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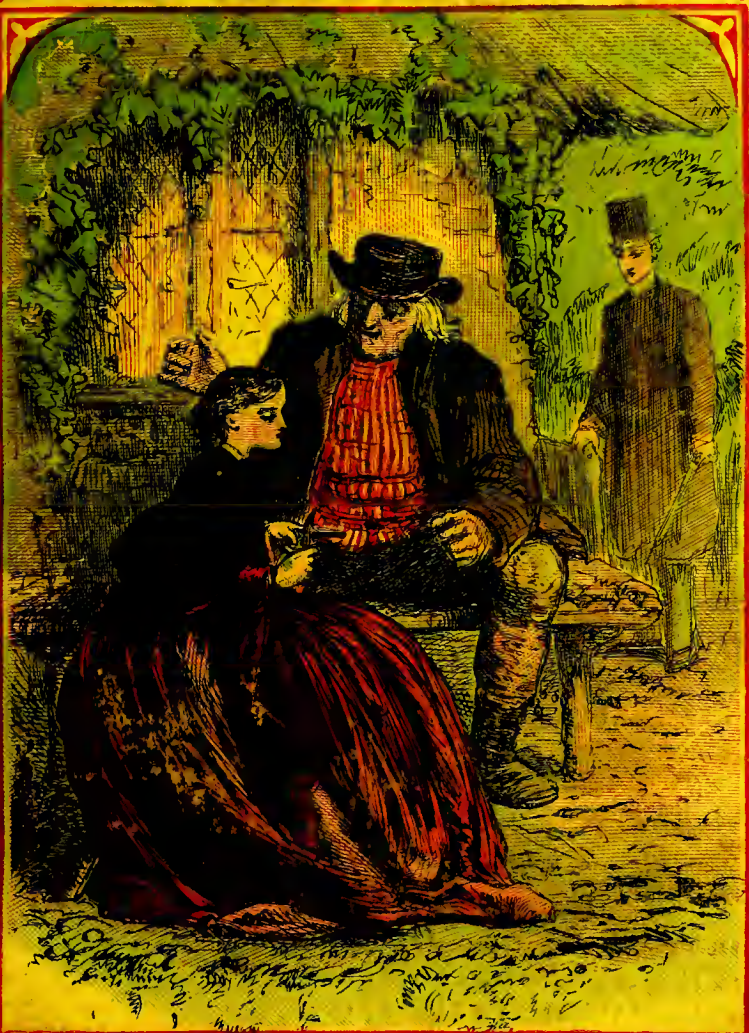
EXTREMES

BY E. W. ATKINSON.



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THIRD EDITION.

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EXTREMES.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

A LONG, straggling street of small, dingy, greystone houses, with red tile-roofs; here a bit of a "garth," with double daisies all in bloom, in front; there a thatched, tumble-down, unpleasant-smelling pigstye beside them: at one end of the street, a tall, narrow, grey, slated house (that was the shop), with a few stoppered green bottles of sweeties, and a bundle of slate pencils in the window; at the other, an old rambling grey house (that was the inn), with a sign-board, whereon a washed-out stag creaked intermittingly to and fro in the wind; —what was there to make the village of Snagton End pretty, or interesting, or in any way attractive? Nevertheless, such is "the way the sun has got" of only looking at the bright side of things, that he makes everybody else do the same; consequently the said queer, straggling street of dingy houses did look surprisingly pretty and attractive, that Sunday at noon, with the said cheery sun artfully lighting up every scrap of red tile and yellow lichen he could catch a glimpse of, and making a perfect gem of an old woman's red cloak, mellowing the dingy greys, as if he had found some warmer tint latent in the stone, and shining away merrily all the time, seemingly quite pleased to look at the pleasant, bright picture he had made out of such homely materials.

I don't know whether the rustic inhabitants of Snagton End speculated much upon the artistic arrangement of colours, or whether they were given to trouble themselves about the picturesque at all; indeed, I strongly suspect the contrary:

nevertheless, every one seemed to like to be abroad that pleasant Sunday.

The people were just beginning to return from church, and the men came sauntering along the street in twos and threes, with the lounging gait of a peasant's leisure, chewing the twig of rosemary or thyme, or stopping to speak to acquaintances who leaned over their garden palings, sunning their broad velveteen-clad shoulders, and showing the spot of wear on each. The women, too, who had stayed at home to cook the Sunday dinner, began to come to their doors and question the returning neighbours about the news of the day; for there was news of moment to be discussed—a new curate had arrived the day before, and his first sermon had been preached that morning! Amongst other curious inquirers Mistress Nelly Smith came to her door to look out for an acquaintance who might give her such information as she desired. Presently she espied Maggy Tillot's red-ribboned Sunday bonnet coming up the street; so, supposing Maggy had been to church, Nelly called out—

"Dids't see t' new minister t' morn?"

"Noa, I were throng; but my Luke, he seed un."

"An' what did a' think to un?"

"My Luke said a' were a lang, lean lad, cute-liked, and very clean-faaced an' civil spoken."

Here Luke himself joined the speakers.

Luke Tillot enjoyed the dignified office of dog-whipper* in the parish church of Snagton cum Thwackelton, and was therefore, no doubt, in a position to furnish authentic information on the point in question. But Luke's brain—what he had of it—was generally in a state of confusion between several half-formed ideas, none of which ever came to perfection, so that the thread of his discourse was apt to become somewhat entangled at times; to-day, however, he was very lucid.

"Tell Nelly Smith about t' new minister," said the conjugal proprietress of Luke.

"Wha'," said Luke, looking wildly round for an idea, and to his great surprise catching hold of one right end foremost, "a's got twa sharp een in's head, an' a's civil-spoken aboon a

* Some of my readers may not be aware that in some of the more remote districts of the country, the "dog-whipper" is still numbered, together with clerk, sexton, beadle, &c., amongst the paid officials of the church.

bit, but a' speaks mincing lahk, saame as all they as be fro' t' sooth. A' were sore put aboot, to be sure, when a' coom'd to look to what a' called t' 'condition' o' t' books an' t' things. An' when a' cam to dress hisself, first a' puts on a long black kind o' smock that made un look sort o' lean-like; and then a' puts on twa little bits o' white hemmed stuff oonder's chin, a'most like my missus's cap strings there; and then a' holds up t' white gownd, as if a' didn't like t' look on't, an' mumbles sommat aboot 'dirty sheet,' and puts an on; an' then a' puts on a kind o' a black and white bag that hangs down a's back; and I thinks weel, he's happed oop enough noo! But noa! a' tak a long black kind o' shawl and haps it aboot 's neck, like a yoong laady boon to tak' a walk, and then a' taks a kind o' square black thing wi' a coop a-top, an' a long tossel, an' a' sticks it oonder 's airm: that cap me woally what that were fur."

"Wha! that were a's cap!" struck in a youth who had joined the listening circle.

Luke, thus interrupted, looked round in dismay for his idea, got it, and broke out indignantly—

"A's cap! What! that thing wi' t' tossel an' t' coop! Dunna 'ee be speaking o' what 'ee dunna oonderstand, Johnny Rawlins."

"Boot I tell 'ee that *were* a's cap; I heerd un ask Jeames Deacon where a'd put a's college cap till."

"Boot lad, noo, ye're oncommon cute," said Luke, perplexed, "where does a' put a's head in till't?"

"Why, a' puts un into t' coop, as ye call un, to be sure," replied Johnny Rawlins.

Bewildered Luke could only murmur—

"Why, then it 'ud be bottom oop'ards; and what 'd coom o' t' tossel?"

Johnny Rawlins was one of the rising generation of young Snagtonians, so he only stuck his tongue in his check at the extreme greenness of Luke Tillot, and went on his way. But the unwontedly lucid flow of Luke's ideas having been thus troubled, remained in a turbid and unsettled state, and his unsated auditors turned eagerly for additional particulars respecting the peculiarities of the unknown animal recently introduced into the parishes of Snagton cum Thwackelton in the capacity of curate, to no less a person than Jeames Deacon himself, the parish clerk, who at that moment chanced to be coming up the street.

"What didst thee think to un? What maak is t' new minister?" cried out Nelly Smith.

"Ough, a's a likely lad enow," replied Jeames Deacon, in a somewhat lofty and patronising manner, "boot a's ower many new-fangled waays aboot un; boot mebbe 'll mend, mebbe 'll mend."

"An' 'ad need mend, to my thinking," said another new comer. "It's awful to hear un talk aboot baptism an' water o' regeneration an' t' lahk, an' t' see un turning himself round to t' taable (the 'altar' he called it) an' booing dahn more to that as to t' naame i' t' Belief; an' then a' preached in t' white dress; I canna dea nobbut grieve ower ye friends, for he's nobbut a regular Pusey."

"A Pusey, an' what's a Pusey?" said Nelly Smith, looking as if some dangerous combustible, liable to explode at any moment, had been suddenly introduced amongst them.

"It's a naame, woman, as is given to them as 'ud fall down and worship graaven images if they dared; an's a deal worse as Catholics."

"Oh, laws! my! worse as Catholics! An' do 'ee think now, t' new minister's worse as a Catholic?"

"That's not for you nor for me to be judging, woman; but a Pusey's a Pusey, and a Catholic's a Catholic, and them that's worse a'n't no better; and if he a'n't a Pusey, I'm——" with which striking, though incomplete enunciation of his sentiments, Willy Simmons passed away from the group, leaving the rest oracle-struck: for Willy Simmons was given to utter dark sayings, of the meaning of which he understood as little as any of his hearers; consequently Willy was reputed a man who knew a thing or two in Snagton cum Thwackelton. After the oracle had uttered its voice nothing further remained to be said, so the company separated.

Meanwhile the subject of this and many similar conversations in the parish of Snagton cum Thwackelton was seated in the best parlour of Widow Hawkins' neat little house; which said best parlour, together with the bedroom over it, she had let as a lodging to "t' new minister," the parsonage house being only an old, tumble-down cottage, inhabited by a day-labourer and his family. The said new minister was just now engaged in glancing over his afternoon's sermon. He was a tall, thin, intellectual-looking young man, remarkably "clean-faced," as the dog-whipper had reported, with that peculiar air of purity of morals, linen and com-

plexion which, somehow, often pervades the appearance of very young clergymen. He should have been a powerful man, but much study had probably prevented the due development of the muscular part of his frame, for he was very slender, and had a slight tendency to a stoop. His eyes were dark grey, and could be both penetrating and sweet in their expression; he had wavy brown hair and small whiskers, and his features generally communicated a pleasant impression to the beholder.

After a while he let his sermon fall upon his knees, and fell himself into a brown study, the subject of which seemed not altogether pleasurable, nor altogether painful. Only a few minutes had elapsed before he rose, and going to the window, looked out, up the long valley which wound away in front, between two ridges of purple, heath-clad hills, until it was lost where the moor-lands faded off, dimmer and dimmer in the distance.

"A wide field," soliloquized he; "a wide field, indeed, and it has been sorely neglected. The people seem very Goths and heathens. Not a response in the church, except from the clerk, and he didn't wait for me; not an attempt to kneel, or do anything but lounge and stare. And then the music—that execrable compound of perverted wind and tortured catgut—that *must* be altered! It is a wide field, indeed; but, please God, I will work it: we will see what can be done in a year. Those ragged books too, and the moth-eaten altar-cloth: I must write to the patron and beg, at least, that he will replace those. But I doubt whether he has much church feeling; and, as for church feeling among the parishioners, that I fear is out of the question: but, who can tell? it may be awakened. To-morrow, at least, I'll get some idea of what materials I've got to work upon. I'll make a regular house-to-house visitation: I must ascertain which are dissenters before I can make a distinction; for dissent, I fear, is prevalent, and they must be reclaimed to the Church. I wonder what the geography of the parish is, so that I might district it. I must explore. To-morrow for the village of Snagton End."

Hereupon, roused to the idea of exertion, Mr. Halstead looked at his watch, took his hat and his sermon case, and, with gown fluttering in the wind, set off for the afternoon service. He had a distance of near two miles to walk, following the windings of the dale; for, with a rare sense of the

practical, the founders of the church had located it in a solitary and secluded position nearly on the extreme limits of Snagton, while the chief portion of the population was assembled at the other end of the parish, where was situated the hamlet yclept Snagton End. The conjoined parish of Thwackelton, much the larger of the two, contained the so-called "town" of that name, one or two smaller hamlets, and a vast extent of lonely moorland, with here and there an isolated dwelling surrounded by its "tatie-garth."

It was a beautiful day in May, that first Sunday in the yet untried sphere of Mr. Halstead's ministration. His path lay for the most part along the course of the little clear river which wound in and out amongst the meadows with their green, soft, luxuriant herbage, all aglow with sunlight and buttercups. It twisted and twined, and did all but tie itself in knots, that little river Erne, so loath was it to leave the pleasant valley, where the hawthorn trees hung over it, loaded with rich masses of fragrant, snowy blossoms; and the bluebells decked it, bending their azure bells to the weighty embrace of the yellow, downy humble-bee; and the cuckoo haunted all its whimsical windings, as if anxious to prove his power of ubiquity. There, too, were heaps upon heaps of orient gold, purer and brighter than ever came from California, loading every slender, tough broom-bough; and the scent of blossoming furze and wild thyme came with every movement of the air, which bore, besides, a sound of bursting buds and buzzing wings and leaping trout. Every here and there the sun glinted down between the branches, and lighted up the clear, brown water, and showed the spirit-like grey trout and grayling, gliding and shooting about, with gently waving fin and valve-like mouth.

"What a splendid stream for the fly!" did just glance across the young clergyman's mind, as he came upon a more open space, where the merry music of the water hushed itself into the silence of a scarcely rippled "pool," most suggestive of piscatorial ideas; but his thoughts were preoccupied by the more serious business upon which he was engaging, and he paid no attention to the invitation of the trout stream, but walked on ruminating upon the work before him.

He saw much work, but he saw unfortunately few contrarieties in its prosecution. His imaginary furrow, stiff though it might be, yielded him a plentiful return; but he was little prepared for sowing in faith, and waiting year after

year, in vain, for any visible harvest. So, in his day-dream, he saw that dissenting chapel which had offended his eye in the morning turned into the granary it so much resembled; he saw troops of neatly-dressed little children flocking to the schools, and half a score of those sturdy young farmers whom he had noticed in the morning gaping upon him with their mouths, transmuted into his Sunday-school teachers, by means of his own evening classes for adult instruction. He saw the church-road thronged with tidy elders and sober young men and maidens, not only on Sundays but on the Saints' days; perhaps even daily, in the course of time.

Finally, he saw the church itself, having re-gathered her wandering sheep around her sacred precincts, rising renovated, shapely and beautiful, and pointing with taper-spired index up to heaven. Even the tang, tang, tang of the solitary cracked church-bell had no power to rouse him from his vision; he only heard instead of it, the music of a peal come toppling, jubilant, down the wind. He saw the stately church, the mother of the chapel-of-ease of larger Thwaekelton, (for conseerated ground must not be abandoned,) rise grand, matronly, and fair; with no overloading of prurient decoration, of crocketed pinnacle and many-lighted flamboyant window, such as disfigure many of our modern Gothic structures. No! simple, chaste, first-pointed, with deep, shadow-casting mouldings; single-lighted, deep-embayed, steep-bevelled windows; high-pitched and oak groined roof: in all the majesty of due symmetrical proportion, it stood before him.

But a sudden turning of the road brought him and his church of the future up all standing before the hitherto invisible church of the present—as ugly a four-square specimen of churchwardenism as could be devised, with staircase windows, a flat slate-roof, without so much as a lichen to make it look venerable, and a square-headed door, like the hall-door at the "House;" only wanting the knocker to make it complete. Within, it was whitewashed and pewed to the extinction of air, sound, and solemnity. Still there was the old tower; that was a comfort any way, cracked and leaning though it was, with hosts of talkative jackdaws up there in the belfry, where that imbecile tang, tang, of the powerless bell only served them for something to chatter about on Sundays.

Mr. Halstead found he was rather late, so he hastily endued

himself with the ecclesiastical vestments which had caused so much speculation in the morning, and betook himself to the desk. The time was up, more than up ; still, tang, tang, went the bell, and the clerk was ringing it. He thought he would give out the hymn ; but the clerk was the leader, and he feared the singers would not begin without him. Tang, tang, went the bell.

Among the many starers he selected a lad who, he thought, looked a trifle less stolid than the rest, and beckoned to him ; but the boy only opened his month wider, and began to grin. Mr. Halstead was about to descend and hunt up his recreant clerk himself, when an intelligent-looking young man, observing his perplexity, stepped up to him and asked him, " What he pleased to want ? "

" Tell the clerk it is considerably past the time," said he.

" But Squire Tappin ain't come," rejoined the rustic, looking a good deal surprised at such a request.

" Never mind, tell him I am going to begin," whispered Halstead.

The young man turned away, half amused and half unwilling, when the question was set at rest by the arrival of no less a person than Squire Tappin himself ; a big, burly farmer, red-faced, shaggy, and broad-shouldered. With him came his three rosy daughters, who seated themselves on the women's side of the aisle, while the father took his place on the men's. Then the service began. There was a numerous congregation, and an ear-splitting concourse of singers ; for all the bassoons, all the violins, and all the voices of the neighbouring parish of Scatterby had come to " sing in t' new minister," and to gratify their owners' curiosity besides. Still, when the last repetition of the last line of the last verse of the opening hymn, with all its astonishing variations, runs, trills, and quavers had come to an end, there was the same flat performance of the two voices as in the morning : the minister's—earnest, solemn, and impressive ; the clerk's, much louder, slow and pompous, in capitals at the beginning, but rattling off to the nothingness of smallest diamond pica at the end of the sentence. An altogether remarkable delivery that clerk's was. However, before long, another voice joined in the responses ; it was a woman's, low and gentle, but distinct. Halstead looked in the direction from which it proceeded. A lady-like looking young woman, dressed in deep mourning, who occupied a seat amongst Squire Tappin's womankind, was

the speaker. Halstead felt a sensation of relief at the thought that there was even one adherent of the cause amongst his parishioners. She must have some courage too, to venture to lift her voice amidst the dead silence of the congregation, and to bring upon her so many inquiring looks : he would remember to inquire her name. After the conclusion of the service, he asked his clerk what was his reason for not coming to his place at the proper time.

"Why, 'tis 't waay wi' oos to wait for t' chief man i' t' parish," replied that functionary, condescending to explain rather patronizingly; "when Squire Aston fro' t' big house is here, we waits for him, an' when he's awa', we waits for Squire Tappin; an' if——"

"Then I must beg that in future we wait for no one, be he who he may," said Halstead, interrupting the list of parties to be waited for. "In God's house all are equal; and Sir Henry Aston and Squire Tappin are not to be waited for, more than the poorest pauper in the parish. Pray, do not let this happen again."

The clerk's dignity was very considerably offended at being thus schooled.

So said he, with an injured and half-sullen air, "It's na lahk 't we're auld warld waays 'ud suit an Oxford gentleman, but that's t' waay wi' oos here ; we dean as we dean to-daa i' t' church sin syne t' church were a church. But we mun gan t' new waays noo, I suppose."

"Nay," said Halstead, "it is not that I dislike 'old world ways,' my friend, but that this way is wrong. Besides, I suspect my 'new ways,' as you call them, are older than your old ones; for, if you remember, the Bible says, 'There is no respect of persons with God.'"

"Weel, weel! we mun dea what ye bid oos, na dou't. But Squire Tappin's saafe to be offended."

"As for that, I will answer for it to Squire Tappin myself, and I have little doubt he will see the matter as I do."

The clerk, however, went his way with a misdoubting shake of the head. He told his select circle that night he had never thought "to see they new Roman waays brought into Snagton church in his day;" and ended philosophically, though with a sigh, "But 'tis what we mun all coom till one daa!" To which his select circle responded, shaking their heads, and sighing likewise, "Na doo't, na doo't, we mun all coom till 't!"

CHAPTER II.

THE "MAAK" OF THE MAN.

It will be as well here to inquire a little both into the "maak" or manner of the young minister, and the peculiarities of the new sphere of labour upon which he was about to enter, perhaps somewhat unpreparedly; for though Mr. Halstead was prepared, theoretically, for a stiff soil, he was by no means prepared, practically, for the individual stubbornness of the soil of Snagton cum Thwackelton.

The Rev. Francis Halstead was a gentleman by birth, education, and inclination. He had gone through the usual course of home, school, and college education. At Oxford he had been a reading man; he had been duly leavened with the leaven of Tractarianism, then a startling but fashionable novelty; had been ordained at the earliest moment his age permitted, and now, raw indeed, but zealous, had come to earn a title to the holy orders of priesthood in the combined parishes of Snagton cum Thwackelton, in the diocese of his Grace the Archbishop of York. He was at present acting as the nominal curate of Mr. Dawson, the incumbent of the benefice; but that gentleman having become imbecile, the lay rector, Sir Henry Aston, had promised to Halstead the next presentation to the perpetual curacy, through the interest of a mutual friend, a clergyman named Latham, with whom both the young men had read at different times during the course of their several educations.

A strange contrast was that offered by the denizens of that sequestered district of the barbaric and broad-spoken North to the refined, intellectual, highly-cultivated young clergyman. A stranger contrast still was that between the Church latitudinarian of Snagton cum Thwackelton, so closely approximating to dissent that the boundary line was almost imperceptible, and the Church ultra-high, authoritative, hierarchical, which was "the Church" of that party to which Halstead belonged. But it could not be helped; there, as the clergyman of Snagton cum Thwackelton, with its dissenting population of baptists, independents, ranters, and, especially Wesleyans (far gone in all but name from the tenets of their mild founder), was planted the Rev. Francis Halstead, strong in his conscious inheritance of the apostolic

succession. So it is to be hoped that Christian charity may attend the exercise of their mutual relations, and it is to be feared that much variance and ill-will may be the upshot of it instead.

Monday was bleak and windy, with hasty driving storms of hail, that made the cattle in the fields hurriedly turn their backs to windward, and dashed off the hawthorn blossoms in little floral storms; nevertheless, Mr. Halstead, according to his purpose of yesterday, commenced a system of parochial visitation. Not without many misgivings did he set forward upon his walk; he was naturally shy, and had all a gentleman's delicacy about the appearance of intrusion into other people's houses and affairs: besides, the whole thing was altogether new to him; he had no idea of cottage life, nor of the needs, either spiritual or corporeal, of the lower classes; he felt that between him and them there existed "a great gulf," and how to bridge it over for mutual access he had no idea; though he would have done it with all his heart if he could, for he was abundantly kind-hearted as to their worldly troubles, and abundantly zealous as to their spiritual welfare. He had yet to find out that the heart that beats in every human bosom is made of a like humanity, and is prone to answer to like touches upon the chords. He did not know that if he behaved like a gentleman (as he was sure to do) and a warm-hearted fellow-creature (as he was by no means sure to do in his shyness) to the poor man, it was the surest way of inducing a similar mode of action from the poor man towards himself. He felt entirely uncertain as to what he ought to say to the inhabitants of the cottages at the doors of which he was about to knock; not at all because he had any paucity of ideas, or any poverty of heart, but simply because he felt that he was talking to beings of an altogether different genus, between whom and himself there could be no instinctive fellowship or intercommunication of ideas; wherein he made a huge mistake, as he found out afterwards.

It may be as well to accompany Mr. Halstead on some of his first visits that day in order to be able to judge in some degree of the class of people with whom he had to do, and of his peculiar difficulties in his communications with the poor, whom he called his "brethren" on Sundays, unknowing that they really were so.

He called first upon Squire Tappin, who lived in a square house, built of the soft stone of the country, which turns a

dingy grey, almost black, by exposure. The house was surrounded by farmyard, stacks, and outhouses, all presenting a most slovenly and uncouth appearance to the eyes of the Southeron; still there was evidently no lack of means about the occupant of the dwelling. Halstead's knock was answered by a young lady (a Miss Tappin, he supposed), in a state of *déshabille*, who beat a hasty retreat, leaving him standing at the door. Presently he heard her calling, "Moother! coom dahn and dea my frock; here's t' new minister." Probably Mrs. Tappin did descend and fasten the robe upon the young damsel's buxom form, for she now returned and asked him to walk in. Showing him into the best parlour, and setting him a chair, she told him, "Faather were out, but moother would coom in a crack;" and left him to study a framed and glazed piece of embroidery, representing a shepherdess with very black eyes and very red cheeks. In due time, having donned her best cap and divested herself of her household apron, Mrs. Tappin, quiet, prim, quaint, and shy, made her appearance. She answered all Halstead's remarks about the state of the weather, the crops, &c., by yea or nay, as the case might be; then followed a long pause; at last, said Mrs. Tappin, with a nervous effort,—

"Ye'll be fro t' Sooth, it's like?"

Halstead replied, "Yes, ma'am, from Huntingdonshire."

"That'll be a long way, no doubt," said Mrs. Tappin; and Halstead remarked—"Not so long in these days of railroads:" and there was another pause. Then Mrs. Tappin ventured further: "Ye'll hae been in Lunnon, mebbe?" and upon Halstead replying in the affirmative, she remarked that was a long way, too; and then intimated that she herself had never been further than the town of Thwackelton for the last twenty years herself, though her husband had been to York several times. But when Halstead touched upon his lodgings, there Mrs. Tappin was at home and fluent immediately: she told him where he could get his washing done, but that he had better stipulate about the starch; where he would be supplied with the best butter, only that Matty Halls didn't manage her cows well at calving time; that she had no doubt Widow Hawkins would do well by him, but he had better keep her to it, for she had a close hand, &c., &c.

"And so," thought Halstead, as the door closed upon him, "that is a specimen of the utmost extent of civilization and enlightenment I am to expect amongst my parishioners!"

The next visit was to a cottage, the door of which stood open, revealing a scene of dirt and misrule which was not inviting. Across broom, upset bench, and broken basin came striding, at his knock, a female, stout and strapping, in stays and petticoat: the usual working costume in those parts; she started at the sight of him, recognizing him as t' new minister, and said, her Luke—for she was no other than Mrs. Luke Tillot—"her Luke were i' 't 'tatie garth, and she were throng. But coom in, wha, coom in, noo ye're there!" and she slapped a child out of the way, and dusted a chair with her petticoat, and then taking a baby, which was crying in the corner where it had been stowed out of the way, she sat herself down on a stool. Halstead asked her how many children she had; and she replied, "Seven."

"And this child, has it been baptized?"

"Wha, noa," replied the woman, "it's never ailed note, so I ha'n't had it deean."

"But do you wait until your children are ill before you bring them to be baptized?" asked Halstead.

"Wha, ay, we dean't have 'em deean note to mostly, unless they're sick. My Luke he dea talk of having t' woal on 'em kessened soom daa'; but we's mostly throng an' I'm allus panning and tuing wi' 'em now, puir bairns."

Here she interrupted herself to separate two of the children, who were quarrelling over the remains of the broken basin; when she had apportioned one with a shake, and the other with a box on the ear, and the squalling incidental to the occasion had subsided, Halstead took advantage of the lull to ask her if she really meant that none of her children were baptized.

"Wha, ay," replied she, "we mostly waits, hereaway, 'till we gets two, three on 'em, and then we taks 'em to t' church, an' gets 'em all fettled oop together."

Halstead was astonished and shocked. He had but little idea of the extreme laxity of the Dales' folk on the subject of that rite which he regarded as of primary importance, or that he should find Mrs. Tillot's a by no means exceptional case. He spoke to her, therefore, very seriously; warning her of the risk she was incurring for her children by neglecting, as he expressed it, "to place them within the holy arms of the church, and thus allowing them to remain heathens, and aliens from the pale of that sacred institution."

Mrs. Tillot was offended that Mr. Halstead should employ

the term "heathens" with reference to her children; she didn't know what "aliens" meant, but felt sure that it must be a very opprobrious epithet; and the word "pale" she probably referred to some new "Roman" kind of baptismal font, for she afterwards declared,—

"She didn't want to have her bairns called on"—(*i. e.*, called names)—"nor yet put into none o' his pails nother, puir things!"

So Halstead, finding he was making but little impression, took leave of Mrs. Luke Tillot, hoping that her half-sullen promise to "see aboot it" might lead to something one day.

His next visit was to a cottage of a very different type: here all was neatness itself. A tall, thin woman of vinegar aspect, with a tendency to beard, and a variety of lines about her thin lips, opened the door, with a sharp—

"What d'ye waant?" in answer to his knock.

Halstead announced himself.

"Ou, ay," said the woman, regarding him with a severe scrutiny, "so ye're t'new minister; ye can coom in if ye've a mahnd:" with which scant courtesy she set him a chair on the neatly sanded floor, and remained looking at him austerely, with her sharp black eyes. Halstead, feeling rather at a loss, made some remark about the weather, to which she replied, tartly, that, "'T is as t' Loord maade it, I suppose." Halstead did not dispute the point; therefore she added, "An' if it's all raight, there's na call to find faut."

"Far be it from me to find fault, indeed," began Halstead, when he was interrupted by a sharp query from his hostess—

"Well, hae ye gotten naething else to saa?"

"I am sorry," said he, "that you do not seem inclined to take my visit in the same friendly spirit in which it was meant."

"Sure, that's na what yese coom for to saa?" repeated the lady, raising her voice to a shriller key.

Halstead began to imagine that she was mad. However, said he—

"What I have to say is this: I have come into this parish with the most friendly intentions towards all my parishioners, and I hope I shall be found no unfaithful servant of the church."

"T' church! an' what's t' church? We want none o' your church waays here, wi' yer booing and yer 'bedience to a wooden taable, an' yer forms and yer ceremonies. Ye

needn't think to be deceiving were puir souls wi' yer forms, and yer ceremonies, and yer Roman waays; ye'd need gan an' be converted and saave yer own sinful soul, and not be deaving oos wi' yer church."

Thinking the poor woman was evidently mad, and unwilling to irritate her more, Halstead assured her that he had not the slightest intention of causing any weak brother or sister to offend; and, to change the topic, asked after her husband. But he was equally unlucky on this subject, for the lady was a spinster, which fact she tartly announced by supposing—

"A woman could bide wi'out a husband: leastways, 'twas said so i' t' Word."

Finding that his attempts at conciliation were fruitless, Halstead told her he would call again, when he hoped they should be better friends; to which she replied grimly, that—

"Frinds were na' that plenty."

Halstead left her, trusting that the poor creature would not injure herself till her proper attendants should return; he little knowing that the dame, mistaking her shrillness of tongue for strength of argument, prided herself upon her powers of theological disputation, and wished to provoke him to a discussion. But not having succeeded, she believed he feared to engage in polemics with her; and reported amongst her neighbours that he was a "well-meaning lad, but, as to t' gift o' disputation, and t' power o' t' spirit, t' puir lad kent note aboot 't na more as t' babe unborn. When I tell't him t' church a' maade sic a wark aboot were nowght, a' had na a word to throw to a dog: a' were clean mazed."

The next call Halstead made was upon an old woman, who was crippled, not over clean, and very deaf; this infirmity made it necessary for him to place his head in a degree of proximity to hers which might have been more agreeable had she been younger and cleaner. Yet despite Halstead's self-devoted disregard of circumstances, the poor old soul didn't understand a tenth part of what he said. Of course she asked him—the poor often do it, as a sort of compliment to a clergyman, as one would ask a musician to perform—to pray with her, or as she expressed it, "ye mut saa yer prayers a bit a' ye lahk, but ye munna tak't amiss if a' dunna sit upon my knees, fur t' 'dea maake 'em wark stammin."

During the prayer she startled Halstead by uttering the most dismal groans and singular ejaculations; he not being accustomed to that style of expressing the devotional emotions of the soul: for though she did not understand what he said, she thought it would be unbecoming not to show some of those signs of edification usual in the supplications of the sect to which she belonged. Moreover, she disconcerted him a good deal by describing her complaints, and finally put him to flight by testifying some intention of unbinding her crippled leg.

Poor Mr. Halstead's nerves had a good many trials to stand that day, for there were more visits to make; some to slatternly, thriftless housewives, some to bed-ridden paupers; some, more pleasant ones, to comely matrons with rosy, shining cheeks, and round red arms. Everywhere there were unbaptized children, to a number which absolutely horrified Halstead; although, as we have seen, he had an idea that the bonds of church discipline were somewhat lax in Snagton cum Thwackelton. He remonstrated with the mothers in vain: they did not seem to understand the force of his arguments on the necessity of infant baptism. They were all "boone to wait till after t' harvest," or they must first speak to their "masters" (*i. e.*, husbands), or they were "too throng to see till 't."

At length, wearied in mind and body, Halstead thought to desist from his labours, but on leaving the village, he passed the neat white palings of a small house built of the usual greystone of the neighbourhood. Here, instead of the absence of all attempt at decoration generally observable in the cottage homes of the North, there were roses and honeysuckle trained up the walls, and the wild clematis went wandering at its own sweet will over the porch, announcing its intention to bloom by-and-by. There was abundance of choice flowers in the garden, and the scent of them wandered out into the road. Altogether the little abode looked tempting, and very different to anything he had yet remarked amongst the houses of his parishioners. He hesitated a moment and then went in at a little white gate, and knocked at the door; it was opened by a very neat, pleasant-looking young woman, who, evidently recognizing him as the new minister, and consequently as one to be held in reverence and welcomed, invited him into the house, and withdrew to tell her mistress.

The room into which he was shown struck Halstead with surprise; notwithstanding its small size, there was an air of elegance and comfort about it that gave him a feeling of home, such as nothing in his new quarters had yet produced. He began to look about him attentively; there were books on the table, and there was a piano, and some music open upon it; the piano was a Broadwood; the music, Handel. He began to conceive a greater respect for the taste of Snagton cum Thwackelton. He turned to the books and took up one that appeared familiar to him; it was *Keble's Christian Year;* it was no stranger to use, and on his taking it up, it opened at one of his favourite poems; there were also pencil lines marking the most beautiful passages in that and various other parts of the volume. Various books were lying about, some on general subjects; others, volumes which he well knew, the works of writers of the school to which he belonged. Halstead was much interested. Surely this must be the habitation of the young lady in black, who had repeated the responses yesterday. A step approached, the door opened, and a lady appeared, but not the lady of the responses; this was a plain, quiet, elderly person, with grey hair and a cap. Halstead became aware of a sensation of disappointment; somehow he did not experience the same glow of kindred feeling at the idea of that elderly person's tastes and feelings coinciding with his own, that he would have done had it proved to be the young lady in black. However, the lady politely requested him to be seated, took up her knitting, spoke of the weather, asked him what he thought of his new parish, and whether he would take some refreshment; all with a quiet, matter-of-fact air, which would certainly have been enough to put to flight any remaining touch of romance about possible "elective affinities" between the two. The conversation was prosaic in the extreme; Halstead tried the topic which was uppermost in his mind, the church general and the church local. As for the church general, she did not seem to attach much interest to the subject, or, indeed, much meaning to the idea; and when he came to the church local, she evidently referred his words to the literal edifice: said he—

"I fear that the church is in a sadly depressed and neglected state in Snagton cum Thwackelton."

"Indeed?" replied she: "Squire Tappin talked of a new church rate, and I thought they had been whitewashing."

Halstead opened his eyes: he dared not allude to Keble after *that;* so he changed the subject.

"Music must be a great solace to you in this solitude."

"Yes; I like music," replied the lady.

That topic was as hopeless as the other.

Halstead took his hat and prepared to say good morning, when Mrs. Wilson observed, in her quiet voice—

"I think my niece is just coming in; she would be sorry not to see you."

Halstead waited.

Presently the door opened quietly, and in walked a young lady in black. It *was* she of the responses, this time. She welcomed him gravely and reverently as a clergyman, expressed her pleasure at seeing him, and begged him to be seated: he obeyed, and the conversation recommenced, this time on far more equal terms. Miss Langley (for that she told him was her name) said that she had heard from some of the cottagers that he had been commencing his acquaintance with them; and there was a lurking sparkle of merriment in her eye as she said so, that somewhat belied the air of gravity with which she had received her guest, and seemed to suggest that the tinge of sadness which spoke in her subdued manner and soft voice, might not be altogether natural to her, but the growth of circumstances, perhaps of sorrow. But Halstead's mind had been so long attuned to a grave key, that he did not remark the gleam of mirth; and as their conversation turned on the relaxed state of church discipline, the proportion of unbaptized children, the dilapidated state of the church furniture and appurtenances, the pewter of the church vessels, and the unmitigated ugliness of the church itself, her eye quite lost its merry sparkle, and she became as grave as he was, and evidently thought the case of Snagton cum Thwackelton a very bad case indeed. He found she knew most of the poor families in the neighbourhood, either personally or by name and reputed character; and there was a great deal of common sense in her remarks. Once or twice she smiled, and her eyes laughed downright, as she touched upon the peculiarities of some of her rustic neighbours.

"You called upon Nelly Haggart to-day, did you not?" said she.

"Nelly Haggart? That is the poor mad woman in the neat cottage at the further end of the street, is it not?" he returned.

"Mad! oh, no; Nelly is by no means mad. She thinks she is more established in her proper senses than we most of us are, I believe," replied Miss Langley. "I was told you had been there."

"Not mad! Why, she attacked me in a most extraordinary way; and in return for my civilities told me, in the barbarous dialect they make use of here, that she wanted none of my 'Roman ways.'"

Miss Langley smiled.

"She is a violent dissenter," said she, "and considers that she has a call to make proselytes of all who differ from her; and if they refuse to be converted to her way of thinking, she considers them irremediably lost, I believe. She even preaches sometimes, upon particularly pressing emergencies; and I have no doubt she will hold forth upon the occasion of your entering the parish, and of the danger into which the souls of those who go to hear you will be drawn."

"Indeed!" remarked Halstead; "that accounts for her very singular reception of me. But I felt convinced she was mad, and would say nothing to her for fear of irritating her."

"Ah!" replied Miss Langley, "she is satisfied, then, no doubt, that you were so overpowered by her arguments that you could not attempt to reply to them. She will have hopes of you, I see, Mr. Halstead; she will make vigorous efforts for your conversion, beyond question."

Halstead laughed.

"I shall be better prepared next time she attacks me," said he. "But can you tell me any reason for the extraordinary manner in which the people withhold their children from baptism, until, as they say, they have 'several to be done together,' Miss Langley?"

"I see," she replied, "you do not quite comprehend us at present, Mr. Halstead. Baptism, or 'naming,' and christening, or 'kessening,' as they call it, are looked upon as two distinct rites by the Dales folk. You will find that if a child be ill, perhaps even if it be not, you will be sent for to 'name' it; but the 'kessening,' will be deferred until there are several 'children to be done together,' so as to render it better worth the trouble and expense of calling together their friends and relations, and giving a grand fête, with abundance of brandy-and-water, cheese and gingerbread."

"Is it possible that they regard the holy sacrament of baptism so entirely as a lay ceremony?" said Halstead, feeling much shocked. "How could Mr. Dawson allow such laxity in the parish?"

"Mr. Dawson had become so completely one of themselves, that their ways were his ways in all such matters: besides, he was a man of but little strength of character or fixity of purpose at any time; and even when he was well aware that things were absolutely wrong, he would, I believe, allow them to remain so, sooner than incur the odium of interfering.

"I fear he has made me much up-hill work by his facility," said Halstead.

"I fear so indeed; but success in such a cause will be the more valuable," she replied.

After a little more talk, Halstead suddenly recollected that he was prolonging his visit most unconscionably, and took his leave, wondering how on earth that highly educated young lady had been transported into the remote solitude of Snagton cum Thwackelton, and rejoicing not a little at the prospect of the aid which her evident accordance with his own opinions led him to hope he might receive from her.

Now the reader is not to suppose that the Rev. Francis Halstead was in any measure prepared to fall red-hot in love with this young lady, because he evidently felt great satisfaction in making the acquaintance; on the contrary, his pleasure at the idea of her co-operation with him was, wholly and solely, of a spiritual nature. He felt very much alone at the outset of the great work which lay before him, and she would take off his shoulders some of the labour, such as could best be performed by female agency; always under the direction of the priest. This was the thought that gladdened him. Perhaps the feeling that she would embellish the exile to which he was condemned might have been latent; but he was unconscious of it: he meant her to be a sister of mercy in Snagton cum Thwackelton; to set an example of church discipline to the women, as he himself should to the men. She would be immensely useful to him, and her time would be profitably employed as regarded herself. Perhaps he had no right to predicate so much of a lady whom he had not yet known for the space of an hour; and, indeed, the thoughts had scarcely assumed form in his mind at all: but her manner was so earnest, her zeal evidently so sincere, that he

would scarcely have been presumptuous in forming such anticipations. As for the rest, he had not even discovered with his bodily eyes, what was undoubtedly the fact, that Miss Langley was not only a very ladylike, but also a very pretty girl. She pleased him certainly, but he did not know why; and he would have had to consider, if any one had asked him, whether she was good-looking or not : as to what was the colour of her eyes, or whether she wore her hair curled or plain, he would have been quite at a loss; so I shall describe her myself, as I hope the reader may not be so indifferent to my heroine's appearance as Mr. Halstead was.

Miss Margaret Langley was rather tall than short, and her figure was such that it always looked graceful, however it might be posed; but there was no attempt at display in her attitudes, which were natural, quiet, and ladylike. She had delicate, regular features, with perhaps a slight tendency to fulness and curve about the red lips, that would suit equally a merry laugh or a cutting word of scorn. Her complexion was rather pale, with a colour that came and went easily; and she had dark brown rippled hair, that would have curled if she would have let it. Her eyes were particularly beautiful, very deep blue, with black lashes, very soft and liquid, yet capable of very intense expression upon occasion. She was not at all strikingly beautiful, but somehow the more one looked at her, the more one learned to admire this rare creature.

Her position in that remote valley, which had so much puzzled Halstead, may be easily explained. She was in mourning for her father, who had been a man of large property, and a member of a good family. On his death, which occurred suddenly, a will was found bequeathing the whole of his possessions to this, his only child. But one of his relations, of a younger branch of the family, laid claim to his property, on the plea afforded by some old entail, and the affair had been thrown into Chancery; possibly, therefore, Miss Langley might be an heiress to the amount of many thousands—possibly she might be left almost penniless, at no distant date. Her guardians, in order to ensure economy, had yielded to her wish to be allowed to pass the period of suspense in Snagton, where a good many of her youthful holidays had been spent with her father, who had property there. She was by nature lively, quick-tempered, and energetic, but her father's death had subdued her spirits, and sobered down her vivacity to a very sombre tone.

Moreover, she had been educated at the establishment of the Misses Smythe, in one of the fashionable suburbs of London, where the principles inculcated were of the highest tone, as regarded all sorts of establishments, particularly church ones. The clergyman of —— visited the school regularly twice a week, upon which occasions any young lady who wished to consult him upon the state of her conscience, was expressly requested to do so ; a regulation which (the heads of school-girls not being generally made of the strongest materials) had produced several cases of conscience that would not otherwise have arisen, besides a good deal of idle and not altogether harmless chatter amongst the young ladies. It was fortunate for Miss Langley that her piety was too sincere, and her mind too pure, to allow her to be fully aware of the evil that was going on around her; and she remained uninfected by the cleric-hysteria prevalent in the school.

Under these educational circumstances it is not surprising that Margaret Langley, upon leaving school, had engrafted upon her own deep religious feeling a surface-growth of "high church" views, very similar to those which had been the produce of Halstead's sojourn at Oxford. To tell the truth, both Miss Langley and Mr. Halstead, being youthful, were somewhat immature of judgment. Neither of them had thought much for themselves, but had put on the opinions of some person or persons in whom they trusted, like armour; and were now "assaying to go," and thinking, moreover, that they got along capitally. They were both of them, in point of fact, rather longing for some Goliath upon whom to try the spiritual weapons in which they trusted. In the thoughts of both, the "Church" held a somewhat undue prominence ; both regarding it less as the great assembly of the faithful scattered over the world, than as the Saintly Mother of the chosen few ; excluding all those who did not hold a somewhat arbitrary and circumscribed set of doctrines, all of which were essential to salvation, and to which nothing could be added. Moreover, there was, besides all this, yet one scarcely conscious, altogether unrecognised, feeling in the minds of both, viz., that there was a "ton" about their division of the church, a degree of refinement and high-breeding : in vulgar parlance, that there was nothing at all "snobbish" about it. Both of them would have been justly horrified (as most of us would) had that secret feeling of their hearts been put into

words, and offered them as their own: they would have repudiated it with lofty indignation; yet there it lurked, nevertheless, deep in the bosom of each.

There was one great difference between the practice of the two persons whose principles thus assimilated, which was probably attributable to the respective sex of the parties: viz., that Mr. Halstead carried out his views fully, and Miss Langley did not carry out hers; at least no further than her own person. For instance, though Miss Langley abhorred dissent, she would exert herself as actively to help the dissenter as if he were a churchman; Mr. Halstead made a marked difference in his conduct towards dissenters. Miss Langley looked sorrowfully upon that as an error, which Mr. Halstead judicially pronounced a sin. Miss Langley hated the sin, but loved the sinner; Mr. Halstead abhorred both. Miss Langley tacitly acknowledged that some who did not hold her opinions might yet reach heaven; Mr. Halstead distinctly pronounced the thing impossible. Miss Langley had experienced the pressure of sorrow, and it was slowly teaching her that faith must be stronger than opinion to uphold a sinking heart; Mr. Halstead had not had any opportunity of trying either faith or doctrine. Yet, nevertheless, with so much common feeling between them, it was highly probable that Miss Langley and Mr. Halstead would become better acquainted. At all events both were pleased with the commencement of their acquaintance.

CHAPTER III.

A SPIRITUAL COMPETITOR.

THE next day, as Halstead had found only women in the cottages, and as he wished to make acquaintance with the male portion of his parishioners, he directed his course through the fields towards the Thwackelton side of his parish, making detours wherever he saw any of the men at work. They were much more uncouth than the women, he found. Some gave him the usual greeting of the district, "Fahn daa," civilly enough; others merely lifted their heads, or gave a kind of grunt in reply to his salutation. He tried to enter into conversation with them, but he could scarcely understand

them, or they him: besides their ideas were few and gross, apparently. One man, a thatcher, who had descended from his ladder, seemed more inclined to enter into conversation, such as it was. He was a middle-sized man, with sallow face and prominent forehead, and an expression of the most entire self-satisfaction on his lank visage and in his small twinkling black eyes. He looked at Halstead somewhat superciliously from underneath his beetling brows, as if he were gauging the breadth and depth of his mental capacity.

"So thee beest t' priest as is to teach t' benighted heathen hereaway what's t' will o' t' Loord conçarning 'em, beest thee? Well, I dunna dou't thee's a brave lad, for what there's o' thee, but thee beest but a lad," he said, with some contempt in his tone. "I dunna conceit thee'll do graat things wi' Snagton, nor Thwackelton nather, for that matter."

"Why do you think that, my friend?" retorted Halstead, somewhat austerely, for the address of the rustic offended his self-respect.

"Wha t' foalk of Snagton and Thwackelton has been i' t' waay o' choosing their own ministers for a good few years, an' I dunna think they'd choose t' maak o' a lad like thee. I hav' na' dou't thee's an honest lad enow, but we want a powerful minister—one that's got an outpouring, an' unction o' t' spirit; an'—I mean na disrespect, but I tak't that's not t' maak o' your gifts."

"I lay claim to no superhuman gifts," said Halstead; "but as an ordained minister of the church ——"

"Then thee waan't deea for were foalks. We waant a preacher as *has* gifts. Na dou't thee wast ordained; an' a sight better t' laying on o' t' bishop's hands made ye, I 'se go bail! But t' foalk o' Snagton an' Thwackelton think na more o' t' bishop's hand as they deea o' my, and mebbe not so much," said the thatcher, sticking out a broad, dirty paw.

Halstead felt it beneath him to be irritated at the man's coarse impudence; he replied, therefore, quietly—

"I hope that the people of Snagton cum Thwackelton and I shall soon understand each other better; but why you, who know nothing of either me or my capabilities, or 'gifts,' as you call them, should take upon you to pronounce that I am incapable of fulfilling my charge, I really do not see. At all events the authority of selecting and ordaining the clergy does not belong to you; therefore I should advise you to do

your best to be contented with those whom wiser heads than yours have seen fit to appoint in that capacity: so good morning, my friend." Halstead was about to walk on, but the man was not silenced.

"Wiser heads as mine, lad? Didst ever hear that t' wisdom o' t' warld is fulishness wi' t' Loord? but belike ye dean't read i' t' Woord: that's t' waay wi' you Romans."

Fairly conquered by the man's conceit and ignorance, Halstead replied, sharply—

"I have read enough to know that a fool must not be answered according to his folly; therefore, good morning."

But as he walked away he caught a gleam of triumph in the eye of the man, who had felt that there was a weak place in the temper of his adversary, as he evidently chose to consider Halstead.

The latter chafed a good deal as he walked on, to think that the man should dare to assume such a tone of contemptuous familiarity towards an ordained minister of the church. Yet he could not help feeling that he *had* answered the fool according to his folly, and that the consequent similitude had been created.

He came up presently with a young man who was driving a waggon and horses. He was a fine, athletic young fellow, with a pair of bright, intelligent, dark eyes illuminating a handsome bronzed visage, set in a dark frame of curly hair and whiskers. Halstead recognised him immediately as the young man who had come forward in church to help him in his perplexity; so he greeted him with a smile: and a very pleasant smile Mr. Halstead had. The young man touched his hat respectfully; it was the first hat on which such a token of courtesy had been manifested to him in the parish.

"I'm glad to make your acquaintance, friend," said he; "pray, let me know your name."

"George Heseltine, at your service, sir."

"Well then, George Heseltine, you did me a service on Sunday, and I'm glad to say thank you."

"No service at all, sir; but mebbe t' waays o' oos north-country foalk seem queer to a gen'l'man as has been i' t' towns. A long bit ahead o' oos, an't they, sir?" said George, curiously.

"Well, yes, in some respects, certainly; but I hope to find you are before them in a good many other things, such as morality, sobriety, order, and the like."

George's face did not betoken conviction on this point, but Halstead was thinking of something else.

"I had a talk with a queer fellow just now," said he. "He was thatching that shed yonder to the left; can you tell me who he is?"

"Thatching Willy Southeron's shed?" said George, looking in the direction indicated; "that'll be Tommy Robinson. Was he a broad maade man, an' did he peer out at you from underneath his brows wi' 's little sharp black een?"

"That's the man."

"Ay, na dou't that were Tommy. He'd have sommat to say to you, sir, belike?"

"Well, yes, he had a good deal to say that sounded to me very like impertinence. But, as you say, I don't know your north-country ways quite yet. What is this man?"

"Well, sir, he'll be a bit jealous like, mebbe, o' you, you see, for he do a good bit of preaching hisself."

"He? indeed! And where does he preach?"

"Ou, i' t' Baptist chapel at Snagton End. He's reckoned uncommon powerful, he is, an' he thinks hisself so aboon a bit. I heard tell he was bragging about t' wark he'd maak wi' t' new minister."

"Indeed! and why should he wish to interfere with me?"

"Why, you see, sir, he considers he's got a gift, as coom raight straight down from heaven, to preach t' gospel; an' he thinks, belike, your call came through so many pair o' hands it lost some o' t' grace by t' way like. Besides he'll be thinking you'll interfere wi' 's traade, mebbe."

"I interfere with his trade! How so?"

"Wi' t' preaching traade, I mean, sir; not t' thatching. But Mr. Dawson, t' last minister, he let foalk have their own way pretty much hereabouts, and didn't tak't to heart if they went to t' chapel instead o' t' church. Besides, mayhap he'll be thinking you're not one of them as has got a ticket like him, raight all t' waay to heaven (asking your pardon, sir), wi'out any more worrit about it; an' he'd be fain to put you i' t' straight road too, sir."

Halstead smiled.

"So he considers himself one of the elect, does he? I hope he does not deceive himself. He seems a meddling sort of fellow."

"Well, you see, sir, being all directed like, and carriage-paid hisself, he thinks, na dou't, he ought to fettle oop those

as ain't. He set-to to put Miss Langley i' t' way o' saving her poor lost soul, as he told her one day; but she gave him as good as he sent, an' mebbe a bit better."

"Miss Langley! then you know Miss Langley?"

"I do, sir, I thank God for 't; I've got good reason to know her. It's my belief, sir, if ever an angel walked on this here earth, there's one walks in her shoon. When my poor mother died last Kessamas—you should have seen what she did for t' poor soul; night and day she waited upon her: but it weean't do to talk on, sir."

Halstead saw that the young man's heart and eyes were both full, and respected him for it; so there was a short silence.

"Has Miss Langley always lived here?" said he, at length.

"Noa, sir, not lived here; she's been here off an' on at times since she were a bairn; but she's only lived here sin' her faather died, well-nigh a year agone. He left her a vast o' money, but one o' the family claim t' woal as heir-at-law on some notion o' a male entail, as they call 't; so t' property were thrown into Chancery, an' folk do say when an estate oncet get in there, it 'll have to get uncommon small afore 't can creep out again."

"I trust that may not be the case in this instance. According to your account few people would be better fitted to inherit a large fortune than Miss Langley."

"An' that's the truth, sir; though I did hear Nelly Haggart and Tommy Robinson talking how she'd have all her inheritance i' this world; but if she ain't an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven there's few on oos as are, an' then it'll go by favour, to my thinking."

"Nelly Haggart! why I called on her the other day, surely. Does she, too, think Miss Langley's soul is in danger?" asked Halstead, struck by the rustic's chivalrous admiration of Miss Langley.

"I conceit she sets 't doon for lost, an' for being dropped on t' road too far behind to gan her ways back to look for 't. But then Nelly Haggart conceits she's safer herself nor what Tommy Robinson is. She's got a louder call, I expect; least ways she makes din enow about it."

Here George Hesseltine and his team arrived at the gate of the farmyard to which they were bound, so Halstead bade him good-morning and walked on alone, rather pleased with his new acquaintance, whose intelligence was superior to anything he had yet met with, and whose dry humour amused him.

CHAPTER IV.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Sir Henry Aston had been at a gentleman's party the night before, consequently he did not breakfast at a very early hour that morning; neither did he trouble himself to open his letters, until near mid-day, when dressing-gowned and slippered, he sauntered into his bachelor apartment; and having established himself comfortably in an easy chair, poured out his coffee, broken an egg, grumbled because the coffee was not so hot as it should have been, glanced over the leaders, the sporting intelligence, and the parliamentary reports, he finally took up his letters. One from his sister—he laid that on one side.

"Good advice, no doubt; that'll keep."

Two looked like bills: those were laid aside likewise. Then he took up one, the manner of which he did not recognize: the address looked like the writing of a gentleman; the seal was a crest, the post-mark was Maltby.

"Humph!" said Sir Henry.

Having ascertained these particulars, he laid the letter down, took a sip of coffee, helped himself to muffins, and thought of minced ham, but finally decided on anchovy paste; then he opened the envelope in a leisurely way, and glanced at the beginning of the letter, reading it half aloud and skipping the connectives. It began thus:—"Sir,—I am unwilling to lose time in addressing you on a subject of some little importance—" He looked at the signature—"Francis Halstead!" "Who the dickens is Francis Halstead? Oh! I remember; that chap Latham made me promise Snagton cum Thwackelton to. Wonder what he wants?"

So he laid down the letter and broke another egg, lay back in the chair and whistled dreamily; then he finished the letter: "'Books completely worn out, much of the morning service so tattered as to be illegible.' Hem! 'Altar-cloth almost in rags from the moth.' Hem! Fellow wants new ones, I suppose. 'Vessels hitherto in use consisting only of pewter; and common earthenware plate used at the offertory.' Hem! 'Can't suppose I should wish him to continue to administer the elements of the Holy Sacrament in vessels of so

common a description.' Wants me to buy silver ones! *Confound the fellow!*"

Here a sporting acquaintancè walked in, and the subject was for the time being dismissed from Sir Henry Aston's mind.

Sir Henry—or, as his acquaintances generally called him, Sir Harry Aston—was an only son. He had succeeded to a large fortune at an early age, so that extensive accumulation of principal had been the consequence. He had lived, as a youth, with his mother and sisters; his mother was ostensibly religious and lady-like, but privately a schemer and a screw; and his sisters, of whom he had several, were passing successively through the various stages of female fashionable "fast" life.

Sir Harry himself was by no means a bad fellow, despite all the spoiling wherewith he had been spoiled: despite his natural laziness, the petting of his mother, the indulgence of his tutor, the subservience of his servants, and the flattery of his "friends," there was a fund of sterling good at the bottom of Sir Harry's character (for he had not an absolute lack of that article) which would not be entirely stifled. He was very good-natured: true, his laziness would have nearly accounted for that; but then he would have gone a trifle out of his way to do any one a kindness, and he certainly would not have done so one hair's breadth for any contrary purpose. Neither envy, hatred, malice, nor any uncharitableness ever found entrance into that broad breast of his: for he was a goodly man and a tall, and somewhat fleshy withal.

Besides all this negative goodness, or rather absence of badness, and notwithstanding all that nature, and fortune, and everything and everybody had done to make him comfortable, he was actually sometimes visited with uncomfortable twinges of consciousness that he was not fulfilling the purpose for which he was sent into the world. What that purpose was, besides eating, drinking, sleeping and enjoying himself, he really didn't know; but he had a sort of vague, general notion that he ought to be being useful or doing some good somehow. His only idea of the manner of doing good, or being useful, was, to subscribe to certain charitable institutions (which he did, but always forgot to send in his proxies), and going to church when he was at home: the latter was a "bore;" besides, he always went to sleep and snored, and made the parson stare, which didn't "set a good example," so he didn't often go. He had entered the Guards, of course,

and consequently spent a considerable part of his time in London, inhabiting handsome chambers in Belgravia. He dissipated as much as was convenient to his laziness, but did not plunge into the abyss of quasi "pleasure," with the mad haste of many of his young acquaintance. On the contrary, he didn't game much, or "lark" excessively: the "one put him in a perspiration," the other was "too much trouble;" neither did he often drink much, because "a fellow got such a thundering headache next morning, and made such a thundering fool of himself at the time."

