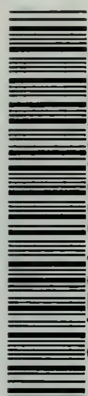
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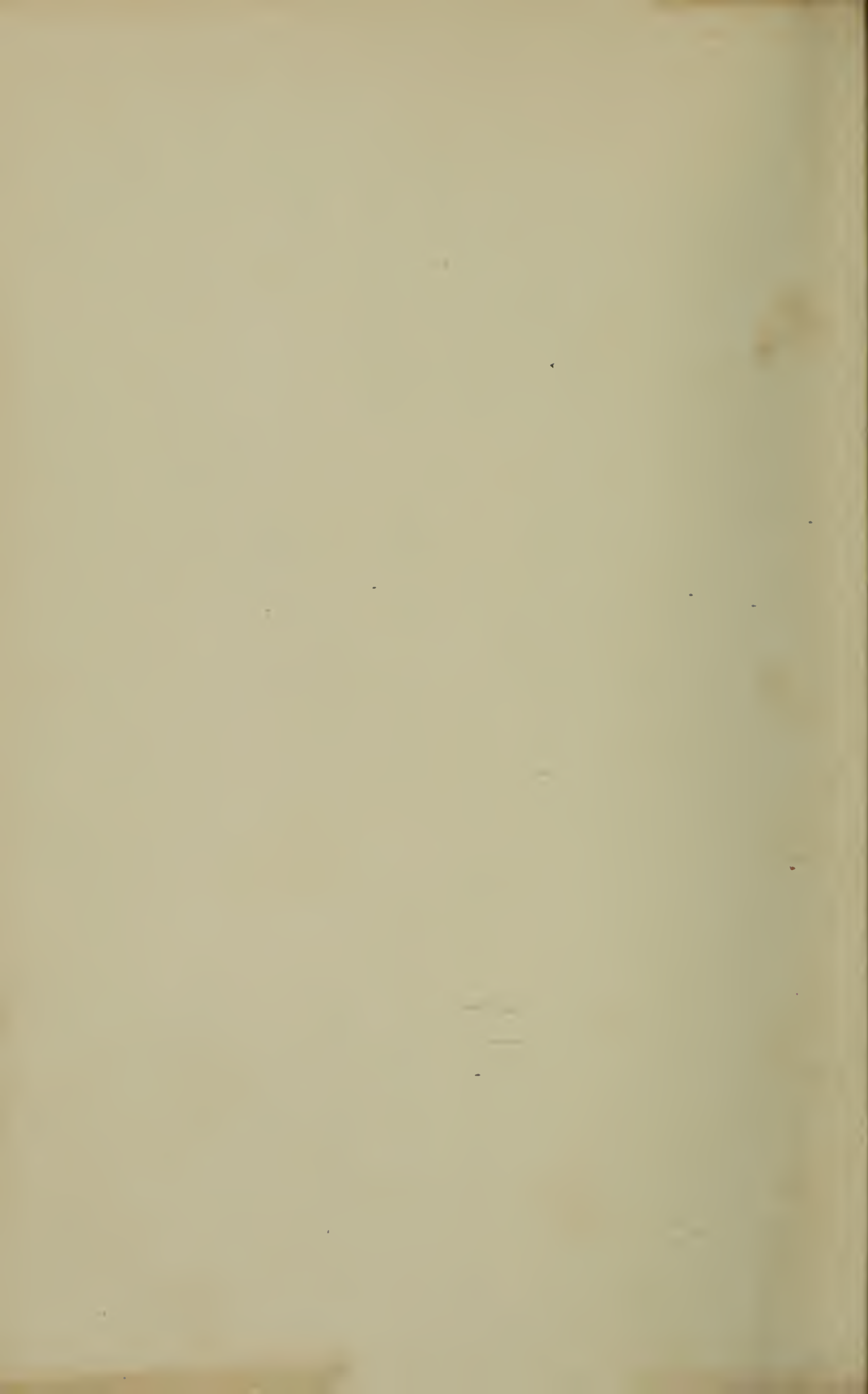

M. ELLEN EDWARDS. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"Laden with Golden Grain."

THE

ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD.

VOLUME XXX.

July to December, 1880.

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THE ARGOSY.

JULY, 1880.

THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MISTRESS OF HERON DYKE.

ALTHOUGH many of the county families and leading people of the neighbourhood were away in London or abroad when Miss Winter took possession of her inheritance, a goodly number still remained who were not long in making their way to Heron Dyke to pay their respects to its mistress. More carriages passed through the lodge gates during the first few weeks after Squire Denison's death than had been seen there for a dozen years before. Everybody was anxious to court the heiress; some, who did not know her previously, to make her acquaintance. Ella had not bargained to have her privacy thus speedily invaded by a mob of fine people; but Mrs. Carlyon told her with a smile that she was now one of the magnates of the county, and that having accepted the position she must take the responsibilities with it. "You can make your escape whenever you please, by coming to me in London, you know, Ella," she said: and said it rather frequently.

The world seemed to take it for granted that Miss Winter would marry. As yet there was no rumour of her being engaged, but as there were several eligible men, bachelors, in the neighbourhood, speculators were much exercised in their minds as to the chances of this, that, or the other one becoming the favoured individual. They all fervently hoped that Mrs. Carlyon would not drag her niece away to London, as she seemed to wish to do, or else there would be no knowing what might become of her. It would be dreadful for such a prize to fall to the lot of a stranger.

Ella bore quietly on her way, never dreaming of the social machinations of which she was the central figure. At present she scarcely

went anywhere; her loss was too recent; and she thought she might be spared a little time before plunging into the vortex of that social power, called Society.

Meanwhile the grand old house began to put on a different appearance. Whether Ella would have entered on desirable improvements so soon, cannot be told, but Mrs. Carlyon urged it. Painters and paper-hangers took possession. Rooms were unlocked and thrown open to the daylight that had been shut up for years. Not the North wing. Some feeling, of which she did not speak, caused Ella to leave that untouched. New furniture, sober in look and in keeping with the old mansion, but very handsome withal, was ordered down from London. Inside and out, the Hall was renovated and put in thorough repair. The green baize doors, that had caused so much speculation, were taken away. The garden paths were re-gravelled, and its aspect changed. John Tilney was more busy than he had ever been before, although he had two men under him now. Two or three servants were added to those indoors, much to the indignation of Aaron Stone, and also of his wife, Dorothy, who could only think with and be led by her husband. They would have preferred that the old state of things should go on for ever; Aaron, in his mind, resenting it as a personal insult that they did not.

"It's all along o' that Mrs. Carline!" he grumbled to his wife. "Miss Ella, bless her, would never have made changes of her own accord. I don't like it, mark you, and I wish she was gone."

"Miss Ella would be but lonely without her aunt just now," Dorothy ventured to answer deprecatingly.

"Waste and extravagance!—them's the words," burst out Aaron. "More servants here indoors; more on 'em out; and a spick-and-span new carriage from London! The old Squire's hair would stand on end if he could put his head out of his coffin and take a quiet look round."

But if Aaron did not like "Mrs. Carline"—as he chose to call her in domestic privacy—neither did she like him; and it was the old man's hair that might have stood on end, instead of the Squire's, had he heard the advice that lady one day gave her niece. There was something about Aaron himself that Mrs. Carlyon had always disliked, and his sour temper and general crustiness of manner did not tend to soften her impression.

"My dear Ella, I suppose you will now pension off old Aaron Stone and his wife."

Ella looked up in surprise. "I have not thought of doing anything of the kind. I have never thought about it at all."

"It is time you did. They are growing old and infirm; they belong to the past. Quite anomalies, they seem, in a modern establishment."

"No one could be a more faithful servant than Aaron was to my uncle. They were together for nearly fifty years. I could not

think of parting with him, Aunt Gertrude," added Ella, with a heightened colour.

"As you please, of course, child. He is a most cross-grained old man: everybody must admit that. He lords it over the other servants as if he were master of the house. They cannot like it: and it is hardly the thing, *I* think, for you to oblige them to put up with it. It might have been all very right in your uncle's time; but that is over."

"It is Aaron's manner only that is in fault, Aunt Gertrude: we are all used to that, and nobody minds it. He bears a heart of gold under that rugged exterior."

Mrs. Carlyon shrugged her shoulders. Ella smiled. "You don't seem to believe in the gold, aunt!"

"No, I do not, Ella. That he was a truly faithful servant to your uncle, I admit—all praise to him for it!—but whether he is as faithful to others, I cannot say. There is a curious secretiveness of manner about him now that I don't like and don't pretend to account for. However, we will leave all that, and go to another phase of the question. Has it never struck you, my dear, that the old couple may wish to retire from service, and would think it only proper and kind on your part to suggest it to them? They may be hoping and waiting for you to make such a proposal—of course, accompanied by a promise of your countenance for their remaining days."

Ella paused, revolving the suggestion. "You have put it in a new light certainly, aunt," she said, "one that I confess I never glanced at. I do not believe Aaron has any wish to leave me, any thought of it; or Dorothy either: all the same, it is a point that must be enquired into."

Ella lost no time. That same day, upon Aaron's coming into the room where she sat alone, she bade him wait—she had something to say to him. Very considerately she spoke: nevertheless, it seemed to strike the old man dumb. His hands shook. His lips quavered.

"You don't want to get rid of me sure-ly, Miss Ella!" he cried when she had finished. "It can't be. I know I'm old; and old folks be not counted of much use now-a-days; but—but the Squire would never have driven me away from the old home. I'll go to the workhouse to-morrow if you wish it, ma'am—and no place else will I go to if I leave here—and I'll never come out of it again. No never, till they bring me out feet foremost."

Ella felt quite sorry for him; sorry for having spoken. She began to speak of what she had meant to do, but he interrupted her.

"I'll be nobody's pensioner; not even yours, Miss Winter. Many a time I've told the Squire I'd not be his. While I'm able to work I will work: and I mean to work on for you, ma'am, my strength permitting it. Time enough for me to leave you when that's gone—but I hope it's my life that will go first. I was faithful to my master, Miss Ella, and I'll be faithful to my mistress."

Ella held out her hand to him. "Do you suppose I do not know that you are, my good old Aaron! But you should not talk of the workhouse. The Squire left you an annuity; he left you also some money. I shall add to it——"

"No, ma'am. Do you suppose I wanted the bit o' money his will gave to me? Not I. I have settled it on the boy—Hubert—every penny of it: as well as the few pounds I and my wife have saved. As to the annuity, I won't touch it."

Ella smiled, and did not contradict him. And so, the question of the old servant's going was set at rest. But Aaron was not himself for days afterwards.

Hubert Stone's services were retained: at any rate for the present. He had had the management of the farm property and other matters so long, that Miss Winter could not well have done without him. Neither had she any wish to dismiss him; he was an efficient steward, and she of course had no suspicion of his attachment to herself. She put him on a different footing, assigning to him a handsome salary, and decreeing that he should live away from the Hall, though a room in it would still be occupied by him as an office for his account-books and papers. It was supposed that he would take suitable apartments at Nullington; he might have had the best there; or perhaps set up a pretty home for himself with a man and maid to wait on him. Hubert did neither. To the intense surprise of the community he made an arrangement with John Tilney to enter on his spare bed-room and sitting-room—for the lodge was a commodious dwelling—and took up his abode there, Mrs. Tilney waiting on him as on any other gentleman.

Hubert had to see his young mistress almost daily about one matter of business or another, but he was careful to maintain towards her a suitable reserve. Nothing could be better than his manner. It would never do to betray the smallest sign of the volcano of passion that was surging within him.

Very little had been said between Ella and her aunt respecting the fright the latter got on the night of the Squire's funeral. The topic was an unpleasant one; and they ignored it by mutual consent. The only person spoken to about it was Dr. Spreckley: and it may be said that that arose from inadvertence.

A week or two subsequent to the Squire's death, one of the maids, Eliza, took a sore throat; it threatened to be a bad one, and Miss Winter sent for the good old doctor. Dr. Jago's attendance at the Hall had ceased with the Squire. Dr. Spreckley got the message late in the day, and it was evening when he started for Heron Dyke, glad and proud enough to be once more summoned there in his medical capacity.

Leaving his gig in the yard, he entered the house by the side door, ignoring ceremony as of old, and went at once to Miss Winter. She and Mrs. Carlyon had just finished dinner, and were sitting at dessert.

Hearing what was the matter, the Doctor went off to see Eliza, promising to return to them and report.

"It is rather severe," said he, when he came back, "but there's nothing dangerous about it. I'll come up again in the morning."

"Sit down, Doctor," said Ella, "and take a glass of wine."

He drew a chair to the fire; the evening was damp and chilly, and a fire had been lighted for dinner. Ella and Mrs. Carlyon turned from the table to sit with him, and they talked of this and that, as he sipped the wine.

"As you are here, Dr. Spreckley, I think I will ask you to give me a little medicine; an alterative, or something of that kind," observed Mrs. Carlyon presently, in a pause of the conversation.

"Ah!" cried the Doctor. "What's amiss?"

"My liver is out of order, I fancy. I had a regular bilious attack after that fright, and I am not right yet."

Dr. Spreckley turned his head to her rather sharply. "What fright?" he asked.

Mrs. Carlyon glanced across at Ella. She had spoken without thought.

"I really see no reason why we should not tell you," she resumed, after a minute's consideration. "In fact, I have observed to Ella once or twice that it might be better if we did mention it to some discreet friend. Not that anything can be done."

And Mrs. Carlyon forthwith related the whole story of her fright in the dusky corridor. Dr. Spreckley listened attentively.

"What it was I know not, Doctor: whether man or woman, ghost or goblin. A silent shadowy form glided past me, imparting to me the most intense terror, and vanishing almost as soon as it had passed."

"One of the young servants, ma'am," emphatically spoke the Doctor.

"No. Every inmate of the house was in the kitchen, or about it, as I have told you. I saw them all when I ran down. Whoever or whatever it was, it was not a servant."

"Could it have been young Stone? Had he gone upstairs for any purpose?"

"No, no, no. Hubert Stone would not have been gliding about the corridors in that silent, stealthy manner. Hubert Stone was not at home that evening, he was spending it with Dr. Jago."

"True," nodded the doctor. He remembered that Hubert had gone out with Jago after the reading of the will, the same mourning coach conveying them to the latter's residence.

"Was this in the North wing?" he asked.

"I do not know," answered Mrs. Carlyon. "Ella thinks it was. I took the wrong turning in the dark and lost myself, and goodness knows where I got to."

"It must have been the North wing," interposed Ella. "The stairs my aunt ran down lead direct from it."

