley, the grass of which was so tall as to reach their heads as they rode through it. Next, they came among thorn-bushes, which often compelled them to dismount, as the only way of passing under their branches. After this, they came to a thick forest, which eventually brought them to the banks of a little stream winding through most lovely scenery. This was the third day of their journeying, and here Mr. Weir determined to make his settlement, and to call it Belforest.

There was a small native village in the neighbourhood, and the chief came to them, evidently alarmed at the prospect of white settlers bringing the lung sickness among his

cattle. Frank Weir, who had studied the language on his way out, and ever since, assured him that he had no other object than to do him and his people good, and that when they came to know him better, all their fears would pass away.

After a long conversation—for these lords of the wilderness are leisurely and fond of talking—he succeeded in creating a favourable impression. They feasted him on what they had, and after some more exploring, he retraced his way back.

“How Frank could get down their nasty messes, is more than I can conceive,” said Mrs. Weir. “However, Mrs. Early broke him in a little.”

Frank did *not* tell her, that on returning to head-quarters, some of his friends told him he had been too hasty, and would find the district unhealthy. For one thing, he did not quite believe them. “The slothful saith, There is a lion in the path.” He had secured the grant now, and meant to turn it to good account. When next he wrote home, he dated from a round bee-hive hut at New Belforest, with a grey Kafir blanket hung up at the doorway.

"It is now night," he wrote. "The soft, sweet air is blowing gently round me, full of the chirping of strange frogs, and fire-flies are glancing about on all sides."

Another time, "You would be amused at my picturesque costume—a shooting coat, and trousers of Oxford grey, and a broad-brimmed wide-awake, with a white cover to keep the sun off. The people are growing fond of me and I of them. They have a great gift for music."

Edith wrote to him that she should enjoy such a gipsy-life amazingly; and almost as good as said she was ready to join him at the shortest notice. On this he wrote back—

"This is no place for ladies."

She did not know whether to take fright or take umbrage at this; so took both. The umbrage soon died out, however. Meanwhile, two mails came in, without any letter from Frank, which made Edith and Mrs. Weir very wretched. Oh the misery of depending much on a letter that does not come! They wrote urgent, affectionate chidings; but did not know he would ever read them.

They counted the days, the hours to the

next mail. Leonard Antony hated the very name of Africa by this time, it so preyed on Edith. At length came a letter from Frank's diocesan. "Dear Mrs. Weir—Don't be alarmed at your son's absence. He is invalided, and I am sending him home."

CHAPTER XX.

VIVE UT VIVAS.

CONTENDING emotions of sorrow and joy made Mrs. Weir ill. She hardly knew whether it were worse for Frank to come home and die, or live out of reach in that horrible country; so it was well the choice did not lie with her. Edith came to nurse her, share her anxieties, and console her as she best might. As soon as Mrs. Weir was a little better, they went to the sea-side to await Frank's arrival. Meanwhile, good old Dr. Fownes died, after a few days' illness, leaving the parish in the very poor hands of Mr. Lamb.

Nessy was not in Belforest. Sometimes when our affairs are at their lowest ebb—when we are at our wit's end, and our faith's end too, events take a course so wholly unexpected, yet so simple—just as we float round the

bend of a river and find ourselves in new scenery—that we are perfectly amazed afterwards, if not at the time, how such changes were brought about. We never feel ourselves more in the hands of God than at such times : when we can look back and see we were benefited by something *not* the result of our own will—of having been destined for some good thing of which we had no preconception. This is what may in a sense be called predestination, though it is a sadly misused, misunderstood word.

Mrs. Saffery—pshaw—Mrs. Porter had no sympathy with Nussy's fine feelings, partly because she did not understand them ; but she was quite clear on one point, that fine feeling was utterly out of place in the drapery line or postal department. Her mournfulness she considered waywardness, and after vainly endeavouring to scold her out of it, she thought it best to ignore it. But physical suffering Mrs. Porter understood and could pity ; therefore when, by a certain peculiar look about Nussy's eyes, she knew that her bad headaches had returned—though, when asked if her head ached, she invariably said " Not much "—

Mrs. Porter felt for her, and cast about for a remedy.

