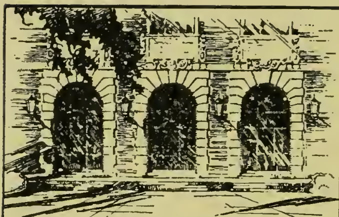

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PHEMIE KELLER.

A Novel.

BY F. G. TRAFFORD,

AUTHOR OF "GEORGE GEITH," "CITY AND SUBURB," "MAXWELL DREWITT,"
"TOO MUCH ALONE," "WORLD AND THE CHURCH," "RACE FOR WEALTH."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
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1866.

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PHEMIE KELLER.

CHAPTER I.

BASIL.

After so long an absence, it would have seemed only natural for his tenantry to greet Captain Stondon's return with "three times three," with arches, with banners; and most probably Phemie's heart might have been gladdened by some ceremonial of this kind, had not Montague Stondon's suicide rendered all thoughts of rejoicing out of the question.

As it was, the pair came home through lonely roads to the park gates, where an old woman admitted them; and in the gathering evening twilight Phemie looked at the elms and the fir-trees till the loneliness oppressed her—till she felt thankful to escape at last from the avenue,

and reach the house which she had never seen but once before.

It was one of those houses every man thinks he should like to own—large enough for any income—comfortable enough never to appear stately: a house that the sun's beams seemed always to fall on warmly: a house in which it was easy to fancy blazing fires in the winter—cool rooms in the summer: a house that the eye turned to look back upon as it might on a pleasant face: a house that was a home: a house that Phemie came to love passionately.

It was built of red brick, and ivy and creepers and roses twined up the sun-burnt walls, covering them with stem and branch and leaf and flower. The drawing-room was at the back of the house, and its windows overlooked the flower-garden that sloped away from the hill on which the house was built to the flat lands below.

Many an English mansion is spoiled by its site. Marshlands was made by the eminence it occupied. Yet if the place had a fault, it was this:

whichever way your glance turned, you could see nothing but Marshlands—its gardens, its fields, its park, its fountains, its avenues, its long belt of plantation: Marshlands was everywhere; and as a natural consequence, some people tired of Marshlands after a season; tired of the firs, the elms, the smooth-cut lawns, the deer, the shrubberies. Half the timber wanted clearing away, and views being thus obtained of the surrounding country; but on this latter point Marshlands was inexorable. You might walk till you were weary, but still you could see nothing save the park and great belts of plantation, clumps of firs, avenues of elms, hedgerows in which trees were growing as thick as blackberries.

The day arrived when Phemie felt those masses of foliage, those banks of branch and leaf, those never-ending plantations, those inexorable stately trees, oppress her soul. Mountain-reared, she longed for greater freedom—for a country over which her eye could wander free and unconfined: she longed for the hill-side, for the desolate sea-

shore: but on the evening when she returned home again, after years spent in travelling from place to place, England—any part of it—seemed a possession gained, a good secured, and Mrs. Stondon rejoiced to cross the threshold of Marshlands, and hear words of welcome spoken in her native tongue.

Like a child she wandered from room to room; like a child, too, after dinner, she insisted on going out and walking about the place by moonlight, compelling Captain Stondon, who would much have preferred remaining indoors, to accompany her along the garden paths, past the lakes, under the shadow of the elms, to a point where further progress seemed stopped by a plantation of fir-trees.

"I wonder," remarked Phemie, as she paused to listen to the coming and going of the summer wind through the branches, "I wonder how you could stay away so long, with such a property as this in England. Is not it worth all the palaces and châteaux abroad put together?"

"As a possession, perhaps," answered Captain Stondon; "as a residence, I am doubtful: that is I am doubtful whether you will like it; if you do, I shall be content to live and die here—quite content."

But Captain Stondon sighed, even while he made this statement, and Phemie looked up at the branches overhead with an expression in her face which made it in the moonlight look almost disagreeable. She knew what Captain Stondon was thinking about. The children that had come to them, dead and dead—children that had come, not to make her a softer or a better woman, but merely, as it seemed, to develop the taint an over-prosperous life had infused into her character.

What shall I call this taint? Jealous selfishness—exacting egotism—a fretful impatience of anything which stood between herself and the affection and admiration of those around her. I should like to find one word to express what I mean; I wish I could discover some sentence

that might embody at once what was so natural and yet so unpleasant. She was prosperous; why should she fret? why should he fret? Had she not had to fight for her own life because of those dead heirs? those heirs who had never existed.

She did not fret; why should he? Would he rather have had the children than her? Supposing she had died and they lived; would he have been satisfied then? Supposing they had lived and she lived too; would the sons have been greater than their mother? That was the set of questions that always made Phemie's face change when she saw Captain Stondon thinking about who should come after him. Had not he her while he was living; was not that enough for him? Mrs. Stondon's creed had grown to be of this nature, at any rate. She was to be everything, and no other person ought to stand even near her. It was horribly unamiable, it was detestably selfish, and yet—and yet it was only because she was so solitary that she was so un-

womanly. She gave nothing, and therefore she sought to receive all homage. Her love was cold, and therefore she exacted love as though it had been a debt owing to her, and she insisting on payment to the uttermost farthing.

Her life had been too prosperous, too easy. She had not had to live on crumbs of affection, to beg for love with wistful eyes, as a dog begs for notice from its master. Every one seemed to think it was so good of her to be fond of Captain Stondon. Mistress Phemie herself was so young, so attractive, so altogether unique, that the world was rather apt to imply she had made a mistake in wedding her husband at all. She was pampered—I think that was the English of the matter; and she needed to find her level once again, before she could become a woman about whom it is altogether agreeable to write.

She did not look pleasant standing in the moonlight with that strange expression on her countenance; for in the moonlight her face

seemed to belong to some one without a heart to feel, without a heart to be broken.

Could she have looked forward then, I wonder what change the moon would have seen come swiftly over her. Under the fir-trees she would have wept and sobbed; she would have fallen to the earth humbled and stricken; she would have turned to her husband with the pride and the vanity and the selfishness and the sarcasm beaten out of her lovely face, and prayed him love her less, trust her less, give her less, so as to preserve her from the sorrow and the evil to come.

But as she stood there, she was simply what his pride and his devotion had made her. The Phemie he married among the hills—ignorant, childish, unsophisticated, had given place to another Phemie, to a self-possessed, lady-like, accomplished woman, who walked gracefully, who had a stately carriage, who wore her beauty like a queen. The half her lifetime she once spoke of had been best part lived out. Five years of the eight were gone, and this was the

result. Had she not finished her task? Was not Captain Stondon proud of her as well as fond? Was he not satisfied with her in every respect? Did she not give him as much love as she had to give to any one? Had he been of a jealous temperament, which he was not, her conduct must yet have seemed without spot or blemish.

Othello himself could have taken no exception to her. She was docile, she was grateful, she was easily pleased. She liked to visit, she liked to stay at home, she liked company, and yet she delighted in such rambles as that under the moonlight at Marshlands, when not a sound save the light breeze stirring among the trees broke the stillness.

Yes, if he had but children, Captain Stondon thought his life would be almost too happy, too round and perfect in its complete content. And if he sighed to think that there were no little feet pattering through the rooms and along the corridors, who may blame him? For a man owning a large property to be childless is to

convert his freehold estate into a mere leasehold, terminable with his own life. He improves his lands for others; he sows that strangers may reap; the very backbone is taken out of his existence, and he loses interest in the place of which he is a tenant-at-will.

And yet Captain Stondon only repined at times at this want in the full measure of his happiness. He was in the main a good man and a just; and he needed no divine to tell him that if children were from the Lord, the lonely hearth was of Him likewise.

And for this reason, if Phemie continued to like Marshlands, he would wander no more. He would cure himself of the restless fever which had for so long weakened his energies, destroyed his usefulness; he would do his best to make her love her home, and enable her to be happy there. A great prize had fallen to him in the lottery of life, and he would be grateful for it. Under the fir-trees he vowed that vow to himself and to his God: under the fir-trees, when his heart brake

in twain, he remembered that vow, and sobbed like a child to think that his love and his tenderness and his gratitude had all been as strength spent for nought.

And yet not so; the end of the battle is not here; the last of the witnesses are never called on earth; and when the great day arrives, in which all human reckonings are to be finally settled, we shall surely find that love and tenderness have never been lost, though to our eyes their streams of blessing may have seemed but as water wasted upon weed and rush and reed.

As for Phemie—naturally, as though she had been born in the purple—she took her rightful place at last as mistress of Marshlands.

She was enchanted to be back in England once again; she was a wanderer on the face of the earth no longer; she was a woman known to every one save those of her own kin and her own country no more.

She was coming home really to enjoy life; to assume her proper position in society; to show off

her accomplishments; to be admired for her beauty; to be spoiled, petted, ruined, if you will.

Visitors came; visits were returned. Norfolk was glad to have Captain Stondon back on any terms. No matter whom he might have married—his wife was young; his wife liked company; his wife would give parties; Marshlands had long wanted a mistress, and here was one whom any county might be proud to receive with open arms.

What if she had been poor? Was she not a Keller? Was she not half a century or so younger than Captain Stondon? Was she not pretty and lady-like and accomplished?—and, beyond all, when once the days of mourning for that disreputable vagabond Montague were accomplished, had she not promised fathers and mothers, and the dancing young men and the dancing young women, parties to their hearts' content?

Altogether it was very delicious to fill the

position she did; and Phemie, as the days went by, felt more and more satisfied that she had made a very good thing of life, and that she had acted in a praiseworthy manner when she secured at one stroke a good kind husband and a fine estate.

She had benefited herself; she was benefiting her family.

Duncan was with Messrs. Hoyle and Hoyle, the great London engineers, and Helen was at school, and the pair spent their holidays at Marshlands that summer, when the Stondons returned to England; and Mr. Aggland came likewise, and passed a fortnight with his niece, during which time he arrived at the conclusion that Phemie was altered and not improved.

"She is not half so good as her husband," thought the farmer. "I suppose too hot a sun is as bad as too keen a frost—prosperity seems to have withered up her buds, at any rate." And then straightway Mr. Aggland tried to find out what soft spots Phemie had left, what troubled

her, what wishes she had, what aims, what objects.

Here he was puzzled: it was for the day and herself—for the pleasures and the joys and the vanities of the day, that Mrs. Stondon existed.

"It is a bright life," remarked her uncle; "but, my dear, the winter must come to the happiest of us. Have you thought of that?"

"It will be time enough to think of the winter when the autumn arrives," she answered, gaily; "besides, why should enjoying the bright days unfit one for enduring the dark? Sometimes, uncle, I think you are sorry I am so happy." And Phemie, standing on the terrace, with the evening sun streaming on her, pouted as she said this.

"Are you really happy, Phemie?" he asked; "happy in yourself; contented and satisfied; or is it all as the crackling of thorns under the pot, a blaze and a sparkle, and then out, leaving no heat, no light behind?"

"I am perfectly happy," she replied, gathering

up the skirts of her light flowing muslin dress, and preparing to re-enter the house; "and why you should think I am not happy, or why you should fancy I ought not to be happy, I cannot imagine."

"You have had trouble, dear," he said, hesitatingly; "the children——" And at that point he stopped in his speech and Phemie stopped in her walk to deliver her sentiments on the subject.

"Can I bring them back again?" she asked, almost fiercely. "Could I help their dying? —did I kill them? Why should I spend my existence fretting over what is irremediable—over what I am not sure I should care to remedy if I could? Captain Stondon would like a son to inherit this place; but as it seems he is not to have a living son, there can be no use in his constantly thinking about it. Have we not Marshlands? Have we not every happiness, every comfort? Have we not wood and field and lake and water? If we had fifty sons, could we have more out of the place? Why should I sit down

and be miserable because children whom I never knew, whom I never heard speak, who might as well never have been born, were not spared perhaps to grow up curses to us? Sometimes I think," went on Phemie, with the tears starting into her eyes, "that you and Captain Stondon both, would rather the boys had lived and I had died—anything for a son, any sacrifice for an heir." And without waiting for an answer, Phemie swept into the drawing-room, leaving her uncle to think over what she had said.

"There is reason in it if there be not rhyme," he muttered, as he walked up and down the terrace; "and yet there is something out of joint in Phemie's life; there must be something wrong in any life that makes a woman talk like that. She was too young," finished Mr. Aggland, looking away down the garden towards the flat lands beyond; "she was too young, and she does not love the man she has married. God grant she may never find it out. It is better for her to be anything rather than dissatisfied. It is better

for her to be a fine lady than a miserable woman." And Mr. Aggland still strained his eyes down the garden, thinking he would give all his worldly possessions to see once more the Phemie who had left him when she plighted her troth to Captain Stondon, and cried because Davie stood at the church porch to bid her his dumb farewell.

Yet there were still some things about his niece which touched Mr. Aggland unspeakably. To him she never changed; she never forgot to ask after the poorest farmer in Tordale; she remembered where each flower grew, and would speak about the hyacinths and the anemones, about the heather and the thyme, as though she had never seen the shores of the Mediterranean, or wandered through earth's loveliest scenes abroad.

She made no close friends. Among all her acquaintance she found no one to love as she had loved Helen; she took no new pets; she who had always chosen some lamb, or foal, or calf, or

kitten for herself, never now stretched out her hand towards any animal caressingly.

"Would you care to have Davie?" asked her uncle, the day before his departure; and for a moment Phemie looked pleased and wistful, but then the look faded out of her face, and she said:

"Davie would not be happy here. He is not handsome enough to be in the house, and he would miss the warm fireside and the children stroking him. I should like him, uncle, but he would not like this. When I can, I will go and see him and the Hill Farm and Tordale, but he had better stay in Tordale than come here."

Many a time, after he returned to Cumberland, Mr. Aggland thought about this speech, and wondered whether Phemie wished she had stayed in Tordale too; but he might have spared himself the trouble of speculating, for Phemie never for a moment repented her marriage; she was perfectly content to be the mistress of Marshlands, to be flattered, courted, sought after; and day by day, as he saw how she

comported herself in her new position, as he heard her admired, and beheld how much she was liked, Captain Stondon grew more and more proud of the wife he had chosen, and allowed her to do more and more as she liked.

And what Phemie liked was to have plenty of society—to have balls and parties and picnics continually, and to balls and parties and picnics Captain Stondon (who was not so young-looking as when we first met him turning into the valley of Tordale), went about with her, content that she was satisfied—pleased with her pleasure. He would watch her dancing; he would listen to her singing; he loved to see her turn her face beaming with happiness towards him.

"I wonder was ever man so blessed?" he thought, one evening, as he stood looking at Phemie from afar; and even while he thought this, a lady touched him with her fan, and said—

"I suppose you do not recollect me, Captain Stondon? but my memory is better. I must see whether your wife recognizes me." And with a

smile flung back to Captain Stondon, she crossed the room, and said to Phemie—

"I am going to ask you to do me a great favour, Mrs. Stondon—it is six years after, and I want you to sing, 'Then you'll remember,' for me."

"Miss Derno!" exclaimed Phemie, and the two laughed outright. "Where did you come from? With whom are you staying?" asked Mrs. Stondon.

"I am staying with the Hurlfords, and I come from wandering to and fro upon the earth—as you do also for that matter; and I am delighted to see you looking so well."

And Miss Derno looked delighted, and held Phemie's hand in hers while she spoke of the last time they had met, of the period which had elapsed since that night when——

"When I broke down," finished Mrs. Stondon, with as much readiness as could have been expected from Miss Derno herself. "I can do better than that now, and if you come over to

Marshlands I shall be happy to prove the fact to you."

"No time like time present," remarked Miss Derno. "I am sorry to take you from among the dancers, but I claim a song as my right." And she drew Phemie gently away towards the music-room, saying as they passed along,

"There is a pet of mine here to-night that I want you to take graciously to. I will introduce him when you have finished my song—that is, if you give me leave to do so. You must have noticed him, I think—a young man who danced with Miss Maria Hurlford?"

"I know," answered Mrs. Stondon: "dark-haired, dark-eyed, indolent-looking. He was talking to Captain Stondon when we left the other room. Who is he?"

"He is Montague Stondon's son, Basil."

Phemie was touching the keys of the piano as Miss Derno spoke. When Miss Derno finished her sentence, Mrs. Stondon took her hands off

the notes and looked up at her companion quickly and strangely.

"What brings him here?" she asked. And the question sounded almost defiant.

"He is staying, like myself, with the Hurlfords."

"Oh!" said Mistress Phemie, and straightway she began her song.

The room was empty of company when she commenced—ere she had finished, it was full of people.

Whenever Mrs. Stondon sang, guests flocked round her as children might to a show. It was her gift—it was her talent, and she had cultivated her voice, and practised; she had laboured, and tried to become an accomplished vocalist, with such success that even Miss Derno stood astonished—stood with the tears in her eyes listening silently.

"Who is the sweet singer?" said some one in a low tone.

"Mrs. Stondon," whispered back Miss Derno.

And Basil Stondon, for it was he who asked the question, drew back at her answer, and left the room.

"An amiable pair," thought Miss Derno. "She is jealous of the possible possessor of Marshlands; he looks with unfavourable eyes on the present mistress of that desirable property." And while other friends gathered round Mrs. Stondon, praying her to sing again, to sing another song, and another still, Miss Derno vanished also, and followed Basil Stondon into the garden, where he was leaning over a stone balustrade, and looking disconsolately at the moon.

"How very stupid you must be, Basil," said the lady, "to spoil your chances in this way. If you want to reach Captain Stondon you must reach him through his wife; and instead of waiting to be introduced to her you run away as if you were a schoolboy ordered up for punishment."

"It is a punishment to me to see her at all,"

answered the young man. "But for her my father might now be alive—but for her I might have been making some thousands a year, instead of going begging after government appointments."

"Don't talk nonsense, Basil Stondon," said Miss Derno, impatiently; "you would never have made thousands a year anywhere: you have not energy enough in you ever to have made money for yourself at all, you are only fit for a government clerk, you are too genteel and too lazy and too fine a gentleman ever to push your own way up. For which reasons take my advice: let bygones be bygones, and strive to get into Captain Stondon's good-will by conciliating his wife."

"I have got his good-will already," was the calm reply." "I went up to him diffidently; but he received me, so to speak, with open arms; he asked me to call at Marshlands tomorrow. He inquired what I was doing—he wanted to know why I had not come to him before—he remarked that something must be

done for me—and he would have talked on for an hour had some General Sheen not broken in upon our conversation with original observations about the weather and the state of the crops."

"Then you followed us into the music-room," suggested Miss Derno.

"Then hearing some woman singing like an angel, I went to ascertain who had come down from heaven. When I saw the hair, however, my heart misgave me. As we know the devil by his cloven hoof, so I knew Mrs. Stondon by her glory of auburn hair."

"But it is beautiful hair, Basil; and because it is beautiful, and she is beautiful, and you admire all things that are beautiful, you must try to be friends with her. She is lovely enough to come up even to your standard, surely."

"I do not admire fair women," he answered, coldly. "I like sunshine better than moonlight. I like warmth better than ice."

"You like talking folly," retorted Miss Derno; "and if you persist in being so silly I shall

withdraw the inestimable blessing of my friendship from you. Come and be introduced to Mrs. Stondon like a rational being. Come and see—not your relative's wife—but merely a very beautiful and accomplished woman."

"At some future time," he said; "but to-night there is a dark mood on me, and I cannot face her. Can you not stay here?" he pleaded, as his companion turned to go away; "you are the only person on earth who talks frankly to me. You are the only being whose voice I care to hear."

"Mr. Basil Stondon, I am honoured," replied Miss Derno; and under the moonlight she made him a sweeping curtsey; "but society has its prejudices, and its prejudices we must study. You and I know we are not in love with one another, but the world might think we were, and for that reason I cannot remain with you talking about the best opera and the last new book." Having finished which frank statement, Miss Derno would have gone in, but that

Mr. Stondon caught her hand and kept her.

"Why cannot we love one another?" he asked. "Why do you say we know we do not love one another? I have never seen a woman equal to you. I have never felt the same attachment for any one as I have for you."

Then Miss Derno laughed.

"It is a blessing, Basil," she said, "that I am not a woman to take you at your word; it is a mercy, God knows it is, that I am not so anxious to be settled, as to snap at the possible heir of Marshlands; for you do not love me, and it would not be natural that you should love a woman so much older than yourself. Have we not gone over all this ground before? Have I not told you, what I do not proclaim in the market-place, that my heart is dead, and that there is no man who could ever make it thrill with joy and love and pleasure and life again?" And as the woman—for she was all a woman at that moment—said this, a light seemed to come from

that far away past—a light that illumined her features and softened them.

"I would I had been born sooner for your sake," whispered Basil, tenderly.

"I would that you had a little more sense for your own," she retorted. "Are there not girls enough in England that you should persist in making love to a woman for whom you do not care, and who had passed through a perfect sea of trouble while you were still busy with the multiplication table?"

"It is easy for you to laugh," he answered; "you who have always some one to love you: who have so many friends; but a lonely man like myself—a man lonely and poor, must love any one who is so good and true and beautiful as you: and if I must love afar off," added Mr. Stondon, "why, I shall still love on."

"Love me as your friend, as your mother, sister, grandmother, what you please," answered Miss Derno, "but not as your love. Lonely and poor!" she went on; "no man who can work

ought ever to be poor—no human being can ever be called lonely who has his life all before him, and who has not left everything worth living for behind him by the way. Lonely and poor! Basil, you have talked sentiment to the moon long enough. Come in and say what is civil to the only woman who can now really better your condition. For *I* do not advise you to marry an heiress. I recommend you to let Captain Stondon advance your interest, if he will. And he will, I am sure of it. Come."

But Basil would not. He stayed behind in the moonlight, thinking of Miss Derno and Mrs. Stondon and Marshlands—whilst ever and anon there came over him a vague instinctive feeling—very dreamy, very unpleasant, very indefinable—that he had that night said something, done something, seen something, which should influence every hour and moment of his future life.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEXT HEIR.

THAT night, as they drove home, Captain Stondon talked about Basil Stondon to his wife, about the young man whom he had met with apparently accidentally, and who had never by word or sign or letter acknowledged the existenec of his wealthy relative since his father's death.

"Poor fellow," said Captain Stondon, "it is very sad for him, upon my word it is." And he waited for Phemie to answer, but Phemie held her peace.

She was wiser in her generation than her husband; it might be that she was less amiable too; and she knew just as well as though she had been present at the enemy's council of war

that Mr. Basil Stondon's rencontre with his kinsman was anything rather than the result of chance.

She had not liked Mr. Montague Stondon, she had not liked Mrs. Montague Stondon, and it was not likely she should like the son who now stood—and it was this which broke on Mistress Phemie Stondon with a shock, as though the idea were quite new to her—in the position of heir to Marshlands.

The fact had never come home till that moment. He would inherit—he was young; he would come after Captain Stondon and own woods and lawns and lake and park, because she was childless. It was she who now held the place merely as a tenant on lease of one life, and that her husband's. If her son had lived, this man would, socially, be nowhere; as it was, Phemie perceived that socially he would take precedence of herself.

She had been philosophical on the subject so long as she did not comprehend how the want of

children might some day affect her own happiness. Almost a child herself, she had not understood how the failure of direct heirs would ultimately affect her position.

She had been glad to get away from Mrs. Aggland's babies: her youth had been spent in hushing refractory imps to sleep, in amusing cross infants, in learning to nurse cleverly and keep the brats from crying; and it was therefore not altogether unnatural that Phemie should consider there was a reverse side to the pleasure of having a family, and, particularly when her life had twice trembled in the balance, rejoice rather than lament because no more children seemed likely to be born, to die.

Hitherto she had been rather vexed to see how much Captain Stondon desired a direct heir—now, Phemie, a child no longer, but a worldly, selfish woman if you will, found that there was rising up from the bottom of her heart an exceeding bitter cry of lamentation for the dead sons whose loss she had never greatly mourned before,

for the children she had passed through the valley of the shadow of death to bring into the world, for naught.

Looking out into the moonlight, Phemie, to whom all strong passions had hitherto been strangers, found that her eyes were filling with angry tears. She disliked this Basil Stondon, to whom she had never yet spoken a word. She hated to hear her husband praising his appearance and his manners. She felt sure he and Miss Derno were in league together. "Her pet, indeed!" thought Phemie; "I have no doubt they are engaged. Her pet! I daresay he is." And Phemie smiled to think she was no longer the girl whom Miss Derno had met six years before; but a woman quite Miss Derno's match in penetration and knowledge of the world.

She had eaten her apple, and left primitive simplicity a long way behind her; and Phemie felt glad to think that it was so. They could not impose on her now. Her eyes were opened, and she saw, as all such people do see, more evil than

good upon the earth. She had tasted of the tree of knowledge, and this was the result. It had been pleasant to the eye, it had seemed good for food, it had been a thing to be desired; and behold this was the end attained—selfishness and envy and uncharitableness.

A character to be disliked rather than admired; and yet have patience, reader, for there came a day of reckoning to Phemie Stondon, when she had to settle for every fault, for every shortcoming!

She was vain;—grievous suffering crushed all vanity out of her: she claimed love as a right, and thought little of all the tenderness that was lavished upon her—when the time arrived that the love of her own heart broke it,—Phemie remembered; she thought she stood firm, and it was only when she lay humbled in the dust that she acknowledged how weak is the strength of man; she was proud of her accomplishments, yet in the future she turned from their exhibition with loathing; she rejoiced in her own cleverness

—she could not avoid knowing how much cleverer she was than her husband—than the man who had taken her from poverty and drudgery to make her the mistress of Marshlands;—is it too early now to tell of the hour when all her talents, all her attainments, all her gifts of beauty and manners, seemed to be but as sand, as earth, beside his truth, his forbearance, his devotion?

That night was the turning point in the life-story of Phemie Keller—that night, when she sat beside her husband, listening while he told her how glad he felt at the prospect of being able to do anything for poor Montague's son, how much pleased he was that Basil had promised to call the next day at Marshlands.

"He really is a very fine young fellow," finished Captain Stondon, "and we must try to keep him from going to rack and ruin as his father did. It is high time he was doing something now. He must be five-and-twenty I should say."

And Mr. Basil Stondon's relative was quite right. He was five-and-twenty—a man with eyes

dark, dreamy, and sadly tender—a man whom women raved concerning—a desperate flirt—and a dangerous flirt, because while the fit was on him he really did care for the person who had excited his admiration.

He danced like an angel—so the ladies said. There were few games either of chance or skill at which he had not tried his hand. He could hunt over the worst country if his friends would only give him a mount. If his horse could take the leaps, Basil could sit his horse. It did not matter to him if an animal were quiet or the reverse. Find him a strong bit, and let the girths be tight, and the young man would fight the question of temper out at his leisure.

He was a good oarsman, a good swimmer, a capital fellow at a picnic. He had quite a genius for making salads and mixing sherry cobbler.

He knew very little about literature, but the number of his acquaintances was something to stare at.

He had forgotten the little he ever learned at

school and college; but he could talk about the opera and the theatres, about the new prima donna and the favourite danseuse, with an intimate fluency that moved his listeners oftentimes to admiration.

Further, he was not conceited; he did not vaunt his talents. He was not boastful, he was not a bore; he was amiable, he was pitiful, he was generous, he was swift to forgive and repentant for having erred; but he was weak and he was self-indulgent; he was weak as water, as uncertain as the weather, as changeable as an April day; a vacillating creature whose purposes ebbed and flowed like the sea, who had no fixed principles, whether bad or good, and who came and went and went and came wheresoever his impulses carried him.

And it was this man, with his handsome face, with his careless, easy, engaging manner, who came the next day by special invitation to call at Marshlands.

He did not call alone. He had not courage enough for that, he told the Hurlfords, laugh-

ingly; so Mrs. Hurlford and Miss Derno and young Frank Hurlford accompanied him, nothing loth, for Miss Derno and Mrs. Hurlford had "taken the young man up," and decided that it was a great pity of him, that it was all nonsense for him to keep aloof from his relatives because his father had cut his throat, and that, in fine, Captain Stondon should know him, like him, and do something for him.