"Ah," said the Doctor, "that North wing has managed to get up a weird name for itself, and the minute any of you get into it, your common sense leaves you. I am not speaking to you, ma'am," he added to Mrs. Carlyon, "but of the house in general:" and, dropping the subject, he proceeded to question her about her ailments.

"One of the wenches got up there; 'twas nothing else," thought the Doctor, as he left the ladies and went away. "Were I Miss Winter, I'd have that wing turned inside out."

Walking round to the stable-yard, his way led him past the kitchen windows. It was growing dusk then, but the fire lighted up the room. He saw Dorothy Stone bending over the fire, stirring something in a saucepan. Dr. Spreckley walked straight into the kitchen.

"Oh sir, how you frightened me!" cried Dorothy, turning round with a start.

"You are easily frightened," retorted the Doctor. "Are you mulling wine there?"

"Law, sir! Wine! I be making Eliza a drop o' thin arrowroot; she thought she could sup a spoonful or two. She has had nothing all day, poor thing; and you said she was to be kept up."

"Keep her up by all means. Put a little brandy in the arrowroot. Look here, Mrs. Stone: you remember the evening of the Squire's funeral?"

The question startled Mrs. Stone more than his entrance had done. She clapped the saucepan upon the top of the oven, stepped backwards, and looked at Dr. Spreckley.

"Whatever do you ask me that for, sir?"

"Do you remember it?—the evening of the day the Squire was buried?"

"Indeed and I do, sir. It's not so long ago."

"Was any one of the servants up in the North wing that evening at dusk? walking about the passages there?"

"Mercy be good to us!" ejaculated the old woman, sinking on a chair.

"Now do be sensible!" cried the Doctor testily. "I ask you a simple question: can't you answer it? Was either of the girls—say Eliza, or that other one—what's her name?—Phemie—was either of them in the North wing that evening, prancing about it?—What in the world are you twittering at?"

"I can't hear that wing spoke of without going into a twitter," said Dorothy with a half sob. "As to the girls being up there—no, sir, you may rely on that. Not one of them would go up there at dusk to save her life: nor alone by daylight, either. Was anything seen there that night, sir, or heard?"

"Never you mind that now: if there was, it's over and done with. Then, so far as you know, none of the household went up?"

"That I could answer for with my life."

"Well, good evening, Mrs. Stone; there's nothing to be afraid of. Take a drop of brandy yourself," he kindly added.

"There's more to be afraid of in this house than the world knows of, Dr. Spreckley—and has been for sometime past. It's an uncanny place—though I dare not say as much before my husband. As to that North wing"—she broke off with a shiver. "The other housemaids left because of what they saw and heard there: and these are getting as frightened as they were."

Down sat Dorothy as the surgeon went out, and flung her apron over her face in a kind of despair. Naturally superstitious, the events in the Hall had but rendered her more so. She lived a life of fear and trembling, believing that if by ill-luck the ghost—Katherine Keen's—appeared to herself some unlucky night, she should die of it. How greatly these questions of Dr. Spreckley had augmented her terrified discomfort, she would not have liked to confess.

Mrs. Carlyon did not feel much more comfortable than Dorothy in the lonely old house on the Norfolk coast. Ever since the night of the Squire's funeral she had wished to get away from it to a more cheerful place; but she could not yet attempt to leave Ella.

It was when the bright summer weather began to give place to a suspicion of autumn, that Mrs. Carlyon found she must really go; matters in London at her own home needed her. She told Ella that she could not leave her alone, and proposed a chaperon. Ella, who had independent opinions of her own, demurred: she was quite old enough to take care of herself, and quite capable of doing it. But her aunt was inflexible: the proprieties and usages of life must on no account be ignored. Ella perforce yielded, and a suitable lady was sought for.

It was just at this time that Mr. Conroy once more made his appearance at Heron Dyke. After the reading of the Squire's will, Mr. Daventry, the Nullington lawyer, had despatched a letter to the office of the "Illustrated Globe," apprising Mr. Conroy of the legacy bequeathed him. For some cause or other the young man had not been able to attend to it, until now. He came to Nullington, saw Mr. Daventry, and thence walked to Heron Dyke to pay his respects to its mistress.

It was well that Mrs. Carlyon chanced to be looking out of the window when the servant announced Conroy's name. Had she seen Ella's face at that moment, it is probable that a certain vague suspicion, which some time ago had taken root in her mind, would have been turned into a certainty. As it happened, she saw nothing.

Conroy stayed but an hour with them; the ladies were engaged out for the latter part of the day. They invited him to spend the morrow at the Hall.

He came accordingly, in time for luncheon. Afterwards the carriage was brought round, and they started to visit the ruins of a certain famous castle some dozen miles away. Hubert Stone, looking

from his office window, himself unseen, watched them set out. A raging fever of jealousy and unrest was burning in his veins. This Conroy was the one man whom he feared and hated; and yet, if he had been asked to state his reasons for feeling thus towards him, he would have found it difficult to do so. He could only have said that he had dreaded and disliked him from the first. It was Hubert's white face and jealous eyes that Conroy had seen peering from behind the yews into the Squire's sitting-room that first evening he spent at the Hall. It was Hubert himself, peering in, whom the Squire had more than once taken for a spy. Jealousy often lends insight to love, pricking it on to finer issues than it would ever attain to without such stimulus, and this it was that had enabled Hubert Stone to divine that these two people loved each other almost before they were themselves conscious of it. Yes, he hated and feared Edward Conroy. No sooner had the carriage started to-day than he put away his books and papers and wandered out into the park, a moody and miserable man. He strolled about for some hours, neither knowing nor caring whither. At length the sound of a distant clock, striking five, warned him that the party from the Hall might be expected back before long. He knew by which road they would return, and he made his way to an overhanging bank, screened by trees and a thick hedge, close to which they must pass. He wanted to see them again, although he knew well that the sight would only add to his wretchedness.

At length the landau appeared in sight. Hubert parted the boughs carefully and peered through his leafy screen. Miss Winter and Mrs. Carlyon sat together, with Conroy on the opposite seat. Hubert's eyes devoured them. Conroy was leaning forward and talking to Ella, on whose face rested a brightness and animation such as Hubert had not seen there since her uncle's death. A minute later, and a turn of the road hid them from view. Hubert paced about in his rage, and at length walked back to the Hall, a still more miserable man than he had left it. His heart was a prey to the direst thoughts. Love, hatred, jealousy, and despair swayed him by turns, one mood alternating swiftly with another. Had it been a moonless midnight instead of an August evening, and had Edward Conroy and he met by chance in some lonely spot, one of the two would never have left that spot alive.

Lights blazed from the windows of one of the smaller drawing-rooms now generally made use of, and which had been re-furnished. It was yet empty; dinner not being over. Two gentlemen had been invited to meet Mr. Conroy—the Vicar and Philip Cleeve.

Into this lighted drawing-room went Hubert: he knew not why. He felt like a man who was being urged forward by some unseen power towards a goal of which as yet he was but dimly conscious, but from which no exercise of his own will could turn his footsteps aside.

Lost in a reverie, he did not hear the ladies approach until it was too late to escape. On the impulse of the moment, he hid himself behind the folds of the heavy velvet curtains that shrouded the deep embrasures of the windows. The guests soon followed them. Mrs. Carlyon and the Vicar settled down to a game of backgammon, Philip amused himself with a book of photographs and a magnifying glass, and Ella, at Conroy's request, sat down at the piano, he hovering round her the while and turning over her music.

From his hiding-place Hubert could see nothing, but nearly all the conversation, especially that which took place at the piano, was audible to him, and this latter was all that he cared to hear. At times Conroy was so close to him that by stretching out his hand he could have touched him. He stood there as immovable as if cut in stone, with white face and passion-charged eyes, listening to the soft words of his rival and to the still softer accents that responded to them. Yet the words themselves were commonplace enough ; it was the hidden something in their tone that lent them their sweet significance. If Hubert Stone had expected to overhear any lover-like confidences, in which people who are trembling on the verge of the great confession are sometimes wont to indulge, he was mistaken.

"Mrs. Carlyon tells me that you have promised to spend a week or two in London with her, a little later on," said Conroy.

"Yes, I have," answered Ella.

"You will find London deserted, I fear."

"So much the better. I never care for a crowd."

"Mrs. Carlyon has been so good as to give me a general invitation to call upon her. I hope I shall see you during your stay."

All Ella's heart leapt into her face at these words. She turned away her head under the pretence of looking at the others.

"It is quite a treat to watch the Vicar play backgammon : he seems to give his whole mind to the game," she said, and then she turned to Conroy again. "You have the fortune to be a great favourite with my aunt, Mr. Conroy," she went on. "I am sure she will be very pleased to see you in town, and—so shall I. If you will look in the canterbury and find me that piece by Schubert which you said you liked so much when you were here last, I will play it for you again this evening."

The piece was played, and then they fell to talking again. Conroy asked Ella whether she really meant to inhabit the Hall during the winter.

"Yes : why not ?" was the answer. "I love the old place. It is my home, and that means everything."

"Very true, Miss Winter—I should think as you do. May I ask," added Conroy, speaking on the impulse of the moment, and without due thought, "whether any light has been thrown on the fate of that missing girl, who—who was so mysteriously lost here ?"

"None whatever," answered Ella sadly, the gladness dying out

of her eyes. "A mystery it is, and a mystery it seems likely to remain. I need scarcely say that it is a great trouble to me. The worst is, the poor sister, Susan, who is not very bright in intellect, is still beset by the hallucination, for I can term it nothing else, that on moonlight nights her sister may sometimes be seen gazing out of her bedroom window; and she comes up to, as she fancies, look at her. Nothing can shake her fixed belief that Katherine, either alive or dead, is still hidden somewhere in the Hall."

"It is strange how the girl's mind should have become so thoroughly imbued with such an idea."

Ella could not repress a shudder. Might there not, after all, be some foundation for poor Susan's wild fancies? Whose hands had covered up the looking-glass in Katherine's bedroom? Whence had come and whither had vanished that figure which the two housemaids had seen gazing down upon them from the gallery? How account by any reasonable theory for the fright undergone by Mrs. Carlyon? It was a mystery that weighed upon Ella day and night: a burden from which her mind could never entirely free itself. Many people under like circumstances would have shut up the old house and made a home elsewhere, but to Ella it seemed that if the fate of the missing girl were ever to be cleared up it must be cleared up on the spot; and on the spot she determined to remain.

Something was said about a picture in the adjoining room—Philip Cleeve declaring that one of the photographs resembled it. The three younger members of the party went into the room to solve the question, leaving Mrs. Carlyon and the Vicar at their game. Hubert Stone saw his chance: he made a bold stroke, emerged from his hiding-place, silently crossed the room, and quitted it.

"Who on earth was that?" exclaimed the Vicar.

"Who was what?" asked Mrs. Carlyon, who sat with her back to the room and saw nothing.

"Some tall young fellow crossed the room from the window. How did he come in? It looked like Hubert Stone. Yes; I am sure it was he."

"Oh, then, he had probably come in to ask some question or other of his mistress; and seeing visitors here, went out again," decided Mrs. Carlyon, with composure. "A well-mannered young man, very, that; might be taken by anyone for a gentleman."

And the evening came to an end, and Mr. Conroy departed again.

The next departure was that of Mrs. Carlyon. But not before a chaperon had been fixed upon for the young mistress of Heron Dyke.

Their choice fell upon a Mrs. Toynbee; who was engaged, and arrived at the Hall. She was a slender, sedate-looking lady of fifty, the widow of a certain Major Toynbee. Her credentials were unexceptionable, and her terms high. Ella did not much like her; but, as she said to herself, we can't have everything just as we like it in

this life. She was kind and gracious to Mrs. Toynbee, as she was to everyone, and that lady soon made herself at home.

Meanwhile Mr. Hubert Stone was having, as the schoolboys say, rather a bad time of it. That Conroy was in love with Miss Winter and she with him, seemed to him clear as the light of day. Could he frustrate this love, he would ask himself as he paced restlessly the solitary glades of the park. He knew something which was unknown to them : a great secret, which neither of them so much as dreamt of. Could he make use of this knowledge, dangerous though it was, to part them? He believed he might. Anyway, it was a thing to be thought of.

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT DOROTHY SAW IN THE SHRUBBERY.

Ella Winter felt dull after her aunt's departure; the Hall seemed more lonely than ever. Although that estimable lady, Mrs. Toynbee, might do very well to fill the positions of chaperon and housekeeper-in-chief, she could never be anything more to Miss Winter. Now it was that she missed the presence of Maria Kettle : who was still at Leamington with Mrs. Pace. She heard from Maria often, but that was not like seeing her. One thing Ella could do, and did; she took an active interest in the welfare of Maria's school, and of the poor old people at whose cottages Maria was so frequent a visitor when at home. Ella did more than that, she instructed Philip Cleeve to draw up plans of a new wing for the school which she determined to build at her own expense, and as a welcome surprise for Maria when she should return.

Ella's thoughts often dwelt upon that promised visit to London which she was to pay Mrs. Carlyon. Previous to Conroy's visit to the Hall she had not looked forward to the visit with any particular pleasure. *Now* she counted the number of days that intervened before she should start, and so see Conroy again. Though the time was not quite fixed, each morning when she awoke she said to herself, with a little shiver of happiness, "Another day nearer." Conroy had never spoken one word of love to her, yet in her heart lay a dim, blissful consciousness that she was dearer to him than all the world beside.

One day there came in an invitation for herself and Mrs. Toynbee to dine at Homedale. Lady Cleeve did not choose that Philip should be dining here, there, and everywhere, and make no return for it. So she invited a few friends, taking the opportunity of Freddy Bootle's being at Nullington, that he might make one. Captain Lennox and his sister were included. Lady Cleeve knew little or nothing of them, but she knew how hospitable they were to Philip:

and the Vicar of course was of the party. Old Dr. Downes was laid up with the gout, and Mr. Tiplady was away: but Dr. Spreckley was there. It was a pleasant, informal gathering, and all felt at ease.

It was only necessary to bring Freddy Bootle into the presence of Ella for his old flame of love to leap suddenly into life again. This evening he could do little beyond sigh and look miserable, and polish his eyeglass perpetually. His usual flow of harmless small talk was as dried up as a mountain stream at midsummer.

"She's too completely lovely," he whispered to Philip more than once; while to Lennox he turned and said, "I've such a longing to-night to be able to write verses. Never had the feeling before. Only they would be awful rubbish, you know"—which very probably they would have been.

Lady Cleeve took quite a liking for Mrs. Ducie: who indeed charmed all without conscious effort. She was a great favourite with the Vicar, and after dinner he sat by her side for an hour. Philip's eyes were turned towards her very frequently, but his attentions to her were not more marked than those he paid to any other of his mother's guests.