Sir Harry Aston was the lay rector of the combined parishes of Snagton cum Thwackelton, the next presentation to the perpetual curacy of which he had recently promised to Mr. Halstead, at the request of a man who had once, for a short period, been his tutor; and for whom, strange to say, although Mr. Latham had been the only severe master he had ever had, he retained (for him) an almost enthusiastic respect and attachment. In the press of business with which officers in the Guards are usually overwhelmed, Mr. Halstead's letter had been laid aside for some days, together with the unopened epistle from his sister, and the equally unopened bills; when one miserably wet day, Sir Harry, having, besides, caught a bad cold in his head, which, as he tersely expressed it, "made him feel beastly," he virtuously set to work to make up the arrears of his correspondence. "Oh! *by* the Powers!" was his exclamation, as he turned up Halstead's letter. "Suppose it's all right: may as well tell him to write to Pugin, or some such fellow, and get what he wants: don't understand the article myself; besides, it would be a bore." So in a round, scrambling, school-boy hand, Sir Harry wrote:—

"SIR,—I BEG that you will give orders for whatever you may require for the church of Snagton cum Thwackelton, and direct it to be placed to my account with Pugin, or any other tradesman whom you may choose to employ ——"

"Hum! Daresay he won't like that, if he's a gentleman —may as well go the entire animal;" so he put a ^ after "account," and wrote "without regard to expense" above. Then he went on:

"I am sorry you find the" (what does he call 'em?) "vessels and furniture of the church in so bad a state. I have the honour to be, sir,

"Your obedient servant, HENRY ASTON."

"'There: I hope that'll please the fellow, for Latham's sake." So the letter was sealed and despatched, and in due time arrived at its destination. Mr. Halstead was much gratified by its contents, and formed a much higher estimate of his patron's "church feeling" than the particularly negative state of his patron's sentiments on ecclesiastical matters deserved.

CHAPTER V.

A "ROKE."

For the ensuing Sunday, Halstead had prepared two sermons with much care; one upon the authority of the church, her ministers and ministrations; the other on baptism, its privileges and blessings, and the risk run by those who neglected bringing their children to receive that holy rite. The first he intended for the morning service, which he had observed to be attended chiefly by men; the other for the afternoon, when the women also were present, as he considered they might have some influence in the matter of baptism, could they be brought to exercise it. He put the subjects under treatment into very strong language; without considering that perhaps a little preparation might be necessary before the very rough, as well as for the most part pre-occupied, soil he had to work upon, should be ready for the seed he was about to scatter. But indeed it scarcely mattered; for although, to do him justice, he used language as simple as he could devise, still, to the mass of his congregation, the sermons would be entirely incomprehensible. Mr. Halstead expected great things from those two sermons.

Sunday morning showed a specimen of atmosphere peculiar to the "Dales:" none of your smoky fogs through which the sun's face looks like a tarnished copper warming pan, but a regular "roke." The thick white watery mist gathered upon the moors in great ragged, cloudy masses, and then rolled down in billows over the edges of the hills into the valley. Over and over tumbled the silent, misty cataract, till the whole valley was full of the wetting, chilling, blinding, minute drizzle; as the mist condensed, the rain began to fall, small, soft, and penetrating at first, then the drops enlarged in bulk, till finally all was one steady soak.

Halstead got to church wet and uncomfortable. To his astonishment the bell was not going: the dog-whipper was there, but the clerk was not to be seen. He looked round the church in consternation; it was perfectly empty, with the exception of himself, the aforesaid Luke the dog-whipper, Miss Langley, and a grey-haired, bent old man. He turned to Luke for an explanation, but that luminous individual having shuffled out, "Coorse daa—heavy roke," got aground, and found no response ready for Halstead's hasty—

"Why isn't the bell going? Where's Deacon?"

Whilst he was still searching in the muddy water of his intellect for an answer to two questions at once, the clerk arrived, out of breath with running; a neighbour having informed him that he had seen "t' minister" go by.

"Why, Deacon, how is it that you are not at your post?" exclaimed Halstead. "It wants but a minute or two, and the bell has not begun."

"How should I ken ye'd be for cooming i' sooch a roke?" said Deacon, sulkily.

"Be for coming! Why, you don't suppose weather would ever stop a clergyman!"

"Well, Mr. Dawson, he used for to gan to t' chapel at Snagton End, wet daa's,"* said Deacon, in a sort of exculpatory grumble; "and I supposed ye'd dea t' lahk."

"I! I go to a dissenting chapel! Why, you must be mad! There, I can do without you. Go to the bell instantly!"

The feeble "tang—tang," however, brought no further congregation, and Halstead bestowed his carefully written discourse upon his four auditors and the bare walls. Miss Langley went with him heart and soul, and greatly regretted the absence of the congregation. The clerk was too sullen to listen; Luke Tillot told his wife it was a "desput fahn discoorse," but could tell nothing more respecting it; and the venerable old man, who had listened earnestly all the time, told Miss Langley he didn't doubt but what "t' sermon were uncommon grand, an' t' lad were a good lad, an' earnest lahk, but he was too learned for a poor old man like him, that wasn't no schollard;" and he shook his head sadly. Miss Langley said to him, "You know, James, Mr. Halstead hasn't been in these parts long, and the people speak differ-

* A fact

ently in the south. He'll soon understand you, and then you'll understand him, I know;" and she smiled so brightly and looked so kind, that the old man really hoped it would be as she said, and hobbled away with his stick, feeling greatly comforted, and thinking what a "loovesome lass" Miss Langley was, and blessing her in his heart.

Miss Langley waited to speak to Halstead; she smiled at the dismayed expression of his face, and said—

"You are thinking what terrible godless barbarians we are here in the North, Mr. Halstead; but the clerk told you the truth: it is not the custom to go to church here on wet Sundays; and Mr. Dawson used to say he 'didn't see that it made much difference reading t' Gospel himself at t' church, or hearing t' Wesleyan minister read it at t' chapel."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Halstead, in a tone of horror. "And yet he was a regularly educated clergyman of the Church of England."

"Undoubtedly he was; but he was one of the old school of clergymen, who thought taking holy orders was merely adopting a leisurely kind of profession, which would not give much trouble either to themselves or other people. Of course he never dreamed of reading, or keeping pace with the times. The beams of awakening light upon ecclesiastical matters never penetrated as far as Snagton, and poor Mr. Dawson's representation of the Church had been merely nominal, long before his increasing infirmities rendered it necessary to remove him."

"But surely he visited the poor?"

"On the contrary: Sundays, burials, and marriages were the only occasions upon which he came amongst them, and then it was more as one of themselves than as their priest; I suppose the only parochial visits he ever made were in the case of his being sometimes sent for to baptize a sick or perhaps a healthy child."

"And did he attend to such arbitrary summonses?"

"Yes; as the people say, he 'let them have their own way,' whenever they wished it. So you see it is not very astonishing that they are so indifferent upon the subject of Church discipline now. But you must not give them up yet; when they see, for instance, that you do not stop for weather, neither will they."

It still rained a little, so Halstead held Miss Langley's umbrella for her as far as they went together, and meantime

he consulted her on some of his plans. He had indulged hopes of having service at the church at least on Wednesdays and Fridays, and on all Saints' days; yet the specimen he had just seen did not seem to afford much hope of a congregation. She agreed with him that it would be useless at present, and he relinquished the project with a sigh. Then they began to talk about the Sunday-schools; and Miss Langley said that from several conversations she had had with the parents on the subject, she had great hopes that, when he should find it convenient to announce that he meant to commence such an undertaking, there would be rather a full attendance of children: moreover, she said that if he wished it, she was ready to take a class herself at any time; and that her maid, Annie Irving, who was much better informed, and in other respects very superior to most of the young girls in that district, would also take a class of junior pupils. Halstead thanked her heartily, and accepted her offer with pleasure; and it was agreed that books should be procured, and that notice should forthwith be given of the commencement of a Sunday school.

"But," said he, looking apprehensively at the delicate figure beside him, "it is not fit for you to come out in such wet, cold weather as this."

"Oh! never fear me; I'm hardy enough," said she, laughing: "besides, the goodness of the cause will keep me warm. I shall be only too glad if you will let me give what little aid I can to it."

And as the colour mounted to her cheek, between her enthusiasm in the cause she spoke of and her shyness in alluding to herself, Halstead *very* nearly found out how pretty she was.

Here their roads separated, so he resigned her umbrella to her own keeping.

The rain ceased towards the time of afternoon service, and the people betook themselves to church; the farmers on horseback, with their wives behind them on pillions, as is still the fashion in the Dales. Halstead preached the sermon he had prepared upon baptism. The congregation didn't understand much of it, but what they did raised considerable comment. The dissenters (for they being not less lax in their corporate discipline, and not less curious than the church people, many of them went to hear him,) denounced him as a "Roman" on his own showing.

The Church people said he "made a deal o' wark about kessening t' bairns, sure*ly*."

Some few even brought their children to be christened shortly afterwards; but the effect was far short of what he had expected.

CHAPTER VI.

FLOREALE.

ONE beautiful bright summer evening, not very long afterwards, George Heseltine, according to his frequent custom, went to attend to Miss Langley's garden a little. Now it so happened that Miss Langley's pretty maid, Annie Irving, had found, or fancied, that some of the flowers in the said garden wanted watering, and that certain withered roses required to be clipped off; so, after Miss Langley had come out and given George some directions, previous to setting off for a walk, the two young people were left alone in the garden. After some time their several occupations brought them into proximity to one another.

"Good even, Mistress Annie Irving," said George.

"Good even, Mr. George Heseltine," responded Annie.

"You're busy to-night," remarked George.

"I shall set you the better example then," returned Annie.

"Ay! no telling what we mightn't come to i' goodness—if you women always set us a good example."

"And so we always do," retorted Annie.

"Whew!" whistled George, as he went to fetch another pot of seedlings to transplant. When he came back, Annie was clipping the dead blossoms off a fine standard rose-tree. She did not look up for some time, but when she did, she met George's eyes fixed upon her with an admiring gaze that brought the colour up into her face, and made her snip away at the roses at a great rate.

"I see you'll be doing a mischief to that tree," said George. "Let me show you how to trim it;" and he came up and took hold of the scissors she had in her hand.

"There, you needn't guide my hand like a baby's," said she, pettishly, giving her hand a pull.

"But I can show you so much better, you know."

Annie replied by another pull, and a very austere, "Leave go, I say!"

"Oh, well! as you will;" and George proceeded to trim the bush. Presently he cut a beautiful half-blown rose, and divested it carefully of its thorns; then he looked up at Annie, who was still pouting. "Isn't it a beauty?"

"I don't see anything particular about it."

"Don't you? I'm sorry for that," said he, softly, (Annie couldn't keep a little smile from stealing to her lips) "because," he continued, "I meant it for Miss Langley."

"Better give it her, then," said she, coldly; and the smile was gone.

"Just what I mean to," he replied, holding it between his finger and thumb, and arranging the dark green leaves, so as to set it off to the best advantage. "So I hear you're to be a teacher i' t' Sunday school, Annie?"

"So Miss Langley said," replied Annie, shortly. "Give me my scissors."

"All in good time," says George, still arranging his rose, and placing a beautiful white bud beside it. "Doesn't that show t' colour well?"

"Oh, very! haven't you done?"

"Not quite. Do you know, Mr. Halstead has asked me to go to his class o' nights, so as I may be a teacher too, Annie?"

Annie could not help a look of interest. George, sly fellow, caught it.

"What do you think of it, Annie?"

"I think you can do as you've a mind," replied she, with an assumption of great indifference.

"Oh! in course: I may go and be hanged, or drowned, or transported, for all you care, mayn't I?" retorted George, piqued. He held up the rose, now quite arranged to his satisfaction. "I hope Miss Langley will like my flowers." Annie would not look at them. "Here are your scissors, Mistress Irving."

She took them without a word, and set off to go towards the house: but when she had gone a step or two, she turned round and said, "I think I'd do as Mr. Halstead says, George."

"Do you, Annie? Do you care about it, Annie?" asked George, eagerly.

"Me care? Why should I?"

"Well, I don't know; I don't care much myself: I think I weean't then."

"Well, but George, I think I would. Mr. Halstead would be pleased, and so would Miss Langley; and—so—well, leastways *I* shouldn't be sorry." George pretended he wasn't at all gratified.

"Oh? you wouldn't be sorry then, Annie; nor yet at all glad neither?"

"Just a little, p'raps."

"Well, I'll think about it then; and Annie," continued George, softly, "mebbe these roses 'll wilt afore Miss Langley cooms back: I'm thinking you'd better take them."

Annie did not pull her hand away so quickly this time, even though George *was* rather awkward about giving her the roses; but she got very red, and started off to the house, scarcely stopping to say "Thank you." Those roses bloomed in Annie's room for some days; and then their withered leaves were carefully placed in the little box where Annie kept her treasures. George called upon Mr. Halstead as he went home that night, and told him he should be glad to be allowed to attend his evening classes, preparatory to becoming a Sunday-school teacher.

George didn't tell his father of the promise he had made, for old Heseltine was a sturdy dissenter, and his son thought it best to let the truth break upon him by degrees, as it was sure not to please him when it did come to his knowledge. Not but that George was a very dutiful son in most respects, but in this instance a variety of motives impelled him to the course he had adopted. In the first place, Mr. Halstead had spoken to him like a friend (for Mr. Halstead was pleased with the young man's intelligence, and felt less at a loss with him than with most of his parishioners), and George had a great drawing towards him in consequence; besides it was flattering to be asked to become a sort of nucleus to the class which Mr. Halstead was about to form: then his fervent admiration of Miss Langley led him to do what he knew would please her; and lastly, but by no means least, he had extorted from Annie a confession that it would please her also, and he was not indifferent to what she thought of his actions. From these various motives, therefore, rather than from any decided conviction of his own, George had decided on doing what he knew his father would totally disapprove. When he entered

the stone kitchen, with its low rafters, whereon reposed a store of goodly bacon; and its wide chimney with the cheerful peat fire, beside which, summer though it was, the old farmer's quaint arm-chair was drawn up as usual, George only replied to his father's kindly "Where'st been, George? Thee's late, lad," by saying:

"I've been tending t' flowers i' Miss Langley's yard, father;" whereupon the old man nodded.

"She's a good lass," said he; "a good lass, forbye she's mebbe sommat o' a Roman. Thee mun maak her flowers look brave, lad, for she was uncommon good to thy poor mother, that she were. Get me my pipe, George, an' tell me what thee dean wi' they young stirks." *

George filled his father's pipe and lighted it, and set his jug of gale-beer † beside him; then he seated himself opposite, and proceeded to give him an account of the day's proceedings: how the said stirks had been turned into "t' coo-paster beside t' Big beck;" how the lambs on the high moors were fit for sale; how Willy Southeron's bull had battered down the gate between the long field and the road, and taken off to the moor, but some men who were "remmoning a cam" ‡ had seen and turned him back. All these particulars George gave with such minuteness of detail as he knew his father liked; perhaps even with more care than usual, because he felt he was keeping back something that would have vexed the old man; neither did he mention his interview with Annie Irving, for his father was jealous of his showing interest in any particular quarter, and George did not wish to awaken suspicions in his mind. He helped the old man up-stairs to bed even more tenderly than usual that night, and received his blessing with the feeling that he had been sinning against him. For George, though his impulses were generally good, was too much given to act upon them. He wanted some one mainspring of fixed principle to guide his conduct, otherwise it was just possible that this tendency of his might lead him sorely astray some day.

* Heifers.

† Gale-beer is in not unfrequent use in certain districts of Yorkshire: it is made from the sweet gale, a kind of dwarf willow, and is regarded as tonic and stomachic. It is a somewhat nauseous beverage to those unaccustomed to its flavour.

‡ Removing a hedge-bank.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FORCE OF EXAMPLE.

THE next morning after breakfast, Margaret Langley was busy in her sitting-room, arranging the flowers she had just gathered, with the dew still glistering on their petals. The window was open, and the soft air and sunshine came streaming in together; the room looked very bright and pleasant, and so did the flowers, and the pretty hands that were grouping them together. Margaret sang snatches of sweet tunes as she leaned over her flowers; then she fell back to look at the effect of the grouping, and the rich contrast of colours she had produced, unconsciously assuming the most graceful of attitudes as she did so; then she moved about the vases with a sort of half-dancing step, putting in a flower here and altering a colour there: Miss Langley was gay that morning. All at once she paused in her employment.

"Auntie dear," said she, "did it ever strike you what a pretty girl Annie Irving is?"

Mrs. Wilson was seated at her knitting as usual. (Mrs. Wilson had found knitting so soothing to her grief when she lost her husband, that she had continued in a state of knitting ever since, though her grief was no longer very acute; but she had got into a habit of it, and would probably knit on till the yarn of existence came to an end and stopped her needles.) She was now manufacturing some curious little angular article destined some day to form "a square in a counterpane." She looked up in surprise, pushed up her spectacles in order to see her niece clearer, and then said, reflectively, "Annie's a tidy-looking girl; but I never considered much about her beauty. What made you think of that, my dear?"

"And, Auntie dear, did it ever strike you what a good-looking young man George Heseltine is?"

"Well, I suppose George is well enough; but I don't see what's put George's and Annie's looks in your head just now."

"Well, but didn't it ever occur to you what a handsome couple they'd make, Auntie dear?"

Mrs. Wilson absolutely laid down her knitting.

"Bless me! you don't mean that."

"Yes, but I do mean that. They would, wouldn't they, Auntie?"

"Well, where did you get that notion?"

"Why, one scarcely knows where one's notions come from sometimes. Don't you think it's a pleasant notion?"

Mrs. Wilson took up her knitting again and said—

"George is nought but an idle lad, and Annie is very young."

"George only wants a few years and a few troubles over his head to settle his character, and then he will be anything but an idle lad," said Margaret, thoughtfully. "I think he would make Annie a good husband."

"I've no fault to find with the lad, I'm sure; and he's obliging and clever certainly," said her aunt; "but does Annie matter George, then?"

"Oh, no! not that I know of," said Margaret; "I was only joking." Then she finished the arrangement of her flowers in silence. Having completed her task, she came up to her aunt, and stooping over her with a smile, "Auntie," said she.

"Yes, my dear," replied Mrs. Wilson, placidly.

"Do you know I want you to make a sacrifice?"

Miss Langley seemed bent on astonishing her aunt that morning; it was no unusual thing for Margaret to make a sacrifice herself, but a very unusual thing for her to ask another person to make one. Again Mrs. Wilson pushed up her spectacles, and held her knitting in suspense.

"It's not a very huge sacrifice, Auntie dear," said Margaret, smiling, "so you can go on knitting."

Mrs. Wilson went on accordingly.

"Poor old James Gilmore has got rheumatism terribly in his knees."

"Has he, my dear?" said placid Mrs. Wilson, and knitted.

"Yes, and you know I'm very fond of poor old James; and he has no one to look to his little comforts since his wife died; and I am afraid his stockings are very thin, and full of holes."

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Wilson.

"And I want him to have a few new pairs before the weather gets damp, you see, Auntie."

"Yes, my dear."

"And you know you knit so quickly and so well, Auntie

dear: so much better than I do; and —— the fact is, I want you to lay aside the counterpane and help me to knit him some. You will, won't you?" she urged, coaxingly.

Mrs. Wilson turned her knitting, and looked at it reflectively.

"You know it's not so well to do too much for the poor," said she; "it makes them depend upon you too much, my dear."

Mrs. Wilson had got hold of the fag end of an argument she had once heard about the evil of pauperism, and so (though she was really kind-hearted) she always brought it out whenever Margaret proposed any fresh charitable scheme; and as that happened very frequently, Margaret knew exactly the weight of the argument.

"Quite true, my dear Aunt; but just think how little of the pauper there is about upright old James Gilmore! Think how industrious he is, in spite of his lameness and his infirmity. Why, I should not dare to insult James by offering him anything as charity. But no one, even the most independent, objects to a gift from a friend, you know, Aunt."

"Yes, my dear, to be sure; that is quite true. But are you sure James Gilmore's stockings are so bad?"

"Quite sure, Aunt; the poor old man was trying to mend one when I went the other day, and I told him he was so awkward that I must take it and do it myself: and I am quite sure it *was* very bad."

"Well, my dear, I don't much mind helping you," said Mrs. Wilson, looking at the same time rather regretfully at her knitting.

"That's a dear good Aunt," replied Margaret; "never mind the counterpane, it will be done in plenty of time for my wedding; and you know you mean to make me a present of it, don't you now?"

"I don't know, indeed, my dear," said Mrs. Wilson, smiling benevolently: "how full your head is of weddings this morning."

Margaret laughed gaily.

"So it seems," said she; "but when one is pleased, one doesn't always talk like the wisdom of Solomon, and I *am* very pleased that my old friend James will be set up for warm winter stockings. It must be very hard to be old and have no one to love one, and attend to one's comforts; and yet

I think I should be glad to change lots with old James Gilmore."

"My dear!" ejaculated her Aunt, as a vision crossed her mind's eye of her niece's fair face and rich locks, which the sun was just then lighting up into gold at all the ripples, changed into old James Gilmore's withered features and scant hoary locks.

"Fact, Auntie; I should, indeed! James is old, and his journey to heaven's gate is nearly done, for he seems so good and so holy that I am sure he is quite safe; while as for me, the journey is long and hard: I feel afraid to look forward to it. It's such very hard work to get to heaven, Aunt, that I feel as if I should like to be lazy and change with old James, who's got the worst of it done, don't you see?"

Mrs. Wilson didn't see very clearly.

"I thought you were talking about your wedding just now, my dear," said she: "James Gilmore's face wouldn't look very well in a bride's bonnet."

Margaret laughed heartily at the notion, and coloured a little; perhaps at some private consciousness of a slight degree of inconsistency in her own thoughts.

"Not exactly, certainly," said she; "but now I think of it, Auntie dear, James's new stockings will do capitally for him to dance with me at Annie's and George's wedding, won't they?"

Mrs. Wilson was getting rather perplexed at the sudden changes in the current of her niece's ideas; seeing which, Margaret kissed her laughingly, saying,—

"Now I am off to tell James that a certain mysterious fairy has promised him new stockings shortly."

When Margaret arrived at the old man's cottage, she found him seated on the bench at his door, busily occupied in cutting wooden pegs for meat-skewers; an employment furnished him by William Smith, the butcher. He lifted his reverend head, well pleased at her approach; and to her cheery greeting of—"Well, James, have you done as I bid you and got a little better?" he replied,—

"Ay, lass, ay, I'se uncommon grand to-daa: I'se cobby as a lop,* an' desput glad to see ye sure*ly*."

Margaret went and fetched the cricket (*i. e.*, small wooden stool) from the hearth, so as not to disturb his pegs, and

* Lively as a flea.

sitting down beside him, laid aside her straw hat, and began examining his work.

"Do you know, James," said she, "I do believe I could make a meat-skewer; give me your knife and let me try." Old James gave her his great buckhorn-handled clasp-knife, and chuckled with delight to see her grasp it in those delicate little fingers of hers, and set gravely to work on a peg.

"Ye'se do 't bravely, lass, I see," said he; "bravely: ye'se be saafe to yearn a haa'penny a daa, if ye gan on thatten a waay."

"Don't insult my efforts, friend James; it will be a very handsome peg, you'll see presently. Now do you know I've something to tell you?"

"Nobbut good, lass, fro' thee, I'se go bail."

"Ah! you'll see whether that's true some day, when you and I quarrel; but it's nothing very bad this time. Somebody told me this morning you were going to have some nice new warm knit stockings before long."

"Na, na, lass; na new stockings for me, I'm thinking. Taks a desput deal o' skewers to get a new pair of stockings, surely. Happen somebody were joking ye?"

"No joke at all; some one told me this morning you were going to have a present of some new stockings: not yarn, but lambs' wool, because they're warmer. Now, you can't guess who."

"Wha noa; not if t' weren't theeself, lass, I can't."

"No, no; it wasn't I. Guess again."

"T' weren't t' minister lad, Halstead?"

"James, I'm surprised at you! as if Mr. Halstead could knit stockings! Guess again."

Old James looked doubtfully round his little garden, as if he were mentally ranging all his knitting acquaintance in a row, and deciding on the pecuniary ability of some and the willingness of others, to make him, James Gilmore, so handsome a present.

"'Tain't Mistress Tappin; she's too many to knit for at home, na dou't," said he;—then hesitatingly, "Happen 'tain't t' auld laady?"

(Mrs. Wilson was called "t' auld laady," to distinguish her from Miss Langley, who was known throughout the parish as "t' yoong laady.")

"You've just hit it this time, James; you're clever to guess so soon."

"She's uncommon good; bless t' Loord as put it intil she's heart," said the old man, gratefully. "Please maak my duty to her, an' tell her I'se greatly beholden, lass."

"I shouldn't wonder, James, if you were able to get to church all through the winter in consequence. For you must not have the rheumatism so bad, you know; else it will be very ungrateful of you, and I shall scold."

The old man laughed merrily.

"Mebbe I shall, mebbe I shall," said he. "I fare better, I dea, when I been to t' church; though 't dea meak my legs stam and wark desput a' times. But sommut there kind o' seems to talk o' home an' o' my poor lass that's waiting for me there."

"I think of that home a great deal, too, at church, James; and you know I too have some very dear ones who have gone there to wait for me," and the tears came into Miss Langley's eyes.

"Poor bairn, thee's all alone noo, surely," said James, compassionately; "and thee's boot a young thing to be left so: boot thee's got a good Father still, that 'll tak tent o' thee lass, better as t' other could," continued the old man, as he laid his hand tenderly on her head. "The Lord bless thee, bairn, and note ill 'ull coom at thee."

It would have formed a striking picture, that scene: the young, beautiful lady, seated on her lowly seat beside the patriarchal figure of the old man, as he laid his toil-worn hand upon her fair young head, while she looked up at him reverently and affectionately. So thought a somewhat astonished spectator, who just then chanced to be coming round the corner of the rough stone wall in which was situated the doorway into the old man's garden. This was no other than Mr. Halstead: he thought he would retire; but it was a pretty sight, and he lingered to look at it, Miss Langley being seated in a position which prevented her observing him. A slight movement caused her to turn her head, and she started up quickly, dropping old James's clasp-knife as she did so. She was not sorry to have the excuse of stooping for it, for the tears were on her cheeks at the affectionate fervour of her old friend's blessing, and she was not fond of letting her feelings betray themselves before other people; so she brushed them hastily away as she stooped, and then greeted Halstead with a smile.

"Coom in, coom in, lad," said the old man, "I'se fain to

see ye ;" and he cleared away his pegs to accommodate his new guest. But Halstead remained standing, and watched with great interest and some surprise the friendly and affectionate familiarity with which Miss Langley appeared to treat the old man. He had been similarly struck several times before : she appeared perfectly at her ease with the poor, and they with her ; yet he could not help remarking that, kind as was her manner, without the slightest touch of stiffness or hauteur, she never by one hair's breadth lost her place as a high-bred lady amongst the rustics ; nor did any one of them ever seem, in the slightest degree, tempted to encroach upon the freedom she allowed them. He could not quite understand, though he could not help admiring.

The fact was, Miss Langley had that master-key to the human heart and character which Mr. Halstead wanted ; she spoke and acted amongst the poor from the dictates of her own heart, relying upon finding a response in theirs; and she was seldom disappointed. She never made herself one of them ; she made them want to be like her in courtesy and kindness, at the same time that they felt how infinitely she was, in fact, their superior, although she was perfectly unassuming. Possibly, with her equals Miss Langley might now and then have showed a touch of pride, for her character had no lack of that quality; but with the poor it was never manifested. This happy union of kindness of heart and refinement of mind and manners, together with a certain indescribable grace and dignity of bearing, had won Miss Langley the high place she held in the affection and respect of her poorer friends. Mr. Halstead admired, but did not know how to imitate ; simply because he was too distrustful of himself and others to inspire the confidence which the frankness of Miss Langley's manner at once produced. He looked on as she took leave of her old friend.

"See how I have hindered you, kind father James," said she. "Not one skewer cut all this time; but this would have been a very neat peg in due course of time, if I'd given my mind to it a little longer, wouldn't it ?"

"Ho, ho ! Ay, bairn, if thee gien 't a daa, and warked desput wi' thay lartle, tiddy fingers o' thine :" and the old man laid the rosy, taper fingers in question on the back of his own broad, brown, gnarled hand, and patted them, chuckling with immense satisfaction at the contrast.

Margaret withdrew her hand, laughing at the old man's glee

"If my hands had done as much honourable work as yours, James, they would not be such signs of idleness as they are now," she said. "Now I must bid you good-bye; I shall soon come again."

"Ay, ay, thee mun coom raight soon, bairn; I'se nobbut dowly when thee decan't gi' me a look whiles: sun deean't shine raight to please me, an' a' fare minded to flyte an' 'tu wi' a' t' things. Coom agean soon, lass."

Margaret promised, laughing; and Halstead wondered to see her put those white little fingers into the old man's hand and shake hands with him—much more heartily than she did with himself—on taking leave.

The old man looked after her with something like a tear in his eyes. "God bless her," he said; "she's a sweet, loovesome lamb as e'er t' Loord bin an' maade, that she be!"

Halstead felt his heart drawn towards the old man by the fervent affection he showed for something that Mr. Frank was beginning to prize more than he was at all aware of. The next minute found him constraining his own length of limb to take the low seat Margaret had vacated, and talking to old James Gilmore in a friendly, chatty way, the freedom of which surprised himself, and the old man likewise; he had begun to find that he and James had some sympathies in common. He made him rather a long visit, and on leaving held out his hand to shake hands, as Margaret had done. Old James rubbed his hand on his corduroys, for that was an unexpected honour, and received a hearty gripe from Halstead, which he returned with good will; and as the young man left him, he said to himself, "Sommut new to sheak honds and be sa kahnd an' free. She dean that, pretty lamb; in coorse he could na be shamed to put's hand where she's bin an' put her dainty lartle fingers, bless her! They's desput kahnd together, they is; na dou't they'se be for wedding: leastways she'll na meak elbows at un, a' guess, by t' roses she got when shoo see'd un, at 't yett. She's most too good for mortal man, she is; boot mebbe she'll meak un's kahnd hersel' Bless her, an' t' lad fur her seake: he's gotten a kahnd heart too, a' has. Boot a' fares kind o' shy, lahk."

CHAPTER VIII.

A DISCOVERY.

Mr. Halstead was now settled in his cure. He knew his parish, and he knew most of his people, by name and person at least; though he knew but little of them as to character. That shyness and reserve of his stood so in his way and theirs, that it stopped much mutual benefit. Still he had worked a considerable change in the outward aspect of affairs. The Sunday-school, by means of his and Miss Langley's exertions, had been formed and put into operation. The already existing day-school had been placed on a better footing than in the days when the purblind old schoolmaster nodded, whilst the boys and girls either conned their tasks or played him tricks, as suited their humour. The furniture of the church had been renewed, and consequently the congregation, which had begun to thin when the new minister's novelty had a little worn off, was now again become more numerous; though still, alas! the same motive, curiosity, led the people thither.

Several other changes, too, had taken place in the church services. Halstead had given dire offence to the singers: in the first place, he had entreated them to sing more simple tunes; recommending to their attention the Morning and Evening Hymn, the Old Hundredth, Rockingham, and various others; then they had been willing enough to adopt chants as an extra display of their powers of harmony, but they had introduced such barbarous ornaments, such shakes and variations into the simplicity of the Gregorian chants he gave them, that he had been obliged to request that they would not alter the original air by so much as half a note. They were disgusted at being expected to waste themselves on the few unadorned notes of the chant, and refused to sing. But this did not distress him much, for silence was better than such frightful sounds for the present, and Miss Langley was teaching her scholars to sing in a way which promised soon to furnish a very creditable choir. Next, Mr. Halstead affronted his clerk. Sunday after Sunday, he performed the service to that responseless congregation. In vain did he preach upon the subject; in vain did he tell them that in old times the united voices of the congregation made the

"Amens" sound like claps of thunder; not a voice responded: the congregation were quite content that he and the clerk should pray for them. Then it became too aggravating to listen to the clerk's ludicrous manner of giving the responses, and Halstead begged that he would discontinue it, and read them in a more simple manner; but Mr. Deacon admired his own reading prodigiously, therefore he replied with an injured air, "he couldn't read no other ways as what he did; an' that dean for twenty year, and no faut found, an' he thought it'd have to dea still." Halstead forgot that his congregation was a mute one, and answered sharply, that the clerkship was no necessary appendage to the church, being but a modern and by no means desirable addition; and that he should not be sorry to see the office discontinued.

"Then if ye dunna need me, there's no call to hae what ye dinna lack," replied the clerk.

The next Sunday he did not make his appearance, and the consequence was, when Halstead began to read the service, the performance was a solo: for—

"Ever was silence where should be the sound"

of the responses, except as regarded the gentle voice of Miss Langley, which trembled as it gave the requisite answers; until George Heseltine for shame could not allow her to remain unsupported, and joined in; but no one else did.

After a Sunday or two, Deacon relented, made a kind of apology, and returned to his post: but then it was Miss Langley's influence which induced him to do so. And, indeed, Halstead was but little aware how he was indebted to that same quiet influence of hers, for what little apparent success attended his efforts. Her habits of active but unobtrusive kindness and benevolence, and her clearness of judgment, had gained her a great ascendancy over the minds of the parishioners, young as she was; and from respect and affection for her, they did many things which neither their sense of religious duty, the impression produced by Mr. Halstead's sermons, nor their personal respect for himself, would have induced them to do. For, as we have seen, he was regarded with a degree of mistrust by his parishioners on his first appearance amongst them.

They looked upon him as an introducer of strange doctrines; cause for such suspicion they had but little, but they regarded the changes he had introduced—some inten-

tionally, some unconsciously, and all in themselves matters of trifling moment—into the service, and the vestments used whilst performing it, as "Roman weays." Pity it was, that he neither thought nor cared to ascertain the temper of the people before he introduced such changes. Possibly he had formed but little idea of the effects such trifles might tend to produce ; possibly he himself attached more than their due weight to the trifles themselves, and so did, far too arrogantly, magnify his office. At all events, certain innovations were made, and a long course of steady perseverance in a discreet performance of the ministerial office, and of the most perfect charity towards his neighbours, would be necessary to reconcile the startled Protestantism of the parishioners to them as merely the pet fancies of their pastor—not necessarily harmful to themselves. Nevertheless, by reason in great measure, as aforesaid, of the unostentatious aid he received from Miss Langley, Mr. Halstead, if he did not feel that he had made great progress in the up-hill task before him, at least was unaware that he had lost ground. He had expected considerable annoyance from the dissenters; but Mr. Tommy Robinson and Mistress Nelly Haggart, finding that their followers were far more inclined to go and hear "t' new minister" than to listen to their warnings against his heretical tenets, had desisted from their efforts to raise an agitation against him, until the attraction should become stale.

Possibly, if the then existing position of affairs had continued, the mutual want of understanding between Mr. Halstead and his parishioners would have disappeared, and been in time replaced by such sentiments of mutual confidence and esteem as befit the relations of pastor and flock. But the fates had not destined the course of Mr. Halstead's experience of life to flow on so smoothly.

Now the matter fell out in this wise. Towards the end of February, one unusually bright day for the season, Miss Langley set out very early to carry some little delicacy to a sick child, who lived at a distance from her own home. On her return she chanced to encounter Mr. Halstead, and he, as usual, joined her: he proposed that they should return by the crags, instead of by the footpath at the foot of the same. These crags were a favourite resort of Margaret's, being not only very picturesque themselves, but affording from their summit a very beautiful view over the dale.

Instead of the usual heather-clad, sloping sides, character-

istic of the neighbouring elevations, the hill they were about to ascend terminated abruptly in a precipitous wall of grey sandstone rocks, bleak and bare; except where a few ferns tufted their crevices, whilst their bases were concealed by a tangle of brambles and brushwood; this was succeeded by a wood, covering the remainder of the declivity, and consisting principally of hazel and holly; the latter here attaining the size of a handsome forest tree, and at that barren season of the year forming a peculiarly ornamental feature in the landscape, with its dark green glistening leaves and scarlet berries. It was a beautiful spot, though it was regarded with some awe by the country-folk; for not only were stories told of sundry cows and horses which had fallen over the precipice and perished, but it was also said that a countryman, although he knew the place well, had been lost there one foggy night, having, as was supposed, fallen into the unfathomable crevices which were reported to exist below, and which had in all probability formed his grave. Nevertheless, Margaret Langley was fond of the place, and she always went round by the crags whenever her walk led her within a reasonable distance of them. She acceded therefore to Mr. Halstead's proposal, and they ascended the steep narrow footpath, and walked on, chatting gaily, over the short, springy "ling" or heather.

The air was brisk and exhilarating, the sun shone bright and cheery, everything spoke the glad influence of the coming spring; the grouse were calling from the heathery knolls, the ring-ousel starting out ahead with their chuckling cry of warning from the tufts of stunted bushes which grew here and there; the black-faced moor-sheep, with their weather-stained fleeces, stared at them a moment, and then scampered off, leaping and bounding like deer. A pleasant walk the young couple found it that day; youth was dancing in the pulses of both, and they yielded freely to the glad influences of the scene, and were, in their way, as blithe as the creatures around them.

"How 'eerie' and elfish the moor-sheep look!" exclaimed Miss Langley, as some half dozen nimble sheep dashed off in front of them, and then stopped again to stare: "I like their black faces, they are just in keeping with these wild moors."

"What horns that old patriarch has!" said Halstead; "they curl round once and again; how he stamps at us, and how vicious those bright hazel eyes of his look!" and Mr. Halstead was actually boyish enough to make a rush at him. Away bounded the patriarch, in most undignified

haste, and Halstead came back laughing. Then they stopped to watch the gambols of a rabbit, which was frisking in and out of the bushes unconscious of their presence. Thus they went, talking gaily of the objects around. When they came to the top of the hill, they struck into a sheep-track, and again leaving that, made their way across the heather, almost to the edge of the cliff.

"How beautiful the valley looks to-day," said Halstead, "losing itself in the grey haze, seemingly such a long way off!"

"Yes; I like to watch the hills when the mist creeps over them of an evening, they look so gigantic and solemn, like mighty, shadowy spirits: they seem to me to be awful with the knowledge of the past and the mystery of the future," said Miss Langley, colouring a little; for she did not often speak the poetry that tinged her thoughts.

"I think some feeling of that kind has always been connected with mountains," said Halstead; "we find so many superstitions have had their birth in mountain scenery. The seats of ancient oracular response and inspiration were generally fixed in some romantic mountainous region: then what an endless store of marvellous legends belong to the German *Gebirge;* and, as for Scotland, second-sight always flourishes best in the Highlands, you know."

"So you think I am rather superstitious about these hills, Mr. Halstead? Look at them; they begin to look very mysterious now, don't they?"

"Indeed they do; I shouldn't wonder if they were to apppoint you their priestess: I shall expect an oracle soon—you begin to look inspired."

Inspired or not, Margaret looked very lovely, as she stood there on the headland, with the wind fluttering her garments and calling up such a brilliant glow upon her cheek; and the whimsicality of the notion giving such a merry lustre to her eye; very lovely she looked, as Halstead thought; for he had long ascertained the fact of her beauty.

"You have asked me no question to test my powers, and prove whether the prescient spirit of the hills is upon me," said she.

"Well, I will, then; a very hard one. Tell me, O Sybil, when will my new church add an ornament to this charming landscape?"

"Nay, that is far too easy a question for a weird woman inspired with prophetic gifts like mine. Know, O short-

sighted mortal, that the stones destined to form that building, respecting which you question the oracle, will shortly be hewn from the already-worked quarry in which they now repose. Know that the swiftly revolving seasons will but girdle the earth once, or at most twice, before those stones shall be needed to lay the deep foundations, and raise the solid walls of that stately edifice! Is that the correct thing, Mr. Halstead?—or would you like me to 'raise the veil of the mysterious future' any further for your satisfaction?"

"I should very much like the mysterious future to be so good as to tell me where the money is to come from that is destined to pay the quarrymen for cutting the said stones, and the masons for putting them in their places."

"What a mercenary idea! The oracle certainly won't condescend to take any notice of it! As for me, I require this fresh breeze to help me to recover from the shock!"

Margarget playfully advanced a few steps nearer the edge of the cliff, when suddenly she felt a strong arm pass round her waist, and she was jerked violently several paces backwards. It was just in time. The fragment of rock on which she had stood the moment before dislodged by her weight, gave way, and fell crashing on the rocks some fifty feet beneath; thence rebounding, it plunged tearing through the bushes into the thicket below. Dizzy and breathless with the peril she had so narrowly escaped, Margaret leaned helplessly upon her preserver: whilst deadly pale, and scarcely conscious of what he was doing, Halstead held her tightly clasped in his arms, murmuring, "Margaret! *my* Margaret! if I had lost thee." This recalled Margaret to a sense of her position: she withdrew herself from his arms, and sank down upon a stone, trembling excessively. The whole affair had but occupied a few seconds; but what a change it had wrought in the thoughts of both! They spoke no more of the hills and their oracles that day—but, when Margaret recovered in some degree from her tremor, they began to descend the hill on the other side. The rest of their walk was silent enough. Halstead saw Miss Langley to her own door; when they were about to separate, she said to him, in a low, tremulous voice, her eyes filling with tears—

"Mr. Halstead, under God I owe you my life."

"Thank God that it is so," replied he, in a voice equally low and tremulous; and he held the hand she gave him in a long, fervent pressure.

CHAPTER IX.

A DILEMMA.

On leaving Miss Langley, Mr. Halstead's mind was in a singularly chaotic state. The gust of feeling roused by Margaret's sudden danger seemed to have kindled the long smouldering embers of his supposed friendly regard for her into vehement passion, which threatened to carry all before it. Instead of the somewhat artificial calm, into which he had striven to school his natural warmth of temperament, a perfect tumult of emotion now stormed through his being: nature vehemently asserted her claim to be heard; passion surged through heart and head ; all his better feelings of admiration, respect, and esteem ranged themselves on the same side. He felt that the one passion of his life was upon him. He loved her deeply, devotedly. He hoped, feared, and believed, by turns, that she returned his love.

Why should he not marry, as well as any other man ?—the idea looked rapturously enticing. He walked on with rapid strides; one moment his heart beat high with exulting love, the next it sank into the cold depths of gloomy despondency. It may appear strange that a man who evidently had it in his power to possess himself of that which he so ardently coveted, should be plunged into such violent fever fits of alternate fire and chill at the contemplation of the fact; but Mr. Halstead had, whilst at Oxford, imbibed certain ultra notions upon ecclesiastical matters ; and amongst these was the opinion that the priesthood ought to be a celibate order. This opinion he had fully intended to carry out in his own person, upon taking orders. Could he, because his own affections and passions were concerned, refuse to be guided by an opinion which he had formed in all coolness of judgment whilst he was a disinterested party? Was it not rather an occasion for that godly discipline, that holy self-abnegation, which would make him a more worthy imitator of the Saints, a more deserving workman in the vineyard of the holy mother church?

Thus he reasoned with himself ever and anon, only to be overwhelmed again and again by the strength of a passion which he had hitherto ignored. It is to be remarked that in

his self-contest, the consideration of Miss Langley's own feelings on the subject, although he could scarcely help feeling sure she was attached to him, was suffered to have but little weight. This arose partly from a modest depreciation of the intensity of any attachment he might be capable of inspiring; partly, from a selfish disinclination to augment his own actual pain by the contemplation of her possible suffering.

Wearied out at length with the violence of the internal struggle, he calmed himself in some degree by resolving to make the ensuing season of Lent one of deeper mortification than usual, in order that he might be able more dispassionately to decide the question; whilst he decided in the meantime upon abstaining from seeing Margaret Langley so often as heretofore.

Thus did Mr. Halstead set to work, upon principle, to reject the choicest blessing which Providence had ever offered him, and to make the greatest mistake he ever made in his life, under the idea that he was doing God service, and winning himself the palm of martyrdom besides! Such a thing it is—rejecting the guidance of God-given reason—to obey the dictates of party opinion, till we confound its voice with the voice of God!

And Margaret Langley! In what light did she regard the discovery of Mr. Halstead's feelings towards her? To tell the truth, she did not look upon the matter from the same point of view at all. At first she had esteemed it a peculiar privilege to be allowed to work as an humble handmaid of the church, under the immediate guidance of the clergyman. Then, by degrees—as Halstead had come to rely upon her unconscious strength of character and clearness of judgment, and to have recourse to her gentleness and kindness to set him straight in his misapprehensions with his parishioners—she had lost some of the awful *prestige* with which she at first regarded him, and began to look upon him as something besides than the mere representative of the cause they both served. Lonely, too, as was her position in the world, her warm affections had instinctively sought some object round which to cling, and gradually and imperceptibly they had entwined themselves round him who had made such frequent calls upon her womanly kindness and sympathy; and from whose refined society she had, in turn, derived so much solace in the dearth of all other meet companionship.

Nor had the unexpected revelation of the state of Mr.

Halstead's feelings come upon her as anything very new or startling; for though she had never distinctly admitted to herself the fact that he was attached to her, still the idea had gleamed through her mind from time to time. Now, for the first time, she allowed the sweet certainty that she was beloved to enter her mind; and deeply, thankfully happy was she in the conviction. Little conscious of the conflict that was distracting the mind of her quasi lover upon the same subject which so differently occupied her own, Margaret, in a glow of tremulous happiness, expected him the ensuing day. She arranged those glossy, waved tresses with more care than usual; she glanced at the reflection which the glass presented of the rosy glow upon her cheek, with deeper satisfaction than the contemplation had ever before afforded her: she joyed to feel that she was fair. All the morning she expected him, but he did not come. He might call in the evening. She looked out at the little white gate and up the road, for the hundredth time that day; she lingered over the tea-making, and kept the board longer than usual: still he did not come. At last she sent it away, and with a chill sensation at her heart, took a book to read to her aunt, who sat placidly knitting at that everlasting counterpane. Eight o'clock; nine o'clock; ten o'clock; no chance now.

Her aunt put away her knitting and went to bed, and Margaret sat still by the fire. An undefined presentiment of evil gathered and brooded over her heart; she felt vaguely miserable, slighted, and hurt. There she sat till the tears began to gather in her eyes, and trickle slowly down the cheeks that had so lately glowed with the anticipation of happiness. All unheeded, they brimmed over, trickled down, and fell—plash, plash, upon the pages of the open, unread book upon her knee. There she sat, till one by one, the red embers on which she had fixed her eyes sank and sank, and turned colder and grayer, until finally all was black; and the chill, sharp air of the February night roused her to the necessity of seeking her bed. It was near one as she passed the clock on the staircase. Those were the first tears her love had cost her: happy exception she, should they prove the last.

The next morning, she rose with a feeling of renewed hope. It was one of her days at the school. Halstead always came in to the school-room in the course of the morning; latterly, he had never failed to wait for her, that

he might accompany her part of the way home: she should certainly see him that day. See him she did, indeed, for he came into the school-room, just spoke to her—though she thought he looked at her anxiously—and then hurried away. She could scarcely restrain her feelings until she had left the school and gained the solitude of her own chamber, and then she burst into a passion of tears. What could it mean? Could she have deceived herself as to his looks and words at the crags that day? Impossible! Could she have offended him? Could any misrepresentation have been made to him? Equally out of the question. He had parted from her so tenderly on that occasion: and to whom could he have listened in prejudice of her? She could not form an idea of what had caused such a change in his demeanour. Fortune! —could it be that? Nay; if she succeeded to her father's property, would it not be his, for the promotion of the good cause and the benefit of the poor? If the suit went against her, she knew that he had a competency. As to his being influenced by the thought of her possible poverty, she could not entertain it for one moment. Lost and bewildered, she could only weep and pray. Another and another day passed away; still Halstead did not come, or attempt any explanation of his conduct. On Sunday she saw that he looked pale and worn. He did not join her, as usual, after the service; though she lingered, hoping he might. She could not conceal it from herself that he was purposely avoiding her, and her pride took the alarm. Henceforward she shunned, or appeared to shun him, as much as he did her.

Drooping and wretched, depressed and weakened also by the bare sustenance which she thought it right to allow herself during the season of Lent, one day, towards the end of that miserable forty days, Margaret found herself ascending the steep side of the little glen beyond the church. She had been to the school, and thence on to visit an old woman, who often benefited by, but seldom thanked her for, her charities, and who grumbled at everything, from the award of the parish dole to the dispensations of Providence inclusive. Weary in body and sick in mind—for this visit was one which always depressed her, and had been undertaken that day rather as an additional piece of self-denial than anything else,—she was languidly ascending the narrow path towards the church, when she heard a step behind her; turning listlessly to see if she must make way, she perceived that it was

Halstead. She would willingly have darted off into the tangled thicket, and lain there trembling till he had passed; but she knew he must have seen her; there was no chance of escape. He came up fast; her limbs trembled, her heart fluttered in her throat. Would he speak? would he pass her? She felt that her face was pale as death as his voice fell upon her ear.

"Miss Langley, forgive me; I have been wishing to speak with you."

She turned round, but could not speak; he took her hand and she felt that he started and looked shocked as her face met his gaze.

"Miss Langley! dear Miss Langley—you are ill."

Margaret's heart leaped at the tender intonation of his voice, and she found breath to falter—"No, only cold."

He put her arm through his tenderly, and made her lean upon him. How changed he was himself; how thin, and worn, and sallow; his cheek sunken, his eye heavy. They were now in the churchyard. She felt him tremble and press her arm convulsively to his side for a moment; then the pressure relaxed, and her heart, which had been fluttering so joyously at the recovered tenderness of its master, sunk dead and chill once more. He led her to the chancel door, took the key from his pocket, opened it, and led her in; then he said,—

"Dear Miss Langley, forgive me for bringing you here; but I have much to say, and the sooner it is said the better for both of us: and nowhere can it be so well said as here."

Margaret had no power to do anything but look at him helplessly. He brought her a chair from the vestry and seated her tenderly on it; then retiring to a little distance, he began with a hesitating, confused manner and faltering voice. "Dear Miss Langley, I know not how—I scarcely dare, to speak to you on the subject which has latterly absorbed my thoughts—yet I feel that some explanation of my conduct is due, not only to you but to myself. It is therefore that I venture—that—that—" feeling as if the power of utterance were fast forsaking him, Halstead made an effort and went on, speaking hurriedly and confusedly, "Forgive me, dear Miss Langley, whilst I confess how blamably, how wretchedly thoughtless I have been, for one of my sacred calling, in my intercourse with you; how I have allowed myself, in the pleasure of being near you, to forget

the inevitable result of witnessing such constant goodness and gentleness as yours. I ought to have communicated to you my conviction that the priesthood—that—in short, that celibacy is binding upon my order, and then to have kept a severer watch over my own weak heart."

Margaret had sunk her face upon her hands, and so she remained. Halstead's voice shook more and more as he went on: "But your kindness—heaven bless you for it!—was so unaffected and sisterly, your assistance was so valuable to the cause I served, that I did not take alarm; and, Margaret, dear Margaret,—let me call you so for once—you are aware how deeply, devotedly, I have learnt to love you." Margaret trembled violently, but gave no other sign that she heard him. "But," proceeded he, huskily, "Margaret—Miss Langley—with such a conviction on my mind, dare I ask you, dare I seek your hand? Judge for me! Pray for me! Help me!"—and here his voice became choked by emotion.

Margaret gave a convulsive sob. Halstead came eagerly to her side, "Oh, dearest Margaret! oh, my beloved——" he was beginning, but Margaret's woman's pride had risen to the rescue. She drew herself up suddenly, and answered coldly, even haughtily:

"No, sir: no, Mr. Halstead; assuredly you could not." She looked uncertainly around her. "Can I go now?" said she.

"Margaret, pity me. I *have* suffered."

She looked up into his face, recalled by the heart-pain of those few words; nothing but that white, sunken cheek and hollow eye was needed to confirm that. She sank down again, and burst into a fit of passionate sobbing. He leaned over the bench where he stood; a deep groan from him roused Margaret, and she tried to check her tears. At last he came to her side again, and took her damp cold hand in a hand as damp and cold; she passively suffered him to lead her to the altar-rail, and side by side they knelt down together. "Margaret," whispered he, "I give up the dearest wish my heart ever formed: I give *you* up to God! May he hallow the sacrifice." She only wept on quietly.

After a time he raised her anxiously; for she was cold and pale, and half led, half carried her to the church-door. The air revived her, and she declined his proffered arm. He would have walked beside her, but the influence of the stagnant air of the dusky building had left her now that the

chill breeze played over her cheek; she waved him passionately away, and walked on with an air of dignity, though with a feeble step and a heart as cold as ice, towards her own dwelling. He stood looking after her, longing, and half tempted, to rush towards her, fling himself on his knees in her path, and entreat her to forgive him, to disregard his rash vow, to be his for ever—his own. He bent forward and opened his arms: he would have moved—would have called, "Margaret, Margaret! stay, stay, have mercy!" but his feet seemed rooted to the ground, his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. As she walked slowly on, and on, he watched her, with outstretched arms and straining eyes, up the path, over the meadow, and along by the mill, then the trees hid her. He seemed to breathe for the first time: he uttered one loud and exceeding bitter cry, and then he dashed away down the little glen, up the steep hill on the other side, through the tall ling, scrambling from stone to stone, taking no heed to his steps, but plunging through bush and brake, fen, and moorland stream; till at length, thoroughly out of breath and exhausted—for he was weakened with long abstinence and much suffering, self-inflicted though it might be—he sank amongst the heather, and there he lay, completely prostrated both in body and mind. When he awoke to a sense of his position, the early night was already deepening around him; he arose wet, stiff in limb, and chilled to the very marrow, from his heathy couch, and slowly and painfully made his way homeward.

Mrs. Hawkins was expecting him impatiently enough. She opened the door for him with a glum face, and brought in the lights, with a lecture trembling on the tip of her tongue; but when she remarked what a wan, ghost-like figure was cowering over the cheerful blaze she had prepared, her motherly heart gained the ascendant in a moment, and she exclaimed—

"Why, Lor' sakes! bless t' lad! what's coom ower ye, sir?"

Halstead turned his face away from the painful glare of the lights, and from the maternal inspection of Mrs. Hawkins, and muttered something about having lost his way. Mrs. Hawkins didn't look half satisfied; but when, after having waited long and vainly for him to ring to have his dinner-things removed, she went up again and found all the little delicacies she had so carefully prepared and kept hot, left

untasted, and her lodger still in the same cowering attitude, she could stand it no longer.

"Mr. Halstead, sir!" she cried; but he made no answer: she grew alarmed, and going up to him touched his arm; still he took no heed: thoroughly frightened, she laid hold of him in earnest, when he terrified her almost as much by starting round so suddenly as to stagger her, and exclaiming, half fiercely, "Well! what now?" Observing his good landlady's bewildered appearance, however, Halstead collected himself as well as he could, and forcing his features into a sickly smile, said he had a bad headache, and would go to bed. Thereupon, Mrs. Hawkins, finding he looked pretty rational, though wretchedly ill, and that he was not gone "clean demented," as she had begun to imagine, proceeded to lecture him; first, for the start he had given her, and secondly, for the neglect of his health.

"Sure, and how's ye'se been an' skeared me! I'm all of a twitter noo! to see you setting an' looking so flaysome there, an' ye only asleep! But, sir, I conceit it's only right, and doing my bounden duty towards ye, to tell ye ye'll gan for to hurt yersel, an' mebbe bring yersel to t' grave wi' yer fasting an' tuing; an' it's my belief 'tis little good ye'll be doing your own soul, or anybody's else's for that matter, wi' ye a ganning on this gait. Wha, the very mother as bare ye, she'd hardly ken ye noo if ye stood afore her—and I canna bide to see ye look sa'!" and kind-hearted Mrs. Hawkins lifted the corner of her apron to her eyes, and began to cry.

Halstead was touched by her distress, so he said kindly—

"Get me some tea, good Mrs. Hawkins, and I'll go to bed: you'll see, I shall be all right to-morrow."

Mrs. Hawkins dried her eyes, and bustled off to get the tea; and Halstead went to bed, but was not destined to be all right to-morrow. A smart attack of fever was the result of excitement and fatigue acting on his weakened frame, and for some days he was talking wildly in his delirium about the joys and crown of martyrdom; and making a most extraordinary confusion of beatified saints and earthly Margaret Langleys.

Once or twice he was St. Simeon Stylites, and Margaret at the foot of his column, was calling to him to come down, and stretching up her white arms to him; he leaned over and held out his arms, lost his balance and fell, and went on falling, falling, right through the white arms; carrying her

with him in his descent : and down they went—down—down —where there were flames and frightful demons. Then he was with her again on the hill top, as he had been that day at the crags, when he first discovered his own secret : and again he held her pressed tight to his heart, and was about to claim her his for ever, when dreadful voices hissed behind him, "Thy priestly vows!" and black-stoled figures came between him and her, and they were separated: he flung out his arms wildly and called her name, and her voice answered faint in the distance, and he struggled fiercely with the black-stoled figures till they turned into grinning fiends, and laughed hideously. Again his distempered fancy saw her gliding, cold, impassive, Heré like, across the meadow path, floating away from him—away—and he strained every nerve to follow, and could not. After some days he came to himself, weak, languid, and exhausted; and found to his dismay that the church had been shut up on Sunday. He felt as if he had no atom of strength to go through the duties of the week (Passion week); nevertheless, he insisted upon doing so, and performed the service to bare walls daily, to Mrs. Hawkins' very reasonable horror.