Women were always taking Basil up—were always, dear souls, planning and plotting to advance his interests. In London he was perpetually being introduced to some great man who promised to find a vacant post. In the country he was continually being put in the way of marrying some sweet creature—some heiress, some widow—somebody who would make him happy, or push him on, or bring him a fortune.

There was no end to the roads that opened out before Basil Stondon; but by a curious fatality they all led nowhere; and the most sensible thing that ever was proposed for his benefit was

to bring him and Captain Stondon together, and to get the owner of Marshlands to give his next of kin a helping hand on in the world.

"All he wants, my dear," said Mrs. Hurlford to Miss Derno, "is a fair start and a sensible wife —a wife just like yourself."

"Only ten years younger," added Miss Derno.

"Now, what would *he* do with a young girl?" demanded Mrs. Hurlford. "Why, they would be lost out in the world like the babes in the wood. He ought to have a woman, a strong-minded, clear-headed woman, who could manage for him and tell him how to go on, and see that he was not imposed on."

"A kind of keeper," suggested Miss Derno.

"How absurd you are. You know what I mean perfectly well. Even for his sake you ought to play your cards better; and for your own, I can tell you, Olivia, Marshlands is a very nice property, and has a very nice rent-roll attached to it."

"What a pity I cannot get Basil to think of

me excepting as his mother!" observed Miss Derno.

"What a pity," answered Mrs. Hurlford, who was a distant relation to her visitor, "that you will not believe any woman may marry any man. Propinquity, my dear, it is all propinquity. I heard a very clever lady say once she would undertake to bring any man to a proposal if she were thrown with him for a fortnight at a country house, and I am positive she could have done it too."

"How glad I am, not to be a man," remarked Miss Derno. "If I were, I would never venture beyond the gas-lamps."

"But it would be for his good, for his happiness, you ridiculous creature!" persisted the lady; and so confident did she feel of the ultimate success of her manœuvres, that she absolutely decided on the colour of the dress she should wear at the wedding, and saw the very bracelet she intended to present as a cousinly offering to the bride.

Entertaining these views, it is not to be wondered at that she eagerly offered to accompany Mr. Stondon to Marshlands.

"We owe Mrs. Stondon a visit," she remarked, "and it will make it a less formidable affair for Basil if we all go over together."

"Poor Basil!" said Miss Derno, "I wonder if he will ever be brave enough to go over there alone?"

"It is not Captain Stondon I dislike meeting,' he replied, "it is his wife."

"I think her perfectly charming!" broke in Mrs. Hurlford, with enthusiasm. "And as for Mr. Hurlford, you should hear him rave about her!"

"I really should not allow it, Laura," said Miss Derno. "Mr. Hurlford ought not to rave about other men's wives."

"I cannot imagine what any man can see in copper-coloured hair and blue eyes to get spoony over," observed Basil. At which remark Mrs. Hurlford shot a glance towards her cousin, who retorted—

"I have seen you spoony about every colour, from white to black, Basil. When you were only twelve years old I remember your being in love with a little Irish girl whose hair was exactly the colour of tow; and as for eyes—do you recollect Miss Smyth, whose eyes were red?—if you do not, I do."

"Now, Mrs. Hurlford, I appeal to you!" exclaimed Basil. "Is it fair for the sins of the boy to be visited on the man? How should you like me, Miss Derno, to commence telling tales?"

"If they were entertaining, I should like it of all things," she answered; "but to return to Mrs. Stondon—she really is beautiful, and she never looks so beautiful as when she is talking. If you do not recant before you leave Marshlands this afternoon I will give you such a scolding," finished Miss Derno, flushing a little as she caught Basil's eyes fixed upon her with an expression which was quite as intelligible to her as it was to Mrs. Hurlford.

"He will propose before the week is over," thought that lady, little dreaming that the ceremony had been gone through two or three times already. "She must be married from here, but it will be very miserable for her travelling in the winter. However, she does not dislike travelling," reflected Mrs. Hurlford, while she went upstairs to prepare for her visit to Mrs. Stondon. "Only if they could be married at once, and get away in the summer, how much nicer it would be."

From which speech the reader will see that Providence had been very good to the male sex in denying Mrs. Hurlford daughters. She had sons, but then "sons are not daughters, Heaven be praised!" said a gentleman of her acquaintance.

"It is a beautiful property," remarked Mrs. Hurlford, as they drove under the elms and the fir-trees up to Marshlands House.

Basil Stondon had been thinking the same thing, and he had been thinking of other things

as well, that made him look a little sadder than usual when he crossed the threshold of his kinsman's house.

"We have come to take you by storm, Mrs. Stondon," said Mrs. Hurlford. And then Phemie assured her she was very glad to see them whatever their intentions might be: and Miss Derno, remembering the shy, blushing girl of six years before, looked on and marvelled.

"The spring cannot last for ever," reflected that lady, philosophically, "and yet summer has set in very early with her." And Miss Derno watched, and Miss Derno listened, and the more she watched and the more she listened, the more astonished she felt.

Mrs. Stondon inquired after the health of Mrs. Montague Stondon calmly and politely, as though she had never sat on thorns in that dreary drawing-room in Chapel Street. She made her visitors stay for luncheon, and went with them about the grounds in a bewitching straw hat, laughing and talking as they walked.

The girl Miss Derno remembered had vanished, but the fascination which had hung about the girl had been retained somehow by the woman. For the first ten minutes people might not like Mrs. Stondon; but the longer Miss Derno watched her the more satisfied she grew that there was a charm about her which no one who knew her intimately could resist.

Under the polish, under the easy manner, under the graceful indifference, there lay heart and passion and feeling and conscience. Under the rocks we find iron and coal, and the iron is firm to endure and the coal has warmth and heat. Whose fault is it if the mines are never worked,—if the hidden treasures lie buried for ages? Is it the sin of the earth that holds them? Is it the crime of the breast where they remain dormant?

After all, was it Phemie's fault that she seemed a well-bred, passionless woman? Had she not done her best in the station of life in which she had been placed, and was her best not what her

guests found her—ladylike, unimpulsive, attentive, a trifle sarcastic perhaps, but still graceful and well-educated?

"I recant," said Basil Stondon to Miss Derno, when Marshlands was left behind. "I think Mrs. Stondon as beautiful as ice in sunshine, as snow in summer. She is as polished as marble, as cold as steel." And the young man went through a pantomime of shivering as he spoke.

"And how do you like Captain Stondon?" asked Miss Derno.

"He is one of the most delightful old men that was ever ruled by a young wife," answered Basil Stondon, laughing. "How did she happen to marry him? Why, a woman like that might have aspired to a coronet."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Miss Derno. "Excuse me, Basil, but really men are so very foolish. They see a well-dressed woman, with a pretty face, and fall down and worship forthwith, and talk such nonsense about her as might make the very angels weep."

"Granted," said Basil; "but what has that to do with Mrs. Stondon?"

"Why, only this much:—you see Mrs. Stondon mistress of Marshlands, and say she might have aspired to a coronet: so she might if she could start in the race matrimonial now; but Mrs. Stondon of Marshlands and Miss Keller of nowhere are two very distinct people. Miss Keller did exceedingly well when she married Captain Stondon."

"But she was a Keller," insisted Basil.

"True, but she was a poor Keller, and she is now a rich Stondon, and she has made, in my opinion, an extremely good match, beautiful though she may be."

"How very vehement you are, Olivia, my dear," said Mrs. Hurlford, as a reminder.

"I am vehement because I do think she has done very well for herself. Setting aside his wealth, Captain Stondon is a husband any wife might be proud of. He is just the man I should have liked to marry myself."

"I shall really have to speak to Mrs. Stondon," remarked Mrs. Hurlford, while Basil laughed, and said that he was sure Mrs. Stondon would feel greatly flattered could she hear all the remarks they had made on herself and her husband.

"I am going over there again one day next week, and I shall be able to make mischief, Miss Derno," he finished; whereupon Mrs. Hurlford at once replied she hoped he would make some favourable impression on her, "because," she concluded, "I did not think her manner at all cordial to you to-day."

"It is not likely," said Basil Stondon, "there can ever be much cordiality between us." And the conversation dropped.

CHAPTER III.

VISITORS.

Time went on, and as it went Basil Stondon grew to know his way over from the Abbey to Marshlands so well that he could have walked the road blindfold.

Mrs. Stondon never grew cordial, but that was no drawback to the young man's enjoyment. He had been so accustomed to women who liked and made much of him, that to meet a woman who did not like him, and who was merely civil, seemed only a pleasant variety—nothing more.

It amused him to watch Phemie's devices for getting rid of him, and to circumvent them; it delighted him to see her face vary and change

while he vexed and tormented her. Especially was he pleased when Phemie grew angry, as she sometimes did, and turned upon him. When her eyes flashed, when her cheeks flushed, she certainly did look beautiful; and no one could bring the colour into her face and the lightning into her eyes like Basil Stondon.

She would sit and think about those dead children if he annoyed her, hour after hour. Had there been a boy upstairs, this young man, this stranger, this Eliezer, would not have been wandering about the grounds with Captain Stondon, riding with him, walking with him, getting to be unto him as a son.

Phemie could not bear it; she got pale, she got irritable, watching the pair. She grew beyond all things doubtful of herself, doubtful whether she had ever made her husband entirely happy.

If he were happy now, he could not have been so before. If he loved her as she once thought he did, he ought to know by intuition that she did

not like Basil being so constantly at Marshlands. And yet was not there something wrong about herself? Was she not, after all, as the dog in the manger? She never really desired anything till she saw another hand stretched out to seize it. She had not cared for her own children to inherit, and yet she grudged that another woman's son should own the broad lands of Marshlands. She knew that had her will been paramount Basil should never have entered the park-gates, either as guest or master; but she could no more hinder her husband asking him to the house, and learning to like him as he did, than she could hinder him succeeding to the estates.

For who could help liking Basil Stondon? Basil, who was so easy, so good-natured, so forgetful of injury, fancied or real, that long before Mrs. Stondon had ever begun to question whether it was right for her to hate him as she did, he had forgotten his feud with her, forgotten that he and his mother had always laid his father's

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death at the door of this strange woman, forgotten everything save her youth, her beauty, and her marvellous voice.

He had no remark now to make about blue eyes and auburn hair. He did not now inform Miss Derno that he liked Marshlands but hated its mistress; on the contrary, the oftener he visited his kinsfolk the pleasanter his visits seemed to be, till at last he found he was so far reconciled to Phemie as to be able to endure to stay under the same roof with her.

"Of course," said Captain Stondon, in answer to the young man's faint remonstrances, "you must do something; but meantime, till you find something to do, make Marshlands your headquarters." And, nothing loth to fall into such good quarters, Basil bade good-bye to the Hurlfords, packed up his portmanteau at the Abbey, and unpacked it again in a house that soon seemed more to him like home than any in which he had ever previously set foot.

"I suppose Captain Stondon means to adopt

you," remarked Miss Derno. "I hope you will not be spoiled at Marshlands; but it is not the lot I should have chosen for you could I have had my wish."

"It is not the lot I should have chosen for myself," returned Mr. Basil, tenderly. "If you could have cared for me, Olivia, how different in every respect——"

"You do not know your own mind," interrupted Miss Derno, hastily; "you cannot read your own heart. You fancied you cared for me, and that fancy has passed, or is passing away; you have only dreamed another dream and wakened from it. How many women I have seen you in love with!" she went on, a little bitterly. "I wonder, I often wonder, who will fix the wandering heart at last, and keep it prisoner for life."

"You might have done," he answered; "you might have made anything you chose of me. I would have worked for you, striven for you, died for you. It may seem a laughing matter to you,

but it is death to me. A man can love but once, and I have loved you."

"A man can love but once, and you have not loved me," she retorted. "You will turn to the first pretty girl you meet at Marshlands and love her, or think you love her, and so you will go on —on—on—till you find some one strong enough to take your heart, and hold it fast for ever." And so they parted—on friendly terms, it is true, and yet not quite good friends—for Basil could not be blind to the fact that the way in which things had turned out did not meet with Miss Derno's approval.

She thought Captain Stondon would have done better to get his kinsman a Government appointment rather than let him idle about Marshlands. She thought so, and she said so; and although Basil carried off his annoyance with a laugh, still he was annoyed at her idea of idleness being so bad for him.

"May a fellow not enjoy this lovely weather without a thought of work?" he asked. "I

shall have enough to do doubtless before the winter."

"I shall be glad to hear of it," answered Miss Derno, drily. And she was very glad when the news came that Basil Stondon was going to be busy at last.

She had a long time to wait first, however, and many things happened before he began to earn his living.

As for Phemie, she disliked the idea of Basil taking up his abode at Marshlands, more even than Miss Derno, and showed her aversion to the project so openly that Captain Stondon felt grieved and hurt.

It was natural, he thought, that she should not care much about Basil, and yet it was only right and Christian that families should live at peace with one another.

He was so happy himself that he wanted to make those about him happy also; added to which there could be no question but that Basil supplied in a great measure the want in his life

to which I have before alluded. He was getting fond of the man who would in the ordinary course of nature succeed to the property after him—they had a joint interest in the lands and woods and fields. Basil was not a wasteful, extravagant man like Montague. Basil had been kept so short from boyhood of money by his father, he had always been obliged to look so closely after his few sovereigns, that he was quite as economical as any young man need to be. He had ridden, he had shot, he had pulled in many a match, but he had always been indebted to some friend for a mount; he had never shot over his own preserves with his own dogs; he had never owned a yacht; he had never kept his own hunters.

His training had not tended to make him either very proud or very independent, but it had made him careful. Save that he dressed well, he had not a single extravagance. Altogether Captain Stondon often marvelled where Montague had got such a son, and wished Provi-

dence had given Basil to him instead of to the reckless ne'er-do-well who ended all his earthly troubles in so ghastly a fashion.

"I am certain, love," he said to his wife, when he saw how coldly she took the intelligence that Basil was coming to spend a month at Marshlands, "you will, for my sake, try to like him a little better. He is so different from his father, and it would be such a comfort to me to be able to do something for him; and I cannot do anything for him unless I first see what he is fit for. You will try to make the house pleasant to him, dearest, will you not?" And Phemie answered—

"I am doing my best; only he is so constantly here, and one has to be so perpetually doing one's best, that there is no time left for rest. However," she added, noticing the look of annoyance on her husband's face—and it was a sign of amendment in Phemie when she noticed annoyance in any one—"I will strive to be pleasanter to him, I will, indeed." Which promise so delighted

Captain Stondon that he called her the most amiable of women, the delight of his life, the blessing of his existence, the only happiness he had ever known.

"And I am so afraid of happiness making me selfish, my dearest," he finished, "that I should like to do as much as I can for others. Perhaps if I had been more lenient to Montague's faults he might never——. It was a money question," he went on, "and it seemed terrible for the want of money to bring about such a tragedy. Blood is thicker than water, after all, Phemie; and I should never forgive myself if Basil went wrong too. You will help me, love, will you not? But you have said you will, and that is enough. He is so young, and he has all his lifetime before him still, and it would be a sin not to help him at this juncture, when he most needs assistance from some one."

Captain Stondon sighed as he said this. It seemed such a fine thing for a man to have his lifetime before him, and not to be tasting his

first cup of happiness when the evening shadows were stealing on!

"You have helped my people," said Phemie, gratefully, "and I will try to help yours. Henry, I have been very wrong."

Whereupon Captain Stondon stooped down and kissed her, as if she had conferred some benefit upon him.

Then Phemie noticed—what she had never observed previously—how grey he was getting. She did not know why she had not seen this before, she could never tell why she saw it then; she only felt that his manner, and that changing hair, gave her a pang such as had never yet passed through her heart. He was growing old, and she had, perhaps, not done what she might for him. She had taken her own pleasure, and grudged him the happiness of having one of his own blood to benefit. He who had done so much for her; he who, never forgetful of her wishes, asked if she was not going to write and ask Helen and Duncan to spend some time with them.

"And if your uncle would come too, we might all go down to the sea-side together. Should you not like it?"

Like it! Next to the hills, or, indeed, better, perhaps, than the hills, Phemie loved the sea. To her it always seemed singing the songs she had listened to in her childhood; to her it was mother, father, home, friends. Phemie knew no loneliness while she sate and watched the waves rippling in on the sand, or breaking upon the rocks. Already she had grown a little weary of the monotonous Norfolk scenery, and she longed for the sight of a more open country, of the far off mountains; or, better than all else on earth, of the restless, murmuring, sorrowing, passionate sea.

Helen came first to Marshlands. She was young, pretty, simple; very proud of the prizes she had won at school; greatly interested in new pieces of music; rapturous concerning fancy work; deferential towards her rich cousin Phemie; and stood in great awe of Duncan, who

was now a hard-headed, hard-working, somewhat plain young man, following the bent of his inclinations among steam-engines and boilers and forges and wrought iron and cast iron and moulds and patterns and a general flare and glare of furnaces and sputter of sparks and din of hammers and blowing of bellows.

A young man possessed of that pleasant turn of mind which made him, in the capacity of a worker, look on all idlers with distrust and contempt. There was war between him and Basil Stondon for some days, till Mr. Aggland appeared on the scene, and rated his son soundly for his rudeness.

"He wanted to know what I did," answered Duncan, stoutly, "and I would not tell him. What business was it of his?"

"What business was it of yours, Duncan, asking him whether he would be afraid to take May-day over the bullfinch at the bottom of the home park?" inquired Phemie.

"So you are taking his part next," said

Duncan, "and I thought you did not like him."

"I like fair play," answered Phemie, "and he has as much right to ask in whose office you are as you have to ask him, as I heard you ask him the other day, where he lived when he was at home, and if it was play with him and not work all the year round."

"I earn my living, and he never did an hour's work since he was born," returned the engineer.

"If you earn your living, you know who put you in the way of earning it," broke in Mr. Aggland. "The same man who buttered your bread—which you would have had to eat stale and dry many a day but for him—chooses to have this young gentleman staying here; and if you will not behave towards him as you ought to do, you shall clear out of this house and spend your holiday where you can."

"Besides, Duncan," added his cousin, "Mr. Stondon did not intend to vex you, I know he

did not. He asked about your employer and your work merely from politeness, just as Miss Derno asked Helen how she got on at school, and what new music she had been learning."

"You ought to scold him well, Phemie," remarked her uncle; "if he is to do any good out in the world, he must learn not to be so thin-skinned. He should write out Shakspeare's axiom, and lay it to heart—'Use every man after his deserts, and who shall 'scape whipping?' He would not, I can tell him that. He forgets all he owes to Captain Stondon—his education, his present position, his chances of future advancement. It is all very well to talk about independence, Duncan, but a man can never be independent who does not know how to be grateful, because an ungrateful man is a slave to his own selfishness and pride. 'I hate ingratitude more in a man than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness,'" said Mr. Aggland, by way of a neat ending to his sentence.

"It is to be hoped Duncan will not take you

literally," remarked Phemie, laughing; and Mr. Aggland laughed himself, while he answered that he hoped whatever Duncan did he would not spoil their holiday.

"I need a truce myself," he added, "from care and pelf;

'And I will have it in cool lanes,
O'er-arching like cathedral fanes,
With elm and beech of sturdy girth,
Or on the bosom of green earth
Amid the daisies.'"

"We all mean to enjoy ourselves," said Phemie; "and to ensure Duncan's happiness as well, I intend to ask Miss Derno to join our party. Duncan has lost his heart to her already, uncle. See how he blushes."

"Well, it is enough to make any one get red to hear how you talk," retorted Duncan. "You should remember there was a time you did not like to be laughed at yourself; when you used to go about the house crying because you had to leave us, you couldn't bear to have a word said

to you in jest. It is not right of you, Phemie, and you have set Mr. Stondon at me now. If he tries it on again I will break his head for him, I will; and as for Miss Derno, I wish you would let her stay where she is; I am sure I never care to set eyes on her again."

"It is very naughty for children to tell fibs," answered his cousin; and the very same day she drove over to the Abbey and asked Miss Derno to accompany them to Cromer, to the infinite delight of Mrs. Hurlford, who declared to her cousin that she thought Mrs. Stondon was the sweetest woman that ever lived.

"Only to think of it!" exclaimed Mrs. Hurlford, "only to think of her asking you, although she has got that young girl staying with her. I may tell you now that I trembled when I heard she and Basil were to be in the same house together. Why, Mrs. Stondon might make up a marriage between them as easily as I could walk across the room; for if he began to flirt with her, he could not back out of that without offending

Captain Stondon. Make the most of your time, Olivia; at any rate keep him from making love to that chit, for she must go back to school before long, and then you can have the field to yourself."

"Why should he not make love to her if he please?" asked Miss Derno, gravely.

"Why should he not? Good gracious, Olivia, are you losing your senses? Are you turning into an idiot? Can he marry both of you? I only put it to you, can he?"

"Certainly not; indeed it does not seem to me that Basil Stondon is in a position to marry any one at present."

"He told you so?" This was interrogative.

"I believe he did make some sensible speech to that effect," answered Miss Derno.

"Then you are as good as engaged," was Mrs. Hurlford's immediate deduction. "I think, Olivia, considering our relationship, and the position in which we stand to one another, you might have told me this before."

" When I am engaged to him you may be quite certain I shall not keep the news back from you for a moment," replied Miss Derno, and she left the room a little out of temper.

CHAPTER IV.

SUMMER HOLIDAYS.

That was a happy time—the happiest Phemie ever knew. It was the bright summer holiday of her life, and not even when, a child, she built her perishable houses of sand and shells on the sea-shore—not even when, a girl, she had wandered over the Cumberland hills gathering flowers and wreathing them into garlands for her hair, had Phemie been so happy as she was in those swiftly-passing hours that sped by, rapidly, noiselessly, like a wild bird on the wing.

Considering how much happiness this world holds for even the wretchedest among us, it is strange that we so rarely get it unalloyed.

The inevitable "but" that seems to dog our

pleasures is incessantly trampling on the heels of happiness; and thus it comes about that whenever we can manage to outstrip our haunting shadow, whenever we do chance to drain a draught which leaves no bitter after-taste behind, we remember those pleasant hours, that delicious vintage, for ever and for ever.

The enjoyment may not be so great when we come to analyse it, but it has been perfect of its kind; the diamond may not be large, but it is without flaw or blemish. We have known no drawback, we have had no mist, no cloud, no cold, no sorrow. We have enjoyed—wholly and entirely—for once we have basked in the warmth of complete happiness; and the memory of that glory of sunshine which has flooded our lives, and forced its way into the darkest chambers of our hearts, can never be effaced by the darkness of the tempestuous days that follow.

Do we forget the summer in the winter? Do we forget the flowers when the frost is covering the ground? We have enjoyed the summer, we

have loved the flowers, and we can no more cease to recollect the sunshine and the gay parterres than we can forget to remember the warm grasp of a hand that may now be cold enough—than we can lay the coffin-lid over the face of the dead, and shut out by that act the recollection of the smiles, the tears, the tones whose immortality has commenced for us on earth.

Did Phemie forget? My friends, if one of you stood for a time in Paradise, should you be likely to let that part of your existence slip out of your memory? If you have ever for a moment stood in the Garden of Eden, without knowing there was a tempter in it; eaten of the pleasant fruit, without thinking there was a worm lying at the very core; drank of the waters of gladness, without dreaming there was poison in the draught, death in their sweetness; I can only say you have felt what Phemie Stondon felt in those days which were happy as heaven unto her. And as the spot where you lay down and took your rest will remain green in your heart till the end, so the

memory of that happy summer holiday, through all the after years, faded not away.

Whether they took long excursions into the country, whether they walked on the sands, whether they sate by the beach, whether under the moonlight their boat glided over the sea, while the dipping oars kept time to the sweet voices of the fair singers, whether they were talking, or laughing, or silent, they were happy. If there had been no such things as sin and care and sorrow, they could not have enjoyed themselves more. Had there been no to-morrow in life, to-day could not have seemed brighter. Mr. Aggland, from his farm, from his isolated existence, from his uncongenial home; Duncan, from his hard work in the heart of London; Helen, from her lessons; Phemie, from company; Miss Derno, from her relations; Captain Stondon, from the cares of ownership; Basil, from anxieties concerning his future,—took holiday.

They carried no skeleton, they left no one at home that they wished at the seashore with them,

and they enjoyed—if I were to write for ever I could never hope to tell how fully they enjoyed that time!

As for Phemie, in those happy, happy days, she forgot her rise in the world—she forgot her accomplishments—she forgot that Basil was to come after her husband—she forgot everything that had made her womanhood so much less lovely than her girlhood, and grew softer, gentler, sweeter.

Away from the familiar family circle—always on her guard before strangers—she had grown worldly and selfish, and self-conscious; but by the lonely seashore, where the waves sung the dear song she had listened to in her childhood, Phemie changed once again—not to the girl who had won Captain Stondon's heart among the Cumberland hills, but to something far different—to a woman who might have won any man's heart. Alas! for Phemie!

In those days she grew pliable as wax in the hand of the moulder; she grew loving and love-

able, and tender; she would sit with her uncle's hand in hers, listening to his discourses, smiling at his quotations, pleased to hear him say how happy he was, how for years and years and years he had never enjoyed himself so much before.

She would talk to Duncan about his future life—about his plans, his hopes, his prospects, for hours at a time, while the waves kept rippling, rippling at their feet. She delighted to have Helen beside her, and the old caressing attitude, so long discontinued, came back naturally to them both. Her admiration for Miss Derno woke to life once more; and best of all, there came into her manner towards her husband a graceful thoughtfulness, a grateful appreciation, that comforted Mr. Aggland exceedingly.

Phemie! Phemie! my love, my darling!—Phemie of the blue eyes, of the auburn hair!—vain, fanciful, exacting, jealous Phemie!—if I were to leave you now sitting by the seashore,

leave you at the acme of your happiness, and close the book, and clasp the rest of the story within its leaves, would the world like you, as I have done, I wonder!

Rather would you not seem a mere sketch, a fair faint outline, an unfinished portrait, beautiful though you may be, lingering in the sunlight of those bright summer days, when your life was full—full to overflowing—of prosperity and happiness, and love. And love, poor child—and love! It was the dream-hero come too late, for the Phemie Keller who had waited for him by the tarn and the waterfall, who had listened for his footsteps over the hills, was free no longer to greet his appearing. She had owned but one life—but one, and this was what she had made of it. Never to be able to love sinlessly, never to be able to love openly, never to be able to whisper the sweet secret to herself save with tears of bitterness, with pangs of anguish. This was what "I will" had meant for her when she uttered the words in Tordale church—where the

everlasting hills looked down on the beautiful valley below.

Never, O God! never—so long as the sun shone—so long as the rivers flowed to the sea—as the birds sang—as the snow fell—as the rain descended—never!

And yet the waves rippled, and the sunbeams danced on the waters, and the green leaves rustled in the summer breeze, and the earth looked lovely in its robes of green all broidered and festooned with flowers, and Phemie came to love the man she had disliked, and was happy, unknowing what such happiness meant.

Knowledge came to her soon enough; but not in those sunshiny days when she walked by the seashore, and rejoiced in the summer gladness, when she "grew," as she said to herself, "to like Basil better," and to wonder less at his popularity.

Poor Phemie! with careful hands and loving hearts all around, was there no one to see whither you were drifting? No one to notice

the rock whereon your poor ship went to pieces?

It was holiday time, and all seem too busy taking their ease, enjoying their hours of idleness, to think of danger or of distress. Besides, we do not ordinarily dream of ice catching fire, of purity itself dragging her garments through the mire. She was innocent. How should knowledge of sin ever enter into such a home as Phemie's? And yet, oh, reader! given this position: on the one hand duty and an unsatisfied heart, a heart that the love of man had never filled, that the faithlessness of man had never broken, that was as inexperienced as the heart of a child; and on the other, temptation, youth, romance—how was it likely to end?

Can one pass through the fire unscorched? Is it virtue, never having even seen the furnace, to reach the end of life with no smell of burning on our garments?