"A pity poor old Downes could not be here!" remarked Captain Lennox to Miss Winter, in the course of the evening. "That gout is sure to attack one at an unseasonable time."

Ella smiled at the last sentence, as she made room for the Captain on the sofa. "I hope Dr. Downes is not breaking," she said, "but he has not looked well lately."

"Oh, he is all right: it was only this fit of gout coming on. The last time I saw him he broke into a lamentation over that loss of his gold snuff-box: it's not often he speaks of it. That was a curious thing, by the way."

"Very," assented Ella. "I was away at the time, but I heard about it on my return. It put me in mind of the loss of my aunt's jewels."

"Why that's what it put me in mind of; very forcibly, too," returned Captain Lennox. "I said so to Philip Cleeve."

Both of them turned their eyes on Philip as the Captain spoke. To Ella it seemed that Philip was strangely restless and excited to-night. His eyes sparkled and his faced looked flushed. "Foolish boy! he has been drinking too much wine," was her thought; and Mr. Bootle was evidently of the same opinion.

But they were mistaken. Philip had been in the same restless and excited mood yesterday, and would be again to-morrow. Captain Lennox was probably the only person present who could have guessed at the real cause of it.

"I wonder," resumed Ella, "whether the Doctor will ever find the snuff-box again?"

"Ah, that's doubtful," said the Captain, gravely shaking his head. "Not if it was taken by an ordinary thief."

"What do you mean, Captain Lennox?"

"If a common thief stole the box, it would probably be melted down as soon afterwards as might be. If—if anybody else took it, he would no doubt sell it for what he could get for it; and the box, in that case, may some day or other turn up again."

"But why should one, not an ordinary thief, take it?"

A smile crossed the Captain's lips at the question, as he looked down at Miss Winter. "To make money of it, of course," he said, dropping his voice. "A gentleman, hard-up, has done as much before, and will do as much again."

Ella looked at the speaker: his tone was peculiar, and she thought he meant it to be. But he moved away and said no more.

The party broke up early, remembering Lady Cleeve's delicate health. Miss Winter offered a seat in her carriage to the Vicar, for whom a fly was waiting. He preferred the carriage, and dismissed the fly. After his return home, he nodded a little while in his study over his cosey bit of fire; he felt dead sleepy, and soon went up to bed.

The Reverend Francis Kettle had a methodical habit of emptying his pockets before he began to undress, and laying out their contents on a low chest of drawers that stood by his bedside. This he proceeded to do as usual. His card-case, his pencil-case, his gold toothpick, and his bunch of keys were all put down in due order, but when he came to feel for the most important item of all, his purse, or small money-case, made of Russian leather, it was nowhere to be found. In something of a quandary the Vicar took his candle and went down-stairs. Could he have left it on his study table in a fit of absent-mindedness, or had it fallen out of his pocket while he dropped into that half doze in his easy-chair?

Very little time sufficed to convince him that the case was nowhere in the study, and he went back up-stairs more nonplussed than ever. The loss of its contents would not ruin him: it had contained a few sovereigns and some silver: all the same, he was much put about by its unaccountable disappearance. He had given the flyman a shilling for himself on getting out at Lady Cleeve's, and that was the last time he had had occasion to open the case. However, it was certainly gone now; and he had as certainly not lost it through any carelessness.

"What in the world is coming to us all?" cried he testily. "This is a second edition of Downes's snuff-box. Have we in truth got a black sheep among us? If so, who is he?" And it is to be hoped that these repeated losses will not weary the reader. Events can but be related as they occurred.

The Vicar's roomy, easy-fitting clothes and capacious pockets would present few difficulties to any clever member of the light-fingered craft. But then he had not been where any light-fingered gentry could possibly be supposed to be. He had been in the society of his friends and neighbours: there had not been a single individual

at Homedale that evening whom he did not know. Most unaccountable it did appear to be, and disturbed the Vicar's sleep.

We must go for a short space of time to Heron Dyke, preceding Miss Winter and her companion's return to it that evening. The reader does not forget that one of the maids had been attacked with sore throat. Dr. Spreckley soon cured her; but since then a few other cases had appeared in the neighbourhood of the Hall from time to time. Not sufficient to constitute an epidemic; though some of the cases were rather grave, and one individual had died.

On this evening, quite late, Hannah Tilney, the gardener's wife at the lodge, came up to the Hall. It was past nine o'clock. Her errand was to ask Mrs. Stone for a small pot of black currant jelly. And Dorothy Stone was very much put about when she heard that this jelly was intended for her grandson, Hubert.

"He has got one of them sore throats come on," said Hannah. "It began yesterday, I know, though he said naught about it, but it's rare and bad to-day; and not a morsel has he ate."

"He said naught about it here to-day," crustily interposed old Aaron, echoing some of her words. "He was up here at his books as usual. It can't be very bad: you women be so easily frightened."

"Well, sir, I know it is bad," persisted Hannah. "He won't take anything for it, but I thought if I put a bit o' jelly by his bedside he might suck a spoonful or two in the night. It eases the throat wonderful, do black currant jelly. And if he should be took worse, I've not a soul in the house that could run to Nullington for Dr. Jago, John being at Norwich!"

"Don't hurry away for a minute," cried Dorothy, as Mrs. Tilney was going off with the jelly. "Aaron," she added in a timid sort of way, "I should like to go down to the lodge and see him. He may be real bad: and he's one that would never complain if he was dying."

"You'd think him real bad if he cut his finger, you would," growled Aaron.

"You must please let me go," pleaded Dorothy, beginning to twitter.

"And who's to sit up for you?" demanded Aaron. "I shan't. It's a'most ten o'clock now."

"Nobody need sit up," returned Dorothy, trying to be brave, her fears all alert for her beloved grandson. "I'll take the key of the side door, and let myself in. Please mind you don't bolt and bar it."

She put on her bonnet and shawl, took the key, and departed with Mrs. Tilney. When they reached the lodge, Hubert was not there. He must have gone out during Hannah Tilney's absence. The children were long ago abed and asleep.

"He goes out a deal at night," Hannah remarked, "and walks about the park. My husband sees him pacing away there as swift as a

windmill. We think he does it by way of exercise, sitting so much over his accounts in the day."

"But he oughtn't to go out when he has got a sore throat," said Dorothy, untying her bonnet as she sat down in the kitchen to wait. "He was always venturesome."

Meanwhile Miss Winter and Mrs. Toynbee returned home, and were admitted by Aaron. He said nothing about his wife's being out.

"You can all go to bed," Miss Winter said to him. "We shall want nothing more to-night."

And accordingly the household did go, Aaron included. Miss Winter's maid had retired early in the evening. She had a very bad cold and was ordered by her mistress not to sit up.

Taking off their fleecy wraps, the two ladies drew to the fire in the sitting-room, and prepared for a cosey half-hour's chat. Neither felt sleepy; or in the least inclined for bed. Falling into an animated discussion of present matters and future plans, the time passed swiftly and unheedingly.

More swiftly than it did for Dorothy at the lodge. Hubert did not come in: the hands of the clock, ticking over the kitchen mantel-piece, drew gradually very near to midnight.

"Where can the lad be—and what has become of him?" bewailed Mrs. Stone.

"He's never as late as this—unless he is at Dr. Jago's, and has to walk home from Nullington. And I'll tell you what, ma'am," added Hannah briskly, the idea occurring to her, "I'd not wonder but that's where he is gone to-night: and the Doctor, seeing his throat's bad, won't let him come away again till the morning."

"Happen it is so," considered Dorothy. "Anyway, I dare not stay any longer. If my husband's sitting up, though he said he shouldn't, he'll prettily give it me."

Tying her bonnet and drawing her shawl round her, Dorothy Stone set off on her lonely walk. She would rather have walked twenty miles in broad daylight than that short course at midnight. All sorts of fears and ghostly fancies were in her mind. It was not a dark night, the stars being well out. Hurrying along with her face down, she had nearly gained the shrubbery, when the great stable clock struck out the hour—twelve.

That increased her superstitious fears: and why or wherefore she knew not, but the night seemed to turn icy cold. She looked back, as by some subtle instinct, wondering whether anything was following her. All around seemed as silent as the grave.

Suddenly, as she looked, she thought she saw something stirring at a distance behind. Something black, which had not been there a moment ago, and seemed as if it must have risen out of the ground. Fascinated, she peered out at it, unable to withdraw her gaze, her face turning white and cold, her heart standing still.

She saw what appeared to be a black hearse, drawn by four headless horses and driven by a headless coachman. It was coming towards her pretty swiftly. But that she drew aside amidst the grass, it would have driven over her. More dead than alive, Dorothy gazed out at it as it passed noiselessly, without sound of any kind, and she watched it till it vanished in the distance. It seemed to drive straight against the wall at the end, where the road took a turn, to go right into the wall and so disappear.

"The Lord be good to me!" she aspirated. "It wanted but this. I've never seen the sight myself, though I have heard tell of it by those who have."

It must be here explained that a belief in the apparition of a black coach, or hearse, with four headless horses and a headless driver, is common to many parts of Norfolk, and is not confined to any one locality. It is supposed to foreshadow the death of some near friend or relative of the unlucky spectator.

The striking of the midnight hour disturbed Miss Winter and Mrs. Toynbee. Neither had any idea it was so late. Starting up, Mrs. Toynbee lighted the bed-candles.

"You go on," said Ella, as she wished Mrs. Toynbee good-night. "I want to gather up my work first: I forgot to take it up-stairs this afternoon."

It took her a minute or two to do this. As she was crossing the hall, candle and other things in hand, she was startled by hearing a noise in the household regions. It sounded like the back door being unlocked. Yes! and now it was burst open with a bang, and a voice that was certainly old Dorothy's gave vent to a fearful cry. Believing that everybody was in bed, Miss Winter felt considerable surprise. Dropping the odds and ends of work, she ran with her candle and found Dorothy gasping in a chair before the embers of the kitchen fire.

Moaning, sobbing, choking, Dorothy related what she had seen. "But that I sprang aside from its path, Miss Ella, it would have gone right over me," she reiterated, her teeth chattering; "it made as if it wanted to. Straight, straight on it came, turning neither to the right nor the left. Oh, it was an awful sight!"

In spite of herself, Ella could not repress a shudder. The story of the apparition of the black coach and its headless horses was not unknown to her.

"And now, Miss Ella, there'll be a death in the house before long," shivered the woman. "It is a safe and sure warning of it—and oh, which of us is it to be?"

To attempt to combat this, would have been a hopeless task: Dorothy had believed in it as long as she had believed in anything. Miss Winter contented herself with soothing her in the best way she could, and she begged of her not to talk of this, not to let it transpire to anyone.

But that was probably too much to expect of Dorothy.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON BOARD THE SEAMEW.

WITH September the lovely weather suddenly broke up, and a few days later there was a great storm along the eastern seaboard. One morning, news came to Heron Dyke that during the night a brig of some three hundred tons burden, the *Seamew*, bound from Dantzic to London, had struck on the Creffel Bank and lay there a helpless wreck. Two of the crew had been washed overboard; the rest, including the master, were rescued by the Easterby lifeboat. The Creffel Bank was known as one of the most dangerous spots on that part of the coast, and many a gallant craft had gone to pieces on its shifting and treacherous shoals.

Miss Winter at once sent Hubert Stone into the village with instructions to aid the shipwrecked men in whatever way might seem best. All of them except the captain expressed a desire to be forwarded to London, and were accordingly packed off by rail, their fares being paid by Hubert. As the brig did not at once break up, when the storm abated several boats went out to her, and in the course of a couple of days succeeded in landing that portion of her cargo which remained unspoiled, and most of her loose fittings; but the little *Seamew* herself was so deeply embedded in the sand that it was impossible to get her off, and the next gale would doubtless break her up entirely.

One sunny afternoon, Ella took her sketch-book to the sands, and was dutifully accompanied by Mrs. Toynbee with a novel. But Ella was not long in discovering that she was in no mood for sketching, that she was rather in a mood which inclined to day-dreaming, and to vague, golden visions of some far-off future. Could it be that the recent visit of Edward Conroy had anything to do with these idle fancies? At length she shut up her book with a little gesture of impatience, and strolled slowly down to the farther shore. Mrs. Toynbee sighed and followed meekly. Her seat had been a comfortable one, and she was in the middle of an interesting chapter; but duty is duty, however unpleasant it may be.

The tide was beginning to ebb, and, as the two ladies paced the sands a little above high-water mark, they presently saw a boat propelled by a single rower making for the shore. The rower was Hubert Stone and the boat belonged to him. He was fond of the water and often went out for hours at a time, alone, or accompanied by some friend. Ella stood and watched the boat coming in. It seemed to be making for the spot where she stood. Hubert's strong and regular strokes propelled it swiftly through the water, and in a little while it shot gently up the sands. Putting down his oars, the young man stood up, and raised his straw hat to Miss Winter. How

handsome he looked as he stood there in the afternoon sunshine with his coat thrown carelessly across his arm !

"Have you been far ?" asked Ella, when he stepped ashore.

"Only as far as New Nullington and back," answered Hubert.

"It must be very pleasant on the water to-day."

"Very pleasant indeed. There is quite a refreshing breeze when you get a little way out. What do you say, Miss Ella, to letting me pull you and Mrs. Toynbee as far as the *Seamew* and back ?"

Miss Winter looked at Mrs. Toynbee. "Oh, that would be very charming, I think," said the latter lady : and they did not observe that she spoke half ironically.

"Who is on board the brig ?" asked Ella.

"George Petherton is there now," said Hubert. "If the weather holds up fine, they hope to be able to save some more of the cargo : meanwhile George remains there in charge."

"Then let us go. We shall get back in time for dinner." She knew George Petherton well. He was one of the oldest and steadiest boatmen round Easterby.

Without more ado, Ella stepped lightly into the boat and sat down. Hubert held out his hand to Mrs. Toynbee. But, at the last moment, that lady's heart failed her: in fact, her bravery had been but put on. Involuntarily she drew back a step or two.

"There is not the slightest cause for alarm, ma'am," said Hubert.

But the boat was a very small one, and looked dreadfully unsafe, she thought. Then the wreck was more than two miles away, and what was it that Mr. Stone had just said about there being a pleasant breeze when you got away from shore ? How could any breeze be pleasant at sea. "I—I don't feel very well, and I think, my dear, I must ask you to excuse me," she said to Ella with a little quaver of the voice.

"You are not afraid, are you ?" asked Ella with a smile. "The breeze when we get out will do you good."