With Miss Langley, meanwhile, things had scarcely gone better than with her quondam lover. When she came back to the house, she went straight up to her room and locked the door. When Anne Irving knocked at her door at dinner-time, she told her to tell her aunt that she had a violent headache and had gone to bed; and there she remained for some days. She was evidently very ill, and suffering both in mind and body, but she would not hear of her aunt's proposal to send for a medical man; gently urging that she only required perfect quiet to regain her usual health. Hence it came about that she did not hear of Halstead's illness.

Perhaps Annie's own heart had given her an instinctive notion that Mr. Halstead was in some way the cause of her mistress's indisposition : at all events she thought it could do no good to tell Miss Langley he was ill, and she had induced Mrs. Wilson also to hold her peace on the subject : consequently, Margaret had no call upon her sympathy in that quarter. Left quietly, as she desired, in the solitude of that haven of shelter, her own room, she turnod her face to the wall, and held long and bitter communing with her own heart. Delicately as Halstead had sought to make his strange communication to her, his renunciation of her could not fail

deeply and bitterly to wound her self-respect. The idea that she had allowed him so thoroughly to perceive her partiality for him, that he had it in his power to talk of "giving her up," was in itself intolerable. She carefully reviewed her conduct, and summoned up all the trifling acts—of mere friendly feeling and confidence they had seemed at the time—which now appeared to her downright confessions of preference. How she must have betrayed herself, and outraged all maidenly reserve! She hated herself and almost despised him. Then came the recollection of his avowal of deep, devoted love, and her heart yearned towards him: she began to endeavour to look at his renunciation of herself through the medium of his own motives. She tried hard to bring herself to regard it—as he must have done, as all of his school would have done, and as she ought to have done herself if she had been true to her teaching—as a noble and devoted act of self-sacrifice. But what right had he to sacrifice her too? She tried to convince herself that her happiness ought to have no weight in the counter balance of his magnanimous self-abnegation; that he was *quite* right not to take it into the account; if he loved her, as he said, that very fact was a proof of the exaltation and purity of his motives. Yet strange to say, try how she would, reason how she would, struggle how she would, to attain the same height of self-devotion from which he must have looked down upon the sacrifice, the question would arise most intrusively in her mind,—Was it a sacrifice required by God or man? Was it conducive to any end, at all equivalent to its magnitude? Was it not rather a presumptuous rejection of the prospect of happiness which God had placed within the reach of both of them? Again and again she dismissed the thought with horror; but again and again it arose stronger and more vivid.

She thought of the many married clergymen she knew, who lived surrounded by their families, blessing and blessed: could she believe them to be living in a state of separation from God by reason of a dreadful sin? Impossible. She seemed to feel the very foundation of the church system which she so much admired, shaken in her heart by the storm that was passing over her. She arose in alarm from her couch, and sought to employ herself. Actively, eagerly, wildly she worked, hoping to drown thought in a press of employment: but no: work, labour as she would, the moment an interval of leisure gave an opportunity, the same harassing, bewildering

thoughts arose more importunately and irrepressibly. She hated and pitied herself, despised and idolized Halstead, by turns. She wrestled with her own thoughts, as many a one has wrestled with reason and judgment before her; but reason and judgment would not be entirely put down.

Margaret was thoroughly unhappy. Her only consolation was in pouring out all the troubles of her soul into the ears of that pitiful Father, who, she knew, loved her, and was making all work together for her good even in the midst of the thick darkness which shrouded Him. There, in her own room, on her knees by her bedside, her face buried in the clothes, pouring out her whole heart's wealth of love in supplications for him who was not hers, but God's; in striving to give him up freely, utterly—to resign him into the hands of his Father and hers—there alone, she found some comfort in her trouble.

> "God raise him to the highest worth
> Of what man can be upon earth:
> Comfort, uphold, and purify,
> And bless him alway till he die,"

was the prayer that ever and always, waking and sleeping almost, was going up from the heart of that loving woman.

Meantime poor Margaret dreaded to meet Halstead; yet how go on with the ordinary routine of her school and parish duties without meeting him? And how—setting aside all question of right and wrong—how bear to look upon that blank, dreary expanse which her future had become, without work, constant, active, and laborious? Meet him she must; and so she did. She was shocked at his appearance, so wan, so hollow-eyed was he. Henceforth their intercourse was uneasy and constrained: they dared not look at each other; questions and answers about this or that parish matter took the place of the free, confidential interchange of thought which had hitherto subsisted between them.

It was shortly after the above-mentioned events that the great Chancery case of Langley *versus* Langley was decided in favour of the appellant; and Miss Langley, the supposed heiress, was left almost penniless. When the intelligence reached her, she read the letter which conveyed it with an unmoved face, and as she concluded it, a sort of almost triumphant expression gathered upon her features.

"Well, my dear,?" said her aunt, who had been watch-

ing her with somewhat less than her usual placidity of expression.

Then the gleam of triumph faded from Margaret's brow; she got up, and in silence laid the letter upon her aunt's lap.

"My child, my poor child!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilson, as she read the letter.

"Indeed, my dear aunt, I regret it more for your sake than for mine: I had hoped always to be able to offer you a home with me. But for myself—I can work—I have been longing for real hard work for some time!"

"Work!" echoed her aunt, in astonishment; "you!"

"Yes: I don't mean work in the fields exactly, aunt dear; but I can go out as a governess, you know."

Her aunt only looked her unutterable dismay.

"Really, aunt, I can: just think what heaps of things I ought to be able to teach: music, and French, and Italian, even drawing perhaps. I shall get quite handsome wages, or salary, or whatever it's correct to call it," said Margaret, cheerfully; for she saw her aunt's spectacles becoming very dim. "I feel quite in a hurry to set to work, only I don't know how to begin: I should think I ought to advertise, shouldn't you?"

"I don't know, my dear," replied her aunt; for Margaret's mind travelled faster than hers, and the thought of such immediate action bewildered her. "But you are joking, are you not?"

"Indeed, nothing is farther from my thought than a joke; unless it's a very practical one. If I only knew some one in London now!"

"My dear, if you really are in earnest—and I am sure I don't know what else is to be done—there's Sarah Fletcher, who was my husband's cousin; she married and settled in London: I might write to her and——"

"My dear aunt, the very thing! Pray do write at once, and say I am coming up; and ask her to take me a small lodging near where she lives, for I shan't know where to go."

"My dear! you going up! why, you don't know what a place London is: it would not be safe. Besides, you couldn't travel all that way alone."

But Margaret said she had once travelled by herself from school—and the tears rose in her eyes as she remembered who had met her at the station at the end of her journey—adding that London had no terrors for her: a statement not altogether founded on fact, by the way. So, as usual, mild

Mrs. Wilson suffered herself to be brought over to her niece's way of thinking, and wrote to the cousin in London. Meanwhile, Margaret began, with nervous eagerness, to prepare for her journey.

In due time, a reply from her cousin, Mrs. Snell, reached Mrs. Wilson; she said that she would look out for lodgings for Miss Langley, but that she would be happy to receive her at her own house on her arrival in town. Nothing now remained therefore but to fix the day of her departure, and to pack her things.

As the day drew near, a host of regrets crowded over Margaret's mind at leaving a place to which she had become warmly attached. She could not bear the thought of the good-byes of her poorer neighbours; and therefore kept her approaching departure a close secret from them. But she feared she might never see her old friend James Gilmore again, so bid him good-bye she must. She went down to his cottage the day before her intended departure, and found the venerable old man with his grey head bowed over that volume wherein he was wont to seek, and to find, a never-failing supply of comfort, and light, and hope. He pushed his old-fashioned spectacles back upon his forehead when he saw her, and greeted her with a smile that lighted up the rugged lines of his worn face into beauty, so pleasant and affectionate was it.

"Sit ye down, bairn, sit ye down, an' crack a bit wi' me," said he, as she shook his withered hand.

Margaret sat down accordingly.

"Tell me what you have been reading about, father James," said she, laying her hand upon the book.

"Ay, ay! I 'se been a reading aboot thay housen up in heaven, where *He's* gone to maak room fur we," said James, reverently. "I 'se been trying to conceit what thay housen be lahk: they 's desput fahn, graät housen, I 'se go bail."

Margaret smiled at the simple idea.

"You will see them soon," she said, "and know how beautiful they are. It must be bright and happy there, James, and not lonely and bleak as it is here."

There was a sad cadence in her voice, as she said so, which made old James feel that the troubles of life were weighing upon the young head he loved so well; he put forth all his simple store of homely comfort to cheer her, and as he drew ever from that deep well of life and divine love

which lay beside him, his comfort, though clothed in uncouth phraseology, went home to her heart, and lightened it.

"Thee 's a wee dowly, my loovesome bairn," said he, "but t' cloud 's nobbut a shelter; an' 't is, mebbe, as good to lead a body t' raight road as t' pillar o' fire, ye ken."

"Yes, father James; but when the cloud looks like a thunder-cloud, one feels afraid and lonely," she said, pursuing his simile.

"Puir lamb, 't is owcr true," replied he; "then thee mun think that He as maak t' thunder is t' same as taks kear o' t' little bods and maks t' wind kahnd to t' shored lambs, an' then thee weean't be sa skeary."

"James," said Margaret, "does your faith always burn so bright and steady that you never lose sight of it, and feel as if you were in a thick, dreadful roke, so that you were obliged to feel about on every side, and yet not find any way out?"

"Thanks be to t' Loord, I hasn't lost my hold on Him noo a good bit," said he: "He mostly helps me raight through, He do. It did seem desput bad, an' black lahk, when my lass gaed awa' whoam; boot He set me through t' other side, and I'se been all raight sin."

"James, you will be sorry to hear that I have come to bid you good-bye, for I am going away."

"Gannin' awaa! Thee's gannin' awaa! It'll be to be wed, happen?"

"No, no, James," replied Margaret, hastily, "not that; but the Chancery case is decided, and I shall not be able to live here any longer."

The old man's face wore a sadly changed expression now to what it had done when she entered.

"My bairn, my bairn!" said he, "what 'll we dea wi'out thee? We canna spare thee, lass; we canna! What's gone wi' t' lad Halstead? Wha, he mun be clean daft lahk, to let ye gan?"

Margaret quickly interrupted him.

"Yes, I fear you will miss me more than I deserve; and I am very sorry to leave Snagton: I can't tell you how sorry, James," and Margaret's voice shook.

Old James passed the back of his withered hand across his eyes.

"'Tis t' warst daa's wark I deean sin my puir lass died," he said. "Boot thee wunna bide awaa lang, bairn?"

"I fear I must, James: I shall have to work for my living."

"Thee wark, my bonny bairn! My pretty laady, t' lahk o' thee canna wark! Oh! 'tis ower hard for a bonny bod lahk thee to ha' to wrastle wi' t' graat, flaysome, sinfu' warld!"

Margaret could not bear to see the great tears gather in her old friend's eyes and trickle down his furrowed cheeks; she knelt down beside him and stroked his big brown hand with her little soft one, and said—

"Dear father James, it's not so bad as that. It will be better for me to work; much, much better. I should be a great deal more unhappy if I had nothing to do but think, I should indeed."

The old man shook his head.

"It's kahnd o' thee to say 't, lass. When's thee gannin?"

"To-morrow, James," and then seeing the look of distress in his face, she added cheerfully: "Oh, yes; of course I shall come back! I *will* come back; if it's only to see you, old friend."

"Wilt coom, lass—wilt truly coom an' see me?" he said, eagerly; but then, relapsing into his sorrowful tone, he added, "but thee mun coom quick, or I'se be gaed awa' whoam."

"Yes, yes; I will come, James, be sure. You must send me word by Annie when you want me."

"I'll waant thee allus, bairn," he replied; and then continued more cheerfully, "boot I munna meak thee sorrier for t' auld chap as thee be'st for theeself. Ay, ay, I'se tell t' lass Annie to let ye ken all aboot 't."

"That's right, James; I shall always expect a message from you in my letters."

"Ay, ay, bairn, surely." And then he went on to himself: "T' waays o' t' Loord is very deep; boot ah munna 'plain: He kens best what's fur her good."

Margaret was anxious to terminate the painful scene, so she said, hurriedly:

"Good-bye, James; I must not stop."

"God be wi' ye, my blessed bairn!" said the old man, solemnly, as he once more laid his hand in benediction upon her head; "may He bless thee, and keep thee, and hold thee i' his hand for ever an' ever. amen."

Margaret wrung his hand and hastened sobbing away, and old James laid his head down upon the blessed book and wept.

One more painful duty remained to be fulfilled. Margaret could not bear the thought of seeing Halstead, to take leave. After much cogitation she had decided, therefore, that the least painful mode of farewell for both parties would be to write him a short, kind, sisterly note, explaining the position of affairs in a few words, and wishing him all success in his labours.

After spoiling various sheets of paper, blotting some with her tears, allowing words which he might have misconstrued to creep into others, and being discontented with all, Miss Langley at last finished her note, and gave it into Annie's keeping, whom she charged to deliver it the next morning some time after she had departed.

Margaret was to start early next morning, therefore the little household had been in an unusual commotion all day; even Mrs. Wilson's knitting lay neglected in her basket, while she packed up the goose and the apples which were destined to propitiate the London cousin. Towards evening the preparations were all completed, but still Margaret sought fresh occupation: she could not bear the thought of inaction, so she arranged such of her books as she could not take with her, to be left under her aunt's charge. Being, as ever, thoughtful for others, she had managed from the remains of her father's personal property to make such an arrangement as, added to Mrs. Wilson's own slender income, would enable her still to rent the cottage they had hitherto occupied, and to retain Annie Irving to wait upon her; for she could not bear the thought of the old lady's going out as a housekeeper, as she had proposed.

"No, no," said she, "it cannot be: I must have you at Snagton. Who knows how soon I may get rich, and want you again; and if you were keeping house for some horrid Mr. Smith or Mrs. Jones, you couldn't come: no, no; I must know where to find you, Auntie dear, when I want you for myself; and as for Annie, I shall want her too, to be my lady's-maid, so she must stay with you. I cannot hear of any other notion."

So, as usual, Mrs. Wilson yielded; being in truth not very well fitted by nature for swimming against the current of the waves of this troublesome world.

Having arranged her books, Margaret made small allotments of her personal possessions as legacies for her old friends, and gave particular instructions to Annie about their distribution. That occupied the time till rather late in the evening. Then she wandered uneasily about the room, every now and then forcing herself to say something cheerful to her aunt, who sat trying to knit, but often stealing a hand up to her spectacles to clear away the mist: it was astonishing how much rubbing those spectacles of hers wanted. Then Margaret sat down to the piano, and striking a few desultory chords, began to play; she tried to play a lively air, but it would not do: instinctively her fingers wandered off into a low, dirge-like, melancholy wail. She shut the piano in haste, and started off under pretence of having forgotten something. At last Mrs. Wilson took her candle and went to bed, and Margaret was left alone. She sat down once more on the low stool by the fire, as she had sat that first night when she found that Love's rose has sharp and bitter thorns. She tried to think only of her journey, and the steps which would be necessary upon her arrival in town; but manful and brave as she strove to be, the sense of desolation fell ice-cold upon her heart.

What a helpless, lonely child she felt, to be thrown out upon the great, cold, heartless world—homeless, and hopeless, and loveless, and bereaved! All the supports on which she had leaned so trustingly and confidently, had broken. She was alone—oh, how utterly alone!—and the feeling came rushing in upon her like a flood, overwhelming everything; almost even her faith. Her father's death was still so recent that her heart's wounds seemed to open and bleed afresh. Then all the bright hopes that she had unconsciously allowed to grow up within the last twelvemonth had been so bitterly, so miserably crushed. She dared not trust herself to think; she rose hastily and went up to her room, hoping to find something still left to do, for she dreaded bed and darkness, with their crowd of stinging, restless thoughts. In her room she found Annie, waiting to brush her hair for the last time.

"You should not have waited, Annie," said she, touched by the girl's attention.

Annie said she liked it best, if Miss Langley pleased; so Margaret gladly allowed her to stop and untwist her beautiful, silky tresses. Annie was a long time at her task to-night;

possibly because her eyes were so misty that she could not see to arrange the long locks. At last she flung down the brush, and lifting her apron to her eyes, began to cry as if her heart would break.

"Oh, miss! oh, miss!" sobbed she, "what *will* become o' us now you're a going!"

The sight and sound of Annie's grief fairly opened the flood-gates of her own. Margaret laid her head upon the affectionate girl's shoulder, and gave way to an agony of crying.

Annie checked her own sobs, terrified at the paroxysm she had roused to wring the breast of her usually calm mistress. She only soothed her silently, stroking the long hair, and putting the wet tresses back from the flushed cheek of the weeper. After a while Margaret's sobs grew gentler, and though she still wept on, it was quietly; at last she said,—

"I am sorry to distress you so, Annie; how kind you are!"

Annie lifted one of the long locks to her lips reverently and pitifully in reply. By-and by-she began once more to arrange her mistress's hair. Miss Langley suffered herself to be undressed and put to bed quite passively; she laid her head upon her pillow with a sensation of entire exhaustion, and closed her eyes. Annie was preparing to steal quietly out of the room, but Margaret called her back.

"Kiss me, Annie," she said: "you have been kind and loving to me in my loneliness and sorrow, and I shall never forget it."

Annie came back and stooped quietly and respectfully to kiss her mistress's fair cheek, and then crept noiselessly away, to finish her cry in her own room; whilst Margaret, thoroughly worn out, sunk into a deep sound sleep such as she had not slept for many nights.

CHAPTER X.

THE SCENE IS CHANGED.

It was a cold, windy, rainy night when the train came to the terminus at the Euston Square Station. Margaret was chilled through and through, and had long ceased to be aware that she had either hands or feet. Besides, she had got into a

state of nervous excitement, as solitary lady travellers generally do, as to whether she should be able to find her luggage; whether she should succeed in getting a cab to convey it if found; and whether, luggage and cab achieved, she should ever contrive to reach the address which Mrs. Snell had given. Visions of driving about all night, and at last being turned out into the street by the cabman, floated across her imagination; fortunately, before she had come to the point of imagining herself to be taken by the police for a vagrant, the stoppage of the train roused her to the necessity of action. Half stumbling on her numb feet, she alighted from the carriage and looked round, frightened and bewildered, amongst the crowd of gentlemen carrying their own carpet-bags, and calling to porters to secure the first cabs; porters rushing everywhere, except to her assistance; friends and relatives meeting and blocking up all passage. Faintly she implored divers persons to tell her where the luggage was; all were too busy to hear. At last, while pursuing a flying porter, she nearly ran against a stout, comfortable-looking gentleman, warmly buttoned up in a vast great coat.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said she.

"Don't name it, miss," replied he, "your name isn't Langley, is it?"

"Yes, it is. Are you Mr. Snell?"

"The same: all right; now for your luggage."

With a reassured mind Margaret followed in Mr. Snell's broad wake to the luggage van, saw her own trunks in the act of being hauled out, claimed them, beheld a no longer fugitive porter, at the magical beck of her large protector, seize upon and deposit them on the top of a cab, and found herself, in no time, rattling over the stones with the said substantial gentleman at her side. He, having completed his business, had now time to observe, with a cheery sort of chuckle, "Wasn't sorry to see me, was you, miss?"

"Indeed, I was most glad, Mr. Snell. It was very kind of you to come to meet me; I didn't expect any one."

"Well, my wife thought you'd be strange in London, so she told me to come and look out for you. I was afraid I might miss of you, as I saw it was a full train; but when I met you running so fast, I thought I'd make so bold as to ask."

Margaret laughed, and owned that she had felt a good deal frightened at being alone in such a crowd at night, but

added that she hoped soon to get quite used to such things; and then she said how much obliged she felt to Mrs. Snell for so kindly offering to receive her, stranger as she was.

"Well, that isn't much to be thankful for," said Mr. Snell; "do a good turn and hope a good turn, that's my maxim, and that's my wife's maxim; and we ain't often out."

There was a blunt kindliness of tone and manner about Mr. Snell, that warmed Margaret's heart towards him, so she chatted to him gaily enough about the incidents of her journey: how at York she had hoped to get a glimpse of the Minster, but had caught instead a glimpse of a trunk she thought was her own vanishing, and had given chase, and found it belonged to some one else; then, how at Rugby the whistle had sounded just as she had put the long-delayed cup of hot coffee to her lips, &c. &c.

All this time the cab had been rattling up one dingy street and down another; now they came into a great thoroughfare, brilliant with lights, and crowded with wet people manœuvring wet umbrellas: this, her companion told her, was Holborn. Here they seemed to become inextricably entangled in a throng of omnibuses, cabs, and carriages, the drivers of which Margaret thought were bent upon locking their wheels hopelessly together, whilst their steaming horses had an evident inclination to put their heads in at the cab window, so that her heart kept always ready to jump into her mouth at a moment's notice; and once or twice she actually seized hold of her jolly companion's arm, to his great amusement. So they went along Cheapside, and through Cornhill, and across Gracechurch Street, and into Leadenhall Street, and down Mark Lane, and in and out, through queer, narrow streets, with rows of dark cobweb-windowed houses on each side, where, Mr. Snell told her, half the wealth of the City was housed. She wondered that rich people should choose such dingy places to dwell in, until she was further informed, that the great dusky houses were not dwelling-houses, but warehouses; though they had been fashionable houses really once, before gentility took wing to the West, and pauperism slunk away to the East, whilst trade, the mighty mistress of modern London, kept all the centre to herself, where, seated majestically on a pile of dry goods, she waves her sceptre to direct the motions of myriads by day, but is left to nod and blink, only guarded by a few porters and policemen, at night.

After sundry further turnings and windings, during which

Margaret made several vain efforts to distinguish certain undistinguishable edifices, which were pointed out to her as docks (where she consequently expected to see shipping, until informed that they were dry docks), the cab stopped at last in a street not far from that romantic district, Nightingale Lane, City ; for Mr. Snell, being a tidewaiter, inhabited that part of town from necessity. Mr. Snell got out and assisted Margaret to alight ; and Mrs. Snell hastened to meet her at the door, lead her into the warm, lighted parlour, take off her cloak and unfasten her bonnet; for her own hands were too benumbed to perform those offices for herself.

Then she had leisure to observe that Mrs. Snell, like her husband, was stout ; nay, there was a degree of amplitude about her person which induced Mr. Snell, when jocosely disposed, to affirm of Mrs. S. that, "though the weaker vessel, she was built with extra stowage to accommodate the extra freightage she carried of constitution, character, and her many virtues besides." And Mrs. Snell, being habituated to the witticism, bore it with perfect equanimity. Notwithstanding her *embonpoint*, however, Mrs. Snell moved about actively enough, speaking sharply and decisively to her servant, and sometimes, indeed, to her husband also ; whereupon Mr. Snell suggested—"Draw it mild, my love," and she replied, "Well, but you know you're so stupid, Snell," but "drew it mild" accordingly.

Margaret was soon seated at a well-spread supper-table, and plentifully supplied with the indispensables of life. Thawed by the influence of food, light, warmth, and kindly faces, she began to think London was not such a very alarming place after all.

"A leetle shaving of this 'am now'd be for your good, miss," said Mr. Snell.

"Indeed you have helped me to meat but too bountifully already, Mr. Snell."

"That's your idea, miss; 'am isn't meat, and don't count as such, you know."

"I'm afraid I've been mistaken all my life, then, for I always thought it did. What does it count for, Mr. Snell?"

"Well," said Mr. Snell, reflectively, "it ain't fish, and it ain't fowl, and flesh it certainly ain't ; I should say now, it's something in the vegetable way! That's about it, I expect, ain't it, Mrs. S.?"

"Snell, how can you be so silly?" said Mrs. Snell.

"Well, well, my love," deprecated Mr. Snell, "there's animal plants, you know, and why shouldn't there be vegetable 'ams, as well as vegetable marrows?"

Margaret laughed and said she considered the fact proven beyond dispute, and that henceforward, for her, ham was a vegetable production. Mr. Snell was quite happy that his wit should be appreciated in one quarter, though Mrs. Snell did turn up her nose at it; for Mr. Snell was a jocose man, and liked to have his funny sayings understood. Margaret was tired, and warmth and comfort made her feel sleepy; she was much pressed by her hospitable entertainers to take "something warm to keep the cold out," but steadfastly declined to do so. Thereupon, she was conducted up to a little bedroom wherein was a dusky bed with dusky hangings; whilst everything there, to her senses, used only to the pure country air, had a very perceptible taint of smoke: moreover, she had scruples about laying her things down, there was such a dusty sensation about the place. Nevertheless, once in bed, smoke, dust, noise, Mr. and Mrs. Snell, even London itself, were soon all forgotten, and Margaret was sound asleep.

After Margaret had retired, Mr. Snell put on his slippers, and received from the plump fingers of Mrs. S. a glass of hot brandy-and-water: Mrs. Snell, as she frequently declared, did not take spirits, though recommended to do so by her medical attendant, having a conviction it would increase her size; she only sipped, therefore, occasionally, as Mr. Snell poetically observed, "like a humming-bird," from his glass. Mrs. Snell also having inducted herself into a loose flannel wrapper, packed up the grey spiral ringlets which adorned her temples into small flat paper parcels, and put on a nightcap with wide borders, the worthy couple placed their respective feet comfortably upon the fender, and thus confidentially conversed:—

"What do you think of your guest, my love?" said Mr. Snell.

"She seems a pleasant young lady enough; but, poor thing, she's so done up with her journey one can hardly tell," responded his spouse.

"She's certainly a sweet-looking young creature," remarked Mr. Snell.

"Oh! of course! all for the looks, or you wouldn't be a

man. But 'handsome is as handsome does' for me," rejoined his wife, with vivacity.

"Exactually so, Mrs. S.: quite right in both your observations. If it wasn't for the first, I shouldn't have picked *you* out, my love; and if it wasn't for the second, *you* wouldn't have thought so high of *me!* My love to you, and take a taste yourself."

"You're full of your nonsense to-night," said Mrs. Snell, and she smiled and took a sip.

"Nonsense, my love! on the contrairy, it's what *I* call sense, and comfort too: one's warm fireside on a cold night, one's glass of something comfortable, *and* one's wife to make one feel it! Last, my love, but *never* least! Another leetle sip." Mrs. Snell took another leetle sip, and, her heart expanding in the genial glow of comfort and conjugal happiness, she began to pity others who were not so blessed.

"I can't help thinking of that poor young thing upstairs," said she. "It's very hard to be turned out of her own, as one may say, and made to beg her bread: not that Miss Langley does that, to be sure."

"But you spoke in a figger, my love," suggested Mr. Snell.

"I daresay I did; but, figure or no figure, it's a cruel shame she should have to give up her father's property to some hundredth cousin, that as likely as not ain't fit to tie her shoestrings."

"That it is, a cruel shame, and no mistake, poor dear!" responded kind-hearted Mr. Snell.

"I'm thinking whether we couldn't give her a lift, by letting her stop here till she can look about her; for she certainly is a good deal too pretty to live in a lodging."

"My love," cried Mr. Snell, warmly, "the idea is worthy of *you;* I can't say more than that."

"Well, I'm glad you're agreeable: though I must say you don't often thwart me, Snell, particular when I want to do a kindness," said Mrs. Snell, with affection glisteni g in her eyes.

"Aye, aye, old gal! I believe you! you've *about* got the measure of my foot!" replied Mr. Snell, with equal affection. (Mr. Snell always called his wife "old gal" when he felt particularly fond of her, as was the case whenever she proposed a kind action.) As Mr. and Mrs. Snell soon after retired to repose, we will here wish them good-night.

CHAPTER XI.

"WANTED, BY A YOUNG LADY, A SITUATION."

MARGARET awoke the next morning in a state of perfect uncertainty as to her whereabouts; but when she recalled the fact that she was actually in London, and on the brink of trying what to her appeared a very hazardous experiment, her heart failed within her, and she would fain have turned upon her pillow and shut her eyes for evermore. But a faint-hearted shrinking from difficulties was not amongst Margaret's failings, so, to prevent getting nervous, she set to work to consider what she had better do first. To advertise in the *Times* seemed just the only thing to do, and she began to compose an advertisement.

Having settled how she could compress the best of her acquirements into the smallest, neatest, and least expensive compass, she found it was time to rise and prepare for breakfast. Beaming Mr. Snell was rubbing his hands by the fire, active Mrs. S. was preparing tea, coffee, and a rasher, when she went down. She responded satisfactorily to the kind inquiries of both, and then, making herself quite at home, knelt down to toast a slice of bread, by way of adding her share to the preparations: that confirmed her in the good opinion of both.

"You've learned to be useful, miss, I see," said Mrs. Snell.

"And the ornamental part is natural," added her husband, rubbing his hands harder, and chuckling his cheery chuckle.

Mr. Snell wasn't far out there, certainly; for Margaret did look uncommonly ornamental as she knelt on the rug, the heat of the fire bringing up a colour which had of late been a stranger to her cheek.

The business of the advertisement was soon settled. Mr. Snell would take it to Printing-house Square himself, and pay for its insertion. Then, unwilling to burden her hospitable hosts longer than necessary, she inquired of Mrs. Snell relative to the lodging which she had begged her to procure.

Mrs. Snell replied that, "if agreeable, Mr. Snell and me

will be happy of your company; at least till you've time to look about you a bit, miss."

Margaret thanked her warmly, and, after a little hesitation about giving trouble, accepted the offer thankfully. It was at least one weight off her mind, to be housed under the roof of people who were both respectable and kind.

Mrs. Snell then asked her what sights she would like to see. Margaret said that she knew but of few, but that she should like to go to the National Gallery, and Westminster Abbey, and St. Paul's whilst she was in London. Mrs. Snell seemed to think her selection rather dull, and proposed the Colosseum, or "Madame Toossard's." Margaret didn't even know what style of exhibition the latter might be.

"Why," said Mrs. Snell, in surprise, "it's the images of everybody as ever lived—at least everybody of any account; and they're all as natural as life: and there's a dear old gentleman that nods, and a woman lying down that breathes just as you or I do. It's a wonderful place is Madame Toossard's! And then there's the Room of Horrors; but I'm rather nervous, so I don't go in there: it might be too much for me, you know," and Mrs. Snell laid her hand languidly upon her capacious bosom.

Finding that Madame Tussaud's it was destined to be, Margaret gave a gracious assent; but she was vastly better pleased in her heart, when Mr. Snell said that he had business in the City, and if she liked, he would take her to St. Paul's in time for the morning service, and call for her as he came back. Margaret was delighted to be in action, so she ran upstairs for her bonnet, and taking Mr. Snell's arm, she started off with him on foot, trying hard to remember the names and directions of the streets they traversed, that she might not be at a loss on coming by herself.

She was contented enough to be left in the great majestic cathedral by herself; few people were there, so she seated herself in an obscure stall, and prepared for an enjoyment thoroughly suited to her taste, the performance of the cathedral service. The anthem was very grand that day; the music seemed to waft her soul away far from all earthly trouble into a high, calm atmosphere of peace; she hid her face, and let the quiet tears trickle down as she listened. After the prayers, she rose from her knees calm and strengthened, feeling less dread of facing her future than she had done in the morning. She wandered dreamily about

in the cathedral, unconscious of the lapse of time, until some one touched her on the shoulder, and, turning round, she saw it was Mr. Snell, in his habitual state of shiny cheerfulness and constitutional chuckle. That put an end to all her reveries. He walked round the cathedral with her, and admired the monuments prodigiously; calling her attention frequently to the beautiful naturalness with which the coats, cocked hats, &c., of the great men of a departed generation were rendered in the deathless marble! Then he insisted on taking her into the whispering gallery, and would even have ascended to the dome with her if she had wished it; but Mr. Snell was naturally short-winded, and Margaret was naturally merciful; so she walked off again beside him, Mr. Snell stepping out at a good pace, and putting on quite a military "now, you sir!"-ish sort of air if any one looked too hard at his pretty *protégé*.

In due time her advertisement appeared in the *Times*. Every day she looked out for answers, but none arrived. Somewhat disheartened, she inserted it again; and in the meantime inquired about governess agencies, which Mrs. Snell had told her were the medium generally resorted to by ladies requiring situations.

The result of her inquiries was that she repaired to the establishment of Mesdames Skinner and Brown, paid her five shillings registration fee, and gave the requisite list of her accomplishments. Mesdames Skinner and Brown took her name and address, entering it on their books with that little air of dignified bustle with which women somehow generally contrive to invest business. They also gave her the brightest hopes of speedy employment. Her music, they said, would undoubtedly make her quite in request; besides, "few ladies could offer such a list of acquirements." A few days afterwards, accordingly, Miss Langley received a letter from Mesdames Skinner and Brown, advising her, that if she called at their institution at a certain hour on the following day, they would communicate with her about a situation.

At the hour appointed, Margaret made her appearance at the office, and was directed to communicate personally with a Mrs. Pratt, of Woodbine Villas, Turnham Green. Thither she accordingly betook herself, and was received by a tall, angular lady, who, after putting her through a list of her accomplishments, and lamenting much that she had not "acquired French and German on the Continent," offered

her a salary of twenty pounds per annum! After that she had very nearly engaged with a very fine lady, but it so chanced that the fine lady took it into her head to pay Margaret a visit in Burr Street, before finally settling with her, and her nerves were so upset by the astonishing vulgarity of the district through which she drove to reach that locality, that she ordered her coachman to turn back, and Margaret heard no more from her. She seemed further than ever from her aim: her position, besides, was growing more difficult every day; as, although Mr. and Mrs. Snell would not hear of her leaving, saying warmly and heartily they were delighted that she should remain with them, she felt that she was trespassing on their kindness; yet to take a lodging now was almost out of her power, for the sum of money which, in arranging for her aunt's comfort, she had reserved for her own immediate expenses—thinking, in her expectation of speedy employment, that it would be amply sufficient—was fast dwindling away.

She had found, after her first experiments in the streets of London, that she was far less subjected to annoyance and impertinence when walking by herself, than with the *chaperonage* of her ample friend Mrs. Snell; and she endeavoured to assume an appearance of business-like indifference to all outward objects, though inwardly she was nervous, and afraid even to stop and look at anything, however much it might interest her. Still she frequently met with some annoyance, which so alarmed and disgusted her that her walks generally ended in taking a cab from the first stand to convey her to her destination, and another back again. Soon she could not afford this indulgence, and had recourse to omnibuses; at last even that mode of conveyance became too expensive, and she was obliged to walk in whatever direction she wished to go.

Still she was tolerably independent. The churches where there was daily service were her most frequent resorts; and many were the long walks she took to the chapel in Margaret Street, and to divers of the other West-end churches, where the officiating ministers were reputed to hold "high" doctrine. But this very church-going of hers produced a singular effect upon her mind. Miss Langley's piety was not at all of the kind which requires spiritual excitement to keep it going. Amidst the choral services, beautiful as they were in some churches—amidst the decorated altars, the candlesticks, and the flowers—she found herself not unfre-

quently sighing for the plain unqualified ugliness of Snagton Church and the simple hymns of her school-children.

But Margaret amidst her church-going was getting very poor. Day by day did her little stock of easily numbered coins decrease, and no chance of replenishing it seemed at hand. Time after time she received summonses to different localities where ladies were in need of an instructress for their children. Sometimes she was received courteously; sometimes the servants at the great houses she went to were impertinent; sometimes their lady-mistresses were insolent. Still no engagement resulted. She had called once upon people she had known in happier days, and who had been kind and flattering then. Now she found them cold in their reception of her, and discouraging when she spoke of her desire for employment. They had been summer friends only—now the winter was come.

Margaret was learning bitter lessons of the deceitfulness of riches, and she resolved to make no more applications to "friends." She sometimes feared she should soon become bitter and hard, and hateful and hating; but then a redeeming spot of brightness in her view of the world was the unfailing kindness of her host, and the real worth of her hostess, a little snappish though she was now and then. When she spoke of being burdensome to them, Mr. Snell rubbed his hands and chuckled: Margaret had got quite partial to that cheery chuckle of his.

"Burdensome! on the contrary, miss: your company lightens my heart, and brightens my home; I have my fears of a consumption when you leave us," said he.

Mrs. Snell, also, though she sometimes sympathized rather too much with Margaret's disappointments, inwardly felt that she should miss her sorely; not only for the sweetness of her disposition, but because her guest was really useful to her. Mrs. Snell's caps and gowns had materially benefited by Margaret's neat and excellent taste; and in many other little ways only known to housekeepers, Margaret had, in her anxiety to repay in some way the kindness of her friends, become quite indispensable to her.

At last Margaret received another summons to wait upon a certain Lady Aston, at her house in Eaton Place. Lady Aston! Poor Margaret's heart gave a great leap as she remembered that Sir Henry Aston was the patron of Snagton cum Thwackelton, and the lord of the manor, owning the

"House" there. Could this lady be any relation of his? She knew he was not married. When she called upon Lady Aston, she found her a tall, very thin person, with a somewhat high nose and hawk eyes, a rather square mouth, and a certain degree of nervous, fidgety quickness in her manner which was not pleasant. However, Lady Aston asked her very few questions: knowing something of Margaret's family connections, she was satisfied that they were of high standing. She talked a good deal of her elder daughters, who would be "so delighted, sweet loves, to have a companion in Miss Langley;" and also about the happiness which Miss Langley was to experience under her roof, and with her "dear darling little ones, quite chicks they were."

She spoke of her great anxiety that her governess should be a person of the strictest "Church principle." She was herself quite "High Church" in her views; she said she wished that her dear children should not get any "horrid low notions."

Margaret replied, "that she was thoroughly and conscientiously a member of the Church of England."

"Ah!" replied Lady Aston, "I am delighted to hear you say that, my dear Miss Langley; we shall really quite sympathise! and you will find Mr. Sharp, our rector, quite what you wish: he is what I call really *nicely* high—no extremes; no confession, you know, or that kind of thing; but he preaches in the surplice, and—and that kind of thing, you know."

Margaret felt a little tickling about her mouth, at Lady Aston's gamy definition of the "nicely high" style of clergyman, but she restrained herself; and presently her ladyship mentioned something in the course of the conversation which made that heart of Margaret's give another leap: she said—

"My only son, my darling Henry (Sir Henry Aston, Miss Langley), will probably take his dear sisters down to his estate in Yorkshire, Snagton near Maltby, Miss Langley——," and Lady Aston went on to say something, Margaret knew not what, she trembled so, and began thinking her own thoughts instead of listening. She was recalled to herself by Lady Aston beginning to make arrangements about her journey down to Aston Hall, in Buckinghamshire, where she resided with her family.

"When could Miss Langley be ready? Would the next week be too early?" Lady Aston was anxious that her

"darling sweet ones should lose no time with their studies, and in making acquaintance with their instructress: sweet pets!" Margaret could go at any time that Lady Aston wished; next week would not be too early. So it was arranged; and Margaret went back to her kind friends, heartily glad to be settled, but yet with an oppressive sensation of misgiving which she could hardly account for. She had no reason assuredly to distrust Lady Aston: what an affectionate disposition she must have! And yet—and Margaret laughed outright as she endeavoured to form an idea of Lady A.'s religious creed. At least she might hear of Snagton; and that name kept ringing in her head all the way back.

When she communicated the intelligence to Mrs. Snell, the good woman looked very grave, though she congratulated Margaret; and when Mr. Snell came home at night and heard it, he neither rubbed his hands nor chuckled for a long time: not indeed till after he had had his supper. Then, said he—

"Is Lady Aston's husband alive?"

"No," said Margaret.

"Does the title drop, then?"

"No; there is a son, Sir Henry Aston," replied Margaret.

"A son, is there, miss?—grown up?"

"I believe so; I really do not know."

"Then, who knows? p'raps you'll be Lady Aston some day! ho! ho! who knows," chuckled Mr. Snell; and he called Margaret "Lady Aston" till he went to bed.

Meantime Margaret set to work to put her wardrobe in order. It was long since it had been replenished, and she was in sad dismay at its shabbiness. Nevertheless, buy new things she could not and would not; she must have the satisfaction of spending her last five-pound note (how often she had looked at that flimsy piece of paper with apprehensive affection of late!) in a present to her kind friends Mr. and Mrs. Snell. She had often heard Mr. Snell wish for a clock in his room, and she had seen in a watchmaker's window a little ornamental one on which she had set her heart, and which would cost exactly that treasure—5*l*. Anxiously, therefore, did she turn over bonnets and dresses; her black silk she thought would do, if "turned," for ordinary occasions. But Lady Aston had talked of "the pleasure of her company in the drawing-room of an evening." A white muslin would not cost much, and she could make it herself.

She reckoned up her finances, and found that she could buy the requisite white muslin, pay for her journey, have five shillings for Nancy, Mrs. Snell's maid, and just ten shillings to spare for herself, without touching the cherished five-pound note. No time must be lost, however, so she went out early next morning, bought the muslin and the long-coveted little clock, and had the latter standing on the mantel-piece when Mr. Snell came in to tea and Mrs. S. down from her toilette. The good people were very much gratified at her present, though they chid her for spending her money on them. Mr. Snell got up, and rubbed his hands every time it struck the hours and half-hours.

"I shall think of you, my dear, every time it strikes," he said; "one, two 'll be, how d' ye do; two, three, she's dear to me; three, four, God bless her store; four, five, with Sir Henry to wive!" and at this point of his poetical effusion, Mr. Snell chuckled loud and long; he tried to mend the measure several times afterwards, but couldn't succeed.

Margaret got her stitching done triumphantly, but it was painful work parting with her kind friends. Mrs. Snell sniffed and blew her nose a great deal all breakfast time, and—

"Dear me, dear me, what a cold I have got!" said she.

As for Mr. Snell he said—

"God bless you, my dear! God bless you, my dear!" many times; he tried once or twice to be funny, but couldn't manage it; and finally, when he parted from her at the station, broke down, and fairly sobbed out his farewells: and Margaret made a duet of it.

CHAPTER XII.

"FAST."

MARGARET was now adrift amongst strangers once more. She cried for a long time after parting from Mr. Snell, until at last, fearing as usual to give way to the thoughts she had been flying from so long, she resolutely dried her tears, and looked out steadfastly at the fleeting objects of the landscape. She found Lady Aston's carriage waiting for her at the station, and when she arrived at the house, Lady Aston received her in the drawing-room, talked a good deal about

her dear children, and finally sent for the two who were to be Miss Langley's pupils. One of them was a young lady of about fifteen, with a haughty face and a self-possessed manner, who marched into the room with an air of secret disgust; but when she had contemplated Miss Langley's appearance for some time, with a stare whose assurance greatly astonished, and somewhat discomposed her, in respect of her anticipations of docility from her pupil, the young lady slightly relaxed her countenance, and walked out through the window on to the lawn. The other girl was a child of from seven to eight, pretty and engaging, shy and childish; she soon began to creep nearer to Margaret, till at last she was standing by her knee, holding her hand, and looking in her face with grave attention. Lady Aston asked Margaret if she would not like to see her schoolroom, and desired the little girl (Nelly, she called her,) to show Miss Langley upstairs.

To Margaret's surprise, dinnerless as she had arrived she was allowed to remain that day: no inquiry was made as to whether she had dined, and she felt too little used to the change from guest to governess, and the consequent necessity of doing what few people would henceforward do for her, taking care of herself, to ring and ask for food; consequently she went without until the early schoolroom tea, and then was almost too faint to eat; for her breakfast had not been of the heartiest.

She found her eldest pupil's manners anything but agreeable or lady-like. Miss Harriet lounged with her arms on the table, reached across Miss Langley for what she wanted, even desired her new governess to wait upon her, in the coolest way in the world, and was astonished and pert when quietly rebuked and told to wait upon herself. Altogether, Margaret did not form very delightful anticipations of the task of guiding and forming the mind and enduring the companionship of so uncouth a specimen of young ladyism.

But it was necessary to dress to go down to the drawing-room in the evening. On entering that apartment, Miss Langley found Lady Aston and the elder part of her family assembled. There were the two Misses Aston and Sir Henry Aston (to which gentleman we have been already introduced). Sir Henry was at present refreshing himself with a quiet after-dinner nap, in an arm-chair, with his head sunk on his breast, and his legs stretched out; though the young ladies were talking loud enough to have disturbed the slumbers of

any unaccustomed person. Lady Aston was lying on the sofa; she got up, however, to introduce Margaret to her daughters, who stared hard at her, as she entered the room in her simple black silk, high up to the throat; for the Misses Aston were themselves accustomed to a rather profuse display of their personal attractions, and were at present attired in dresses which had once been ball-dresses, but were now somewhat the dirtier for wear; though still, as always, the lowest of the low. They thought Margaret's plain dress quizzical and old maidish: we will not say what she thought of theirs. Lady Aston, having introduced Miss Langley to her fair daughters, turned round to perform the same office to her son; but Sir Henry was still wrapped in profound slumber, only manifesting his presence by an occasional snort or snore, and by the extension of those substantial legs of his: and Lady Aston, gazing maternally at the sleeper, said softly, "Dear fellow, he is so tired with his ride, I am sure you will excuse my not waking him, Miss Langley; pray take a seat."

But the possessor of those strong legs had unconsciously stretched them across the only path which Margaret could pursue to get round the table to a chair; for the Misses Aston had reoccupied theirs, and did not seem inclined to relinquish them. She looked round in vain for another mode of attaining a seat, and finally attempted to glide by the sleeper without disturbing him; unfortunately for her purpose, her dress displaced a book upon the table, and the falling of the book roused the young gentleman sufficiently for him to remark that somebody was trying to cross the barrier he had extended, and he drew in his legs a little: as he did so, his half-opened eyes caught a glimpse of Margaret's face, which induced him to open them wide, and stare at her with an aspect of great wonder. Seeing that the "dear fellow" was awake, instead of making use of the narrow passage he had left open, Margaret drew herself back in a rather dignified way, saying quietly:

"Will you allow me to pass, if you please?"

He pulled in the long legs, and rose instantly, saying rather confusedly:

"I beg your pardon," and Margaret went to her chair. Lady Aston said:

"I would not awake you, dear, it seemed such a pity," and she did not look pleased that Margaret had had the

misfortune to disturb the slumbers of the weary youth, who muttered something about "dinner" and "tired," which seemed meant as an apology for the legs.

Lady Aston did not introduce her son, and that young gentleman, after having employed himself for some time in turning over the leaves of a book, and occasionally stealing a furtive glance at Margaret, returned to his chair, and packing his legs into as small a compass as they would conveniently occupy, sunk his head upon his chest, and slept, or appeared to sleep, once more: though he did not snore again. Margaret did not find the evening very entertaining, as the young ladies continued talking in a loud tone, interspersing their conversation with copious quotations of slang; this quite astonished Miss Langley, who was not at all accustomed to that phase of young ladyhood represented by the Misses Aston. Indeed it seemed to her inexplicable that young women who had certainly not moved in the lower classes of society, should choose to use terms and modes of expression which would have seemed less out of place in the stable, amongst the grooms, than in a drawing-room.

From time to time, between her naps, Lady Aston interrupted the tangled thread of her daughters' conversation, by sleepy comments of her own, retailing scraps about fashionable dress, manners, or religion; the latter were principally addressed to Miss Langley, and contrasted so ludicrously with the very "fast" talk of the young ladies, that the muscles of Margaret's mouth twitched involuntarily with restrained laughter.

Margaret escaped up to her room with great delight when ten o'clock struck and a general move was made; Lady Aston observing that "early hours best suited her dear children's health," and Miss Evelina putting in an aside to Miss Arabella, "and prevented the candles going into a consumption!"

The next day, lessons being over, Margaret had discovered that, with rather a showy list of acquirements, her elder pupil's amount of actual knowledge was—*nil*. She found that she and the said elder pupil were expected to walk out together. The day was lovely but very sultry, and as the roads were hot and dusty, Margaret begged Harriett to go across the fields in whatever direction it might please her; they set off accordingly through the meadows, where the aftermath had now sprung up again abundantly; then the

path crossed a grove of beech-trees, the common forest-tree of the district, and skirted a little pool of sleeping water, where yellow water-lilies floated amidst the green reflections of the overhanging beeches. Margaret was delighted at the sight of fields and green trees once more, and would have thoroughly enjoyed herself but for the companionship of her gentle pupil, who was out of humour, and who, to all Miss Langley's attempts to interest her in the objects around them, as she found here some rare plant and there some curious insect, responded by sullen monosyllables or expressions of contemptuous wonder that she should care for such stupid, common things. When they came to the pool, Margaret exclaimed, "What a lovely little green solitude! If there are any fairies left, I should think they must haunt this spot."

"A disgusting little stagnant pool!" exclaimed Miss Harriett.

Margaret reproved her for such rudeness, and the girl being additionally displeased, and in a humour to make herself disagreeable, vented her ill-humour by stalking off to the water's edge and pelting the tadpoles; to which interesting occupation Miss Langley left her pupil, and wandering on out of sight of her, sat down on the trunk of a felled tree.

She would have enjoyed the magnificent view which lay spread out before her, over miles and miles of rich, undulating country, all lying mellowed and purpled by the hot haze which was quivering over their outline, had it not been for the thought of that mental clog to which she was as yet unaccustomed—her self-willed pupil. She felt what a succession of struggles must be gone through before Harriett Aston could be broken in. It was disagreeable work, and Margaret felt herself shrink from it with loathing; and as she looked away and away over the rich, fertile lands, where the yellow corn was waving almost ready for the sickle, she sighed for her own purple moorland.

Harriett soon verified all Miss Langley's forebodings; for the young lady was not at all contented with the tone of authority assumed by the new governess, as if it were her right. With the last lady who had attended her in the capacity of instructress, there had been a brief struggle for authority, which had ended in Miss Jones becoming her humble servant. With Miss Brown, who preceded Miss Jones, there had been a perpetual series of quarrels, which had resulted in the dismissal of the governess. Miss Harriett

resolved, therefore, again to assert her claim to independence of control, without loss of time; and during the afternoon's lessons she was so rude and saucy, that Miss Langley at last ordered her out of the room. Harriett refused to go; but Margaret insisted so sternly that the girl was alarmed, and, afraid to offer more overt resistance, had recourse to hysterics.

Margaret quietly rang the bell for the schoolroom-maid to help her to lead the young lady to her room; and to her room she was led, sobbing and screaming to such an extent, that Miss Langley expected to see the household coming *en masse* to inquire if she were committing murder.

Fortunately the family were assembled in the dining-room at dinner; so no one heard the disturbance, except the butler and the footman.

Meantime, though Margaret had subdued her rebellious pupil, yet the struggle had cost her much. She was all unused to trials of the kind, and, disgusted and dispirited, she repaired to her own room; as she entered it a sort of sick dizziness came over her, and, wondering what ailed her, she fell forward, and, for the first time in her life, fainted. When, a short time afterwards, Bessy, the schoolroom-maid, came to help Miss Langley to dress for the evening, she was terrified at finding her lying quite unconscious on the floor. As it happened, Bessy had a fair share of sense and kind-heartedness; so, instead of screaming and running away in a fright at the sight of poor Margaret's deathlike-pallor, she seized the ewer, and, all in a tremble as she was, dashed its contents in her face. The shock of the cold water made Margaret give a convulsive gasp, but she did not open her eyes: thereupon with trembling hands Bessy began to chafe her temples and hands; then she ran to Lady Aston's room, and returned with smelling salts and a bottle of hartshorn. Margaret's eyelids soon began to quiver, and a faint tinge came back to her lips. Presently she murmured, "Thank you, Annie, I am better." In another minute she unclosed her eyes, and seeing a strange face instead of Annie's, whose ministrations the kindness of her attendant had first recalled to her wandering mind—

"Where am I?" she asked, looking round her in wonder.

"Oh, miss, I'm glad you're better! I was so frightened!" said Bessy, still in a tremor.

That recalled the remembrance of her struggle with Harriett, and of the feeling of sudden exhaustion which had

come over her as she entered her own apartment: she shut her eyes again in disgust, and her lip quivered.

"Oh, please, miss, don't go for to do it again!" quavered Bessy. "Oh, don't now!"

There was something so ridiculous in Bessy's alarm, in her own position, and the whole affair, that Margaret's fancy was irresistibly tickled. The quivering lip curled into a smile, and she began to laugh.

"Oh, now she's a-going to laugh! Oh, dear, oh, dear! what *shall* I do? *Pray* don't, miss."

Margaret opened her eyes, and kindly assuring her alarmed attendant that she need not be afraid, for she was not going into hysterics, tried to get up, but fell back again.

"Oh, that naughty, little, wicked puss! She'll be the death of you, miss—I know she will," said Bessy, getting quite fond of Margaret in her helpless state.

"Oh, no! she won't. She will not trouble me again," said Margaret. "But you had better say nothing of her—of what you saw, I think, Bessy."

"No, miss, I won't; that was why I didn't call any one. I thought you'd like people shouldn't know the trouble you'd had p'raps: though, lor! what a shame it is young ladies shouldn't know better than to go acting so."

Bessy now helped Margaret on to her bed, and felt quite touched at the earnest thanks she received for her kindness.

"It seemed as if the poor young lady felt so desolate like," said kind-hearted Bessy, with the tears in her eyes. Henceforward Margaret had at least one warm friend in Lady Aston's establishment.

But disagreeable as the contest had been, Margaret experienced the beneficial effects of her timely firmness afterwards. Harriett, though often troublesome, was never so decidedly rebellious again: that stern, inflexible look of Margaret's never failed to bring her back to her allegiance. She even began to get fond of her governess, in a way peculiar to herself, and sometimes more troublesome than agreeable; for her nature had not much of the generosity which sometimes accompanies pride and stubbornness.

Little Nelly, therefore, was Margaret's chief resource and consolation. A great love had sprung up between them, and often, after Harriett, with her lessons and her half-fond, half-troublesome ways, had departed, Margaret would take the little one up on her knee, and with the round, childish cheek

close pressed to her own, coo over with her some pretty childish story.

Thus matters went on for some time. Margaret fell into the daily routine of self-sacrifice demanded by the life of a governess, as unmurmuringly as might have been expected from her character. It was not pleasant to her to merge her existence into the petty, turbid current of the family life of people with whom she had few tastes in common, and but little sympathy; and whom she did not even like as acquaintances. It was hard to have to sell her mind for the existence of her body; but it was necessary, and a duty, so she bore it: nor did she let herself complain, even in those few precious moments that she could secure for her own uninterrupted thoughts.

In August a change took place in the family arrangements of Aston Hall. Lady Aston and her two elder daughters went to visit some friends; and Sir Harry set off for the Snagton Moors: how poor Margaret envied him in her heart the privilege of even treading the heather of her beloved moors! She was left in the almost deserted house with her pupils; the great empty rooms, with all the furniture done up in brown-holland covers, looked bare and comfortless, and the voices of the lonely party echoed in the wide stone hall. Still the change was not unpleasant; for the adult Astons had not been very congenial to Margaret's taste, and now she had books, and the piano, and time. But, alas! time was the one thing which she did not wish to have; for with time came its companion—thought. Hitherto excitement had kept her up, and she had fled successfully from the grasp of her enemy. Even that rude contact with her kind in the London streets had been an excitement; her walks to the churches for the daily service had been an excitement; it was something active to be done; then the reading of the newspapers to Mr. Snell had helped to dissipate her thoughts; the looking out for a situation, disagreeable though it was, had been vastly exciting. Now, suddenly, all around her fell into a state of stagnation: she heard nothing of what was going on in the world, and saw no faces but those of her charge, the old housekeeper Bessy, and the few people she met in her rambles with her pupils. A great silence seemed to have fallen round her life, and she began to listen through it, with a strained sense of longing and lingering for, yet fearing, something—anything, she knew not what—to break it. It

was vain now to seek for active and distracting occupation: there were the daily lessons, but these required no great amount of exertion, for Harriett learned easily and forgot quickly, and took too little interest in her lessons to make a very engaging pupil; so Margaret had no longer any resource against thought, and consequent pain. Her loneliness seemed to hedge her round, and shut her off from human sympathy. Her heart still clung to the image it had sheltered so long; and, with no view nor object in life but to get her own living —with no one else to expend her great capacities for loving upon—it seemed as if that one idol formed part of herself and must go with her to the grave.

Her grand fête-days were those when one of the rare letters came from her aunt at Snagton. Mrs. Wilson's was not the pen of a ready writer, it is true, but there was interest for Margaret in every scrap of Snagton intelligence: and, at least, there was sure to be some mention of the name that always made her heart leap and her colour mount. Now, there was often something additional, such as, "I hear the young Squire, Sir Henry Aston, has called upon Mr. Halstead, but they don't seem very thick with each other." At least, then, Sir Henry had seen him. She wondered whether she should hear of him; whether she should know how he was: she quite longed for Sir Henry's return.

But meantime, though Margaret was aware of no great change in herself, and of no particular ailment, except a feeling of entire exhaustion both of mind and body, a great change might have been perceptible to any one either sufficiently interested in her, or sufficiently acquainted with her general appearance, to remark it. She got thinner and thinner, and her colour went and came more rapidly than ever when speaking, but when in repose her cheek was transparently colourless; her breath grew short, it became a trouble to her even to go upstairs, and her walks were a perfect toil. She had never felt like herself since that long fainting fit on the day of her contest with her refractory pupil. She did not know what ailed her, but her life seemed to be ebbing slowly away.