Had sin never stood in the path before her, how would it have been with Phemie Keller—

who can tell? And who can tell either, oh, friends, how it would fare with any of us if at some point of our journey we had to buckle on our armour, and wage war with the devil and his legions?

It is one thing to be a criminal and another to be a judge. I pray you to remember this, you who from the heights of virtue look down on these pages, and read therein the story of Phemie's struggle.

Slowly as the waves steal in upon the shore, as the leaves come upon the bare branches, crept this love into Mrs. Stondon's heart.

That the sky seemed clearer, that the days were shorter, that the whole earth appeared more beautiful, that there was a stillness on the sea, a glory over the landscape such as she had never before dreamed of, Phemie knew; but that the brightness and the beauty, the calm and the glory, were all born of love she did not suspect till she wakened from her slumber—till, like the gold and the silver of a fairy tale, her

happiness turned to misery, her rejoicing to despair.

But at the time of which I am speaking, what did love mean to a woman who had never felt its power? It meant nothing. No more than religion means to the infidel—than the Word of God signifies to the atheist. She had never believed in it; she had treated it as an idea, a folly, a delusive dream. Children put faith in stories of dwarfs and giants, of enchanted castles, of magicians, of sprites and gnomes; boys and girls, in a similar manner, placed confidence in love tales, in romantic legends, in sentimental songs; but when children grew up to be boys and girls, and when boys and girls grew up to be men and women, they abandoned their old superstitions, and became like unto Phemie herself, a wise individual who believed in nothing out of the common course of events, who thought that marriage meant no more than what the prayer-book said it did, who would have gone before a magistrate and sworn to the fact, had such testimony

been desired of her who laughed at love, and whose firm opinion was, that love between a man and a woman not related to one another by blood meant either folly or sin.

Folly! In the day of her bitterest distress, she learnt that the strongest love may be the highest wisdom. Sin! I think Phemie, through much suffering, came to understand that there may be as much sin in loving too little as in loving too much.

Till she had eaten of that tree, however, how was she to distinguish between good and evil? Till she had felt danger, how was she to arm herself against harm? Are the blind to be blamed for walking on straight towards a precipice? Was Phemie a sinner, then, because she rejoiced in the sunlight on the waters, because she delighted to hear the birds sing, because she thought the country had never before looked so beautiful, because she looked with dreamy eyes up at the pure blue summer sky, because the floating clouds were lovely to her imagination,

because there was a glory on the sea, on the land, on the fields, on the woods, because she was happy, unknowing why?

Was she to blame? Was she a worse woman, then, in the day of her temptation, than she had been in that of her prosperity? Was the dead heart holier than the erring one? Who may answer? I can only tell the story as it came to pass—only show how the error produced fruit of sorrow, how her fault brought forth trouble and remorse.

They were all talking on this subject one Sunday evening after their return to Marshlands. Talking, I mean, about how his sin finds a man out even in this world. How the fault committed and forgotten by the creature is not forgotten by the Creator; how it is rather like seed cast into the ground, sure to spring up, and to bring forth abundantly sooner or later after its kind—either private sorrow or public shame, when Captain Stondon remarked—

"The last time I heard a sermon on the same

text as that this afternoon was among the Cumberland hills. Do you remember Mr. Conbyr's 'Wages of Sin,' Phemie?" he added, turning to his wife: "the day I first saw you—the day I first saw Tordale—the day I sat on the side of Helbeck, and watched the sun set among the mountains—the day I broke my arm and sprained my ankle—that day Mr. Conbyr told us that the wages of sin is death?"

"And have you seen any reason since to believe that he told you what was not true?" asked Mr. Aggland.

"I am afraid I have never thought about the subject from that day to this," answered Captain Stondon. "Sin seems so strong a word, so utterly outside the ordinary experience of an everyday life."

"Perhaps so," was Mr. Aggland's reply; "yet still we acknowledge every Sunday that we are sinners. What does that signify? I only ask for information," went on Phemie's uncle. "What is the sin of which the wages is death, if it be

one which we can ward off with a fine house, good fires, and purple and fine linen? And if we are not all offenders, if we are not every day committing some fault, what do we mean by confessing we are miserable sinners? We either attribute some meaning to the words, or we do not. Which is it?"

There was a moment's pause before any one answered. Then Miss Derno said—

"I think you and Captain Stondon are traversing different mental lines. You are taking sin in its broadest sense; you are thinking of sins of omission, and sins of commission, of sins of temper, of sins of selfishness, of sins of which the law of the land takes no cognizance; while Captain Stondon was speaking of those that are punished by Calcraft, or by fine, or by imprisonment."

"Which are not usually committed in well-regulated households," put in Basil Stondon.

"As, for instance, theft, murder, and so on," added Captain Stondon.

"But the text refers to death in the next world, not in this," remarked Phemie. They were talking the matter over, just as people do talk such matters over—neither theologically nor philosophically—not pursuing any distinct line of argument, but speaking out whatever thought chanced to come uppermost at the moment.

"I should rather say death in the next world *or* in this," amended Mr. Aggland.

"Will you explain your meaning a little more clearly?" asked Miss Derno.

It was an interesting group on which the beams of the departing sun fell aslant—interesting because of the beauty of the women, of the faces of the men; because of the way in which the light wandered in and out among the trees that overshadowed the talkers; because of the golden track that lay upon the grass; because of the stillness of that holy summer's evening; because, taking sin in the sense we generally use the word, it seemed so strange a subject for such a "well-ordered household," to quote

Basil Stondon, to have selected for conversation.

Sin! If a select party, standing about the bar of a public-house in Whitechapel had commenced such a discussion, it would have appeared only natural. If rags and filth and vice had been able to tell all about it, we should only have said it was right and proper for the natives to speak of a plant indigenous to their soil. But twice now Captain Stondon had heard the same text preached from, under circumstances that had impressed it on his mind. Both times the preacher had addressed himself not to the men and the women from contact with whom virtue in this world shrinks decorously. In Tordale, Captain Stondon had wondered for a short space as to what sin the farmers among the hills were likely to commit; at Marshlands, when the clergyman had not above twenty of a congregation, the text grew almost personal.

Sin! The rector had discoursed to them

about all sorts of sin—about the sins of idolatry, and the sins of disobedience; about the sins of the Israelites—about the sins of Ahab—about the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat—about the sins of Saul, and the sins of David, and the sins of Gehazi, and the sins of the Jews, and all the offences which are counted as sins in the New Testament. He had told them how "sin when it is finished bringeth forth death." And now they were discussing the subject, and Mr. Aggland said sin brought death in this world or in the next or in both.

"Unrepented sin," he observed, in answer to Miss Derno, "may bring death in the next world; being no divine, however, that is a point I should prefer not meddling with; but any man has a right to speak of what he has seen in this world—he has a right, I mean, to talk of the ways of Providence, so far as he has been able to trace them on this side of the grave; and I have seen even in this world that the wages of sin is death."

"Death by disease or violence — which?" demanded Basil Stondon.

"Neither," replied Mr. Aggland; "but death to every hope, to every wish; death to peace and contentment, to every pleasant memory, to the happiness of every passing hour. 'We have all our vices,' says Horace, and Baxter advises us to kill them before they kill us. 'Use sin,' are his words, 'as it will use you—spare it not, for it will not spare you: use it therefore as a murderer should be used, and though it kill your bodies, it shall not be able to kill your souls; though it bring you to the grave, it shall not be able to keep you there.'"

"I am still at a loss," remarked Captain Stondon, "to understand what sin could produce such effects as you speak of. What sin, for instance, as any among us would be likely to commit?"

"What sin did Dives commit?" asked Mr. Aggland in reply. And the evening sun fell, as he spoke, on his strange face, on his hollow

cheeks, on his tangled hair, on his thoughtful eyes, on his mouth, which he opened wider than ever while he put his question—"What sin did Dives commit? He was a rich man, and not a bad man. So far as we can see, he wore purple and fine linen; he lived in a grand house; he fared sumptuously every day. No death came to him in this world, but hell fire in the next. Look over the Bible for yourself, and you will find it is not sin which the law of the land punishes the most severely that we are warned against with the greatest frequency. It would be a hard thing if it were more difficult for the poor to reach heaven than the rich—for Lazarus than for Dives. It would be an awful thing if God despised the poor as we do; if there were 'respect in the next world for him who weareth the gay clothing, who enters the assembly with a gold ring, and in goodly apparel.' (You look at me, Miss Derno, as though you did not know I am quoting Scripture.) Though we go to the grave in a carriage with nodding plumes; though

we are followed thither by the wealthy and titled of the land; though we lie down and take our rest in a coffin covered with velvet and lined with silk, yet we shall all have to enter heaven as paupers. Happy will he be in that day who, finding himself naked, shall yet not be ashamed."

And Mr. Aggland looked up to the western sky, all crimson and purple and gold, as he concluded his little sermon,—looked up as though he there saw what he had been talking about, while Miss Derno said—

"You give us the truth naked enough, at any rate, Mr. Aggland."

"For anatomical purposes clothing is unnecessary, Miss Derno," he answered. At which remark they all laughed, excepting Phemie, who, sitting a little apart, was looking, like her uncle, at the pomp and splendour that surrounded the setting sun.

"Does not some one say something about our sins resembling our shadows, uncle?" she asked, with a sad, thoughtful expression on her lovely face.

"Suckling does," he answered. "His idea is that in our noon they, like our shadows,

> 'When our day's in its glory—scarce appear;
> Towards our evening—how great! how monstrous!'"

"And it is evening now, and too late for us to sit talking here much longer," observed Captain Stondon, offering his arm to Miss Derno.

Mr. Aggland arose, and followed after Basil Stondon and his niece. Before he passed into the house he paused, and looked once again towards the west, and as he looked, sighed.

That was the last night of their happy holiday, and their talk had been of sin!

CHAPTER V.

KNOWLEDGE.

Time went by—it was autumn—it was winter—it was spring—and still Captain Stondon found some good reason why Basil should remain at Marshlands.

Nothing loth, Basil stayed on; stayed to be always with Phemie and her husband, to go with them everywhere; stayed till people forgot the time when he had never been seen in Norfolk, and came to consider him not merely the heir, but the child of the house.

A child in comparison to Captain Stondon, perhaps; but how about Phemie? Phemie, who was younger ever so much than he; Phemie of the blue eyes, and the auburn hair, and the

divine voice; Phemie, who was growing to be all the world to him, who was becoming fonder, and fonder, and fonder of him—fonder and fonder as the days went by.

"That virtue which requires to be ever guarded is scarcely worth the sentinel," says the Vicar of Wakefield; and yet I doubt whether, in this case, it had not been better for Captain Stondon to have trusted Basil a little less, to have thought of consequences a little more.

We watch the woman whose purity we suspect; we leave perfect purity to be sullied if it choose. Is not this locking the stable door after the steed is gone? Is not this being "wise afterwards" with a vengeance?

Time, as I have said, went by; but to Basil and to Phemie the months seemed days, for they had entered into that dreamland where, as in eternity, there is no account taken of the passing hours. They were happy, for Phemie did not dream of danger, and Basil would not think of it. He liked the river, and he wilfully shut his eyes

to the fact that it was flowing to the sea; besides, if there were any harm done, it would be only to himself. Mrs. Stondon, "of course," was safe. Of course; ah! well-a-day!

A young man who from his earliest boyhood had been in love with some one, was scarcely likely not to know that he cared for Phemie more than it was quite in the proper order of things for him to care for another person's wife; in fact, by the time the primroses were blooming on the banks and under the hedgerows, he knew perfectly well that his fancy for Miss Derno was gone, and that an attachment for Mrs. Stondon had taken its place. He knew it, but he would not acknowledge it. He was like a man who, feeling every hour in the day twinges and pangs that are the premonitory symptoms of a mortal malady, will yet not even whisper to himself that he is sick. He has not courage to turn from the sunlight and look down into the grave. Basil Stondon was for once in his life afraid to think of his new love. All his

wounds before had been trifling in comparison to this cancer, that he dared not show to mortal.

Not even to the woman who was to "fix the wandering heart at last," durst he show by word or look or sign what she had become to him. He had to know and suffer in silence; he had to bear his pain with a smile on his lips; for he understood well enough that if once he spoke he would be cast out of his earthly Eden; and though there might be a serpent in it—a serpent stinging him every day—still it was Eden for all that.

"The battle between evil and good," says a living preacher, "is perpetually being fought in silence."

Have you ever thought about this, my reader? ever laid it to heart that, under all the decorum of our nineteenth-century life, the old, old warfare that began so many thousands of years since is still being waged? that the devil is defied, that the devil is triumphant, that temptations are resisted,

that tragedies are acted out with no spectator, save God, looking on the while ?

Smooth and bright may be the surface of the waters, but what about their depths ?

Happy and peaceful seemed that Norfolk household: there were pleasant walks about the grounds, there were drives through the narrow lanes, there were rides across the breezy commons; within sight of the quarries where the "crags" were hewn out; beside marshy pools, from the margin of which geese stretched out their long necks and hissed at the strangers as they paused to look; there were parties at Marshlands, and at the houses of friends and neighbours. There was the usual routine of an English country life; its calm, its contentment, its want of excitement, its affluence, its propriety, its monotony; but there was something else besides, something that was changing Phemie and altering Basil, that was eating the heart out of that happy life ; eating, eating at the core of that rich ripe fruit, and changing

all its former sweetness to bitterness and decay.

He should have gone when he first learnt how dear she was growing; he should have left her, "loved her and left her—left her for ever." He had friends; he might have visited them. He had a mother; he might have resided with her. Had he pressed the point, Captain Stondon would have got him some appointment; but even supposing none of these roads open, he ought to have left Phemie; ought to have been man enough to say, "I will not bring sorrow on her; let the future hold what it may for me."

A man can get away from temptation, but a woman cannot. Without telling any one, without asking advice or seeking assistance or making a disturbance, a man may always turn his face north, east, south, or west, at a moment's notice. He can cease visiting at a house; he can walk where he is certain not to meet the woman he loves best; he can do, in fact, what Basil Stondon ought to have done—leave her.

But this was just what Basil Stondon did not do. He would pay a flying visit to London, or go to see his mother, or accept an invitation to stay for a day or two with a friend here, or another friend there, but he always came back to Marshlands, hungering and thirsting for a sight of the woman whom he ought never to have seen more.

His mother would not come to Marshlands. It was well for Basil to remain there if he liked, she said, but she could not forget her husband, which was the less praiseworthy of Mrs. Montague Stondon, as Marshlands would have killed her in a month.

"How you bear the monotony," she remarked, "I cannot imagine." To which Basil made answer that men were different from women; "we can ride and hunt and shoot," he explained.

"And she" (the "she" meant Mrs. Stondon), "she, you say, is really presentable. I have heard the same thing from other sources, but I can scarcely credit it. She was so dreadfully unformed when I first saw her."

"You would not think so now," answered her son.

"Those kind of people," said Mrs. Montague, "soon learn our ways—that is, if they are clever; and she is clever, Miss Derno tells me."

"I suppose she is," replied Basil, who found his mother expected him to make some answer.

"And that cousin. Now, my dear Basil, I do not wish to put ideas into your head, but pray be on your guard, pray—pray. You who may marry so well—you who will have such a property—do not let any one entrap you into marrying that girl. Whenever you told me 'she' was getting more civil, I suspected her reason. As she has no children, she would like one of her own family to marry the next heir. Be on your guard, therefore, I entreat, be on your guard."

Basil very solemnly promised her that he would, and remarked that if she would only come to Marshlands when Helen Aggland next visited it, she might see for herself how little danger

there was of his falling in love with such a chit of a child; but his mother would not believe in his safety.

"I cannot forget, if you can," she answered. "If Captain Stondon had only done half as much for your father as he is doing for you, I should not now be a widow." Upon which Mrs. Montague began to cry, and Basil changed the subject, for he knew he had altered his opinion about that matter entirely, and that he did not now consider either Phemie or her husband had any share in his father's suicide.

"Blameable share, of course, I mean," said the young man to Miss Derno, and Miss Derno remarked she was glad to find he was growing so sensible.

This was in the spring, when Miss Derno came down into Norfolk again, to stay with the Hurlfords, who meant to have quite a gay time of it, in honour of a General Sir Samuel Hurlford, who having done great things in India, had returned thence, been knighted, and was now

making a tour of his relations prior to returning to India in the beginning of the new year. He was a very wonderful man, so everybody said, and the Hurlfords were naturally proud to have, and anxious to exhibit him, as well as his daughter, Miss Georgina Hurlford. This young lady had been educated in England, and after having been brought out (unsuccessfully) in London, under the most excellent auspices, was about to accompany General Sir Samuel back to India.

Money and fame had not quite kept pace together in the General's case, and prudent friends thought it was quite possible Miss Hurlford might marry better on the other side of the equator. At any rate Miss Georgina meant to try.

She had not found the husband crop plentiful in her season, but she hoped matters would be different in India. She was just the girl to "go off" there, her acquaintance said—lively, good-natured, ladylike. She liked the idea of tra-

velling; she did not mind the sea; she did not care for the heat; she thought it would be something new; and besides, she could then be always with "dear papa."

Dear papa was very fond of Georgina; very proud of her hair, which curled naturally; of her eyes, that were a light cold brown; of her cheeks, which were round and rosy; of her mouth, which was small and pretty.

He admired his child excessively, but when he said she "is like her poor dear mamma," he sighed.

There were those who knew that "poor dear mamma" had led the worthy General a pretty dance before she reluctantly left a world that seemed to her a very desirable one to inhabit; but no one in Norfolk, unless, indeed, it might be Miss Derno, was aware of this, and the sigh was put down to regret for the dead, not to solicitude for the living.

Miss Georgina had been most carefully educated, so the General's sisters assured him. She

had spent eight years of her life at a school where there were masters for everything, extras in abundance, a pew in church, and a clergyman once a week to catechize the young ladies.

Her vacations she had spent with one or other of her aunts; either with her aunt in town, or her aunt in the country; either at Kensington, or at an old Grange in Berkshire. In London she learned the value of a good settlement; at the Grange, how to sit close to her saddle, and not to ride on the reins. Miss Georgina was an apt pupil, and gave great satisfaction to all who were kind enough to instruct her. A most discreet young person, who could dance well, sing German songs, talk French with any one, take her fences, interpret Schulhoff and Chopin, play waltzes and quadrilles, and who withal was pleasant-mannered and agreeable. What more could a man and a father desire? particularly as Georgina was prudent, which her poor dear mamma had never been.

She had met Basil Stondon before, in London;

as who, indeed, among the upper middle class had not? She liked him greatly (they danced together many evenings); and if I may say such a thing of a young lady brought up as Miss Georgina Hurlford had been brought up, she loved him.

There are some men whom all women seem to like or to love, and Basil Stondon was one of them.

The dear creatures have a fancy for extremes—extreme of strength or extreme of weakness.

It is your medium man whose love goes a begging, in whose face the door is shut unceremoniously.

Without fortune, Basil might have looked long enough for a wife, but he need not have walked abroad to look for love and affection.

Women were very fond of this young fellow; women who, it is to be hoped, met with husbands calculated to make them happier in course of time; and one of the girls who liked him excessively was Miss Georgina Hurlford.

To General Sir Samuel, Captain Stondon took amazingly, as in duty bound; they talked about India together all the day long. In a small and friendly community any strange face is welcome, providing it be a pleasant one; and Mrs. Stondon made quite as cordial advances to Miss Hurlford as her husband did to Miss Georgina's father.

Here was an opportunity not to be despised, and Miss Hurlford was not above availing herself of it. She met Mrs. Stondon half way, more than half-way; and after the curious manner of the gentle sex, fell in love with her straightway.

If a man had paid her half the compliments that fell from Miss Hurlford's lips, Mrs. Stondon would have thought him deranged. Hero worship! What was any hero worship in comparison to such heroine worship as Miss Georgina offered to her new friend? It was incense all the day long; and Phemie never, because of the smoke, could see the meaning of it.

Everybody joined together in making much of

her; and Phemie was pleased to be made much of, and basked in the sunshine.

She was happy; ah, heaven! she was so happy: she was so innocent; she was still so young. This girl, fresh from a boarding-school, was wiser in her generation than the seven years' wife, and wound Mrs. Stondon round her finger like packthread; but there was a balance! the sun and the wind and the rain could never talk to the one as they did to the other; the voices of the night never spoke to Miss Hurlford as they did to Phemie. Never since she was a child had Georgina looked at anything with the same guileless eyes as those with which Mrs. Stondon stood gazing through the calm twilight of a summer's evening at the woods and the fields, on the last night when she and perfect truth and unsullied purity walked through life together.

For ever—for ever, the Phemie we have travelled with so far in poverty and riches departed, and another Phemie came and stood in her place.

It was as though the calm, self-possessed, unimpressionable nature set with the sun; as though the night, the cool, calm night, took her in its soothing embrace, took her away and hid her, and gave back with the dawning day—not the same, ah! no, but another—a passionate, sorrowful, despairing woman, who knew why the hours had sped by, why time had seemed to fly instead of to travel at ordinary speed; why a glory had all at once come over her life; why she had appeared to be always living in the sunshine; she knew all this, I say, and knew at the same moment that the sun had set, that the glory was departed—the illusion dispelled—the happiness passed to return no more—no more.

Knowledge came to her thus—came in the twilight as she stood under the verandah, watching the night steal on.

She had never felt so happy before, I think; and as she leaned against one of the pillars of the verandah, and drank in the thousand perfumes that arose from the garden beneath, she

gave herself up to the full enjoyment of the moment, to that sensuous enjoyment which is produced on the minds of some by the scent of flowers, by the fading light, by the trees standing dark and silent in the distance, by the balminess of the air, by the lights and shadows on a landscape.

The roses were blooming beside her; the honeysuckle was lying against her cheek; the night air fanned her forehead. They had no company that evening save General and Mr. Hurlford, and Miss Derno. Dear Georgina had not been able to accompany her papa: so at that present moment Captain Stondon was doing the agreeable to General Sir Samuel and Mr. Hurlford; being assisted in his laudable efforts by Mr. Basil Stondon.

Miss Derno, who had been staying for a few days at Marshlands, was, to the best of Mrs. Stondon's belief, writing a letter in her dressing-room, and Phemie had consequently the twilight and her reverie to herself.

It was getting dark—darker, but still Phemie stood leaning against the pillar, with her dress concealed by the trailing creepers that covered the low light trellis-work dividing the balcony from the terrace, thinking dreamily and happily, until it suddenly occurred to her that under the distant elm-trees she could see something moving.

If we fancy anything of this kind we watch, and Phemie therefore only did what her neighbours would have done under the circumstances—she strained her eyes to see if she were right in her conjecture.

She was not frightened, she was hardly curious; she thought it might be some of the servants; and though the servants had no business to be making love under the elm-trees, still Phemie was not likely to speak harshly about their having done so.

"It must be two of the servants." Phemie said this to herself over and over, as the shadows changed to figures, and came slowly on.

"It must be the servants," and her heart began to beat quicker.

"It must be the servants," she repeated, and she could have struck herself for refusing to believe her own words. She knew well enough who it was. She knew even in that dim light the sweep of Miss Derno's dress, the gracefulness of her walk, the lithe beauty of her figure. She knew—she would have known it among a thousand—the pleading softness of Basil's voice, the whispered music of the tones that came to her through the stillness.

She plucked a rose from its stem, and pulled the flower to pieces in her nervous irritability. She dropped the leaves from the naked stem, and the thorns pricked her soft dainty fingers.

They came nearer—nearer still, and then they paused for a moment, and spoke earnestly and eagerly together. After that they turned on to the grass, and walked across the turf closer and closer to where she stood, till Phemie could

almost hear their words rising to her in the stillness.

Then they paused again, and one sentence reached Phemie.

"I could never doubt you, never misinterpret you: if all the rest of the world proved false, I should still believe you true till the end."

It was Basil who spoke—who, stooping over Miss Derno's outstretched hand, kissed it ere they parted.

He walked down towards the fir plantation where he smoked a solitary cigar: she went round to the conservatory, and re-entered the house that way.

It was all past, and that was all, and yet Phemie, kneeling in her own room—kneeling with her face buried in her hands, wept such tears that night as had never fallen from her eyes before. Passionate tears, jealous tears, tears of shame, of anguish, of despair.

She knew all about it now—knew that the foe she had mocked at was her conqueror—knew

there was such a thing as love in the world, and that she loved—knew she had been walking along the road leading to destruction—knew that she was fonder of this man than she had ever grown to be of the husband who had raised her to what she was.

To what she was! Alas! was it for this he had taken her from the sinless quiet of her former life? for this he had given wealth and rank and position? Had she passed from the peace of that tranquil valley, so far away in point of distance, so much further away in memory and feeling, to be sobbing her heart out all alone in the dark?

She had wept once looking down the valley of Tordale, but not like this; she had shed tears before, but not like these; she had looked out on life then—on an ideal, an untried life; she was facing its realities now; the wells of her heart were open at last, the secret chambers were unlocked after all, and with an exceeding bitter cry Phemie woke to a full knowledge of what

nature had dimly foreshadowed to her before marriage.

She had never loved her husband—never. She loved this other man who could never be anything to her—never. Among the hills she had owned one life—among the hills she had pledged that life away. She could not go back to the hills now, and begin existence in the new. She had sinned; she had sinned in marrying; she had sinned in loving; she could never be happy, but she could be true; she could, though her sorrow killed her; she could, though her tears fell ceaslessly; she could and she would. Poor child! poor wife! poor Phemie!

CHAPTER VI.

FROM LESS TO MORE.

For two days Mrs. Stondon kept her room. She said she had a headache, that she had caught cold, that she was too ill to see any one excepting her husband, and yet she would not allow Captain Stondon to send for a doctor. She was afraid a doctor might guess her malady to be more mental than physical, and so she refused to do anything except lie on a sofa in her dressing-room, while her maid bathed her forehead with eau-de-cologne and water, and brought her up morning and night a cup of tea.

On the evening of the second day Phemie went down-stairs, lest her husband's anxiety, her husband's tenderness, should kill her.

She had thought over the matter during those two days till she was almost mad. She had loved a man not her husband—a man who loved another woman. She had loved unsought, unwooed. She had planted without hope of gathering. She had loved unasked, but, thank God, unknown.

Well, she could bury her own dead without the help of man; she could destroy this curse which had come to her in the guise of a blessing; she could hate Basil as she hated herself; she could leave him and Miss Derno to settle their love affairs to their own liking. She could keep her secret, her shameful, disgraceful secret, to herself, and mortal should not wring it from her. It was known but to herself and her God, and He would have pity.

Thinking all these good thoughts, having formed all these good resolutions, Phemie left her room and rejoined the family circle, and answered all inquiries about her health with a

disagreeable politeness which she had laid down for the rule of her future life.

Ill enough she looked to have satisfied any doubt that might have been entertained about her sudden indisposition. She was pale, she was weak, she was weary; she spoke as though it was a trouble to her to talk, and though both Miss Derno and Basil Stondon saw she was trying her best to keep up before her husband, they took private occasion of advising him to send for a doctor whether she liked it or not.

"You seemed so well at dinner on Tuesday night," said Miss Derno.

"But we had a long walk over Wildmoor, you remember," remarked Basil, "and Mrs. Stondon complained then of being tired. Do you not recollect her sitting down to rest as we came back?"

Miss Derno did remember perfectly, and she remembered something else which she had scarcely noticed at the time, namely, how concerned Basil seemed about Mrs. Stondon's weariness.

The coming of light is often felt before its actual advent. Miss Derno had not arrived at putting two and two together yet, but she had begun to perceive that somehow there was a two and two, and Basil's anxiety about Mrs. Stondon's indisposition set her wondering. It was not ordinary anxiety, it was not ordinary interest. To have heard Captain Stondon, any one might have thought his wife sick to death with some mortal malady, but to see Mr. Basil was more astonishing still.

Nothing would serve him but to mount his horse and ride off for a doctor. He would trust no messenger, he would listen to no remonstrances. After he once saw Phemie's face, he never rested till he got leave from Captain Stondon to fetch medical advice, and through the twilight he galloped away to seek it.