Mrs. Toynbee shuddered. "Really, my dear, I should feel pleased if you would excuse me," she said. "I am not at all myself this afternoon : and I am apt to be so very ill upon the water. Do excuse me—and I will wait for you here."

"Well, I should like to go," responded Ella. "I should like to see the wreck, and I shall not be long away. You can watch me skimming over the water."

"I will," assented Mrs. Toynbee with an air of relief. "I wish you bon voyage and a safe return."

Hubert waited for no more. He pushed the boat into deeper water, then got in and took up his oars. He wanted no Mrs. Toynbee in it, not he, and was glad matters had turned out so. That lady stood on the sands waving her handkerchief till they were quite a quarter of a mile away from shore, and then sat down to continue her novel.

But—it may as well be at once mentioned—the expedition took longer than Mrs. Toynbee had expected. She grew tired of waiting, felt rather chilly, for she had but a thin gauze shawl on, and she got up at length and went back to the Hall.

Hubert Stone rowed on with strong steady strokes, feeling like a man who cannot be sure whether he is dreaming or awake. Could it be true, he asked himself, that he and his sweet mistress were alone together? alone on the waste of waters where no living soul could come between them? Together, yes; but in reality as far as the poles asunder. Still, to be so near her, to have her as it were all to himself, though only for one short hour, was both a pleasure and a pain unspeakable. If they could but have gone on thus for ever, sailing away into infinity, and never touching land again, unless it were some desert island untrodden by any footsteps save their own! Wild, foolish longings! In an hour their little voyage would be at an end, and never again, in all human probability, would Ella and he be in a boat together; never alone, as they were to-day. He needed no prophet to tell him that. Never again!

By-and-by Ella roused herself from her reverie: for she too had fallen into one. They were nearing the wreck. It lay low on its sandy bed, slightly heeled over to starboard. There was little more of it left than the bare hull. Masts and bowsprit had been unshipped and carried away.

"How quiet and deserted it looks!" she exclaimed. "I don't see George Petherton."

"We shall have a splendid sunset," remarked Hubert, as he rested for a moment on his oars, and taking no notice of her words. "See there, Miss Winter!"

"Yes, many of those cloud effects are very lovely."

A few more minutes brought them close to the wreck. Ella was looking at it steadfastly.

"I do not see George Petherton," she again remarked.

"He is probably below deck, smoking his pipe, or trying to fish up some more of the cargo. George is not the sort of man to care for sunset effects." Hubert said this with a short, hard laugh, which Ella, preoccupied, took little notice of. It was well perhaps that she did not see the expression of his face. It had changed strangely during the last few minutes. His mouth was hardset, and in his eyes there sat a look which might have been set down as compounded of despair, burning passion, and desperate resolve.

Hubert shipped his oars, and made a trumpet of his hands to sing out. "Hillo there! Petherton—Petherton, I say, where are you?" But there came no answer; there was no sign of life whatever on board the wreck.

"Can he have gone ashore?" exclaimed Ella quickly.

"Not likely," returned Hubert. "He is shut in below, smoking his pipe, and cannot hear: perhaps has dropped asleep. I will go

and arouse him. But let me help you on board first, Miss Winter.—Hark ! yes, George is there, safe enough. I hear him."

He brought the boat up under the lee of the wreck, made her fast with a rope, sprang lightly on the *Seamew's* deck, and turned to assist Miss Winter.

But Ella held back. "Go and tell him to come and help you to get me up," she said laughingly.

Hubert disappeared down the cabin stairs. He did not come back immediately. Left alone in the boat, Ella began to feel anxious, vaguely uneasy. Could she but have divined his treachery ! He knew perfectly well that George Petherton was not on board, that he had gone ashore at mid-day.

Hubert made his way aft into a little room, not much bigger than a rabbit-hutch, but which was in reality the captain's cabin. Here he found a keg of hollands, still about one-third full; near it was a horn drinking-cup. Twice in quick succession he filled the cup with neat spirits and drank it off. He was very pale, and there lay still that same strange lurid light in his eyes.

After drinking the spirits, he stood rigid as a statue, his hands clenched, his eyes fixed on the ground. "His or mine—his or mine ?" he muttered under his breath. "Not his—not his ! Never his ! Death before that."

Once again he filled the cup and drank its contents. Then he pressed his hand to his heart for a moment as though to still some wild commotion there; and then, as if afraid to hesitate any longer, he made his way quickly back on deck.

Ella was watching anxiously for him. The moment she saw his white, set face she became filled with alarm. "What is amiss?" she cried, her fears flying to the boatman. "Is Petherton ill? Has anything happened to him ?"

"Yes," shortly replied Hubert; "not much. You had better come on board, Miss Winter."

Ella did not hesitate another moment. She had known George Petherton all her life, and liked him greatly. A thought came over her that the man might have fallen and hurt himself amidst the damaged cordage and rigging.

"Put one foot there and the other here, and give me your hand," said Hubert. Miss Winter, active and fearless, did as she was bidden. Next moment she was standing on the deck.

"You will find him aft in the captain's cabin, if you go down," said Hubert.

Thinking only of the poor old boatman, Ella went slowly down the little staircase and was presently lost to view. When Hubert could no longer see her, he gave a great gasp and, sinking on one knee, he laid his head against the bulwarks of the brig. "What have I done—what have I done?" he cried. "It is too late now to turn back. Too late."

He rose slowly when he heard the young lady's returning footsteps. She came up looking about her.

"I can't find George Petherton," she said. "He is not below. I thought you told me——"

"I told you a lie, Miss Winter. Petherton went ashore hours ago."

Ella gazed at him in amazement. "Then why did you say he was on board? What does all this mean?"

"Oh, are you blind?—cannot you guess?" he burst forth, unfolding his arms and drawing a step nearer to her. Ella, on her part, stepped back: she was becoming frightened at the matter altogether, and at the fierce, dreadful look in his eyes.

"I brought you here, knowing we should be alone and beyond the reach of men, to tell you a secret, Miss Winter. I brought you here because I love you," he added, flinging himself on his knees before her; "because I cannot live another day without telling you! I have you to myself here, and none can interfere."

"Get up instantly," she indignantly cried, with all the bravery she could command. "Never let me hear another word of this folly. Help me into the boat again: I will return to the shore." Her heart was beating very fast and all the colour had left her lips, but there was a fine fire of anger in her countenance.

"Folly! yes, that is the word for it," answered Hubert, as he rose to his feet. "Not until you have listened to the whole tale of folly do you leave this spot."

"You would not dare to detain me?" said Ella proudly.

"Indeed but I would: I do. Being in the mood, I would dare much more than that," boasted Hubert, the spirit he had taken imparting to him a wicked bravery. "Oh, my sweet mistress!" he resumed, his manner changing to softness, "why do you scorn me thus? How was it possible for me daily to see you and not love you? Do you think I have willingly brought this misery on myself? You have blighted my life, but what of that?—it has been one long worship of you. I have loved you ever since the days when we used to gather blackberries in the lanes with your nurse, and dig for pretty shells in the sand."

He paused with emotion. Ella felt more scared with every word.

"Why did not Fate make me your equal instead of your servant? Surely the force of my love would have drawn yours in return. I have hands to work for you, I have a brain to plan for you, I have love that will never grow cold. I am not without manners or education; but, despite all these things, the world does not count me—a gentleman. I am but a son of the soil, and I must not dare to look up to any lady with the eyes of love."

His tone, full of anguish,—almost of despair, was respectful now. Despite Ella's indignation, she felt some compassion for him.

"You must forget all this," she said with gentle gravity: "and I will try to forget that you have spoken as you have to-day. You

have an honourable career before you if you choose to follow it, and you may rely upon my doing all that is in my power to further your interests. But never must you address me in this strain again; recollect that. And now I shall be glad if you will row me ashore."

What a revelation his words had been to her! A thousand little tokens, never noticed before, flashed across her memory.

But Hubert made no movement towards the boat. "Forget all this: never speak of it again!" he exclaimed, with renewed bitterness. "What easy words to say! There is one thing I should like to remind you of, Miss Ella; it may lesson my seeming presumption. My mother was a lady born; but she left friends, station, everything, to follow my father's humble fortunes. Other gentlewomen there are, who have sacrificed all for love, and deemed the world well lost."

This persistence annoyed Ella while it frightened her. She had never seen the expression on his face that it wore this afternoon, and she shuddered while she looked. Surely this could not be the Hubert Stone she had known for so many years! It was the spirit of some demon which had got possession of him and was looking out of his eyes. She had seen that other kind of spirit below, and rightly deemed that he had been making free with it. It might not answer to be too severe with him.

"Will you not let me go? I am tired," she said pleasantly. "You are not like yourself, Hubert. I hardly know you this afternoon."

"Faith, I hardly know myself," he answered with a strange, jarring laugh. "It is all your fault: you have ruined me, body and soul."

Ella cast an imploring glance towards the distant shore. She was growing desperately frightened. Again his mood changed to tenderness.

"Oh my sweet mistress, is there no hope for me?" he wailed. "Is there none, none? No man else could love you as I love; no heart could be as faithful as mine would be."

"Hubert Stone, enough of this," cried Ella, her fears merged in her indignation. "Once and for all, understand that you could never be anything to me in the way you speak of. If you have the slightest spark of honour, you will not persecute me further."

He could not avoid seeing the scorn that shone out from her voice and countenance. How beautiful she looked, he thought!

"I wish the lightning of your eyes could strike me dead at your feet," he exclaimed. "It would be better both for you and me. I know it is useless to ask for what it is not in your power to give. Your secret is known to me, Miss Winter, well hidden though it be. You love another, and you believe that he loves you in return."

She opened her lips to answer, but closed them again. A lovely colour flushed the alabaster of her cheeks.

Close to the bulwarks she had drawn now and could get no farther away. He stepped nearer, and laid one finger lightly on her arm.

"I heard all that passed between you and him the other evening," he said, staring straight into her eyes.

"All that passed between *whom*?" gasped Ella.

"Between you and that man—that Mr. Conroy—your lover. I heard his low-voiced questions and all your soft replies. You gave no scorn or contempt to him: yet am I not as good as he, and do I not love you a thousand times better?"

"Let me pass, sir, this moment. How dare you insult me thus?" she cried, brought to bay. "If I could but strike him to the ground!" was her unspoken thought.

"You shall go when I am ready to let you go, and not one minute before," answered Hubert. "You love this man: I know it from the way you speak to him, from the way you look at him. And he loves you—apparently. But—I beg you listen to me, Miss Winter. I have something I must say. That man is wise in his generation. He waited until your uncle was dead and Heron Dyke yours; and then—not before, mark you,—he comes with his low, honied words to steal away your heart. But now—are you listening?"

What could she do, poor thing, but listen?

"Dare to wed that man," he went on; "and, on the day you do so, the secret I have kept for your sake shall be a secret no longer. The world shall ring with it."

"A secret for my sake!" she exclaimed in her surprise.

"It would be a grand thing for this adventurer, this journalist—photographer, to become the master of Heron Dyke, would it not? *He* thinks so. But that he shall never be."

"Be silent, sir. You know not what you are saying."

"Unfortunately I know too well. Should he marry you he will not find you the heiress he expects. He will find too late that his wife has no more title to the estates of Heron Dyke than I have, that what she holds she holds by *fraud*. By fraud alone."

"By fraud!" Anxious though she was to get away, Hubert's words startled her. "What do you mean?"

"I mean this, Miss Winter. A dozen words from me, and Heron Dyke would know you no more as its mistress."

"Then speak those words," said Ella bravely. "It is your bounden duty to do so. I have no wish to keep what belongs to another." Her tone was clear and decided. She believed there was something in this: that he meant what he said.

"Why should I speak them—and injure you? No. Give up this man, who cares only for your money, and my lips shall be sealed for ever."

"Do your duty, that is all I ask. I have no other word to say to you."

"Will you promise to give up that man?"

"No."

"Beware. You are driving me to desperation."

"I cannot help that."

"You have not a better word to say to me?"

"Not one."

"So be it. You have driven me to do it. Remember that."

"What would you do?" she asked a little faintly.

"You shall see." He crossed to where the boat that had brought them was tied to the wreck. He unfastened the rope that held it, and let it drop into the water. Then he took up a broken spar and pushed the boat away. The tide was still on the ebb, and the boat floated slowly out to sea.

Ella sprang forward. "You would not murder me!" she exclaimed.

"No, I will not murder you," he answered quietly. "But since the Fates have willed that we shall not live together, we can at least die together."

Ella sank back faint and dizzy. Could it be that the only link between themselves and the shore was really broken? There was no other boat near, and two miles of water intervened between the wreck and the land. It was terrible to think of the doom to which this madman had possibly condemned her.

Madman! Was it not likely that he was one in reality? It flashed across Ella's mind that, long years before, she had heard that Hubert Stone's mother had died insane. Had he inherited the awful malady, and had this day's agitation brought it suddenly out? In terrible fear she glanced across at him.

He was standing on the opposite side of the deck, lighting a cigar. His hat was off, and the breeze ruffled his black, silky hair. Could anything but madness account for his actions this afternoon? Ella shuddered and hid her eyes, and tried to think. The pulses of life beat strongly within her. It was hard to realise that the end—and such an end—was so near.

Presently Hubert came a little nearer. He was puffing quietly at his cigar. All traces of his previous excitement had disappeared.

"The barometer has been going down all day," he observed, "and the wind is beginning to rise. It will blow a gale during the night, the wreck will break up, and when daylight comes again, the *Seamew* will have disappeared for ever."

Miss Winter made no answer.

"A few days hence," he resumed slowly, "two bodies will be washed ashore, those of a man and a woman; and the woman will be so closely locked in the arms of the man that people will not be able to separate them. They will be buried together, and she who would not be his bride in life shall be his bride for ever in the grave."

"That shall never be," said Ella to herself with a shudder. But she spoke no word aloud.

"Meanwhile, Miss Winter, you have nothing to fear. We have still some hours before us."

By this time the boat looked a mere speck in the distance. Sunset splendours flooded the western sky. In mid heaven, borne swiftly away by some upper current, were ragged shreds and fragments of cloud, looking like crimson fleeces that had been roughly torn asunder; but in the north and north-east an ominous-looking bank of sullen sky was growing out of the sea and creeping slowly up towards the zenith. There was not much wind, but what there was blew in fitful puffs that went as suddenly as they came, hurrying away to whisper elsewhere of the coming storm. The tide had begun to turn, and was bringing with it a heavier swell. Now and then the timbers of the ship creaked and strained: it was as though the brave old brig knew that its end was near, and could not repress its groans. In another hour darkness would reign over land and sea.