When Lady Aston came back (which she did, leaving her daughters behind, it having been settled that they should return by way of Snagton under the escort of their brother), she did certainly remark:

"Really, Miss Langley, you look quite ill!" But Lady Aston took no further notice, except once when she met Margaret stopping, panting on the stairs a day or two after her return; being in a very gracious mood, she said, "Why, you are quite out of breath, Miss Langley! have you been running?"

"No," replied Margaret; "going upstairs takes my breath away."

"Dear me!" said her ladyship, "how very shocking! you ought to take port-wine."

"I think it would do me good," said Margaret, and in the simplicity of her heart she supposed she should have it; but no—to furnish wine to her household formed no part of Lady Aston's scheme of domestic economy: and a system of the strictest nature it was, as far as Lady Aston could make it so. Who could suspect a fine lady, and a religious lady, like Lady Aston to be guilty of so pitiful a meanness, as stinting the supplies of necessary food to her retainers? Yet the fact that Margaret's slender appetite was sometimes left unsupplied, at the sparingly spread board of her employer, seems to admit of no other construction.

When Lady Aston returned, the luncheon table at which Margaret and the children dined, whilst Lady Aston lunched, frequently afforded scarcely enough for the requirements of the party; and somehow or other Margaret's plate was the one upon which Lady Aston placed the least in apportioning the viands provided. Margaret blushed at herself for thinking such a thought, when more than once or twice she found herself eating dry bread, because there was nothing else to eat. But as we may take the liberty of glancing behind the scenes, we may as well avow that, though Lady Aston carefully concealed it from herself, in all private household matters she was niggardly to an excess; disgusting in any one, and doubly so in her position. These petty savings did not apply to her kitchen and servants' hall, it must be understood—for there the housekeeper ruled supreme, and Lady Aston was afraid of her, as she was of all her servants—but only to the parlour, where she knew Miss Langley would be too delicate to remonstrate, and she herself could take care the dear children were supplied! If the reader is disgusted, let him consider that Lady Aston had an appearance to make in the world: was it likely, with the dear girls to provide with dress and other necessaries calculated to aid in procur-

ing them a settlement, that she could study the wants of a governess!

So Lady Aston economized, and Margaret grew weaker and weaker. Lady Aston often took Harriett as a companion, and that spared Margaret; but sometimes she was required in that capacity, and told that "a walk would do her good, and rouse her;" and then she was walked over hill and dale, till, perfectly exhausted, she came home, and fainted. Almost daily those faints had become now.

The clergyman observed to his wife on Sunday, "Did you notice that beautiful girl, who is, I suppose, Lady Aston's governess? How shockingly she is altered since she came!" Bessy grieved over her sorely; exclaiming, probably with the purpose of consoling her, and keeping up her spirits, "Oh, miss, how bad you do look! for sure you're going to die!" Harriett showed her a considerable degree of rough, uncertain kindness; little Nelly cried over her, and kissed her a great deal; but Lady Aston shut her eyes and could or would see nothing, except that Miss Langley "was nervous and wanted rousing." Poor Margaret!

One day, after a long walk, the now usual fainting fit came on. Harriett called Bessy and sprinkled eau-de-cologne; Bessy tried hartshorn and salts, cold water and friction; the housekeeper tried burnt feathers and cutting of laces; but all was in vain: Margaret lay like one dead—beautiful still, but colourless as a corpse. An hour passed away, and she gave no sign of returning animation: the housekeeper grew alarmed; Bessy was sorely frightened; Harriett was terrified; little Nelly was wild with fear: she caught the look in the housekeeper's face, and heard her whisper to Bessy—"Suppose she should be dead!" and she flew down to Lady Aston, crying wildly,—

"Oh, mamma! she's dead! she's dead! Mrs. Cooper says she's dead!"

"Who's dead, child?" cried Lady Aston.

"Oh! Miss Langley; my own Miss Langley! oh! mamma!" sobbed poor Nelly.

Really terrified in her turn, Lady Aston rushed up to the schoolroom, where, on the floor, lay poor Margaret, dead indeed to all appearances; pale, but beautiful, with her long, rich rippled hair, dishevelled by the attempts which had been made to resuscitate her, streaming about the floor.

"Good heavens! send for the doctor! good gracious; oh,

dear!" shrieked Lady Aston, and she went off into hysterics upon the spot; thus calling off Bessy and the housekeeper from their attempts to revive Margaret, to support her while she kicked and screamed. Harriett could do nothing but wring her hands, and threaten for hysterics herself; only there was no one to attend to her. Nelly cowered away into a corner, and sobbed her little heart out.

This was the scene which presented itself, when Mr. Brown, the surgeon, who fortunately lived close by, arrived; he gave a glance at the position of the respective parties, told Bessy, the housekeeper, and a housemaid or two to convey Lady Aston to her room, whispered in Mrs. Cooper's ear something that sounded like "brandy-and-water, *strong!*" and then he knelt down by Margaret, felt her pulse and her heart, and shook his head. On rising, he said to Harriett, who was sitting by crying and trembling, "Now, my good girl, leave off crying, and come and help me: first show me this lady's bedroom;" he then raised Margaret in his arms, and carried her to the room indicated by Harriett; there, with the prompt aid of Bessy, who had managed to escape from Lady Aston's room, he quickly applied cataplasms and other restorative means; and, in a short time, Margaret was recalled to a weary sense of troublesome existence. The doctor saw her sink off into a sort of uneasy sleep before he left her, and said he would come again in the evening; for he did not seem satisfied as to her state. When he did come, he found her so weak that she could scarcely speak to answer his questions, and he shook his head as he left the room. He felt convinced it must be a case of gross neglect, or his patient never could have been reduced to a state of such extreme exhaustion. He asked to see Lady Aston in order to learn a little more about Miss Langley, for her singular beauty interested him; besides, he was the father of a family, and he had a tolerable idea of the position of a governess in that family. Now, Mr. Brown was a plain-spoken man, and perhaps on that account not a great favourite with Lady Aston; consequently, when, after inquiries after her own health, he began, scarcely waiting for her replies, to question her about her governess, she thought him a very great bore indeed. "She really did not at all know" Miss Langley had been reduced to such a state of weakness.

"What had she been doing?"

"Nothing, but taking a healthful walk with herself. But some people are more nervous than others."

" There is something more than mere nervousness in this young lady's case," interrupted Mr. Brown, quickly; " she could not have been in a fit state to take a walk."

Lady Aston " really did not know; Miss Langley had not complained, and she (Lady Aston) could not be expected to take care of people who were old enough to take care of themselves. She supposed Miss Langley's constitution was delicate."

" On the contrary, Miss Langley's constitution must be remarkably strong, or she would not have rallied from the state of entire prostration in which I found her: indeed, if the fainting fits recur, I think the matter still doubtful."

" Good heavens, doctor! you don't think she'll die on my hands? How shocking! How dreadfully unpleasant!" And Lady Aston gave signs of another fit of hysterics, which Mr. Brown didn't want to have to cure, so he said—

" Well, I should hope not; but I would recommend your ladyship to send for Miss Langley's mother, if she has one: at least, to let her friends know.'

" Let her friends know? Good gracious! I don't know whether she's got any friends! For Heaven's sake, doctor, don't let her die! What should I do?"

" Do, madam?" returned Mr. Brown, rather gruffly, for he felt disgusted at Lady Aston's heartless selfishness; " supply the place of a friend and mother to her yourself; for she's a sweet young creature. Good evening."

So Mr. Brown went away, and Lady Aston exclaimed, as he left the room—

" What a brute of a man! I wish there was any one else as clever in the neighbourhood, and I'd never send for him again: it's no comfort to have a man like that. Dear, dear! if the girl should die, what should I do? How frightfully disagreeable!" Lady Aston rang the bell nervously, ordered that every attention should be paid to Miss Langley, and that she should have everything she required: " couldn't she take brandy, or wine, or arrowroot, or a mutton chop, or gruel, or anything?"

Poor Margaret lay a long time between life and death; for the attack of low fever from which she had been long suffering had now assumed a typhoid character. But with that fact Mr. Brown did not acquaint Lady Aston; he only advised her to run down to Brighton for a week or so, with the two younger girls, to change the scene a little, after the shock she

had sustained. And she thought him "really quite nice and sympathising: if he would only always be like that!"

So she went, and Margaret was left to the care of a nurse, for whom Mr. Brown told Lady Aston to send. Lady A. went, as a sort of duty, to see the invalid, before she set off on her trip; but poor Margaret's mind was wandering about "Dearest father," and "Snagton," and "Auntie," and "Annie," and "old James," and one other whose name did not pass her lips even in her delirium, and she did not know Lady Aston.

"Dear me!" said Lady Aston, advancing to the bottom of the bed, in a nervous sort of bustle, and looking at Margaret's fever-flushed, but still lovely face, as she lay with her eyes shut; "dear me, nurse; she really doesn't look so very bad!"

Margaret opened her heavy lids at the unaccustomed sound of Lady Aston's voice, and looked at her wildly, with no sign of recognition in those beautiful, now preternaturally large-looking blue eyes.

"Oh, good gracious, how she stares! and how monstrous her eyes look! oh, heavens! my nerves cannot stand this!" and away rushed her ladyship, leaving the nurse to shut the door, and mutter—

"Then I wish you'd keep your nerves out o' this, I does: sech it is to 'ave nerves a flustering of people, and doing. Never mind 'em, duckie! they ain't no sense—no more they ain't. Lay down agin, honey, and keep yourself quiet now."

This was addressed to Margaret, who had started up in the bed at the disturbance, and was gazing wildly round; she mechanically obeyed the old woman's coaxing command, and lay down again quietly, but soon recommenced her soft wandering talk to those who were either dead or far away.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

And the Rev. Francis Halstead? what had become of that gentleman, in the meantime? He did not, by Margaret's own arrangement, receive her short note of farewell, until she had proceeded some distance on her road to London. When it was brought to him, he read it and re-read it with a sort of stupefied air; then he laid it down upon the table, and laid

his head and his hands upon it, and so he remained for a very long time, quite motionless. Mrs. Hawkins' clock ticked a sort of sepulchral accompaniment to his thoughts; the strengthening sunbeams reached him, shedding a long stream of light straight upon his head, passed him, fell on his chair, and then on the wall, and then went away quite to gladden more thankful hearts. The little brown mouse, with black, startled, shiny eyes, came to its hole and peeped, and then came boldly out, and played about, almost close to his feet; but he did not stir. He was passing alone through the valley of the shadow, and he heeded not the lapse of time, nor the stir of outward things. At last he lifted up a face, as it had been the face of an aged man, it was so lined and marked, so ashen white. Now the blow had fallen upon him in its might, and it was crushing heart and brain. Whilst *she* was there, he had her still, in part; he knew her every haunt, fancied her every thought. He had made the sacrifice, but still possessed at least a share in the object sacrificed—her neighbourhood, sometimes her presence, always her love, he knew, despite her coldness of manner. Now he had lost her, she was gone—gone for ever to him; and for the first time he fully knew the meaning of that word "sacrifice." What if it had been a presumptuous rejection of God's offered gift? What if that solemn renunciation of the holiest of human ties, there by God's altar, had been something little short of sacrilege?

The cold sweat stood on his forehead at the thought: he fell on his knees. "O God! O Father! have mercy! have mercy!" he murmured; "I meant it for the glory of Thy Church!"

But no ray gleamed upon his dark soul, and he started up and clutched that tear-blistered writing to his heart, and wandered away where the moorland was blackest, and bleakest, and loneliest. On came the gathering clouds, and the chill wind, and the keen driving rain, and beat on his thin form: he never felt it, but wandered on and on, stung by the goading of his pitiless thoughts. He knew not, in his misery, that the Father on whom he had called for mercy—he thought in vain—was bidding nature do her work, and recall the self-deceived, self-martyred man back from his self-exile to his man's place in the fair order of creation: that order which, in this weak vanity, he had thought to make more fair by violation.

He was recalled to himself by the rattle of wheels, and the hail of a loud jolly voice:

"Sakes! Mr. Halstead! ye here o' t' moor, i' a wahld nicht lakh thissen? Tak' a seat by me, ye'se best, lad, and I'se gie ye a lift to Snagton End. Coom, quick's t' word! for t' stours awful."

But, to Squire Tappin's astonishment and dismay, Halstead refused his offer decidedly: he could not bear the thought of friction with his kind yet; the bleak, black moor, and the wild, beating, drenching rain harmonized with his mood far better: he hugged his solitude. Squire Tappin stared at him.

"Weel, a' ye weean't, ye weean't: leastways ye canna say ye'se not had t' chance," and drawing his "haps" closer round him, Squire Tappin urged on his sturdy "Galloway" and left Halstead to his coveted solitude. But the burly Squire looked round, once and again, through the growing darkness at the tall, slender figure he was leaving behind.

"Weel," he said to himself, "ye'se na' o' my mahnd, yoong chap, or ye wouldna' say nay to a good offer, a' mebbe a glass o' sommat hot to warm yer stomach; a' ye bean't seafe o' a fever, or, leastways, o' a stammin' rheumatiz, an' roopin' oop, my name ain't Jerry Tappin. If I wasn't e'en a'most drownded mysel', I'd stop an' tell Daame Hawkins to get t' poor chap a drop o' brandy, an' warm a's bed. But bless oos, if t' lad's a fule, a fule a' mun be."

And Squire Tappin drove past Mrs. Hawkins's cottage, straight on to his own door, and, throwing his reins to a boy, rushed into his kitchen, the wet streaming from him and his haps. At length, Mrs. Tappin and his fair daughters having hastened to relieve him of these drenched garments, and he having chafed his numbed hands over the blaze of the cheerful mingled peat and coal fire, and taken a "good few" sips at the "glass o' summat," not only "hot," but strong, which his affectionate partner handed him, he observed—

"Ye'se none o' ye guess, noo, woa I coom oop wi' out o' t' high moor, a matter o' four, five mile awaa?"

Some guessed one, and some another, whose business might have led him across the moor in such "coorse" weather.

"Noa; I kenned ye'd none o' ye guess 't," said the Squire, "'t weren't none o' they. I offered un a lift, I did, an' a' says, kind o' queer an' absent lahk, 'Noa, I thankee, I prefer walking.' 'Dea ye, my lad,' says I; 'it's more as I dea:' an' I left un to t' enjoyment on't."

"I know, faather," said his youngest daughter, a sharp rosy lassie with black eyes and white teeth; "I know, 't were t' new minister."

"Thee's hit it, Hetty; thee's a sharp 'un, thee is," said her father, slapping her plump shoulder proudly. "'Twere t' minister chap: 'tis my belief 't lad's gone out o's head, an 's clean distraught; he looked as skeary 's a tyke * fresh fra' sucking eggs, when I coom oop wi' un. Ah wonder whether a's gotten home yet!"—for the blast howled loud and dismal, and rattled at the casement, and the rain dashed in angry gusts on the panes outside.

"Lor' sakes! and I wonder what ails un," pondered Mrs. Tappin.

"I should na be surprised if he were taking on about Miss Langley gannin awea sa sudden," said sharp Hetty.

"Miss Langley! Thee dunna mean she gone awaa, lass."

All his womankind answered the Squire's question at once.

"Yes; she started 't morn all in a hurry. T' Chancery suit's decided agean her, an' she mun be off to London. She told Annie Irving to step in an' tell oos, for 'she couldna bide to say good-bye,' Annie said. Mother asked if Mistress Wilson were gone tu, an' Annie said, 'Noa, she were boon to stop till Miss Langley coomed back;' an' Hetty asked whether there werena sad wark wi' t' leave-takings w' t' minister, an' Annie said she kent nought aboot it."

"Ay, but Annie's deep," put in Hetty the sharp. "She kent more as she 'll let on, I' se go bail."

"Whisht, lasses, whisht," interrupted their father, putting up his hands to his ears to defend them from the clamour of so many feminine tongues. "So she's gone awa, poor lass! I'se sore put on to hear 't, I is. What'll auld Jeames Gilmore an' t'others dea wi'out her? She were uncommon soft-hearted to 'em all, she were; an' she were allus desput kahnd along o' auld Jeames."

"Oh, ay! she gone an' seen auld Jeames," said the elder Miss Tappin, "to bid him good-bye! T'were queer she couldna gan nowheres else, I think: for my part, I dunna see no great things i' auld Jeames."

"Then thee's none sa cute as thee mut be, lass," said her father, gravely, "for thee mut see as honest, an' as right oop, an' as godly an auld chap in auld Jeames as ye'd meet wi' i' t' Dales, or out o' em either for that matter. Thee mut

* Cur.

send un sommat for's dinner t'morrow, moother," turning to his wife.

"Ay, faather, I will for sure ; poor auld Jeames!"

"An' I 'll tak 't to un, faather," said Hetty.

"Raight, lass, raight ; thee canna dea better as be lakh Miss Langley, Hetty," said her father, stroking her hair : for Hetty was his favourite child.

"An' thee mut tak 'un t' comforter I knit," added Sally, the elder daughter.

"Raight thee is, lass, also ; an' I canna gie thee no better an example as I deean thy sister."

So Margaret left the blessing of charity behind her when she went away.

Mr. Halstead took neither rheumatism nor cold, nor was he at all "rooped oop," despite Squire Tappin's predictions: his internal excitement was probably too great to allow the drenching he received to have the effect he might have produced upon his physical frame had his feelings been in an ordinarily placid state. But, notwithstanding his immunity from corporeal discomfort on account of his late exposure, Mr. Halstead was perhaps enduring mentally a greater amount of suffering than even a severe illness would have caused him.

Shy and retiring as he had always been, he became still more so now. Few except the sick amongst his parishioners saw him, save on Sundays; he shut himself up almost entirely with his books. He became more rigid than ever in his observances of the fasts and vigils appointed by the Church; sometimes, it was whispered, even going to the church at midnight to pray. Curious neighbours came and asked Mrs. Hawkins if this were true; and if it were true also that he used a bed shaped like a coffin, with a cross at the foot for his eyes to rest upon on waking. But Mrs. Hawkins gave them little information ; she only said her lodger "were oft wakeful o' nights, and might be fain to amuse himself, she couldna say:" as for the coffin-shaped bed, she denied it altogether; and as for the hair shirt which Halstead wore next his skin, and the "discipline" which he carefully locked up out of sight, she could not have told them if she would. Poor Frank! he did his best to keep down what he chose to consider the sinful inclinations of the flesh.

But these rumours did him no good in his parish. Nelly Haggart and Tommy Robinson rose up triumphant and said,—

"Didna we allus tell ye say? Boot ye wouldna tak

heed; an' if ye'se na' been an' let Satan ensnare yere puir souls, along o' his'n, puir lost sinner, it's na your own fault, wese e'en say thatten for ye." So Nelly preached and Tommy prayed, or Tommy preached and Nelly prayed, as the case might be, and dissent rose more rampant than ever. Once Tommy came in whilst Mr. Halstead was visiting a sick man, and without more ado, and despite that gentleman's presence, down went Tommy on his knees, and began to pray in a style which he considered "desput powerful." But it wasn't powerful enough to wrench asunder the grasp of Satan from his supposed prey, Mr. Halstead, who rose hastily and left the cottage. Tommy knew, in spite of his closed eyes, the pained, white, disgusted look which his opponent's face wore as he closed the door behind him; and, said Tommy, "Ah wrastled desput i' prayer for 's puir lost soul, ah did,—an' mebbe 'll repent; 's none can tell t' ways o' saaving graace!"

In prosecution either of his benevolent designs for Halstead's conversion, or in furtherance of his own honour, glory, and renown, by means of what he pretty well knew to be a perfectly safe experiment, Tommy Robinson challenged Halstead to hold a public disputation with him in the long room of the inn of Thwackelton town.

The challenge was worded as follows, barring the orthography, which was peculiar :—

"Thomas Robinson, of the parish of Snagton, does hereby dare and defy Francis Halstead, of the parishes of Snagton and Thwackelton, to meet me and dispute publicly upon that wicked and dangerous invention of Satan (the father of lies), the doctrine which you uphold of regeneration by water in baptism; when I do not doubt but I shall be upholden to beat down the works of the Evil One, and to convince you of the error of your ways, and, maybe, be the honourable instrument of wresting you out of his (Satan's hands) afore it be too late.

"The disputation to be holden on the 20th June, 18—, at the long room at the King's Head Inn, at Thwackelton town,

"I remain yours to command, Thomas Robinson."

Of this modest epistle Halstead took no manner of notice: it was not likely that he should debase his priestly office by replying to the miserable scrawl; so he flung it into the fire in disgust. But neither were Tommy and his friends likely to let so golden an opportunity as this slip through their

fingers. They blazoned it abroad far and wide that Halstead had not dared to accept the challenge, so certain had he been of disgraceful defeat at the hands of his redoubtable antagonist. But of this Halstead knew nothing; he went too little abroad to hear gossip, and such gossip as this was not likely to be brought to him by motherly Mrs. Hawkins, unless she got urged beyond her powers of endurance by his supineness: for she was by no means deficient in the delicacy often observable amongst the lower classes in matters of this kind.

Halstead, however, remarked that the Sunday services and the other ordinances of the church were more and more thinly attended. Perhaps that neglect of the Sunday services was not, upon the whole, to be very much wondered at; for, wrong though it be, most congregations, especially country ones, think much more of the sermon than of the prayers. Now Halstead, partly from knowing too little of the people to be able to interest their feelings, and partly from his principle that his duty was "simply to declare his Master's message" and not trouble himself at all about their feelings, made his sermons more and more abstract and doctrinal. The more his hearers nodded, the more doctrine "high and dry" he mingled with his pulpit oratory; so his hearers took to staying away.

But he flattered himself he was doing his duty fully, and he preached much about "Church" and "Dissent," and "baptism" and "primitive purity of doctrine," and little about the one grand truth of God's great love to sinful man, "in that He gave his only Son to die" for him. Thus he went on feeding his flock with the husks of doctrine and morality, and letting the precious grain, the saving truth, slip through his fingers and away from their hearts.

Still, discontented with what they heard at church, the people kept away from the services; and still they neglected the other rites of the Church. Children in plenty were born in the two parishes, but they were not brought to be baptized. Halstead preached upon the subject in vain; in vain did he tell his flock that the unbaptized man amongst them was "not a Christian, but a heathen man and a heretic; not to be considered within the pale of the church, not a member of Christ, not a child of God, not an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, not able to receive any of the holy rites of the church, as the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or marriage, or even burial. In vain did he tell them, as they

reported it, that "if they were not baptized and confirmed they would not go to heaven." The people said—"It were downright awful to hear un tak' on sa about a wee drop water, as if that could maak any odds whether a body could gan to heaven or no. An' as for being married an' buried—they were married tight enow! an' they didna want to be buried any saafer as their faathers had been afore 'em." And still children were born and still they remained unbaptized. But Halstead was very much in earnest in endeavouring to persuade his people not to persist in denying their children what he justly thought so great a blessing; he therefore forsook for a time his cherished solitude, and went amongst them in their homes.

"Why," said he, "why do you refuse to your children the privilege of being brought and presented to Him who said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not?' It cannot hurt them to be sprinkled with water in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and you do not know how great a blessing it may prove to them in after-life, when, instead of having their own sinful wills to combat, and the temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil to overcome, before they can make up their minds to be baptized, as you say, the holy Mother Church has already collected them in her tender arms, and trained them up to renew for themselves in confirmation the vows their sponsors have hitherto borne for them."

That would have gone down very well, and perhaps done good, if only Halstead had left out what related to the "holy Mother Church;" but somehow there was a smack about that which savoured not of Protestantism to the Dales folk, and they took alarm again. They did not insult him when he called, but they were not glad to see him, and they showed it; so he desisted from his visits, and shut himself up more closely than ever.

But he had not given up the baptismal question; he was screwing himself up to the point of attempting to use what he conceived to be the only means left for him to resort to, namely, the discipline of the Church: he must refuse to bury the unbaptized according to the rubric. One or two examples he thought would be sufficient; and afterwards he could again shut his eyes to the fact that so many of his parishioners did die unbaptized, but did nevertheless receive Christian burial. For, strange to say, in these districts, though a

dissenter may keep religiously away from the church all his life, he always reckons on being laid to take his long sleep in that very consecrated ground which he had heretofore so zealously avoided; and that, too, with the accompaniment of the prayers of that very ordained minister of the Church who has hitherto been to him *anathema maranatha.*

A few Sundays after the aforesaid cessation of his visitation of his flock, Halstead, on rising in the pulpit to deliver his sermon, took for his text the words of the rubric, before the order for the Burial of the Dead: "Here it is to be noted that the office ensuing is not to be used for any that die unbaptized, or excommunicate, or have laid violent hands upon themselves." All eyes, we may be sure, were turned upon him, in wondering expectation of what was to follow. Then he began to tell them, sorrowfully enough, that, as they would not heed his many warnings—spoken, as they had been, in all affection, and with deep yearnings of heart toward them in their error—he felt himself compelled to make use of that godly discipline which the Church commanded her ministers to enforce upon those who would not yield to exhortation and remonstrance; and that henceforward he must refuse to read the burial service over those who should die unbaptized. That sermon made a very strong sensation in the parish. The dissenters were up in arms against him; and even the Church people exclaimed loudly at his want of charity. Still, despite his threat, nobody believed he would carry it out.

Carry it out, however, Mr. Halstead was firmly determined that he would; and carry it out he did: with what effect we shall see. It so happened that the very next death which occurred in the parish was that of an unbaptized person; and, moreover, that person was one in whose behalf he would have given worlds to have recalled his words. But those words had been solemnly spoken, and their purport must be solemnly performed. The person dying unbaptized was no other than old Heseltine, George's father. Now, though Halstead had seen but little of the old man, who was opposed both to him as a "Roman" and a misleader of his darling son, yet George himself had been very useful to Halstead, and a warm friendship had grown up between the two young men, in their respective stations. George had not only attended the evening classes, and helped energetically and well in the Sunday-school, but Mr. Halstead, being interested

by his intelligence and ability, had given him a good deal of private instruction besides on secular subjects, and had lent him many books both doctrinal and otherwise : Halstead had at first wished heartily to make a sort of model churchman and parishioner of George, like the " Richard Nelson " of the " Tracts; " and during the process he had become as sincerely attached to George as George had to him. Therefore, it was with very great pain that Mr. Halstead received the news of old Heseltine's death; partly because he knew George was devotedly attached to his father and that his loss would cause him deep grief; but chiefly because he knew that he himself must infallibly add to the sting of that grief, by the steps he felt compelled to take. He was half inclined to shirk the question, and pretend to be ignorant of the fact that the old man had never been baptized; but then he knew the whole parish was watching him : and what right had he to hesitate to do the work the Church had set before him, for the sake of his own feelings, or even those of his friend? The only thing remaining to be done seemed to be, to see poor George, and soften to him the involuntary disrespect which Halstead felt himself compelled to show to the remains of his dead father, and to beseech him to look upon it as the performance of a most painful duty, wrung forth only by the waywardness of events. With a heavy heart and a lingering step, Halstead set off to the farmhouse. George was alone, in the freshness of his grief, in the sitting-room. The young men wrung each other's hands, but did not speak.

" It's kind o' you to come, sir," said poor George, after a moment, with a faltering voice. Halstead felt that George would not think so if he knew all, and he did not reply. Presently he laid his hand on George's shoulder, and said :

" George, let us pray together ! "

They knelt down in silence, and in beautiful, tender words, Halstead poured out the grief of his soul for his friend, and prayed that he might be comforted with such comfort as no earthly pain could take away; nor even pain yet more difficult to bear than that which was already upon him. Poor George laid his head upon his hands, and wept as softly as a child. When they rose from their knees, he again wrung Halstead's hand : his heart was too full for utterance. It was very hard and bitter to tell the poor fellow for what purpose he had expressly come; and Halstead's heart failed him again and again; but at last, with a faltering, broken

voice, he communicated what he had to tell: even then George did not take it in, and Halstead had to make it plainer.

"Not read the burial service o'er t' poor old man? I dunna understand ye, sir."

"George, you heard what I said in my sermon two Sundays ago, and you know what the Prayer-book says as well as I. You know I *must* do what I said I would do. You yourself would be the first to act so, were it your own case."

"But, sir—oh, yes, I know what the Prayer-book says—but faather was a heart-good man, as godly a man as ever was baptized: he was indeed, sir. It canna mean the like o' him; it *can't*, sir."

"Oh, George, spare me this great pain! I know he was—you think he was—all you say. Your sorrow is like the stab of a knife to my heart; but I cannot go back from my solemnly spoken word."

George's face worked fearfully as the full bearing of this unexpected trial broke in upon him.

"Oh, sir, ye wunno do't! ye canna do't! My faather, my poor old faather," and his manly frame shook with suppressed emotion.

"George, I *must*. It is not as if it were a mere private matter between you and me; then you know how easy a sacrifice would be to me for your sake, George, my *friend;* but you know the eyes of every one are fixed upon me, to see whether I will carry out my threat, now that the blow must fall on some one whom I love—ay, even as I would a brother. George, for the sake of the Church, bear this trial bravely: for *my* sake, *my friend*, be a man, and bear it bravely!"

But George *was* a man, and like a man he had loved his father alive, and no breath or thought of disrespect could he bear to be shown to his memory when dead. He seemed scarcely to hear Halstead's appeal: he raised his head from his hands, where it had been resting, with a strange, dark, stern look upon his fine features.

"Then, Mr. Halstead, I understand you clearly," he said, speaking with singular distinctness, and even refinement; "you refuse to read the burial service over my poor father, sir?"

"George, how *can* I do otherwise? Judge for me yourself. He can be laid to rest in the holy ground; but more I *cannot* say," said Halstead, in a voice broken by emotion.

"Then," said George, rising cold and stately, "the Lord be judge betwixt you and me this day."

"George, George," exclaimed Halstead; but George's face was rigid as marble: he waved his hand with a sort of stern dignity for Halstead to be silent.

"I cannot," he said, "believe in a Church which can teach a son to show disrespect to a father's memory, for the sake of a few drops of water and a few words spoken by a priest—that's, maybe, a bad man—when that father was a righteous man in the sight of God. My father *shall* have Christian burial, Mr. Halstead, if I carry his poor body on my own back to Kirton Church, and beg the minister upon my knees to read the burial service over him."

George turned away, and walked, stern and stately, to the door of the room where his father lay.

Halstead started up, exclaiming—

"Do not part from me thus, George;" but George passed on in the desolate majesty of his filial love and sorrow, and shut himself in with his dead.

From that day a marked and most unhappy change was visible in George Heseltine's conduct: he went no more to church or Sunday-school. Mr. Halstead saw nothing of him at his house, and if he chanced to come upon him out of doors, George avoided him, escaping as if it were from a wild beast. Even time, which so strangely soon obliterates the sharpness of first impressions, seemed to fail in its usual effect in this instance; for days and weeks, and even months, rolled on, and did not bring the young man back to his former habits.

By degrees, too, a great change might have been seen to come over another of our acquaintances. This was no other than pretty Annie Irving. The reader may have inferred that there was a little shy kindness existing between her and George Heseltine, even before Miss Langley's departure; consequently it was a great consolation to her to receive George's sympathy with and participation in her sorrow at that event; and as George took care to keep Miss Langley's flowers in as first-rate order during her absence as if she had been there to thank him for his cares, Annie's opportunities of receiving the said sympathy were not unfrequent. Somehow or other there was often something which demanded her attention in the garden, on the evenings when George was at work there; and there was often a talk as they walked home

from church, and a lingering pressure of hands over the back gate in the twilight when they parted. They had had one of those long, pleasant talks on the Sunday before George's father was seized with the first symptoms of the short illness which terminated in his death. George had been speaking with great affection about his father, and there had been a short silence, and then George said, *àpropos* of nothing apparently—

"Mebbe t' ways o' an' old chap like faather 'ud worrit you, Annie?"

"You must think very bad o' me, George."

"Noa, I don't think bad o' you, Annie; but some o' you young lasses get out o' patience wi' t' whimsies o' old folk."

"And how do you think I could bide to think o' getting old myself, if I hadn't any love and respect for old age?"

George looked admiringly at the bright blue eyes and sunny hair of the rosy maiden beside him, as if he didn't think there was much cause for her to think of getting old just yet; but he said, "I like to hear you say that, Annie," very tenderly. Then he walked on, pondering silently, beside her; and she pondered, too; and somehow, though very little more was said by either, both felt, when they separated with that lingering shake of the hand, and that silent, soft eye language, that they had had a very pleasant walk indeed. Annie went up to take her bonnet off with a happy flurry in her little heart, and a smile on her pretty blushing face; and the dimples deepened on her rosy cheek and round white chin, as she took a shy, pleased glance at the little glass which hung on the clean white wall over the washing-stand in her bedroom.

The next thing she heard respecting George, was, that he was in great anxiety about his father, who was dangerously ill. Annie could not know that George was in trouble without being in trouble herself; and she was so dull and absent all day, that Mrs. Wilson could not help observing her distraction: and once, when Annie did something very stupid, she exclaimed in surprise—

"Why, what ails the lass? she's quite lost her head!" It was a great relief to Annie, when, in the evening, Mrs. Wilson sent her to the shop, and as she was starting, said, "By the way, Annie, it wouldn't be far out of your way,

just to call and ask after old Heseltine, and who George has got to nurse him ; George is but a lad to have such a charge."

When Annie knocked, George himself opened the door. She saw by his red eyes and pale face that there was no hope, and she was afraid to ask. But George knew the question that was trembling on her tongue, and replied to it in a hoarse, husky voice—

"He's going, Annie," and he leaned his head against the door-post in a dejected, heart-broken sort of way that went to Annie's heart. She was afraid to trouble his sacred sorrow with anything she could say; but after a little silence, during which her eyes filled and ran over, she murmured—

"I am heart-sorry for you, George."

George felt thankful for the comfort of her sympathy.

"Thank you, dear Annie," he said, "thank you," and he held out his hand. Annie put hers into it quietly: he pressed it fervently. "Pray for me to-night, Annie," he murmured, in a sort of choked voice.

"Yes, I will," whispered Annie, with the tears silently streaming down her face. Some of them fell on George's hand, which still held hers locked in its clasp. He raised his face from the door-post and looked at her.

"God bless you, Annie," he said.

"God bless you, George," sobbed Annie; and they wrung each other's hands. He went back to his father's bedside, and she to her evening task. She kept her promise faithfully that night, and many were the tears which streamed, as in her simple prayers she named the name which had long held the foremost place in them; and manifold were the blessings which she besought upon the head of him who was now all in all to her.

When the news of the old man's death arrived, Annie cried, and longed to express to George the sympathy and love with which her heart was running over, but no opportunity arose for her to see him. Then she heard of Mr. Halstead's refusal to read the burial service over his father's corpse; and church-woman though Annie was, her heart burned with indignation at what seemed to her the cruelty of the case; so again she longed to see George. Then she heard how, by paying the double fees, he had secured for his father's remains, in a neighbouring parish, that burial in consecrated

ground, and the reading of that service, upon which the dissenting Dalesmen set such store. Still she knew that George would grieve that his father did not lie amongst his own people. But George did not come to her, as in her fond foolish heart she had dreamed he would, directly he was free to go about his daily business. He did not then prize the consolation she fancied she could give him, so much as she thought; and the simple girl cried her fond little heart nearly out at the thought.

Whether it were so, or whether George was in no mood for receiving consolation, certain it is, that he did not go near Annie for some time after the funeral; and when he did, there was a something half fierce, half bitter, about his manner that frightened her, and made her forget all she meant to have said to him. Even the tenderness for herself which still showed through his wayward mood, had in it something of the same wild fierceness which seemed to characterize his grief. He did not ask her that one soft question which Annie had half-fancied he would; but he took her hand, and gazed down into her eyes with a deep, burning glance, which terrified and bewildered her: it seemed to have as much suspicion as love in it. But she was fascinated, and could not withdraw her eyes from his: he drew her towards him, and Annie panted breathless, thinking he was going to speak; but a sharp spasm, as if of pain or anger, passed over his brow, he pressed a hot, hasty kiss upon her forehead, and left her.

After that she did not see him for some time; and all that while poor Annie passed in great tribulation, worrying that poor little heart of hers with surmises about all sorts of terrible things that she could have done to offend him. When she did see him again, he was not wild and fierce, as he had been before; but the way he went on did not give her much more comfort than if he had been. He seemed in high spirits, and attempted a sort of familiarity and freedom with her, which made her angry; she spoke sharply, and was half inclined to quarrel with him, but didn't, though she made her pillow wetter than ever with tears that night. The next time she saw him he was as far from attempting any freedom towards her as she could desire; but then he was cold and distant, and that made her quite as unhappy as his former conduct. Sometimes George would seem to be visited with fits of wild, impetuous tenderness and bitter self-reproach; after that, he was sure to be distant and freezing, or rudely

familiar. Altogether, poor Annie grew perfectly wretched in consequence of her *quasi* lover's freaks of humour. She lost her colour, and her happy, sunny smile; she no longer carolled blithely over her work; and her little feet no longer went tripping so daintily over the fragrant meadow thyme and moorland heather of the church path, where George no longer walked beside her. Poor Annie! long fits of silent musing, only broken by deep, struggling sighs, took the place of her pleasant snatches of country song; and a tear often dimmed the brightness of her blue eye, and trickled slowly over the round cheek, where the dimples no longer played at hide and seek with the smiles. Her duties became a burden to her, and, while the neighbours gossipped and shook their heads, even placid Mrs. Wilson was struck by the alteration in poor Annie's looks and manner, and gradually made up her mind to give the girl a long "talking to" about the duty of giving up all thought of a graceless ne'er-do-well, such as it was reported George was fast becoming.

Reports were beginning now to get abroad that young Heseltine was no longer so select in his choice of associates, and in his places of resort, as he used to be. It was said that he was not unfrequently to be seen at the Stag (the village public-house) with companions of no very creditable description. One young man in particular, Joseph Robson by name, was reported to be inseparable from George; and by all accounts, a less desirable companion than this same Joe Robson could scarcely have been found. He was not an inhabitant of the Dales; indeed, nobody knew whence he came, what he was, or even whether his name really was Robson or not. But he was well known in both Snagton and Thwackelton, for he was often there; sometimes with a pack, sometimes with no ostensible object. People said that Sir Henry Aston's game suffered considerably by his visits. He was often to be seen amongst a certain set of *mauvais sujets*, who frequented the tap of the Stag, or the King's Head at Thwackelton, and with whom he was very popular; for he could sing low comic songs, and make what appeared to them wonderfully eloquent speeches, containing plenty of fine sounding words and abundance of infidel sentiments, which Mr. Robson had probably picked up at second-hand elsewhere, and now passed off upon the stolid brains of the rustics as something particularly new and original.

Robson was, however, by no means an ordinary personage,

at least in those districts, and he was a considerable favourite with the lasses of the Dales; for he had a smooth, soft, flattering tongue, and a handsome person: he was very dark, his hair and whiskers were black and soft, and curly as silk; his eyes, too, were intensely black: he looked more like an Italian than an Englishman, but he spoke English with a decidedly native touch of cockneyism. In person he was slender, but well knit and proportioned; and was said to be, if not extremely strong, yet exceedingly agile, and as lithe and slippery as an eel.

Strange as it may seem, George certainly had allowed this man to acquire a degree of influence over him; this accounted in great measure for those parts of his conduct which to Annie appeared so mysterious. Robson had, in time past, made repeated efforts to become intimate with him; but, prosperous in his circumstances, happy in his love, and proud of his high place in Mr. Halstead's opinion, George had turned a deaf ear to his artfully thrown-out sceptical notions, or loose and immoral suggestions. But, in an evil hour, the tempter came upon him whilst he was yet in the first bitterness of his mingled grief and anger, after the death of his father and Halstead's refusal to bury the old man. It was easy under the guise of sincere sympathy to approach the open-hearted, unsuspicious young man. It was easy to insinuate into his excited mind—at the opening left by Halstead's mistaken zeal—a doubt as to the truth of the Church which could deny to a Christian man the rites of Christian burial; for George's mind was too heated to perceive his own inconsistency in making such a point of having the service of the Church of England read over a man who had never been a member of it. He bitterly resented the fancied irreverence shown to his dead father, and felt that, in doing so, he was performing a filial duty to that father's memory.

One doubt successfully introduced, made room for another in poor George's unsettled state of mind, until the whole fabric of his faith in God and man seemed to be shaken. He had been longing to go and pour his sorrow into Annie's loving ear as soon as he was at liberty after the funeral; but Robson had, for some reason of his own, contrived in a measure to check the flow of even that spring of comfort in his heart, by insinuating that, of course, staunch Church-woman as she was, Annie approved of Mr. Halstead's proceedings with regard to him; and George, with that unhappy facility for being

influenced by others which was the weakest point in his character, had put off his visit. Dissatisfied with himself and others, depressed and unhappy, George soon rather sought Robson than was sought by him; for he was wretched when alone. Then one luckless day, he was induced by his *quasi* friend just to take a glass of something to "keep his spirits up." Led away by the pleasant excitement thus produced, he was enticed to repeat the inspiriting draught; and being unused to stimulants, a small quantity sufficed to render him as riotous, mischievous, and mad as his companion could have desired; a little more, to intoxicate him helplessly. He awoke the next morning to the full physical discomfort consequent upon the last night's excess, and to the miserable mental consciousness of having disgraced and degraded himself, and sunk very low in his own esteem.

Unfortunately the enemy who had tempted him into evil was at hand to laugh at his remorse, and bid him "get up and dip his head in a bucket of water, and take a hair of the dog that had bit him, like a man, and not lie there all day like a muff and a milksop." And so, once fallen, and having let go his hold of that which alone can make man strong against himself, George was led on from one sin to another, and taught to drown thought in dissipation. Hence it was that his alternating fits of remorse, shame, love, and relapse into sin, made his conduct towards Annie appear so strangely capricious. At one moment he would fancy that all women were as unworthy of respect as those with whom he was but too often in the habit of associating; at another, he would feel that, sullied as he was, he dared not approach his former love, so high above him she seemed to stand in the awe of her maiden purity.

But not even upon Annie did the change in George's conduct and habits make a more grievous impression than upon Mr. Halstead. We have seen that he had suffered himself to become, first, deeply interested in, and then attached to, this young man; who had afforded the fairest promise of becoming so valuable a member of society, and so useful a coadjutor to himself. And now that Margaret was gone, he had clung more to George than ever, in the absence of all other sympathy. Thus, then, to find so sad a change in the young man, resulting apparently from his own deed—a deed of purest self-denial and devotion to his duty, as he had deemed it—was a bitter cup to poor Halstead, and he drained

it to the dregs ; for, in the morbid state of mind to which he had partly reduced himself, partly been reduced by circumstances, he brooded over it by day and by night, until it came to assume a gigantic appearance in his mind. He looked upon it as a consequence, possibly of his own previous shortcomings in his duty, and felt as if he must bear George's sin for him. Poor Frank ! bitterly he suffered, lying prostrate for hours in prayer, when all other eyes were closed in wholesome sleep, and mercilessly lacerating his flesh with the discipline, often blood-stained now, which he fancied it requisite to apply to bring his body into subjection to the spirit ; till at last, so weak did his ill-used body become, that it seemed a question whether it would much longer serve as a vestment to his spirit.

Halstead was thin to attenuation ; his eyes looked unnaturally large, and his usually pale cheek had, at times, a hectic flush, which was anything but prophetic of health : added to this, he had contracted an ugly cough in his midnight excursions to the church, and his long prostrations ; and his tendency to stoop had increased decidedly. Altogether poor Frank was in a very bad way, both of body and mind. At last he took it into his head that he was not fit to continue his ministrations in the parishes of Snagton cum Thwackelton. The cold, averted looks of his parishioners went to his heart.

He had always continued to visit old James Gilmore, however, when he went nowhere else, for there existed a tacit bond of union between them, none the less strong that it was never alluded to. On the first visit that Halstead had made him after Margaret's departure, old James had said—

"Ye should na ha' let her gan awea, lad ; yese ne'er happen o' sooch another. I thote ye were seafe to meak 't oop together, I did."

But Halstead had seemed so painfully embarrassed and so hurt that, with native delicacy, the old man had never alluded to the subject again ; but he had always been ready with his—

"I'se desput glad to see ye, lad," and his hearty shake of the hand. Yet Halstead began now to imagine that even his old friend James looked strangely and coldly upon him. That was the last feather—he could bear no more ; and he made up his mind that he ought to resign the curacy : but it seemed only right, before doing so, to mention the matter to

Mr. Latham, by whose intercession he had been appointed to it. Halstead had altogether ceased to write to Mr. Latham of late, and he felt a difficulty about beginning, and put it off from time to time. At last, however, he wrote. It was about the middle of March, rather more than twelve months after that conversation with Margaret which had wrought such a change in their respective positions, and had been the first step in the series of acts of self-denial—and perhaps self-delusion—which had led Halstead by degrees into his present position.

CHAPTER XIV.

PISCATORIAL.

It was a sunny spring morning when the cheery sunbeams, so additionally pleasant because of late so unfrequent, came dancing down into the room, glancing on the bright knives and spoons and glistening china; and making mysterious wavery reflections on the walls and ceiling, that set the children wondering, and hiding, by turns, all the reflecting objects on the table, to see where they could come from; so that a great shout of delight arose when papa suddenly popped his hand over a cup of steaming coffee, from whence a mimic sun was sending up the light that so puzzled the young ones. Mr. and Mrs. Latham were seated at their pleasant early breakfast, surrounded by their merry young family. There were the two elder girls, with sweet, fair, gentle faces, like their mother's, wanting not in bright, mirthful intelligence, and the four younger children, with their rosy, shiny, happy, healthy faces.

It was a birthday and a holiday, and the young folks were very hilarious; sweet, motherly Mrs. Latham, with her blue eyes and pleasant features, was looking on with a smile; while broad-browed Mr. Latham, with a very perceptible tinge of iron grey on his hair, such a look of benevolence on his pleasant, plain face, and a youthful, happy light in his dark grey eyes, was foretelling to them, with great minuteness of detail, all the misfortunes which should happen to them in the course of their holiday walk with him.

"First," said he, "we shall go down the meadows, where

it's very boggy; then Fred, as it's his birthday, will stick tight in the mud."

"I shan't, father," remonstrated Fred, gravely, with his mouth full of bread and butter.

"Yes, you will, Fred: but only for a little while; for Farmer Evans' cow, seeing your dilemma, will come and give you a poke behind with her horns, and so help you out."

"Father! what nonsense," broke in Charlie.

"Yes; and then he'll be wet, so I must hang him up on a thorn, by the waistband of his trousers, to dry, you know; so he'll be settled."

Fred having emptied his mouth, and stared for some time with his big, blue eyes at his father, at length comprehended the joke, slipped down from his stool, and came to give "Father a beating, for being a naughty man to tell such stories." Father pretended to be very much hurt by the beating, but went on, with Freddy between his knees,—

"Then Luey will just be going across the little plank-bridge over the ditch, when Mrs. Evans' great white gander will come, and take hold of her frock and pull her in; but that won't matter much, she's such a little goose, she'll take to the water easy, and swim away with him!" (Here Luey slipped down from her chair, and came to bestow her playful punishment upon father for his romancing propensities.) "So she'll be settled, too; and as for Harriet"—— but here the post-bag was brought in.

"Oh, father, do tell us what'll happen to Harriet!"

"Oh, Harriet will be caught under the chin by a gossamer, and a great ferocious fellow of a gossamer spider will be just rushing up to devour her, as I come to the rescue, only just in time." The post-bag was opened amidst great laughter at Harriet's fate.

"Father, father! and what will happen to Charlie and you?" cried the children.

"Well, children, I'm not sure; but when we all come home, *so* hungry, to dinner, mother will say—'Dear, dear! I'm very sorry! I quite forgot the plum-pudding!'" Here Mr. Latham began to open his letters, and Mrs. Latham said,—

"Hush, hush! let father read his letters quietly." None of the happy young folks dreamed of disobeying her direction, but stole quietly off to their story-books or their playthings. Mr. Latham opened one letter after another, and as he read them he passed each on to his wife, who read them too;

making no comment as she did so, but waiting to compare notes presently. The third letter Mr. Latham opened seemed to cause him so much uneasiness that Mrs. Latham looked up, and, observing his contracted, pained brow, she laid her hand upon his knee.

"What is it, Henry?" she said, anxiously.

"That foolish boy Frank Halstead wants to throw up his curacy, and to throw himself into the arms of Rome; judging by what he says."

Mrs. Latham got up, and coming behind her husband, read over his shoulder. It was a miserable letter, bespeaking hope long deferred, and unsuccessful effort, and heart-crushed despondency, and a morbid longing to throw off a too heavy responsibility. He said that the worse than lack of success which his most zealous efforts had met with, had convinced him that he was not fitted for the charge of Snagton cum Thwackelton; if, indeed, for the care of any parish: that he was convinced not only that he was doing no good, but that absolute and terrible harm was resulting, even from his most prayerfully studied actions, and that he felt it was his manifest duty to resign his curacy. As to his future intentions he spoke with utter despondency; his existence, he said, was unendurable with his present feelings.

When both had read to the end, Mr. Latham looked up in Mrs. Latham's face.

"What's to be done, Alice?" he asked. She only, in reply, said, "Poor fellow!" and remained leaning on his shoulder, looking abstractedly into the fire; while Mr. Latham echoed "Poor fellow!" very sadly indeed, and looked into the fire too. People generally do look into the fire (if there is one) when they are in a perplexity, as if there was counsel in it. Perhaps Mrs. Latham found some, for presently she said,—

"I was thinking, Henry—it would be very inconvenient, certainly—but couldn't you run down and see him?"

Mr. Latham mused.

"It *might* be of use," he said; "but then about the duty?"

"I think you might manage that; Mr. Eden and Mr. Roberts both owe you a duty: and don't you think, if you can do any good to the poor boy, it would be better even to drop the service altogether, for once, rather than run the risk of missing the opportunity, and letting him, as you say, go over to Rome?"

"Certainly I do, my dear," said Mr. Latham, still musing: they were both silent for a short time. Presently his face began to clear up from its look of uncertainty, into an expression of cheerful decision much more in keeping with its strongly marked features. Mrs. Latham saw and understood; she replied to his face, for she knew it by heart:

"Perhaps you might induce him to come back with you, and stay with us a little while," she said; "he used to like the children."

"I will try what can be done, at all events," replied Mr. Latham.

"How soon can you manage to start?" asked his wife.

"The sooner the better," he replied: "there seems to be no time to be lost."

"There is a London train which passes Enderby Station at a quarter to six in the morning," said Mrs. Latham.

"That will do very well; I should be in town by half-past eight, and probably catch the early Northern train. Can you have my things ready by to-morrow morning, wife?"

"Yes, certainly. Will you write to Mr. Eden for next Sunday? or shall I?"

"I will, my dear. Oh! I forgot; I must not spoil the children's holiday walk; they're all ready, I see. Will you write then?" and Mr. Latham looked up in his wife's face again with a grateful, affectionate smile, for she was "sage counsel in cumber;" and he had proved the value of her quiet suggestions, rather than advice, often enough to be perfectly aware of it. She returned his smile with a look of confiding love, and then she went to her letter-writing and her domestic business, and he to take his children for the glorious holiday walk. What a walk it was!

"Father is all our own to-day," cried the children; and what a life father had of it, to be sure! for there was Freddy attempting to "swarm" up one leg, and Charlie the other, and Harriet and Lucy each hanging on to an arm. Having concluded these demonstrations of delight, they set off: they must needs run hand in hand down all the hills, in order to get a start up the next; then there were races with father, and father was somehow always beaten, and left behind, to the great delight of the party. And there were ditches to be jumped over, or father was to carry them over, one on his arms and one on his shoulder, and come back for the others.

A terrible noise the party made—but what wonder—father was the biggest baby of them all; for he said so!

Pleasant it was to see the hearty share the country folks they met took in the merriment of the happy party—pleasant to hear the kindly greeting that passed between them and their pastor—pleasanter still to listen to the murmured blessing that some of them invoked on him, as they looked after the good man and his little ones, and blessed them too for his sake. For Mr. Latham was beloved like a father in his parish: for his had been a ministration of many years' standing: he was now uniting the children of young couples whom he had married when he first came into the parish. But a long steady course of fervent piety towards God and love towards man, of a conscientious but kind discharge of the duties of his sacred office, of constant unvarying friendship and benevolence; all this had endeared Mr. Latham to his people, until they were ready "to rise up and call him blessed."

And gentle Mrs. Latham, how she too was beloved! They blessed her in the cottages where sickness or sorrow had come; in the new homes when the young married folks remembered her motherly advice; sometimes, even in the families where sin had blighted a daughter's fame, and that gentle woman had been the first to say, "You may yet be forgiven, and recover your place amongst us, if only you come back now to the paths of virtue." How they loved them both, so that their highest praise always ended thus, "She's just fit for him, and he's just fit for her; and they're just fit for one another, bless them!"

Thus loving and beloved, engaged in one quiet round of useful labour and untiring benevolence, equally healthy and active in body and mind, lived Mr. Latham the clergyman: no whit ashamed to be a man, because he was a minister of the Church; no whit the less a holy man of God, because he *was* a man, with human ties, with human hopes, with active mind and energetic hands to work in human things.

There was a tremulous softness in the good man's deep voice, which Mrs. Latham only understood, when, in the family devotions that night, he prayed for "all them that be in error," that God would "show them the light of his truth." And the wife lifted up her heart with her husband's in supplication for poor Frank. Doubtless those supplications were heard, and in due time answered, by Him with whom "the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much."

The next morning Mr. Latham set off for the North Frank Halstead was beyond measure astonished and delighted, when, late that evening, his old master walked quietly into his room! He started up—

"Mr. Latham! Is it possible?" And then he shook hands with him again and again, exclaiming—"Now, this *is* kind." And a bright colour came up into his thin face at the pleasure of once more seeing his old and highly valued friend.

"Well, to tell you the truth, my dear fellow, your letter perplexed me a good deal, and my wife suggested that I should come and talk over the subject of it with you; and, as I have a great respect for her opinion, why—here I am, Frank, my boy!" and again they shook hands.

"Mrs. Latham has rendered me a kinder service even than usual," said Halstead; though a painful blush began to steal over his features, at the thought of that "talking the matter over." There was much that, valuing Latham's counsel highly as he did, it would yet be intensely painful to talk over; still to have such companionship in his, of late, oppressive solitude was cheering. Frank grew quite merry as he sat by whilst Latham took his supper, and they talked over old times and old friends.

"By the way, have you seen Aston?" asked Mr. Latham.

"Yes; he was down here last August for the grouse shooting."

"What a pity it is he's so lazy. There's the making of a man—a real good one too—in that fellow; and yet he's contented to cumber the earth with his six feet of humanity, just as inertly as a respectable log of the same dimensions would do, barring the power of locomotion. I always think of him as a fine piece of unappropriated material—as one of nature's unclaimed dividends, in fact. I was in hopes you would do much towards putting a soul into his clay, or stirring up the one that lies at the bottom of the mud somewhere."

"I!" exclaimed Halstead.

"Yes, you: how did you get on with him?"

"Why, I saw almost nothing of him; we exchanged calls, and that was all."

"All! how was that? Both young men, both able-bodied, both fond of manly exercises; one with a soul, and the other with something that might be roused into one. I thought you would have been as 'thick as pickpockets,' and have done each other, in your respective ways, a world of

good. How's this?" and Latham looked hard in Frank's face.

There he read asceticism, morbid self-martyrdom, sequestration from his kind: but again came that painful blush, and he withdrew his eyes, and went on, talking gaily about all sorts of quaint subjects; and Frank became merry again. They sat up late, talking; and parted finally with another hearty shake of the hand.

When he betook himself to the little room where Mrs. Hawkins had hastily made up a bed for him, tempting enough though it looked with its clean lavender-scented sheets, Mr. Latham still sat up for some time thinking about what was to be done for poor Frank. He had a pretty fair notion of the causes which had been at work.

"Those wretched puseyite—tractarian—what shall I call them?—pre-Reformationite notions of an obsolete hierarchy have done the mischief," said he to himself. "I had hoped that the sturdy pugilism of dissent here, would have knocked down such mere ghosts of dead doctrine as those Oxford-begotten ideas of his. It has all gone wrong; everything has gone the contrary way to what it ought to have done!" and even in his grief and perplexity, a whimsical light stole into Mr. Latham's eyes, at the thought of his long-headed schemes having jostled each other.

After much musing, he came to the conclusion that his best plan of treatment with poor Frank would be, to endeavour to re-arouse, by any means in his power, the associations of past and happier years, and with them a healthier tone of thought and feeling. He saw in the young man's extreme emaciation, and in the feminine whiteness and delicacy of his long, thin fingers, that all sorts of exercise had been laid aside in his neglect of his bodily health.

And if the bodily health is neglected, and doesn't take care of itself—as is evidently the case here—what's to be predicated of the mind?" mused Mr. Latham. "What can be expected from the actions of a man who never allows a tolerable supply of oxygen to get into his lungs, to redden his blood and drive the blue devils away? At all events, it shall not be my fault if poor Frank doesn't get a good dose of that said gas to-morrow. Poor Frank! poor Frank!" he repeated to himself, pitifully: and when he knelt down for his usual prayers, he prayed long and earnestly that help might be speedily sent to the soul that was struggling in so

much darkness and sorrow: and should it please God to make himself an humble instrument in recalling his beloved young friend to a healthier and happier tone of mind, that the ways and means might be placed within his reach, and that he might be guided in the use of them. Then, having commended his earthly treasures, his wife and little ones, to the same heavenly keeping, Mr. Latham had hardly laid his head on his pillow before he was sound asleep. Frank Halstead meanwhile tossed on a sleepless pillow; rose in the cold for his midnight vigil, and his long, seemingly unanswered prayer for help and guidance; and finally, having laid himself down once more, slept a heavy, deathlike, exhausted sleep. He slept till long after his friend was up, and cheeringly making acquaintance with Mrs. Hawkins, and her daughter Sally, and the wiry-haired terrier, Bob; a respectable, aged quadruped, which had, she told him, belonged to her late husband, and which wagged its stump of a tail, and cocked one cropped remnant of an ear knowingly, but did not stir at Mr. Latham's enticing invitations to accompany him for a walk.