"How very much Basil takes your illness to heart!" remarked Miss Derno as he left the room; and Phemie, from among the sofa pillows answered, "He is very kind."

Very kind! he was indeed too kind; and Phemie, noticing it, felt that her own love might not be the only battle she should have to fight—felt dimly that she had not loved without return, that heart had answered but to heart, and spirit to spirit.

Poor Phemie!—poor soul!—what could a doctor do for her? He could order her back to her own room, and send her draughts, and prescribe quietness and arrowroot; no fatigue, and beef tea; no excitement, and after a few days a couple of glasses of Madeira; but the fever that was on Phemie he could not conquer; the heat and the cold, the alterations and the changes, he could neither see nor control.

She knew when he said she was better that he was mistaken. She felt that from day to day the struggle must continue—the fight go on. She confessed to her own heart, when she came down stairs for good, and began to walk and drive and ride once more, that the old disease was still

unsubdued, that she was no stronger than ever she had been, but weaker by far.

Day by day the battle grew worse; the more she absented herself from Basil the more eagerly he welcomed her when she did come. Though she did not now like Miss Derno, still she entreated her to stay rather than go back to the old life—the sweet life that had been so full of pleasure and of peril. She asked Miss Hurlford, Mrs. Hurlford; she filled the house with company; she seemed never happy save in a crowd; she grew restless, impatient, irritable; she answered Basil shortly, and, as Miss Derno thought, sometimes not over civilly.

"I have it!" exclaimed that clever lady to herself one day; "Basil has been simpleton enough to fall in love with Mrs. Stondon's bright eyes, and she thinks it necessary to assume the grand matron with him. Heaven help the woman! If she knew as much of him as I do, she would not attach much importance to it."

Which only shows how greatly deceived even

the wisest women may be. Could Basil have married Phemie, he might not have cared for her; had she been eligible, he might have found his love damped by considerations of ways and means—of the butcher, baker, and grocer; but as it was—as Phemie was perfectly unattainable—Basil lost his senses about her. God help any woman who being loved by such an one loves him back! There are times in a woman's life when it is better to fall into the hands of the wicked rather than of the foolish. I think Phemie would have known what to do with a villain, but she did not know what to do with Basil, who was not sinner enough to think of bringing misery to her, who was not man enough to leave her, who had not sense enough to see what the end might be, but who, torturing himself by Phemie's change of manner, by Phemie's pale face and fretful answers, stayed on, tormenting her with his presence, with anxious inquiries about her health, about her spirits, about her varying moods.

"I am ill," she said one day, when he had per-

sistently followed her about till she could keep her temper no longer. "I am ill—cannot you see that for yourself? I want to be alone—I want rest—I want quietness——"

"And yet you fill your house with visitors. That is a strange way of compassing the desired end," he answered.

"If Captain Stondon be satisfied, I suppose it cannot signify to you what I do," she retorted.

"Anything signifies to me that affects your health or happiness," he replied, a little tenderly.

"I am surely the best judge of what does affect my health and happiness," answered Phemie.

"You say you want rest," he began.

"So I do," she interrupted; "rest from being asked perpetually how I am."

"You say you are ill, as any one, indeed, may see for himself. Why do you not have some advice?"

"I have had advice, but found it did me no good."

"Why not go to town with Captain Stondon,

and consult some first-rate physician? We are thinking of running up to London for a few days next week."

"I know you are," answered Phemie.

"Well, will you consider the matter, and come with us?"

She stood silent for a minute or two, and then answered,

"Any physician who knew exactly what was the matter with me would order rest and change. I may think about that while you are away, but I will not go to London."

"Perhaps, however," urged Basil, "you do not know what is the matter with you?"

"Perhaps not," answered Phemie, shortly; "but I believe I do."

This was the way he followed her about; before strangers he kept at a distance; even when Miss Derno chanced to be present he had learned to be prudent; but for all that he pursued Phemie like her shadow; he was always pleading and praying that she would take care of her health;

he was always telling her how, for his sake, for Captain Stondon's sake, for the sake of all her friends, she should give up so much company, and live quietly, and keep early hours, "as we used to do," finished Basil, who longed with a terrible longing for the days to come back again —that could never come back more.

"We cannot live to-day as we lived yesterday," was Phemie's answer. "What was pleasant in the past might kill one in the present."

"Would that quiet home-life which we enjoyed so thoroughly until just lately kill you if it could come again?" he asked.

"It would," replied Mrs. Stondon. "I could not bear it now. It was all very well while it lasted, but I could not go back to it for all that."

And then knowing that leaving those days against the monotony of which she was inveighing, had been to her like leaving heaven for earth, Phemie went off to her own room and cried— cried till her head was aching and her heart weary.

"If he would but leave me alone," she thought.

But when he did leave her alone, as he sometimes did—for Basil occasionally grew angry at her answers and left her in a rage—matters were no better.

Phemie would watch him talking to other women, smiling his smiles for them, speaking his tenderest, looking his handsomest, until she grew sick with jealousy, until she went almost mad to think how she must always keep him at a distance—how it ought to be her greatest happiness to see him angry with her, indifferent to her, fond of some one else.

She could not help speculating as to whether he cared for her. The one battle of her own love she might have fought, but the many battles of her own love and his doubtful love, of his tender care, of her own overpowering jealousy, of her own despairing remorse, made Phemie little better than a rudderless boat on a turbulent sea.

"O'er billows of temptation" the poor child tossed day by day in safety; but she felt the

struggle was an unequal one; that the day must come when Basil would know her coldness, her indifference was all put on—unless he went away, or she went away—unless they were separated altogether.

While he and Captain Stondon were in London, she had nothing to contend against save her own sad loneliness and her constant desire to hear his voice, to see his face, to feel his presence in the house.

It was so easy to be good away from him that Phemie took her resolution.

She would leave Marshlands; she would flee to the mountains, and stay there till she grew strong again, till she had conquered herself, till he, perhaps, had got something to do, or decided on marrying Miss Derno. She would leave—and Mrs. Stondon straightway ventured on the first decided step she had ever taken in her life; and, without consulting Captain Stondon on the subject, started for Carlisle, accompanied by her maid and a man servant, in

whose care she sent back Miss Jennings to Marshlands.

At Carlisle her uncle met her; and after years —after long years of travel and success and happiness—Phemie returned to the dear old valley, to the sweet beauty of the familiar landscape, a delicate, unhappy woman.

"Why did your husband not accompany you?" asked Mr. Aggland, who was uneasy lest something had happened.

"I thought I told you in my letter," she answered, listlessly. "He was in London and I at Marshlands. The notion took hold of me that I should like to sleep in my old bed, to look at the waterfall, to walk over the heather once again; and when the fit came on I could not rest, I could not wait. I felt I must get away from those trees, from those fields, from those trim gardens, or die. And I am so ill, uncle, I am so ill."

"Ought you not to have gone to London for advice?" said Mr. Aggland.

"No, I ought to have come here," she an-

swered; "I want the mountain air and the mountain scenery and rest and quiet—rest and quiet." And she closed her eyes as she spoke, and leaned back in the carriage which her uncle had provided.

Mr. Aggland looked at her; he did not understand the cause of this sudden freak, and he was just the man to dislike whatever he could not understand.

"Phemie," he said, "I suppose I need not ask you whether there is anything amiss at home? Captain Stondon would not, I am certain, be unkind——"

"Unkind!" she burst out, "unkind! He is far too good and kind. You do not know, I never could tell you, how good he is, how tender, how devoted. It is not that, uncle; it is only that I am ill; bear with me as he has done. Let me be at peace for a while, let me go as I like, come as I like, and if I am cross and irritable and out of spirits, think I shall be different soon." And she put out her hand and

stroked his face with an imploring gentleness which made Mr. Aggland feel sorrowful.

This was not the Phemie of the Hill Farm—this was not the Phemie of Marshlands—this was a beseeching, dependent, exhausted Phemie, who might, for aught he could tell to the contrary, have come home from the midst of all her wealth and luxury to the old place to die.

He thought of her mother, he thought of those terrible illnesses abroad, when she had fought for her life, fought so hard to keep it! What if this passion for the hills and the mountains was but a morbid sickness to see earth's best-remembered places ere passing away from earth for ever?

He took the poor hand—now so thin—and felt her pulse. He prided himself on being half a doctor, and said,

"Irritable and weak; you will require wine, Phemie; I must send down and ask Mr. Conbyr to let me have some old port out of his cellar." But Phemie answered—

"I want no wine except the wine of the mountain air—the bouquet of the wild thyme and the heather. Have not I come, uncle," she said, "from a place where everything money can buy has been able to do nothing for me? It is not eating or drinking that can make me well, but the sight of the dear old hills—of the sky as we see it reflected in Strammer Tarn (I have never seen such a sky since)—of Scotland from the top of Skillanscar—if I ever get strong enough to climb it or Helbeck. I have grown weary of the Lowlands," she added, with a sigh, "and I have come to the Highlands for you to make me well." And the soft hand stroked his cheek once more, and Mr. Aggland could have wept because of her words and manner.

"She must be going as her mother went," he thought; "I will send Johnny over for Mr. Fagg in the morning. He may not be very first-rate, but he will be able to tell me that."

Now "that," in Mr. Aggland's vocabulary, meant, were Phemie's lungs sound—was she in

a consumption? And he sat pondering on what could be the matter with her, if it were not consumption, while his niece lay back in the carriage, watching for the old familiar faces of the hills—watching, with her uncle's hand clasped tight in hers, with a terrible sorrow tearing at her heart, with a sickening remorse oppressing her conscience.

"There they are! there are the dear old mountains!" she exclaimed at last; and then she burst into a passion of tears, which frightened her uncle, who could not understand what was the matter with her.

"You will make yourself worse, Phemie," he remonstrated; but it was all the same to Phemie.

Whether tears made her worse or better, she could not help remembering what she had been when she left those hills—what she was now.

"If he but knew," thought Phemie, "it would break his heart too!" And I fancy Phemie was right, and that had Mr. Aggland suspected what

was really the matter with his niece, he would sooner have seen her in her grave than coming back burdened with such a secret to the place where she had dwelt in innocence and purity for so long.

And yet never a sweeter, gentler creature trod those lonely hills, those mountain fastnesses, than Phemie Stondon, who revisted each well-remembered haunt—each tarn and stream, and crag, sorrowing.

With her long dress trailing among the heather, she walked slowly over the moors day after day, thinking thoughts such as had never passed through her mind before. She would sit beside the trickling waterfall, where the ferns and the grass bent down the stream just as they used to do, and with her hand leaning upon some mossy stone, would weep tears that, had she shed them before marriage instead of after, might have made her life more useful and more happy.

She had a kind word and a sweet smile for

every one; she was vain and fanciful no more; she was subdued, and quiet and humble to such a degree, that the farmers and the farmers' wives looked after her in amazement, and marvelled among themselves whether that could be the Phemie Keller, the saucy, flighty, conceited Phemie who had gone away to be made a grand lady of all at once.

"She does not think as much of her silks and satins now as she used to do of her old muslin gowns," said one.

"And is she not homely like and kind?" added another.

"She took the baby in her arms the other day," remarked a farmer's wife, "and the tears came into her eyes when she told me she had never a living one of her own."

"And oh! my bairn, my bairn!" mourned Peggy McNab, "what hae ye dune wi' the heartsome life that was in ye? and whaur hae ye gotten that mournfu' luik that it gars me greet till see? Yer mither had the

same when she came back hame amang us; but——"

"But I have no reason for looking like what she did, is that what you mean, Peggy?" asked Mrs. Stondon. "Perhaps it is only because I am ill that I am mournful, as you call it."

"But ye're no *that* ill," remarked Peggy.

"I may feel as ill," answered Phemie, who was only too glad in those days to make her health appear as bad as possible. She laid all sins, all shortcomings, to sickness; and she was ill enough to make Mr. Aggland seriously uneasy, to urge him to grave discourse with Mr. Fagg—now a married man and the father of three children.

"I cannot tell what is the matter with her," said that gentleman, frankly, "unless it be, as she declares—exhaustion. "You see," went on Mr. Fagg, "Mrs. Stondon is one of those women who keep up for a long time and then drop all at once. She would scarcely feel she was overtaxing her strength till the stock was completely

gone. You must have known yourself many a man who never felt fatigue while walking, and yet who gave way in a moment when the distance was accomplished. His spirit kept him up, and then, when the motive for exertion was over, the reaction came on. Now that is what it seems to me is the matter with Mrs. Stondon—reaction, and perhaps her longing for the hills. Her passion for this solitude is probably nothing more nor less than nature's voice telling us what will cure her. One thing I know," finished Mr. Fagg, 'that I can do nothing for her, and I do not believe any man in England could."

Mr. Fagg was right; the fever that was on Phemie was beyond the power of man to cure, and it was beyond the power of nature either. Beside the waterfall among the heather, pacing the valley with Davie—now old and sedate—following the mistress he loved so well, Phemie came to understand all she had pledged away in the church among the mountains.

She knew now why she had wept that night

when the wind blew and the rain beat against the windows, when, through the wind and the rain, Captain Stondon came up from the vicarage to hear her decision.

She had forgotten that night until lately—forgotten her tears, her doubts, her hesitation; but, as at the day of judgment the scroll of our lives will be unfolded before us, so even in this world there are times when part of the history is remembered by us, when the thoughts and the resolutions of the long ago, appear before us like unwelcome ghosts.

Her life had been her own then, but it was too late now—too late—too late!

And among the broom and the ferns, and the thyme and the heather, Phemie would take out her husband's letters—the long loving letters he sent her each day from London, and read them till she forgot her own misery in thinking of the misery knowledge of her fault would bring to him.

Could there have been anything worse for such

a woman than solitude? when she never knew peace day or night for thinking of Basil, and for reproaching herself for thinking of him.

She was sitting one afternoon by Strammer Tarn, on the very spot where she had been wont to twine wreaths and garlands for her hair in the old days departed—sitting looking at the dark waters, at the frowning rocks, at the expanse of moor and mountain.

It was the glory of the summer time, it was the noon of the year, and she had walked slowly over from the Hill Farm, drinking in the full beauty of the season, the perfection of the scenery, with a strange sad thirst. There was not a thing during the progress of that walk she overlooked—the moss growing upon the stones, the heather budding into flower, the wild thyme blooming upon sunny spots, the trailing brambles, the chirp of the grasshopper, the humming of the bees, the great grey boulders lying on the grass, the springing of the turf beneath her feet, the little pools of water in which Davie slaked

his thirst, the very insects that winged their way past her—all these things Phemie noticed and remembered afterwards.

She remembered when she sat by Strammer Tarn—how Davie lay stretched at her feet—how with her face resting on her hand she had been looking for ever and ever so long into the dark deep waters, when suddenly Davie sprang up, and with all his short bristly hair standing on end, growled at one who came brushing his way through the heather towards her.

It was Basil! She had barely time to rise from her seat, and with breath coming quick and short, and colour deepening and fading, make sure it was he, ere he was beside her—ere he held her hands in his—ere he was pouring out almost unintelligible words of joy.

Why had she run away and left him to come home to a desert? Did she think he could exist away from her? Did she think he knew peace, or rest, or comfort where she was not? Ah, Heaven! did he not see in the woman's face

all she thought, all she had suffered? Had he not noticed the red and the white, the blush and the pallor? All alone there, could he not tell her the tale of his love at last—tell her, sure that his love was returned—that she had fled less from him than from herself?

He had not come there to tell her his story, he had only come craving to see her—to speak to her—to be near her once again. But—well—well—love, holy or unholy, finds a vent for itself sometime: and it was among the lonely mountains, under the summer sky, that Basil yielded to the temptation and spoke of his.

And Phemie. Ah! reader, be pitiful, be merciful, if you have ever known what it is to have the man you love best on earth tell you that you are all the world to him—be lenient to this poor sinner whose dream-hero had come to her beside the tarn—too late—too late!

She could not help it: she had never felt before what it is to love—to be beloved: her

heart gave a great leap of triumph, and then it stood still with agony.

She went mad with happiness, and then the misery of her position made her sane.

She tore herself out of his arms and fell to the ground and wept; she lay with her face buried in the turf, sobbing till her heart was fit to break. In the stillness of that mountain solitude, the voice of lamentation seemed to rise through the air and float away and away, while the bee hummed, and the rocks frowned, and the flowers sprang, unmindful of passion, unsympathetic with woe.

Her beauty, her accomplishments, her wealth—everything of which she had been proud, of which she had been ambitious—had brought her to this.

Then she rose up and bade him go: with his kisses on her lips, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, she reminded him of her position and of his.

She told him how, so long as the sun rose and

set, she could never be anything to him; she told him she honoured her husband beyond all men on earth, and that sooner than hurt him or disgrace him, she would die a hundred times over.

She felt strong now, stronger than she had ever been; she spoke of all her husband had done for her—of how he had taken her from poverty and given her wealth—of how he had fulfilled his part of the compact—of how he had loved and trusted her always.

"And he has been kind and good to you, and this is how you repay him!" she went on. "God give me strength to despise you as I ought."

He stood silent till she had done—till, having panted out her last reproach, she ceased to speak—then he said,

"Oh! if *I* had but met you then—if *I* had come here instead of him——"

"You would have left me here," she retorted.

"I would not! I could never have seen you and not loved you."

At which Phemie laughed scornfully.

"You see me a lady now," she said; "but I was only a poor country girl then. You would have been much too fine a gentleman to have looked at such as I was, or if you had looked, it would not have been with honest eyes like his. I did not know the world in those days, but I have seen enough of it since; and what I have seen has taught me that there is not one man in ten thousand—not one man in a million—who would have married me as he did."

"I would," said Basil.

"You would not," answered Phemie, and she turned away; but Basil stopped her.

"Phemie," he began—it was the first time he had called her by her name, and it sounded strangely sweet in her ears—"Phemie, can we never be anything to one another? I will wait years—I will wait till my hair is grey—only say you love me."

"Basil Stondon," said Phemie, facing round, "I know what you mean—I know what you would

say; but put that out of your mind once and for ever. I will never step across a grave to happiness. I have made my bed, I will lie in it. If I am ever a widow, if I should have the misfortune to outlive my husband, I will outlive him single. When I pledged my troth to him among these hills, I did so for better or worse—the worse has come to me, but that cannot alter our position. We can never be anything to one another—for I chose my life before I ever saw you. Never."

Never! He was a poorer creature even than Phemie thought him, for as he walked up and down Tordale valley that night, recalling to his memory her every word, her every gesture, he vowed to himself that she should be something to him—that he would be something to her.

He was in for the race and he must strive for the winning-post. He had loved this woman, and he could love no other woman in the future like Phemie, his kinsman's wife.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DOWNWARD ROAD.

BASIL STONDON had come to fetch Phemie home. Before he knew of her departure for Cumberland, Captain Stondon had invited some of the friends of his bachelor days to stay at Marshlands, and he accordingly wrote to his wife, begging her, if she felt at all well enough, to return to Norfolk.

"And later on in the season," continued Captain Stondon, "if you, dearest, wish it, we can take a house for a month or so beside Derwentwater or Windermere, which surely would be pleasanter for you than the Hill Farm."

To this Phemie had agreed, so far as returning home was concerned. She only begged her

husband to allow her to remain as long as possible. "If you let me hear from you one day, when your friends are certainly coming, I shall be ready to start the next," were her words; and when Captain Stondon read them out to Basil with the comment that he thought she ought to return at once, the young man proposed going to Cumberland to fetch her.

"I have never seen the lakes," said Mr. Basil, and I should like to take a look at them."

"Very well," agreed Captain Stondon, "only do not fall down the side of a mountain as I did."

"It proved a very lucky fall for you though, I believe, sir," remarked Basil. To which Captain Stondon answered that it had, little dreaming what was passing in his companion's mind at the moment.

Thus it came about that Basil Stondon found his way to Cumberland and to the Hill Farm, from which place Mrs. Aggland showed him the path to take to reach Strammer Tarn.

Mrs. Aggland had grown fat and unwieldy in her later life, and offered no temptations for a *tête-à-tête*.

"One of the children can run with you to show you the way," she volunteered; but Basil declined her politeness.

"He could find Strammer Tarn, no doubt, thanks to her explicit directions; and if he did not find it he would turn back when he thought he had walked far enough."

All of which he said with such courtesy and politeness that Mrs. Aggland was quite taken with him, and greeted her husband on his return with a glowing account of the "nice young gentleman" who had come to take Phemie home.

"So pleasant-mannered and genteel," she said, "and as handsome as a picture, too; but what are we to do with him here, Daniel? He'll never put up with our house."

"Then he must go to Grassenfel," was Mr. Aggland's reply. And he went out to the top of the hill to watch for their coming.

"I can offer you but poor hospitality, Mr. Stondon," he said. "If you think you can sleep in so humble a dwelling I shall be only too proud to do my best to make you comfortable; but at the same time I must tell you we are very plain people, and that I am sure Mr. Conbyr would give you a hearty welcome at the vicarage."

"Thank you," answered Basil, simply, "I had much rather remain at the Hill Farm. I have heard of it so constantly that it seems like the realization of a dream to sleep beneath its roof."

For which speech Phemie hated him. According to her ideas he ought to have left her then and there—left her for ever. After her explicit answer, was not all over between them? Could not he take his "No," and go, and leave her to return to Marshlands under her uncle's escort?

"You can make a tour of the lakes, and stay away until you have decided on your future plans," was Phemie's suggestion; to which Basil listened in silence, without the remotest intention of following her advice.

No programme, indeed, was ever more altered than that sketched out by Phemie for his guidance. Had there been no lakes in England—no Skiddaw to climb, no Stockghyll Force to see, no Langbourne to visit, Basil could not have stayed on more contentedly at the Hill Farm.

What Captain Stondon had done before him Basil did now. He walked over the hills, he sate by the tarns, he drank of the waterfall, and wished that he might keep Phemie's heart till his own was cold. He visited Mr. Conbyr and talked with him of the outer world; he sate in the same pew in church where Captain Stondon had sate beside the ill-dressed girl who was now as stately-looking as any princess in the land. He leaned over the wall of the graveyard, and looked at the rivulet wandering away and away. He lay on the grass where the mountain stream came tumbling over the rocks and dropped into the basin beneath; he looked at the ivy and the lichens, the foxgloves and the broom, the grass and the ferns, the mossy stones and the trees

that waved their branches over him. He stood in the garden at the Hill Farm and gazed down the valley—the sweet valley of Tordale; he went about with Mr. Aggland and won golden opinions from all men—particularly from all women.

He was so frank, so pleasant, so kind, and so handsome, that he won upon the inhabitants of that remote spot, as he had won upon the inhabitants of very different places.

"An amazingly fine young fellow," remarked Mr. Aggland to his niece, when he saw that Basil really did not care about his inner man, that luxuries were indifferent to him, and that he made himself as much at home in the parlour of the Hill Farm as he might in Captain Stondon's drawing-room. "An amazingly fine young fellow. I wonder, Phemie, that you have never taken to him kindly."

To which speech Phemie answered—

"One never does like the next heir cordially, does one, uncle?"

"Shame, shame!" exclaimed Mr. Aggland;

"I never thought, Phemie, to hear you make a speech like that. When you have enjoyed fully yourself, you ought not to grudge another the chance of enjoying fully in his turn likewise."

"Still one never does like an heir, unless he be of one's own blood," persisted Phemie, who never missed an opportunity of throwing dust in her uncle's eyes.

"Can she be grieving because she has no children?" wondered Mr. Aggland. "Does she dislike this young man because he occupies the place that might have been more happily filled by one of her own sons? I should like greatly to know now," thought her uncle, "if it be envy and hatred and all uncharitableness that is the matter with poor Phemie after all. 'As rust corrupts iron, so envy corrupts man,' says Antisthenes. Solomon declares it is the 'rottenness of the bones,' and Cowley calls envy 'of all hell's throngs the direfullest.' According to Socrates it is a poison which drieth up the marrow of the bones and consumeth the flesh.

Daughter of pride, he calls envy. Now Phemie was always proud,—a little, I mean," modified Mr. Aggland, "and she has never been the same —at least judging by her letters—since this young man came to the house. I remember her expressing strong dislike to him before we went to Cromer. It may be that she is jealous." And for years afterwards Mr. Aggland believed that Phemie cordially hated Basil Stondon—that she hated him because he stood where her children might have stood, and that she was pining and fretting because she had no living sons—no prospect of having sons who might oust the intruder out. Of which idea Phemie herself, I am sorry to say, took no pains to disabuse his mind, but rather encouraged his notion, and led him to believe she was very sorry Basil must inherit after her husband, when the real truth was, that if Phemie had been able to shower gold and property on him, she would have done it.

"You should not dislike him, Phemie," Mr.

Aggland said one day; "it is not right. Though you are my own niece, and he a stranger, I cannot say that I think you treat him properly at all."

"Now pray, pray, uncle," entreated Phemie, "leave that Basil Stondon question alone; you cannot tell in the least what you might do if you were in my place."

"I know what I should do if I were in his," retorted Mr. Aggland; "I should not endure your manner, Phemie. I declare I hear you speaking to him sometimes as I should not speak to the poorest labourer I employ."

"Well, you can address your labourers in whatever form of language you think best, uncle," she said, a little flippantly; "but I mean to talk to Basil as I choose."

"Phemie!" was Mr. Aggland's only remonstrance.

"I am not a child any longer," she burst out, passionately; "I will say what I like, as I like it. If people think I am wrong, they may think

it; but they shall not tell me. I know what my own sorrows are; but I will not let anybody intermeddle with them. I know my own business, but I will not have anybody interfere with it; not even you, uncle," she added, "not even you."

"I cannot imagine what has come to you, Phemie," he said. "I think you must be mad; one day you are as docile as a lamb, and the next you are rabid."

"There is a pleasure sure in being mad," she answered; but when he turned away, pained and wearied, she followed him into the garden, and hanging on his arm, said coaxingly,—

"Forgive me, uncle; the things I would not say, I speak; the things I would speak, never, somehow, pass my lips. Does not some wise man say that clocks will go as they are set; but that we will not? That is the way with me, I want winding up. I want new works. I want sending to the jeweller and seeing to. It is not my fault, uncle; it is my misfortune."

"Phemie, dear, you are ill; you ought to have first-rate advice; you must go abroad."

"I never want to see 'abroad' again," she answered; "I should like to stay in the hills with you always. I should like to go to Scotland and see the coast I loved when I was a better girl than I have ever been since."

And Phemie dropped her uncle's arm as she spoke, and sate down on the grass, saying she was tired.

I should think she was tired! The conversation that ought, in her opinion, to have ended the subject of love between her and Basil, proved only to have been the commencement of her troubles. He would not leave her alone; he could not let her be; she had fled from Marshlands to be rid of him; she must return to Marshlands to see if she could escape from him there.

She felt like a hunted creature; she felt every day that her strength was decreasing—that his power over her was increasing. His words sounded sweet in her ears; she grew weary of

struggling; she learned to listen to his poor sophistry and believe it.

He was taking nothing from Captain Stondon that had ever belonged to him; he only wanted Phemie's love—only a kind look, a pleasant word. There was no sin in speaking civilly to him, surely; there could be nothing wrong in talking quietly and gently as she used to do. If he had said anything to offend her he was sorry; if she had not run away from Marshlands and left him desolate he would never have told her how he loved her—never. He would have borne any pain rather than wound her—she ought not to be so unkind when his very heart was breaking for her sake.

And at that, somehow, the words of that old, old song she had sung when she was still free, came into Phemie's mind.

Oh! if she could only go back—only be a girl again—what happiness might not be hers!

Alas! the happiness might be, but the misery was.

Who can travel a dangerous road and keep clear of the pitfalls? Who can begin descending and not slip? Who can touch pitch and not be defiled? Who can handle sin without becoming less virtuous? Who can drink of the wine cup and keep his head perfectly clear?

Phemie could not at any rate. She was quaffing in a draught that was stealing through her veins like poison. She had her times of repentance—her seasons of despairing remorse—her hours when the sound of Basil's voice was hateful to her—when she detested her own weakness in listening to him; but after all, what did this signify—what good did this effect?