Hubert went on smoking in silence, lighting a second cigar when the first one was finished, and—what could Ella say? Even if she were to appeal to him to save her life, and he listened to her appeal, it would be useless. The boat was gone beyond recovery, and with it their last chance of reaching the shore. A few short hours, and then would come the bitter end: one brief struggle, and that coil of joys, sorrows, and perplexities which we call Life would have snapped like a broken dream, and the unknown, awful dawn of Eternity would be shining in her eyes.

She was sitting crouched up against the bulwarks, her face hidden in her hands. Never had the wheels of thought moved more swiftly. She had so many things to think of, and so little time to give to them! She thought of Mrs. Toynbee sitting placidly reading her novel in the drawing-room at Heron Dyke—for that she had gone home ere this Ella did not doubt—looking at her watch occasionally, and wondering what had become of the runaway, but otherwise quietly enjoying herself.

Next her thoughts flew off to Edward Conroy. Where was he at that moment, and what was he doing? Oh! if he only knew the bitter strait she was in! Ella no longer attempted to disguise from herself the fact that she loved him. Would she ever see him again on earth. A blinding rush of tears filled her eyes, and for a little while she felt as if the bitterness of death were already upon her. But before long she grew calmer, silently praying that help and strength might be given her: and she did not pray in vain.

"Are you not cold, Miss Ella?" asked Hubert by-and-by. "Is there nothing I can do for you?"

"I am not cold, and all my wish is to be left alone," she answered. He turned away with a groan and muttered something under his breath.

"I would give my heart's blood for you," he cried passionately. "But you shall never be the wife of that man. I have sworn it, and I will keep my oath. We will die together."

Striding off, he gave a look round at the weather, and went below. Probably in search of more hollands.

Ella rose to her feet as he disappeared. She felt cramped and chilled, and everything seemed to swim before her. She strained her eyes across the darkling waters and, while she was looking, the lamps of Easterby lighthouse flashed suddenly out. The sight made her heart beat more quickly. With help so near, it was hard to realise that there was no help for her. The great bank of cloud was still creeping slowly up and the wind was begining to pipe more shrilly. What was that madman doing below? If he would but stay there and not come on deck again!

But—while she was looking and listening—a strange wild idea, born of despair, flashed across her mind as suddenly and clearly as the rays from the lighthouse lamps had flashed across her sight. For a moment she stood with her fingers pressed to her temples, asking herself whether she should do this thing or not. Yes! In it lay her only hope of rescue. The staircase which Hubert had gone down could be shut up in bad weather, by means of a hinged door, which at present stood wide open. It was the work of a moment for Ella to shut this door and shoot the bolt into the staple. Her enemy was a prisoner.

Broken boxes and other wreckage lumbered the deck. There was also a small tub containing a quantity of tar. Ella quickly made a pile of these boxes and poured the tar over them. Then she tore a number of leaves out of her sketch-book and put them under the boxes. Hubert's fusee-box lay close by, where he had left it. After some little difficulty she succeeded in setting light to the paper, the tar caught fire, and in a little while a bright sheet of flame was leaping toward the sky.

This was effected just as Hubert found out that he was imprisoned. He shook the door and flung himself against it with all his strength. To no purpose. He found a heavy piece of wood and began battering the door with all his might. The blows filled Ella's soul with affright. Surely, surely, she said to herself, her signal would be seen from shore, and help would come—sent by God. But—would it come in time? would it come before that caged madman succeeded in breaking loose? She was partly crouching, partly kneeling a little way off the fire.

Suddenly, the faint sound of what seemed a far-away shout fell upon her straining ears. Even while she asked herself whether it was only fancy, it grew more distinct. Help must be approaching. The revelation was too much for her. Hubert's blows grew fainter in her ears, and she fell on the deck bereft of sense and feeling.

(To be continued.)

A FORGOTTEN CRIME.

I.

TOWARDS the end of the last century, the great English University of O—— was startled and alarmed by an event which had no parallel in its history. Dreadful as the event in itself was, and widespread as was the horror which it occasioned at the time, nearly all record of it has disappeared. The pages of old reports of criminal trials are silent on the subject: in the scanty columns of the daily newspapers of that day but little reference to the occurrence will be found. It was by the merest chance that I, who am about to narrate the history of these extraordinary incidents, happened to light in a friend's library on an old and musty copy of a book which still preserves a very brief outline of the facts. This book was an archæological history of O—— and its colleges, with the usual amount of gossip about the most celebrated buildings and inhabitants of that ancient city: and in giving a history of what I shall call "Bedford" College, it mentioned the occurrence of the tragedy which I intend to describe.

The account was meagre and unsatisfactory in the extreme; still, it seemed so extraordinary, that I wondered I had never heard a word of the matter before. During the four years of my academic course in that very University, I had never heard so much as a whisper of this long-past history. But then I was not a member of that particular college which was the scene of the tragedy: and I have lately been told by one or two of my old friends who hail from that college, that they remember hearing of a tradition that long ago a murder had been committed within the walls of that venerable building. They had, however, never enquired into it, and had always treated it as a fable.

Perhaps, if I had not taken the trouble to probe the matter further, I also should have regarded it as fabulous; but the account in that old volume had excited my curiosity, and I set myself to find out the truth about this mysterious tragedy, which seemed to have been so effectually blotted from the memory of man. The result has amply repaid me. After diligent investigation of old manuscripts, of college archives, of one or two volumes hidden away in dark and dusty corners of the great University library, and a collection of all the scattered threads of tradition which still exist with reference to this long-forgotten subject, I now am in possession of indisputable evidence, showing not only the truth of the account of these remarkable events, which is contained in the volume that first attracted my attention to them, but also all the most important

details connected with the chief actors. I will now place the story, as clearly as I can without further preface, before the reader.

In the Michaelmas term of the year 179—, in the dull and cold November days which heralded the advent of winter, the young men of Bedford College determined to vary the monotony of their daily studies with a display of fireworks. Of course the authorities: consisting of the venerable President of the College — an old gentleman of about seventy years of age—and the tutorial staff, or Fellows: had strictly forbidden any such display; and, equally as a matter of course, this prohibition added strength to the undergraduates' determination. A large quantity of fireworks had been ordered from London, and by the beginning of the month were safely deposited by the London coach at the gate of the College, and hence surreptitiously carried to a disused cupboard in the room of one undergraduate.

On the night of the 14th of that month some eight or ten young men were sitting in a large oak-panelled room of the College. The room was then occupied by an undergraduate named Sydney. It was furnished tastefully, though more in the style of a drawing-room than of a student's apartment, books being few and far between, while sofas, easy chairs, and handsome pictures showed the tastes of the occupant. It was a gathering of the ring-leaders in the firework movement, and this was the night determined upon for carrying out their undertaking. Every person in the room was masked, for these young gentlemen were much afraid of being identified by the Fellows, in which case they would probably have met with severe punishment, perhaps even the pains and perils of rustication itself.

Sydney himself, who, from subsequent descriptions of his appearance, must have been a handsome, elegant youth, was lolling against the mantelpiece and explaining to his comrades his plan for making the night hideous. It was, briefly, to gather together various old chairs, brushes, boxes, and pieces of wood into the middle of the great quadrangle, as noiselessly as possible, to saturate them with oil, to set fire to the mass, and then, when the authorities descended from their rooms to attempt to put an end to the unexpected bonfire, to welcome their appearance in the quadrangle with squibs, crackers, and all the other infernal machines which lay ready to their hands.

The plan seems to have been readily adopted; and by ten o'clock, under cover of darkness, a very considerable pile of combustible materials had been gathered together, and sprinkled with all the available oil that could be found in lamps and cans. At half-past ten it was agreed the bonfire was to be lighted, and the fireworks were brought out of their hiding-place, put into a large hamper, and placed ready for use in one dark corner of the quadrangle, at the

entrance to the passage which led to the rooms occupied by the Dean of the College.

To understand what follows, it is necessary to have some idea of the way in which the College buildings were arranged. There were two quadrangles, an inner and an outer; the outer, which was much the smaller of the two, was a kind of ante-chamber to the great quadrangle. A person entering the College first passed through the great gateway, with its massive oak doors, its finely carved stone ceiling, and its porter's lodge on one side; out of this he emerged into the smaller quadrangle with its small central grass-plot, its gravel path running all round, and its great grimy stone walls pierced at regular intervals with antique windows. There were three storeys to the College buildings (except over the gateway, where there was a tall, imposing-looking tower rising a storey above the surrounding roofs), and the architecture was plain Gothic.

From this outer quadrangle a low passage led through into the larger quadrangle, which also had a central grass-plot, and a wider gravel path encircling it on its four sides. On one side of this quadrangle was the College Hall, the scene of examinations, of lectures, and of dinners, and on the other side was the College Chapel. At various points there were passages leading into the building, and staircases—old, creaky wooden staircases—which led up to the rooms on the higher storeys. The house occupied by the President of the College was in neither of the quadrangles, but a little to the left of the main gateway, in a little yard of its own. So the venerable head of the establishment was removed a slight distance from the scene of the disturbances of that eventful night. Even had he been nearer, and within view of the disorderly proceedings of the undergraduates, it is very improbable that he would have attempted to check them, as he left all that sort of work to his subordinates—the Dean, the Bursar, and the other Fellows.

The Dean, it must be remembered, is in most of the O—— Colleges a very small functionary, not at all resembling the ecclesiastical dignitary of the same name to be met with in cathedral towns and knee-breeches. He is not even a clergyman, except by an accident, and his duties are confined to a general superintendence of the lives and manners of the undergraduate members, and of the general well-being of the whole college. At this time a Mr. Hamer was Dean, a gentleman apparently of a rather hasty temper, who was noted for being—or wishing to be—a strict disciplinarian. All the greater, therefore, was the youthful pleasure of the conspirators in their anticipation of the anger and excitement which they foresaw would be the consequence, in the breast of Mr. Hamer, of their midnight frolic. One other point should be mentioned, and that is that the servants of the College had departed long before the time of the intended display; for it was a rule then, as it is now, that all servants should be out of the gates by nine o'clock in the evening.

The night was exceedingly dark. A cold mist had crept up from the river and lay like a thick pall over the old academic city. The streets were nearly deserted; but in many a college window glistened the rays of lamps or candles, telling of studious toil or idle dissipation carried into the late hours of the night. But there were few lights to be seen in the windows of Bedford College; for at this moment the great bell of the University Church was striking the half-hour, and most of the undergraduate members of the College were gathered in the open air near the centre of the grass-plot in the big quadrangle. Had any Fellow chanced to look forth at that time, he would have been astonished and perhaps a little alarmed to observe groups of dark figures gathered together underneath the windows, and others flitting to and fro carrying mysterious burdens—all this happening in a profound silence which denoted that something "out of the way" was occurring.

"Now's the time," whispered Sydney, as the last notes of the clock were dispersed into the fog; and suiting the action to the word, he struck a light from a tinder-box held ready in his hand, and applied it to the base of the black pile.

Suddenly a bright flame shot aloft, startling even the performers. In a few minutes the bonfire was blazing in a way that lit up every corner of the old buildings, and made those who had not provided themselves with masks pull their trenchers down over their foreheads, and retreat into the darker entrances to the staircases and passages. But the spirits of the chief actors rose with the occasion; with a wild shout of triumph they hailed the success of their plan, and, joining hands, danced round and round the blazing pile, shouting, laughing, and singing at the top of their voices. Then crackers and all kinds of fireworks began to fly about the quadrangle. Authority, in the shape of the porter, appeared, but was at once induced to beat a retreat by a shower of fiery missiles. The fun became fast and furious; and it could hardly be doubted that the Dean, whose windows overlooked this scene of turbulence, would soon appear in person and try to quell the tumult.

But the Dean, like a prudent man, was first taking an observation from behind his closed window, before issuing forth. Anger, however, at this unseemly disturbance soon overcame his prudence, and it seems that about ten minutes after the breaking out of the bonfire he appeared in the quadrangle, and shouted in loud tones of indignation to the performers in the war-dance to "put out that fire and go to their rooms." He even ventured out on to the grass and tried to get near enough to identify the individuals; but he was received with so *warm* a welcome that it is a wonder he escaped back into shelter without the loss of one of his eyes. He retired to his chamber, and, opening his window, expostulated in loud and angry tones on the character of the proceedings, on the danger to the buildings, and the probable consequences to the culprits. But his eloquence was cut

short by renewed discharges of fireworks directed to his casement, so that he was fain to draw back into the safety of his own apartment in a condition of impotent rage.

But soon the fire began to need replenishing; the store of fireworks was exhausted; several undergraduates had retired, thinking that the best of the fun was over; while others—and among them Sydney—had gone off in search of fresh fuel. Under the circumstances, the Dean, backed up by two other Fellows of the College, made a determined rush into the middle of the quadrangle, dispersed the remnants of the blaze, and had the pleasure of seeing the conspirators—who now thought that prudence was the better part of valour—retreat to their various quarters.

Augustus John Hamer, however, was not satisfied with this empty triumph. He was still boiling with fury. His dignity had been insulted. His authority had been set at nought. He had noticed that several of the conspirators had worn blackened masks, and he now proposed to his two colleagues to make a raid on the rooms of those whom they suspected to have been the ringleaders, and, if possible, to surprise them before they had doffed their disguise. It was agreed that they should separate, each selecting one set of chambers, and by making an unexpected entrance discover some evidence of guilt. The two Fellows, it afterwards appeared, succeeded in gaining admittance to the rooms of two undergraduates notorious in the College for being the first in defiance of restraint and schemes of insubordination. But their expected victims were apparently deeply immersed in study, with no outward sign of having been recently engaged in the uproar, and were innocently surprised at the honour of so late a call.

The Dean, however, met with a different reception; and as the comedy now ends, and the more tragic part of that night begins, it will be best to give the exact events as minutely as possible from this point.

It so happened that he had long suspected Sydney of being an unquiet spirit, so he directed his attack to his room. Entering the smaller quadrangle, he proceeded to a staircase on the west side, ascended one flight of stairs, knew by the printed name on the door that he was at the right apartment, knocked once, and without waiting for an answer, entered. But the room was nearly dark. There was a small fire burning on the hearth, throwing every now and then a flickering light over the room, but the room was very dark, and it felt cold and chilly, one window being wide open, and the night air blowing in. In spite of the darkness, the occupier of the room might be playing a trick; he might be concealed in a corner, or he might be in the smaller inner room—the bed-room—which opened out of the bigger chamber, and the door of which was wide open. So the Dean advanced nearly to the fireplace. Then, as the fire suddenly burst up for a moment, he had a distinct vision of an arm-chair

drawn up in front, and a human figure sitting in it, with legs stretched out in the laziest possible attitude towards the smouldering embers.