"What a dear, beautiful man, sure!" said Mrs. Hawkins.

"Wha, moother! I think he's raight ugly!" said her daughter.

"Mebbe 'tain't joost beauty like," rejoined Mrs. Hawkins; "'tis t' loovesomeness o' 's look; and sooch a grand, soft voice, a' has: sort o' like music."

"Ay, mother! 'tis joost a loovesome faace a' has," said the girl, "an' a's voice does kind o' sink into ye soft like, when a' speaks: boot a's raight ugly i' t' faace."

"Oh, thee's thinking o' that ne'er-do-well, good-for-note chap Joe Robson, Sally; an' thee better ha' note to dea wi' un, lass, I can tell thee! he's nobbut note, he is."

Sally coloured, and took herself off with the breakfast things quickly enough.

It was a beautiful morning, and immediately after breakfast Latham proposed a walk to Halstead; who, languid and heavy, with a dark, leaden circle under each sunken eye, assented to the proposition solely to please his active friend. Being clergymen, they naturally took the path towards the church; this led them along by where the little winding river was glittering with a merry sparkle on its brown waters, through the already budding trees. Mr. Latham's ear caught

the babbling music of its shallows, as they trilled over their pebbly bed, before his eye informed him of the presence of those—to sportsmen—most desirable alternations of "stream," and "pool;" and when he came upon one of these latter dark, placid "woodland mirrors," and beheld the widening circles caused by the emergence and re-subsidence of a leaping trout, he exclaimed, gleefully—

"Why, Frank! what a glorious stream for the fly! Not tried it, do you say? Why, Frank!—why Francis Halstead—not tried it! Let's go back, now, this minute, and get your rod! Not tried it! Why, man alive! I'd give something handsome off my nett value, to turn such a stream as that through Enderby! Not tried it!—Well, that *is* what I call throwing away the blessings of Providence! Come along home; do, man, and get your rod."

Frank laughed.

"Well," said he, "I didn't take that view of the case before, certainly—but I'm not at all sure I can find my rod. I believe I did bring it with me, to be sure; but where Mrs. Hawkins has put it, I have not the remotest idea, nor she either, by this time, probably."

Latham lifted up his hands and eyes for all reply to this confession, and hastened on towards Halstead's lodgings.

"Mrs. Hawkins! Mrs. Hawkins!" cried he, in that rich, musical voice of his; "please to find Mr. Halstead's fishing-rod, now directly; for I've a great fancy for some trout for my dinner to-day."

Mrs. Hawkins "were throng wi' t' beaking," and up to her elbows in flour. She appeared presently, wiping them with her apron, and looking somewhat "put about." But Mr. Latham would hear of no delay.

"Never mind the flour, Mrs. Hawkins," said he, "the bread will take no harm, I know, whilst you are doing a kindness."

Mr. Latham had a wonderful way of turning the wills of others to the bent of his own, seemingly without an effort; and either those few words, or the manner of uttering them, or the voice, or perhaps all three, so worked on Mrs. Hawkins' heart, that she left her bread to Sally, and went with a pleasant smile on her face up to some remote lumber-chamber, when they soon heard her knocking about the invalided chairs, disabled tables, empty boxes, &c., there assembled, in the strenuous prosecution of her search. In the meantime

Mr. Latham set Halstead to work to hunt up his fly-books and lines. Cupboards and desks were ransacked to no purpose; at last Latham set to work himself, at a hitherto unopened closet, wherein lay piles of sermons.

"I doubt if you'll find anything there but theology," said Frank.

"Nothing like trying;" so down went Latham on his knees, and down went the pile, remorselessly, in an indiscriminate heap on the floor. Then from underneath, out came old mathematical papers, essays, packets of examination papers, notes, &c.

At last came out a pair of boxing-gloves, never used since the days of Eton. Latham quietly drew them on, threw himself suddenly into a "sparring" attitude, and made Frank put himself upon the defensive, in a style which would have done credit to old times. This made both laugh heartily: it was long since Frank had laughed such a laugh as that before. Latham felt in his heart that he was not incurable, and a glow of hope thrilled through him.

"He'll do yet. There's a long way between him and Rome yet!" said he to himself, with a thankful heart; and down he went on his knees again, and set to with renewed ardour. Out came all manner of lumber—literary lumber, college lumber, clerical lumber; at last, out from the very depths, came a mouldy fly-book, a reel, and a tangle of line, gut, and fish-hooks all as rusty as they could be.

"Hurrah! here we have him!" shouted Latham, striding in triumph over the heap of *débris* he had produced.

Just then in came Mrs. Hawkins with a rod-case in her hand.

"I can't find note o' t' maak o' t' thing, unless ——" she began, when her eye caught the pile of litter, tangle, and rubbish on the floor, and she stood aghast, the words suspended on her tongue, the rod-case in her hand.

"My good Mrs. Hawkins, that is the very identical 'maak!' my obligation to you is boundless! Never mind the litter, I'll see to that. All success to your bread! may it grow light in the oven as you have made my heart in my bosom."

Mrs. Hawkins' rueful gaze over the vast pile of litter changed into a smile, and she disappeared into the kitchen.

Meanwhile, at the appearance of the rod-case, Latham had flung the fly-book to Frank, and was himself busily fitting in the joints of the rod, and using his silk handkerchief to rub

off the mildew from the dark, polished wood and brass fittings. At last it was complete in two pieces. Latham threw open the window and protruded the slender, tapering end, in order to effect the last junction in the middle: a very dainty rod it was, certainly. He grasped the butt, and waved the implement out of the window, with a look of great satisfaction, as the pliant, elastic wand described graceful bends and curves, whirring in the air.

"Upon my word, friend Halstead, your back deserved another "maak" of rod from this, for having allowed such a stream as that, and such a tool as this, to be neglected so long."

Here Frank came to him with a very rueful face, holding out the fly-book as he used to hold the book when he didn't know his lesson of old. There were the flies, it was true, but the hooks were rusted into the flannel, and the hackles were moth-eaten and maimed. Latham looked at them, and shook his head.

"To think," said he, "of a fellow wasting things in this way! not only his own health and his own carcase till half of him's gone—evaporated—gone to brew thunderstorms, or fevers, or something unpleasant; but as if that wasn't enough, to waste good flies like these!"

After much search he succeeded in finding one or two that were just usable. Then the endless tangle of line, that had run off the reel a bit at a time, as things had been drawn out of the closet, had to be got on again. At last this, too, was accomplished, and, with tackle complete, and the litter tumbled into the closet again anyhow, off they started to the river, Mr. Latham flogging the air with the whip-like wand which he carried, letting out yards of line, and making wheels and curves innumerable in the whizzing air, and then reeling in again, all with huge satisfaction.

The sky had meantime clouded a little, with breeze enough to put a ripple on the pools, but it was still warm—a first-rate day for the fly. Latham's first throw produced a rise; he hooked his fish, played it a moment, and then landed it, leaping and struggling, and twisting and twirling, with its silver belly and gold-spangled brown sides, on the bank; it was but a little fellow, only fit to throw in again. Another throw or two brought another rise, and Latham landed a better fish. He saw with secret satisfaction, that a glow of interest and excitement was kindling on Frank's wan cheek. They were not far from the mill-dam now.

"Ah!" said Latham, peering under the overhanging banks of the deepening stream, "these be the dwellings of the patriarchs. Let's have a try here."

He made several unsuccessful throws, and the fly glided slowly on towards the sluice. At last a very neat throw dropped, down-like, on the water, just under the dark shadow of the projecting root of an old tree. There was a rise, a heave of the water, rather still, but suggestive: a turn of Latham's wrist fixed the hook; the fish leaped half a yard out of the water—again and yet again—and then away went the line spinning off the reel.

"Hurrah!" cried Latham, "he's safe! Why he's a regular leviathan! Off he goes!" and away went the line threading the water up-stream. Then there was a pause. Latham reeled in what line he could, still keeping a steady but gentle pull on his fish. The pause was only momentary. In a second or two away went the fish again, and away went Latham after it—under the bushes, over the stumps, into the water. Then another pause, another cautious reeling in, and another start; only a short one this time. Latham began to feel the weight of the fish as he wound up his line again. "My word!" cried he, "'tis the 'slockdolager' of the Erne! How shall I land him, Frank? He 'll break the line if I pull."

Frank was holding on by an old stump, and leaning down over the water, too much excited to answer. The fish was by this time almost at the water's edge, but the bank was steep. Latham gave a rather incautious pull, and the trout gave a bound up half out of the water.

"Now for the flurry," cried Latham.

Dash—splash—and splutter! the rod bent and quivered like a willow wand.

"He'll be off! he'll be off!" shouted Latham, when in slipped Halstead—quietly as an otter—black broadcloth quite forgotten—popped his hands like an artist, under the struggling, slimy, slippery monster, and landed him fairly at Latham's feet. A leap or two, a faint struggle, and there he lay, with heaving gills, a good three-pounder.

But there was a gleam of triumph in Mr. Latham's eye, far deeper than even the landing of the leviathan of the Erne warranted, as Halstead came scrambling up the bank, and stood beside him, dripping and muddy, but with heightened colour and glistening eye.

must have a rod at the 'House.' I'll try and borrow one, and then we should both be equipped: and, my lad, what a day we'll have to-morrow! Here, catch hold, get us another trout or two for Mrs. Hawkins. No time like time present. Tell me which way to go, and I'll be off to the House at once."

Halstead directed him, and off started Latham with the elastic step of a boy, leaving Frank, rod in hand, and the excitement of the sport in his spirit. He got rise after rise of smaller fish, and, finally, bent his steps homewards with a tolerably weighty basket of fish, and a sensation of pleasurable fatigue to which he had been a stranger for many a long day; it was richly suggestive of the pleasure of lounging in an arm-chair after dinner, and having a long pleasant chat with Latham. The latter came up with him near his own door. He had succeeded in procuring another rod, though not quite so first-rate a "tool" as Halstead's. Still it would answer his purpose quite well enough; and there he was, whipping the air with it as he came up. After dinner, instead of letting Halstead sit still as he wanted to do, he insisted upon his hunting up every scrap of tackle he possessed, and every atom of material that might help to dress a fly.

"For," said he, "what can we expect with two flies already half worn out? Fish won't rise to rusty hooks, I judge."

Mrs. Hawkins' daughter Sally was called into their councils about silks, and finally despatched to the shop at Snagton End to procure some, and she actually succeeded in obtaining three or four little reels of grays and browns, as well as some great fluffy skeins of greens and blues and reds and yellows. Fortunately, the others were the most important, and were seized upon with avidity by Latham. Finally that gentleman seated Frank and himself at the window with little piles of feathers, coils of gut, heaps of hooks, a hare's ear, a bit of peacock's feather, fragments of fur "of sorts," a starling's wing, &c., &c., sorted out upon a little table between them.

And they set to work in earnest to dress some flies for the morrow's sport, interlarding their discourse with scraps of pleasant talk, interrupted when the interest of a slip-knot, or the neat and firm fastening of an end of silk, became importunate. Having selected and bound on his hook, Mr. Latham said,—

"Hand me that cock's hackle there to your left, I think I'll have a brown body—no: on consideration, the hare's ear

will do better. By the way, Frank, have you read the new novel of 'Falconhurst?"

"Novel? No. I have not even heard of it," replied Halstead.

"There you are wrong, let me tell you then, friend; you should have heard of it. No man of your years—especially if he has any work to do, and wit to do it—is justified in letting his peers get ahead of him in the world, without so much as asking what they're about (h'm! how the silk twists! —that's it!)"

"I fear you are right," said Halstead, sadly; "I have let the rest of the world shoot ahead of me terribly; and yet I have not lain upon my oars: but what about this new novel?"

"Well, it's written (this will be a perfect body!)—it's written with a sort of purpose, indeed a decided purpose enough. It is well and powerfully worked out. It made a vast 'sensation' in the circle—not a very large one—in which it was calculated to become popular. All the literary runlets of that circle flowed 'Falconhurst' for more than nine days after its appearance; yet it was not calculated to influence the currents of the great ocean of light literature. I was glad of it, for I disapprove of its tendency intensely.—Isn't that lovely? (The subject of this exclamation was a little dumpy stumpy roll upon the shaft of the hook, by an exercise of the imagination not altogether unlike the body of a small moth.) Now what wings? Starling feather? No; too light. Speckled hen? No-o. Partridge? ay: those little dark ones from the rump are the very things!" so two little, smooth portions of the aforesaid partridge-feather were carefully selected and prepared for binding on. Meantime Halstead demanded,—

"Why did you disapprove of the book, then, if it is so clever and so well written?"

"Well, in the first place, it was devised and written in furtherance of the views of a certain Church party; and that particular party, though it has been useful in some ways, perhaps, in its immediate operation, yet in its ultimate tendency can be regarded from but one point of view by all English Protestants. Besides it is in itself a *party*, and therefore anti-scriptural: in its accompaniment most anti-common-sensical, but by no means anti-natural. Poor human nature! it has sunk hugely in the scale since it was

only 'a little lower than the angels,'—(ha! my wings are crooked: so, that's better.) There are plenty of other reasons why I should dislike that book, and be sorry to see clever men thus endeavouring to palm off subtle and disingenuous sophistry as pure heavenly wisdom upon the minds of the multitude, through the attractive medium of fiction. One is scarcely surprised at the majority of those who take up one-sided views and fight for them to the death, for they have only one-sided brains. But when men, with due craniological developments make use of all the subtlety of their wit to forward party views in Church matters, it puts me painfully in mind of the times of Jeremiah when 'the prophets prophesied falsely, and the priests bore rule through their means.'"

Halstead looked surprised at his friend's warmth, but did not interrupt; Latham continued: "Again, it is one of my settled convictions that God meant man to take just the work that was placed before him, and go at it with a will; not to go out of his road, and make an eclectic set of duties for himself. I can't for the life of me see, for instance, the use of, what that book warmly advocates, the establishment of a sort of (Protestant) monasteries, now that we have lost the feudal system, and have got the printing-press."

"They would probably now contribute but little to civil uses," remarked Halstead; "but do you not think they would tend to strengthen and support the Church system?"

"On the contrary," replied Latham, "institutions of the kind appear to me to be incongruous with the system of our Church. I can't, for instance, see what we want with sisterhoods of mercy either. Why, every woman is a sister of mercy, if she's worth being called a woman: my wife's as useful to me and my parish as a whole sisterhood; and, please God, now my little girls are growing up, they'll help her and be like her. Why, sir, there's not a farmer's daughter in my parish, nor a girl that leaves our school, but what, if she has not taken example from her already, at least knows right well that it is her absolute duty to be a sister of mercy to her family and neighbours. Besides we don't want what these sisterhoods would certainly become—nunneries full of imaginative women, nursing hysteric and all sorts of morbid manias. Neither do we want celibate establishments of ascetic young men, visionary, or conceited, and self-indulgent old bachelors of no practical utility whatsoever. We want *prac-*

tical men—really devoted and hard-working men; healthy in body, that they may be well balanced in mind; husbands and fathers, that they may have warm human hearts in their bosoms, not cold doctrinal abstractions. Those are the men for the Church;——Frank, it is your duty to marry," said Latham, abruptly.

Halstead, who had been listening languidly, without attempting to argue the point, gave a start as if he had been shot, and turned as white as a sheet; tried to laugh it off as a joke, made a miserable failure of it, rose from his seat to look for something he did not want, and finally left the room, in quest of something already in it.

"Poor fellow; so he's hit there too," said Latham to himself, compassionately. "I wonder what it is: I wish my wife were here; her woman's wit would know how to get the thorn out without hurting him, poor fellow!"

When Halstead came back, he found Mr. Latham intent apparently only on his flies.

"These will be very killing, I foresee," said he, pointing to his favourite "variety" of "the peacock fly." "No trout in all Snagton 'becks,' big or little, could withstand such a delicate, tempting, little, seductive, sham-insect as that, 'I'se go bail.'"

Mr. Latham now took off one of his shoes, and regarded his sole attentively, from heel to toe, and from toe to heel.

"Could you lend me an awl, Frank?" said he.

Halstead sought amongst all sorts of receptacles of stray articles, and at last brought out the instrument in request. Mr. Latham gravely set to work to bore sundry little round holes through the sole of his shoe.

"There," said he, finally, having accomplished his task to his satisfaction, "the old lady will never know! but I'm not fond of that squish-squash-squeak of pumping the water out of your shoes by the action of the foot."

He put on that shoe, and proceeded to operate upon the other. Halstead meantime had quite recovered his equanimity, and the talk flowed on as though there had been no interruption. They discoursed of one theme and another, sometimes gaily, sometimes gravely; but on all subjects Mr. Latham was at home, clear and logical, in no danger of getting out of his depth. They talked of books, of things, of science, of politics, and here Mr. Latham had it all to himself, for Halstead had taken but little interest of late in

the political changes at home and abroad. Then they got upon agriculture—agriculture generally, locally, and as practised at Snagton cum Thwackelton in particular, where the land was not leased in large farms as at Enderby, but generally belonged to small landholders, descending from father to son. The consequence of which state of things was, that none of the farmers had capital enough thoroughly to work his farm in the old way, or information and enterprise enough to attempt either to enlarge his holding, or to improve the condition of his land by any new method. But the inhabitants of Snagton cum Thwackelton were thorough Conservatives. "Their fathers had done so before them," was quite reason enough in their eyes to justify their adherence to any custom, good, bad, or indifferent; so things seemed likely to remain as they were, "till generations yet unborn should rise." Mr. Latham, on speaking on the subject, observed, "even here a clergyman may do something. Why don't you give a few simple lectures on agricultural chemistry, Frank? You used to be a bit of a chemist; surely you've not given it up?"

Halstead had begun to feel ashamed of those various givings up of his, so he only looked his contrition.

"Wrong again, my friend; whether Bacon ever said 'knowledge is power' or not, you have no right to suffer the beneficial influence which knowledge may give in a place like this, to remain unexerted. I should really be glad to hear you had taken the matter up in earnest: a few simple experiments, that seem wonderful to the uninitiated, would be enough to attract attention at first; and attention once drawn to such a subject, is pretty sure to lead on awakened curiosity to test theory by practice. You could not fail to do good."

Halstead actually half promised he would try to resuscitate his old acquintance with the elements of chemistry, before Mr. Latham finished all he had to say upon the subject. Then they went on to other subjects. On all Halstead listened with delight, scarcely attempting to do more than give Latham headway. It was a pleasure to hear that man talk, he

> "Spoke such good thoughts natural,
> As if he always thought them."

Finally, the discourse turned upon the subject of religion, and there the good man's thoughts flowed forth, calmly and grandly, from that broad, catholic, heaven-lighted mind of his. He was speaking of the true meaning of the words,

" one Lord, one faith, one baptism;" and of God's own Church Catholic, which, though here sected, split up and divided, rent and torn by human error and human passion,—yet with a remnant of the great immutable truth in every one of its torn fragments,—at length—no longer the Church militant, but the Church triumphant—shall be united into one fold under one Shepherd; one Church with one High Priest. And as that righteous man talked on, it seemed to Halstead that his face became as it were the face of an angel; and as he thought of the very, very little he had done to promote that beautiful, heavenly union of which his friend spoke—rather how, in his blindness and presumption, he had widened and deepened the breach—he leaned his head upon his hands, and groaned aloud in the bitterness of his spirit.

Latham's kind, fatherly hand was laid gently upon his shoulder. "Frank, my dear boy, what is it? tell me."

There was something so inexpressibly tender and gentle, yet so commanding, in the tone and touch, that Halstead felt he had no choice but to pour out the whole long story of his sorrow and trials; of his fruitless struggles, his untempered zeal, his faults and failures in temper and patience. Then he came to the grand trial—his determination of devoting himself to a celibate life. He did not mention Miss Langley by name, merely speaking of her, shortly, as one ten thousand times too pure and noble for such a weak worthless wretch as he. He stumbled and winced at owning his renunciation of her: it was too humiliating to avow that he had repented of the vow he had made unto the Lord. A gentle pressure of the kind hand on his shoulder gave him courage to mention even that. When he spoke of his refusal to bury old Heseltine, he hesitated again; and his voice trembled as he recounted the way in which George had taken it.

Latham said gently: "A mistake certainly, but no sin." Halstead lifted up his head, and looked at him eagerly. "But the poor fellow, sir," he said, "has fallen into all sorts of bad company, with men who prate infidelity, with drunkards: he has taken to poaching—he seems quite desperate. Such a fine fellow lost—and *I* the cause!" and Halstead groaned again.

"My dear boy, this young man must have had the seeds of scepticism and vice in him: he must be revengeful too."

"Ay, but to have brought out those seeds and ripened that tendency—I, whose soul should have been for the soul

of each one of my flock—I who would have done anything for that young man, as if he had been my brother——"

"I should like to see this George," mused Latham to himself as Halstead stopped, his heart too full to go on. "At all events, Frank, there is nothing to be so utterly downhearted about in all that you have told me, and I see by your face that the worst is out now. You did your best according to the light that was in you. If you did act with a somewhat misguided zeal, it was a zeal for God's glory; and God does but try our work according to our capabilities."

Much more Latham said to him, which, gentle and judicious, at the same time that it was inspired by the sincerest affection and the most heartfelt piety, soothed and lightened Halstead's heart unspeakably. Before separation for the night the two men knelt down together, and Latham offered up a simple, fervent, earnest prayer, for help and comfort for all who were in trouble, especially for light, help, and guidance for his suffering brother. When they arose from their knees each grasped his friend's hand; and Latham laid his other hand upon Halstead's head, and blessed him with deep tender solemnity.

CHAPTER XV.

AN ADVENTURE.

The sun set red behind the hills one evening about the time of Mr. Latham's arrival at Snagton, leaving them black and sharply defined against the orange and gold of the sky, where the last beams were still shooting up their broad pennons, which grew fainter and fainter, till they faded off into the pale blue overhead; the opposite hills still kept the last rosy blush roused by the day-god's parting glance, though the evening star had just started into sight above them. The evening was chill, and the sharp air made Annie Irving shiver and wrap her shawl closer round her, as she left Thwackelton town, whither she had been on an errand for Mrs. Wilson. She did not walk very fast, for there was a degree of mental and bodily listlessness about her, which made her find it more irksome to move rapidly than to bear the cold of the evening breeze; so she only wrapped her

shawl more closely about her, and walked on, with her eyes sunk upon the ground. She heeded not the last rosy reflections of the lingering sunbeams, nor the orange mist in the sky, which turned colder, and dimmer, and grayer, until it seemed to descend and wrap the hills with a veil of awful mystery : she heeded nothing of the deepening shadows of the coming night; perhaps they suited better with the mournful colouring of her thoughts than the jocund sunbeams and the gay hues of day.

Her road lay through a narrow glen, on one side of which lay a thicket, sloping away to a rivulet which wound in and out among the stones at the bottom ; on the other side, the bank rose steep above her head, with tufts of fern and heath here and there, and fantastic wreaths of ivy draping the gnarled tree-roots, which now began to assume the likeness of divers uncouth monsters in the uncertain light. It was a lonely, eerie spot, and to any one who was either timid or superstitious, the walk through it, at that hour, might not have appeared tempting: even Annie, Dales-woman as she was, felt the solitude of the place oppressive.

Yet it was not without a sensation of fear, and an unconscious quickening of her pace, that she heard the sound of a footstep behind her. It gained upon her rapidly, and the person soon came up with her. Her feelings of alarm, groundless as they might be, were by no means lessened when she was accosted by a voice which she recognized as that of Joseph Robson.

Annie had conceived a perfect antipathy for this man, ever since he had first made his appearance in the parish a year or two ago. Most of the girls of the place would have been beside themselves with delight, had the handsome stranger showed them one-half of the deference and flattering attention which he paid to Annie, whose beauty seemed to have especially attracted him; but extraordinary as her dislike might have appeared to other girls, his attempts to ingratiate himself with her had been totally unsuccessful: his advances had met with nothing but a series of rebuffs—rebuffs which seemed to have greatly angered him at times; though he still persisted earnestly. Possibly Annie's decided predilection for another had something to do with her dislike to Robson; but be that as it might, she certainly regarded him with positive aversion : the freedom of his manners, and the licence of his bold, black eyes, made her turn from him

with loathing; which the reports she had heard of his having led George astray, by no means tended to mitigate.

It was, therefore, with no very pleasant sensation that she recognized his voice, and thought of the long distance she had still to walk before she passed the next houses.

"You walk fast," he said. "I've followed you some bit: I began to think I shouldn't catch you."

Annie wished she had walked faster, but replied, shortly, that it was cold and she was in a hurry, and hastened on.

"Well, you'll get on faster if I carry your basket. Come, give it me."

"No, thank you; it's not heavy," said Annie.

"And you don't want to be beholden to me, I suppose?"

Annie made no reply, and Robson went on saying, with something in his tone that made Annie's flesh creep,—

"I tell you what, pretty girls like you shouldn't walk so late alone. Annie, you ought to be very glad, now, to have some one to take care of you."

Annie replied coldly, in a voice that she contrived to keep steady, though her heart failed within her, that she was not at all afraid: she was much obliged to him, but she did not wish to hinder him.

"You're not very likely to hinder me much, going at this rate," said the young man, sullenly: "you want to get rid of me, I suppose, and you're not going to, just yet; so you may as well make up your mind to be civil," and he muttered something which Annie did not catch. Then, changing his tone to one of insolent familiarity, he said,—

"Come now, take hold of my arm, and don't be in such a hurry, little one."

Poor Annie was now too terrified to temporize; instead of answering, she quickened her pace almost to a run. Robson, however, kept up with her, and putting his hand upon her shoulder, compelled her to slacken her speed.

"You precious little fool!" said he; "I ain't going to hurt you, am I? At least, not if you behave yourself. Now I've got something to say to you, Annie Irving, and you've got to hear it; so don't shake and shiver like that, or you'll maybe put notions in my head:" and his voice became half fierce, as he spoke. "Now stand still and listen to me."

It was just the deepest and darkest part of the glen where he made her stop. She knew no shriek of hers could, except by the rarest chance, reach any human ear, and she believed

this man to be capable of any crime. The ice-cold hand of fear upon her heart almost stopped its pulsations, and turned her deadly sick: she heard his words through a kind of mist of dizzy faintness.

"I've tried soft ways a long while," he said, "and you've despised me. Now you *shall* listen to me. I tell you, Annie Irving, I love you!" Here he sank his voice to a low, cooing whisper, and stooped his mouth to a level with her ear; but when he felt her shrink away as his hot breath scorched her cheek, the cooing whisper changed into a serpent's hiss. "I love you like fire, and have you I *will*, in spite of heaven and hell."

Annie made a wild effort to escape, but the hand upon her shoulder held her like a vice. "Stand still, I say," he said, in a fierce low tone, and he muttered words that froze her back into passive helpless terror: "I tell you I love you now —don't make me hate you (how I could hate you!) or,—and he used a terrible oath—"I swear that you shall rue it. Don't think I don't know your sneaking fancy for your fine jo George; I know all about it, and a nice fellow he is! and nicely he's getting on with his light of loves, while you think he's mooning about you."

That taunt roused Annie once more to try and throw off his hand, and to exclaim, "It's false! I don't believe it."

He held her fast, answering mockingly, "False, is it? Don't believe it, don't you? Oh, no, not of dear George! of course not! nor yet that he's now at the King's Head drinking and dancing with Betty Crowe and another or two such" (naming several women who bore shameful characters in the place), "where I left him, because I saw you pass the window, my dainty lady. You owe that to your high and mighty ways, mistress; I should not have led *him* into scrapes, if you had been pleased to be civil; so you're paid, I hope," continued her tormentor, scoffingly. Poor Annie shuddered, and shrank away from him as far as she could, moaning. He softened his voice a little as he went on, "Now, Annie, I've got you here, as much in my power as if no one else was in the world but you and me. No one could hear you if you screamed yourself dumb: do you understand?"

Annie only murmured, pitifully, "Oh, let me go! pray, pray let me go."

"Not just yet, if I know it, my lady; not till we understand one another a little better, I should say. Now I'm

content to be very moderate; George is in my hands, and, Annie, he's as weak as water; if I like, I can make him do what will bring him to gaol, if not to the gallows, when I choose: do you hear?" (That was a mere threat to impress Annie more deeply.) "Now I'll just let him alone—let him drink himself dead, if he likes, I don't eare—if you listen to me; but I swear"—and he again used a ruffianly oath—"I'll ruin him, or do for him some other way at onee, if you won't; ay, and I'll kill you too, sooner than he shall have you. I'll murder you both: and yet, oh! Annie, I do love you! Say you don't hate me—do!"

Annie gathered strength from despair, horror, and detestation. She drew herself baek to the full length of his arm, exelaiming, in a shrill strained voiee,—

"I do hate you: every nerve in my body loathes you. Let me go!" and with a frantie effort, she nearly wrenehed her shoulder from his grasp.

In a moment his other arm was round her. Annie saw death, or worse, in the glare of his tiger eye. She uttered a terrible, loud, shrill scream: it rang in her own ears for days after. A loud shout, not very distant from the top of the high bank above them, answered it; something she knew not, eared not what, dashed down into the path, and rushed violently between her and Robson. She heeded not the deep eurse he uttered: she was free; and she darted off like a deer, flying rather than running. Her heart beat so thick she heard it, and faneied its sound the steps of her pursuer; as, breathless, panting, sobbing, she flew along. So headlong was her race, that she saw nothing, until she fairly ran against a human figure whieh was preeeding her in the road. The shoek stopped her flight, and took away her little remnant of breath, whilst it produeed a most unmelodious yell from the person with whom she had eome in contaet.

"Oh, lauks! it's a bogle! oh!" shouted a well-known, thin, cracked, and now terrified voice; whieh Annie reeognised, in spite of her terror, as that of a poor, half-witted fellow, known in the neighbourhood by the name of Silly Willy, who had been a *protégé* of Miss Langley's. Even he seemed a protection. Breathless as she was, she managed to call his name, as he in his turn darted away from her in terror. Willy knew the voiee whieh had so often called him to reeeive broken vietuals and other trifles, so he stopped in his flight, and came back to her, exclaiming in his quaver-

ing high-pitched voice, "Lor' sakes! thowt 'twere a bogle: nobbut thee, Annie, lass! Lor' sakes! thowt 'twere a bogle, so ah did!" Annie was still trying feebly to run on, too breathless to speak. Silly Willy trotted along by her side, keeping up his rambling "Lor' sakes, thowt 'twere a bogle!" A moment more and another ally came up; something bounded past Annie, and then leaping back thrust a cold nose into her hand. At the same time a voice hailed them from behind, with a loud though rather unsteady—

"Woa's there? whatten ye deean there?"

It was not Robson's voice, and Annie stopped her feeble effort at flight; in a minute a man came up with them, reiterating his "Woa's there, I saa?" It was Willy Simmons, Squire Tappin's shepherd, with his young sheep-dog. Silly Willy's shrill voice answered—

"Woa boot me, an' 't lass Annie!"

"Were't thee, thee feäl, maade yon flaysome screeeh a while sin? wha, what ails 't, lass?" he continued, as he noticed Annie's panting, exhausted condition, and perceived, even through the gloom, that she was trembling violently in every limb. She laid her hand on his arm to steady herself, and gasped out "Joe Robson!"

"What, that ne'er-do-weel been an' flayed thee, lass? Thee should ha nowght to dea wi' thay wahld yoong chaps——"

Annie managed to explain that he had overtaken and terrified her, threatening to murder her, "and some one else."

Willy Simmons always knew every one's business better than they did themselves; so, recovering his own somewhat wavering courage, as he found no harm had been done, he remarked:

"The good for nowght raseal! t'were some o's seabby jokes, na dout. A' meant nowght, I'se go bail. Sakes! what a sereech that were, 't made me woally quiver right thruff! Ah hollered as loud 's ah could, to let 'em ken somebody were nigh hand: boot ah were all of a trimmle, an' couldn't seaee run. Bouneer, he started, an' got there fust, I reckon; for I heerd un' holler out as if a' got more kicks as ha'apence."

"T'was Bouncer made him let go, then," said Annie. "Bless you, Bouncer!" and she stooped to earess with her trembling hands the rough, uncouth ereature whose impetuous puppyish curiosity had set her free; Bouncer answered

her caresses after his puppy-fashion by throwing his cold nose up in her face with a lick, and struggling out of her arms, to scamper off and bark, and then rush back against her with a bounce of delight that nearly knocked her down.

The fact was that Willy Simmons had been out on the moors that evening with the pup he was training, looking after the sheep and their lambs. When he heard Annie's awful shriek, he had replied by a loud shout. But Willy Simmons was a discreet man, and every one knows discretion is the better part of valour ; therefore, the said quality had somewhat clogged his heels in his speed to the rescue. The pup, on the contrary, not being yet trained to the sober ways of the intelligent, half-rational shepherd's dog of the north, had sped off like a shot, and flung himself bodily into what he considered the thick of the fun; freeing Annie by the violence of his onset, and receiving in return a brutal kick and an equally brutal curse from Robson, which had sent him yelping and "hollering," as his master called it, into the shelter of the bushes. Robson, having run off in the direction whence he had just come, and thus easily avoided the shepherd's not very strenuous search for the cause of the disturbance, poor Bouncer came forth from his retreat; and, after a whine or two, to inform his master that he had been ill-used, forgot his smart, and bounced off afresh after Annie.

Annie did not get over the fright she had received for a long time. She declined to go into any of the houses they passed to rest; for she dreaded the eager curiosity, and the storm of questions and gossip, which she knew would assail her ; so she begged Willy Simmons to "set her home," which he did. When she had arrived safely, hurriedly bolted and barred the door—a precaution hardly thought necessary in the Dales—and put up the window shutter, then for the first time did she begin to breathe more freely.

She dropped upon the first chair which stood in her way, and had a good cry, just to steady her nerves a bit; and then she went to her mistress. Even placid Mrs. Wilson was startled, as poor Annie's face, colourless, all but the eyes, which were red with the tears she had just shed, met her gaze.

"Good gracious me, Annie Irving! what ails the girl? It's that George Heseltine, I know."

Annie hastened to exculpate the man she loved from any share in her disorder, and related the manner in which Robson

had overtaken and threatened her; suppressing still, in her maiden modesty, the passionate declarations of love he had uttered, and the mention he had made of George and his pursuits. Mrs. Wilson, like Willy Simmons, seemed to think he had only meant to frighten her; and, after a few ejaculations, and a reiteration of very needless cautions to Annie to have nothing to do with such good-for-noughts, she relapsed into her customary placidity.

Thus thrown upon herself for counsel, Annie tormented herself almost into a state of high fever about the threats Robson had uttered; not for herself, but for George. She was sure it was a foul falsehood, what he had said about the Stag and those women: George could not be so vile, so utterly depraved. All night poor Annie tossed and turned, with burning, fevered brain, upon her sleepless pillow. All sorts of horrible fancies came into her head. What if he *should* lead George into some dreadful sin! What if he should bring him to the gallows, as he said: and all because of her!

"Oh, George! my darling, my darling!" sobbed the girl. But she could not cry: her eyes glowed in her aching head like hot coals. Then she thought, if Robson should murder him—if he should be doing it then! She seemed to see the murderer, with stealthy, creeping step, and *something* glittering in his hand: she seemed to see *him*, her beautiful, her own, stiff and cold in his blood. She could not bear it, but started out of bed, and flung open the window. The night wind blew cold upon her throbbing, burning, bursting forehead; the gentle stars looked lovingly, soothingly down upon her, out of the deep, holy sky. The churn owl whirred peacefully in the distance, and the landrail sent its curious crake, crake, crake, up from the fallow.

The calm influences of the night soothed Annie, and she began to feel the protecting presence of the Great Being, who seems so near when all the earthly noises which make us forget Him in the work-day world are hushed. As Annie grew calmer, the tears began to trickle and relieve her head, and she could begin to think and to pray, and at last to believe that the great God who had made could also save her darling; and she committed him and his precious safety more calmly to his Father's hands. Then a thought came into her mind: could she not do something herself? Could she not see George and warn him—remonstrate with him—plead with

him? She had been cold and distant with him of late. But if need be, she would even let him see her love,—all—all! into the depths of her very soul and life, how she loved him, if that would make him think. Oh! her love, *such* love! couldn't be all—all useless. She might see him; she *would* see him: she would see him to-morrow, somehow, she *would*.

Comforted at the idea of doing something, poor Annie shut her window and crept back, shivering, into bed. She lay there, contriving how she would see George; what she would say; how she would urge him, and plead with him, to be his own dear self once more. She lay impatiently till the sky flushed up red, and the birds began to twitter; then she got up, and dressed hastily, uneasy till she could put her plan in execution.

Fortune favoured her that morning, for who should come loitering by the gate but Silly Willy, crooning some rambling song, in his shrill, cracked voice. Annie tapped at the window to stop him, and then ran hastily down to the gate to him.

"Willy," she said, "I'll give you this bright new sixpence, to take this little packet for me."

Willy was not too silly to understand the value of the little coin Annie held up, and his eyes glistened with pleasure; though he would have served her willingly without reward, for Annie was kind, and he was capable of appreciating kindness.

"Whar' mun I tak't, Annie, lass?" he asked, holding out his hand.

Fearful lest in his delight he should forget her message, Annie told him he should have the sixpence when he came back, and then repeated her instructions many times. He was to go and give that packet to George Heseltine; but to be sure no one saw him give it. Did he understand?

"Ay, sure," said Willy, looking at the sixpence.

"Tell me what you are going to do," said Annie.

"Gan to George Heseltine——"

Poor Willy's wits would carry him no further. "And give him," suggested Annie.

"And gi' him t' saxpence," said Willy, mournfully.

"No, no," said Annie; "give him this little parcel, and you shall have the sixpence for your own self, when you come back and say you've done it. What will you give, George, Willy?"

"T' wee parcel," answered Willy, brightly.

"That's right, Willy, and you won't let any one see you?"

"Noa."

"Now, what will you do, Willy?"

"Give George t' wee parcel, an' not t' saxpence," said he, joyfully.

"And what else, Willy?"

"Wunna let nob'dy else ha' 't."

"No, Willy; and not let any one else see you give it."

"Not let nob'dy else see me gi' 't," he repeated.

"Say it once more, Willy."

"Gi' George t' wee parcel, and not t' saxpence, an' not let nob'dy else see me," said Willy, patiently.

"That's just right, Willy. Be quick and do it, and then come back, and you shall have the sixpence."

So Annie finally trusted her little packet into the half-wit's hands, and watched him down the lane, as he started off alertly.

When Willy came to George Heseltine's house he saw the young man in the little farmyard. Sadly neglected and untidy the farmyard looked now, to what it used to do when George had taken a healthy pride in "fetling oop" everything to the highest pitch of neatness and nicety, during his old father's life. Now, the farm implements lay about in slovenly disorder, some broken, some tied together with rope. Lean pigs ran, squeaking and grunting about hungrily; and George's Cleveland mare looked poor and spiritless and out of condition. George himself was leaning listlessly against the wall of the cart-shed in the sun; his dress was disordered, his dark curly hair untidy, his beard unshorn, his eyes red, with a tell-tale black circle under each, his cheeks colourless. Altogether a very different-looking individual was George Heseltine now from the intelligent, handsome, humorous young farmer of a year ago. His evil genius, Robson, was seated on the low, rough, uncemented stone wall swinging his legs, near his "friend." They were talking together, and neither of them seemed to be in the sweetest of humours.

"You'll have to sell the mare," suggested Robson, apparently in reply to an objection raised by George to some proposition or demand of his.

"Sell the mare! Ay, you'd sell yer moother, I reckon, if she'd fetch money," retorted George. "Why, Nancy, poor old lass, he talks of selling thee." Nancy lifted up her head,

and whinnied at her master's well-known voice; and walking up to him, she put out her gentle head to be patted.

George patted and caressed her, and leaned down his aching head upon her neck disconsolately. Nancy snuffed at his hand, and put her nose in his waistcoat, and whinnied again. "Poor lass, thee wants sommat to eat, does thee? I tell thee what, Nance, thy master is a fool and a scoundrel, an' thou mun suffer for 't; poor old Nance!" and a tear or two fell from George's eyes, unremarked, and trickled down on his favourite's coat, as he stooped his head on her mane. Robson looked on with infinite contempt:

"It should tell its horse all about it, so it should!" he said, in a mocking voice. But when George lifted his head with some of his old proud bearing, and looked at him with a scowl on his brow, he changed his tone to one of firm, friendly exhortation. "Come, be a man, and face the thing, George," he urged. "I have business which calls me away, and I can't go, because, being a friend, I've lent you money to help you out. I've put myself out of the way a goodish deal for you, I can tell you, and said nothing about it; and it does *rayther* rile me, to see you whining over the old mare, instead of saying, 'Anything, my friend, sooner than put you to a pinch.'"

"An' as if you didn't know I should do that, an' more too, need was. Whining ower t' old mare, indeed! I guess thee's not carried *him* man and boy for the last seven year, an' never played him a trick, did thee, Nance? Whining indeed!" And George put his arm round his mare's neck, and led her gently to the pasture gate and turned her in. "There, old lass, I canna gi' thee corn nor hay neither; I'se gi' thee what I can. I wish I'd never listened to worse advice as thine, old girl, that was always—'Home, George, now, as fast as we can foot it.'"

As George turned round from watching the mare eagerly cropping the already oft-cropped herbage, he became aware that Silly Willy was eagerly watching him from the road. As soon as he found George saw him, Will began making all sorts of mysterious nods and becks to him. George thought the poor fellow had come to prefer his frequent request for "a shoot with George's gun:" a petition which he had often good-naturedly granted, to please Silly Willy, who would hold the weapon with trembling eagerness while George directed the barrel so that the discharge could do no damage,

shut his eyes at George's 'Now!' till his unsteady fingers had pulled the trigger, and then go into a state of rapturous and antie delight at the noise of the report. George did not feel inelined to go through the performanee just then, so he called out kindly—"Not to-day, Willy, my man, another time."

But Willy persisted in his mysterious signs; peering through the gate at Robson, then dueking behind the wall and holding up the packet and beekoning with fingers and head; until, at last, George's attention was exeited, and Robson's also: the latter rather the most, perhaps. He got up and approaehed, whereupon Willy whispered loudly, "Sommat for thee, George, fro' Annie," and started off down the lane. George looked jealously at Robson, to see if he had heard. Robson affected to be oeeupied with peeling a hazel wand; George whistled, pretended to be quite abstraeted, sauntered to the gate, put his hand upon it, vaulted over, and walked off down the lane. Robson watehed him, with a malevolent expression upon his swarthy features, till he turned the eorner of the road by the pond, and was lost to view behind the hedge. Then he flung down the hazel switeh, pocketed his knife, vaulted the gate in his turn, ran aeross the road, vaulted the gate into the field on the other side, and, stooping down and keeping under the hedge to avoid being seen, took the same direetion as George had taken. He heard voiees in a minute or two, and ereeping along as a cat, came elose to the spot where George was talking to Silly Willy on the other side of the hedge.

But the quiek, animal-like sense of hearing of the half-wit eaught Robson's stealthy tread:

"Whisht! what's thatten?" said he, peering round.

"Nobbut a rabbit or weasel," replied George, earelessly. "What did Annie say?"

"She said, 'Gi' George t' wee paeket—an' not t' saxpence—and dunna let nob'dy see!"

"Give me t' packet then, Willy."

"Be 'ee sartain sere nob'dy dunna see?" asked Willy, jealously, still holding the little paeket within his ragged eoat.

"Certain. Give it me quick, man," said George, impatiently. Willy crept a step or two nearer, holding up one finger mysteriously and poking out his head in a listening attitude; then he stole forward and looked up the road and down the road and behind him, and finally popping the paeket

into George's hand, was darting off to claim his sixpence, when George stopped him:

"Bide a bit, Willy, my man," said he, as he eagerly tore open the mysterious packet. Within were two withered roses, a white one and a red one, and inside the envelope was written, in a trembling hand, "If you ever cared for me when you gave me these roses, George, come to-night at six to the spring in the church-path."

"Tell her yes, for certain, Willy," said George.

"I'se tell she 'yes for sartain,'" repeated the half-wit.

"That's right, Willy; away with you now."

Nothing loath, off started Willy at a round trot. George wanted to be alone, that he might read those words, and look at those roses once more, and remember—oh, how well he remembered!—the night he gave them to Annie, when he was first certain she cared for him more than she wanted him to know. How she must have cared for him, to keep them—withered, ugly things—all this time for the love of him! He took them up tenderly in his rough fingers, looked shyly round, and pressed them to his lips and his heart, kissing the paper and the words in it, and thinking them wonderfully sweet words. Oh, George, if you could have known how many scalding hot tears had poured over those withered roses from Annie's sweet blue eyes, and how they had lain day after day on the little sore heart that you had left no other token of your love to, you would have thought yourself a still more worthless, miserable dog than you did a moment after, when, having folded them up in their paper and put them in your breast, you came back to your present self, and remembered who and what you were, and how you had spent last night.

When George came back to the farmyard he missed Robson, and looked round for him anxiously. But Robson was absent and did not come back for some time; when he did, it was from the direction of the village: he appeared to have forgotten the subject they had been talking of, and was as friendly as usual. He said he had been to the shop to get some shot, and carelessly laid down on the table the parcel containing it.

"Why, the birds are breeding now; what do you want it for?" said George.

"Oh, just to keep my hand in against August," replied the other, carelessly.

Robson was particularly amusing at dinner-time, and told anecdote after anecdote of adventures that had happened to "chaps he knew:" some in poaching expeditions, some on enterprises of even a more questionable character. One story he told which sounded marvellously like the recital of a house-breaking expedition, only he veiled those parts of his tale which might have rendered that point clear, in a garb of slang words which were Greek to George, who sat and listened in a bewildered state. He hinted, moreover, at certain mysterious methods of getting money, with which he and his friends were acquainted, and into which he would indoctrinate George if he once had him amongst the said friends. And then he proposed, that as George couldn't pay him the sum he owed him—and he wouldn't be hard on him for the world—he should go with him to London, and be introdueed to the said friends, and learn the art of making money. He watched George's face like a lynx all the time.

George's face was worth watching, for it had gone through a singular variety of expression whilst Robson had been speaking. First there had been interest; then a sort of incredulous wonder; next bewildered; then something—Robson couldn't make out what—but which, however, soon manifested itself. For George slowly turned round so as to confront Robson fully, and leaning his arms on the table, remained looking at him steadily.

Robson didn't like that steady gaze. He put on a frank air, and slapping George on the shoulder, exclaimed—

"What say you, old fellow? will you be one of us? A jolly set we are as you'd wish to see;" and he struck up a drinking song.

George still sat staring straight into his eyes, then, in a slow, steady tone, he began—

"Joe Robson, I've often wondered what you and your friends in London were. Now I begin to get a kind o' notion."

Robson assumed a careless, jocular air, and said, laughing—

"Well, old boy, give us your notion. What is it? never mince matters! Out with it! now then!"

"Why," said George, still very slowly, and still with his fixed, steady gaze, "I begin to conceit you're nobbut a set o' mean, cowardly, rascally pickpockets and thieves: and if I thought so, I'd——"

Robson had grown deadly pale, lips and all; his white

teeth glittered through his drawn lips, and his eyes glared fiercely: he sat crouched like a tiger prepared for a spring.

"You'd what? out with it. Don't be afraid."

For all reply, George doubled his broad fist unmistakably. But he was not prepared for what came next.

Robson, with a face ghastly with passion, dashed at his throat; George saw something gleam in his hand, and had but just time to seize his arm as the blow descended. There was a short struggle. Little and eel-like as Robson was, he was no match for the muscle of George, who had him on the floor in a minute, holding him down with a deadly gripe, and kneeling on his chest.

"You mean, dastardly hound," cried George; "so you'd have stabbed me, would you? only for telling you the truth. I've a mind to shake the rascally life out of you, I have:" and he gave him a shake, to try how it felt.

Robson, though black in the face and half choked, lay there glaring hatred and defiance in every line of his face. But softer feelings came over George, as he thought he had called the man "friend;" so he went on coolly, "but I wean't do 't, nother: thou's eaten my bread. Noa, I wean't do 't; nor I wean't even gi' thee a kick to help thee oop, so help thyself." George let go his hold, and got up; and so did Robson, his dark face still livid with defeated passion. "Now I tell thee what, Joe Robson," said George, steadily; "thou better gan thy weays out o' this, back to Lunnon as quick's thee can, afore worse cooms o't: I might not let ye off so easy next time. I owe thee sommat, I know, an' I'll get t' money this very night, if I sell old Nance and t' coat off my back into the bargain. I promise it; and, bad as he may be, George Heseltine never broke his word yet, nor never will."

Here Robson turned round, and coming towards him, said, in a voice which he compelled to be friendly—

"Come, George, old fellow, forget and forgive! I was in a rage because you called me hard names. Come, shake hands, old friend."

But George waved him off, with a degree of stern, sorrowful dignity which awed Robson somewhat.

"No," he said, "I deean't strike hands again wi' thee, Joe Robson: thou's done me a mortal deal o' hurt—more as thou knows; but I've been a weak an' a wicked fool to listen to thee, and I'll do 't no more. We part this night as soonI s' gien thee t' money I owe thee; an' that I'm going to get."

Robson sneered ironically, as he returned—

"Well, well, as you like; but you'll change again soon: George roaring last night, maudlin this morning, quarrelsome at midday, pious in the afternoon. Why, I'd go to the parson, and confess, if I was you, George; an' ask him if he'd give me Christian burial if I chanced to die sudden."

Robson relied on that taunt rousing George's evil spirit, as it had often done before in his fits of compunction; but he was mistaken: George answered, in a stern deep voice—

"Hold your tongue, man; if you're not a devil, as I sometimes think. I'm going now to get the money, and when I come back again, you be off, while the way's open."

"And where will you get the money, George? Who'll trust you now, d'ye think?" pursued his tempter.

George's fingers clenched involuntarily, but he only answered gruffly—

"That's my business, not yours;" and putting on his hat he left the house.

Robson glared after him vindictively, grinding through his clenched teeth words of which the only audible ones were—

"You'll not escape me so, my fine fellow. And yet," he soliloquized, involuntarily, "he is a fine fellow: I could like him in real earnest, if it wasn't for the girl;" and again Robson's face grew black, and he ground his teeth. "He *shan't* have her, if I stab them both. Her too—I could like to stab her right through and through the heart, if I saw her in his arms: I hate them—hate them both:" and the unhappy wretch fell to cursing them and himself. Then a softer mood came over him. "Oh, if the mother that bore me had been a woman, and not a brute that left me in the streets—if she'd loved me as Annie would love her baby—I might have been a man like George, and not a 'dastardly pickpocket and thief,' and she might have loved me; but now ——" and black and withering rushed the whirlwind of passion over his heart. He started up and went to the door, opened it, hesitated, turned, hesitated again, then rushed to the corner where George's gun stood, clutched it savagely, yet with a half-scared look, and set off to dog George's steps to the rendezvous he believed Annie to have given him.

It was getting on for five o'clock. George wandered irresolutely about. Annie's letter, coming in the moment of the morning's remorseful view of the night's excesses, had produced a strong revulsion in his feelings with regard to Robson.

That man's influence, he could not help being aware, had always been exerted to keep him apart from the only woman whom he had ever really loved, and whose memory, through all his wanderings and sins, had shone upon him like the one pure star of hope and safety. He had never ceased to love her through all; but shame, remorse, and a feeling that he should degrade her purity by his approach, had led him to his strange course of conduct towards her. Now she herself called him back, and he was impatient till he could rush to her and implore her to forgive him; let her demand any sacrifice she chose, he was ready to make it, if she would only forgive him and love him once more.

Then his thoughts reverted to the scene that had just taken place with Robson. He was not altogether sorry to have so good a cause for breaking with him as their quarrel afforded. Robson had taken a base advantage of his facility, and led him into debt and difficulty as well as into mischief. But then, thought the kind-hearted fellow, "Woase is t' faut if it beean't my own? If so be I was fool enow to gan wrong when I knew better, why, I ought to suffer for't; an' if he did sponge on me, why, I could count as well as him. He did flee me like a wahld cat, sure; but then he's a wahld fiery sort o' chap when's put aboot, an' I said hard words to him. Mebbe I been hard upon t' poor lad."

But present emergencies recurred to his mind as he thought of his promise to pay the money, which Robson, in order to get him more completely into his power, had advanced him when he got into difficulties.

George did not at all know where to turn for ready money. His farm was already mortgaged, and this year's stock and crop would scarcely cover his debt to Robson, and the claims of one or two other creditors, who began to press for money; even were his corn reaped and housed, and his lambs, "stirks" and "stotts," ready for market. What to do he did not know: for a moment he thought he would go to Squire Tappin and beg him to lend him money on the mare; but he was ashamed to do it. The idea of Halstead came into his mind. No, he could not, and would not ask it of him. He would do nothing till he had seen Annie: she should decide him. He thought he would tell her all; and if she forgave him he would do anything she said—except ask Halstead. And if she spurned him? At that thought his face grew dark. "Then I'll go to the devil," was in his mind.

At that moment a gentleman whom he didn't know passed, and saluted him in a deep, rich, musical voice. George could not choose but touch his hat and respond politely. The sun was stooping towards the horizon, and the slant, golden rays fell full upon the gentleman's striking face and person. The face was not handsome, but singularly pleasant and benevolent; the eye was so piercing, yet so mild, that the young man was indescribably struck, despite the stranger's clerical garb. The gentleman seemed equally struck with something in George's appearance, for he looked at him hard, half stopped, and finally walked on. Both he and George turned their heads after they had passed, and each smiled on encountering the other's eyes.

George knew it must now be near six, so he sauntered on to the spring Annie had mentioned, and sat himself down on the stone step beside it to wait and listen. The little streamlet gushed from a tiny spout in the rough stone wall that had been built round it, and spouting out a little way, fell with a musical tinkle into the stone trough beneath; the cattle were grazing down in the meadows below ; the quiet, slanting sunbeams made all the trees ruddy gold on one side, and black on the other, and cast long shadows over the grass. George felt the quiet of the fair scene steal over his troubled mind, and it soothed him. But it *must* be close upon six, and he soon grew impatient again ; he took out his father's great, old silver watch, and looked: it wanted five minutes. He went to gaze up the narrow path: Annie was not in sight. The five minutes must be passed—no, it still wanted three; he fancied his watch had stopped, and held it to his ear; but it ticked its old, respectable, steady tick. He put it in his pocket and felt damp and nervous, and took it out again; two minutes and a half.

Just then he caught the flutter of a female garment coming down the path: he stepped eagerly forward, but was ashamed to meet her; and turned his back and drooped his head on his chest with such a great load of remorse weighing it down, that he felt he could not raise it to look Annie in the face. She came up to him where he stood and hesitated. "George," said her low faltering voice ; and when he did not answer, she laid her hand on his arm. He turned, and their eyes met. Poor George burst out,—

"Oh, Annie, Annie! I know all you think; I've been worse than all you think ; I've been a brute, and a fool, and

worse! Oh, Annie, Annie! You can't forgive me: you never ought, I know." And he stooped his head over the hand which lay on his arm, and which he dared not touch with his own, and covered it with tears and kisses. Annie was half terrified at his vehemence, and so she began to soothe him, trembling all the time.

"Hush, George, hush!" she said; "I didn't believe it, George, I didn't." She began to think Robson had been telling him.

"Oh, Annie! but you must believe it all, and more, much more; but don't hate me, Annie, pray don't; I couldn't bear it!"

Annie didn't look much as if she hated him, as she stood stooping over him, with the tears trickling fast down on to his curly hair. But George was no hypocrite, so perhaps he thought she felt inclined to hate him; or might, or ought, or would do it presently.

"Oh, George! don't take on so," she whispered, "don't now;" and she stroked the curly hair unconsciously with her little hand. "Oh, George! do promise me one thing; do, George."

"Yes, Annie, say what—say what, quick, Annie dear!"

"Promise you'll give that man Robson up: make him go away, do, George—do, dear George."

George looked up eagerly; she had never called him "dear George" before, and she had touched upon the very point on which he had intended her acceptance or rejection of his penitence to decide him.

"Call me 'dear George' again," he said, "and I'll promise anything, Annie: anything."

"And keep your word?" she said, quickly.

"As I hope to be saved," he replied, solemnly.

"Dear, *dearest* George!" whispered Annie, "now promise."

"I promise and swear I will give him up," said George, and was about to clasp Annie rapturously in his arms; but she withdrew herself from his grasp, saying decidedly,—

"No, George, not that; you must give me proofs that you are sorry—before you have anything more to say to me."

"Proofs? oh, yes! Annie, I will: I will indeed! Do believe me, or I shall get hard and bad again."

George looked entreatingly, and came a step nearer. Annie retreated again. She must have "proofs, not words," she said.

"Well, what proofs? tell me, Annie. I'll do *any*thing."

"Send Robson away, and be steady and like yourself, George; and go to church again, for a year and a day, and—then—why I'll see!"

"A year and a day—and go to church again," echoed George, despondingly. "Oh, Annie, you don't know what you ask—a whole long year! And then you don't know all, Annie, about poor faather, and how that made me hate church, an' priests, an' all. Don't be so hard on me, Annie."