Now, it was a sister of Mrs. Porter's—the childless widow of a tobacconist—who had left Nesity thirty pounds a year, and desired that she might have the tastes of a lady—little good they had done her, her mother said. Mrs. Porter also had a sister, still surviving, married to a Guernsey man, and the mother of several children. This Mrs. Lacoste generally wrote to her sister once a year; and as her letters were the fruit of a good deal of labour, on successive Sunday afternoons, she had scarcely sent her condolence on Mr. Saffery's death, before her sister had to tell her of her marriage to Mr. Porter. This, however, she deferred doing, relying on Mrs. Lacoste's hearing of it from no other source; and thinking a little longer interval might make it appear more seemly. Having once put it off, the longer she delayed it, the less inclined she felt to write; and at length thought she might as well give it up altogether. Now, however, her purpose changed: and she wrote to this effect:—

“ Belforest, *Oct.* 21.

“ DEAR SISTER,—

“ Poor Saffery’s loss troubled me and Nussy very much. The house did not seem the same. I quite hated to be by myself. I was always fancying I heard his voice in the office, or his step on the stairs. I hope you may never know what it is to feel so. The two first months seemed as long as two years : almost longer. My spirits being weak, I felt I required protection, and we have sometimes large sums of money passing through our hands, so that a lone woman was hardly safe ; and yet Saffery left his charge we was to have no man to sleep on the premises. I have put up a very nice stone over him. You was very good to ask Nussy over to Guernsey. At the time, she was not equal to it ; but now I think it would do her great good. She cannot get reconciliated to the great change in the house ; and nothing would get rid of her vagaries so well as a little change of scene. I should like you to see what a tall daughter I have, and for her to make acquaintance with Josephine and Etienne, and Louis and Lucette. I am now united to John Porter, who is appointed to

the post-office. It was too much for me, and I nearly lost it. With love to your numerous family, I remain, dear Susanna, your affectionate sister,

“ELIZ. PORTER.”

What Mrs. Lacoste thought of her sister's letter, nobody knew but herself and her good husband. She lost no time, however, in sending for Nussy, who to her immense surprise and satisfaction, soon found herself, under a homely but safe escort, on her way to Guernsey.

It may readily be understood how wholesome and happy a change it was for this too nervous, meditative girl to be taken from a silent home, full of sad memories, into the midst of a family circle full of young life, mirth, and action. Her tall cousin Etienne, her pretty cousin Josephine, her droll cousin Louis, and her plaything cousin Lucette, all strove, in their artless, hearty way, which could cheer her most. It is no wonder, therefore, that she had a most delightful visit, and returned to Belforest bright and happy, being promised a second invitation to Guernsey the ensuing year.

The annals of Belforest are nearly ended.

The sea voyage did so much for Mr. Weir, that when he reached England, he did not look nearly as ill as his friends expected to see him, though thinner and darker. In fact, he soon became quite well ; and Mr. Greville thinking he could not place a fitter man in the living, which was in his gift, presented him to the rectory of Belforest, and he read himself in, the same week that he married Edith Antony.

How sweetly the wedding-peal swells and dies away again in the gentle air ! How brightly the mellow sunshine touches up the old tree opposite "The Swan," and the little islet of mossy turf, and the geraniums in Mrs. Brown's window, and the blue merino dress of Carry Brown, as she stands shading her eyes at the door !

So thinks, at least, a slender, sallow girl, who stands in deep shadow at a door on the opposite side of the green. She notes it all with an artist's eye ; not one happy effect is lost on her, though she could not fitly express it either in words or in writing or with her pencil. She feels it as a poet would feel it, though she never wrote a verse of poetry in her life. She feels it as a Christian, who

feels that this world is very fair, very dear, but that it will all pass away ; and that, at its best, it is but the shadow of a better world, prepared in the heavens. Nussy has been at the wedding : she is full of happiness at the return of Mr. Weir and his marriage with Miss Antony : to live near them and work under them will henceforth shed perpetual sunshine on her path : the thought of it does so already. She has accepted her home lot ; and sometimes she looks forward to a future stay at Guernsey, and sometimes to a future life in the presence of her Heavenly Father, where she shall regain her earthly father too ; so that I can say of her, as I hope I can say of you, that Nussy is happy.

THE END.

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