"Sir! Mr. Sydney! Do you hear me? It is I—Mr. Hamer—the Dean—it is I, sir! Be polite enough to rise and light a candle, if you please."

But the figure remained perfectly still.

A Dean of a College is an important personage—in his own eyes. No wonder he felt his anger rising at this stolid indifference to his dignity. A Dean to pay a visit to an undergraduate, and the undergraduate to sham to be asleep!

"Mr. Sydney!—it is useless to pretend, sir!—if you don't answer me at once, I shall report you to the President. Rise up, sir, at once!"

But the figure remained obstinately still.

Something began to make the Dean feel uncomfortable. Was he sure this was Sydney? Had he *really* seen him in the chair? The fire had not blazed up again—he was speaking to silence and darkness. It was quite a new experience for the Dean. He thought of the warm, brightly-lit rooms he had just left, and began to wish that one of the Fellows had come with him.

Just then another flare from the fire. He again saw the arm-chair, the outstretched human form, and this time he caught a momentary sight of the face. Yes, those were Sydney's features, there could be no mistake—looking pale, in the firelight, or perhaps because he knew that he was found out. Truly, the wrath of deans is a dread thing to incur. Well might he look pale. So fancied the Dean of Bedford College, and his anger rose again within him at the thought of this barefaced pretence of sleep, this obstinate continuance in a detected imposture. It was a shock to his feelings to be so treated. Aye, Mr. Dean, you have had one shock already in this silent chamber, and you shall have another before you leave it.

"For the last time, Mr. Sydney, I order you to rise!"

There was no movement, no sound.

The night-wind blew into the room with a gust; it lifted the window-blind, and made it flap with a weird, impatient sound. Anger will not last under such conditions; the Dean shivered, and again, he scarcely knew why, he felt uncomfortable. He looked round him nervously: the door was shut. Why did he shut it when he came in? Why were there no people stirring outside? He must end this, at all costs. He made a step forward, clutched the chair-back, and gave it a violent shake.

This time the figure stirred. It gave a convulsive shivering movement—then it uttered a deep shuddering groan—and again all was still.

There was no mistaking that sound. In the deep silence of that chamber it struck upon the ear as awful, portentous, appalling. The

Dean, not generally a timid man, shrank back in horror. What did this mean?

Once more the fitful firelight blazed up, and the blaze lasted full a quarter of a minute. A short time, but long enough for him to see that the face was ghastly pale, and that the hands were clutching the arms of the chair with a convulsive grip. For a moment the thought occurred, "This may be all a sham." What was that on the floor? —that small dark line creeping slowly from the chair to the fire? A fearful idea possessed his brain: he dropped on his knees—he touched it—it was wet—*it was red!* He, the strong man, staggered to his feet, rushed to the door, shrieked for "Help! help!" was just conscious of people running, of lights, of noise, and then sank in a dead faint, overpowered by the slow-growing, suddenly realised horror of that dreadful night.

II.

THE next day, as will be imagined, all was consternation in Bedford College and throughout the University.

The bolt had fallen, but whence? Why had a blameless lad been singled out: what was the motive of the perpetrator: and why above all had that particular moment been selected for the deed?

It was soon discovered that the blow had been aimed from behind. Sydney, who was not dead, but dangerously wounded and lying unconscious, had been taken at once to the President's house, where he could have the benefits of female attendance and nursing. In those days there was no hospital in O——, and indeed it would have been unsafe, if there had been, to have taken the wounded youth so far through the cold air and fog. He was undressed and put to bed, when a large wound, produced apparently by some sharp instrument, was found just between the shoulders, at the back of the neck. A great deal of blood had been lost, and the doctors gave faint hopes of recovery.

The police, such us they were at the end of the last century, were put upon the scent; but the would-be murderer had left no trace behind him. There was no appearance of a struggle in the apartment; no weapon had been found; nobody had seen any suspicious person hanging about the College during any part of that day. The College servants, about twenty in number, were, without an exception, old retainers whose honesty was well known. Besides, had any one of them done the deed, he would have had to secrete himself somewhere in the College between the hours of nine and eleven—that is, between the time when all servants had to leave, and the hour when the act was accomplished. This perhaps would not have been difficult. But it was harder to understand how, after effecting his purpose, he could have escaped. The porter had let no one out after eleven on that evening; high walls surrounded the College, and

the windows on the ground floor were strongly barred to prevent anybody dropping into the street.

A fact which was soon discovered was that no money or other property of the victim had been stolen. His purse, his watch, were in his pocket: all his goods and belongings were left in his room just as they usually were. No; the motive—whatever it might have been—was not plunder.

The members of the College were of course most active in giving assistance. The old President had made the most valuable suggestion that came from any quarter for discovering the author of the crime. "Search the College thoroughly *at once*," he said; "search every room, every attic, every cellar!" And with the willing aid afforded by the undergraduates, this was done. Before twelve o'clock on the night of the tragedy every hole and corner which could possibly conceal a murderer had been thoroughly explored. But with no result.

Under these circumstances there was nothing to do but to keep a vigilant watch on the premises and in the whole city for the next few days, and wait until Sydney himself should become conscious enough—if that ever happened—to give his account of what he knew of the event.

Meanwhile an uncomfortable feeling at once sprang up in the College. If nobody from outside had done the deed, it followed that the murderer was still among them. Of course this idea was only mentioned to be immediately scouted. Everybody pretended to believe that some outsider crept in unobserved, had hidden himself in the room, had taken his victim in an unguarded moment, and then had managed to escape: fear of being discovered probably preventing him from carrying away any booty. Such was the favourite theory.

Still an undefinable feeling of uneasiness pervaded the whole College. Undergraduates hurried quickly along dark passages at night, nervous glances greeted any unnoticed foot-fall, "oaks" were "sported" at unusually early hours, and the majority attempted to banish fear by meeting together in large numbers in each other's rooms, and talking loudly and vehemently about other subjects. But conversation always seemed to come round to the same theme: the vision of their comrade seated in his arm-chair warming himself at his own fire, and the stealthy tread of his murderer coming on him from behind. These were the images that filled their minds, and gave the prevailing tone to all attempts at unconstrained talk. All agreed, however, that whatever else might happen, it was hardly likely that the murderer would dare to attempt another deed of the same kind within the walls of the same building. In other colleges, and, indeed, through the whole city, there was an alarmed watchfulness of the slightest suspicious circumstances, and a feeling that, Bedford College having had its turn, the undiscovered criminal

might now pass on to some other field on which to indulge his murderous propensities.

On the third night after the event above described, a party of some six or eight undergraduates was sitting in a large room, occupied by one of the number, on the ground floor. This room was between the two quadrangles, with windows looking on to both, and its door opened on to the passage connecting the larger with the smaller. It was quite half-past eleven by this time, but there seemed to be no sign of a breaking up of the gathering. Wine was on the table, cigars and pipes were being smoked, coffee was circulating in large cups, and conversation and merriment—for nothing can make youth melancholy for long—was at its height. Every one of the names of this small assembly is to be found in the books I have referred to, but as they are not material to our present purpose, it is not necessary to repeat them.

While they were thus engaged, another undergraduate entered, who was welcomed by all present with lively marks of recognition. His name was Rutherton: a gay, light-hearted youth, who hailed from across the Border, but who retained few traces of his Scotch parentage beyond a slight accent. He was universally popular throughout the College, and was now greeted as an acquisition and addition to the enjoyment of the evening.

"Enter, my friend, enter," said the master of the chamber. "Some excellent coffee very much at your service. Where have you come from? Take a chair, and a cigar; make yourself at home."

Rutherton drew a spare chair to the fire. "By Jove! it's a cold night, though," he said; "freezing hard." Then he looked round the room in an absent kind of way, and stopped.

"Now, Rutherford, cheer up," shouted one of his friends; "you look down in the mouth. What's the news?"

"He's been having it out with the Dean for 'gating' him," suggested another.

"No, no; he's been carrying on an unsuccessful flirtation by post with some Highland lassie; she won't respond to his affections, so he's hipped, poor fellow."

"What is it, Rutherford?" said his host.

"What's what?" replied the new comer. "I'm all right."

"Ah, that's disappointing. We were all hoping you had some dreadful news to communicate to us. It would be so exciting, you know. Don't you think you could go away and get murdered, and then come back and tell us?"

"Murdered? I! No, but I'll tell you what," said Rutherton, suddenly rousing himself, and looking round earnestly, "I shouldn't wonder if somebody else had been murdered to-night."

"What do you mean?" said several voices at once.

"Well, I'll tell you about it. That's what I came for, really. I was sitting in my room, doing, or trying to do, some reading; it was

about half an hour ago. I daresay I began to nod over my books. But I was made wakeful enough before long, I can tell you, by most fearful and extraordinary noises somewhere near me. And I want some of you fellows to come and listen, and find out what it is; for upon my soul I would rather have somebody with me than go searching about the College at night by myself."

All were startled and excited. Each looked at his neighbour, and asked, "Is there another mystery?" Who could tell? Their sense of horror, which had been preternaturally awakened on the night of the tragedy, but had since burnt low again, blazed up once more at the slightest suggestion of a new cause for alarm. They followed Rutherton noiselessly through the smaller quadrangle to the gateway, ascended the stairs, and found themselves in his room on the first floor. These rooms were very lofty, being immediately over the porch, which itself was a tall one; so that the gateway and the chamber, in which they were now assembled, together reached as high as the three storeys of the rest of the College. Then above these rooms there was the highest room in the College, in the tower itself, which rose far above the roofs of the rest of the building. The Tower rooms—as they were called—a bed-room and a sitting-room, were then occupied by an undergraduate named Ferrand. Rutherton's rooms were exactly below.

The lamp at which he had been reading was still burning, and there was a bright fire. So they all waited in a state of anxious expectancy, and remained quite noiseless. A few minutes elapsed, which to them appeared hours, and Rutherton was just beginning in a low voice, "It may have been only my fancy ——" when a distinct and peculiar sound struck upon their ears. It was a laugh; a prolonged, low, monotonous laugh, unmirthful, metallic; coming, as it seemed, from some adjoining chamber, and deadened in its passage through intervening walls. There is nothing, one might think, very terrifying in a laugh. This, however, could hardly be heard by the least nervous person with equanimity; there was something so unearthly, so appalling, so unnatural about it that it chained every one of the hearers to their seats while it lasted: and at length, when it died off into a distant gurgle, they did not stir for some little time, but seemed overpowered by the influence of a vague terror.

At last Rutherton shivered, and rose up. "That's what I heard," he said. "Now, what does it mean? Let me tell you that I am glad to have you with me, for that's not a pleasant sound to listen to alone, by any means."

"Pleasant!" exclaimed another. "It's the most appalling cachinnation I ever had the luck to listen to. Where on earth does it come from?"

"Oh, it must be the porter; his lodge is below," suggested one.

"The porter!" replied another; "not he, unless he's suddenly

taken leave of his senses. Who are in the rooms on either side of you, Rutherton ?"

"Let me think," said Rutherton. "You know these rooms are approached by different staircases, so there is a solid wall between us; I hardly think any noise could penetrate. On this side"—and he pointed to the left—"Anson's room would come; on the other ——" and he mentioned another undergraduate whose chambers would be beyond the wall to the right.

It was at once proposed that they should separate into two parties, and explore the two rooms, to discover, if possible, the cause of what had alarmed them.

"You fellows are making a great mistake," said Elworthy, one of the quietest of the group. "Which do you think conducts sound best: a brick wall of eight inches thick, or a wooden floor of one or two planks?"

"Ah, that's worth considering," Rutherton replied. "Then you think the sound came up from below? There is no room below this, however: only the college gateway."

"And that has a solid ceiling, much admired by connoisseurs in stone carving," retorted the other. "But above this"—and he pointed to the ceiling of the chamber—"there is only a wooden floor. The sound comes from there."

All acknowledged that this was more probable; so in a body they passed out into the passage, and ascended the steep, winding wooden stairs that led to the floor above. They knocked at the door, and entered.

No, they were disappointed. The only occupant of the chamber was its usual tenant, a student whose name was Ferrand, who had been two years at the University, and bore a good character among all the authorities. Among his fellows he was regarded as rather a book-worm, though those who knew him well asserted that he was exceedingly good company when he liked to exert himself to amuse.

"Very glad to see you," said Ferrand, shutting up the book he had been reading. "A rather late call, and you seem to be in somewhat overwhelming numbers. But come and sit down; there are chairs enough for us all." And he did the honours of the room in a perfectly unconstrained manner.

Rutherton and the others felt rather foolish. "The fact is," he began, "have you heard any strange noises to-night, Ferrand?"

"Noises!" said Ferrand, in a quick, short way. "What noises? Where?"

"Well, somewhere near where we are standing now," replied Rutherton; and he explained to Ferrand what had caused this sudden irruption into his room.

Ferrand laughed—a hearty, honest-sounding laugh: not in the least like the sound of evil memory. After asking a few questions, he treated the whole matter as the result of excited nerves. "Or

else," he added, "some friend of the porter's may have been indulging in a little revelry with him in the lodge, and, of course, distance would lend, not enchantment, but power to the sound."

So he laughed the event away. And on cooler reflection the others began to feel ashamed of their panic. To redeem their character as bold Britons, they became very noisy and uproarious, and Ferrand aided and abetted them in the most successful manner. He joined in all the merriment, told amusing stories, produced wine and eatables, and proved a charming host. In this way an hour slipped by, and it was by this time nearly one in the morning—the late hours kept by collegians being then, as in the present day, proverbial.

Suddenly Ferrand exclaimed: "But where on earth *did* those sounds you heard come from? I had a dream last night that another murder would be committed in the college. A foolish fancy, you will say. Well, perhaps so. Yet I propose we patrol the buildings, and make a final inspection before going to bed."

All looked uneasy. Rutherton shuddered. "I wish you wouldn't speak in that soul-freezing kind of way, Ferrand. *Another* murder—impossible! What could put such a fancy into your brain?" Rutherton had by this time forgotten his previous fears.

"A curious fancy, indeed," remarked Elworthy, in his quiet way. "Did you see the murderer's weapon, too, in your dream, Ferrand? I wonder you weren't frightened. What was it like? A dagger, I presume. 'Methinks I see it now!'"

"See it!" said Ferrand, turning suddenly, so as to face the speaker: "where? What do you mean? You must be mad!" And his eye followed Elworthy's, till it rested upon a certain part of the wall, just above the mantelpiece.

"You seem alarmed," said Elworthy, as quietly as before; and rising, he went to the hearth. "This is a peculiar knife; a good stabbing instrument, I should think," and he took it down from its peg on the wall.