When purity is sullied, who may make it otherwise than soiled?

> "The fleece that has been by the dyer stained,
> Never again its native whiteness gained;"

and the man whose hands are guilty may not wash them in innocency.

I have no excuse to offer for Phemie, save that the heat and burden of the day was too much for

her; that she had not strength enough to extricate herself from the net; that she had no one to help her; that she was not called upon to resist absolute sin, such as the world frowns on. He did not ask her to leave her husband; he never again spoke of a future in which she might be his wife. He only prayed for love that it was no wrong for her to give him, because she had never given it to any one else.

"It belongs to me, Phemie," he said; "though you are another man's wife; though you may never be my wife, yet I own the love of your heart; and whether you try to keep that love from me or not, you cannot prevent my having it."

He was right: Phemie could not prevent his having all the love of which her nature was capable. She could not help the tears with which she watered her pillow; she could not help her thoughts, her regrets, her misery.

"I will go back to Marshlands," she said, "and get rid of you; it will be impossible for you to say these things to me under the same

roof with him." And Phemie turned her from the mountains and the valley, and, weary and wretched, travelled home.

How shall I tell of the time that followed?—of the torture that woman passed through—of the frantic projects she formed—of the resolutions she took—of the plans she devised?

She would go away, where neither Basil nor Captain Stondon could find her. She would tell her husband—and she would have told him, too, but that she dared not even think of the anguish her fault would cause him. She would try to get rid of Basil; but Captain Stondon did not want Basil to leave Marshlands. She would never be alone with him. How was it possible for her always to have some one at her elbow?

And besides, it was so hard—so hard! He loved her so much; better than Captain Stondon had ever done! Better? Down on your knees, Phemie, and pray God to deliver you from such love that would drag you down to hell. Better? There is a love which can love a woman better

than itself; but of such a love Basil Stondon knew nothing.

It was not in his nature to be thoughtful for others, unselfish towards himself. He did not care about its being the road to perdition along which he was leading Phemie, because he chanced to fancy travelling it himself.

He had no mercy, because he was weak; he had no pity, because he was foolish; he had no forbearance, because he had no principle: so he tortured the woman he professed to love; he put her on a mental rack, and tormented her every hour in the day.

"I cannot leave you, for I love you," he said once.

"You will not leave me, because you love yourself," she answered. And yet still his love, whatever it might be, was sweet to her. She was making a journey from which few ever return in safety; she was trying an experiment from which no heart ever came forth pure.

She was endeavouring to love two men; she

was striving to serve two masters: and still she was slipping—slipping towards the precipice over which no one who fell ever came back.

She loved her husband no less than ever; nay, rather, she loved him more. She was so repentant, so wretched, so angry with herself, so sorry for him, that there came into her manner a tenderness—a thoughtfulness which it had always lacked before; and many and many a time Captain Stondon would follow her with his eyes, and wonder, with the wonder of old increased and magnified, if any man was ever so fortunate as he—so blessed in home and wife and friends.

"If my darling's health were only better," he said one day to Miss Derno, "I should not have a care or anxiety in life; but she looks so ill, and her spirits are so wretched, that I cannot help feeling anxious about her."

"I am afraid she is not strong," answered the lady, who was a great favourite with her host. "Let us talk about her," she suddenly added: "come down to the lake, and I will tell you my

opinion of your wife. She wants rest; she is wearing herself out: all these people may be very pleasant, but she ought not to be among them. You should take her abroad, or winter in the south of England, and send Basil away. He is strong himself, and he thinks fresh air and exercise is all she requires; and so she goes out walking and riding and driving, when she had a great deal better be lying quietly on the sofa. Get Basil an appointment. In Mrs. Stondon's state of health she ought to have no strangers near her: and besides, Basil will not take kindly to work after all this idleness. He was lazy enough when he came here; what he will be after this long holiday I am afraid to think."

"But Basil is the next heir, Miss Derno," answered Captain Stondon; "I do not see why he should work. I will speak to him about dragging Phemie out. She need not stand on ceremony with him as though he were a stranger. It is only his anxiety for her to get well that

makes him urge her to be constantly in the open air."

Miss Derno beat her foot impatiently against the ground.

"Do you think idleness good for any one?" she asked. "Do you think it well for a man to have all the advantages of a large property, without having any of its anxieties and responsibilities? This is a Castle of Indolence for him; and if I were his mother I should like to see him usefully employed.'

"Was it not about my wife we were talking, Miss Derno?" inquired Captain Stondon.

"Yes; but I have long wanted to speak to you about Basil. He is an old pet of mine, you know. I know his faults and his virtues better, perhaps, than anybody else on earth, and I am confident this idle existence is not good for him: it would be trying to any man; and it is doubly trying to a man like Basil."

There was truth in what she said, and Captain Stondon admitted it.

"The same idea occurred to me the other day," he said; "and I have been considering whether I could not give him the management of some portion of the property."

"Will you be angry if I put a question to you?" inquired Miss Derno. She was leaning on his arm, and she stooped forward and looked up in his face as she spoke.

She could see that its expression changed a little; but he answered kindly and courteously as ever,

"It must be a very singular question, or series of questions, Miss Derno, that could make me angry with you."

"You are bringing up Basil as your heir," she said; "suppose you had a son; how would it fare with this idle young man then?"

For a moment Captain Stondon remained silent. The idea was one which he did not think she ought to have suggested. He did not consider it at all in Miss Derno's department to talk about such possibilities to him. He felt it was

inconsiderate of her to open up the old sore. He believed that it was nothing to her whether he had sons or whether he had not; but still he replied, quietly and calmly,

"If such an extremely improbable event were to happen, I should provide handsomely for Basil —be sure of that."

"But still you would not give him Marshlands."

"I could not if I would," was the reply; "I would not if I could."

"And yet you will not make him independent of Marshlands altogether?"

"Should such a necessity as you have named arise, I should do my best to push him on in the world."

"Expecting him, doubtless, to be satisfied with a dry morsel, after he had been regaling himself on the stalled ox?"

Miss Derno could put things as unpleasantly as possible when she had a mind; and she succeeded in making Captain Stondon uncomfortable for the moment.

"The fact is," he answered, "I am very fond of Basil. Having no son, I like to forget that he is not my son. I should miss him sadly if he were to leave me; and I do not think it is well to deprive oneself of pleasure in the present, because of the chance of what may happen in the future. However, Miss Derno, I will think over what you have said. I will give the matter my maturest consideration."

She was grateful to him for what he said. She felt, all things taken into account, that he had borne her interference as few men would; and so, with all her heart in her face, with all the earnestness of her nature thrown into her manner, she spoke her thanks.

"If I have seemed impertinent," she said, "pardon me; if I have seemed intrusive, think that I am not really so." And Captain Stondon assured her he could never think of her otherwise than as she would wish him to do; and the pair walked on beside the lake where the lilies

floated, and then back beneath the lime-trees to the house.

"Miss Derno seems to be almost as fond of your husband as she is of Mr. Basil Stondon," remarked Miss Georgina Hurlford, who was standing beside Phemie in the garden.

"Yes, I think she likes them both greatly," answered Phemie; and the conversation dropped. But Miss Hurlford noticed that the blood came rushing into Mrs. Stondon's face one moment, and that the next she was pale as death.

CHAPTER VIII.

JEALOUSY.

Marshlands had never been so gay before as during the August of the year concerning which I am now writing.

The house had never been so full of company ; there had never been so many parties, so much visiting, and such innumerable picnics in the memory of that part of Norfolk. Young girls and staid matrons walked about the grounds ; in all the bye-lanes in all the cross-roads, sprinkled over the commons, were ladies mounted on glossy steeds, attended by cavaliers who seemed to think that the whole duty of man was flirting and pleasure.

Flirting and pleasure was the order of the day at Marshlands ; and every one agreed the Stondons were delightful people to know.

Mrs. Stondon was such a thoughtful hostess, mothers and daughters both agreed. She never spoiled sport; she never put either herself or Helen forward; she exacted no attention; she conversed, by preference, with white-haired old gentlemen, who called her "a delightful woman."

"To see Captain and Mrs. Stondon," said an old bachelor, "is enough to make one think seriously of marriage."

"Talk of May and December," observed a man who had served out in India with Captain Stondon; "I tell you what, sir, I never saw May and June agree so well as my dear old friend and his young wife. Charming!—I should think she was charming! All I am afraid of, sir, is that she will leave him a widower. She is getting thinner and paler every day."

Major Brooks was not the only person who felt uneasy about Phemie. Miss Derno made effort after effort to induce her friend to take more care of herself, but her entreaties, listened

to at first coldly, were at last replied to sharply and angrily.

Mrs. Stondon would go out in the night air if she chose; she would ride, if riding gave her any pleasure; she would walk when she took a fancy for doing so; and she would attend to no remonstrances on the subject.

"What can it signify to any one what I do?" she said one day to Basil, when they were out driving together. "I would rather die than live. If any doctor came to me now and said, 'You cannot last two months,' I should be glad."

"But you ought to think of others," he answered. "You ought to think of me."

"Of you!" she echoed; "what would you care if I were dead to-morrow? You would look after any pretty girl you met, out of the window of the mourning-coach, though it is you who have brought me to this," and she took off her glove and stretched out her hand before him. "You make love to others before my eyes. I do not want your love," she went on. "I do not wish

you to cease holding this girl's bridle rein; to cut no more bouquets; to beg no more flowers; to stay indoors instead of walking in the moonlight with Miss Derno. I do not want you to do this, only be honest. Do not harass my life out one moment, and then make me jealous the next. Leave me to go my way, and I will never follow you or yours. And do not talk to me about my health, for you and Miss Derno both would be only too glad to see me in my coffin."

"Phemie, how can you make such an assertion?" They had reached a very lonely part of the road, and he laid his hand gently on hers, but she shook it off and answered—

"Keep your hands for the reins; I will not have them touch mine. Every word I say is true. You do flirt; you are a flirt; you make every girl you meet think you are in love with her. You know when you were trying to make me care for you that you were engaged to Miss Derno. You know while you are talking to me now that you are engaged to her still."

"Who told you that falsehood?" asked Basil.

"Miss Hurlford."

"Miss Hurlford be damned," said the young man, laying his whip not over lightly on the near pony, which at once began to plunge and kick.

"You need not upset us because you are angry at my hearing it," remarked Phemie. "It does not matter to me whom you marry; but you shall cease persecuting me, you shall. I will ask my husband to send you away. I will tell him it is not pleasant to have a stranger in the house. I came out with you to-day solely to be able to say this to you. I am not double-faced, if you are. I cannot do one thing and pretend another."

"I know that," said Basil, sneeringly. "You never professed to dislike me before people; you never answered me as though you hated me while your uncle was present; you never hang about Captain Stondon as though you liked him better than all the world; you never pretended anything, did you, Phemie?"

Then Phemie broke out.

"If I ever pretended, it was not of my own free will. I am no hypocrite with my husband. I do love him, and honour and trust him more than any other man on earth; and if I seem not to like to be with you before people, you cannot say that I like any better to be with you alone. It is you who are a hypocrite; it is you who pretend; it is you who want to have every woman you meet in love with you. But this I tell you, Basil," she added, sitting bolt upright in the phaeton as she spoke; "you have chosen to make my life wretched, and I will make yours. You never shall love anybody as you have loved me; you shall never forget me; you shall never love girl, or woman, or wife as you have loved me. When you are standing in the twilight you shall remember me; when you are lying awake in the darkness you shall think of me; when we are far apart you shall not forget me. I can never be anything to you as another woman may; but I can be near to you for all that, and I will.

You may try to make me jealous now, if you like; I do not care."

And Phemie dropped back in the carriage, whilst her companion vainly endeavoured to convince her she was mistaken; that he had never tried to make her jealous, that he had never thought of caring for any one but herself.

"Will you attend to your driving, Basil?" she said, "and not talk any more about the matter. It is a light thing for you, I dare say; you can go out and never think about the misery you have brought on me. You fancy this will form but an episode in your life, though it has taken all the sunshine out of mine; but you are mistaken. Good gracious, Basil, what are you doing with those ponies? There, now, I told you so."

They had come out of the lanes, and were driving over a road that led across Wildmoor Common. As Phemie spoke, the near pony shied at a flock of geese, and Basil, glad to vent his annoyance on anything, lashed it savagely.

The creature reared and plunged and kicked;

then it got its head down and the bit between its teeth, and both ponies were off.

"Sit still—sit still; for God's sake don't jump out!" said Basil.

"Never mind me, attend to them," was Phemie's answer.

They were tearing across the common now; over the little unevennesses of the ground the carriage went rocking like a cradle.

Basil was a fair whip, but he could do nothing. What man ever did do anything with a pair of mad ponies harnessed to a low light phaeton?

The bays had it all their own way over the grass. They dashed through stagnant pools; they flew past bush and bramble; the horses grazing on the common galloped hither and thither, making the brutes more unmanageable still. The sun was shining on the bare, flat Norfolk landscape, and Phemie could see in the distance farmhouses, with their tiled roofs; homesteads, where the new hay had just been stacked; trees standing dark and clear against the sky;

she could see all this as they dashed along; see it even while she was sick with terror, while she was wondering what would bring them up at last.

She knew Basil never could stop them; what would? what! She saw the walls of a house in the distance, shining in the sun; she thought of the flints that were in it, and then she screamed out—

"Oh! Basil, the quarry; keep them away from that."

He stood up and pulled with might and main at the reins. He sawed the ponies' mouths. With all the strength he had he tried to pull them in, to turn them aside. For a moment he had the mastery; then the phaeton tilted up on one side over a mound of earth, and he was jerked out.

He made an effort to retain the reins, but they were torn from him, leaving his hands bleeding and raw. Phemie tried to seize them, but failing to do so, shut her eyes.

She knew what was going to bring them up now. With a crash ponies and phaeton and Phemie went down into the quarry together, and when Basil Stondon came to the edge and looked below, he could see nothing but a confused heap of broken woodwork, of struggling horses, of blood, and muslin.

For a moment his courage failed him, then he jumped down after them.

Let life bring what it might to Basil Stondon, it never could bring a bitterer moment than that.

He would not go for help, he did not call for assistance; living or dead, he would do what he could for her himself.

From under the phaeton he somehow managed to extricate her; then he took the dear burden in his arms and carried her on to the common and laid her on the grass.

By that time people, who having seen the runaways had hurried after them, came up, and asked was the lady killed?

He could not tell; he knew nothing of medicine; he only saw she had moved no finger, made no sign; that she was covered with blood; that she was shockingly cut and mangled.

Never since his boyhood had any human being seen Basil Stondon weep, but he cried like a child then.

He had made her life wretched; they had been quarrelling all the morning; he had tried to make her jealous; he knew she had only spoken the simple truth. When she tried to do right, he had endeavoured to roughen her way as much as possible. Her last words before the ponies ran away were full of upbraiding. It was his fault that the animals had started at all. Half an hour before he had taunted her; he had been unmanly, mean, angry; and now she lay before him, apparently dead, while he knelt beside her, sobbing in his passionate despair.

"I do not think, sir," said one of the men, that the lady is dead. If you would only sprinkle some water over her, and let one of us go for a

doctor, and bring her into the farmhouse yonder, and see what the women can do for her. Will you, sir? will you?" and he approached to raise Phemie up, and carry her away.

But Basil would not permit it. He lifted her himself, and holding her close to his heart, bore her across the common; and as he walked under the sunshine, with everything around him looking its brightest and its gayest, his tears fell thick over the face of the woman he loved best on earth.

"My darling! my darling! I was cruel to you; my darling, I have killed you!" and so he kept moaning and whispering till he felt the feeblest pressure of the fingers that lay beside his hand.

She could not speak, she could not open her eyes; but she could show him by this mute sign that she was still alive.

In a moment he saw the sunshine and the sky; in an instant hope revived within him.

She was not dead; she might not be fatally

injured. She might recover, and he might have opportunity given him of atoning for all the past.

Stumbling across the common, dizzy with his own fall, bruised and shaken and hurt, half stupefied by the events of the last few minutes, Basil Stondon prayed to God as he had never prayed in all his life before.

He prayed that she might live, that he might have opportunity for making atonement to her; that he might not have to bear the sight of Captain Stondon's agony; that he might not have to go on—on through the years without her.

With all his heart and with all his soul he prayed, and the prayer was granted; but in the future—in the sad, sad future—he often marvelled whether it would not have been better for him and for her had she died on Wildmoor Common, and never lived to face the dreary after-years to come.

CHAPTER IX.

STRANGE TIDINGS.

There was silence in the house which had lately been so full of merriment; the guests were gone; the rooms deserted; the sweet laughter of women was heard no more echoing round and about Marshlands; the sunshine had given place to gloom—gaiety to sadness; for Phemie lay in a darkened room, struggling for life as the young only can struggle—fighting, fighting for the victory.

She had not been strong from childhood; but there are some weak constitutions that have a wonderful hold on existence; and though Phemie had a hard battle for life, still she won the day at last, and came forth from her chamber after

weeks, white as spring lilies, delicate and beautiful, fragile and weak as they.

Weak, mentally and physically. God help us! in the great day, will not the Lord Omnipotent—the Judge of all the earth, remember how feeble His creatures are? how frail His servant was at this point and at that? Has He not, think you, more knowledge and more pity than we? Will He, who took our poor humanity upon Him, not have mercy upon us, and bid many poor sinners pass into Heaven who have gone with weary feet far astray on earth?

Will He not be merciful? Friends, dear friends—I say nothing against the righteousness of the world's verdict in cases grievous and terrible; but, after all, may the world not oftentimes be but God's officer, who brings the accused before His bar to be judged on higher evidence, to be pardoned because of fuller knowledge?

It may be right—it is right—in the plan of the Almighty that men and women should suffer here; but it is comforting to think that, maimed

and bleeding, many a man and many a woman may stand up for judgment at the last day, when He who sits on the Great White Throne, knowing what they have suffered, shall wipe the tears from their eyes, and bid them enter, wanderers though they may have been, into the joy of their Lord.

I think, hard and lonely, sorrowful and desolate as Phemie's life was, still that the Almighty ordered every step of her way and brought her to Himself by paths which, though weary to travel, led ultimately to the beautiful city whose maker and builder He is.

Phemie never sinned. Let me say this much before going farther—never sinned as the world views sin—never "fell," as society puts it—never, I may even go this far, trod the edge of the precipice of vice voluntarily.

There is many a woman at this present moment whom the world talks well of standing at the very mouth of the pit of hell—many a woman, wise, discreet, decorous, keeping herself straight with society, believing in no sin except the sin which

is found out, and forgetful that there is another bar besides that of a certain "set" in fashionable society, before which things that have been hidden shall be made manifest, and all that has been concealed shall be brought to light.

There is many a woman worse by far than Phemie ever was, who yet knows nothing of the pangs of remorse, of the agony of the self-reproach, of the prickings of conscience, of the fierceness of the battle through which she had passed, ere wearied and worn, ere faint and exhausted, she ceased to struggle against her fate, and, lying between life and death, considered that, after all, love was very sweet; that to her, who had always stood without in the cold darkness, the warmth and the brightness of loving and being loved was something wonderful.

For a moment they had been close to one another, close as people are who, with all the conventionalities and fashions and artifices of society stripped off them, draw near, soul answering unto soul.

To Phemie that moment was a revelation—the "might have been"—the certainty of the awful mistake she had made—the assurance of Basil's love—the hopelessness of that love—its very uselessness, and the impossibility of it ever bringing happiness to either of them—all conspired to weaken her resistance of evil—all caused her to lie bruised, and shattered, and suffering, hugging this sinful affection to her heart, while she wished for death, while she prayed for no better boon than to be taken away from the struggle and to pass out of life, carrying her love with her.

Only to float thus away—only to glide down the stream, away from the duties which had become intolerable, from the affection for which she was ungrateful, from the ties which were now unendurable—only to float with the sweet music she had listened to sounding in her ears—only to touch his hand before passing away for ever—only to feel his lips press hers once more, with a knowledge that all necessity for battle was

over—only to leave her memory with him, and then to sink to rest. Reader, pity her! for though she might be a grievous sinner to wish to enter eternity burdened with a love which she found too heavy to carry through time, still her ways had not been ways of pleasantness; she was very young—she was very weak—the sunshine was very beautiful, and that fair land wherein even the very birds seem to be singing the old old story was lovely in her eyes.

It was a dream, shall we say?—a sad, sweet dream, in which the slave imagined herself free, in which the prisoner thought her chains were unloosed, her fetters struck off, her dungeon doors opened. It was a dream, and Phemie woke to find that reality's cold grey shadows were stealing in on her life; that she had to come off the shining river, and return to the shore she once hoped she should have to tread no more—that Death holds back from those who court his embrace; and that there remained for her in the future only what the past had held—duty and

struggle—a colder duty, a fiercer struggle, and repentance and despair.

When she was well enough to travel they all went together to the sea—to Hastings—a place Phemie had never previously visited, and which, it being the very height of the season, was full of youth and beauty, of fashion and frivolity, of sickness and sorrow, of age and infirmity.

Had she not a happy time there? I am afraid she was dangerously happy then—that in the midst of her weakness there was a subtle sense of pleasure and triumph tipping the moments as they fled by with sunshine, making her poor, cold, narrow life seem wide and beautiful. She was taking her heart's holiday—the working days were all to come. Out over the sea she looked, but she must return to the woods and the fields of Marshlands for all that. She sat and listened to the music; but the years were advancing when the drip, drip of the rain, and the falling of her own tears would be the sole

music of her life. She passed among crowds, and was amused and interested by the variety of characters, by the succession of fresh faces. She beat time to the waltzes, as in a state of delicious convalescence she leaned back and hearkened to the band on the Parade. Under the moonlight she saw gay groups standing: she beheld the visitors walking up and down: to the laughter of children, to the happy voices of the young, and beautiful, she inclined her ear. Night after night she walked slowly up and down, up and down the Parade, with her husband on one side of her, and Basil on the other, while the music rose and fell, and the feet of many people hurried by, and the faces of the young and the old, of men and women, succeeded to each other as the scene changes in a panorama, and the moon sailed high over the East Cliff, and the waves came washing up on the shore—now advancing—now receding, and the sound of the waters fell on the ear like a subdued accompaniment to the noisy melody of human fears and

hopes that was being sung continually on the strand.

To Phemie, who was dreamy and fanciful, it seemed that the Parade was the stage, the visitors the performers, the sea the orchestra, herself the one solitary spectator. She seemed to do nothing save listen and feel; and yet there was at times a tone in the great sea which woke an answering chord in her heart, and caused her vaguely to marvel whether in the dim future every string in her nature might not be tried and tested; whether she should not some day understand more fully the meaning of that eternal murmur which never ceased by day nor by night; which went on just the same, whether men stood on the shore or left the coast desolate; which took no heed of human sorrow or of human joy; which had gone on through the ages, and which should continue through the ages, till there was no more sea—till the heavens were rolled up like a scroll—till time was merged in eternity, and the great problem of existence solved at last.

Life! She was beginning vaguely to think, not merely about her own life, but about all lives—about all those men and women who went hurrying along within sound of the great sea. She was commencing to understand that there was a lesson to be learnt out of these things somehow, though she had never conned a line of that lesson yet herself. It was all very vague—it was all very sweet, but there was a terrible sadness in it notwithstanding—a minor that brought tears into Phemie's eyes oftentimes, she scarcely knew why or wherefore.

Yet it was a happy time—sinfully happy to the poor misguided woman—until the Hurlfords and Miss Derno arrived at Hastings also. Then in a day all seemed changed; the liveliest tunes sounded sad to Phemie; the sweetest airs grew wearisome; she tired of the rush of the hurrying feet; the moon ceased to rise over the East Cliff; there was no longer any track of silver light on the waters; the evenings felt chilly; the sun did not shine the same as formerly.

It was all as when a man puts a sprig of some bitter herb into the wine-cup, and bids his neighbour drink—the flavour of the wine is lost, and he turns from the rich juice of the grape, because of the disagreeable taste of the herb. Phemie's visit to Hastings was spoilt. "Well, let it be!" she said, wearily to herself. "What does it matter?" What! though she could not see the waves for tears; though she sat alone in-doors while they went about enjoying themselves?

Mrs. Stondon was not strong enough to bear the rocking of a boat. She grew dizzy when the little vessel was tossed about on the waters. She was unable to ride for very weakness, and so in time it came to pass that—as she was not selfish at this advanced period of her story—as her affection would not let her keep Captain Stondon always at home for her sake, as her pride would not allow her to make any sign to Basil, she was often lying on the sofa solitary, whilst the Hurlfords, and Miss Derno, and Basil, and her husband were riding, or boating, or walking.

In most lives there are such pauses, when the musicians are silent—when the voices of the singers are hushed—when there is a time between the lights—when we lay down the volume of experience, and think, tearfully it may be, of all we have read out of it. Happy the man or the woman who, unlike Phemie, think to some good purpose ; who can trace the meaning of the life story ; who can resolve that the future shall not be as unprofitable as the past.

Wearily, she thought, ah ! wearily—grievously she misjudged the best friend God could have sent her—a woman who loved and pitied the poor wife.

There was nothing Miss Derno did that seemed right at that time in Phemie's eyes.

Dressed in mourning for the aunt she had spent best part of her life with, Mrs. Stondon considered her a hypocrite.

"People who have been left handsome legacies can afford rich mourning," Miss Georgina Hurlford suggested; and that was a view of the

question upon which the invalid thought it pleasant to dwell.

If Miss Derno offered to remain at home with her friend, Phemie viewed her kindness as a piece of deception. If she went out riding or boating, walking or driving, Phemie still thought she was playing her cards—doing her best to win Basil.

And supposing she did win Basil, what then? Had Phemie not said she never would step over a grave to happiness? Could she expect him to remain single for her sake all his life?

"Can you guess the course Miss Derno is urging me to adopt?" Basil said one day as he leaned against the window, looking out over the sea. "She wants me to accept General Hurlford's offer, and go out to India."

"Perhaps she would not object to accompany you herself," Phemie answered.

For a moment Basil, though a gentleman, hesitated; he knew Phemie's weak point, and his power through it, then he answered—

"Miss Derno would not marry a poor beggar like myself even were I inclined to ask her."

"The heir to Marshlands cannot be considered a beggar," Mrs. Stondon answered, coldly.

"Phemie!" it was the only word he uttered, but their eyes met, and she turned hers aside abashed, but, woman-like, she held to her opinion, and brooded over it.

"You will go, Basil," she suggested.

"And leave you?" he replied.

"Don't talk to me like that," she entreated; "don't, for God's sake. Leave me and seek your own life—that which a man at any point, at any age, can make it. Leave me—my life is gone. I ask nothing but to be let do my duty which I have neglected. Take his offer, Basil—take it, and go;" and then she buried her head in the sofa pillow while he answered—

"And you think I could do this—you think a man's love is no more constant than all that comes to. You imagine I could go away and forget—forget you, Phemie—forget you"—

Then with all the strength of her nature Mrs. Stondon uprose, and said—

"I think, Basil Stondon, that if in the book of a man's life there are two wicked pages, he should paste them together, and go on and make a better of the leaves that are to come. I think that if I were in your shoes I should flee from temptation, and not remain even within sight of dishonour. I do not think I could eat a man's bread, and be conscious all the time that I loved his wife. I do not believe—woman though I am, weak though I may be—that could I go, as you can go, I should stay."

"Shall I take General Hurlford's offer, then?" he asked. But she had exhausted her strength, and was lying weeping in the very extremity of her physical weakness. God help us! again I say, when the weakness of our bodies is sometimes able to subdue the strength of our souls. God help men and God help women, for we are all poor frail sinners alike!

"I did not think," said Miss Georgina Hurl-

ford to Mrs. Stondon, "that Olivia would have counselled Mr. Stondon to accept my father's offer; but I suppose her aunt's death has made all the difference? It cannot matter to her now whether she marries in England or goes abroad."