But Annie was resolute: George must fulfil her three conditions; and George stood, looking humbled and haughty, triumphant and despondent, by turns. He hesitated so long, that Annie grew a little alarmed for her success; so she came a little nearer, put her hand on his arm again, and stood looking up in his face reading its doubtful workings. Presently he withdrew his troubled gaze from the far-off hills, and looked into her blue eyes.

"George!" she whispered, entreatingly.

"You ask so very much, Annie."

"Not too much: you said 'anything.' Dear George, do promise! I shall love you better than I do now, if possible." Again George tried to encircle her with his arms, but again she eluded him.

"Promise," she said.

"Yes, well, I do promise, then: now, Annie," but Annie retreated. George took hold of her shawl; still she persisted in going. He let it fall, and his hand drooped heavily by his side. Annie reproached herself for paining him, Heaven knows how! and relented. George opened his arms once more, and she fled into them like a bird to its nest, and their lips clung together as if they would never part.

"That kiss has made me strong, Annie," whispered George, as he released her. "I can do it all now, easy."

Annie fled away up the lane like a startled hare; for her eye had caught a glimpse of a stranger gentleman who must have seen the embrace, though he did pretend to be looking hard another way.

CHAPTER XVI.

SPECTATORS.

Mr. Latham, for it was he whom George met just before he reached the rendezvous appointed by Annie, had been struck by the air of superior intelligence characterizing the young man's appearance; and the idea came into his head that this might be the very George Heseltine whose conduct had so greatly distressed Halstead, and whom he himself had been so much wishing to see; and as he walked on, he blamed himself for not having ascertained the truth of his surmise. He was sauntering along the road towards the church to meet Halstead, who had gone thither to take some occasional duty. After proceeding some little distance, Mr. Latham climbed up on a gate, and seated himself in order to enjoy the delicious evening, and to wait for his friend more at his ease. All at once, he jumped down from his elevation, and began quickly to retrace his steps, muttering, "I was a fool not to ask the fellow; I'll go and see if I can find him now."

The consequence of this sudden move of his was, that he emerged from an intervening clump of trees which had concealed each party from the view of the other, just in time to witness the embrace which closed the interview between George and Annie, and to feel himself very much *de trop*. He was upon the point of beating a hasty retreat, when Annie's sudden flight prevented the necessity for his doing so.

Now George had not said half he wanted to say to Annie: he wanted to have confided the most pressing of his perplexities to her, perhaps to have been guided by the view she should take of the matter, for he needed her clear sense of right and wrong to help to strengthen his judgment against his inclination; but in the excitement of his feelings he had forgotten everything except his shame, and penitence, and love: consequently, when Annie darted off so suddenly, George stood staring stupidly after her, till the last flutter of her dress disappeared round the corner of the road, and then he began to remember all he meant to have said. When, therefore, he was accosted by a deep voice from behind, and turning round, recognized at once the clerical-looking gentleman whom he had met some half-hour before, and the cause of Annie's flight, he felt inclined to be rather surly than civil.

"Good evening, friend, once more; you're the very man I was looking for."

"Am I?" growled George.

"You are—at least I think so. I want one George Heseltine; are you he?"

"You might have gone farther and not found him."

"Then, George Heseltine, I'm glad I did not go farther."

George did not respond to the sentiment. Latham had a difficult and delicate game to play, and he knew it. He was not at all rebuffed at George's surliness: it would not have been natural for him to greet an intruder at such a moment with a welcome. He persevered, therefore, resolving to speak frankly and freely—this being probably his only chance of conversing with the young man—and to run the risk of interference making matters worse.

"I am a stranger to you, but you are no stranger to me," he said. "I have heard much about you, from a mutual friend."

George stared: the stranger's voice and manner were so exceedingly pleasant, his bearing was so manly, and his eye so honest, that he began to feel his ill-humour melt away in spite of himself. The thaw was slightly apparent in the tone of his "Have you so?"

"I have so," replied Mr. Latham.

"Then, mebbe, I may make so bold as to ask who *you* are?"

"You will be no wiser if I tell you. My name is Latham; I am a friend of Mr. Halstead's."

George shut himself up tight; Latham saw it, and went on:

"He has spoken to me of you repeatedly, and in a manner betokening the most sincere friendship, and the warmest interest in your welfare; so much so, that it made me wish to see you, and have a little talk with you on a subject which you ought not to allow to distress him as it does."

George's eye had glistened with an involuntary expression of interest at the beginning of this speech; at the end of it a frown came over his brow, and he remained sternly silent.

"You think it is no business of mine. It would not be if I were not Mr. Halstead's most intimate and confidential friend—as regards him; and, as regards you, you have no right to take anything said to you by a clergyman, as I am, as a personal affair."

George growled out something about "Meddlers doing nobbut burn fingers, parsons or no parsons." Mr. Latham took no notice, but continued:

"If Mr. Halstead's health were not in a very shattered state, he would probably not think so much of a matter in which he did only what appeared to him his manifest duty——"

"Duty? Tell me it's a duty to want a son to give a dog's burial to the poor dead corpse of his father, that the Lord God made one of the ten commandments about him honouring! It's my belief if you parsons haven't got any better duties as *that*, they'd better not have any at all; or, leastways, not *do* 'em."

"Recollect," said Mr. Latham, "that your private opinion of what is or is not duty, is no standard for other men. I have no intention of entering into a doctrinal discussion with you, or it would be no very difficult matter to prove that the making a point of procuring the final rites of the Church of England for those who have never been partakers of her ordinances, and who would have been offended at being called members of that Church, is a mere absurdity. I know the Methodists in the Dales set a superstitious value upon the performance of the Burial Service over their dead; but in other parts of the country, the Wesleyans themselves would be the first to resent such a proposal. So that you see, Mr. Halstead did not, actually, offer any disrespect whatever to your father's memory; he merely referred him to the burial rites of the community of which he had been a member. I honour your filial respect for your father's memory; but you are altogether mistaken in your views. Besides, whether Mr. Halstead was right or wrong in acting as he did, is no business of yours or mine. He certainly did no more than carry out to the letter the rubric of the Church of England. Who—even supposing him to have acted injudiciously in announcing his intention of refusing to bury Dissenters—who is the most to blame?—he, for doing manfully what he believed to be a duty, however painful; or you, for nourishing an unmanly enmity towards him on that account?"

But George's feelings upon this subject were far too excitable to admit of his reasoning coolly upon it. He replied—

"Ay, well; I know you say true, but somehow we do set a deal on t' buryin' service hereawaa'. An' I know 'tis true a man oughtn't to bear a grudge ageän another man for doing

what he conceits to be his duty. But, 'tisn't that: 'tisn't as if 'twas *me* Mr. Halstead had done any hurt to. God knows I'd have laid myself down for him to walk over, and been proud to—but poor father; an' him dead an' couldn't stand up for himself!—I can't forgive him—I can't!" said George, passionately; and then he added, with a strong touch of pride in his tone, "No doubt you judge a low chap like me hasn't got any right to bear a grudge ageän a gentleman like him."

Latham laid his hand very kindly upon George's arm, as the youth drew himself loftily up from his attitude of lounging upon the low wall towards which they had both sauntered whilst speaking.

"I judge a man is a man, before God, be he gentle or simple, if that can give him a right to bear a grudge against a fellow-man; but I never found that in the Bible."

Somehow, stranger as Mr. Latham was, George had fairly allowed himself to be enticed out of his shell; and now, yielding to the instinct that said it was a friend's hand which lay on his arm, he answered the sympathy that glistened in Mr. Latham's eye, though his words were a rebuke.

"Oh, sir, you don't know what a right-up, honourable, God-fearing man faather was; and then to be told he wasn't good enow to have the burying service read over him, when *he* (meaning Halstead) went and read it over that drunken old good-for-nought, Wat Nash, and never a word said, just because a priest splashed a wee drop o' water ower t' one when he was a bairn, an' not ower t' other: an' all for t' sake of t' Church he'd been dinning me wi' till I e'en a'most thought nobody could win to heaven wi'out it! Why, sir, 'tis meaking that 'Anglo-Catholic Church' he tells about no better as a mean, beggarly dissenting shop, like yon," pointing to the dissenting chapel the roof of which was visible in the distance, "where they tell a man he's a child o' t' devil, an' saafe to gan to hell fro' t' cradle unless he's o' their waay o' thinking. 'Tis my belief if God has got a Catholic Church, it's got doors wide enow to let in them as have served Him, whether they've got a shade of sin washed off i' baptism or no. It may be a close shade to get in; but not so close as *that*, sure! The Bible says God gives free pardon; t' Church says He doesn't. What is a man to believe when the Bible says one thing, an' t' Church, or leastways t' *priest*, another? One o' 'em must lie: sometimes I feel e'en a'most inclined to think they both do."

There was a tone of grave rebuke in Latham's voice as he replied :

"Young man, you, in your ignorance, speak lightly on a subject which has occupied the gravest thoughts of the wisest men for ages. But, as I said before, I do not wish to discuss with you the liability of human reason to err in matters of belief as well as in other things; it is enough for us that God *cannot* err. No doubt His grace is free and broad, and He knows well who are his servants, and recompenses them accordingly. But I would speak to you like a real friend and father, if you will let me, as well as like God's minister, as I *must* speak to you. Tell me, in your doubt whether the Bible and the Church were true, did you think you should find what truth was, by keeping company with bad men and loose women, with drunkards, thieves, and liars, who had not a grain of truth in them ? "

George's face flushed red and his brow grew black, and a fierce "What business is that of yours?" trembled on his tongue, when again Latham laid his hand upon the young man's arm.

"For your dead father's sake, and as if he could see you —who knows but that he can ?—tell me, did you find truth, or comfort, or even stupefaction, or anything but shame, and degradation, and disgust ? "

The flush and the frown faded away. George sank his face upon his hands on the wall, and answered, humbly,—

"You say true, sir."

"George, in the name of God, whose servant I am, I command you to repent and forsake such evil ways; and in the name of your father, even as if I were he, I entreat you to return to your duty and lead a life like an upright Christian man as you may be, and not a worse life than that of a beast, as you have been doing lately."

George remained silent, with his face hidden between his hands. Latham went on :

"In the name of the woman you love, let her have a *man* for a husband, and not a blackguard, who will soon be a brute and break her heart." George started, and raised his head.

"That I *never* will, God knows ! " he exclaimed.

Mr. Latham seemed to know so much about him, and spoke with such irresistible authority, that George in his wonder, quietly acquiesced in his knowledge of his love-secret also. Mr. Latham almost smiled at his simplicity.

"Can you promise that in your own strength?" he asked.

George sank his head again.

"No, sir; no, I can't," was his dejected, humiliated reply.

"Can't you look for strength anywhere?"

"I'll try," said George, in a low, meek voice.

"God bless the endeavour!" said Latham, solemnly. "Now, friend George—if you will let me call you friend—I should like, before we part, to hear you say that you will let bygones be bygones with Mr. Halstead."

George replied, doubtfully, "I'll try, sir—but I *can't* forget poor faather: an' I doubt I gien ower many promises to-night already."

Latham thought it better to leave time to exercise its healing influence upon this sore point, and therefore pressed it no further.

"Now," he continued, "I can easily imagine that, in making up your mind to give up a set of companions who may have claims of one sort or other upon you, there are difficulties which I can know nothing at all about. All I can say, therefore, is, if there be anything which is particularly disagreeable to you to do, and yet which you know *ought* to be done, do that thing *first;* if possible, before you sleep this night."

I am not sure George did not begin to conceive that Mr. Latham was a wizard; for he looked up with a startled air, and stared in that gentleman's kind, honest face in a way that brought a smile there.

"I don't know how you know it all," said he, "but that's *just* where it is! I *do* know what I ought to do, an' I'll do it; though I hate to think on 't: and, sir, I know nowght about you except you're an honest, hearty man, an' you've done me good, an' I humbly thank you; an' if you don't mind taking a poor man's hand in yours, I give you my word of honour, sir, I'll do my best, with God's help, to make a change, and be as right-forrard a man as my father was before me."

Latham returned the stringent gripe of George's hand with interest, and with a smile whose brilliancy sent a ray of sunlight dancing into the youth's heart; and so they parted.

George walked straight on, with a swift purpose-like step, to Squire Tappin's gate; there he felt a qualm come over him, so he opened it hastily in order not to give himself time to think, marched up to the kitchen-door, lifted the latch, and walked in. Squire Tappin was seated beside the blazing fire napping cozily, his wife and daughters were knitting and

gossiping, and Kid, the brindled sheepdog, lay stretched at his master's feet. The said Kid started up with a very unkid-like and canine growl, but, recognising George, he changed his threatening salutation into a friendly wag of the tail and a snuffing inspection of the intruder's hands and clothes, and then sat down, blinked lazily at the fire, and yawned. Squire Tappin waked up, too, as George said—

"Good even, mistress; good even, misses. Squire, can I have a word wi' you?"

Squire Tappin regarded George with some degree of hesitation and doubt.

"Thee can so, lad, na doubt," he replied; and then, his hospitality overcoming his dubiety as to what sort of a reception he should give the young man, he was about to bid him take a seat; but George said hurriedly,—

"A minute i' t' yard, Squire, if you please."

The Squire looked unwillingly at the glowing fire; then, raising his substantial person slowly from his chair, he gave himself a shake, and went out into the yard with George.

George tried at an introduction, but failed; so he went straight to his subject.

"Squire, I've got into a bit o' trouble, and I want you to lend me a matter o' twenty pounds upon t' auld mare, till I can get t' money to pay you and get her back again."

Squire Tappin looked reflective, stuck his hands into his breeches' pockets, and looked down at his sturdy, buskined legs in silence. George watched him anxiously. At last he said,—

"Time was, lad, when I should ha' said to thy father's son, 'Here's t' money! Tak 't. I want nowght o' thee but thy word: pay me as soon's thee canst.' Boot noo—— Thee's played na de'il's tricks wi' t' auld mare, George?"

The gathering twilight hid the scarlet flush of indignation which mantled George's face, but the feeling spoke in his hurt, offended, yet sorrowful tone.

"Devil's tricks wi' t' poor auld mare? I'd as lief ha' played tricks wi' t' moother as bore me! Why, Squire, I'd have given you my own blood as surety a deal liefer as I'd give my old Nance, if I thought you'd take it."

"Weel, weel, lad—no offence; boot thee's not been so ower 'sponsible o' late as to maak a man blithe to trust thee; dost see?"

"I don't ask ye to trust me Squire; there's t' mare, she's

worth more as twenty pound if she's worth a penny: if ye dunna get your money, ye get more as your money's worth; but, if you wunna do't to befriend me, wha', I mun sell her out an' out."

"Ay, ay, George, lad, I'll do 't for auld acquaintance sake. But dunna ye gan on thatten a-waay, young chap, or t' farm 'll gan next."

"I wean't maak pie-crust promises, Squire. But if you'll lend me t' money, I'll be greatly beholden to you."

"Ay, lad, I'll do't—I'll do't. Boot coom in to t' hoos, for 't wex chill, and I'll get it for thee."

"I thank you, Squire, but I take no money till I bring you t' mare, and that'll be in an hour from now; an' I'm your servant for the obligation," and away strode George without waiting for an answer.

He walked rapidly back towards home: he didn't like his errand, and wanted to get it over. Then the idea of Robson came into his mind. He wondered if he had been too hard upon him. Just then he heard the report of a gun somewhere near his own premises, and he thought, "There he is blazing away at some poor little dumb beast of a rabbit; an' it breeding time an' all: but *he* dean't heed if there's a kindling of little 'uns 't home to be starved if t' moother's killed—not he. After all, he's a cruel-hearted kind o' chap. Well, I shall get out of his debt, and keep my promise to Annie to ha' nowght to do wi' him."

Here he came to his own gate: he called to the mare, and the gentle creature came quickly at the sound of his voice. He took her into the stable, gathered together the scattered oats from the bottom of the bin and put them into the manger, and then proceeded to groom and clean her with the most scrupulous care. When he had made her coat shine, and combed her main and tail, he looked at her admiringly, though sorrowfully.

"Thee's a real beauty, old Nance; I wouldn't take thy weight in gold for thee if I could help it: thee looks well now, if 'tis the last time I ever rub thee down. Coom, lass, 'tis a sorrowful thing for thee and me to part; but we mun do't. Coom, then;" and George put a halter round the patient head that yielded so willingly to his hand, and turned such wistful loving eyes and quick graceful ears towards all his motions. Having finished his preparations and cast an eye round him to make sure he was alone, poor George flung his

arms round the creature's neck, and kissed her on the white spot on her forehead, and fairly cried; but time was flying fast, so he led his favourite out, and laying his arm across her back, the two walked quickly off to Squire Tappin's.

When Mr. Latham came upon George and Annie so inopportunely, as it seemed, that evening, he rendered them a mighty service; although, indeed, not one of the three thought so at the time. But it so happened that Mr. Latham was not the only spectator of the conclusion of that interview.

Behind an old, gnarled, tufted pollard-elm, that grew near the little spring, lurked one in whose bosom seethed a tumult of hatred, passion, and revenge, as he witnessed that meeting. It was Robson, who, unobserved by George, had followed him to the spot, and now, with livid face, and breath held back, was bending eagerly forward, straining every nerve to catch the words of the discourse of the lovers, although they fell like blisters on his ear. He held George's gun with both hands, and his knuckles stood up white with the violence of the gripe, which seemed as if it would have pressed his fingers into the welded steel. Once and again the weapon was lifted to his shoulder, and once and again a deathly cold-sweat came over the forehead of the would-be murderer, and the levelled piece trembled in his relaxed grasp. But stung to madness by the sight of that final embrace, he flung the gun once more to his shoulder, and, his nerves strung by passionate hate, took deadly aim. A moment more and the trigger would have been pulled; when a footstep, inaudible to the rapt lovers, caught the ear of the guilty wretch; he dropped the gun from his shoulder, and, scared, as if he had done the deed he meditated, slunk off under cover of the hedge, until he was safe from the danger of observation, and then he dashed away madly across the fields.

Robson had taken the way back to George's farm instinctively, but he did not go in; he hung and slunk about miserably, in the farmyard and about the outhouses: once, when George's old-woman house-servant came out to feed the pigs, he startled her horribly with his white face, by coming upon her suddenly and then retreating as suddenly. She called to him when she recognized him, to know if he and George were not coming in to supper; he said he had not seen George, and wasn't hungry himself, and went off again. After that he went into the road, and then back again, always carrying the gun; sometimes clutching it fiercely, sometimes almost casting

it from him. Once he heard a step coming along the road, and he trembled all over violently; but his strained ear soon distinguished that it was the lumbering, heavy tread of an every-day peasant, not George's firm, quick step, and a sensation of almost joyful reprieve came over him. Shortly after that, whether he gave way to some more human feeling towards the man with whom he had lived as a friend, or whether his courage utterly failed him, he hardly knew himself, but in one of his sudden impulses of passion, he fired the piece off into the air, and, hastening into the house, thrust it into its corner, as if to hide it from his eye, and then went out again. It was late before he came back, and when he did, he was more than half intoxicated. George was waiting up for him, and there was a solemnity blended with kindness in his manner, which somewhat sobered Robson, as he came reeling into the room. George was surprised to see him in this state, for he seldom drank to such an excess as to render himself unsteady.

"Joe Robson," said George, "I've been waiting to keep my word with you before I slept this night: here is the money I owe you." He proceeded to count it out of a small canvas bag; that done, he replaced it, tied it up, and handed the bag to Robson, who took it with a half stupefied stare. George added: "Now, Joe Robson, I don't owe you any grudge: I freely forgive you all the harm you've done to me, though God knows it's been a terrible deal; and if I've any ways misjudged you, I ask your pardon. I said I wouldn't strike hands with you again: no more I will; but I'll do you a good turn if ever it comes in my way. I won't say go out o' my house this night, now you're drunk nigh enow not to be able to take care o' yourself; but I do say, don't let to-morrow's sun show me your face. God forgive you, Joe Robson, and so farewell." George was turning away as he said this, with a sorrowful mien; but Robson, now pretty well steadied, exclaimed—

"George, if I didn't hate you as I do, I could like you right well! Forgive me, do you? that's more than I do you. Think yourself lucky if you never set eyes on me again. I'm not drunk enough to lie in your house to-night. If I did—one of us would never see the light again," he muttered between his teeth, and turned to the door.

George laid his hand on Robson's shoulder, exclaiming, "Stop the night, man;" but Robson flung it off furiously.

"Don't stop me, or you'll get it yet!" he shouted, and dashed out of the house.

George followed him to the gate, and even a little way down the road; but he heard Robson's footsteps already in the distance at a rapid run. He went back, closed the door, and went to bed, with an easier conscience than he had borne of late.

On the Sunday after this day so eventful to our friend George, Mr. Latham took Halstead's duty. A large congregation thronged the church to hear "t' straange minister," and a very strange one they concluded he was, before the service was over. As usual, the people left the parson and the clerk to do the praying, whilst they stared at the stranger: but Mr. Latham did not approve of this mode of proceeding at all; accordingly, when he came to the Creed, his grand, solemn voice repeated the first sentence, "I believe in God the Father;" there he came to a dead halt: no one but the clerk had repeated it after him. He began again; once more the solemn words rolled sonorously through the building, this time quite unresponded to. Another stop. A third time he repeated them, and stopped. Then looking inquiringly upon the crowd of aghast faces and gaping mouths, he enunciated, in a loud, clear, distinct voice—

"My brethren, are there none amongst you who believe in God?"*

The Creed was repeated audibly enough after that—and what a sensation it did make! In the afternoon, so great was the concourse, that many people had to stand, after James Deacon and Luke Tillot had exhausted their ingenuity in improvising seats. Mr. Latham preached, and certainly it was a sermon well worth listening to. Halstead heard with astonishment the simple, homely words, in which the preacher put forth the glorious Gospel truths. Mr. Latham sometimes even adopted the idioms of the country folk; and they listened as if they were fascinated, with a breathless, absorbing interest, such as Halstead did not fancy could have been excited in their sluggish minds and stolid countenances by *any* subject, far more by such a one. Why, they were actually human beings, with *souls!* hungry, questioning souls, that wanted feeding and satisfying! He began to doubt about the doctrinal chips that he had been giving them so long, whether they really were nutritious enough to keep the souls he saw were

* A fact.

there from starvation. So we leave this question to work in his mind, together with all the other questions that were already fermenting there.

"Pardon me, Halstead," said Latham, "for taking what I fear was a great liberty in your church this morning: I mean speaking about their not repeating the Creed. I thought an expression of surprise from a stranger might do more than the oft-repeated admonitions of their own pastor, or I should not have ventured upon such an attempt. Of course I could not foresee the necessity, and ask your leave."

Halstead replied, "Don't apologize: I see more and more every day that I have not understood these people; I have done them injustice as well as harm. Do you do them good fro Heaven's sake, where you can. You have my free permission to do and say what you please to them and me; perhaps light may come to me yet, and you may be the means of bringing it."

Latham stayed with Halstead "a clergyman's week" longer; that is, over the next Sunday; and till it was time to depart upon his homeward journey, to be ready for the duties of the Sunday after that.

A marked alteration for the better took place in Frank's looks before his friend left him; there was a colour on his cheek, and a life in his eye, and a degree of elasticity in his step that astonished the neighbours and surprised even himself. Latham won from him several promises before he left him: one was to take no further steps at present as to the resignation of the curacy, another to come into the south so soon as he could get his duty supplied.

Besides this, he also enticed Halstead in one or two instances into such familiar contact with some of the younger members of his flock, as, had the question been propounded to him in cold blood, he would have considered most inconsistent with his "priestly office;" yet resulting from which, when once led into it, he found no derogation either from personal or ecclesiastical dignity. One of these occasions was as follows:—Latham observing some of the young men standing idling about in the evenings, proposed a game at cricket; and before he left he actually managed to organize a sort of cricket club, of which he took care to make Frank "Captain," and "Treasurer," and "Secretary" all in one: not to speak of his being *the* scientific player whose batting and bowling the youths admired, but scarcely hoped to imitate.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PEEP BEHIND THE SCENES.

MARGARET was but a poor, wan, weak creature, scarcely able as yet to bear her own weight, when Lady Aston and the younger girls returned from Brighton. Lady Aston talked of Margaret's "rousing" herself, and recommenced the lessons immediately; but Mr. Brown said—

"Impossible for another week at least; and in the meantime she must be well fed, and kindly cared for, and amused, my lady, amused."

Lady Aston was astonished at the idea of a governess requiring to be amused. She was accustomed to look upon the article as a kind of knowledge machine, to be set to grind when required; and as regarded its humanity, made of very inferior stuff, only a little better than that required for a housemaid. And now the creature was to be amused, and that without lessons! At first, Lady Aston thought she would send the lady's-maid to sit with Margaret; but then Paget was a very fine lady, and her dignity might be hurt at being requested to sit with the governess: Lady Aston dared not ask her. So with a sudden attack of benevolence which quite took her by surprise, her ladyship decided upon undertaking the task of amusing Margaret herself! Inspired with this bright idea, she bustled into Margaret's room, where the fair wan invalid sat wrapped in a white dressing-gown and supported by pillows; looking as ethereal and as unfit for this rough earth as could possibly be. Lady Aston was startled by the contrast offered by that pure, white figure, to the rouged reflection which had answered her glance in the mirror in her own room a minute before.

"Good gracious me, Miss Langley! you look like a ghost! For heaven's sake put on another dressing-gown! or stay, there's a pink flannel one in my room: you'll look charming in it!" and off went her ladyship to fetch it. Poor Margaret, languid and spiritless, would have been very glad to have remained as she was; but Lady Aston meant it kindly, so she exerted herself to make the requisite change of apparel, and then sank back on her pillows exhausted. Her ladyship loudly applauded herself for the improvement she had effected; and then she was going to read to Miss Langley. Would Miss

Langley like to be read to? Margaret would fain have replied, "No, I should like to be let alone;" but she thanked Lady Aston faintly, and shutting her eyes, leaned back, and submitted to a chapter of the newest novel; Lady Aston occasionally interrupting the thread of her story by a few remarks of her own on the latest style of bonnet, dress, &c.

But Lady Aston really did do Margaret good, by obliging her to remember she belonged to the actual world, and ought to be up and doing. A good constitution came to her aid likewise, and she soon rallied from the state of debility in which the fever had left her. The lessons were recommenced, and so by degrees were the customary walks.

Whilst she was recovering, Sir Henry and his sisters came back from Snagton. This was matter of no small excitement to Margaret. She dressed herself with trembling fingers, and betook herself to the drawing-room on the first evening of their return; looking forward eagerly to hearing something of Snagton—perhaps also of Mr. Halstead. She had never mentioned her connection with the place, and wondered whether they would have heard of it; but they did not seem to have done so. Presently she ventured to ask how they had liked their visit to Yorkshire.

"Oh!" replied Miss Arabella, "they are such a lot of Goths there! and the 'Hoose,' as they call it, is such a queer old place: and what a jargon the people do talk!"

"Ah! I remember, love: I went down with your poor papa, poor thing! on my wedding trip; but the people were so barbarous, he never could induce me to go again, though he had a sort of unaccountable liking for the place himself. There wasn't any sort of a creature to speak to that understood English except the clergyman, and he actually dined at eleven o'clock in the morning. Your papa insisted that I ought to call, and that we should ask him to dinner; and so I went really quite early, and he said he had dined, and he wouldn't go out so near bed-time as half-past six: he did indeed, dears!"

"I shouldn't think the present man, Halstead, ever dines at all, by the look of him," said Miss Evelina.

"Not bad-looking though, for all that," put in Arabella.

"I suppose he's some unfortunate quiz or other, of course, love?" queried Lady Aston.

"I can't say, ma," replied her daughter; "we did go to church on purpose to get a look at him, but bless you, one

might as well have wasted one's most dashing turn-out on one of the Nineveh bulls! I don't believe he even saw we were in church."

"I did some stunning genuflexions, and went through the service in the most elegant and correct way; but an oyster would have appreciated it just as much as he did!" cried the fair Evelina.

"Ah! some ignorant countrified clown, no doubt, loves," remarked her ladyship.

"An uncommon gentlemanly fellow, whatever else he may be," said Sir Harry.

"Really? Did he call on you, dear?"

"No, I called on him," replied that man of few words.

"Indeed! was he tolerable?"

"Very."

"Ah! what sort of a man, love? Does he know anybody, or belong to any one?"

"Didn't ask him. Uncommon pious I should think—seemed to think church architecture had a good deal to do with religion."

During this conversation Margaret had remained stooping over her work, so that it was impossible to see her face, if any one had felt inclined to watch it; but she looked up quickly and brightly when Sir Harry defended Halstead from the accusation of clownish rusticity. She felt a small debt of gratitude to him on that account, and even addressed some remark to him with a smile, in the course of the evening. After that day a sort of friendship grew up between her and Sir Harry, who often did her little acts of kindness that one would have scarcely expected him to think of; true, they were proffered in such a shy, awkward fashion that Margaret didn't know what they were meant for till she came to reflect. He never talked to her in the evenings before his mother and sisters; but if he were ever so sound asleep before she entered the room, he was sure to wake up in time to draw in his legs, so that she could get to her chair. Sometimes, also, when she looked up, she found his eyes fixed upon her; but they seemed quite void of all speculation, and Margaret generally met his glance with a smile of undisguised good-will. As to making an impression upon Sir Harry's affections, she never thought whether he had got any! The idea of rousing a flame in the breast of so sleepily well-disposed a lump of humanity certainly never entered her head.

She had as little idea that her looks and actions, as well as those of Sir Harry, were most constantly, anxiously, and jealously watched by both mamma and sisters, until the young man returned to London. Sir Harry often came down for a day or two at a time; sometimes bringing an officer friend or two, sometimes coming alone. His coming, accompanied, was generally a signal to the young ladies for a rush to adorn, and for a vast deal of excitement. But when he came alone, remarks would pass such as—"How often you come down now, Henry. Do you find the air good for your health?"

"What the deuce is that to you, Arabella? Why shouldn't I come down?"

Before Margaret, too, mention would be carefully made of certain ladies whom Sir Harry was supposed to admire, to have admired, or to be about to admire; and she, in the simplicity of her heart, believed in them all, hoping that she who, amongst the many, might be the selected fair one would make him a judicious wife, and draw forth the good qualities which she believed were latent under the habitual indolence of his character.

The winter passed as winters in the country generally do, varied occasionally by an evening party at the neighbouring houses. Lady Aston herself, urged by maternal solicitude for the settlement of her elder daughters, entertained friends at a ball, the real object of which was the hope of fixing the supposed favourable, though wavering, inclination of the wealthy Lord Desborough for Arabella. But, alas, the choicest of bait was thrown out in vain, the wayward fish resisted all such allurement; and worse than all, seemed decidedly struck with the appearance of Miss Langley, by whose side he was to be seen much more frequently than by that of Arabella; until alarmed by the indications of storm she beheld around her, the governess retired to her own room—and then Lord Desborough too retired!

But things resumed their usual course again after that. The spring came, and the London season, and the Misses Aston and their mamma went to town; Margaret and her charge being once more left to the lonely house. Lady Aston came down once or twice to see how things were getting on; and towards the end of June the whole party reassembled. But then recommenced Lady Aston's maternal anxieties about her son. He did, most certainly, admire Miss Langley: indeed, he didn't scruple to say as much, in his blunt, lazy

sort of way. Lady Aston would have been thankful to find any cause of complaint against Miss Langley; but then there was nothing to find fault with. Margaret's duties were scrupulously performed; the children made visible progress, and were both very fond of their instructress. Even that was in some sort a grievance: little Nelly was a great pet with her large brother, and little Nelly was never willingly far from Miss Langley; and Sir Henry was sure to come to them wherever he saw them, and little Nelly was sure to be caught up and set upon his shoulder, where she sat steady and dignified like a little queen, whilst he walked beside Miss Langley. And Margaret, as unconstrained and easy as could be, was chatting with him, with never a notion that anything was going wrong. It *was* aggravating: Lady Aston and her daughters felt it to be intensely so; and they could not help showing their feelings in a way most unpleasant and most inexplicable to Miss Langley; namely, by a series of such petty slights and annoyances as only minds of calibre vast as those of Lady Aston and her daughters could have invented. Margaret Langley became most uncomfortable in her situation; though why she was rendered so, was to her a mystery. But a little incident which occurred soon afterwards, brought affairs to a climax, and unravelled the riddle to her comprehension.

One evening, when Bessy was helping Margaret to dress, the latter noticed that she loitered about the room, as if she had something on her mind, which she could not bring out; so she said,

"What have you to tell me, Bessy?"

Bessy hemmed, and put the things right on the table, and then said,

"Please, miss, I'm a-going away."

"Are you, Bessy? I'm very sorry. Why are you going?"

Bessy puckered up the corners of her mouth into a demure little screw, and the corners of her apron into a neat little frill, and replied,

"Please, miss, I'm going to be—married, miss."

"Really, Bessy! Then I ought to congratulate you, instead of saying I am sorry. I hope it is to a good man, who will make you happy."

"Oh, yes, miss! he's a very 'spectable young man: I shouldn't never 'ave been and a thought of him if he 'adn't 'ave been, miss, I'm sure!"

"What is he, Bessy?"

"Well, miss, he's the hunder gardener at Mr. Weston's; and he do a little in the private gardening way himself."

"Well, Bessy, I congratulate you, and wish you all kinds of happiness. When is it to be?"

Bessy blushed, and replied,

"Why, William is always a-pressing of me to name the day, miss; and so, I think it'll have to be early next month."

"I can only say, Bessy, that I am very glad for your sake, and sorry for my own. Mind you make him a tidy, good, loving wife: I think you will do that. I shall come and see you as soon as you're settled."

"Oh, if you please, miss; I shouldn't feel complete without *that*, indeed, miss."

Bessy left in due time, and the next morning at breakfast the conversation turned upon her approaching union with the "hunder gardener."

"I don't like that under gardener," said little Nelly.

"Why not, Nelly?" asked her brother.

"Because I wish Bessy had stopped, she was so kind," replied Nelly, with the tears coming up into her eyes.

"Why, Nelly, you wouldn't like to keep Bessy from having a nice little house and an under gardener all to herself, would you?" said Sir Harry.

"I wish she'd stopped," Nelly reiterated.

"Come, come, Nelly, you mustn't be selfish. I tell you what! Bessy's a good girl; suppose you and I were to give her a wedding-dress?" Nelly brightened up at that. "Yes; and I say, Nelly, when there's a small 'hunder gardener,' you should have him put into a state of buttons, to be your tiger, eh? Miss Langley will help us choose the dress, I am sure. What must it be, Miss Langley? silk, or satin, or bombazine, or what?"

Margaret, pleased at the kind thought and the comical way it was put, looked frankly up in his face with those great, beautiful, blue eyes of hers, and as she answered, laughed her own silver-clear, bright, happy laugh; such a laugh as she had not laughed for many a long day: she felt quite startled at the sound of it herself, or else at the looks of the faces which stared, stony, upon her from all sides of the breakfast table. Sir Harry, however, seemed as if the sound of it pleased him very well, for his face got quite handsome in its eagerness. as he said.

"Can't you go to Amerton with me to-day to choose it? Suppose I were to drive you and little Nelly over in the dog-cart this morning, and then we could——"

But a little shriek from his mamma stopped the rest of his speech, whilst, with a theatric gesture, Lady Aston rose from her seat, clapped her handkerchief to her eyes, and rushed out of the room; banging the door with a thunder that rolled down the stone passage after her.

Margaret sprang up, utterly astonished and confounded; and, reading in the visages of the sisters that she was, somehow, the unlucky cause of the disturbance, she followed suit and left the room also, whilst Sir Harry, altogether bewildered, sat and stared after her.

"What on earth ails my mother?" asked he.

"As if you didn't know?" returned one sister.

"Oh! of course you couldn't guess! not you!" retorted the other.

"Now, no humbug, girls: if I knew, I shouldn't ask. What do you mean?"

"Mean?" echoed Miss Arabella. "Isn't it enough to make mamma ill and miserable and wretched, to see you go on as you do, flirting with that horrid Miss Langley?"

"Whew! That's your game, is it? Now, I tell you what it is, girls," he continued, in a tone of severity very unusual with him, "Miss Langley is worth about twenty thousand of either of you, or both of you put together, for that matter; and I'd go to the devil sooner than be wanting in the least tittle of respect and honour to her: and if she only makes little Nelly a tenth part as good and as much a lady as she herself is, instead of such a fast, vulgar, empty-headed flirt as you are, I shall be thankful to her to my dying day. Flirt with Miss Langley indeed!"

And therewith Sir Harry marched very loftily out of the room and banged the door in his turn.

"Well! upon my word! Did you ever!" exclaimed Arabella, turning her astounded gaze upon the equally astounded countenance of her sister.

"After that!" said Evelina, slowly; and then as she recovered her presence of mind, on observing little Nelly's wide-open astonished eyes and Harriett's eager curiosity and attention, she remarked, "Little pitchers," and making a sign to her sister, the two young ladies followed their mamma.

Margaret, on her retreat from the breakfast-table, went

into her bedroom, and began to reflect upon what could possibly be the cause of Lady Aston's extraordinary conduct, and how she could be connected with it. An idea not very unlike the true one came into her head, but it was so absurd that it made her laugh aloud; and after puzzling herself a good deal, she came to the conclusion that, as she was aware of nothing reprehensible in her conduct, probably matters would right themselves again; or, if they did not, she must demand an explanation. Whilst she was still engaged in thinking over the matter, as she sat with her elbow on the table, she became aware that a little figure had stolen noiselessly to her knee, and that a pair of serious dark eyes were looking up into her face with a great deal of grave inquiry in them. Margaret looked down at the child with a face from which the impression of unpleasant thought had not yet cleared away, but she smiled as she met Nelly's eyes.

"What is it, Nelly?" she asked.

"Miss Langley, I want to know something."

"What do you want to know, little one?"

"What does 'to flirt' mean?"

"To flirt? What put that into your head, Nelly?"

"I want to know what it means, Miss Langley."

"Why—it means—to be giddy and foolish, Nelly."

"Then it's naughty to flirt?"

"Oh, very! but I am not afraid you'll be so naughty as that just yet."

"And brother Henry *doesn't* flirt with you, *does* he, Miss Langley?"

"Your brother flirt with me! no, child, *certainly* not! Who has been putting such nonsense into your head?"

"Then it was all a story Arabella told!" exclaimed Nelly, indignantly. "She told Henry that he and you flirted together and made mamma ill, and he was *so* angry."

Here was a peep behind the scenes with a vengeance.

Margaret said, "Hush, hush, Nelly! you must never repeat what you hear: it is very wrong; now go and play in the nursery till I want you."

Nelly went away in a state of suppressed indignation at the injustice done to her kind good brother, and her dear Miss Langley, and Margaret fell to reflecting what was to be done. Her first idea was to ring, and ask to see Lady Aston directly; but then a scene with her ladyship was not desirable, hysterics being sure to ensue; besides, she did not

wish to bring Nelly into disgrace. Now she understood the meaning of all the coldness and slights she had experienced of late. She had been supposed to be trying to entrap the representative of the family; and, much as she was annoyed, she could not help being amused by the idea. Still, something must be done; she could not think of remaining with people who could attribute such motives to her conduct.

She resolved to write a polite note, stating that, as she had observed with regret that Lady Aston did not appear to place such confidence in her integrity as she felt it deserved, she must beg to inform her that she wished to discontinue her residence in her ladyship's family on the next quarter-day. A reply was brought in so short a space of time, that Margaret could not but appreciate the relief her decision had given. Lady Aston "was sorry Miss Langley should think of leaving, and she was sure she was very much obliged to her for her care of her pupils, dear loves; but she observed that Miss Langley did not look well, and a change might be desirable; and indeed for some reasons she thought it would," &c. &c.

So Margaret wrote to Mrs. Snell, to ask her whether she could take her in for a little while; as she had given that good lady and her husband a promise to make their house her home, should she again require one.

Sir Harry left home the day after the breakfast scene, so that Margaret scarcely saw him again, and she sincerely hoped he would remain away during the remainder of her stay; for, with all her good-will towards him, she by no means wished to submit to a martyrdom of petty insults for his sake. Unfortunately for her wishes, Sir Harry came down a day or two before the time for her departure. He was evidently quite unconscious that any change had taken place in the household arrangement, though he was shyer than before in his manner to her. Little Nelly, too, knew nothing of her approaching loss, and Harriett was equally uninformed, although she had her own surmises. Margaret caressed little Nelly so tenderly the night before she was to leave, that Nelly looked up in her face with a sudden fear.

"Why do you kiss me so often to-night, dear Miss Langley?"

"I want you to be a good child, Nelly, and grow up to be a good woman."

"You'll always show me how, won't you?" asked Nelly, apprehensively.

"Good night, little one," replied Margaret, with her eyes full.

Harriett, who had seen signs of packing, came to her again in her night-dress after she was supposed to be in bed.

"Miss Langley, do tell me, are you going away?"

"Shall you be very sorry if I am, Harriett?"

Harriett needed no other answer; she burst at first into a noisy fit of crying, exclaiming,

"And it's all because mamma and my sisters don't want Henry to marry you! I know it is! and it's a horrid shame!"

"Nonsense, Harriett, you know nothing about it."

"I know it is!" broke in Harriett, "I'm certain of it! I wish he *would* marry you, dear Miss Langley!"

"I can't say I do," replied Margaret, and she pursued, "Harriett, put that nonsense out of your head; your mamma and I found we did not quite suit about some things, and so I proposed to leave myself."

Harriett did not seem satisfied, but she stopped crying, and throwing her arms round Margaret's neck, said,—

"I'm very sorry I ever bothered you, I really am! I want to be good for something, and if ever I am it will be all owing to you."

Margaret returned the embrace affectionately, and bidding Harriett endeavour to make herself good for something, she dismissed her. On the family retiring to rest that night, Lady Aston (who had been in a state of nervous agitation all the evening, to prevent anything being said before her son about Margaret's approaching departure) stopped at her bedroom door, and took leave. "Really, Miss Langley, I'm sure I am very sorry to part with you; I dare not tell the children till they find it out, poor loves: and indeed, if you had not been determined to leave us ——"

Here there came such a mischievous look into Margaret's smile, that Lady Aston hastened to add, "but I'm sure it's better as it is, my dear Miss Langley: I'm sure you're quite right."

But Margaret did not like hypocrisy, so she said, "Indeed, Lady Aston, I imagined that I was merely carrying out your wishes: if, on the contrary ——"

"Oh, my dear Miss Langley, pray don't think of it! I couldn't put you to so much inconvenience."

Margaret viciously persisted, "It would be no inconvenience, Lady Aston——"

"Oh, pray don't think of it! I wouldn't disarrange your plans for the world! Indeed, now I think of it, I have made arrangements with another lady!"

Lady Aston got quite into a fluster.

Margaret smiled and bade her good-night; the young ladies shook hands coldly.

"I say, ma, how near you were getting into a 'fix,'" said Arabella.

"Yes, love: words cost nothing, you know; and I thought it better to part on good terms, because she might say things, you know: but I never thought of her offering to stay. It really made me quite nervous."

"Why, didn't you see by her eye that she saw through it, ma, and was only just trying it on to give you a fright?"

"Dear me! do you think so, love? How very disagreeable and ill-natured of her!"

"How neatly we managed not to let Henry know: he'll be fast asleep when she starts."

But Sir Henry was *not* asleep when Margaret started; his mother's evil genius it was, perhaps, which put it into his head to get up early and take a constitutional walk that morning. At all events, just as Margaret's trunks were being put on to the fly, and as she came down prepared to start, who should come out of his smoking-room but Sir Henry himself. He stared at sight of Margaret, looked disconsolately at the trunks, and then said—

"Are you going for your holidays, Miss Langley? I hope you don't give very long ones?"

Margaret replied hastily, that she should not return, she believed.

Any one who knew Sir Harry intimately might have observed that his complexion blanched several degrees. He receded a step or two in speechless dismay; and before he had time to collect his thoughts, Margaret had shaken hands with him heartily, stepped into the fly, and been driven off.

When Sir Henry recovered his presence of mind, the first thing he did was to growl out something very like an oath; the next, to order a horse to be saddled directly; and he walked up and down, looking like thunder till it was ready. Then he mounted and rode off to the station. But just as he reached the platform, he saw Margaret's train start; so he thought better of it, and instead of taking a ticket, he went home and took his breakfast. But never a word said he all the time, till poor little Nelly, who had been covertly drying the trickling tears instead of eating her breakfast, suddenly broke into a fit of very bitter crying; then her big brother

got up, and, taking in his arms the little girl, who clung round his neck and wept as if her heart would break, he turned round to his mothers and sisters, and said—

"Mother, and you, sisters, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves and your plotting and planning. You've helped me to make up my mind though, I can tell you, if that's any satisfaction."

And thereupon he walked off with Nelly, whom he comforted by telling her that Miss Langley would perhaps come back some day, and they should be very happy; and he took her to see Bessy, who was now happily united to her "hunder gardener."

Sir Harry returned to town next day, and did not reappear for such a very long time that his mother became alarmed; more especially as letter after letter remained unanswered.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"T' FEVER."

GEORGE kept his promise to Annie faithfully, though he was beset in his course of amendment by difficulties and temptations innumerable. He had lost a valuable aid to his agricultural operations in his mare: fortunately, the crops were in, and up; still the mare was a terrible loss, and one which his couple of oxen could in no way replace. But he laboured with his own hands incessantly; he was out late and early after his sheep, and he hoped to extricate himself from his pressing embarrassments by the sale of the year's produce: though it must necessarily be a pinch. So George kept up his spirits in the midst of his difficulties, and every Sunday found him walking to church beside Annie, as of old. Things were not on the same footing as formerly between him and Mr. Halstead, it is true; for, though he did not so obviously avoid that gentleman as before, and though he touched his hat to him respectfully when he met him, still there was an almost imperceptible, but none the less deeply felt, separation between them. This arose, on the one hand, from shyness and the reserve of wounded feeling; on the other, from George's idea that he should be wanting in respect to his dead father's memory did he become reconciled to one

who had wished to treat that father's remains with irreverence. But it so happened that he was not brought at all into contact with Mr. Halstead during some time; for the latter, having succeeded in obtaining a representative in his church, took a journey to the south in the beginning of May, intending to visit all his friends, and to pass some time with Mr. Latham at Enderby.

As time wore on, George's difficulties did not lessen; nevertheless, he still struggled with them as well as he could, sometimes turning faint-hearted, yet keeping up a manful spirit upon the whole. But it is easier to let a farm get out of condition than to bring it round again, especially when funds are scarce; and George's crops did not answer as he could have wished; and despite his care, he had sundry losses in his flock. Things didn't look well at all; and he began, what with hard living, hard work and anxiety, to look careworn and shrunken. It needed all Annie's soothing ways and little coquettish wiles to keep him from desponding outright, not to speak of getting snarly. For instance, when one evening George came to the back gate and Annie tripped down to speak to him,—

"I was just wishing you'd come," she said, "not that I wanted to see you, in course, George!"

George smiled so sadly, it made Annie's heart ache. But she said, "You never saw anything like our roses, they are so full of bloom; only they want fettling up terrible."

"What time have I to think about roses?" said George, moodily.

"Oh! but for Miss Langley's sake, George! I shouldn't like her to come and see *you'd* not thought about her while she was away."

"I wish she'd never gone away: things never went right afterwards."

"Ah, but they'll mend soon, George, dear; I'm sure they will."

"I wish I was dead, Annie!"

"Oh, George, dear! Don't talk like that! I think sometimes you worrit too much. It's no good tuing about things as if one had got to do it all for oneself, instead of waiting for God's blessing on it; and the Bible says, 'It is in vain to rise up early and take rest late, for so He giveth his beloved sleep." *Do* have faith, George: it'll all come right."

George sighed.

Annie took hold of his hand. "Come and look at the garden," she said. Onee there, George began to lift up the trailing branches of the rose trees, as they hung down loaded with blossom; he pulled a piece of string out of his pocket, and began to tie them up, and as he worked he became more cheerful.

"George," said Annie, softly, as he set free a glorious spray of cloth-of-gold roses from its entanglement of wild bindweed, "when God makes the roses come again so beautiful after winter, I don't think he'll leave us to be always in trouble."

"Mebbe not, Annie: I begin to feel so too."

"Come and look at *our* tree, George."

George went. The tree was a sheet of blossom; Annie picked the sweetest bud she could find, smelling at them all to ascertain, and put it into George's button-hole.

"If I give you that beautiful, sweet bud, won't you give me my two withered roses back, George?"

"Noa, Annie, I'll never part with them all my life. I don't know what I might ha' been, but for you an' they roses, my Annie."

Annie hid her face against the rosebud she was securing; but as George put his arm round her, she slipped away from him. "Give me another then, Mr. George; and mind it's a beauty." George picked her one. She took it and examined it and said, with a little toss of her head, "Are you sure you wouldn't like to give it to any one else better this time, George?" George put a kiss on the saucy upturned mouth. "How dare you, sir, and never said 'by your leave!'" exclaimed Annie.

"Beg pardon, Annie, I forgot; I'll just put it back again, and that ll make all square!"

So the summer passed on, and the autumn approached, and the roses left off blooming, and the corn began to grow yellow, and George looked anxiously after his harvest.

Meantime, Mr. Halstead, down there with those kind-hearted Enderby people, was picking up fresh health of mind and body every day; for Mr. Latham led him into bodily exercise, and the young folks enticed him into romps, and Mrs. Latham beguiled him of his sorrows with her gentle, motherly ways and cheerful talk. Frank began to feel himself a new man, and to look with surprise upon the views he had taken of life a month or two ago. He looked on at the

working of Mr. Latham's parish, and saw that it answered exceedingly well : schools, congregation, church, and services, all were in first-rate order ; although there was no ostentatious display about any of them. The quiet superintendence and active efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Latham had set things going, and kept them progressing ; and Frank confessed to himself that, though he heard little discussion upon "Church" subjects, he had never anywhere seen the effects of the ecclesiastical institution so well carried out. Nay, more than once he caught himself doubting whether he had not been greatly mistaken in grafting on to the merely pastoral office, which he saw his friend simply claiming and fulfilling in all humility, so much of the sacerdotal character asserted by the priests of Rome. He began too, from time to time, to feel a degree of uncertainty, as to whether the Church system, upon which he had hitherto placed his dependence, necessarily involved any of the spirit of vital religion ; and once more we leave him to his doubts.

It was autumn when Halstead came back to Snagton. It was a cloudy day, and as he came to the brow of the moor whence the road sloped down into the dale, the valley lay cold and gray before him, losing itself in a sullen autumnal mist which hung on the skirts of the hills. A chill came over his heart as he thought of all he had suffered there, and he was about gloomily to commence the descent ; when, all at once, the clouds parted away from the sun behind him, and a long, golden beam went glancing away and away, down the slope, up the valley, and along the hillside ; the dingy lifeless gray cottages started into warm, human dwellings with blue, curling smoke ; the yellowing corn waved, gleaming golden on the upland ; the mist caught the magic, and curled gracefully in shadowy wreaths amidst the trees, where the red berries and yellow leaves of the rowan and wild Guelder rose gleamed like veins of ruddy ore amongst the forest green. And into Halstead's heart, too, that sunny beam of hope went smiling, and lighting up all the gloom it found there into thankfulness and love and faith ; and as he looked and saw how God had blessed the earth with beauty, and made it very plenteous, he thanked Him in his heart, and prayed to be taught how to serve Him according to His will.

But the bright augury of the hour did not seem destined to be verified. Halstead met with but a doubtful welcome

from his parishioners, when he went amongst them once more. Prejudice takes deep root in the minds of the ignorant. His very kindnesses and gifts were looked upon with suspicion, as if they covered a purpose; and he fell back upon himself, hurt and silent, with the chill of disappointment at his heart. For all the kindly feeling of his nature had been roused up into active play amongst the warm ties of affection and friendship at Enderby; and it seemed almost a doubt whether things would not fall back into their old unhappy train, and whether he had not been right in his wish to throw up his cure, and recommence his career under different auspices.

But, as sometimes happens in the varied accidents of human life—if such things as accidents there be—an occasion of common misfortune resulted in the common good, and by serving to bring Halstead and his parishioners into far closer connection with each other than hitherto, induced a reciprocity of good offices, and thereby, necessarily, of friendly feeling.

It happens, not unfrequently, amongst the Dales—where the villages are located, with more regard to shelter than to health, in the valleys which receive the drainings of the hills, and thence derive a tendency to marshiness, white fog, and malaria—that epidemics of a very serious and even fatal character prevail. Scarlet fever and typhus of a malignant type, at such times, make sad ravages amongst both the child and adult population of these hamlets. The report that a scourge of this kind has made its appearance in a village, is a signal for a universal panic amongst the inhabitants. The bonds of social life seem to be snapped for the time: even family affection is scarcely sufficient to subdue the ignorant terror of the Dales folk; and but too often the infested house is entirely abandoned by all the neighbours, so that a mother and children have even been known to lie dead in a house for several days before any one was aware of it. This year the summer had been unusually damp, and when the autumn approached, a sickly season ensued. Halstead had been very much occupied in visiting the sick, and was one morning preparing to recommence his rounds, when Mrs. Hawkins came in, with a rather anxious face.

"Ye wasn't boon to gan ower t' hill to Smoorham Becks, was ye, sir?"

"No, Mrs. Hawkins, I am going to the village. Why do you ask?"

"Wha, sir, I did hear Miles Agar's folks had gotten t' fever, an' I was feared ye mut be gannin amongst 'em an' gettin' yersel laid by, or summat."

"What fever is it? I have heard of nothing of the kind."

"Wha—'tis—t' *fever*, sir; an' 'tis desput ketchin' an' no seafe to gan nigh. Boot if yer na boon thatten aweay——"

"Well, but, Mrs. Hawkins, if there's anything of that sort in the parish, I must see about it. I'll go there instead of to the village, this morning."

"Sakes, Mr. Halstead! why, 'tis as much as yer life's worth, sir. Ye'll na gan' an' put yersel straight i' t' weay o' t' *fever*, sure?"

"Oh! I am not afraid for myself; and I shall have a long walk, and a fine breeze on the moor coming back, so that there's no fear of my bringing the infection here, Mrs. Hawkins."

"Well! boot Lord be gude till oos—dunna ye do 't, sir! pray, dean't, noo!"

"Yes! yes! Mrs. Hawkins, I must," said Halstead, smiling at her alarm. "Why, what should I be good for, if I was afraid to go and see after my people in their troubles? You need not be at all alarmed on my account, though, I assure you; I believe that I shall not run the smallest risk of catching this fever, whatever it may be, for I am strong and well: I shall not be long in the house, and I have not the slightest fear of it. But I must see whether I can be of any use. Good-bye, Mrs. Hawkins."

And off went Halstead, leaving Mrs. Hawkins gazing after him with a face of anxious foreboding.

"Guide t' lad!" she exclaimed, shaking her head, as he turned the corner of the road. "How wrongheaded he be, when a' oncet get sot upon summat. Boot I canna help liking 'un for 't neither, gannin to see arter t' puir souls i' their trouble, danger or no danger; an' they, the very ones as thwarted 'un so aboot their bairns: 'tis joost lahk t' puir lad. I hope note o' ill 'll coom at him, puir chap—bless him!" and Mrs. Hawkins passed the back of her hand across her eyes, and recommenced her ironing and her frequent chiding of Sally.

Halstead did not exactly relish his purposed visit, for Miles Agar was a surly, ill-conditioned fellow, of no good repute as to character; who had always avoided him if possible, or had treated him with incivility when brought in his way. The man was cooking some mess over the fire when Halstead went

to the door. He gave a grunt of surprise at observing who was his visitor. Halstead entered, and said, kindly,—

"I am very sorry to hear you have sickness in your family, Miles. I came to see if I could be of any use to you."

"Did thee?" growled Miles. "A' gucss thee's gan quicker's thee coom, when thee kens what sickness 'tis we gotten." Halstead entered uninvited.

"What is the sickness then, Miles? and which of your family is it that is ill?"

"Thee's better not coom in," said the man; "t' is t' *fever* missis and t' bairns has got."

"I heard so before I came," replied Halstead, quietly, setting down his hat. The man stared at him in perfect astonishment. "Are they very bad?" he asked.

"Ay!" answered the man, and then nodding towards a door into an inner apartment, he added, "They's in there. Ye can see for yerself if ye've a mahnd," but, seeing Halstead quietly go towards the door and open it, he called out—"Ye'd better not gan in. Ye'll be getting 't yersel, mebbe."

Halstead went in nevertheless, despite the stifling atmosphere of the place; for one of the children was feebly crying for "Water, daddy, water," so he went and raised the little thing up tenderly, and gave it some water from a cracked teacup that stood near. Then he began to look round him. The two children were in a little crib together: one was lying in a state of stupor, only moaning occasionally; the other was restless and burning with the violence of the fever. The woman lay on another larger bed: with her, also, the fever was evidently at its height; she talked and raved incessantly, tossing her arms wildly about. Halstead examined into the condition of the elder child, and felt its pulse; it was feeble and fluttering: he saw that its sufferings were almost over. He put away the tangled hair from the eyes of the other child, and wetted its forehead with the water, speaking soothingly to the poor little thing, and promising it some nice, cool, sour drink, as soon as he could go and get it. Then he turned to the mother; as he did so he observed Miles Agar standing in the doorway with his hands in his pockets, staring at him in stupid amazement.

"Have you no nurse to attend on these poor things?" inquired he.