"Oh, that!" said Ferrand; "yes, that's a Moorish dagger. Beautifully carved, isn't it? I've had it some time. You really alarmed me at first, Elworthy, by the way you pointed at this weapon."

"Did I?" carelessly replied the other: "I'm truly sorry. But suppose we do as Ferrand suggested, and patrol the college? After which it will be about time for us to retire, if we intend appearing at morning chapel to-morrow."

They all rose. Leaving the apartment, they went down the steep stairs as they had ascended, in single file, Ferrand staying a little behind, to put out the candles, he said.

Elworthy had got half down the stairs when he remembered that he had left his trencher behind him. He reascended the steps quickly, and was just about to enter Ferrand's room, when through the half-

opened door a sound reached him—the very same low, suppressed, dreadful chuckle which had been heard before that evening. Elworthy stood half-paralysed. Where did that awful laugh proceed from? It must have come from within. He entered; there was nobody but Ferrand there, who had just put out the candles, and who did not notice his entrance, which had been made quietly.

At the door for a few moments Elworthy stood, wondering whence that sound had issued. Was it his own fancy?—yet he was not given to fancies.

And if his ears had deceived him, surely his eyes could not—for what saw he now? By the light of the fire he saw Ferrand take down the dagger from its place, look at it carefully, then breathe upon it, then rub it vigorously with a handkerchief, then look at it again, then replace it. That was all. That, however, was quite enough for Elworthy, who, with a nameless terror on him, glided out of the door, ran as quickly and noiselessly down the steep stairs as if fire or pestilence were at his heels, and found his fellow-students waiting in the porch. But before he had recovered his breath, or had time to gather his thoughts together, Ferrand joined them, and proposed to examine the rooms in the smaller quadrangle. This was at once agreed to. He led the way, and Elworthy could do nothing at present but follow the others and wait for events. Meanwhile he concentrated all his attention on the task of watching Ferrand.

Now let us turn to what happened in that same College a few short hours before. There was one studious undergraduate, a shy and retiring youth of the name of Butler, who occupied the rooms just opposite to those of the Dean—that is to say, on the first floor in the big quadrangle. He knew but few of the men of the College, but one of the few who were intimate with him was Ferrand. In fact, the two were great friends, and Butler seems to have regarded Ferrand, who was older and cleverer and stronger than he was, with a kind of boyish confidence. On no member of the College had the awful event of a few days back produced a more terrifying effect than on Butler. Directly after dinner in hall every evening he retired to his room, securely fastened his door, and did not again emerge till the next morning. Those undergraduates who had talked with him, noticed how his mind seemed to be filled with the subject of the attempted murder. All the details seemed to have a ghastly fascination for him, and one of his acquaintances afterwards related into what a state of nervous terror he had been thrown by a chance suggestion that the assassin might try to find another victim within the walls of the same college.

At about ten o'clock on that evening he was sitting in his room with the door securely "sported," and some author open before him on the table, when he was startled by a gentle tapping. He listened for a minute—and even such an ordinary event threw his nerves into

a state of tremor—then approached the door and asked who was there. A well-known voice replied; and now, his doubts and fears removed, he opened the door, and admitted Ferrand.

"Still studious!" said the new comer, entering. "Upon my word you ought to take more care of your delicate brain. I have come to rouse you—to look after your health; so put away your books, and come and sit here before the fire." So saying, he drew an easy chair right in front of the hearth for his host, and took an ordinary chair for himself.

"It's very good of you to look me up," said Butler, "and to think of my health. But you startled me a good deal by knocking at this door."

"Startled you!" said the other. "What, are you still nervous about that wretched affair?"

"I didn't know who it was knocking, you know," explained Butler. "It might have been"—and here he gave an involuntary shudder—"it *might* have been the murderer himself outside."

"Do *I* look like a murderer?" answered Ferrand, laughing—a clear, unbroken, open laugh, while his eyes glanced and glittered as if with merriment. Certainly he did not look like the ordinary vulgar notion of the secret assassin.

Butler was now sitting in the arm-chair. Despite the comfortable seat, and the blazing fire in front of him, and the presence close at his side of his trusted friend, he did not seem at his ease. Looking suddenly round at Ferrand, he asked, "Why do you keep your hand in your coat like that?"

Ferrand's coat was buttoned tight. It was a great-coat, and his right hand was buried deep in the inside pocket of it; a harmless position enough, one might imagine.

"Why not," he answered, carelessly; "it's a way I have. But how nervous you are to-night, old fellow. Shall I sport your oak for you? Then you *must* be quite safe."

"No, no, don't do that," said Butler.

But Ferrand had already left his seat and closed the outer door with a reverberating slam. Then he shut the inner door, and walked back to his place; he again took his seat on his chair; he noticed that Butler was nervous, and he set himself to amuse and beguile him with talk. He told him story after story, interesting, racy anecdotes, and was gradually exerting his potent spell over his host; he drew his own chair closer to the arm-chair in which Butler was reclining; he put his hand on his shoulder, and ——

Who can tell what induced Butler at this moment to rise from his seat? Some sudden wave of mental foreboding perhaps it was. Whatever the cause, he rose, and walked slowly to the door—opened it—opened the outer oak ——

"What are you doing?" shouted Ferrand.

"I'm just going to see if the Dean is in his room," said Butler.

"Oh—all right; don't be long; I've something to say to you," returned Ferrand; and he heard Butler knock at the Dean's door just opposite.

Ferrand may have been disappointed at this exit. If he was, he did not show it by any violent signs. At any rate, he was now by himself in the room; that was one advantage, and he knew Butler would soon come back. He looked carefully round. Nobody there. Then he thrust his right hand still deeper into his coat, and slowly drew from the breast of it a small but deadly instrument—the little Moorish dagger that two hours afterwards was hanging above his fireplace. Did he always carry this ugly-looking "plaything" about with him? Or what was its use now? He held it in the ruddy glare of the fire: there were one or two dull places on the blade; he wiped it on his sleeve—but the spots would not come out. He felt the edge and the point; he was satisfied, and broke the stillness of the untenanted chamber by a grim and ghastly chuckle of delight. Low, unearthly, diabolical was that laugh of his: it rose fitfully, and fell again: it swelled into a ghastly paroxysm of joyless merriment, then subsided: it hardly stirred his features, nor could it add to the fiery, gleeful sparkle of his eye. The Dean's door meanwhile had opened again, and Butler was crossing the narrow passage to his room. Ferrand had just time to thrust back his dagger into its hiding-place.

"Ferrand! Are you here?" shouted Butler, on the threshold, without entering.

"Of course I am," answered the other.

"What on earth—Did you hear someone laughing—a most peculiar sound?"

"Come and sit down again!" said Ferrand; "upon my word you will make *me* nervous. Come and sit down again in your chair—shut the door first; is it right? Now, sit in your arm-chair again—we'll listen for the noise together. What was it like?"

"Oh, dreadful!" said Butler, seating himself once again in his chair. "I can't describe it. It sounded like a madman's laughter."

"I am rather good at imitating different people," said Ferrand. "Was the laugh something like this?" And again—was he jesting?—he broke into that unearthly and monotonous chuckle. Butler looked at him in horror. He sat up in his chair, and gazed with fascinated yet dilated orbs at the unlaughing lips that were uttering such fearful sounds—at the eyes that were sparkling with a light that was not the light of mirth.

"Ferrand!" he tried to shout—he could only whisper: "What does this mean? What—what are you doing?"

III.

It was quite three hours later that the group of collegians, among whom were Rutherton and Elworthy, was starting under Ferrand's guidance on its tour of inspection round the College to see that all was safe. I will not linger over this part of the story : the dreadful narrative draws near its close. Suffice it to say that after visiting several rooms, and finding no cause whatever for alarm, most of them began to consider that they had done enough for the protection of their fellow undergraduates, and the band of volunteer watchmen was about to disperse, when Ferrand suggested that they had not yet been near the Dean's room—perhaps it would be as well to see to his safety. The fancy tickled the others, inasmuch as the Dean might be supposed to be the guardian of the collegians, rather than the collegians of the Dean ; and without thinking twice they started off for the Dean's staircase. Arrived at his room, however, they found his outer door closed, so they hardly considered that it would be advisable to rouse him from slumber. But the opposite door was standing half open, though all was dark within, and at the suggestion of somebody—who it was, was not remembered afterwards—they turned away from the Dean's room and finished their evening's search in the chamber which *had* been that of Butler.

The room was quite dark, the fire having gone out long before. The part just near the entrance was dimly illumined by the rays of the passage lamp ; but the further end—near the fireplace—was in complete obscurity. One of the party felt his way to the mantelpiece in order to strike a light, while the others stood at the door.

"Don't tumble over the arm-chair," was Ferrand's warning.

"Arm-chair? Where is it? I can see nothing in this pitchy blackness," replied the voice from near the fire.

"Just in front of the fire," answered Ferrand.

"How do you know where the arm-chair is?" said Elworthy.

"Oh, I'm a friend of Butler's, I know his room," Ferrand rejoined, with apparent carelessness.

"You seem to," remarked Elworthy ; and as he said this his eyes met those of Ferrand ; they looked at each other for a moment, and Ferrand's eyes dropped.

"You haven't been here, once before to-night, have you, Ferrand?" Elworthy asked quietly.

"What do you mean?" Ferrand was rejoining fiercely, when the pioneer suddenly struck a light, having steered his way safely to the mantelpiece where the tinder-box was kept, and holding the piece of lighted paper over his head, took a survey of the room. Only for one moment, however, for the next he gave a slight cry, dropped the light, and rushed to the door, leaving the room in its previous condition of darkness.

"What is it? What did you see?" were the questions eagerly shouted out by the others, as all crowded round him.

"Don't go in! Don't go in!" he half screamed. "He's there; he's there—in the chair!" and he forced his way out into the passage, through the group of his comrades, who, now thoroughly terrified, were not slow to follow. There they stood, just outside the door, with all kinds of horrible fears coursing through their minds, not knowing if the next instant an assassin might not spring out on them from the darkened chamber.

But the assassin was not within.

"What cowards you men are!" suddenly exclaimed Ferrand; and rushing into the room, he found his way to the hearth, and the next minute stood with a lighted candle in his hand, gazing fixedly down on the few square feet just in front of the fire.

There was an arm-chair there; and in it was Butler; and Butler was quite dead.

The others gradually took heart to enter. They saw Ferrand standing silent near the hearth; they came slowly forward to the front of the chair, and—then they, too, saw what was in it. Young and strong as they were, you might see the cheek blanch and the hand tremble as they looked at each other, awe-struck and horrified, overwhelmed by the terrible doom inflicted, as if by some invisible power of evil, on one who so lately had been one of their living comrades. Elworthy alone—though at the dread sight his face, too, turned pale—Elworthy alone preserved presence of mind; he was occupied in observing Ferrand. Ferrand was standing, as he stood from the first, gazing down on the murdered youth, with fixed, unswerving gaze. The horrified exclamations of the others did not move him; he seemed not to be conscious that anybody was present.

"What do *you* think of it?" asked Elworthy, quietly.

Ferrand did not seem to hear the question. But he must have heard it; for in a moment more he answered, in an absent, self-contained kind of way: "Think of it? Think of it? Who would have dreamt that he would look so pale? Only three hours ago! he might have been dead a week!"

Elworthy started forward, and caught him by the arm. "Only three hours ago! What do you mean! Before Heaven, I believe that *you* killed him!"

Strange to say, Ferrand did not seem to heed the accusation; but he still stood gazing, as if his senses had been petrified and his intellect benumbed by that dread spectacle. Mechanically his lips moved. Slowly the import of the last words that had been uttered must have made itself intelligible, at least in some dim unconscious way, to his brain; for in a few moments, without taking away his rivetted gaze from the chair, he said:

"Who says that I killed him?" and then stopped.

It was impossible for Elworthy at that moment to know whether he

was addressing a being conscious enough to understand the accusation that had been made against him—or whether the mind was far away. He saw, at all events, that Ferrand did not then fully realize the gravity of the charge, or the perils of his own position, and was more likely to betray the truth in such a condition of mind than if he were rudely awakened from his trance. So, altering his tone, he said in a low, soothing voice, but carefully watching the effect of his words :

"Poor Butler! poor fellow! Why doesn't he wake up?"

"Why doesn't he wake up? Yes, why doesn't he wake up?" echoed Ferrand, dreamily. Then, looking closer at the body, he added : "He is dead, I suppose."

"It was cruel of you to kill him," returned Elworthy, quietly. Then, as he saw that Ferrand did not seem to have quite understood the words, he asked, in the same low tones: "Wasn't it cruel to kill him, Ferrand? Why did you do it?"

"Oh," said the other, with a long shudder, "I don't know why I did it. The knife was so sharp—I had had it a long time—it seemed so tempting ——" Here he suddenly stopped, and for the first time looked at his interlocutor in a startled, questioning manner, as if to ask: "What have I been saying to you?" He had awoke from his trance; the light of understanding again shone from his eyes; but the secret was out.

"*You* are the murderer," shouted Elworthy; and, retiring a few steps, he shouted to the others: "Don't let him get out—close the door—he did it!"

But before anybody could even attempt to secure the criminal, he had given one frenzied look around, rushed at Elworthy, who barred his passage, and brushing him aside, broke through the ring of the other spectators, out of the room into the passage, and was gone.

"Follow him! follow him!" shouted Elworthy. Little need of exhortation now; for, with what speed they might, all had begun the pursuit; but on arriving at the door leading up to Ferrand's staircase, they found it bolted from the inside. They could afford, however, to wait now; the murderer was trapped. The secret of Sydney's assassination was discovered: the perpetrator was no longer a mystery—a malignant Unknown; he was a wild beast in human form—a raving, furious wild beast—but he was caged at last.

It need hardly be said that the news of the murder, and of the discovery of the criminal, spread like wildfire through the College. Late as it was, not many minutes elapsed before the tutors, the undergraduates, even the old President himself, were gathered on the grass-plot of the little quadrangle, eagerly discussing the exciting events of the night, and the steps which now must be taken.

The Dean was the last person among them who had seen Butler alive. He at once told how that evening, somewhere about ten o'clock, Butler had come into his room, and asked some trivial

questions with regard to an approaching examination; how he had appeared absent and strange in his manner, and how he showed a disposition to remain after the question that he had come to ask had been answered. The Dean said he was rather surprised at his behaviour; but that when Butler had left the room and closed the door behind him, he soon forgot the occurrence, attributing the strangeness of his visitor's manner to a natural shyness, which he had before noticed in him.