In her desperation Mrs. Stondon turned to Miss Derno. "I suppose," she said, "your aunt's death will make a difference in your future plans?"

"Most assuredly," was the reply. "I have some idea of taking a cottage near Marshlands; I feel that I should like to be near you."

"If Basil remains in England, you remain, I conclude?" answered Mrs. Stondon, and at her remark Miss Derno flushed scarlet.

"I am at a loss," she replied, "to imagine how Basil's future plans can influence mine."

Whereupon Phemie laughed. "That is what we all say," she answered, and the laugh grew hysterical.

"We! Ah, heaven," thought Miss Derno,

"what can she know about the matter?—she who has never felt what it is to love honestly and passionately all her life long—whose purest love can never more be anything but sin—who, if she had only known Basil Stondon first, and her husband afterwards, might have loved her husband with all her soul and strength and might, but who can never love anything but this poor weak, unstable young man—never, for ever—for ever, never."

Was she right in this, my reader? No. For there came an hour when Phemie was able to put the two men in the scales together, and weigh their merits impartially—when she knew which of them had been true and faithful, which false and fickle—when, for the second time, she could make her heart's choice, and took the better man.

But according to her then light, Miss Derno argued—according to her then light, Phemie judged.

"You think," answered Miss Derno, "that *I*

mean to go to India with Basil if he accept Sir Samuel's offer—that I intend to take a place near Marshlands if he do not—and in both ideas you are wrong—how wrong you may know, perhaps, hereafter. Meantime, I can only say this much:—I shall not—much as I should prize your friendship, greatly as I should like to be near you—take a cottage in Norfolk at all. I will flee to the uttermost parts of the earth—to Wales, to Ireland, to the Highlands—(what does it matter to me?)" she added vehemently; and Phemie remembered she had uttered words like them. "I have promised to remain for a month with my cousin; at the end of that month, farewell, my dear, a long farewell; for it is ten chances to one if you and I ever meet again on this side heaven."

"Where do you mean to go, then?" asked Phemie; "you told me long ago everybody met somewhere in the end—that there was no 'never' in society."

"There is no 'never' in life, Mrs. Stondon,"

was the reply; "there is no 'never' in eternity—unless——"

"Unless what?" Phemie inquired.

"Never mind," was the reply. "I detest religious discussions; this present life ought surely to be enough for us, without wanting to penetrate the mysteries of the next, before our time."

"But we live here for the next," said Phemie, who could not forget the teachings of that old Scottish manse; of that lonely house among the hills.

"Do we?" retorted Miss Derno; "I should not have thought it. Forgive me," she added next moment, as Phemie broke into a fit of weeping—"forgive me, I was thinking more of myself than of you—I was indeed—I was, upon my word—forgive me, dear—forgive."

But, somehow, Phemie's forgiveness was a thing not readily granted in those days. Phemie, what with her beauty, and her delicate health, and her devoted husband, and her fine position, was rather a great lady, and as she had not been

born great, she was not perhaps magnanimous: let this be as it may, she did not accord her forgiveness readily, and within a few days she and Miss Derno were removed further than ever from each other, namely, by a visit from one of Mrs. Stondon's relations, the first who had favoured her with word, or call, or letter since her marriage.

Mrs. Keller prefaced her visit with a letter, skilfully worded, penned in the most beautiful of handwritings on the best of note-paper.

The Stondons were in Hastings; she dated from St. Leonards. They were, after a fashion, strangers. She was a regular comer, well known and respected. Captain Stondon was from Norfolk, a place as it might be in the Antipodes; Roundwood was in Sussex, and every Hastings tradesman, livery-stable keeper, and lodging-house lady knew Mrs. Keller, and Mr. Keller her husband, and the young ladies her daughters.

Mrs. Keller had a very bright pair of black eyes, that were capable of seeing any object at

any distance; further, she had a very clear head, out of which she planned a letter to Mrs. Stondon.

"What does it mean?" Phemie asked, listlessly handing her aunt's epistle up for Captain Stondon's judgment. "I cannot understand what she is driving at. What does it mean?" And she turned towards her husband, who, after reading the letter placed it before Basil.

"It means," said the latter gentleman, "that Mrs. Keller has no sons,—that there are no more brothers,—that failing direct male heirs, the estates revert to the female branch,—and that you are the next heir."

"I?" and Phemie's pale cheek grew paler.

"Yes, you," went on Basil. "Mr. Keller cannot live twelve months, so the doctors say. Miss Keller is dead. Mrs. Stondon will inherit Roundwood, and become a greater lady than ever, —so great a lady, in fact, that we shall all have to approach her hat in hand."

"Then, if my father had lived," interrupted

Phemie, "he would have inherited Roundwood before this Mr. Keller?"

"Undoubtedly, after General Keller's death."

"And you are certain you are not mistaken?—you are satisfied all that property will some day be mine?"

"Perfectly satisfied, unless, indeed, Mrs. Keller takes it into her head to have a son at the eleventh hour, which, considering this note, is scarcely probable. There now," added Basil Stondon, "what have I said, what have I done?" And repressing the strong impulse which made him long to take Phemie in his arms, and kiss away her tears, and hold her to his heart, he stood aside while Captain Stondon sat down beside his wife, and drew her lovely head on to his breast, and let her cry out her heart there—sobbing—sobbing passionately.

Her life—it was that she was considering—poor disloyal Phemie—weak, traitorous, unworthy wife—with her head against his breast, with her face against the heart which held no thought

save for her—she was yet reflecting what a happy lot hers might have been, had this news come before marriage instead of after. She might have had Basil then, instead of Captain Stondon—might have had the tinsel instead of the pure gold, the coloured glass in lieu of the precious gem!

CHAPTER X.

BASIL DECIDES.

"And I am so sorry, my dear, never to have been able to call upon you before." It was Mrs. Keller who said this, as she and Phemie sat in the drawing-room that looked out over the sea. "But, of course, as long as poor Miss Keller lived she was so bitter on the subject of her brother's marriage, that it would have been impossible for us to take any step of the kind without offending her. Had we made any advances towards you, we would always have thought our opposition was the reason of her iniquitous will, and I am certain that would have made you most uncomfortable; so, perhaps, it is all better as it is. Her will, my dear? Is it possible you never

heard about it? She had not a living relative except her cousin, my husband, our children, and yourself; and she had an immense fortune from her mother—a fortune that would have enabled us to live without anxiety for ever.

"Well—would you believe it?—she turned Dissenter, and left everything she had in the world to building chapels, and sending out missionaries, and we were never one sixpence the better of her death, except fifty pounds, which she said my husband was to spend in buying a mourning ring. Ring, indeed! it did not pay quarter of the expenses of the mourning. Jacqueline, my youngest daughter, had a horrid set of amethyst ornaments—hideous things—that might have been worn by Queen Philippa; but she bequeathed her diamonds to some society, and they were sent up to London—absolutely sent up and sold by auction for the benefit of some penitentiary, or reformatory, or whatever it was."

Phemie laughed. The misfortunes of her

relations clearly did not affect her as they ought.

"I suppose Miss Keller thought she had a right to do what she liked with her own," she suggested.

"But she had not a right," returned Mrs. Keller; "she induced my husband to join General Keller in effecting a mortgage on the property—Roundwood, I mean—and told him she would make it up to him someday; and she never made it up; and to this hour we are paying interest on the mortgage, and unless we live like beggars, we can save nothing, absolutely nothing; and there is not an insurance office in England will take Mr. Keller's life; so there is a predicament for us; and the property goes after his death."

"I suppose that is really the most disagreeable part of the business?" Phemie remarked.

"It would be useless to deny it," answered Mrs. Keller, with charming sincerity; "but as it

is to go away from us, I am glad it is to pass to you."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Stondon, and she leaned a little forward in her chair as she uttered the word.

"Why? because, of course, one would rather have to do with a woman than with a man."

"Should you?" interrupted Phemie; "notwithstanding your experience of Miss Keller?"

"But then all women are not like her," answered Mrs. Keller; "indeed, she was as unlike a woman as anything I ever saw in my life—not in the least like you, at any rate: and in the next place, you are married, and would not want to turn us out of Roundwood in a minute if anything did unfortunately happen."

"Well, what else?" asked Phemie, as Mrs. Keller paused.

"Nothing else. I have said all I meant to say——"

"Though not all you were thinking," laughed Phemie, once again. "It is something to have

for next heir a woman without children, whom your eldest daughter may one day succeed in——"

"My dear Mrs. Stondon, I assure you——"

"My dear Mrs. Keller, I assure you," interrupted Phemie, "that I know you know a great deal too little of me, and a great deal too much of the world, to be indifferent to such considerations. There is but a life standing between you and Roundwood, and I cannot blame you for seeing that this life is not a good one; still it is only fair for me to assure you that my present illness is the result of accident, not of constitutional delicacy. In a general way I am as strong as my neighbours." Having concluded which pleasant little speech, Phemie sank back in her chair, and looked straight in Mrs. Keller's face, with a sweet smile.

"Godfrey," said Mrs. Keller, on her return to St. Leonards, "that woman frightens me. She knew what I was thinking of; she is worse than her aunt ever was—cooler, more collected, keener.

Talk about Captain Stondon having married an innocent, unsophisticated girl! Folly! Depend upon it, she is far more worldly-wise than he, and knew all about his property, and the position he would be enabled to give her. Guileless, indeed! A designing minx, like her mother, doubtless."

"Her mother had not any great amount of guile about her," answered Mr. Keller. "I remember seeing her in Paris, just before Mrs. Stondon was born; and a prettier creature I never beheld."

"There you are, man—man—man all over," retorted Mrs. Keller; "a pretty face and a soft manner deceive the wisest of you. It has evidently taken in Captain Stondon, who is certainly one of the very nicest old gentlemen I ever met—such frank, kindly manners: so courteous, so considerate. He came in from Battle while I was there; and to see him speaking to her was really as good as any comedy. Had she been a queen he could not have treated her more reve-

rentially. How was she? and had she felt lonely until I came in? and did she feel inclined to take a drive or a walk? and had she eaten any lunch, and was she certain she had taken her wine? and had the doctor called? and did she think she was really better, really, really? Those are the kind of things that annoy me in this world," finished Mrs. Keller; "the perfect idiots men make of themselves about women, as if they belonged to some superior order of being."

"Well, don't you think that you do, Honoria?" asked Mr. Keller; "it has often occurred to me that you must entertain some idea of the kind."

"I entertain no idea of the kind, Godfrey, so don't be ridiculous. I hate to see men humbling themselves before women, more especially before such a piece of languid superiority as Mrs. Stondon. And she is just the same to everybody; she orders that young Stondon—what is his name? Basil Stondon—about as though he were not next heir to Marshlands; and he comes

and goes at her beck and call just as a dog fetches and carries; he does, indeed."

"It is very sad, is it not?" answered Mr. Keller; "but perhaps, my love, if you were as young and handsome as Mrs. Stondon, people might fetch and carry for you, too."

"Now that is precisely what I meant about Captain Stondon. *He* would never have made a speech like that even to his own wife; he would never be rude, unmanly, brutal. And as for Mrs. Stondon," burst out Mrs. Keller in an accession of indignation, "some people might call her handsome, but I don't. She has not an atom of colour in her face, nor a bit of flesh on her bones. I wonder she does not rouge. It would make her look a little less like a ghost."

"Did she express any wish to see the girls?" asked Mr. Keller, who, as was natural, felt some paternal anxiety on the subject.

"Could you imagine the Queen expressing a wish to see them?" asked Mrs. Keller, facing suddenly round. "When you meet Mrs. Stondon

you will have some idea of the woman she is, but not till then. I asked her to come to Roundwood, but she declined. 'My mother was not received there,' she said, 'and I shall certainly not visit at a house, the doors of which were shut in her face.'

"'But they were not shut by us, my dear,' said I.

"'No,' she admitted, 'but that could not make any difference. Her relations had not taken any notice of her (Mrs. Stondon) either, and would probably not have taken any notice to the end of the chapter, but that she chanced to be the next heir. As for children,' she added, 'she could not bear them; girls, more particularly, she disliked. Some day, perhaps, she would be able to see my girls, but not till she grew stronger.' And there she sat in the arm-chair all the time," went on Mrs. Keller, "as though she were an empress, and I a subject paying her homage."

"Then on the whole your visit was not a productive one?" suggested Mr. Keller.

"It was, so far as Captain Stondon could make it so," answered his wife. "He is going to call upon you, and he hoped he should see us at Marshlands; which I intend he shall. And upon the whole I don't think she disliked me; but then she seems to care for nothing. I cannot make her out at all."

"And neither can I," declared Miss Georgina Hurlford, to whom Mrs. Keller confided this opinion a few days subsequently. "When first I went to Marshlands, I thought Mrs. Stondon the most beautiful and charming woman I ever beheld, but she is quite changed lately. It is not the effect of that terrible accident, for she was changed before it happened. Now do, Mrs. Keller, use your penetration, and see if you can discover for what she wishes, or whether she wishes for anything; of whom she is fond, or whether she is fond of any one. I am dying to understand Mrs. Stondon. Sometimes I think she is too happily married, for such a husband I never saw. I am sure if I could meet with any

one like him, I should not mind having to beg my bread for his sake."

And Miss Hurlford fell into a little fit of rapture over Captain Stondon's perfections, while Mrs. Keller, who had sense enough to see Miss Georgina did not look much like a young lady who would relish begging her bread, even in company with a model husband, ventured to suggest that Mr. Basil Stondon, who was eligible, would probably make a wife quite as happy as his relative.

"Basil!" repeated Miss Georgina, with a curl of her lip, "Basil thinks far too much of himself ever to be like his uncle. Besides which, he is engaged. Did you not know it? Ah! really, now, you are jesting. I thought every one knew that, although they keep it so quiet—Miss Derno and he have been engaged for years, at least so I am told; but Mrs. Stondon cannot, it is said, bear the match, and wishes it broken off."

"Why, what possible business can it be of hers?" asked Mrs. Keller, in astonishment.

"That is what we all want to know," returned Miss Hurlford. "Some people say she hates the notion of Basil having Marshlands at all; others that she wants him to marry some relative of her own—a pretty girl, Helen Aggland, have you ever seen her? (her father is the funniest old man possible); in fact, no one seems to be able to tell what to think——"

"But surely Miss Derno must be much older than Mr. Basil Stondon?"

"A few years. She is the kind of wife, though, he ought to have—at least so everybody says—clever and experienced, and able to take the lead, and keep him in order," rattled off Miss Hurlford.

"Has he not been offered an appointment in India?" asked Mrs. Keller.

"In Ceylon, I think it is. No person thinks it can be good for him living in idleness at Marshlands, and so when papa heard of this vacant post, he said, 'Now that is just the thing for young Stondon;' but Captain Stondon won't

hear of it. Miss Derno, of course, wants him to accept papa's offer, because it would enable them to marry; and now her aunt is dead, she may go abroad if she likes any day. I am sure I cannot tell how it will be," finished Miss Georgina thoughtfully, while Mrs. Keller returned to the bosom of her family, thinking—

"She seems a frank enough kind of girl, but for all her frankness I have an idea she wants Basil Stondon for herself."

Wherein Mrs. Keller chanced to be right, only matters were not progressing at all to Miss Hurlford's satisfaction. Boating, riding, driving, walking, listening to the music on the Parade, wandering over the East Cliff, climbing up the Castle Hill, she was not an inch nearer her object than ever.

Phemie had him heart and soul. She was the love of his life, and since the accident he had loved her more despairingly than ever. From all other women he turned to her. He would have asked nothing better than to sit at her side,

to walk with her along the shore, to drive her through the pleasant lanes, to look in her pale face, and to feel her soft hand lying still and warm and quiet in his. The man's very nature seemed changed; he was fickle no more, he was importunate no more; he loved her entirely, and he knew she loved him, and he was content to wait—that was what he said to himself—till she was a widow, when they would marry and be happy.

He ate Captain Stondon's bread, and yet still thought this; he addressed his relative respectfully, and spoke of him in terms of the highest admiration and affection, and yet all the time he would have taken his ewe lamb from him—all the time he was thinking, "Captain Stondon is getting old, Captain Stondon's health is failing, Captain Stondon's spirits are beginning to flag," which observation chanced to be quite correct. Phemie's husband was altering every day. He was growing less cheerful, he was getting sadder, and not all his wife's tenderness, not all her

remonstrances, could clear away a gloom that seemed to be settling down upon him.

From the time General Hurlford mentioned the Ceylon appointment to him, a change seemed to come over Captain Stondon. At first it was but a shade, but the merest cloud; but as time wore on the cloud grew blacker, and people began to think that the idea of Basil deserting Marshlands had seriously hurt and grieved him.

"I will give you an answer, so far as I am concerned, when we return to Norfolk," he said to Sir Samuel; "though, after all, it is a question for Basil to decide."

"But Basil says he will do whatever you think best," answered the General.

"I cannot expect any man to build his house on my plan," replied Captain Stondon; "it would not be right for me to do so, and perhaps I have already been selfish in keeping Basil so much at Marshlands. I will think the matter out there, and talk it over with him."

"He ought soon to make his mind up on the

matter," said General Sir Samuel, a little pompously, for he thought—naturally perhaps—that his offer had not been accepted so promptly as it ought, and that the amount of gratitude felt by both Captain Stondon and Basil fell infinitely short of that which he considered his due.

"It is not with my good will that he has hesitated for so long," answered Captain Stondon. "I wished him to refuse your kind proposal at once—for reasons which I have explained more than once."

"But consider the opening, my dear sir."

"Consider the distance—consider the climate. It is an excellent opening for men in the position we occupied at one time, but certainly not for Basil. We had our way to make, his is made for him. There is no reason that I can see, why he should risk his life out there, when he might just as well stay at home. In fact," went on Captain Stondon, "I confess there is something I cannot understand in the persistency with which all Basil's friends urge him to do something for

himself. One would think that a man could desire no better home than a place like Marshlands, which will be his own in the ordinary course of nature. Do you all think I am going to turn him out some day? Can it be that you fancy I shall not deal fairly by him so long as I live? Tell me frankly why his friends are making themselves so busy in his affairs. Tell me, for instance, why *you* think Basil should go to India."

"Well, in the way you put it—I really can see no reason why he should go at all; but still, as you say, all his friends seem to think he ought not to be dependent on your bounty, or charity, indeed, as Miss Derno puts it. The moment the appointment was vacant everybody cried out—"Why, that is the very thing for Basil Stondon;" and so, of course, I offered it to him; and as they still keep saying he is mad to refuse, I keep offering it to him still. That is all I have got to say about the matter—it is, upon my word and honour."

And Sir Samuel who had uttered all this in the

teeth of a north-east wind, blew his nose violently, and buttoned up his brown top-coat with a tremendous show of dignity.

"It is very singular," remarked Captain Stondon.

"It is indeed—as you observe, it is very singular."

But at this point Sir Samuel, who was descending the steps that led down from the West Cliff to the old town of Hastings, past St. Clement's Church, stopped as if he had been shot.

"An idea has just occurred to me," he said. "I remember a remark Mr. Hurlford once made, that may serve to throw a little light on the matter. It was to the effect that Basil could not marry without your approval; for although you kept him you might not feel inclined to keep his wife and children also. Do you think we have solved the enigma at last?" inquired the General, whose nose was blue and whose cheeks were black from the cold cutting breeze that seemed to be trying to cut him through and through.

"Thank you, I think you have," answered Captain Stondon, simply; and he took Sir Samuel's hand and shook it heartily—gratefully. "If that is all, I believe we can get over the difficulty; but does Basil want to marry any one? Is there anybody to whom he is attached?"

"Such things are not much in my way," answered Sir Samuel; "but you know people do talk about him and Miss Derno."

"Miss Derno! you amaze me. If I had thought at all on the subject I should have guessed very differently; but I will talk to my wife about it. Women, you know, generally are sharper in affairs of this kind than we are."

"May I inquire," asked the General, on whose comprehension a faint glimmering of light was just dawning, "where your guess would have fallen? I do not ask from idle curiosity, believe me."

"It was only a passing idea," answered Captain Stondon. "I thought for a moment of my wife's cousin, Helen Aggland."

"Certainly—yes, to be sure." And the light that had been struggling into General Sir Samuel's brain was suddenly extinguished.

That very evening Captain Stondon talked to Phemie about Basil. He told her what he had heard, he asked her what she thought. He opened the subject so unexpectedly that Phemie blessed the twilight in which they sat for hiding her face while she listened. She felt it flush—that poor face usually so pale and white—and she grew faint and sick, as her husband inquired whether it had ever occurred to her that Basil was attached to Miss Derno.

"I have thought so for a long time," she answered. "I once heard they were positively engaged, and I remember teasing Basil about it."

Teasing!—it was an easy, simple word, far enough removed from any feeling she had ever experienced in the matter. Had she said tortured herself—had she said tormented her spirit—lacerated her heart—she would have been much

nearer the mark; but as it was, she merely declared that she had teased him, and Captain Stondon asked—

"What did he say?"

"Oh! he denied it, of course; and then I tried Miss Derno, and she denied it also."

"And what is your opinion, Phemie?"

There was a great silence in the room; outside on the shore the waves came rolling up against the Parade; over the sea the grey twilight was settling down into darkness; there was a wild night at hand; and all these things together seemed to speak to Phemie of a time when the waves would be talking to her with a different voice—of an evening when the twilight would be merging into a deeper darkness—of a night, wilder, colder, more dreary, that would come to her if she were not wise in due season, if she did not confess and repent, and turn back, ere the tempest was unloosed, ere the rain beat and the wind blew upon her.

"Tell him now," was the murmur that filled her ears; "tell him now," said the holy voices of the night; "tell him frankly and truthfully that you believe Miss Derno cares for him, but that you know he cares for you. Tell him the truth —now in the silence—now in the gathering darkness, with the evening shadows hiding your shame from him, with the night concealing his anguish from you—take courage and begin—be honest and be true."

And there arose in the poor wife's heart a terrible longing to burst out and tell him what I have written. She would have given her life then to be able to speak the first word—to take the first step back to loyalty and peace. If she could but have been sure he would not ask her how it was all the time with her, she might have spoken; and even as it was, she hesitated—hesitated too long.

"I asked you what was your opinion, love," Captain Stondon gently repeated; and the opportunity was lost; the wave had receded, the

precious moment had slipped back among its fellows.

"I have always thought she cared for him."

"And he, Phemie?"

"I cannot tell. I fancy he must be fond of her still."

"And you imagine she wishes him to accept this appointment, so that they may get married?"

"It is very likely."

"Then he must not accept the appointment; we can do better for them here."

Her punishment was beginning; she put her hand to her heart, while a pain, sharp and terrible as the thrust of a sword, seemed to pass through her breast. Could she see them married, and live? Could she go through the years of the existence his love had made wretched, bearing and making no sign? She thought of the lonely hours, and days, and weeks, and months; and as she leaned back in her chair

tears, hot and scalding, rolled down her cheeks slowly and silently.

Deep wounds do not bleed much—the worst of all bleed internally; and so in like manner deep grief weeps little, and the bitterest tears are those that never wet the eyeballs.

Could she live if he left her? Could she live if he deserted her? And the pain grew sharper, and the agony greater.

This was love—this was that which she had walked on through the years to meet—unholy, jealous, passionate love, that was draining away her heart's blood drop by drop. It was killing her. She had mocked at love, and behold love had taken her unawares—taken her captive.

Only to die—only to be sure of dying; and she turned her tired eyes towards the window, from which she could just discern the sea tossing and moaning.

"I wish I were out there," she said, aloud. "It would be free and pleasant."

In a moment her husband's arm was about her

waist. "Out where, my darling?" he asked. "I am afraid it is too cold a night for you to venture on the Parade."

"I did not mean that," she answered. "I meant out on the sea. I never seem to want to be on it except when the night is coming on, and the waves are rough and crested with white foam. Then I think I should like to be out on them without a boat, going away and away to the ocean."

"My love, I am afraid you are not so well to-night," he said anxiously.

"Yes, I am," she answered; "only when I sit in the twilight I begin thinking—and when I begin thinking, I want to be away—away in the body, or out of the flesh, I suppose. Shall we soon be going home?" she asked. "I believe I want to return to Marshlands."

"We can return whenever you please," he replied, and then she nestled her head down on his shoulder, and thanked him; and so it was settled that they should go back to Norfolk im-

mediately, and Captain Stondon begged his wife to ask Miss Derno, and Miss Georgina Hurlford, and General Sir Samuel, and Mr. and Mrs. Hurlford to return there with them.

"I want to see Basil and Miss Derno together," said Captain Stondon, who considered that his penetration had been sadly at fault; and accordingly, when the October woods were arrayed in their most brilliant colours of brown and yellow, and red and russet green, guests again assembled in the old Norfolk house, and Phemie played the hostess there—for the last time but one.

On the whole it was not a successful attempt at gaiety. Phemie proved a less charming entertainer than formerly; the whole party seemed somehow at sixes and sevens. Everybody was continually taking somebody else into inner chambers, into remote parts of the grounds, into dark walks, into shrubberies where the leaves were lying ancle-deep, into woods that were fast getting bare and cheerless, and talking confi-

dentially to him or her for half an hour or so at a time. In the evenings nobody would sing or play: the gentlemen sat long over their wine, the ladies yawned a great deal, and talked about fancy-work and the new clergyman. There were too many guests for anyone to be able to do as he liked; there were too few for any entertainment to be got out of them. Altogether, it was, as Miss Derno remarked, a little slow—a little like a Quaker-meeting, in which every member of the assembled company was waiting for some one else to make a diversion in the proceedings.

As for Basil, he wished the Hurlfords and Miss Derno at New Zealand; he wished India still further; and he seized on the chance Captain Stondon gave him of escape with avidity.

"He did not want to go to India," he said; "he had no desire to leave Marshlands; but if his friends thought he ought to do so, why, he would be guided entirely by their advice. He

felt he must be sometimes in the way; he knew he owed everything he possessed to Captain Stondon's goodness and kindness; and goodness and kindness were not things to be unduly encroached on. Did Captain Stondon really wish him to remain? then he would remain, only too gladly; should he tell General Sir Samuel the matter might be considered settled, and his offer gratefully refused?"

"There is one thing more I want to speak to you about, Basil," said Captain Stondon, when they had definitively settled this point. "It has been suggested to me that your position here prevents your marrying. Now, should such be the case, I wish to say that in all respects I desire to treat you as though you were my own son. If you desire to marry, I will ——" but at this point Basil interrupted his relation.

"I have not the slightest wish to marry," he said; "I am too happy as I am."

"Have you no attachment ——" Captain Stondon felt he was putting the question awkwardly;

and so perhaps did Basil, for he changed colour, and bent his eyes on the ground.

"I want to be plain with you, Basil," went on Captain Stondon, "so forgive me if I am abrupt. Is it Miss Derno?"

"Certainly not;" and Basil lifted his eyes, and laughed with a secret sense of relief.

"Have you never given her any reason to think—?" suggested his relative.

"I have given her every reason to think," was the bold reply. "I proposed to Miss Derno years ago, and she refused me. I have no intention of proposing to her again; you may be quite satisfied about that."

"But do you suppose she—that is, are you quite certain there was no misunderstanding—that she was not influenced by her comparatively dependent position?"

"I conclude you mean, would she marry me now if I wished her? No, she would not; and if you doubt the fact, you can ascertain the truth from Miss Derno herself. She never cared for

me. Even when I had a fancy for her, she had none for me; and for the rest," added Basil, with a sudden appearance of frankness, "if I do care for anyone, it is a hopeless love—one that may be buried with me in my coffin; for nothing can ever come of it in this world."

"Are you serious, Basil? could money not help you—could my assistance be of no avail?"

Then for a moment Basil Stondon stood conscience-stricken, looking straight into the face of the man he had wronged.

"Had I all the gold in the vaults of the Bank England," he said slowly, "it would not mend my case. That is the only thing would take me to India; but it is as easy to bury a love here as in the East."

"And easier, perhaps, to get a new one," said Captain Stondon, with an attempt at *badinage;* but Basil shook his head.