"Noa," said the man; "nob'dy wecan't coom nigh t' fever, for sure."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Halstead. "Surely no one could refuse to come if they knew what distress you were in?"

"Coom! not they! we mut all die, and rot, afore anybody kent aught aboot 't," answered Miles, bitterly.

"Not so bad as that, Miles, I hope: we must try. I will go and see if I can't get a woman to come and attend your wife, and I will bring you some wine for that eldest child. Has the doctor been to-day?"

"Noa; a' coomed t' daa afore t' missus were took wi' t' fever. I han't had nob'dy to send for un sin'"

"I will send him," said Halstead: in the meantime this room is much too hot. Will you let me open this window?" and he approached the loophole which lighted the apartment.

The man seemed inclined to prevent him at first, but stopped and said,—

"Ay, ye can dea's ye will. 'Spose ye ken best."

So the window was opened, and Halstead set off to fetch the doctor, and try and secure the services of some woman as nurse. The doctor he found and sent; the nurse was a much more difficult person to find: every one was terrified at the thought of the fever. At last, in despair, he turned homewards, to get the wine and lemonade and other things he had promised, and to see if Mrs. Hawkins could offer any suggestion.

"Noa," said she, when he had told her of the emergency: "they's queer foalk, they Agars; and 'tis no lahk t' neighbours 'd be fain to wait on 'em i' common times, forbye when they gotten t' fever."

"But what is to be done?" urged Halstead; "we must not leave the poor creatures to die in this frightful way; it is out of the question."

Mrs. Hawkins suggested that "if 'twere nigher t' town a sick nurse mut mebbe ha' been gotten."

"Then that must be done immediately, Mrs. Hawkins. You must get a man and horse to carry a note from me to the medical man at Maltby, for I am going back to Smoorham Becks."

"Lord be good till oos, sir, ye'll not think o' soochen a thing."

"Yes; I am going as soon as I have taken something and written the note, so please to send for some one directly."

Mrs. Hawkins looked terribly "put about;" but she told

Sally, who was staring blankly at Halstead, to go and seek for a messenger, whilst she finished packing the basket of necessaries. Halstead swallowed a hasty meal, and then set off again, carrying the basket with him, and ordering linen and other things to be sent after him. He found matters much as he had left them. The man stared with incredulous wonder, as he saw "t' minister" he had been in the habit of grumbling at as "a dea-note lay-a-bed chap o' a parson," return quietly into the midst of the danger that he could induce no one else to face, carrying a weighty basket of wine, arrowroot, and other matters for immediate use. He stared more still when Halstead told him that, not having been able to find a nurse in Snagton, he had sent to Maltby for one ; but that he intended to remain there himself for some time, and be of what use he could in attending to the children in the night, so that the man might be better able to bestow the necessary care upon his wife.

Miles Agar looked on while Halstead put some teaspoonfuls of port-wine into the mouth of the elder child, and so revived it a little, and he helped him with a surly sort of gratitude to move the crib into the outer room, and when he received the fresh linen which Halstead had directed to be sent, he turned round and stared once more at the latter, and muttered to himself, "Ye be a rum 'un, ye be."

Halstead stayed with the two children, and watched and cared for them all that night as tenderly as a woman could have done ; and he had the satisfaction of seeing the younger of the two sink into a quiet sleep with a smile on its baby-face, after a long draught of the "nice sour drink ; " the other, despite his cares, was evidently destined to sleep another and sounder sleep. The man looked in from the other room once or twice, but offered no remark.

In the morning the sick nurse from Maltby arrived, and Halstead was released. Miles Agar came and leaned against the door again, with his hands in his pockets, as Mr. Halstead was preparing to leave ; and when he went out the man pulled a lock of his hair, and said,—

"I thank ye kindly, sir, I'se sere," in a strangely awkward kind of way.

This, however, was but the beginning of evils. Family after family took the fever, and the panic was universal. Halstead alone went from house to house, attending upon the sick with that womanly tenderness of his, cheering the

healthy with hopeful words, and remonstrating with the neighbours upon the unfeeling selfishness of their terror. His appearance was greeted with a very different welcome now from what it used to be. He seemed to come like a strong angel of hope and comfort to their bedsides, when even their friends had forsaken them. His health had become a matter of earnest anxiety to every one, sick and well; and many were the hopes that "nought ailed t' lad," if he were absent longer than usual. He seemed to bear a charmed life himself, though he was beginning to look very thin and anxious; when he received most unexpected aid from a quarter whence he least expected it.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOVE CONQUERS DEATH.

MR. SNELL rubbed his hands perseveringly and chuckled intermittingly for some days before Margaret was expected to arrive. When the day really did come, he made so many jocose remarks, and went off into such a series of small explosions after them, that Mrs. Snell was quite provoked (although privately as much pleased as Mr. S. himself at Margaret's return), and exclaimed,—

"Really, Snell, I do think you grow stupider every day!"

"My love, 'tis you grow sharper day by day, and so perceive it!" rejoined Mr. Snell, not put down too much even by that rebuke to attempt a joke; and he chuckled so much after it, that Mrs. S. whipped the sofa she was dusting hard with her duster, probably because she would have liked to whip him.

Mr. Snell went to the station to meet Margaret; and when she alighted, he shook hands with her with both hands, and ran after porters, and made vehement signs to cab-drivers, and puffed, and shook hands with Margaret over again, like an excited stout gentleman as he was; whilst Margaret responded to his expressions of rejoicing with a pleasure quite as apparent, though not quite so funny as his own. It *was* pleasant to see the face of one who really cared for her. Very pleased she was to see Mrs. Snell, too, and very pleased Mrs. Snell was to see her: but that meeting was a

more matter-of-fact affair. Mr. Snell was rather disappointed that Margaret was not, and had no prospects of becoming, Lady Aston.

"A great mistake that young gent's been and made," said he; "I wonder now whether he's in any ways aware of it!"

One day, after Margaret had been some little time at the Snells', she was sitting busily at work in Mrs. Snell's parlour, when the postman's knock was heard, and a letter was brought to her; she opened it eagerly, for it had the Maltby post-mark. It was from her aunt, Mrs. Wilson. She remained quite silent for a long time after she had read it. Mrs. Snell asked her for something, but she did not heed the request; Mrs. Snell looked up in surprise, and saw Margaret sitting with the letter on her knee, gazing vacantly with a strange sort of fixed expression on her face.

"You've not got bad news, my dear?" said Mrs. Snell.

Margaret did not answer for a minute or two. At last, as if the sound of Mrs. Snell's question had been lingering in her ear for some time before her brain caught the sense, she said, slowly,—

"Yes! I must go."

"Go where, my dear?" asked Mrs. Snell, surprised at her unusual manner.

Margaret roused herself to reply that she had received a letter from her aunt informing her that a malignant fever was raging at Snagton End; adding that she thought she must go.

"Surely you don't think of going just into the midst of a bad fever? Your aunt's not got it?"

"No," replied Margaret. "But I must go: I know I shall be needed."

Mrs. Snell tried all sorts of arguments to shake this strange purpose; but Margaret held to it with a silent steadfastness which had something quite mysterious in it to Mrs. Snell's mind: it seemed as if the necessity for the journey to the north was "borne in" upon her mind; for she only repeated,—

"I know I shall be wanted: I must go."

When Mr. Snell came home, his wife told him the state of the case. He exclaimed, as she had done; and Margaret said—

"Indeed I must go. I have but few friends in the world; some of the dearest I have are in the midst of danger. Yes; I ought to be there."

Seeing that her purpose was thus fixed, Mr. Snell forbore to combat it, and induced his wife to do the same; and Margaret made a few hasty preparations for her journey.

The next evening found her passing in a fly over the moors above Snagton. As she recognised point after point in the well-remembered landscape, her heart throbbed and fluttered, and an unpleasant kind of doubt as to the wisdom or necessity of the step she had taken, came into her mind. Strange to say, throughout her hurried journey no thought of the kind had struck her. She had been urged on by a strange feeling of the imperative necessity for her presence at Snagton just then, and she had acted upon the impulse, unaccountable as it was; now she began to reflect that her aunt was well when she wrote, and Halstead also was well; though Mrs. Wilson said that he was passing day and night by the sick-beds of the fever patients. What if he should imagine she came to seek him? She almost thought she would tell the driver to turn back: but no, she *must* see her aunt and old James at least; so the fly drove on unchecked. Then she got into a state of nervous apprehension lest her strange presentiment should be verified, and her aunt or *he* should have been seized with the fever. The last mile seemed endless. She passed house after house that she knew; but the inhabitants had long retired to rest. Here and there, a light in a bedroom window made her think that there was some sick-bed, some watcher: perhaps *he* was there. At last the chaise stopped at the little white gate, and Margaret's hurried, eager knock soon brought Annie down; who, on beholding Miss Langley, uttered a cry of delight, which induced Mrs. Wilson also to descend, although she was already nightcapped and dressing-gowned. Then followed exclamations, eager questions, and affectionate greetings. They were well; old James was well; yes, Mr. Halstead was well, but working terribly hard and looking pale and worn.

"And what the people will do if he gives up, I do not know," said Mrs. Wilson, "for nobody else dare go near the sick folk: that silly lass Annie wanted to go and help nurse Nelly Smith's bairns, but I wouldn't let her."

"Wouldn't you?" said Margaret. "If Annie is not afraid, I don't think it would have hurt her."

"My dear!" exclaimed her aunt. "You don't know what a terrible thing this fever is; why, I wouldn't have had Annie come near me again, even if she hadn't taken it herself."

Here Annie brought Margaret some tea.

"How's George Heseltine, Annie?" said Margaret.

"He's quite well, miss, thank you," said Annie, blushing and smiling; though there was a little trouble in her smile. "He's kept the garden nice for you, miss."

"How kind of him! Tell him I should like to see him, will you, Annie, if you chance to meet with him to-morrow?"

Annie smiled a bright answer, as she went to prepare Margaret's bedroom. Then followed a long gossiping talk with Mrs. Wilson about everybody in Snagton cum Thwackelton, and Margaret's experiences in London, &c. &c.

After breakfast the next morning, Margaret set off to see her old friend James; Mrs. Wilson, as she started, cautioning her not to go near any of the fever houses. The old man's delight at seeing his young friend again may be more easily imagined than described. When she entered, and tapped him on the shoulder, as he was arranging some turfs on the hearth in order not to let his fire out, he thought it was Annie, or Hetty Tappin, so he said, leisurely,—

"Bide a wee, lass; my auld back's stiff, and ye mun let me fettle t' oop noo I'm dahn."

But the white hands which began to help him were neither Hetty's nor Annie's; he looked up in surprise, and then started up quickly, and staggered back to his chair.

"Wha, lassie! wha, ma bonnie lassie! is't thee?" he exclaimed, as Margaret took hold of both his hands and shook them. "Wha, I ne'er thowght to look on thy feeace wi' these auld een again. Wha, lassie! lassie! Oh, but I'se fain!"

"I told you I should come, James," said Margaret.

"So thee did—so thee did, but a' thowght na' to see thee. Eh, boot *thee* munna get t' fever: we'se sore put aboot lest t' minister lad 'ud get it; an' if thee got it too——"

Margaret's heart leaped up as she heard from old James all about Halstead's noble self-devotion. She exulted as she heard how the people loved him for it; how he was watched for, and his coming longed for, and his health prayed for by old and young.

"A' kent 'twere a good lad when a' got ower's flaysomeness," said the old man. "An' a good lad he is as ever stepped; t' Loord preserve un till oos, and pay un for 't. 'Tis little an auld chap lahk me can dea for un; but ah'd lay dahn my life for un, I would, and so would a many i' both Snagton and Thwackelton."

And as Margaret heard such words about him—how she had longed and prayed to hear of him so!—she was proud and happy for the moment, in spite of his danger, and of the sickness and suffering around her. She had thought of returning to London the following morning, and had felt ashamed of her hasty journey; but when she heard from old James of the virulent character of the disease, and of the number of new cases which had occurred within the last few days, she felt that, setting all considerations of delicacy aside, he *must* be helped, or he would kill himself with such constant exertions: she hurried back therefore, and, writing a hasty note with a trembling hand, she told Annie to carry it to Mr. Halstead, and then she set to work to talk down her aunt's terrors. The note was to tell Mr. Halstead that she was ready to give her assistance as nurse the moment that he should point out where it was most needed.

Mr. Halstead was out when Annie arrived, but she followed him to the house he had gone to, and he came out to her. He turned deathly white and trembled violently when she gave him the note, for he recognized the hand. Annie turned away, with native delicacy, that she might not see the signs of emotion he could not avoid displaying. He soon overcame it, apparently, for he hastily scrawled a few lines in pencil on the back of the note, and gave it back to Annie. What he wrote was only a literal answer to Margaret's note; thanks for her offer of help, and a caution as to what preventives she had better make use of. Margaret made her preparations, and went to the house he had directed her to, instantly. She found abundance to occupy both her hands and thoughts; for there were several children ill in the family, and the mother had the fever herself. Margaret had to stifle many feelings of natural repugnance in the performance of her self-imposed task of tendance upon the sick of that class.

Halstead came in the course of the day, and he and Margaret shook hands gravely and calmly; they might have been mere ordinary acquaintances, but for the slight tremor in his voice, and a little hesitation in her answer to his inquiries after her health: after that, neither betrayed the smallest sign of emotion during the few moments he stayed. A day or two passed thus. One of Margaret's child-patients died, but the others were pronounced out of immediate danger, and she was summoned to a more pressing case. She

saw Halstead for a few minutes each day, and that was all; and still neither gave any visible sign of how much self-control those few moments cost them.

The force of example was not wholly lost upon the stolid minds of the Dales folk. True, few were found to imitate the self-denial of Margaret and Halstead; but all in their slow, wondering way, admired: and there is no saying whether seed so scattered may not some day produce its hundredfold. Even now, some results were manifested, for two or three of the women of the parish professed their willingness to help unpaid in the houses of the sick; though actual contact with the patients was still avoided as much as possible. Mrs. Wilson, too, began to relax in some of her precautions, and even ventured to approach Margaret; whereas, she had heretofore only dared to ask anxiously after her niece's health, out of the window, when she came to the house.

The violence of the fever had now considerably abated in the village; no fresh cases were reported, and most of the former patients were in a fair way of recovery: but Dr. Yeoman's sturdy brown pony still trotted down the street every day; for some of the patients lingered for a long time in a precarious state. Nevertheless, the doctor, the parson, and the head nurse had begun to congratulate themselves that the worst was over, and to hope for a cessation of their labours. But that very relaxation of the overtaxed powers was a time of peril, for one of the parties at least. No one, not even Halstead himself, was aware how much his powers had been taxed, until the strain was taken off, and the excitement of constant calls upon his sympathy and aid was at an end. Nor was any one aware of the strong effort of self-control that he had been obliged to exert during his interviews with Miss Langley; even when they had been brought together by business, and their sympathy for the wants of others had in great measure removed the embarrassment which both must have otherwise felt.

Now that business inquiries were beginning to be unnecessary, Mr. Halstead felt a painful degree of embarrassment at the thought of meeting Margaret. From the coolness and self-possession of her manner, he had received the impression that whatever warmer feelings she had once entertained towards him had now given place to complete indifference; and he was most painfully aware that this was by no means the case with himself. Even had it been other-

wise—had she still cared for him—how should he have acted? He did not know. Suppose her composure were only like his own, assumed to hide feelings of a far different nature? He dared not trust himself to think about it, but assured himself over and over again that her manner was not assumed. No, no, impossible; it was perfectly natural—there, then, was an end to the question. But put an end to the question mentally as often as he would, he was sure to find himself not five minutes afterwards debating that same satisfactorily terminated question over again as warmly as ever; and then angry at himself, he settled it again and set himself to think of something else—and found himself hard at work over that self-same question once more!

Mr. Halstead was, therefore, far from tranquil in his mind; moreover, he got up one morning feeling far from comfortable in his body. He was languid and weary, and indisposed for everything; his head ached, and he thought it a miserably cold day, though every one else said how warm it was. He wished he had not had several sick visits to pay; he dreaded meeting Miss Langley, to speak the few formal words he had accustomed himself to say to her, and hear the formal answers he should get to them. He did not want to say any other sort of words to her then, to be sure; he was too languid to wish for anything, and dreaded every sort of exertion. Nevertheless, he went through his day's work mechanically; though he looked so ill that every one noticed it, and commented on it in their own way. He met old James Gilmore hobbling along with his stick, and the old man stopped to "shuck hands," and say how "fain" he was to see him well; but as he straightened himself a bit to look in Mr. Halstead's face, he stopped in the midst of his congratulations.

"But ye'se na looking ower peerk to-daa nowther."

"Why, I feel tired, James; but a few days' rest will set me all right, never fear."

"T' Loord grant ye saa true, sir. Ye mun tak kear o' yersel! God bless thee, lad," and as Mr. Halstead walked slowly on, old James turned to look after him, and shook his head sadly, saying to himself, "T' lad's clean wore out; a's been an' wasted hisself fur we're folk: a' looks desput bad, so a' dea. Boot she's coom back noo, mebbe 'll fare better when they's setten 't all straight. They's terrible fond o' one another surely, if they wasn't kahnd o' too proud to let on't. Mebbe 'tis t' waays o' t' gentry folk to worrit one another

instead o' sayin' raight out, 'Ise tak ye, if ye'll ha' me,' an' a' dcean wi' 't, lahk we're lads an' lasses. Weel, weel, t' Loord bless 'em both, puir yoong things." And so old James went on to get his quarter of a pound of tea, cogitating about the two young people, in whose fate he was as deeply interested as if they had been his own children.

When Margaret saw Mr. Halstead that day, she could scarcely repress the exclamation of alarm which arose to her lips; and more than once she turned away abruptly, to hide the tears that rose in her eyes as she looked at him. He complained of being tired, and, as she had nothing but satisfactory reports to give him, he soon took his leave. Margaret could not help saying, as they shook hands,—

"I hope you are going home, Mr. Halstead!"

Poor Frank's hand trembled, as he raised his heavy lids and caught the look of interest—perhaps something more—in her eyes.

"Yes, I am going home," he replied.

"Pray, rest to-morrow," said she, and added, as she saw his colour heighten, and felt her own rising, "For the sake of the people you *must* be careful of your health."

When Halstead went home that evening, he ordered a fire, under the impression that it was very cold. Nevertheless, his chilliness increased to shivering, and his headache to racking pain; he went to bed and fell into a sort of uneasy, dreamy slumber, but it was only to wake with a sensation of strangling and a violent pain in the throat: he knew he had the fever, and before morning he was delirious. The doctor was sent for, and when he came, he looked very uneasy, as if he did not at all like his patient's symptoms. Moreover, he called again in the course of the day, and looked still more uneasy when he left the sick-bed.

Ill news travels fast; and it was not long before the report that Mr. Halstead had taken the fever, and was very seriously, if not dangerously, ill, was spread all over the place. The first question asked by every one on meeting an acquaintance was, "Hast heerd ote o' t' minister?" and every face wore a dejected look at the answer, "T' doctor said a' were desput bad, an' a' weren't sure a'd coom through wi' 't." Every one felt that if he died he would have given his life for theirs.

With Margaret, meanwhile, anxiety had become almost insupportable. She had no immediate call upon her time, as

the sick nurse was in attendance upon the only dangerous case remaining besides Mr. Halstead's; so she had only to suffer the torments of inaction. She could not remain quiet in any one place, but wandered about the rooms, down into the garden, about the walks; then down the lane, past Mrs. Hawkins' cottage: she could not go to inquire, having already sent; she could only look up at the open window, where the drawn-down blind was swelling blankly in and out, and strain her ear to catch any sound. Then she would go back again into her room: but if she sat down for a minute, she was sure to start up and recommence her restless wandering; and at night, time after time, she rose from her bed and walked up and down her room till she was weary, for she could not sleep. Only pitiful little Annie knew by her instinct what made her young mistress so uneasy, and she often contrived to obtain some intelligence of the sick man; which, unsatisfactory as it was, she knew would be better than the torture of uncertainty, and therefore duly communicated to Miss Langley.

Annie had frequent opportunities of hearing how Mr. Halstead was going on, for, strange to say, George Heseltine, who had long avoided him so sedulously—who, even lately, on returning to a more steady manner of life, had seemed to wish for no resumption of his intercourse with his pastor—now showed the deepest and most sorrowful anxiety about his fate; indeed, so frequently did George's anxious face appear at Mrs. Hawkins' kitchen-door, that Sally got tired of answering his often-repeated demand for news of the invalid: and worse and worse the news he received became.

One evening Margaret's wistful ear caught the sound of a pony's quick trot coming up the lane: she knew that sound well, and listened eagerly. It stopped at the gate: she knew what was coming, and ran down to meet Mr. Yeoman at the door. He was a sensible man, though a somewhat rough specimen. Taking off his hat and rubbing his bald, shiny head, for it was warm and he had ridden fast, he entered upon his business in his blunt, practical way.

"Mr. Halstead's very bad, miss," he began; "I'm half afraid how it will go with him, poor young man. He was a good deal pulled down by over-work, to begin with, and hasn't got much strength to stand such an attack as this. Only the best of care can save him, and I don't know what to do; for Mrs. Hawkins, though she's a decent body enough, is

tired to death and frightened out of her wits, and Sally's of no manner of use : we mustn't lose the poor lad, if we can help it. Will you come and nurse him for a few days, miss, till we see how it goes? "

"Yes, Mr. Yeoman," replied Margaret, quite calmly, and without the least hesitation.

"That's right then," said Mr. Yeoman, seeming in some degree relieved. "Better go as soon as you can, miss; I doubt it'll be a close shave."

After giving her some instructions, which she listened to quietly and repeated to be sure she understood, Mr. Yeoman remounted his pony and rode off.

Margaret felt as if she had known this all along, and was quitc prepared; her fever of anxiety and apprehension was stilled at once, as the death chill of hearing the extreme danger of the person whom she loved best in the world, struck upon her heart and froze it. She was cool, calm, collected. It seemed as if she felt herself supported by some superhuman power, and was conscious of her ability to do everything that could be done by the most vigilant and unremitting care, to save the precious life that was in danger. She was ready instantly.

Mrs. Wilson's curiosity forgot even her fear of infection, and Mr. Yeoman was scarcely off the premises before she came out of her room to ask what he had come for. As she did so, Margaret, dressed to go out, stood before her.

"Where are you going, my dear ? " she exclaimed.

"To Mr. Halstead's," replied Margaret, quietly; "he is in great danger."

"But, my dcar! not to nurse him ? "

"Yes, aunt."

"But it's not right—not proper—you can't, my dear ! "

"Aunt, his life is at stake; what is propriety to that ? "

"But, my dear, some one else can go—lct Annie go," urged Mrs. Wilson, forgetting even her fears in the startled statc of her nerves.

"No one could nurse him as I can," cried Margaret, vehemently; and then recollecting herself, she explained, "Mr. Yeoman came to ask me to go for the present—till the crisis is over," she added, slowly and shudderingly.

Mrs. Wilson was about to adduce some further argument against her niece's going, but Margaret cut it short.

"I must not delay," she said. "Good-bye, dear aunt, I

will send you word how——" The rest of the sentence was lost as she walked quickly away.

Her swift, steady step brought her soon to Mrs. Hawkins' cottage; Sally, with eyes swelled and red with crying, opened the door and showed her up the stairs. Margaret's heart throbbed violently as she entered the darkened chamber that held the secret idol of her life; but it fell back sick and drear in her bosom as Mrs. Hawkins silently put back the curtain, and she beheld a face in whose unshorn beard, haggard, pinched features, hollow, but fever-flushed cheeks, parched, blackened lips, and sunken eyes, even her eye could scarcely have recognised her heart's treasure, as poor Frank Halstead lay with closed eyes in a kind of stupor, unconscious of her presence. She smothered her agony until, after various whispered communications, which she scarcely heard or comprehended, Mrs. Hawkins willingly relinquished her anxious post, and left the room: but Margaret kept herself under control until she had made every possible arrangement that could be devised for the invalid's comfort, and then she sat down and gave way to a long fit of silent, heart-broken weeping: there seemed so little hope. She had long ago resigned him into God's hands: she had given up his love, given up all share in him—but, oh, his life, his life! it seemed to be ebbing away fast before her eyes, and she was utterly powerless. Her soul had come into the deep waters, where there was no standing, no light, no hope. She could not pray: "O God! help! help!" was all the faint cry that her fainting faith could utter. Still, even in the deathly wrestling of her agony, the slightest motion, the least change in the hurried breathing of the sick man roused her to instant solicitude for his wants; and by degrees she grew calmer. She watched by him hour after hour, with a sharp, strained sense of watchfulness that knew no shadow of fatigue.

All night long he remained lying in that stupor, except when she roused him to take the requisite medicines or nourishment, and then he did not recognise her; but his mind wandered off into some endless intricate maze of bewilderment and uneasiness, or he would put out his hands with a feeble, groping motion, and murmur—

"Darkness, darkness everywhere—nothing but thick darkness."

At length the chill gray dawn came creeping up over the eastern hills, and Margaret, cold through and through, shivered

from head to foot; still she would not leave her patient for any persuasion of Mrs. Hawkins, until the doctor came. He, after examining into the condition of his patient, turned away with a very dissatisfied air, and, looking at Margaret's face, where anxiety and grief had already left marked traces,—

"You must go to bed, miss," he said; "he'll want you worse by-and-by, poor fellow: I wish we were safe over the next three days."

So Margaret went obediently, and lay down upon Mrs. Hawkins' bed, and forced herself to remain there for what seemed to her days, so acutely was her sense of hearing taxed to comprehend all the muffled, but unaccustomed sounds of the house. There seemed only a change for the worse when she went back; Halstead looked still more pinched and haggard.

Another endless night she watched by him: another gray dawn came slowly up, making his features look bleak and death-like, and freezing Margaret's pulses with fear. She *would* not leave him that day. Mr. Yeoman confessed that there was but little hope now: none, indeed, unless a great change for the better took place very soon. He again told her to lie down; she said she was not tired, and when he insisted, she feigned obedience and went, but came back as soon as he was gone.

All the hours of the lagging daylight lingered through their twice-told length; the sunlight moved slowly round from east to west, and died away, and night, with shadowy hand, unveiled the peaceful stars, as Margaret watched the failing life-sands of the being that had absorbed her own. Minute after minute, hour after hour, she watched on, hearing, with her heart rather than with her ear, the feeblest stir of the flickering life that seemed as if a quicker motion in the air around might waft it away. When Mr. Yeoman came again that evening, he ordered stimulants as often as they could be given, and said pitifully, looking at Margaret's wan face—

"You had better not stay to-night, miss."

She knew the death-doom was in those words, and a feeling of indignation rose in her heart: how dared they to think to send her away—to part her from him at the last? No, nothing but death itself should part them now. He was hers whilst he was alive, at least. She silently shook her head at Mr. Yeoman's kindly meant request, and when he repeated it, she motioned him away with an imperious gesture

—heedless now that she was betraying her intense feeling for him who lay dying—and resumed her place. The doctor, seeing her determination, urged that at least Mrs. Hawkins must remain with her: as to that she was indifferent, so Mrs. Hawkins remained. The night wore on; all was profoundly silent; there was no motion of the invalid beyond the faint effort to swallow when the restorative was placed between his lips. At last, there being no call upon her wakefulness, Mrs. Hawkins fell asleep, and her deepened breathing alone broke the hush.

Margaret watched on. There seemed such absolute stillness at last about poor Frank, and his face looked so gray and sharp in the flickering light of the night-lamp, that Margaret rose and leant over him in a sudden agony of terror. Did he breathe or did he not? She bent her cheek almost to his lips—she could not feel his breath: her heart stood still, she took his hand in a sudden grasp. He slowly unclosed his eyes and looked in her face, and as he looked, the vacancy that had been there so long, cleared slowly away, and a light of recognition dawned into them. She felt a feeble pressure from the hand she held, and saw a slight motion of the lips; and as she bent down her ear to his mouth, she caught the breathing, "Margaret!" and then the eyes closed again and the grasp relaxed. In what a mingled agony of hope and fear she watched on now! Certainly the cordial she administered was swallowed with less of an effort—but all seemed pulseless again immediately: again and again she stooped down to ascertain whether the breath was still there. At last the action of the lungs grew stronger and more regular—she could *see* that he breathed. Deeper and longer grew the inspirations; at last they became soft, gentle, and regular—her ear told that he slept!

With a feeling of inexpressible, unbounded thankfulness, Margaret sank down upon her knees where she stood, still holding poor Frank's thin hand; and, as she knelt, she felt the iron bondage of despair loosen away from her heart: she was free to pray, and weep—to feel that she was not forsaken—that even if God took him now, she could let him go, and only pray soon to follow, and even that according to God's will. But Halstead was too exhausted to sleep long, and his eyes soon unclosed upon the figure, that, with hand clasping his, and head bowed upon the coverlet, was kneeling, weeping silent, grateful tears beside him.

The tightening of his clasp roused Margaret—there was no *dawning* of recognition in his eyes now—there was consciousness and love. She yielded to the motion of his hand, and as she rose and stooped over him he whispered, "My own?" and she whispered back "Yes," as she pressed her lips calmly upon his forehead. There was an expression of unearthly peace and beauty upon his face as he closed his eyes faintly again. After receiving some nourishment, he sank into a natural, easy sleep; having first possessed himself of Margaret's hand, as if to be conscious of her presence even during his slumber.

When the doctor came that morning, expecting to find the house shut up, he was agreeably surprised to hear that his patient was certainly better; and on seeing him, and hearing Halstead had slept, and had even asked for food, he rubbed his little round hands together, shook hands with Margaret, and rubbed his hands again.

"Coom, miss, coom," he said, "we shall get through yet!" and his bald head actually seemed to shine with a reflection of the pleasure that came from his heart. Margaret shook hands heartily, and then, willingly enough this time, did as he told her, and went to lie down; for she was for the first time conscious of a feeling of intense and overwhelming fatigue, that made her feel as if she should fall asleep as she stood. She slept for hours, so completely was she exhausted. The evening shadows were beginning to fall when she awoke, and her eyes rested upon the figure of Annie, who was sitting by the bedside watching her; she started up with a feeling of alarm, and of being too late; but Annie said quickly and cheerfully, in reply to the wild expression in her eyes,—

"He's better, miss, he's much better: he's been asleep nearly all day."

Margaret threw her arms round Annie's neck in the fulness of her heartfelt gratitude, and the two mingled their tears together.

Annie said that Mrs. Wilson had become so uneasy about her niece that she had sent to see whether Margaret could not be induced to return and sleep in her own bed that night, if Mrs. Wilson herself took her place in the sick-room. Margaret smiled gratefully at the thought of the conquest which her aunt's affection for her had gained over her terror of the fever, and told Annie to tell her how soundly asleep she had found her. And as Annie, moreover, added that George

Heseltine was waiting outside the house, and was very anxious to know how she was, Margaret in the joyfulness of her heart went down to speak to him before she returned to her post for the night.

Halstead was still sleeping when she went to him, but the pinched, unnatural look had left his features; he had waked several times in the course of the day, and looked uneasily round him, as if he missed something necessary to his comfort; but the effort of taking the nourishment that was offered had soon exhausted his feeble strength, and he had sunk off to sleep again. In this state he remained for a day or two, and then, thanks to the unremitting cares that were lavished upon him, he began to rally fast; and Margaret went back to her home, leaving him in Mrs. Hawkins' charge.

Frank did not relish the change of nurses at all. But he did not allow Margaret to leave him without making himself perfectly sure that he had not dreamed her answer to his question on the night when he recovered his consciousness; nor until she promised to come and see him, the first time he could get down upon the sofa in his sitting-room. It was not many days before he managed it; but then there were so very many explanations to be entered into, and they occupied so long a time—Margaret being greatly alarmed lest Frank should excite himself—that we had better leave the young people to come to a perfectly clear understanding by themselves: which they did, very much to their mutual satisfaction, at last.

CHAPTER XX.

REJECTED ADDRESSES.

Sir Harry Aston had gone up to his chambers in town in a state of great disgust with the world in general, and his mother and sisters in particular. He did not appear in public much for some days, for he had got a problem to work out in his head, and his head worked slowly, so it took him a good while to come to a solution. At last he came to one.

The problem was, was he sufficiently in love with Miss Margaret Langley to make it worth while to provoke what he mentally termed "the deuce of one shine," which he knew would infallibly occur at home, should he propose to, and be

accepted by, the late governess? The combined efforts of his head and his heart finally put Q. E. D. to the fact that he *was*. So Sir Harry raised his head from his broad chest, on which it had been sunk, his brow smoothed from the lines of thought; he got up, shook himself, erected himself to his full height, and felt himself tenfold a man. He then put on his hat, and went out to take a walk, with all the added dignity of purpose in his step: he would go into the park.

All at once he came to a dead halt: an obstacle of some importance had just occurred to his mind—he didn't in the least know where Miss Langley was to be found, nor how to find her. Thereupon he turned sharp round and went back, sat down in the same place, sunk his chin upon his chest, and fell to thinking hard again.

How was he to devise a plan for finding out Miss Langley's address? He had begun to get into the way of thinking by this time, for an idea soon struck him. "What a confounded ass I was not to ask the housekeeper where her letters were to be sent!" Should he write her a formal proposal, and address it to her at Aston House? But then it was a chance whether it would reach her, even if his hand were not recognised: that would not do. At last he thought of a plan: he wrote a letter to his little sister Nelly, as he sometimes had done of late, taking pains to make the writing clear and round, nearly as her own; and inside, upon a separate slip of paper, he put, "Get me Miss Langley's address, and send it to me, but don't tell any one; and perhaps I shall get Miss Langley to come back."

In a few days came little Nelly's reply, containing Margaret's address, in Burr Street, Nightingale Lane, City. Sir Harry had been very impatient until he got the letter and the address, but somehow his courage forsook him all at once, when he did get it; and as to presenting himself at Mr. Snell's, Burr Street, Nightingale Lane, City, and making Margaret the proposal he wished to make, he could no more do it than he could fly, and that certainly was beyond his powers. He thought he would write, so he took pen, ink, and paper, and actually got as far as—

"My dear Miss Langley,—I——"

There he stuck fast: he wished he had not begun with "I;" some other commencement, such as "May I venture," would have started him better. He took another sheet of paper, but stuck again after the "May I venture;" then

he added "to hope;" that seemed too confident. He made a blot on the third sheet, and finally screwed them all up, in a rage, and flung them into the fire, lighted a cigar, stuck his hands in his pockets, and looked disconsolate.

He was so long in screwing up his courage to the height requisite to face Miss Langley and say what he wanted to say, that when, in a state of great dampness and discomposure, he did at last knock at Mr. Snell's door, he was told that Margaret was gone, the servant didn't know where. But an inspiration came to his aid, just as he was turning away in dismay. He asked whether he could not see the girl's master or mistress, and sent in his card—"Sir Henry Aston." Mrs. Snell was quite in a flutter when she got it! Sir Henry was shown into the best parlour while she went to put on her new cap; she was all out of breath with hurrying up-stairs and down again when she entered the room, with such a curtsey as only Mrs. Snell's *à plomb* could produce.

Sir Harry had come to call on Miss Langley; could Mrs. Snell favour him with that lady's address?

"With pleasure, I'm sure. Miss Langley's address is Snagton, near Maltby, Yorkshire." Sir Harry gave a start of surprise as he heard it.

Mrs. Snell proceeded to tell him of the cause of Margaret's hasty journey some days ago; that she had not yet heard from her, and that she was very anxious lest Miss Langley should have taken the infection of the dangerous disease which was prevalent at Snagton. Sir Harry was anxious too, and in a good deal of perplexity besides; so, after trying some polite speeches and stumbling a good deal over them, he took his leave. He then began to reflect what a blockhead he was not to have asked more about her connection with Snagton, which had considerably surprised him. However, he could not go back to ask that large lady any more questions, that was clear. What was next to be done? "Why, go down to Snagton, and look after my estate, to be sure!" said Sir Harry to himself, with a feeling that he was actually making a sort of a joke! "But then the fever," whispered prudence.

"Hang the fever!" cried Sir Harry. So when he had again got his damped energies up to the culminating point of action, Sir Harry went to Snagton.

When Sir Harry arrived, Halstead had just reached such a degree of convalescence that he was unremittingly hungry,

and obstinately determined that he would not go away for change of air, as Mr. Yeoman wanted he should.

"Why, Yeoman," said he, "where *could* you find a more bracing air than I can get on these glorious moors? *I* don't want your sea-breezes."

"Ay, ay, my lad, that's very fine; but sea-breezes you must have, and sea-baths too, or we shall have you break down again in the winter."

"No such thing, I tell you, doctor; you'll see I shall strengthen with the cold."

"Well, well, we will see what your nurse says: if I could send her too, now—aha! Mr. Halstead, that would be a different matter, I guess!"

Whereupon Frank laughed and blushed, and held his peace. Seeing that Mr. Yeoman was very much in earnest about the necessity of a change of air, Miss Langley became very much in earnest too, and of course that settled the matter. Frank Halstead, though very much against his will, was sent off to a little town on the coast at some fourteen or fifteen miles distant; though he did threaten to come back much worse, and bad enough to be nursed again, next day.

One morning a little while afterwards Margaret was busy writing letters in the sitting-room: one was a very long one, over which she smiled as she wrote; sometimes even a tear trembled in her eye, but was hastily wiped away, lest it should fall and blot the paper. The letter seemed to be in answer to a very, very long one which she had received that morning, and which she consulted from time to time, and over which the tears came fast; at last she folded up her own letter, sealed it, and directed it to the Reverend Francis Halstead, Sea View, Redscaur, and then she folded up the received letter —kissing the signature first—and put it very near her heart.

Just as she had done so, there was a knock at the door, and whilst she was gathering her papers together, the room door opened and Annie ushered in Sir Henry Aston! Margaret rose from her seat, and hastened towards him with an exclamation of glad surprise.

"I did not know you were here; how glad I am to see you!" she exclaimed, as she shook hands. She then turned to present him to her aunt, who was busy replenishing old James Gilmore's winter supply of stockings.

Sir Harry felt very ill at ease, and had but little to say for himself; yet as he, nevertheless, did not seem inclined to

take his leave, and as Margaret did not exactly know what to do with him, she professed to think it was time to post her letters, and asked him if he would object to walk so far with her. Sir Harry was only too happy: he thought he should be better up to the mark in the open air; but, no, he felt just as sheepish as ever! And there was Margaret, so gay and happy as he had never seen her before; looking delicate, but lovelier than ever. He admired her so much that he began to feel as if he should be inspired to speak presently.

Just then they met George Heseltine, who touched his hat respectfully, and stood aside to let Margaret pass. She saw, with pain, that a heavy cloud of care and anxiety sat darkly upon George's face; but she could not stop to question him then: she would ask Annie whether anything fresh had occurred to depress her lover. In the meantime she was glad to have the opportunity of mentioning him to Sir Harry.

"Do you know that young man?" she asked.

"Yes, I know him by sight; isn't his name Heseltine?"

"Yes; is he not a fine-looking young man?"

"Uncommon: he'd make a first-rate soldier."

"Poor George! I shouldn't like him to be a soldier. I am very much interested in him. He is in sadly embarrassed circumstances just now, I fear, poor fellow."

Sir Harry looked interested because Margaret had said she was interested; so she went on: "There was some unhappy misunderstanding between him and the clergyman here," and Margaret hesitated; "at the time of old Heseltine's death: Mr. Halstead acted as he thought for the best; but George resented it, and, listening to evil counsellors, got into debt and difficulties, from which, though he has worked very hard ever since, he has never been able to extricate himself. If you could in any way lend him a helping hand, Sir Henry, I am sure you would have no reason to regret it afterwards; for poor George is an upright and worthy young man, though he is not faultless."

"Whatever I can do for him shall certainly be done, if Miss Langley wishes it," replied Sir Harry, gallantly.

There was such a stress upon her name and such a very tender tone in Sir Harry's voice, that Margaret felt startled and apprehensive, and was delighted to see Mr. Yeoman approaching, whom she delayed with questions about one patient or another till they reached her own gate. She then wished both gentlemen good-morning, and walked in; leaving

Sir Harry to call himself ass, fool, and blockhead, as he walked back to the house.

The evening of the day following, George Heseltine went to the back gate at Mrs. Wilson's to look for Annie, for he had something to say to her; but Annie was not to be seen. He coughed, and whistled, and hummed snatches of tunes she knew, but all to no purpose; so, concluding she was out on an errand, he went away disappointed: after loitering about for some time in vain, he turned into the path towards the village, hoping to meet her.

The said path passed about midway between the house and the village, through a romantic little glen, where the never-failing springlet, after furnishing its stone trough with the most transparent of water, went bubbling down in a tiny stream amongst the bright pebbles that formed its bed, under the little plank bridge which spanned it. Just as George entered the dell, he heard voices—a man's and a woman's—engaged in earnest conversation. To his surprise, the female voice was one he knew well; and a pang of jealousy shot sharp through his heart as he heard the masculine bass which now took up the dialogue in very pleading accents. He might easily have ascertained what was the subject-matter of the discourse: but George was no eaves-dropper; so he strode hastily forward, to avoid hearing what was said, just in time to see Sir Henry Aston bend eagerly towards Annie. George gave a loud "hem," and strode forward, with a most portentous thunder-cloud on his brow. At another time he would have touched his hat to Sir Harry, but it was not likely he was going to do anything of the kind to a fellow whom he saw, as he thought, playing the fool with his sweetheart; no, not if he were a king; so George strode rudely past, casting an angry look at Annie.

"Hi! hallo there, I say!" called Sir Harry.

George turned round with an inarticulate growl.

"Here! stop a minute, I want to speak to you," and actually, as he said so, before George's very face, he stooped down and whispered to Annie—and she smiled! George saw her! Then, just as he was longing to knock Sir Harry down, and was, moreover, half a mind to do it in earnest, what does she do but turn to himself with a half-vexed, half-mischievous face, and gave him the coolest, sauciest of little nods, as she passed! He clenched his hands tight and set his teeth, to keep the mischief down: his fingers absolutely

tingled to "pitch into" Sir Harry; when, in the coolest way in the world, and as if George could have no business with his interview with Annie, that gentleman turned to him, and said—

"Your name's Heseltine, isn't it?"

"Ay," growled our amiable friend.

"I hear you've had bad luck with your stock."

"That's my look-out."

Sir Harry stared; but he was very anxious to oblige Miss Langley.

"A friend of mine spoke well of you to me the other day. If you will tell me how, I shall be glad to be of use to you."

George thought—"Ay, he's trying to coom ower me wi' soft words;" so he replied gruffly—

"I can mind my own matters myself, I thank ye all the same."

It was Sir Harry's turn now to think.—"Shall I knock the fellow down just to teach him manners a bit? Don't think I will: too much trouble—besides, Miss Langley——"

"Well, if I can't help you, I can't. Miss Langley thought I could."

That name would have disarmed George at any other time; besides, was it likely that Annie would be unfaithful enough to coquette with another man, and he a gentleman, whom she must know meant her no good if he made love to her? And as the remembrance of her devoted, long-tried love flashed across his mind, Mr. George felt a good deal ashamed of himself, and lowered his tone considerably.

"I thank you kindly, sir," he said, "but I got myself into t' muddle, and I think, somehow, I ought to help myself out agean, an' not be beholden to other foalk for what I didn't work for."

"As you like," said Sir Harry, somewhat surprised at this independent mode of viewing the question. "If a man repents when he's jumped into the water, I don't, for my part, see why he shouldn't catch hold when another man holds out his hand to help him; but that's according to taste."

George had by this time arrived at the conclusion that he was a very great fool to be in such a rage. As for Sir Harry, he knew nothing about him, and didn't care; but he was heartily ashamed of himself for distrusting his own little Annie: he was thinking he would go and beg her pardon. He hardly heard what Sir Harry said, but he knew he had

been very rude to Miss Langley's friend; and an apology was due.

"I spoke gruff just now," says George, not replying to Sir Harry, but to his own thoughts: "I'm sorry, as Miss Langley's a friend o' yourn, sir; but I was put about to see you along wi' that yoong lass, an' that's where it was."

"Oho!" cried Sir Harry, "that was your sweetheart, then? She's an uncommon pretty girl, Hescltine."

Thereupon Mr. George's face gathered a fresh thundercloud, which Sir Harry observing, replied, laughing,—

"Nay, man, never scowl at me like that; I had no intention of making love to your sweethcart. I wanted her to do me a service with—some one else. There, are you content?"

Sir Harry spoke so simply and frankly, and his face flushed up so, as he alluded to the "some one else," that George felt almost as much ashamed of distrusting him as he had done of distrusting Annie. He touched his hat, and said, "I beg your pardon, sir."

"So now, as you're easy in your mind about the young woman," said Sir Harry, "I've been thinking that, as I'd do anything for Miss—that is—well, there's a good deal of poaching goes on here, I rather judge by the state of the game, and old Waters, the gamekeeper, is past his work; if you like to be under-keeper till his death, you can: or I'll pension him off, and put you in his place."

George flushed up absolutely scarlet. "You're very good, sir," he said, and hesitated, and then out it came: "but truth to tell, your game has sufferecd a goodish bit by me, i' times past, an' if I took t' pleace o' keeper, sir, I should feel 'twas setting a thief to catch a thief, and I should deserve to be shot myself, sir."

"Whew!" whistled Sir Harry, "that's what I call candid, and no mistake. So you've been a poacher, have you?"

The epithet was not pleasant, but there was the fact; so George faced it, and would not feel angry. "Well, I have so, there's no gainsaying on't," he replied. "I didn't see much harm in't though then; no more I dean't now, for other poor chaps, though I dea for myself, who dean't want nobbut t' sport like: but when a poor chap's got but little for t' missis an' t' bairns at home, what's he t' worse for taking one o' t' little wild beasts as nobody wants? an' what are you t' worse for losing a hare or a moor-bird, more or less?"

Sir Harry did not at all appreciate that doctrine. The

game laws were to him as wise and venerable a specimen of legislation as any of the laws of the land. However, he used a very straightforward argument, the simple force of which George at once admitted.

"Well, it seems to me uncommonly like stealing," he said. "A poor fellow goes into a baker's shop, and takes a bit of bread because his wife's starving, and he gets sent to the treadmill for it. Well, it's very sad, but it was *stealing*, wasn't it?" George assented. "What's the difference between taking the baker's bread and my hare?"

The distinction was so subtle that George did not try to make it.

"Yes, I see 'tis thieving; an' wi' me it surely was bare mischief thieving, for I had no want. But t' beaker should ha' gien t' poor chap a bit o' bread, sir, instead o' getting him sent to gaol."

"Well, perhaps he should," reflected Sir Harry: he did not feel exactly "not guilty" himself on that count. After a pause he continued,—

"I don't clearly see what I can do to help you, as this won't do. I agree with you, you would deserve to be shot if you took the keeper's place. But I'm not going to proceed against you as a poacher."

"Thank'ee, sir," returned George, with a grin.

"I won't forget you, though; and if you find I can help you, why ask me."

"I am greatly beholden to you, sir, I'm sure," said George, respectfully; "an' if so be I can't shove through, why, sir, I'll make so bold as ask you to lend me a trifle: but I'd rather try and get on my feet again by myself, sir—I had, indeed. I don't know as I *can* do't, for things look bad; but if my creditors 'll bide while I gotten my corn sold and my lambs turned into money, sir, I'm in hopes," but poor George's voice faltered as he spoke of his hopes, in spite of his independent spirit.

"Well, it's all right to be independent, I suppose," replied Sir Harry. "I must go on now, for I have business. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir, and thank ye hearty."

Sir Harry walked on quickly a little way, and then stopped and considered. It was getting late, too late for a call; but suspense was a horrid bore: he didn't feel as if he could stand it any longer. Should he go and *do* it? Yes, he *would*.

She would not be alone; but he would ask for a private interview. His heart knocked at his side nearly as loud as the knocker did at the door: at least it seemed so to him. Margaret herself opened the door. He was in for it now: he stammered out, that he wished to see her for a few moments privately. Margaret showed him into a little side room, feeling nearly as uncomfortable as he did. He was awfully nervous at first, but as he began to speak, his honest nature got the better of his shyness; he spoke of his earnest affection for her, and his modest hope that she might consent to accept his hand, in such a simple, manly, upright way, that Margaret was touched to the heart and could only say, with tears in her eyes, "I am *very* sorry!" But as she met his eager anxious look, she went on as simply and straightforwardly as he had done. "I am very, very sorry, Sir Henry: If I had thought—if I could have known anything about this, you should never have had this pain. I would have told you—let you know that I—in short, that I was attached to somebody else."

This was quite enough for poor Sir Harry. His countenance fell, and he turned away to go to the door; then he came back, and held out his hand to Margaret, though he dared not trust himself to look at her. She took the proffered hand and wrung it.

"Sir Henry, you have done me the greatest honour a man can do a woman; do believe that I fully appreciate it, and that I value your friendship and good opinion very highly indeed; I do, and always shall, entertain the sincerest esteem and regard for you."

"Thank you, Miss Langley," he replied, in a low voice; "may you be as happy as you deserve. As for me, I might have done some good, with you to show me how. Perhaps I may as it is—if so, it will be your doing. God bless you, Miss Langley."

"And you, Sir Henry," replied Margaret, earnestly; and so they shook hands again and parted. As soon as the door closed upon him, Margaret actually began to cry; it had hurt her so to wound that honest, simple heart of big Sir Harry.

He walked away as fast as he could stride; for though he carried a heavy heart in his breast, he had not fallen, but rather risen, in his own esteem. Margaret's assurances of her respect and friendship had comforted him somewhat, and the blow was not so hard as it might have been. He had

been, truth to tell, indulging in sundry visionary schemes of doing a great deal of good amongst his tenants with Margaret's help; of being a *man*, and having some business in the world. Besides, Margaret's rejection of him had been so gentle, her regret at wounding him so heartfelt, that he felt she recognised him already as being a *man* worthy of *her* respect. And, therefore, though his schemes were dissipated, he was not so altogether cast down as he might have been.

He was striding rapidly along, thinking he would return to town to-morrow, when as he passed through the little glen where his colloquy with George had taken place, "bang" went a gun from the thicket beside him, and "whiz" went its charge past his ear, singeing his whisker and grazing his cheek. To dash into the bushes and grapple with the fellow who had fired was but the work of a moment. But it was dark, and he could not see whom he had hold of. The struggle was brief; the man dropping his gun, succeeded in wrenching himself free, and darted off, Sir Harry after him. But the fugitive was a lighter man than his pursuer, and evidently knew the ground better; for he very soon planted Sir Harry in a piece of boggy ground, whilst he himself made off without difficulty. Sir Harry, meanwhile, floundered about till he got upon firm ground again, and then, sending a few not very mild or agreeable epithets after the runaway, he made his way back to the thicket; remembering that the fellow had let the gun fall. After groping about for a long time amongst the dead leaves, and finally stumbling over what he was in search of, he picked up the weapon and went home.

He roused up the old keeper as he passed his cottage, and asked him if he knew the gun; but the old fellow was purblind: besides, the sleep was hardly out of his eyes, and he replied that he did not. Sir Harry could, therefore, do nothing that night but direct the old man to fetch the police-constable from Thwackelton town early the following morning, and not to mention the subject to any one in the meantime. When he went in, he allayed the old housekeeper's terror at the sight of his bleeding cheek by saying he had "run foul of a tree in the dark, and barked it," and told her to plaster it up. He wrote off also to Scotland Yard for a detective; for he had no great faith in the astuteness of the guardian of the rural peace of Thwackelton and its surrounding district: and Sir Harry was very wroth. He did

not approve of being made a target to improve the gun practice of the vagabond sportsmen on his own estate, and he was quite certain that the shot was not accidental, whether it was intended for him or for somebody else.

The constable, Jackson by name, waited upon him before he was up the next morning. Sir Harry soon came down to him in the old stone hall, with the captured gun in his hand. The old keeper, Jos Waters, was there also waiting for orders. Jackson examined the gun in a very knowing and imposing manner, and, no doubt, arrived much nearer the truth of the matter thereby, for he ascertained the fact that it had undoubtedly been recently discharged, even if the state of Sir Harry's plastered cheek had not vouched for the fact. The weapon in question was a somewhat clumsy and antiquated flint lock; it appeared to have been recently cleaned, although there were traces of previous rust upon the barrel. The constable was slow of comprehension, and whilst Sir Harry was explaining and re-explaining certain points in his account, the old gamekeeper, unnoticed by either, took up the gun, as a man who has been used to such things mechanically lays hold of the accustomed implement. A startled exclamation called their attention to him; the old man's face was blanched, and his trembling hands bid fair to drop the weapon he grasped.

"Why, what ails the old man? What is it, Waters?" cried Sir Harry.

"Wha, sir, I'd be loath to dea any hurt to an honest chap —boot, lor sakes! 't is desput lakh——"

"Like what?"

But the old man's dim eye was seeking along the barrel for some particular sign. All at once he seemed to find what he sought for, for he dropped into a chair, exclaiming,—

"She be, for sartain she be!"

"What? Come, Waters, what is it?"

"She's—George Heseltine's gun!" said the old man, with an effort. "I ken her by t' dent o' t' barrel where t' auld chap, George's feather, let her fall a daa when we was young lads together."

Sir Harry drew a deep breath. "The infernal scoundrel," said he, slowly, in a voice not loud but deep. And then, having ascertained carefully, with reluctant conviction, that there could be no doubt upon the subject, either of the identity of the weapon or its present ownership, he fell to

pacing up and down the hall with his hands in his pockets, in a state of very great and very painful perplexity.

From what he had been able to observe in the darkness of the thicket, the man who had fired at him was about George's height and build, though, judging from the struggle, a less powerful man than he supposed George to be: but that was not much to trust to. Then he began to reflect upon the conversation he had held with Heseltine, not an hour before the shot was fired. Despite the young man's surliness at the beginning of the interview, there had been something in his frank, blunt manner, which had touched a responsive chord in Sir Harry's own breast, and made him feel he could depend upon that fellow. At the end of his cogitation Sir Henry exclaimed aloud, "I don't believe it."

Nevertheless, on an examination of the ground, he found something which gave rather a shock to his conviction. This was a small piece of singed, blackened paper, which had formed part of the gun wad, and which seemed to have been a fragment of an old school copy-book; at the bottom was written, in a fair, round hand, the word "Heseltine," with a date: this, at least, seemed to prove the fact that the gun had not been fired since it had been loaded by its proper owner.

Moreover, to strengthen the suspicion against George, Willy Simmons, whose curiosity had been excited by the movements of the party, here came up, and had his testimony to add. He said that, as he was crossing the fields the evening before, he had heard a shot in the direction of the grove; that, very shortly afterwards, a man who was not following the beaten path, but making a short cut, crossed the path just as he came up; that he, Willy Simmons, said "Fahn nicht," and was answered by a voice, which, though gruff and short, he recognised as that of George Heseltine; and that, although he made some further remark, the young man did not answer, but went on at a very quick pace: which want of civility had so surprised Willy that he walked on wondering what could have "put George about" so much.

With the knowledge of all these circumstances, which seemed so strongly to criminate young Heseltine, Sir Harry sorrowfully admitted that he had no objection to urge against the constable's procuring a warrant for George's apprehension.

Meantime, it is needful to record the proceedings of George during the evening in question. His first impulse on leaving Sir Harry, with a heart lightened of half the load it

had borne for some days, was to go and seek for Annie, and beg her pardon for having misjudged her. But it was already quite dusk, and, after an unusual continuance of dry weather, the clouds now promised rain before morning; and he recollected certain arrangements which must necessarily be made amongst his stock: so he turned his face homeward first, intending to go to Annie afterwards. He hastily completed his home duties, and then set out again.

As he went out of his farmyard, he fancied he saw some one disappear from the gate on the opposite side of the road; he was surprised, as it was an unlikely spot for any one to be in at that hour; he, therefore, went to the gate and looked over, but saw no one, and received no answer to his call; so, supposing that his eye had deceived him, or that it was some one who might not wish to be suspected of snaring hares, and consequently did not answer, he set off to see Annie; not going round by the road, but taking a short cut across the fields: for we may be sure George well knew the shortest road to Mrs. Wilson's. He ran a good part of the way, for Mrs. Wilson kept early hours, and he was afraid Annie might have locked the door for the night. When he reached the gate, he called her softly by name. Annie heard very well, indeed she was rather expecting to hear some sound of the kind; but she let him call once or twice more before she answered, for she was not best pleased with him and his black looks: when she did go out, it was with a sufficiently cool greeting.

"Oh, Mr. George, you're there, are you? Have you got the black cat off your back yet, sir?"

George had meant to be very penitent; but somehow, when Annie met him in that way, he felt tempted to justify his conduct, instead of begging pardon immediately.

"Well, Annie, '*twas* enough to rile a chap to see another man whispering along wi' you, an' you not seeming to mind about 't——"

But little mistress Annie had been very much piqued that George should venture to distrust her—her, who knew that no single thought of her heart had ever strayed from its fealty to him for years. She was hurt, and she did not choose to come down from her dignity for a mere excuse, so she said,—

"And so you went and behaved like a bear, and were as rude as ever you could be to the gentleman: not to speak of how you behaved to me!"

"Coom, coom, Annie, forget and forgive," said George, trying to take her hand. But she drew it back pettishly.

"No, I'm not going to forget and forgive. I'm ashamed of you, George. I don't like such suspicious ways — I don't."

George had felt very much ashamed of himself before, but Annie's reproaches annoyed him, so he said, rather drily—

"Well, Annie, I came o' purpose to say I was sorry; but I didn't think you'd ha' been so awk'ard aboot it, or mebbe I shouldn't ha' coom. Mebbe I'd better ha' knocked t' chap down, as I thought to."