"My fate met me one day," he answered, "and my fate was too much for me;" and as if in mockery while he spoke, a gust of wind came

through the wood, stripping the leaves off the trees, and casting them at his feet. "I will try to repay you hereafter for all your goodness to me," he added, and he meant what he said—meant it fully and faithfully, every word. Captain Stondon's generosity and unsuspiciousness had touched his heart.

"I will try," he repeated to his own soul; and he swore to himself with a great oath that he would strive to conquer his passion, and—meeting Phemie every day, make-believe that he had ceased to love her.

Staying on at Marshlands, he was bound to make this vow to himself; but it is one thing to make a vow, and another to keep it; and so Mr. Basil Stondon discovered.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MARCH OF EVENTS.

No sooner was Basil's decision made known to the circle at Marshlands, than dissatisfaction appeared in the faces of two of that circle at any rate. Phemie, who really in some things was "changeful as the weather," took a private occasion of telling Basil that he had done very wrong—that an opportunity had been presented to him of "getting away from temptation, and relieving her of a burden (such was the flattering manner in which she conveyed her meaning), of which he might have availed himself."

"And I think it very wicked of you," she added. "I know if anybody had offered such a chance to me, I should have snapped at it."

"But I assure you, Phemie, upon my honour—upon my soul, I will not persecute you any more. Let bygones be bygones, and forget and forgive. We can be friends—can we not, dearest?"—over which last word he lingered so lovingly, that Mrs. Stondon knew perfectly well the struggle was not ended—that there was more misery in store for her—that he had no intention, no real intention I mean, of ceasing to persecute her. Well, she must only try to do her part,—and she would, she would, so help her God!

As for Miss Derno, she was something more than dissatisfied,—she was indignant. Miss Derno knew all about the matter now—knew that Basil loved Mrs. Stondon—knew that poor Phemie loved him. She had kept her eyes open, and she saw, moreover, that other people's eyes were beginning to be opened too, and that Phemie's reputation was not safe from hour to hour.

She loved Mrs. Stondon, loved her as women oftentimes love those of their own sex who are

much younger and weaker than themselves—loved her tenderly, compassionately, faithfully; and at length decided to take the first opportunity that offered, and throw light on Captain Stondon's understanding.

After a time the opportunity arrived. She was walking over from the Abbey, and Captain Stondon overtook her, riding. Spite of her remonstrances, he dismounted, and leading his horse by the bridle, proceeded by her side along one of the interminable high-banked, sandy Norfolk bye-roads, which seem to stand to the inhabitants in lieu of footpaths. They talked about politics; they talked about the weather, about the soil, about the county generally, about other English counties; about Miss Derno's future plans, and then she said—

"I only wish I were a man, like Basil, a man with the opportunity for pushing my way in the world, which he seems able to throw aside. It is a great pity you do not use your authority, and make him go abroad. It would be so good for him."

"But he does not wish to go."

"Children never wish to go to bed, and yet no rational parent allows his child to sit up with his playthings all night. England chances to hold Basil's latest toy; but for that very reason perhaps he ought especially to be sent abroad."

"You speak in enigmas, Miss Derno."

"Do I? Let me speak plain English then. From his youth upwards Basil has been in love, and the more unattainable his love, the more constant he has usually proved."

"Human nature," suggested Captain Stondon.

"It was his human nature, at all events," answered Miss Derno. "I have known him all his life, and I know pretty nearly every woman with whose hair or eyebrows, or finger-nails, or dimples he has fallen in love. I chance to know his latest "possession," and he wants a change of climate to cure him of his passion."

She was very pale, and she began walking very fast. Captain Stondon detained her by laying a hand on her arm.

"Would it be wrong for me," he asked, "to share a secret which seems to have been confided to you so fully?"

"It was not confided to me," she answered; "but I have observed signs and tokens in Basil which I should recommend you to observe likewise. Heaven forgive me if I am making mischief," she went on, vehemently; "but some one ought to tell you, and why not I? All the disagreeable things in life have always fallen to me to do or to say! It is your own wife, Captain Stondon, whom Basil loves. I have spoken."

She had spoken with a vengeance. A man standing in her shoes would have measured his length in the road; but a woman was as safe with Captain Stondon from retort as from injury.

"You must be mistaken, Miss Derno," he said, when he could speak, and those were the only words he uttered. She never made him an answer; and they parted when they stood in front of Marshlands without another sentence being spoken.

He had looked once, indeed, in her face entreatingly while they passed up the avenue; and she, understanding the meaning of that look, had replied to it mutely. She was to say nothing more, and he was to use his own discretion. Phemie's prudence, Phemie's goodness, Phemie's purity had not been called in question, thank God! About Basil he would think: he would do nothing rashly.

And yet it was time some person interfered, for the struggle had got too much for Phemie. Basil had kept to his resolution for a couple of days; and then finding he could endure such a separation no longer, he became worse for his very forbearance, more desperate in his importunity.

She avoided him, and he followed her; she treated him with cold indifference, and he grew mad; she would have nothing to do with him; she eschewed all places where he was likely to be; she behaved at that time, as Captain Stondon himself, who was silently watching her behaviour,

could not but perceive, unexceptionably; and if he thought this, what must not the woman have been suffering, the woman who was fighting two battles—the battle of duty, and the battle of love?

For she loved Basil still, and he knew it.

"We cannot go on this way," she said, one day, when he chanced to be left alone with her in the great drawing-room, the windows of which opened out on the terrace.

"I know we cannot," he answered; "will you leave Norfolk with me? It is misery for both of us as it is; and Captain Stondon would give you a divorce at once; I know he would. Then, at last, we might be happy, Phemie. Only speak the word."

But she would not speak; she bent her head down on the chimney-piece, and her great sin rose before her. He had spoken lightly of divorce, lightly of the great love the one man felt for her, who would, "he knew," grant her this boon at once; but, oh, God! the desolate home, and the

lonely hearth; the rooms without her—one less on the path to heaven; one more traversing the road to hell—that was what Phemie saw while she remained silent—such pictures as conscience never painted for the preservation of the poor, weak sinner who stood beside her.

"Phemie, dearest—the one love of my life—will you put an end to all this struggle and misery?" and he bent down his head over her, and kissed the once rich hair, that was now short and unlovely.

Then with a start she turned upon him. "I will never leave my husband. I swear that to you, Basil Stondon, before God!"

As she spoke the door opened, and Miss Georgina Hurlford entered. At a glance she took in the whole situation, and a sudden rage came over her as she did so.

"I will be revenged," she thought, and she was. Before the guests separated for the night, she heard Phemie say to Basil:

"To-morrow, at six, in the pine plantation."

For hours she sat and wrote after she went to her own room, and next morning the housemaid found a perfect hecatomb of burnt paper under and about the grate in Miss Hurlford's room.

"She's been a-burning of love-letters I'll be bound," soliloquized the housemaid; but she happened to be wrong.

Miss Georgina had been simply inditing a little note, which came to Marshlands next day by the hands of a strange lad:—

"If you wish to know what keeps Mr. Basil Stondon in England, be near the pine plantation this evening at six.

"A WELL-WISHER."

Have you ever had an anonymous letter, dear reader? if you ever have, perhaps you can understand with what feelings Captain Stondon read the above epistle, and with what cheerfulness and unconcern he turned him to the duties and employments of the day.

Phemie was coming to be talked about, that

was his first idea; his next was—had his darling given any occasion for scandal? He would save her, he would; he would stand between her and the world; he would keep her from all sin and from all danger. Was this the substance of the shadow that had been brooding over him? Was this the reality of the dread which had been haunting him? Could Phemie—his Phemie—Phemie of the auburn hair, of the pure heart, of the innocent mind, have been deceiving him? He would not believe it; but still I am not ashamed to add that, in the solitude of his own chamber, Captain Stondon covered his face with his hands and wept bitterly.

He had been happy, and happiness was over for him for ever; he had loved, and she whom he loved was "talked about" and suspected.

He guessed, now, what Phemie had been thinking of that night when they sat together at Hastings. Oh! if she had only told him then; only told him herself; only let the knowledge

come to him from her own lips, uttered by the music of her own voice.

Life—life; if we could only seize your opportunities as they slip by us; if we could only see the end of the paths we blindly pursue; if we could only understand that there are cases in which silence is not wisdom, in which speech is golden—I think and believe even this world might be happier than it is, freer from misunderstanding, more perfect in its bliss. As it was, Phemie, even at the eleventh hour, did not trust her husband; did not throw herself on his charity, his forbearance, his trust; but went wandering away through the twilight to keep her tryst, a mistaken woman, a lonely wife.

The heart has its diary, which it keeps more faithfully than the hand can ever do. Ink may fade, but flesh and blood cannot forget. Lines which have been traced by the pen may in time suggest merely the faintest shadows to the memory; but the story which has been traced by either joy or sorrow, the photograph which has

been burnt into the heart by passion or despair, remains stamped there indelibly till the end.

And not the one grand event merely either: every trifling accessory is photographed as well as the principal figure, and the odds and ends about a room, the floating clouds in the heavens, the ivy climbing up the wall, the folds of a dress, the straggling branch, the scattered leaves of a flower—all these things which we never could have imagined would have found themselves in the picture, are there, and will remain there till the heart is cold and its pulses still for ever.

Phemie found it so, at any rate. Did she ever forget, could she ever forget, that walk down to the pine plantation? The wind was high, and seemed to be chasing the clouds into the night. Looking up, she could see the pine-trees tossing their dark foliage against the grey sky; banks of clouds swiftly changing their position, changing and shifting as the breeze bore them hither and thither; some leaves whirling past; beds in

which geraniums were blooming late; helio-tropes still scenting the air; fir-cones under foot; the dry grass rustling beneath her tread—what did these things say to Phemie from that night on, henceforth? What did she see when she walked out at that season, at that hour, in such weather afterwards? She saw a man and a woman standing beneath the firs, hand clasped in hand, heart talking to heart, soul laid bare to soul. She heard low, broken sentences, and then louder words of entreaty, of pleading, of reproach, while the wind, after thundering and blustering among the further-off plantations, paused for a moment by the firs to listen, and then went sobbing away through the trees—sob-bing and moaning farewell, farewell!

Could she say it? She had come to try. She felt so sure of herself now, she felt so strong to cleave to the right at last, that she was there by her own appointment, in the dusk of that autumn evening, to meet the man whom, loving beyond all other men, she had hitherto avoided—

to bid the only man she had ever loved leave her.

He was there, he was waiting for her; he had no thought for the lonely husband he was trying to disgrace, for the hearth he was striving to make desolate. He remembered only himself and Phemie; he felt only the strength and the might of the curse she had laid upon him. "You shall love me for ever! You will never be able to love another woman as you love me—never."

And it was true: he felt in every throbbing pulse, in every beat of his heart, in every nerve of his body, that she had told him only the simple truth. He should never love another. Weak and false and feeble and unstable he might be in regard to everything else in life;—but Phemie—while the streams flowed to the sea—while the sun shone—while the flowers bloomed—while the grass sprang—while the earth brought forth her increase, and the rain fell, and the dews descended, he could love none

other—none—but this woman whom he wanted to make wretched—whom he wanted to destroy, body and soul—whom he took in his arms and kissed over and over again. Oh, woe for Phemie!

"You have come, my own darling, my own only love!"

"Yes, Basil, I have come." And she released herself, and stood with her one hand against a fir-tree and the other pressed hard upon her heart. "I have come, for, as I have often told you, we must part."

"Why, Phemie?"

"Because I cannot bear it—I won't bear it," she answered; "because the deception is too great, the burden heavier than I can carry; because I had rather go to him and tell him all—how I never loved him—how I have loved you—than be a hypocrite any more, than listen to the things you say to me any longer."

"I love you." It was all the excuse he could make.

"You love me!" she repeated. "Yes, and you love yourself; you love your own love better than you love me. Is it right, Basil?" she went on, passionately; "is it right for a woman to be stronger than a man? Is it for a woman to show a man the path he ought to tread, and force him into it?"

"You do not know what love is," he said, "or you would not talk in that ridiculous way."

"I do," she answered; "I do, God pardon me. Having once married my husband, I ought not to have known—I ought to have lived the decorous, untempted existence that falls to the lot of many a woman; but I met you, Basil Stondon—met you and disliked you—met you and loved you—met you and almost lost my soul for your sake! Not know what love is!" she cried, despairingly. "Basil, if I were to go through hell could I burn your kisses off my lips? Could I forget the touch of your hand? Could I come out pure as I have been? Is there any physician who could undo the past—

who could take the scars of your unholy love off my soul, Basil! Basil?"

She was not crying. Phemie had outlived that state of simplicity in which a woman weeps because she suffers; when the vessel bursts that destroys life, we do not bleed externally; when our hearts are breaking no tears flow from our eyes. She was not crying, but there was an agony in her voice which wrung even Basil Stondon's soul, and made him answer—

"Phemie, dearest, I have sinned—what can I do?"

"You can go," she said; "you can take General Hurlford's offer, and leave me; you can remember how good and kind my husband has been to you, and quit tempting me. I cannot help having loved you, Basil Stondon, but I can help being false to him, and I will be true, I will."

"You ought to have thought of that before—you led me on," he said, sullenly.

"Led you on!" she flashed out. "I lead you on! What knowledge had I—what arts could

I use—what wiles did I practise? Whatever wrong I may have done, it has not been to you. Did I ask your love—did I want your love? What has your love brought to me? I was happy, and I am wretched, and it is through no forbearance or generosity of yours that I am not more wretched still. Led you on!—it would be no great trouble to any woman to drag you down, but—I—I have tried to keep you up; I have striven hard, you know I have, and this is the way you thank me. You bless me with reproaches, you repay me with falsehood."

"Forgive me, Phemie, I did not mean it. It has been all my fault."

"It has not been all your fault," she said; "but it will be yours if you stay on here when you have the chance given you of leaving. Did you not promise me that we should be friends—but friends—and what did you ask me yesterday? —to go away with you, Basil, to live with you in sin, to leave the husband who has been good to me lonely and dishonoured. God pardon

you, Basil, and God pardon me, for ever having fallen so low that you could say and that I could listen to such things."

"Where is the sin?" he retorted. "I love you and you love me. You do not love your husband."

"But I respect him—ay, and I love him too much to bring sorrow to his door by any act of mine. Where is the sin?" she repeated; "where—oh, Lord in heaven!" and she clasped her hands together, "if this man be so blinded that he cannot see his sin, open Thou his eyes; give sight to him as Thou alone canst."

"Phemie."

"Yes, Basil."

"What is the use of all that rubbish? You do not believe in it, you cannot believe in it. How can a man and a woman, who have felt as we have felt, pray to God, if there be a God?"

With a cry of despair she fell on her knees.

"I am here before Him, Basil," she answered; "He can remember, better than I, every thought

of mine since I first met you, every thought of yours since you first set eyes on me, and yet I feel He has not forsaken me. I know the day must come when you will feel He has not forsaken you."

She put that thought between him and his sin. She put the thought of her God, she put purity and perfection so great, that it could afford to look without turning aside on impurity, between her and temptation. The old lessons learned so many a year before in the manse, within sound of the mourning and murmuring sea, came to her help then. The God who had been her grandfather's Father in that old innocent life was her Father now, and to Him in that hour she appealed.

"Oh! Lord," she went on, "in so far as I have sinned give me my wages and I will take them without a murmur, but let me sin no more, and keep me out of temptation."

"She lifted her hands clasped above her head as she spoke the last words—spoke them

almost with a sob—and, from among the pine-trees, it seemed as though her sobs were echoed back.

"Was that the wind, Basil," she asked, springing to her feet—"or has somebody been listening to us?"

"Who would come here to listen?" he answered sulkily; "are you going to talk to me rationally now, at last?"

"No," was the answer, "never will I talk to you what you call rationally again. I know all you want—I know all you would say—I know how weak I am for good—how strong you are for evil—and for all these reasons, I say we must part. If you will not go, I shall have to find some means of making you go. I am willing to leave the 'how' in your hands, Basil, but the result I cannot have changed. You must go, or I will tell my husband—I was once very nearly confessing everything; and I would rather confess everything, than live the life of misery and deception I have done for fifteen

months past. I came to tell you this—I have told it to you—so good-bye."

He would have detained her, but she fled from him—he would, had it been possible, have carried her off there and then, but Phemie's will was stronger than his purpose. "Good-bye," she said, and the wind took the words and carried them up into the branches of the pine-trees.

He answered her with a muttered oath—and the wind took that likewise and bore it away.

When Phemie and Basil had both left the pine plantation, the sob which attracted Mrs. Stondon's attention was repeated once again.

Amongst those pines a man's heart had that night been broken—his dream was dispelled, his trust destroyed. She had never loved him—she had loved Basil; and Captain Stondon, who had played the spy for the first time in his life, heard her words and took them home to brood over.

Was it for this he had wished when he drank

of the waters that fell over the rocks at Tor-dale?—was it for this he had married a young wife in the church that looked adown the sweet valley under the shadow of the everlasting hills?

CHAPTER XII.

THE SOCIAL RACK.

The real tragedies of life are, as a rule, played out behind the scenes, and the men and the women who have received the severest wounds—who have wept the bitterest tears—who have passed through the fiercest fires, come forth with serene faces, and enact those comedies which society loves to see, on the conventional boards of the drawing-room theatre.

Society hates tragedy, and it is perhaps only fair that it should do so, since tragic actors, on their part, detest society. They hate the boisterous sympathy of the people, who fill the galleries of that great playhouse, the world; they loathe the surprised ignorance of the upper

boxes, and with the keenest dislike they writhe under the critical appreciativeness of the stalls and dress-circle.

Comedy, comedy, wit, gaiety, for the social audience! youth, beauty, the brilliant dress, the smiling face for strangers, acquaintances, and even friends! but the ghastly wound, the eating cancer, the deathly disease, the tear-stained face, the contrite prayer, the repentant heart—when the lonely chamber is reached and the door closed.

It was so at Marshlands. The guests there had each his or her little tragedy hidden away from sight—tragedy past or present; and yet to have seen the company assembled round the dinner-table, and to have heard the gay chatter in the drawing-room, no one would have suspected the existence of the mental haircloth each in the little circle wore underneath the fine linen and the shining satin. With some, long years had rubbed away all the painful points, and left the trouble and the endurance, a memory—

nothing more; but with others the garment was new, and caused the lips, wreathed with smiles, to tremble occasionally because of the pain to which, as the years went by, they were to grow accustomed.

It was a pretty drawing-room, and pretty women moved hither and thither about it. Besides Miss Derno and Miss Georgina Hurlford, there were perhaps seven or eight ladies in the apartment, girls and matrons, who looked at sketches, and the new magazines, who stood together beside the wood fire, or near the centre table, talking about their children, about their governesses, about their houses, their favourite horses, dogs, books, pursuits, gossiping away the half-hour after dinner till the gentlemen should come in and create a diversion.

"You look tired," said Miss Derno to Phemie, as Mrs. Stondon at length turned away from the group by the fire, and sat down on a sofa near one of the windows.

"I am tired of that insufferable woman,"

answered Phemie, pettishly, referring to a Mrs. Chichelee, who had been entertaining her hostess with an account of the ailments, peculiarities, and special virtues of each one of her nine children: "she always does weary me to death." And Phemie leaned her head back on the pillow while Miss Derno said—

"Any person might have thought you found her conversation interesting, you listened to it so earnestly."

"One has to be civil," was the reply; "that is the worst of living—one has to be civil to *everybody*." And Phemie laid a stress on the last word, which was not strictly complimentary to her hearer. "Sometimes I wish I were dead; but then I remember there will be even more people in the next world than in this."

"You ought to buy some solitary island, and retire there with some fowls and a goat," suggested Miss Derno.

"I think I shall; but then those horrid women with tribes of children would always be visiting

me under pretext of giving the little wretches change of air. For twenty minutes Mrs. Chichelee has been entertaining us with the biographies of her children from their birth up to the present hour—how Gwenny had the measles, and Harry broke his arm——"

"Pity it had not been his neck," interposed Miss Derno, "for a more detestable brat could not be found in all Norfolk."

"And how Ada knew her letters at three years old, and how Rupert, when he was in his nurse's arms, was always calling out, 'horse, horse.' I confess it is a perfect enigma to me how any woman can imagine such talk can be interesting to another woman, not the aunt, or grandmother, or great-grandmother of her precious progeny."

"When it is all a woman is able to tell about," was the reply; "when her life is passed in the nursery and the schoolroom with her babies and their nurses—when the care of her children is the one absorbing occupation of her life—her

profession in fact—I am not certain that one ought to blame her."

"Are you not?" answered Phemie; "well, then, I am. Out of your mouth I will convict you. Is it good taste for a man to talk of his profession or trade? What should we think of an artist who made his friends' lives a weariness unto them because of the multitude of pictures he had painted? May a musician speak by the hour about the pieces he has composed, or an author bore one about his stupid books? Following the same rule, if it be the sole business of a woman's life to bring children into the world, and fill her husband's quiver full to overflowing with boys and girls, I think she ought, when she comes out visiting, to leave her shop behind her."

"What treason are you two concocting?" demanded Miss Georgina Hurlford, coming softly up to where Mrs. Stondon was seated. "Is it a secret, or may I come and listen to you?"

"We were talking about trades and profes-

sions," answered Phemie; "as we are all after a fashion workers in this world, so I suppose we may all be said to be in business."

"Then yours is making yourself agreeable it is only fair to conclude," said Miss Georgina, who had a neat way of "putting things."

"It must be," was the reply, "because I dislike the occupation so much, and I have always heard men dislike that which is the business of their lives."

"That rule would not appear to hold good with regard to women," remarked Miss Derno.

"How do you make that out?" asked Miss Georgina.

"Why, the two great employments of our sex seem not to be unpleasant to the majority—rearing sons and daughters and looking out for good settlements." Having concluded which sentence, Miss Derno looked straight at Miss Hurlford, who answered without a change of colour—

"Your experience is doubtless greater than mine, but I should have thought the latter occu-

pation, at all events, most wearisome and unprofitable."

"It is early in the day for you to cry out that the land is barren," was Miss Derno's not over civil retort; but the entrance of the gentlemen at this juncture did away with all necessity for reply from Miss Georgina Hurlford, who was only too happy to allow the conversation to drop.

Coffee and tea were handed round; the young ladies brightened up, the matrons looked relieved; the ten minutes' interval was over, and the curtain again drew up; the sketches were studied with more interest than ever, for were there not wiser heads bending over the sketches too, able to point out their especial merits to the girls whose minds were supposed to be still lying fallow?

"Your evenings are *so* delightful, my dear Mrs. Stondon," said plump little Mrs. Enmoor, who had the pleasure of seeing her eldest daughter airing her small knowledge of botany in

the sun of Mr. Ralph Chichelee's admiring smiles. (Mr. Ralph Chichelee was nephew to the happy father of nine waxy-faced, pug-nosed children, and next heir to a baronetage. Judge, then, of the maternal pleasure.) "As I often say to Mr. Enmoor, if Marshlands were thirty miles distant instead of eight, I do not think I could resist one of Mrs. Stondon's cordial invitations."

Mrs. Stondon looked round the room, took in the position at a glance, and then said, with the smile which was her stereotyped company smile, and nothing that had ever belonged to Phemie Keller, "You are very kind."

"It is you who are kind," returned Mrs. Enmoor, in a little ecstasy of enthusiasm; "and it is because you are kind, and because your house is like one's own home—only pleasanter, I think—that your friends are so fond of coming here."

Phemie put out her hand and touched Mrs. Enmoor's round white arm. Somehow the little lady's heartiness and gratitude touched her,

although she knew the heartiness was not quite genuine nor the gratitude wholly retrospective. There was a great yearning in the poor desolate heart at times for something to love—something to pour out its treasures upon sinlessly; and when women spoke kindly and tenderly to her, she often thought she could love a woman very much indeed. After all, why should she not help on these little feminine schemes a little? Men and women must marry. Why should she not assist at the ceremony? Lily Enmoor was rather a nice specimen of a young lady. Phemie thought she could grow in time fond of Lily, and, after all, might such a marriage not be better than sending poor Basil away to India, where she would be always fancying some dreadful thing was happening to him—either being dead of fever, or being eaten by wild beasts, or wounded or maimed in some way. Basil had, however, never once looked even admiringly on Lily Enmoor, or perhaps Phemie might not have said, in answer to Mrs. Enmoor's remark—

"Thank you so much. I wish you would allow your daughter to spend a week or two with me. I want to know more of her."

And then seeing how Mrs. Enmoor's eyes sparkled with pleasure, Phemie wished the words unspoken; and looking back, thought that after all the old life on the hill-side had been best, where, without diplomacy or the interference of friends, or the "helping-on" of acquaintances, Jack courted Jenny in the gloaming; and the farmers' sons wooed the farmers' daughters, the parents having no hand in the matter till consent was asked, and the whole affair merely wanted, to make its happiness complete, the blessings of father and mother on the young and loving couple.

Mrs. Stondon had known another and a simpler life than that in which she now moved and had her being; a simpler life, and perhaps a happier; but she had not been content then, and longed to leave it. Had her game proved worth the candle? she asked herself, bitterly. Does any human

game, when the last card is played or the last stake gathered in, seem worth all that we have spent to gain it? Does it? Oh reader—you who have just pocketed your winnings, and risen from your chair, answer—has your game turned out altogether profitable? has nothing come with success to dim the colour of the gold—to dull the bright tints of the picture—to cause a discord in the sweet melody—to make fame insipid—happiness regret? Is any game worth the candle? that was what Phemie sat considering while Mrs. Enmoor answered her invitation with—

"You are really too good, Mrs. Stondon; but I am afraid Lily would be in your way, with so large a party already. No? then I am certain she will be delighted: you are her model of everything beautiful and charming—her ideal of perfection. I will not tell you all Lily says about you, for it might sound like flattery, though it would be only the simple truth—the simple honest truth, as we often declare at home."

Phemie knew it—knew that as she had once admired Miss Derno, so many and many a young girl now admired her. She had gained ease and grace of manner, she had employed her talents, she had acquired accomplishments, she had learnt how to show off her beauty to the greatest advantage, and yet still how to wear her beauty like a garment. Everything she resolved years before to conquer, so that her husband might be fond of her and not ashamed, she had now made her own. To what end? Misery. What had she done with her gifts? Gained Basil Stondon's heart and lost her own. What signified the beauty and the accomplishments and the grace and the ease and the knowledge of the world? what had all these profited her?

Oh! for the old life—for the pure soul—for the unsophisticated nature—for the unspotted innocence—for the girlish trust—for the faithful heart—for the loving, guileless, unsuspicious spirit that had been her own, but which might be hers again—no more, alas! no more.

Miss Derno was at the piano by this time, playing one of those old pieces of which people never seem to tire. That mad polacca of Weber's, somewhat resembling in its insane abruptness the Tarantellas of the present day, chanced to be the music on which she was literally expending her strength, when from one of the company there came one of those excessively mal à propos requests which cause us frequently to think people must have some intuitive knowledge of a disagreeable subject—some secret information as to an unpleasant topic.

"Pray, Miss Derno," inquired Mr. Ralph Chichelee, who considered himself rather a master, not merely of botany but of thorough-bass, "do you know that little 'Farewell' song written by Motherwell, which has just been published?—set to music I mean, for the words are as old as the hills."

"Scarcely, I should think," answered Miss Derno, as, having completed her polacca, she sat with her hands folded, looking up in Mr. Chiche-

lee's face. "Motherwell was not in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, or else we are talking of two different men."

"I am speaking of the—of, in fact, a Scotch Motherwell," was the reply.

"Precisely so," said Miss Derno, "and I am speaking of a Scotch Motherwell who was born towards the end of the last century and who died some twenty years since. If you mean that 'Farewell' of his, I can sing it, of course."

And Miss Derno sang Motherwell's "Farewell," two verses of which are as follows:—

"'Twas not in cold and measur'd phrase
We gave our passion name,
Scorning such tedious eloquence,
Our heart's fond flame,
And long imprison'd feelings pent
In deep sobs came—
Farewell!