"Well, I may be awk'ard, George; you haven't got any right to mistrust *me* so—you haven't, George," and Annie began to cry.

George heard the little sob; and saw by the light that streamed from the open kitchen door, that Annie's head was bent down quite dejectedly. The thought of her tears was quite too much for him; and he was about to throw his arms round her and beg pardon very humbly, which, doubtless, would soon have set matters straight, but just then Mrs. Wilson's bell rang, and Annie had to answer it. She shut the door after her, without giving him any sign that his peace was made; so George had nothing for it but to take himself off, not in the best of humours. As he returned across the fields by the way he had come, he passed about a field's distance to the back of the little dell which has been so often mentioned. Whilst doing so, he heard a shot.

"Well, that's impudent too!" thought he, "an' t' master down i' t' pleace an' all. I expect by that, there's some pheasants i' t' woods t' year. I'm fain *I'm* not t' keeper, anyhow. A kind-hearted manful sort o' chap that Sir Henry is: and 'twas desput kind o' Miss Langley to speak to him for me. I could ha' liked to tell Annie, an' what t' lawyer chap said t' morn. I wish she hadn't a' been so awk'ard."

As George, in no very pleasant mood, was thinking over what had passed, and how unwontedly Annie must have been irritated to utter such sharp reproofs, whom should he stumble upon, as he crosed the footpath, but Willy Simmons. Now, if any one person did make George feel more cross-grained than another, it was that identical Willy Simmons, whose meddling ways and mischief-making tongue always irritated him past endurance. He gave but a surly response, therefore,

to the shepherd's salutation ; and, to his attempt to commence a conversation, made no response at all, except by quickening his pace considerably.

The next morning, events were not calculated to restore George to a more equable state of mind. He was out early, as usual ; and, despite his various causes of annoyance, came back with a keen appetite for his breakfast. Shortly afterwards, two men, strangers to him, came to the house and requested to see him. Their business was soon explained: they had come on the part of one of his creditors to lay an execution upon his goods.

This was a dreadful blow to poor George. The thing itself possessed a sort of inexpressible horror and disgrace to his mind ; and then the implied distrust and depreciation of his character and honour was still harder to bear. George reeled back against the wall like a drunken man when he understood the purport of the paper that was put into his hand; and there he stood, staring with vacant eyes, as the two men went round taking an inventory of his goods and household furniture. But when they came to his father's old oak chair, which still stood where the old man had last sat in it —when he saw them turn it about and move it with rough, curious, irreverent hands—he could bear it no longer; he gave a deep groan and hurried out. But then where was he to go? He knew, in spite of the lover's quarrel between him and Annie, where to find the one true heart that would have the best sympathy and comfort for him in his trouble, and so he turned instinctively towards Mrs. Wilson's cottage. It so happened, however, that before he got there, he met Miss Langley, who, as he raised his cap, stopped, noticing his agitated face.

"You are in trouble, George?" she asked. The kindness of her voice and manner upset poor George altogether, and he was obliged to pass his coat-cuff two or three times across his eyes before he could steady his voice enough to reply.

"Catchem and Hawker's been and put in a distress, miss; and t' bailiffs, they're *there*," pointing towards his home, "taking a list o' poor faather and moother's old bits o' things, and I could na bide to see 't."

"My poor friend, I *am* indeed sorry for you! But is there nothing that can be done, George?"

"Not as I ken o', miss; unless——" replied George, hesitating.

"Unless what, George?"

"Why, there was Sir Henry Aston said to me yestreen you'd been so kind as to speak for me to him, miss; an' he said he'd help me, if he could anyways."

"So he will, I am sure; and he can help you in this matter, beyond a doubt. Go to him without a moment's loss of time, and tell him what has happened. Go directly, George; I will break it gently to Annie," added Margaret, as she saw George give a lingering glance towards the house: for she had sufficient insight into human nature in general, and Sir Harry's human nature in particular, to know he would wish to put many miles between him and Snagton before sundown.

George's look lightened considerably. He knew Annie would be told gently of his trouble and disgrace, as he considered it; and though he was unwilling to ask aid in a quarter where he had so lately declined it somewhat independently, still Margaret's timely counsel suggested something to be done: and something to be done was a boon to poor George in his then state of mind; so, with a grateful acknowledgment, he turned his steps quickly in the direction of the house.

Margaret meanwhile went back to seek Annie, and acquainted her very gently with what had occurred, making it appear as if the inconvenience arising from the affair would only be temporary: but the poor girl took it to heart as deeply as George himself. Again and again Margaret explained to her that, after all George's efforts, and hard, unremitting labour, nobody could consider it as a disgrace; it was a misfortune, under which all his friends would sympathise with him. At last the secret came out.

"But I was *so* unkind to him last night!" sobbed poor Annie, and the tears ran down so fast over her work that at last Margaret said,—

"Annie, I wish you would run and ask George for me, what Sir Henry Aston said."

Margaret had a strong "fellow-feeling" for her little maid, and it made her not only "wondrous kind," but wondrous skilful in applying a styptic to Annie's tears.

We may be sure the grass did not grow under the girl's feet, as she took the road towards her lover's dwelling.

George, meantime, had not succeeded in finding Sir Harry at home. The housekeeper asked him to wait; but he did

not feel as if it were possible to sit there in the hall with his hands before him; so he said he would call again, and went back to his own home. When he got there, he had not the courage to go in and see the bailiffs in possession, but sauntered about the road and the yard, in a desultory, miserably dejected way. He was standing leaning over the gate, with his back to the house, chewing the cud of fancies, in which there was, at that moment, little of the sweet, but plenty of the bitter ingredient, when he was surprised by the appearance of Jackson, the police constable, accompanied by our bustling acquaintance Willy Simmons. George scarcely knew the policeman, except by sight, and, as for the infliction of Willie's tongue at that moment, the thought of it was more than he could stand. He feigned not to have seen them, therefore, but turned hastily away, and walked quickly towards the house. He had reached the door, when the sound of his own gate made him turn his head. To his surprise, the two men entered the yard, and came towards him.

"Oh!" groaned George to himself, "mishaps always do come in flocks, they say. I wish Willy and they bailiff chaps was in a bag together, keeping company with Pharaoh,—I do." And he turned round to face the foe, with a sort of feeling of standing at bay to everything and everybody, which did not communicate a particularly mild or agreeable expression to his features. To his utter and intense astonishment, instead of being accosted by Willy Simmons, as he expected, the policeman walked up to him and laid his hand upon his collar, saying—

"I arrest you in the Queen's name."

George stood for one half-second with open mouth and widely distended eyes, then he exclaimed, doubling his fist—

"I say, you chap, take your hand off my collar, if you don't want to be floored," whilst, by a wrench of his shoulder, he procured himself, at the same time, the release he requested so mildly. "Now, then, what do you mean by this foolery?" he demanded, fiercely.

If his astonishment had been great before, what did it become when he saw the warrant for his apprehension, and learned that he was arrested on strong suspicion of having attempted the life of Sir Henry Aston? He uttered an exclamation of contemptuous wonder at the absurdity of the charge, and when asked whether he had lent his gun to any one, replied at once, decidedly, in the negative.

His gun, he said, was in its place in his kitchen; he had cleaned it himself the morning before, and put it in its own corner with his own hands. And upon being requested to produce it, he went confidently to the nook where he was accustomed to place it; but, to his astonishment and dismay, no gun was to be found! Moreover, the bailiffs denied positively the fact of a gun having stood there since they had been in possession. Vague suspicions of some plot against him, of witchcraft, of he knew not what, flashed confusedly through the poor fellow's bewildered brain, as he learned that a gun which was identified as his, had been picked up by Sir Henry Aston himself on the very spot not five minutes after the shot had been fired.

With a face that varied from blank dismay to angry impatience, he listened; and, as momentary ideas of escaping and rushing away, he knew not, cared not whither, darted through his mind, he glared fiercely round upon the ring of spectators which now surrounded him. But the whole infamy and disgrace that seemed to rest upon him—an execution for debt on his goods, an arrest for attempted murder on his person—rose before him, and seemed to overwhelm him at once. The poor lad dropped down upon the stone bench outside his door, exclaiming, despondently—

"Well, the devil's done his worst agean me *now*, I reckon."

Just at this moment Annie came up to the farmyard gate. She had expected to see some strangers, and was therefore not surprised at beholding a group of persons gathered before the house door. She had hoped that George would come out to her; but she could not see him, owing to his being seated, whilst several persons stood between him and her: for the discussion had drawn every one upon the premises to the spot. The only thing to be done was, to go and ask whether George was come home. Fortifying herself, therefore, in the strength of a message from Miss Langley, Annie, after a short pause of timid hesitation, opened the gate and entered the yard.

As she approached the group, her apprehensions became excited; for not only did the faces of the by-standers wear a look of consternation, but George's old housekeeper was standing by with her apron at her eyes, crying. Then Annie beheld her lover himself, seated upon the bench, and so bowed together that nothing of his face was visible except the corrugated brow, as he sat, with his arms resting upon his knees, and his eyes sternly fixed upon the ground. He did

not remark her approach; and, terrified at she knew not what, Annie hurried up to the housekeeper and asked her, in an agitated whisper, whether anything worse had happened. The old woman only answered with a fresh burst of crying, as she waved her hand towards George. In her terror, Annie turned to Willy Simmons, and entreated him to tell her what had taken place; Willy, nothing loath, immediately proceeded to do so in a loud whisper, accompanying his recital by divers mysterious signs. In speechless amazement, Annie listened, whilst Willy told her that Sir Harry's life had been attempted the night before; that the shot had been fired with a gun known to be Heseltine's; and that George was arrested on strong suspicion of having fired it.

Then Annie's bewilderment and horror gave way to burning indignation. "How dare they?" she exclaimed aloud—"how dare they say he did it? Shame on you, Willy Simmons, to tell such things o' him, when you know he never would ha' hurt a fly;" and her woman's love overcoming her maiden bashfulness, she rushed to George, who had raised his head quickly at her voice, and flung her arms round his neck, exclaiming, "My George, my darling, they *shall* not tell such lies about you!" He clasped his arms around her, deeply moved by this proof of her affection, coming as it did at such a moment of despondency.

But in her vehement grief and anger, Annie, not content with thus publicly making her protest against the accusation, turned round again towards the policeman, eagerly exclaiming, "I can prove he didn't do it—couldn't ha' done it, for he was with *me*, he was! And I was quarrelling with him, like a cruel, wicked, hard-hearted girl as I was."

Here, overcome by her agitation and tenderness, Annie sank down upon her lover's shoulder, and sobbed, whilst George whispered comfort and love in her ear. The police constable caught at her last words, and began to question her; and Annie, eager to exculpate her beloved, hastily dried her tears, and stood ready to answer:

"What time had George been with her the evening before?"

"It was nine, just going to strike, as he left the door: she noticed the clock."

"Had he a gun?"

"No; she was certain. Besides she had seen him before in the course of the evening."

"Where had she seen him?"

"She had seen him in the grove between Mrs. Wilson's and Snagton End, speaking to Sir Henry Aston, between seven and eight; and Sir Henry had been to Mrs. Wilson's afterwards," said Annie, triumphantly. But her statement did not seem to make the impression she expeeted.

She was asked whether George Heseltine had appeared to be on good terms with Sir Henry? Annie felt her face undergo a ehange as she remembered George's look when she left the two young men together; but she only pressed his arm eloser to her, as she answered eautiously, fearful of betraying his interests—

"She could not say: she had been vexed with George, and hadn't noticed him much."

"What time did Sir Henry leave Mrs. Wilson's?"

"She eould not say exactly; she did not let him out."

"I doubt you won't be able to prove an *alibi*, young woman," said the eonstable. "Now, Master Heseltine, you must eome along with me; for the present, at all events."

Then, as George, with a strange, white, stony faee, rose up, and turned and kissed her on the cheek to bid her good-bye, the terrible reality for the first time burst upon Annie. Where were they going to take her darling?—to prison? She flung her arms passionately round him, as if she wished to keep them from him by her hold, exclaiming:

"They shall not! they dare not! My love! my dearest!"

But George stooped and whispered entreatingly:

"Don't make it so hard for me, Annie, my treasure! Don't, dear! I shall soon eome baek."

With one last passionate embraee, she unloosed the soft elasp of her arms, and let him go. As they led him away, with his head bent down that they might not see the unmanly tears upon his eheeks, Annie staggered slowly back upon the stone-bench, and sat there, cold and impassive as a stone, paying no heed to the attempted eomfort of the spectators who gathered round her. At last, when, failing to reach her understanding by his words, Willy Simmons attempted to raise her and lead her in, she, as if annoyed by his persistenee, put back his hand, got up, and walked away stiffly and strangely, as if she were walking in her sleep and neither saw nor heard, nor was in any way conscious of surrounding objects and present eireumstanees.

CHAPTER XXI.

A RECONCILIATION.

THE commotion excited in Snagton cum Thwackelton by the occurrence of such an event as this, can only be described by the paragraph which appeared in the *Maltby Gazette* on its next publication :—

"The inhabitants of a lovely and secluded district in this vicinity—the romantic villages of Snagton cum Thwackelton —were, a few days since, thrown into the utmost consternation by a most base, brutal, and cowardly attempt to assassinate that distinguished and accomplished gentleman, Sir Henry Aston. We are happy to state that the brutal assassin was immediately apprehended, and we understand that the ruffian made no attempt to deny the charge. The honourable baronet is, we rejoice to add, slowly recovering from the serious wound inflicted by the miscreant, whose sentence to condign punishment we hope shortly to record in these columns."

But beside mere vulgar curiosity and gossip, this extraordinary affair excited an exceeding degree of interest and anxiety in all who knew George Heseltine, for he was a general favourite ; his open-hearted spontaneous kindliness, his readiness to lend a helping hand whenever a neighbour might require it, and his well-known humanity, had won him "golden opinions from all sorts of people."

"I dean't, nor I wean't believe a woord on 't," said old James Gilmore, when his neighbour, Mrs. Tillot, came in, eager and open-mouthed, with the news. "Tell me a soft-hearted chap lakh that un—wha, 't puir lad 'ud scace ha' crushed a flee as worrited un !—tell me he gone an' shot at t' yoong squire ! Na, na, Maggy Tillot, I'se kent George sin' a' were a bairn : *he* never dean't, not he."

"Wha, boot, ye see," said Mrs. Tillot, "'t were a bit jealousy, 'tis lahk, o' t' lass Annie; shoo's nobbut a stuck-oop bit o' a thing, an', na doubt, t' yoong squire bin gettin' kahnd along wi' her."

"Haud yer tongue, Maggy, woman, if thee can find nobbut sooch lees to saa aboot t' lass," exclaimed old James, indignantly; "'tis as loovesome a good, sober, bonnie lass as yese find all ower; an' I'se ne'er hear nob'dy speak agean her whilst shoo's i' trouble. Gan thee weays hame, Maggy

Tillot, an' mahnd thee bairns, an' dunna speak ill o' thee neighbours."

It was a rare thing to see the gentle old man put out so much as he was upon that occasion. Squire Tappin, too, heard the news just as he was about to mount George's mare in order to go to market. The good-natured squire was quite struck and disconcerted : he relinquished the bridle he had just taken to the boy who had been holding it ; took his hat off and scratched his shaggy head, looked at the mare and scratched his head again. "I'd liefer as a hunder pound that never happened," said he ; and he put on his hat again with one hand, and stroked the mare's sleek coat with the other. Poor George ! it would have done his heart good to see how his mare's coat shone with the care the squire had taken of her.

"Aweel," said Squire Tappin, as he mounted and rode slowly and thoughtfully out of his yard, "if t' puir lad gets off thee shall gan an' fetch him back to Snagton, puir auld beast, so thee shall."

Poor little Annie meantime needed all the sympathy her friends had to bestow ; for George's misfortunes had gone nigh to deprive her of her reason, if not to break her heart. That taking him away to prison with all the stigma and disgrace which it conveyed to her mind, had been more than she could bear. When she went in she was cold and marble-like ; and all Margaret's questioning and soothing could only elicit—

"They've taken him—taken him away to prison."

She did not sob or weep, but sat quite still, her mind apparently altogether absorbed in the horror of that one idea. Margaret became alarmed, and, with Mrs. Wilson's assistance, led the poor girl up to her room and put her to bed. She submitted quite quietly to all, except the being required to lie down, and that she could not be induced to do ; it seemed to disturb her mind. She raised herself again immediately to a sitting posture in the bed, pressing her hand to her forehead, as if trying to remember something, and then repeating in a wild, pathetic, pleading way that made Margaret's heart bleed—

"Yes ; it *was* my George they took away—took him to prison."

Margaret strove, by soothing and caresses, to induce her to lie down again ; but Annie suffered the soft hand that lay on her head to stroke her yellow hair and try its gentle persuasion in vain. Seriously alarmed for the poor girl's reason,

Miss Langley sent in haste for the doctor; and it was well she did, for Mr. Yeoman ordered cold applications to the head and hot ones to the feet as speedily as possible, telling Margaret he feared that an attack of brain fever would be the consequence of the shock the girl had received.

To Margaret's great relief, Halstead returned that day from his banishment. It was, besides, an unspeakable delight to her to see the hue of health that once more tinged the young man's cheek. The greeting of the two as they met was rapturous enough, though little was said. Frank, as soon as he had time to hear what had taken place, exclaimed at the absurdity of the charge against George Heseltine, and hurried off instantly to see Sir Henry Aston.

Sir Harry was very much discomposed by the events of the two last days, and greatly annoyed that he could not leave Snagton. He did not at all know what to be at, and so, for want of other employment, he was amusing himself by unscrewing, oiling, and cleaning the locks of his various guns. He was greatly delighted when Halstead arrived to relieve him from his *ennui;* and whilst the two talked over the affair together, Sir Harry's real kind-heartedness and good-feeling shone forth in such pleasant colours, in his evident sorrow at being necessitated to consent to Heseltine's arrest and his anxiety to exculpate him, that Halstead and he became quite friendly before they parted. They did so at length, having agreed that Halstead should visit the young man in his confinement, and endeavour to ascertain whether he really did not know who had used his gun; or whether, as Halstead suggested, he might be only feigning ignorance to conceal the guilt of some one else.

The following morning, accordingly, Halstead set off for the county gaol. He was not sure what reception George might give him, but he was at least anxious to assure him of his own entire belief in his innocence. Besides he wished to ascertain whether proper steps had been taken to procure counsel for his defence. When he was admitted to the cell, George was sitting in a disconsolate attitude upon his bed, his face haggard with the suffering of the past day and night; he turned his head quickly at the sound of the key in the lock, and, when he saw Halstead, he started up, and came eagerly forward a step or two; then, remembering the long separation that had existed between them, he checked himself and turned away: but Halstead went straight up to him.

"George," he said, "I came to assure you that I—that

all who know you are confident of your entire innocence of this charge."

George looked up, gazed wistfully and earnestly in Halstead's face, and, as he met the heartfelt, sorrowful sympathy of the other's eyes, a gush of feeling came into his own, and he faltered—

"God bless you for that word, sir! Poor faather 'd bless you for that."

Halstead held out his hand; George grasped it, leaning his forehead against the high window-sill, with a sob he could not repress. And thus was effected a reconciliation between the two young men, who, though never alienated in heart, had so long been separated by their respective mistaken ideas of their duty towards God, and their duty towards man. But presently George grew calmer, and Halstead replied to his shy, questioning look, when he asked after "all at home," that all were well except Annie Irving; and added quickly, as he saw poor George's countenance fall, "and she will be better when I go back and take her a message from you, I have no doubt; and you know she is in good hands."

Mr. Halstead was soon convinced, on questioning George, that he knew absolutely nothing beyond what he had stated about the affair. Halstead made him go over and over the most minute details of his proceedings that day, after the cleaning and putting away of the gun, but he could gather very little light from anything the young man had to relate. However, he did all that lay in his power, under the circumstances, by securing the aid of a gentleman whose name stood high in the legal world, as the prisoner's counsel upon his trial.

In the meantime the detective for whom Sir Harry had written came down to Snagton, and made a most minute examination of the place of the rencontre and the fields adjoining, as well as of all the circumstances connected with the affair. The result of his investigation was, that whoever had been the perpetrator of the outrage, it could scarcely have been George Heseltine. Still it was a period of miserable suspense to all parties concerned; for no direct testimony could be obtained at all sufficient to exculpate the young man from the charge, supported as it was by so many points of the circumstantial evidence which would have to be adduced at the trial.

In due course of time Annie received a subpœna to attend

as witness at the approaching trial. Both Miss Langley and the kind-hearted little doctor dreaded the consequences of such fearful excitement upon the girl's unsteadied brain, and Margaret suggested that possibly the danger might be less if she were allowed to see George first.

Mr. Yeoman assented to the advisability of the expedient, but recommended that she should be kept in ignorance of the meaning of the summons she had received until it was absolutely necessary for her to be made aware of it.

So Annie was only told that she was to go and see George. Poor girl, she was in a state of wild, eager, tremulous excitement from the moment she knew it until she reached the gaol ; and then her agitation became so fearful, that Miss Langley was terrified for the consequences to her little favourite. All the way there Annie had seemed conscious of nothing, except the urgent desire to get on, and her eyes wore a wild pleading look at every slight delay; she did not heed or seem to hear when spoken to; her whole soul was occupied with the one idea—she was to see him. And when, at length, the prisoner's cell was reached, what a meeting was there ! Margaret turned away to hide her tears—Mrs. Wilson sobbed aloud—even the rough turnkey blew his nose angrily, as those two stood locked—strained in each other's embrace, lost to all but one another. Margaret signed to Mrs. Wilson to leave them alone.

" She is safe now," she whispered, and glided away, that she might not intrude upon the sacred privacy of their love.

Annie was better after that meeting ; she began to move quickly, and like herself once more, instead of creeping about with a wan frightened look, scared almost at the sound of a falling leaf, or the sight of her own shadow.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TRIAL.

MEANTIME matters had progressed but little, as regarded George Heseltine's cause. Of his innocence there could, of course, be no reasonable doubt, yet hitherto no evidence, in any way sufficient legally to exculpate him, had been obtained; and the assizes were fast approaching. Heseltine's friends were very uneasy at the possible result of the trial.

At last Halstead heard from Sir Henry Aston of the capture by the police of the person who was supposed to be identical with Robson. Still nothing had been discovered which could tend to prove that the man was in any way implicated in the Snagton affair. A few days before the trial Halstead went to see George once more, and found the poor fellow pitiably altered, by the change from a life spent almost entirely in the open air of the moors and fields, to the close air and confinement of the prison: his cheeks were sallow and sunken; his dark bright eyes had contracted an anxious worn look; and he seemed utterly cast down and despondent. The turnkey's confidential remark to Halstead as he went away, seemed but too likely to prove true.

"He's one o' they as dies wi'out air, keep 'em never so comf'able!"

Halstead left poor George scarcely less dejected than he had found him; for what comfort had he to bestow, except the repeated assurance that all his friends had a perfect conviction of his innocence.

On returning home in the evening, depressed and uneasy, Frank thought he would go and see Margaret, to be cheered and comforted. He was just preparing to do so, when Mrs. Hawkins put her head in at the door.

"Please, sir, you're wanted."

"Who is it?" inquired Halstead, rather annoyed at the idea of his visit being deferred.

"Miles Agar, fro' Smoorham Becks," was the reply.

"Miles Agar! what can he want?" and Halstead felt strongly inclined to add—"Tell him to come again," but he said instead, "Tell him to come in."

Miles Agar entered the room, wearing, Mr. Halstead thought, more of a hang-dog look than ever, as, awkward and confused, he pulled his lock of hair, shuffled with his feet, and pinched his old, battered hat into a variety of extraordinary forms.

Wondering what had brought the man, and he not seeming inclined to disclose his errand, Halstead asked after his wife and family. That afforded Miles an opening, apparently, for he began—

"Ye was oncommon good to t' missis an' t' bairns i' t' fever, and ah thowght on't a good few tahms sin'; for though ah be a roughish kahnd o' chap, ah bean't a brute beast, nowther. Well, to maak short wark wi' 't, for I bean't

owerly clever a' talkin', ah's coom to ye t' nicht about a baddish kahnd o' job. Ah thowght oncet ah wooldna let on 't to nob'dy; boot mebbe 't 'll gan hard wi' an honest lad, if ah houd my tongue; an' he deän me mony a good turn when a' might ha' deän me an ill 'un: that's George Heseltine, that's now i' t' gaol. Muster Halstead, I'se ready an' willin' to tak' my solemn davy *he* never shot at t' yoong squire."

The man's manner, which had been agitated throughout, now became so much so that he was obliged to stop. Halstead, who had leaned forward in breathless eagerness during the latter part of his speech, said, hurriedly—

"For Heaven's sake, if you have any knowledge of the person who did fire that shot, speak!"

"Weel, I dunna raightly ken woa fired 't," said the man, cautiously; "boot ah's innardly sartain. Yoong George, *he* didna dea 't."

Halstead drew back disappointed.

"So am I perfectly certain that he did not; but then that does nothing towards proving his innocence. I was in hopes that you possibly knew something which would have given some clue to the person who *did* fire it."

Miles Agar hesitated a while longer: at length, having apparently made up his mind, he said—

"Mebbe 't 'll bring me i' trouble if ah tell ye a' ah ken aboot 't. Boot ah 'd be fain to dea 'un a good turn back, puir lad; and ah 'd be fain to sarve ye, Muster Halstead, likeways. Soa ye see, I dean't get noa graat i' t' weay o' wark; an' whiles t' bairns is hungered, an' t' missis, she can't bide to see 'em hungered, an' she gits contrairy an' flytes a' tahms. Weel—ah wean't saa I dean't whiles springe a rabbit, or mebbe a hear, joost to keep 'm fro' hungering."

Miles Agar, at this confession, regarded Halstead apprehensively, to see how it would be taken; but the latter only said impatiently,—"I see: go on."

"Weel, there's whiles hereawa' a chap they call Robson——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Halstead.

"What did ye please fur to saa?" inquired Agar.

"Nothing. Go on, pray; I will make some notes of what you tell me, Miles," said Halstead, drawing a sheet of paper towards him; and as Miles was a somewhat slow speaker, whilst his language was of the broadest, we compress the substance of his disclosure into fewer words than those

used by him. He said that Robson had come to him on the Wednesday when Sir Harry had been shot at, and begun inquiring about the state of the game in the preserves, and also about George Heseltine; and that on hearing the latter was now very steady, and intended to marry shortly, he had exhibited signs of discomposure. That he had expressed a wish for a gun that he might try for a bird or two, and had finally bribed Silly Willy "t' feäl" to slip in unperceived and steal George's gun for him, whilst he and Miles Agar waited outside. It was almost dark when Willy at last overcame his fears that George "'ud flyte" and got the gun, and just as he came back with it, George came home; that he, Miles Agar, held Willy down "beside 't cam," lest he should in his fright betray their presence, whilst Robson "dodged aboot beside t' gett:" that presently George came out again, and apparently caught sight of Robson; for he called out "Woa's there?" but receiving no answer, leaped the gate and set off apparently in the direction of Mrs. Wilson's house. "Ah guess to see 's lass," said Miles, and that Robson immediately followed him, *carrying the gun.*" "That were," continued Miles, "t' last I heerd and seen o' t' gun, till ah heerd t' yoong squire been shot at. Muster Halstead, ah dean't believe 't wur t' *yoong squire* was to ha' been shot wi' that gun! An' noo I'se tell 't ye a' ah ken, an' na dout ye ken enow to bring me to t' gaol, if ye will: boot ah hope ye'se mebbe not let on o' what I said o' t' springes."

"I cannot promise that," said Halstead, "but I feel sure that, whether or not your evidence establishes George Heseltine's innocence, Sir Henry Aston will not be hard upon you. I will speak to him about it. Now listen to what I have written, before I ask you to sign your name to it."

Miles Agar accordingly listened and subsequently affixed his "mark" to the document, in Mrs. Hawkin's presence. Then, scarcely waiting to seize his hat, Halstead rushed off to Mrs. Wilson's.

Margaret was listening anxiously for that step, and when she heard it come rapidly up the little gravel path, she ran to the door herself. Halstead's first greeting took her somewhat by surprise, for he caught her in his arms, exclaiming triumphantly,—

"My darling Margaret! George is safe!" Margaret released herself as speedily as she could; there was one who had an earlier right to hear the glad news than herself. When

she opened the door of the room where Annie was at work, the poor girl was sitting, pale, breathless, and motionless as a statue: those ever-wakeful senses had caught Halstead's first eager exclamation. Gently he communicated to her his joyful hopes that Miles Agar's evidence would be sufficient to clear George on his trial. Annie, white as the linen she was sewing, sat and trembled more and more, but did not speak. Again Margaret began to fear for the consequences of the sudden joy upon the poor girl's mind, when suddenly the sealed fountain of her eyes was loosed, and a plentiful burst of tears relieved poor little Annie's overburdened heart and head.

The result of the trial could no longer be doubtful, with such a reinforcement as the evidence of Miles Agar.

The court was greatly thronged upon the occasion, for the case had excited much interest in the neighbourhood, and all who knew George personally were desirous of being present at his trial. He looked ashamed and confused when he was first brought into court, but soon raised his head in a modest, manly way, and listened with great interest to the depositions of the various witnesses. There was something almost ludicrous in the expression of utter amazement depicted on his countenance, when, in the course of the examination, it became evident that he had had not only a deadly enemy, but also a bitter rival in love, in his supposed friend Robson. Towards the close of the trial a person whom the police had captured upon a different charge, but whom, for reasons of their own, they believed to be no other than Robson, was brought in, and identified without difficulty as that personage. The general sympathy on behalf of George Heseltine was so strong, that, when, after a short absence, the jury brought in their verdict of "Not guilty," a series of deafening cheers arose.

And George? —— He turned very pale and faint as he heard the words, and lifted his hand dizzily to his head. He scarcely knew what passed further, until he was led away from the bar, a free man, with his name unequivocally cleared from the stigma of felony. He felt sick and dizzy: as he passed out, the place and the people seemed turning round with him. He could not see the friendly hands that were held out to grasp his innocent hand. He staggered forward a step or two, and fell. The joy of his deliverance had been too overwhelming: the strong man had fainted. When he came to himself he found himself in the witness-room, with Annie supporting his head and chafing his temples, whilst she

sprinkled them abundantly with tears of thankfulness from the soft blue eyes that were watching his unclosing eyelids. And there was Halstead holding his hand, and Miss Langley standing by.

George soon recovered. The deep exulting love in those soft eyes that were gazing down upon him so tenderly, was enough of itself to recover any man from a fainting fit, especially one that was only the result of joy. He was to go home with Annie in the fly in which Mr. Halstead had brought her and Miss Langley. But when they reached the door, there were so many friends waiting to congratulate George, that it was no such easy matter to get away. First there was Sir Henry Aston, who had waited shyly outside, because he did not dare to approach Miss Langley; but who now came hastily forward holding out his hand and exclaiming,—

"Shake hands, George. I didn't think anything could add to the pleasure of finding one hadn't got a shot through the head, but upon my word I'm almost as glad to have it proved *you* didn't shoot at me. It seems I only just missed what was meant for you, eh?"

Then there was Miles Agar standing by, with an awkward, wistful look, and he had to be shaken hands with and thanked. Many others, also, whom George knew, pressed up to congratulate him; and last of all, just as he was about to place Annie in the carriage, a loud cheery voice was heard, exclaiming,—

"Noa, noa; get oot o' t' weay there, I saa; nobbut t' auld mare 'll dea to bring t' lad back to Snagton." And sturdy Squire Tappin was seen to drive up in his spring-cart, with George's mare, her sleek coat shining like silk.

"Coom, George, lad; here's auld Nance, blithe and bonny! ketch houd o' t' reins! What! thee gotten t' lass wi' thee? Wha, then we munna part ye, nother! Loup oop, Annie, lass! an' ah mun e'en budge back o' my twa pins. Whisht, man, whisht!"

The squire kept on talking loud and fast, for fear of being betrayed into doing anything else, as George, unable to speak, pressed his hand in silence. Then the poor fellow patted his sleek favourite's neck, and the mare turned her bright eye sidelong upon him, and whinnied her old loving whinny, as she felt the accustomed hand. She sprang away blithely, with a start that made half a dozen little boys scamper, as her old master took the reins, and jumped up beside Annie, turn-

ing round and waving his hand again and again to all the friends who had assembled to see him off.

What a ride that was across the wild moors, all in their royal array of purple heather and golden brakes, with the free breeze singing wild songs of liberty about his ears; the old mare in high condition, and full of mettle and spirit at feeling his hand once more upon the rein, trotting away up hill and down dale as if she hardly felt the ground in her gladness; the free heart in his bosom leaping with all the wild buoyancy of recovered liberty — and his own little darling, his glad heart's best treasure, beside him! George Heseltine was a thankful and a happy man that day: he thought that very drive across the moors payment enough for all his sufferings; and as the town and the eyes of all spectators were left behind, he flung his arm round his Annie, and pressed her close to his faithful heart.

There came no check in the flow of his delight, till the mare, instinctively following the direction in which the hand that now held the rein had been accustomed to guide her, turned sharp round the corner towards her old home. George pulled up short.

"Noa, auld Nance, we munna gan there noo. I couldna bide to see t' auld bare walls yet awhile."

But Annie said, "Please go, George, dear: Nance would like to, and so should I."

George looked so sad, that one *might* have hoped Annie would have been sorry to cast a damp on his spirits by urging him to take her to the dismantled chambers of his old home; but no, the self-willed little thing persisted, looking up persuasively in her eyes, and laying a little hand on his arm: "Just to please me, George."

There is no saying what George would not have done to please Annie that day; so he gave impatient Nance the rein once more, exclaiming,—

"Well, then, go it, auld lass! t' laadies mun always ha' their waa', an' the two o' ye's a good few too many for me!" Thereupon he began to console himself in a way that made Annie exclaim,—

"There now, *do* ha' done, George; you've made my bonnet all of a wisp!"

Nance dashed up to the farmyard gate in great style: it was wide open. George thought, "Ah! there's no one to care for 't, an' no stirks to keep in noo."

But there was some one there though, for one of George's farm-servants came running at the sound of the wheels to take old Nance, quite as if he expected her, and to "shuck hands" with George. George began to stare; but Annie would scarcely wait for him to jump out and help her, she was in such a hurry. Indeed he had to catch her in his arms as she sprang, as it was; and then, hardly waiting to feel her feet, she ran off into the house, so George was fain to tell the man to stand by Nance a minute while he followed. His old housekeeper met him at the door, with something between a laugh and a cry.

But George got no farther: he stood staring as if he was bewitched! There was everything just as it used to be ever since he could remember! There was the old walnut-wood eight-day clock, ticking away as solemnly as ever; he heard it for all his amazement. There was the old oak-table, with its queer, twisted legs, shining in all the glory of bees'-wax and turpentine; there was his father's old arm-chair standing in its own place, just where his father had last sat, and sending back a sober gleam of rejoicing and reflected fire-light from every ultra-polished knob and boss; even the old brass tea-kettle, and the very plates and dishes, sent back a glitter of welcome! There was something fresh besides, which used not to be there—flowers in pots in the window, and flowers in bunches everywhere, all out-blooming themselves with delight. George stood and stared so long that Annie had to go and pull him in by the hand; and then he gradually recovered his powers of speech, and said, slowly—

"Annie, be I weakin', or be 't a' a stound?"

The silly little thing, having possibly exhausted all her other ways of showing delight, or else her eyes having of late become so used to the way of tears that they came natural, laid her head down on his arm and began to cry. *That* roused George from his bewilderment somewhat, for he clasped her in his arms, exclaiming—

"Well, I conceit *it is* real—leastways, I *know* 't is my own flesh and blood, Annie!"

He wanted her to explain it all to him; but she wouldn't, or couldn't, or, at all events, didn't for all he could get from her was, that it wasn't *her* secret. She could only tell him Miss Langley and she were out ever so early, before the sun rose, getting the flowers, and dressing the room up to make it look pleasant for him.

"And there's two roses off *our* tree in that glass, George, bloomed late o' purpose!"

And now a fresh sound of wheels was heard, and while the old woman hastened out to meet the guests, George laid his hand on the back of his father's chair, and drew Annie to his side, saying, solemnly—

"God has been very good to me this day, and I thank Him from my heart; and if He pleases to give me yet this one blessing above all, to bring *you* home here soon to be my wife, Annie, we'll try together to give Him back our thankful service all our days."

And Annie folded her hands together with his like a child praying, and whispered, humbly and devoutly—

"Amen!"

The fly in which Mr. Halstead and Miss Langley had returned now drove up, with the jolly squire seated beside the coachman, and crying out—

"T' auld mear's bet oos by a quarter n'our: shoo's famous i' t' wind, shoo be!"

There were fresh hand-shakings and congratulations; and then George turned to Mr. Halstead for an explanation as to how it was that he found his home just as he had left it, only brighter and cleaner and in better order.

"Nay, I know nothing about it; you must ask some one else," replied Mr. Halstead, laughing.

George looked at Miss Langley appealingly, and she said—

"Ask the squire, George."

So George asked the squire, whereupon he laughed a great hearty laugh, and said—

"Soa, thee were fixed to ken aboot 't, were thee, lad? Weel, I'se meak 't clear i' a crack. T' yoong squire he coom to me raight dahn oneasy—a soft-hearted chap he is, I'se go bail—an' he ses, 'Squire,' ses he, 'I'se oncommon put aboot along o' Heseltine. I dean't, na more as note, credit he been an' shot at me,' he ses, 'an' 't is desput hard upon t' poor chap,' he ses, 'to be so worrited for note.' 'T is soa,' ses I, 'an' na twa woords aboot 't;' an' wi' that, ses he, 'I heern there's a 'stress warrant dahn to 't farm, an' t' bailiffs is in;' an' I meade answer 't were soa. Soa he ses, 'Squire Tappin,' he ses, kahnd o' sheam-feaced lahk, 'I wish ye'd settle wi' 's creditors, an' let me ken what 't coom to: an',' ses he, 'what did you loan him on t' mear?' An' I ses, 'Wha, ye see,

that's betwixt George an' me ; an' I know he's ne'er be easy i' 's mahnd, onless he pay me hisself. Boot,' ses I, 'George shall ha' 's mear back wi'out a doubt, if he get off free; an' he's pay me when he can ; an' if he can't, wha, I'se no tak t' law o' him,' I ses. Soa t' yoong squire he ses, 'Weel, I'se no interfere betwixt you an' George. Boot,' an' he taks a bit o' peaper oot o' 's pouch, 'there's a cheque on my bankers. You fill 't oop, squire, an' thank ye fur t' trouble;' an' wi' that he meade off as thoff he wur clean sheamed to look me i' t' feace!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

MATRIMONIAL.

It was a day or two after the events last recorded that Margaret and Halstead walked arm-in-arm down to old James Gilmore's cottage. They found the old man busy as usual, beside his hearth-fire, cutting meat-skewers with his great clasp-knife. Margaret fetched the "cricket" and sat down, and Halstead stood leaning against the mantel-shelf, looking on. The old man was more "cobby" than usual that day, and very merry; for it gladdened his old heart to see that the two young people had "meade 't oop together," as he had always hoped. When, therefore, Halstead said, "James, Miss Langley and I are come about something very particular to-day; nothing less than to ask you to a wedding. Can you guess who the bride is?" old James had no need of witchcraft to divine.

"Ho, ho! lad," laughed the old man. "Shoo bean't that far boot what my eyesight be lang enow to ritch shoo, bad as 't be, ah guess,—ho ho!" And then, as Margaret blushed and laughed, he added, "Sakes, boot ye's a lucky 'un, Muster Halstead."

"You'll come then, James?" said Margaret.

"That ah wool, thoff ah walk o' my thumbs; please 't Loord sparc me while t' tahm!"

"This day fortnight then, James, you'll have to be stirring early ; for we must have you at the church, you know," said Halstead.

"And you must have a nosegay in your button-hole, mind that," added Margaret.

"Ay, ay, I'se be bonny, ah warrant ye! Ise mebbe

coot 'un oot!" and old James pointed with his thumb at Mr. Halstead, and the three laughed right merrily; and as Margaret and Halstead went away, the old man gave them so solemn a blessing that it made the eyes of both fill. "T' Loord bless ye," he said, "an' meak ye blessings: an' meak ye woorthy t'one o' t' other, an' woorthy o' Him for ever an' ever. Amen."

Meanwhile George had written (for he was a very fair scribe) to Sir Henry Aston to express his hearty thanks for the great obligation which that gentleman had conferred upon him; assuring him that as far as it was a pecuniary one, the loan should be repaid as soon as he possibly could get the money together; but that the kindness he could only feel and never hope to repay.

There came back an answer in Sir Harry's rambly handwriting, as large and lounging and open-hearted as himself, saying, that having offered to be of service to Heseltine, and having only, on the contrary, involved him in great annoyance, and laid him under disgraceful suspicion and great anxiety, he had felt that the least he could do was to act as he had done; but that if George preferred considering the money he had advanced a loan, he was at liberty to do so, and to pay it at his convenience. Meanwhile, the letter went on, there was an off-hand farm of Sir Henry's lying handy to work from George's house, for which he wanted a tenant who would farm thoroughly and improve the condition of the land; and that if George liked he would put him into it, and advance him capital (likewise as a loan, and bearing interest, if George wished it, at a fair percentage) to stock and crop it for the first year.

George was well nigh beside himself with delight. It was the very thing—the very land he had longed to have under his hands! He ran off with the letter to Annie, and astonished her by whirling her almost off her feet, flinging his cap into the air and shouting, "Hooray, Annie, we'll be married to-morrow!" But when the first excitement was past, and he could talk the matter over more coolly with Annie, he began to feel rather uneasy as to the amount of the debt he should incur, and the possibility of his ever paying it off. So they decided that the letter must be shown to Mr. Halstead and his opinion asked. As Mr. Halstead was already at Mrs. Wilson's it was easy to consult him, and his advice was both decided and pleasant.

"Accept the offer?" he exclaimed—"why, yes! and think yourself the luckiest fellow in the parish for getting such an one." Margaret whispered an aside, smiling, to Halstead, and he added, "And, George, couldn't you and Annie manage to be married the same day that I am? You know Mr. Latham; he is coming to perform the ceremony. What say you?"

George did not see the smallest objection to that proposition; and Annie had suffered too much on his account during their long attachment, to be very coy about giving her consent; so it was arranged that the two weddings should be solemnized together.

It was indeed a time of preparation and gay excitement! Margaret was busy from morning till night, with such a look of silent, steadfast happiness in her deep, beautiful eyes, that it seemed as if its source must be some holy fount amidst the very lifesprings of her being. Little Annie, too, was beaming all over with happiness and blushes. Time's wings are never leaded for the happy, and the appointed day drew rapidly near. Halstead and Margaret were out together walking the morning before the wedding, sauntering happily, slowly along. Frank had begged her to come out, because it was the last walk he could ever have with Margaret Langley.

"Let us go to the crag, Margaret," said he; and thither they turned their steps, laying bright plans for the future as they went. For though Halstead, as of old, saw much work before him,—much up-hill work even,—it was no longer the unintelligible task that it had been of old.

He had made two great practical discoveries in the mystery of life: the one he had read a thousand times embodied in the words of an ancient writer, before he understood it, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it;" the other he had known likewise, in theory, from his cradle; that the master key to the human heart is sympathy. That "dearly beloved brethren" of the exhortation had something more for him now than a mere formal acknowledgment of the common origin and common father of mankind; he was speaking to *brothers* whom he loved, not only "as good men love their kind," but with a warm, heartfelt love, that would scruple at no sacrifice made for them, either individually or collectively.

Something of all this Frank was telling Margaret, as they slowly ascended the steep hill-side, hand linked in hand, and

heart in heart; and she, as she listened, felt that he was speaking out the best feelings of her own heart in every word; that he was a noble-hearted Christian gentleman and clergyman, worthy of the purest love of the best and noblest of womankind; and she feared she was not worthy of him.

Thus they came at length to the top of the hill, and looked far away over the stretch of winding valley and distant purple hill. The deep green of the woods had already changed to gold and russet, some trees even stretched up leafless branches already to the sky. The sun spanned but a small arc of the heavens in his daily round, and was now descending towards a spot far to the southward of east; but he cast his long beams gloriously over heath and bracken, gold-crested tree and naked graceful bough. Halstead led Margaret gently forward to the very spot where they had stood together when first the words, "*My* Margaret," escaped from his unguarded lips. They stood looking out over the fair scene for a long, long time. At last Halstead, pressing Margaret close to his side, said, in a low, soft voice,—

"*My* Margaret, when I vowed to give you up to God, and consecrate my lonely life to Him, I had no assurance of His favour and blessing, such as I have now, when I am humbly and thankfully receiving back from His hands the choicest and least deserved of all His blessings!"

Margaret lifted up her eyes to his, and he read in her soul the deep, passionate, yet holy love that was illumining them. The two were as happy as it is possible for mortal man to be upon this earth.

Mr. Latham had arrived when they reached home again, and was waiting to be introduced to Margaret; and most eloquent was the silent, fervent pressure of hands, and the glance, so fraught with meaning, with which he and Halstead greeted each other. He and Margaret were friends and old acquaintances at once; as happens sometimes in this strange humanity of ours, when kindred hearts look out and greet each other through the eyes of strangers.

When Frank had, after much lingering, taken his last farewell of Margaret Langley, Latham and he went home together. They sat late, conversing on things deep, and high, and solemn: even of that eternally founded Church which, overstepping the narrow boundary walls of the various often-abused ecclesiastical polities within which men have at various times deemed the way of salvation to be limited, shall at

length be found to combine the truths, whilst it abjures the errors, of each. For those two men alike

> "Believed
> In one priest, and one temple, with its floors
> Of shining jasper, gloomed at morn and eve
> By countless knees of earnest auditors;
> And crystal walls too lucid to perceive
> That none may take the measure of the place,
> And say, 'So far the porphyry; then the flint—
> To this mark mercy goes, and there ends grace!'"

and when they parted for the night Frank said, in a voice of deep emotion, as he took Latham's hand,—

"Under God I owe it to you, dear friend, that, instead of being what I now am, a sincere, though unworthy minister of the Church of England, I am not a miserable self-deceiver, vainly leaning upon the broken staff of Rome, in the weak hope of throwing off my individual responsibility towards God upon the shoulders of a Church. I pray God to reward you, in His own best of ways, for the benefit you have bestowed upon me. Pray with me, and give me your blessing as you did that night when I told you all——"

Need I describe the proceedings of the day of the double wedding? how the two brides blushed their brightest, the one looking like a little, wild hedge-rose with the dew on it, the other like the perfect rosebud of the garden's choicest tree. Need I tell how the bridegrooms looked all handsome, eager, and expectant as bridegrooms ought to look, and always do—in story-books at least; or how Mrs. Wilson in her new, becoming cap with white ribbons looked quite wedding-like, and seemed perfectly to remember that she had once been young and a bride herself; or how old James Gilmore, in his best, Sunday, long blue coat, with the two fresh-polished brass buttons shining in the morning sun like two stars, on his bent back, and a nosegay as big as a cabbage in front, went hobbling along the church path, too blithe to think of rheumatics? How the imbecile church bell went into a state of feeble frenzy in its attempt to add its mite to the general jubilation? How Squire Tappin was there, bigger and redder and lustier than ever?

And there was Silly Willy too, who had at last got over his fear that George would "flyte;" though scarcely over the vague notion that he had been instrumental in doing George —whom he loved as well as he had the power of loving—

some grievous "hurt." Willy was clad in an old coat George had given him, "a world too wide," for his skinny form, but very magnificent to Willy's mind. Luke Tillot was in a state of such intense entanglement of ideas upon the occasion that he could only gasp and shuffle when Halstead spoke to him and gave him a bright piece of silver. Jeames Deacon, the clerk, too, of course received a gift.

There was all the parish there besides, and most of them joined heartily in the prayers. Latham's grand, rich voice trembled with deep feeling as he gave the blessing, and at last Francis and Margaret Halstead, and George and Annie Heseltine, rose up respectively man and wife.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

TIME passed on more swiftly than ever. Margaret and Halstead came back from their visit to southern climes, old ruins, and stately palaces, and as they beheld their own wild moors around them once more, they whispered to each other that amidst all the beauties of the foreign lands they had seen, there was no beauty so dear to the heart as the beauty of home!

George Heseltine, though he took no wedding tour with his bride, was a happy man with that sunniest of pretty faces at his side; and prosperous he was, as heart of man could wish. The old mare was still wont to kick up her heels with the most coltish vivacity when George led her to pasture (for George let no one touch her but himself), and to start off with a bound when he jumped into his cart, long after little toddling Georges and Annies came out to see if "Daddy" wouldn't give them a ride on "pretty Nance."

There was a neat substantial cottage on the new farm, where George's stockman Miles Agar lived; who having laid aside traps, snares, and other such poaching contrivances, had settled down as a quiet day labourer, and found that "t' missis never now had cause to flyte 'cos t' bairns was hungered."

Sir Henry Aston did not come to Snagton for some time: he dared not as yet meet Margaret Halstead, as he knew she had become. But after about a year and a half he came once more, quite gay and light-hearted—really handsome he looked,

very pleased to see Margaret, and not a whit embarrassed. After he was gone, Margaret said,—

"Frank, I am sure Sir Harry is going to be married: I do hope he is!"

And indeed he confessed as much to Halstead before he left Snagton; for the two young men were much together, having taken an exceeding partiality for each other's society, and rod or gun often kept them in each other's company for a long day's healthful exercise.

In a short time, Sir Harry came back again, bringing with him a fair and gentle lady, who had had discrimination enough to appreciate the sterling gold that lay under the outside litter of laziness and carelessness which somewhat disfigured his character.

But this alliance of Sir Harry's was scarcely more satisfactory to the wishes of his mother or sisters than that with Margaret Langley would have been; for it was no other than Mary, the eldest daughter of his old tutor, Mr. Latham, to whom Sir Harry informed them he was engaged to be married.

Halstead and Margaret, on the contrary, were beyond measure rejoiced at Sir Harry's choice, both on his own account and on that of the closer connection which it would establish between the Lathams and Snagton, and the consequent greater frequency of their visits to the place.

Mr. and Mrs. Halstead called upon the young Lady Aston immediately after her arrival; for she and Halstead had been great friends during her girlish days at Enderby, and they were mutually pleased to renew the acquaintance; though, as Halstead afterwards told Margaret, he should scarcely have recognized his old friend, little Mary Latham, in the tall, fair, graceful, and very pretty young woman who came forward to receive them, and whom Sir Harry, with a shy but happy smile, introduced to Margaret as Lady Aston. But the change was only in appearance; Lady Aston was "little Mary Latham" still, in her affectionate, sincere, warm-hearted disposition and her bright playfulness of mood; for in her character much of her father's quaint humour and her mother's gentle decision blended happily together; in truth Sir Harry had found and secured in his young wife a pearl of great price, and he was perfectly aware of it.

Margaret and the young Lady Aston became firm friends, and a series of gradual improvements and mild reforms began

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Margaret and the young Lady Aston became firm friends, and a series of gradual improvements and mild reforms began

and continued for years in the parish, under the joint direction of the two families; for Sir Harry and his gentle wife loved Snagton dearly, and nearly always lived there.

Morcover, Margaret's former pupil, little Nelly Aston, who had always been her brother's favourite, spent a great part of her time with him and his wife at Snagton; and thus growing up under the joint influence of women so truly feminine and elegant in their manners, so pure and exquisitely refined in their minds as were Lady Aston and Margaret Halstead, little Nelly promised to become all that her brother could have wished in mind and character.

Many improvements took place in the parish: it was not many years before a new church, simple and beautiful as Halsted could have dreamed in his early enthusiastic visions of church architecture, rose up in a fine central position betwixt Snagton and Thwackelton. In time, also, a modern parsonage-house graced a beautiful eminence, looking up the fair valley with all its changeful moods of mists, and fading blue, and deepest purple gloom. These were some of the works of Sir Henry Aston's open-handed liberality.

Halstead worked his parish well and zealously: but in a very different spirit from that in which he had begun his ministrations, when all was the "sound and fury" of religion. Now no novelties distracted the minds of the parishioners; all was simple, quiet, homely piety, and Christian love. Dissent died away by degrees amongst such as were only Dissenters by profession: those who remained Dissenters from truly conscientious motives, respected Mr. Halstead's earnestness and undoubted piety, and ceased to oppose him; nay, not unfrequently they even acted with him in matters of parish reform. The secession of a leader with such loudly asserted "gifts" as those of Tommy Robinson from the ranks of Halstead's opponents no doubt had a considerable share in effecting this desirable change. After a time also, the shrill voice of Nelly Haggart ceased to be raised in denunciations of "t' church priest" and his "Roman weays;" for time, trial, and other causes had begun to exercise their modifying effects upon the character of Nelly Haggart as well as upon that of Tommy Robinson.

If at times disturbances did arise in the parish, or if Margaret saw Frank look fagged with his work, her sweet sympathy was ready to soothe; or her gentle suggestion, "Frank, I should like to have some game, or some trout

to-day," would send him out for needful recreation. And when from time to time Latham and his wife visited their daughter at Snagton, we may imagine the jubilee that prevailed in both families.

We must by no means here omit friendly mention of worthy Mr. and Mrs. Snell. After that visit of Sir Henry Aston's to Burr Street, Mrs. Snell greeted her husband on his return from business with the words, "Who do you think's been here to-day, Snell?"

Mr. Snell guessed several persons likely and unlikely to have called upon his better half; of course not the person in question. When informed that no less a person than Sir Henry Aston in his six feet, and proportional breadth of flesh and blood, had been there, Mr. Snell rubbed his hands with much fury, and ejaculated, "Was *that* the party? Bless my soul! Why she'll be Lady Aston yet! ha! ha! ha!" and Mr. Snell remained in a state of great excitement for some time. When, therefore, the worthy couple received a letter from Margaret informing them of her intended marriage, Mr. Snell felt his anticipations somewhat chilled at the absence of the title; but he bore it upon the whole with great cheerfulness, as Margaret promised faithfully to come with Mr. Halstead to see them, when she was in London on her return from the Continent. Mr. Snell afterwards paid more than one visit to the parsonage at Snagton, where he was greatly fêted both by Margaret and Halstead, as well as by sundry small individuals who had necessitated the addition of a nursery to the establishment. Mr. Snell was frequently heard on his return to express his feelings regarding Margaret's home, in a quotation from the hymn

"Oh! 'tis a little heaven below,"

—there Mr. Snell always involuntarily stopped, because he didn't know any more of the poem.

We must here say a few words about the fate of the wretched Robson. He was tried upon the charge of the burglary, for which, in the first instance, he had been arrested; and was convicted and sentenced to the penalty of transportation for life. After hearing the sentence, which cut off all hope of escape, he volunteered a confession of the apparent mystery of the gun affair. He had merely gone to Snagton because it was necessary for him to absent himself from London, the police being on his track. He said that he

had a sort of curiosity to know how things were going on, and that in sending Willy for the gun he had not had it clearly in his mind to employ it to take away George's life; but that on seeing him come out, and take the road which he knew led him to see Annie, a fit of ungovernable rage took possession of him, and he followed, scarcely knowing what he meant to do; that he had seen George go to Mrs. Wilson's door, and then waited about until he heard a step in the road, which he took to be George's going round by the usual path; that he then cut across a field to get to the wood, so as to intercept his rival's passage, and had just time to secrete himself in the thicket, before the supposed object of his jealousy came up, when he fired almost at a venture. The sequel is already known to the reader.

Of the remaining personages who have been introduced to the reader in the course of this veracious narrative a few remain to be mentioned. Sir Henry Aston allowed his mother and sisters to remain in possession of Aston Hall during the life of the former. The Dowager Lady Aston, frivolous, scheming, and parsimonious as of yore, still laid continual plans for the settlement in life of her three elder daughters, and with tolerable success: for Miss Evelina at last actually secured the hirsute guardsman with whom she had been flirting, though almost hopelessly, so long, and became Mrs. Hilton, on half-pay and expectations. Harriett Aston, who was pretty, and somewhat less "fast" than her elder sisters, married a substantial gentleman farmer: "Not much of a match; but then there's *money*, you know, loves!" as Lady Aston observed to Arabella and Evelina. Perhaps Harriett found there was something better than money—viz., affection—in her marriage, for she made a good wife and mother upon the whole.

The elder sister, Arabella, meanwhile presented that melancholy spectacle of a woman who is losing all the attractions of youth, without gaining the compensating dignity of advancing years; who spends her time in fruitlessly sighing over the inroads of time, and endeavouring to repair the faded charms of her long past girlhood; and who thus lends to the term "old maid" its invidious reproach.

The green old age of good old James Gilmore, as cheerfully and peacefully he descended to man's long home, is a far pleasanter subject of contemplation: the old man's last tranquil hours were carefully watched and affectionately

tended by those whom he now loved best on earth, Margaret and Halstead; and they at last consigned to the earth, in peace and hope, the worn-out mortal frame of their aged Christian friend.

In concluding a narrative which has exemplified some of the errors arising from mistaken zeal in religious matters, and their evil consequences, it may be well to remark that few persons, in embracing the views of any *party*, remember that from the moment they can be denominated as belonging to that "party," they have stepped aside from the exact mean of *right*, and consequently become sectarians. Fewer still of those who hold extreme opinions on either side perceive, what is manifest enough to a bystander, that their views nearly approach those of their opponents, in their extravagance at least, and thus afford a striking commentary upon the old proverb that "Extremes meet."

THE END.

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