"Would that our love had been the love
That merest worldlings know,
When passion's draught to our doomed lips
Turns utter woe;
And our poor dream of happiness
Vanishes so!
Farewell!"

Olden memories, olden hopes, olden sorrows, go to make a singer's singing pathetic; and olden memories, olden hopes, olden sorrows, all contributed in this instance to make Miss Derno's rendering of the words and music perfect. Miss Georgina Hurlford stole a look towards Mrs. Stondon as the last two lines of the song rose and fell with a despairing cadence impossible to convey the meaning of in any mere form of words—

> "And our poor dream of happiness
> Vanishes so!
> Farewell!"

Vanishes so!—oh! poet sweet and tender, vague and beautiful, it was wise to express the universal feeling briefly, leaving it to each man and to each woman whose dream has been broken in upon to supply the hiatus.

Vanishes so!—it was all passing away from Phemie then—vanishing like a vision after which it was vain to stretch out her feeble hands. Vanishing—oh! Lord, she had dreamt—and behold now she was awake, and the realities and the

duties and the trammels of every-day life were around her. Vanishing—vanishing like the faint colour from her cheeks—like the strength from her limbs. Vanishing so!

"Dear Mrs. Stondon, are you ill?"—it was Miss Georgina who addressed her—"can I bring you a glass of water? will you not come and sit down?" But Phemie put her aside a little impatiently, and with a short "No, thank you, I am quite well. What an exquisite song!" she went on speaking to Miss Derno. "I am so fond of those Scottish ballads, they always seem to me to have a second accompaniment—the sobbing of the sea; the rippling of the waves; the plash, plash of the ocean; can you recollect any more? I think they are perfectly beautiful."

Miss Derno looked up at Phemie as she spoke—looked into the face which was now flushed, into the eyes that were tearless.

"I do not know any more of the same class of songs," she answered, rising; "in fact, it was quite by accident I knew that." And she lifted

her gloves and bouquet from the piano while she said this, and would have drawn Phemie back, but that Phemie would not stir.

"I am so sorry," she remarked, "it is so rarely one hears a really beautiful song."

"I know one of Motherwell's," broke in Miss Georgina, with that manner of ease and frankness which so tried Miss Derno's patience. "If I can give you any pleasure it will make me so happy —it is one of Miss Derno's songs though, so you must make my peace with her."

And without more invitation Miss Georgina seated herself at the piano, and sang "The Midnight Wind," with which Mr. Chichelee was so enchanted that he begged her to try if she could not recollect something else—something, anything. Upon which the young lady, putting her finger to her dimpled chin, considered. What did she know? what could she sing? It was so provoking, whenever she was asked to sing, directly she forgot every song she knew, and she knew fifty—oh, far more than fifty—two hun-

dred; yes, she was certain she could sing two hundred for her papa, but now she was unable to recollect anything.

"What, not one?" whispered Mr. Chichelee in his softest tenor. He had a way of speaking to young ladies as though he were executing a very low recitative, intoning is perhaps a better expression, which, as a rule, produced its due effect.

Apparently it produced its due effect on the occasion in question, for Miss Hurlford took her finger from her chin, and thought she could remember a very pretty song indeed—"one quite in Mrs. Stondon's style, I am happy to say. I do so love to do anything which can give her the slightest pleasure."

There is no accounting for the things that are capable of pleasing some people—so perhaps Mrs. Stondon did derive some satisfaction from the song Miss Georgina selected. Remembering the circumstances of her life, reader—judge whether the melody struck on any of the minor chords in

Phemie's nature; whether the old times and the new did not mingle together; whether past and present did not mix and swim confusedly before her. Phemie dear! Phemie, my love! society had taught you much, I think, when it enabled you to listen to all those songs without a tear springing to your eyes—without your flinching from the torture.

"O think it not strange that my soul is shaken
By every note of thy simple song,
These tears, like a summoning spell, awaken
The shades of feeling that slumber'd long;
There's a hawthorn tree near a low-roofed dwelling,
A meadow green and a river clear,
A bird that its summer tale is telling,
And a form unforgotten—they all are here.

"They are here with dark recollections laden,
From a sylvan scene o'er the weary sea,
They speak of a time when I parted that maiden,
By the spreading boughs of the hawthorn tree.
We sever'd in wrath—to her low-roofed dwelling
She turned with a step which betray'd her pain,
She knew not the love that was fast dispelling,
The gloom of his pride who was hers in vain.

"We met never more, and her faith was plighted
To one who could not her value know:
The curse that still clings to affections blighted,
Tinctured her life's cup with deepest woe.

And these are the thoughts which thy tones awaken,
The shades of feeling that slumber'd long;
Then think it not strange that my soul is shaken,
By every note of thy simple song."

There were some things which even Miss Georgina Hurlford could not do, and one of these chanced to be putting a natural expression into music. She could play *piano*, and she could play *forte*, but she lacked the soul that made Phemie's simplest airs steal their way into the hearer's heart.

In the former days Phemie's singing had been a revelation of the love and the passion which was at some future time to make her life wretched. Knowing what he now knew, thinking what he now thought, Captain Stondon felt the tones of his wife's voice thrill through him as she carolled a little French song, at Miss Georgina's earnest request for her to do so. He turned sick as he listened—sick because of his great love and his great pity. He could see all his mistake now—from the height of his age he could look down on her youth. He had been warned before—not by

man—not by sense—not by any act of his own reason, but by instinct—that, though he might love Phemie, she could never give him that love which was the only one he wanted from her. He could see it all now; he comprehended at last the meaning of the feelings that had passed through his mind that night when he heard Phemie sing for the first time "Alice Grey."

He was in the Hill Farm again: the blazing fire, the closed curtains, Phemie with her guitar, Mr. Aggland with his strongly-marked features, with his wild hair, with his deep-set eyes, the boys listening open-mouthed to their cousin's singing—these things were before him once again. He was making his choice; he was deciding on his future life—all the time instinct was whispering to him, "Leave her, or it will be worse for both of you"—all the time that voice never was silent; and yet he shut his ears, and made her his wife.

He took the young thing from her mountain home; he brought her to a new and an untried

life; he matched her teens to his almost three-score years; he had taken her faith for granted, and he had left her in the way of temptation. He had been so sure—oh, he had been *so* sure of a heart he never owned! And now he knew, he understood all she had suffered, all she had resisted, all the wrong she had done to him, all the perils through which she had passed in safety. He knew—ah, well, when such an hour as that comes to any man who has married a wife, and loved her through all the years of her wedded life, God help him! God strengthen him!

After all their stranger guests had departed, after all their visitors had retired for the night, after she had done everything which could be demanded of her as a hostess and the mistress of Marshlands, Phemie stood alone by her dressing-room window, looking out into the night. Long before she had dismissed her maid, and she now stood, as I have said, looking out into the autumn night.

It was not very dark, and she could see the pines and the elms and the beeches tossing their branches mournfully to the sky. She was weary; she was sick of the struggle. She had spent her last strength in trying to keep up during the course of the evening, and the old longing to get away, to be out on the sea, to be travelling from billow to billow, came over her once again. She thought it would be nice to lie with her hands clasped, and let the waves toss her hither and thither, wheresoever they listed; that she would love to feel the ocean breezes fanning her cheeks, that she would like to be out on the sea in the darkness alone. She never thought of drowning; she never felt it would be possible for her to sink; and yet she could not bear the idea of Basil adopting the very course she had been so lately urging upon him. She felt if he went away his ship would founder, and that he would go down, down among the foam and billows over which she desired to float.

What should she do, save die? How other-

wise could she ever untie this knot, release herself from fetters that were entering into her very soul? She did not want him to stay; she did not want him to go; she did not wish him to marry; she did not desire that he should stay to make existence a misery—life something worse than useless. Would he go? If he did not go, how should she ever endure the struggle longer? She was faint and weary; she had borne the heat and the burden of this her day, and was sinking under it. What should she do? Would no one help her? Was there no one to whom she could turn for advice or assistance? Should she go to the old Hill Farm and tell her uncle everything? It would break her husband's heart. Should she feign sickness, or would he go—would he——?

And then she sobbed a prayer—sobbed it with her cheek leaning against the window-frame the while, looking with her great, sorrowful eyes at the night and the flying clouds and the mourning trees—that God would help and strengthen her,

and enable her, spite of pain, and spite of temptation, to reject the evil, and to cleave to the right.

"Phemie, dearest,"—it was her husband who spoke, and Mrs. Stondon started—"Phemie, dearest, you will catch cold standing by the open window." And he closed the window, and drew her away towards the fire.

"Tell him now," her better angel whispered to Phemie; "tell him all," added conscience; but Captain Stondon left her no time for confidences. He only kissed her gravely, and would have turned away, only that Phemie flung herself on his neck, and with her arms twined round him, lay with her head on his shoulder, weeping despairingly.

Had he spoken to her then—had he asked her any question, she could have told him all; but Captain Stondon had decided that no human being, not even Phemie, should ever again speak to him about his wife's imperilled honour—about the disgrace which had swept by her name. He

knew—who better ?—all that was passing through that poor heart then; he knew why she wept, why she clung to him, why she touched his grey hairs so lovingly, why she concealed her face so resolutely. The depths of her nature had been sounded at last, not by him, it is true; but yet the waters so long pent up having found a vent, she could not help but pour out some tenderness on the man whose love she was now able to estimate, whose truth and faith and honesty and trustfulness she had learned to appreciate through the very extremity of her own treason.

She could not love him best, but she loved him more then than she had ever done since they were married. She had suffered, and suffering is a great teacher. She felt more loving then than I could ever hope to explain: gratitude, repentance, affection, contempt of her own weakness, all struggled together, and caused her to cling despairingly to the man whose confidence she had abused.

And all he kept saying to her was, " My poor

child! my poor darling! you have done too much this evening, you are thoroughly worn out!"

That was the *rôle* he had laid out for their future life. He could keep her from harm; and yet to her he would ignore the possibility of harm.

He could not unmarry her; he could not give her back the chances of possessing an early love which she had lost for ever in marrying him; but he could save her. He could end the struggle, and she never be the wiser as to his motive for doing so.

He was a just man and a good; and yet still, I think, he made the mistake all people must make when they treat a woman as they would treat a man. It may not be any luxury for one of the lords of creation to acknowledge his misdemeanours, and enjoy the pleasure of a good talk over his shortcomings; but no one of the daughters of Eve is happy till she has acknowledged her transgressions; in which respect, so far as any information we have on the subject

goes, the daughters do not resemble their mother.

But according to his light, Captain Stondon judged, and as he judged, he acted; and it was many a day before Phemie knew that, notwithstanding all her errors, he had loved her better than himself—better than houses and lands—better than anything in creation, excepting purity and virtue—excepting her honour and his own.

CHAPTER XIII.

PARTED.

"BASIL," said Captain Stondon the next day to his relative, "I am going to ride over to Disley before luncheon, will you come with me?"

To which request, never doubting but that his opinion was desired on some question of renewing leases or felling timber, Mr. Basil at once agreed.

As for the General, he was deep in the mysteries of letter-writing. The Indian mail was going out the next day, and he always sent a budget of manuscript by it. Miss Hurlford also had her home correspondence to attend to.

"I often think," remarked Miss Derno to Phemie, "that hostesses must bless Rowland

Hill a hundred times a week. I have frequently tried to fancy what a visit could have been like a hundred years ago, when people did not write letters, when ladies did not use up quires of note-paper and scores of envelopes of a morning. How the mistresses of households bore it, more especially those mistresses who prepared medicines for the bites of mad dogs, and such like useful mixtures, in the still-room, I am at a loss to imagine."

"Probably," said Phemie, "people did not pay visits in those days."

"And you are wishing in your heart at this present moment that they did not pay visits in these. I agree with you; if ever I have a house of my own I do not think I shall fill it full of people, even though they promise to write letters by the hour. Just look at the General—only look at him. One would think the whole of the management of India was resting on his own high shoulders! Are you recommending another protégé for the Ceylon appointment, Sir Samuel?"

Miss Derno inquired, walking up to the table where the officer sat engrossed in his correspondence.

Very much astonished at being spoken to, Sir Samuel looked up.

"I am—no—that is, Miss Derno, Captain Stondon requested me not to write to my friend until the last moment, as he rather fancied Mr. Stondon had changed his mind, and would be glad to accept."

"I am delighted to hear it," answered Miss Derno; "delighted also to learn on such good authority that Basil had a mind to change; only," added the lady, "I am afraid it is much too good news to be true." And she shot, as she finished, a look first towards Phemie and then towards Miss Hurlford, which glance told her, that with regard to the latter lady the news was hoped for, yet not expected, and that Phemie did not hope, and yet half-expected, while at the same time the news astonished and startled her.

"He has taken me at my word; he does not

care about leaving me—he will marry her—he is offended. He has never loved me as I have loved him."

Could Phemie help all this passing through her mind faster than I can write it? Could the poor creature help the jealousy which had tormented and harassed her so often? Do you blame her because the veins of her heart broke out bleeding afresh at the thought of parting with him for ever? She had been very wrong; she knew it was a sin, and yet—and yet—ah! reader, he had been all the world to her, he had possessed all the love she was ever to feel for man, and it was hard. The punishment might have been deserved, but the lash fell none the lighter for all that.

Meantime the two men who loved her most on earth, who loved her perhaps equally though differently, rode on side by side towards Disley. When they had left Marshlands a couple of miles behind them, Captain Stondon pulled his horse up into a walk, and began,

"I asked you to come with me this morning, Basil, because I want to speak to you where we can be secure from eavesdroppers. There is at least one spy at Marshlands."

Involuntarily Basil tightened his grasp of the bridle, and his horse, a well-trained one, stopped dead; the next moment he sprang forward with a bound, while the younger man answered—

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear you say so."

"Not more sorry than I am to say it," was the reply; "but all this is beside the question. What I want to talk to you about is the Ceylon appointment. I have been reconsidering that matter, and it seems to me that we have perhaps been hasty in declining General Hurlford's offer. Sometimes I think, Basil," went on the old man, with his head bowed over the saddle-tree—bowed to conceal his emotion, "that it is possible you may feel I am in the way, that I am keeping you too long out of Marshlands."

He spoke all this very slowly and at intervals; but still when Basil would have answered, he held

up his hand and motioned him to keep silence while he proceeded.

"I am afraid I have considered myself too much, and others too little. I was so happy; I forgot others might not be happy too. What I am going to tell you now, Basil, I wish you not to repeat to any one, especially to—to—my wife."

It was more by intuition than with the help of his ears that the young man gathered Captain Stondon's meaning. The hour Phemie had always dreaded was at hand, and he partly understood what Captain Stondon desired should be the nature of the compact between them. The knowledge, and the shame, and the punishment, and the suffering were to be theirs; she was to be kept out of the business altogether. Vaguely comprehending this, he promised, and then waited for the rest.

"I know all," Captain Stondon went on, and he looked straight into Basil's face as he spoke, "and that is why I say you ought to accept

General Hurlford's offer, and leave England. No honourable man, feeling as you felt, placed as you were placed, would have refused that offer. I say nothing about the past, however," he continued, "for I cannot recall it—would to God I could!—only you must not remain at Marshlands for the future, and I should prefer that you went abroad. I have a right, I think, to demand that you shall go abroad. It will be best for all of us that you should do so."

"I will go," Basil answered, and answered sullenly. He never tried to defend himself, he never uttered a word of excuse or apology; he simply said, "I will go," feeling himself a very ill-used man all the time; and the pair rode on in silence till they reached Disley, where Captain Stondon had some business to transact.

When he completed it, they turned their horses' heads eastward, towards Marshlands, and trotted back mile after mile without exchanging a word.

Till, in fact, they came in view of the pines and the elms; and then Basil, thinking of all he

had promised, of all he should have to sacrifice, burst out in anger against both his sentence and his judge.

"Will nothing satisfy you but my going thousands of miles away?" he began. "Will you believe no promise? will you accept no oath? If I swear never to come near her, if I leave Norfolk, if I never darken your doors again, will that not satisfy you? What is the use of my leaving England? If we are parted, what can the distance you put between us signify?"

Captain Stondon turned in his saddle, and looked at the speaker in amazement.

He could no more understand a man hesitating in an affair of this kind than he could have comprehended a man hanging back in battle. He had no more toleration for a moral coward than for a soldier deficient in physical bravery. The thing was to be done; why should he show the white flag about the matter?

He had loved Basil: he had been gentle with him because of his love and of his sorrow; but

now there was as much contempt as pity in his tone when he answered—

"A moth may wish to stay near the candle, but we put him out of the room and close the window, notwithstanding. Just so I desire to put it out of your power to see my wife. I do not want to have to watch you. When it was in your own power to flee from temptation you did not flee; you stayed on and tempted her. I want now to remove you from temptation. In one word, I mean to have no more tampering with her honour and with mine. When I think of it all, when I remember how you took advantage of my blindness, and tried to bring misery to her and to me, I feel as if I could not forgive you. But go, now —only go, Basil, and I will not reproach you; I will try to remember my own folly and forgive yours."

It was over, and Basil felt it. This was not a husband to be deluded into any false security again. His very love would make him strong to protect Phemie; watchful, for her sake; a very

Argus concerning his young wife. So perfect had been his trust, that now it was once broken nothing could ever mend it again—nothing. It was over; he should see her no more; he must leave her; he should never feel the soft hand trembling in his; he should never see the colour rush up into her cheek; the troubled look pass over her face, the tears dimming her dear eyes again. He would not be able to torment her in the future. Words of love, words of reproach, words of entreaty, words of passionate sorrow, of despairing regret—for all these there must hereafter be substituted the silence of separation, the agony of loneliness. She could be nothing to him in the days and the weeks and the months and the years to come. In that far-away country there would be no Phemie; in England there would be no Basil Stondon; and but for very shame the man could have cried aloud in his anguish. Parted! parted! he and she, who had loved one another so exceedingly. Parted! he and she, who could never love husband or wife

with the same passion of attachment as she had loved Basil! as he had loved Phemie!

"I cannot do it; I cannot bear it," Basil thought. "I will shoot myself." And he remembered his father's end, and considered that his father had been right.

"They will be sorry then," he decided in his own mind; "they will wish they had not driven me to it." And he resolved that directly he went up into his dressing-room he would blow out his brains, and make Phemie and her husband wretched for the remainder of their lives.

But Basil Stondon was not the man to blow out his brains. "I would not do it if she would go away with me," he reflected, putting back his pistol in its case, and he determined accordingly to give Phemie one other chance.

"If she be fond of me, she never can let me leave England alone," he argued. And all the time General Hurlford was talking about the appointment, its duties, its salary, the climate, the country, the society, Basil was wondering whether

Phemie would see that strange land with him, whether, hand in hand, they would walk through that earthly Eden sinfully together.

He thought he should have many opportunities of speaking to her before he left England, but in this idea he was mistaken.

He had to go to London to provide his outfit: it was of course necessary for him to bid his mother farewell. Time slipped by, and still he had never seen Phemie alone; so at last, living in the same house, he wrote to her, and bade Phemie's maid give her mistress the letter before she went down to dinner on the evening preceding that on which he was to start for London to join the Hurlfords.

He prayed her in that letter to grant him one more interview, to give him one more chance.

A selfish man can always write eloquently when the subject is his own sorrow, and because the letter was very touching, and because she herself was very miserable, Phemie cried over it till she could cry no more.

But nevertheless she would not see him, would not contrive that one opportunity he craved.

Although it was for her sake, as she believed, he was going—although it was at her instance, as she had no reason to doubt, he was leaving his native land, still she distrusted her own heart too much to yield to his prayer. She had vowed, by all the lessons of old, by all the teachings of her earlier youth, by all the truths she had learned in the days of her innocence, that she would put herself into the way of temptation no more. She had prayed to be kept from evil, and she would not walk into evil with her eyes open; for all which reasons, when Basil held her hand that night in adieu—when he looked imploringly into her face—when his eyes asked for a reply to the question he dared not frame into words, Phemie's mouth formed the monosyllable "No." Phemie, with her fingers clasping his, with her blue eyes swimming in tears, with her dear face pale and sorrowful, shook her head. It could not be, it could not, and Basil cursed her in his heart. Till

he has tasted all the bitterness of the very dregs of the cup of sin, there is nothing a man of Basil Stondon's stamp hates like virtue, and for this reason he detested Phemie Stondon then.

But once in London he relented; and as he would not or could not write to her direct, he enclosed a letter to Mrs. Stondon under cover of one to Miss Derno, stating that he would be in the plantation the next evening at six o'clock, and praying her to meet him there.

He was mad. I do think at that crisis of his life, the fact of the toy being beyond his reach, the grapes too well guarded, made him insane.

He felt he must try to see her once again, and he might perhaps have compassed his end, for Phemie was not stronger than her neighbours, but for this, that she never received his letter.

Miss Derno knew Basil Stondon well, none better; and knowing him—knowing his selfish weakness, his thoughtless disregard of consequences—she put the letter he enclosed into the fire, and saved Phemie from one temptation more.

All that evening he wandered round and about Marshlands till he had hardly time to catch the last up-train from Disley; he waited in the plantation, and watched the house which held her whose heart was only too full of love for him.

Then he went—with his soul full of bitterness, with his mouth full of curses.

"She loves herself too well," he thought; "she loves ease and social position, and her fine house and the life she leads at Marshlands too much even to come out and bid a poor devil, who has only sinned in being fond of her, good-bye. Farewell, then, Mrs. Stondon," he hastily finished, pausing on his way towards Disley, and taking off his hat to make a low mocking bow in the direction of Marshlands. "Farewell. I wonder where you will be when I return to England—where you will be when I ask you next time to meet me. Farewell, then, Phemie, my Phemie of the blue eyes and the auburn eyes—my Phemie—my darling—mine no more!'

The man's heart was breaking. All his heart

had been given to this woman, and now the woman was prudent. She would sacrifice nothing, so he put it, for his sake. Well, he would go, and the time might come, yes, it might, when Phemie would pray to him as he had prayed to her, and pray in vain.

He looked on the new life and the new country differently now; perhaps when he was gone quite beyond her reach, she would repent. He rejoiced, therefore, to consider she soon could not recall him; that he would be in twenty-four hours more beyond the possibility of aught save regret.

And yet when the twenty-four hours were gone, and he was steaming down the Channel, all the bitterness departed from his heart. He would have given all the hopes of his future life to look upon her dear face once more—to hold her to his breast—to kiss the sweet, pure lips—to stroke and smooth the soft hair that he had touched with fear and trembling in the days that were gone. Standing by the ship's side, gazing down into the sea over which he was passing

further and further from her, the man's eyes grew oftentimes dim, thinking of the woman he had loved. Not all Miss Georgina's prattle, not all Sir Samuel's wise and improving discourse, could chase away *that* memory, could make the beauty of that far-away face seem faint, or blurred, or indistinct.

The old things of his life were put on one side, and he could not even flirt. How terrible must have been that wound which prevented Basil Stondon seeking consolation for the frowns of one woman in the smiles of another! How wonderful the power of that love which could still retain a hold over him when he was travelling on—on—over the sea, away from the smiles and the tears and the weakness and the strength of Phemie, who had said, "You shall never forget me—never love girl, nor woman, nor wife as you have loved me. When you are lying awake in the darkness you shall think of me; when you are standing in the twilight you shall remember me. I can never be anything to you as another

woman may; but I can be near to you for all that, and I will."

And was she not near to him?

Further and further the vessel bore him from England, but still Phemie bore him company. She was with him in the desert; night and day he thought of her; he wished to be with her; his heart went travelling out to meet her form, and brought it back to lodge in his bosom. He wept for her—he sickened after her—he hated her one moment—he prayed for her the next.

"If my being away gives her happiness," he would think when his softest moods were upon him, "it is well for me to be away; but let me die, oh God! let me die." And then through the darkness he could still see her standing among the pines, her hands clasped above her head, crying with a sob—

"In so far as I have sinned, give me my wages; but let me sin no more."

Should such wages be given to her and not to him? Should the fruit of the tree they had

planted never be tasted by him? Was she to bear all the pain—to weep all the tears? Was she to suffer for both, and he to get off scot free? No; and Basil felt, in some vague kind of way, that his punishment was beginning; that his money had still to be paid him; that in the future he would be able to answer out of his own experience whether it was a fiction or a simple truth, that the wages of sin is death.

They were parted; the world knew nothing of their struggles, of their errors, of their misery.

Thousands of miles lay between them, the great sea, and the lonely desert, and more sea, and a foreign land, gay with tropical flowers, bright with sunshine, presenting at every turn something new and fresh and interesting to a stranger's eye, separated the man and the woman. To their fellows they were as though they had never thought much of one another: he went on his way and she continued on hers. They never heard directly from one another, and yet day after day their hearts were constantly mocking at time

and space, flitting over the ocean, setting at nought the sandy desert and the desolate plain; they were crossing—crossing—his to England, hers to India; faithful both—sinfully faithful still.

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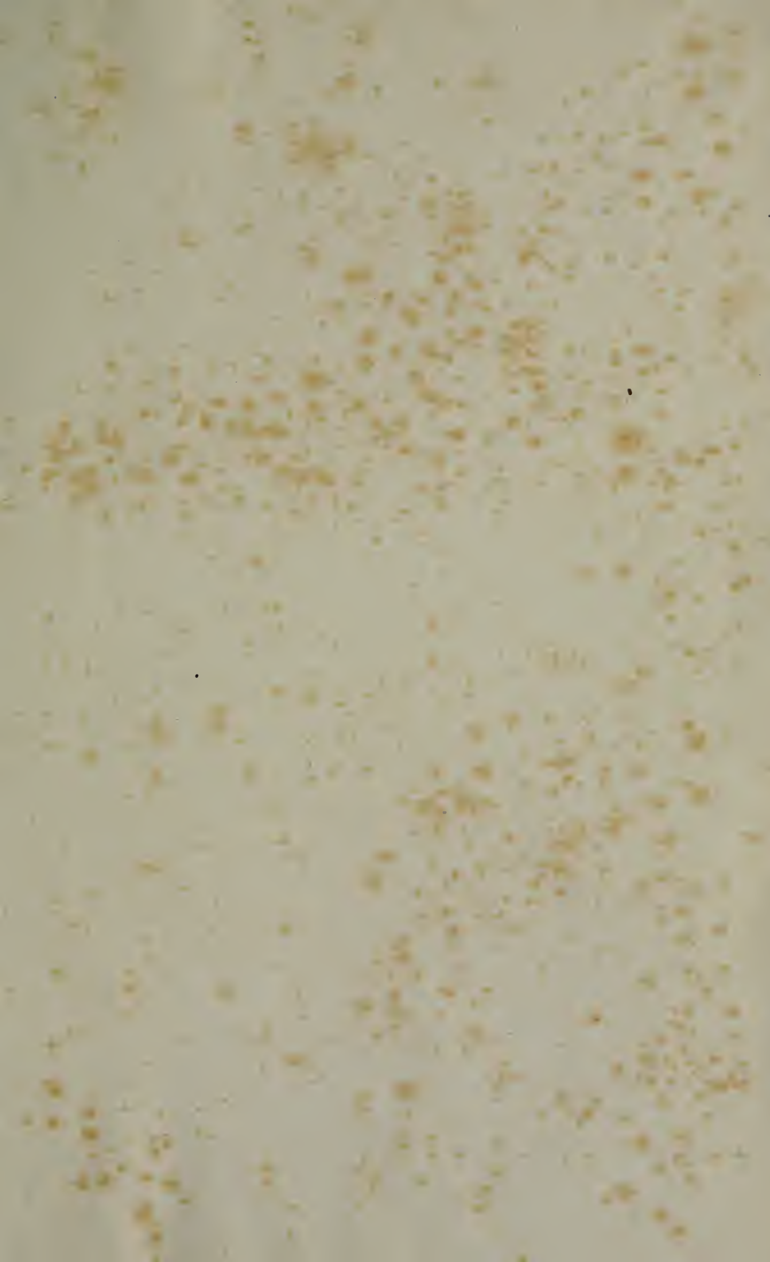

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