But events now were hastening on to the conclusion of the tragedy. The windows of Ferrand's room, high up in the tower, were plainly visible from the quadrangle. They could see that the interior of the room was brilliantly lighted up, the reflection showing vividly through the blinds of the apartment, and illuminating the old stone walls. Peals of riotous laughter could be plainly heard proceeding from within—wild, reckless laughter—which proved, if anything were wanted to prove, that the perpetrator of the two outrages was a madman.

The great object now was to secure the culprit. But how was this to be done?

Evidently no time was to be lost. It was feared that Ferrand might set the chamber on fire, or resort to some other desperate expedient to escape capture. A party of volunteers was detailed to break down the outer door leading up to the tower rooms. Willing hands and arms lent themselves to the work. It was clear that the murderer heard the sound of the blows administered to the ponderous wood-work, for from the first moment of their commencement all was silence in that lonely upper chamber. Up to this time the little crowd gathered on the grass-plot had heard that boisterous laughter, rising now and again on the still air of midnight, muffled and subdued by distance, but still with a peculiar ghastly intonation of its own. But now the solitary laughter had ceased. At length the old oak door crashed in, and one or two of the leaders in the work sprang through the gap thus made, and rushed up the steep stairs. They half expected to be met with a murderous resistance at the top of the steps, and that the criminal, armed with the strength of madness, would make a desperate struggle before being secured.

But no resistance was made. As they rushed into the room, involuntarily they were arrested on the threshold by the sight which then presented itself. There in one of the distant corners, near the window, stood Ferrand, apparently utterly unconscious both of their presence and of the approach of danger, fingering the fatal steel which he still held clutched in his hand, and talking and laughing gently to himself. There could be no doubt that he was a maniac. Gradually they drew round, and quickly seized him. He offered no resistance at all, but went on gibbering to himself, with glassy eyes that evidently did not comprehend the import of what was going on around. The dagger was taken from

him, and he was conveyed down the stairs firmly secured. No sooner did he arrive at the foot of the tower than he was seized with fearful convulsions. In less than three days he died, after passing through fits of raving delirium, but mercifully allowed to sink into insensibility at the last.

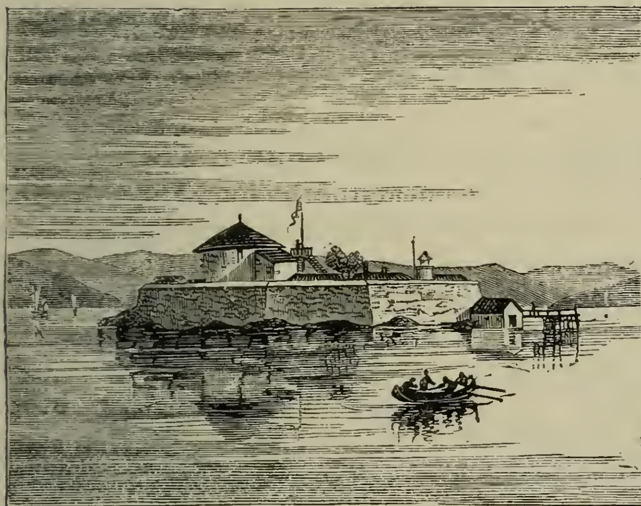
Sydney recovered finally, though his recovery was tedious. He explained, before the coroner's inquest that sat to try the facts connected with this terrible case, the modus operandi adopted by Ferrand to lull his victims into security before striking the fatal blow. He said that on the night of the firework display he had gone back to his room, to look for more fuel, and had found his lights already burning, and Ferrand seated in an arm-chair before the fire. He was rather astonished at this, as he had not previously been very intimate with Ferrand, and had, indeed, as he confessed, cared little to make his acquaintance, not being prepossessed with his appearance. But on this occasion, Ferrand made himself most agreeable, and gave some excuse (he forgot what) for his presence in the room, persuaded him to leave the bonfire to itself, which Sydney was very ready to do, as the fun was really over, induced him to sit down in the arm-chair, and himself took another chair before the fire. Then he began to tell stories, to laugh and chat in an agreeable manner, till his host thought that he had never before known what a pleasant fellow he was. Finally, he pretended to be interested in a picture on the wall, which hung just above Sydney's head. To look close at it, he drew his chair near to that of his victim, and while Sydney's head was also turned away, looking at the print of which they were speaking, Ferrand had taken that opportunity for the attack upon his friend.

There is no more to be told. The matter, as far as it could be, appears to have been hushed up; and though of course it produced a great sensation in the city and University at the time, only meagre accounts found their way into the metropolitan journals of the day.

Although we naturally look upon such a character with terror and loathing, it is almost needless to add the remark that only in a state of complete mental derangement could a man imagine the perpetration of a succession of crimes so purposeless. Perhaps it would have been better to have let the events I have described sleep still in their forgotten chronicles, and drop quietly out of human memory. But I thought that the interest which the discovery and the tracing of this long-past tragedy awoke in the mind of its narrator might possibly find a slight reflection in the reader of these pages.

ABOUT NORWAY.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland."



Munkholmen.

FEW things of the kind are pleasanter than a voyage to the North Cape. Much may be said in its favour—little on the other side. It is quite a different experience from most of the sea voyages usually taken for health or pleasure. The very word voyage is suggestive to many of infinite terrors: the misery of the mal de mer, or at best the monotony of endless days that succeed and resemble each other: the unbroken sameness of a great waste of sea and sky, varied only by a greater waste of black darkness in the long night watches. Even a journey across the Atlantic, which may now be almost counted by hours, is too much for the courage of multitudes to contemplate.

But a journey from Bergen to the North Cape requires no courage whatever. From first to last you are almost continually in smooth seas, and the worst of sailors need fear no ill. There are, occasionally, short interregnums of a little roughness, when the good ship lets you know that she could do her part at pitching and rolling, if the chance were given her; but these occasions are so rare and so quickly over, that ere you are able to think the change is not for the better, the capricious mood has passed, and you are once more in the Elysium of calm waters.

And there is no monotony in this voyage. Everything is variety. The attention and interest are for ever being aroused and kept awake. You are constantly steaming near the shore, passing through long channels, land-bound on the one hand, protected on the other by high rocks that shut out the sea beyond. That sea may be tossing and tumbling in heaving billows and angry waves, but they cannot reach you. Your course leads you amidst small green islands, that lie hot and glistening in the sunshine, charming the imagination, and throwing a glow over the whole man—body, soul, and spirit—that makes the

very fact of existence itself a great and sufficient happiness for the time being. Small green islands, here and there crowned by a lighthouse; small fishing stations, where the dried cod are piled in many and huge stacks, that surcharge the breeze with odours no fancy could describe as scent-laden, so subtle and detestable is the smell. Islands, again, that are uninhabited patches of green earth, not in any way utilised. They serve no purpose, and might just as well go down to the bottom and join the weeds and anemones, the coral rocks and reefs, the haunts of those sea syrens, the mermaids: and be no more seen.

The waters, too, up here are often so transparent, of so pure and pale a green, that you may see far down into their depths, and near the shore trace the beauties that lie at the bottom, and think the sight fairer and more wonderful than the grandest dream of fairyland that ever dazzled the mind of youth or age. Indeed, whilst gazing at these wonders we become children again, with all the freshness of feeling, the love of the marvellous, the absorption of rapt wonder, that, alas, seldom survives the test of maturer age. If it be true that in some things, "Once a child always a child," is it not in its penalties more than its pleasures that we pay for this evergreen state of existence?

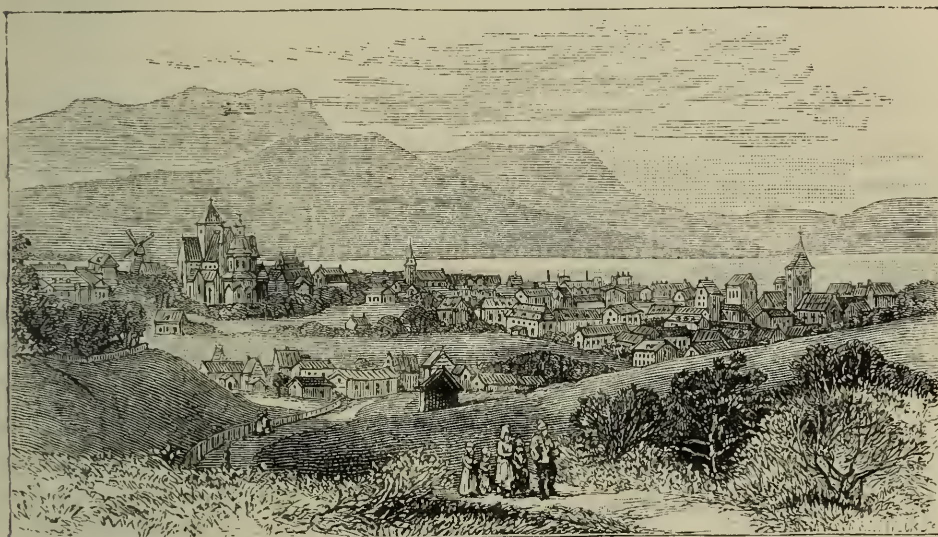
But that first morning after leaving Bergen all was pleasure to us, pure and unalloyed. Life for the moment was rose-coloured and ethereal as the dream-clouds that flitted about the sky and gradually faded—like most of our day-dreams—into thin air. The sun had shot above the horizon, full of splendour, gilding everything, sparkling the water, throwing over the atmosphere an indescribable golden glow, steeping everything in an Eastern warmth of colouring that charmed and almost intoxicated the imagination. It was not always so, and the reverse of the picture was bad enough to endure; but it was so to-day and for several days. Let us make the most of it.

We steamed away in the good ship "Michael Krohn," Captain Björnstad. Let it be stated, once and for all, that nothing could have exceeded the kindness and courtesy of the captain to his passengers. During the whole voyage he did everything in his power to please them. He showed them all that could be seen; occasionally went out of his course for their especial gratification; did all he could (and what a task it was!) to satisfy that craving for novelty which so frequently fastens upon travellers, and makes them so truly wretched if they have left a celebrated stone unturned, a wonderful fossil unseen, or a pickled mummy unvisited. A craving that will not be satisfied in its unreasoning, but fastens upon the victim, as nostalgia seizes upon the poor Savoyard, and breaks his heart if it is not cured by a return to his beloved mountains. Difficult as the captain's task was, he performed it well, and from first to last was uniformly considerate, amiable, and polite. The same must be said

of the other officers of the ship. We embarked from Bergen, but most of the passengers joined at Throndhjem.

Steering to the right after getting clear of Bergen, we were soon amongst the islands that dot and decorate these waters, and passed the entrance to the Sognefjord. Our first call was at Floröen, a small island of some importance, containing nearly five hundred inhabitants—its chief trade a herring fishery. Beyond, to the west, on a rock jutting sharply out of the sea, was perched a lighthouse, and so rough is the water at times that the keepers for days together can hold no communication with the island that is but a few yards distant.

It was far otherwise to-day. The sun was throwing his hot beams upon a glassy sea; the golden haze in the distance did not lift, and



THRONDHJEM.

near at hand the island and the lighthouse formed a picture of quiet solitary repose. Where the five hundred people had bestowed themselves was a mystery: not five were visible. To our right, as we went on and on, the land for ever stretched away: to our left, great rocks and cliffs, towering bulwarks, perpendicular walls of granite, rose to immense heights. The mainland sloped upwards, now green and dotted with hamlets, now presenting a barren, rocky surface, with scarcely a patch of lichen to vary its dull monotony. In the afternoon we passed Hornelen, the highest rock in Norway, a gigantic wall, of great breadth, rising some 2,500 feet out of the water. The captain stopped the vessel and blew a shrill blast upon the whistle, and the echo was countlessly repeated from point to point, from crag and hollow, in a marvellous way, flitting about in all parts at once, like a phantom Will-o'-the-wisp. Then, shooting across a rapid; to the entrance of the beautiful little Nordfjord, whose slopes

on either side were green and picturesque, clothed with pine trees that fringed the summits of the hills, we stopped at Moldöen.

This, too, is an important fishing station, though less in the direct route of the steamers than Floröen. A telegram was here handed to the captain from a wedding party, asking him when he passed their little settlement if he would dress the ship and salute them. This, with his usual kindness, he failed not to do. Presently we came upon the wedding group. A small assemblage of people on the green slopes, decked out in picturesque costumes, surrounded the bride and bridegroom, who stood the conscious centre of attraction—the former wearing the large orthodox crown usual to such festal occasions. The boat stopped, and up went the flags, stretching from the decks to each masthead.

Meanwhile the greatest excitement of which the Norwegians are capable possessed the little group on shore. They shouted and hurrahed lustily. A red flag, evidently the impromptu performance of some native genius, was hoisted on a long pole and wafted gracefully in the air. Then one of the young men let off a gun, and above the heads of the happy couple we traced the thin line of smoke, almost before the report reached us. After this we went on our way, and the gratified concourse returned to the bride's house. If this was the first day of the revels, they would probably last two more, and the whole thing would end by some one unloosening the pin that held the crown together, and the bride continuing to dance until she danced it off. Then the music would cease abruptly, a sudden hush would fall, and in silence the company would disperse. Strange that so quiet, unemotional, sensible a race as the Norwegians should celebrate their weddings by a three days' uninterrupted festivity that seems more in accordance with the warm dark Spanish or Italian temperament, than that of this fair pale people of the North.

Throughout that day we were steaming amidst these islands and rocks, which every now and then fell away, and gave us a view of the sea beyond, always calm and smooth as a painted ocean. Towards evening, as the sun went down, the colouring on land and sea became gorgeous. Flames of red shot across the sky, and a crimson flush covered the water. As the sun neared the horizon, the colours deepened in intensity, and every moment changed, wave upon wave of colour seeming to chase each other, as the waves of the sea follow in quick succession.

We were not yet in the regions of the midnight sun, but quite dark it did not become. A weird twilight fell upon land and water, giving depth to everything, increasing in size the rocks and the hills, veiling but not concealing anything. The sky was still luminous at midnight, when we turned in, simply because rest was a duty, not because there was nothing more to see.

Our first stage the next morning was Molde, by some thought the most beautifully situated of all the towns on the north coast. Cer-

tainly nothing can well surpass it in loveliness and charm. Before reaching it we entered the narrow fjord, whose banks were clothed with rich pine trees to their very summit. Then the town opened up, and many of its houses almost overhung the water. The hills, sloping upwards to immense heights, were of richer verdure than is generally seen in Norway. On the opposite side the harbour towered the mountains at the head of the lovely Romsdal, jagged and abrupt in outline, the gigantic Romdalshorn conspicuous amongst them. There was a charm about the place that tempted one to land. It is an excellent spot in which to pitch one's tent for a time, so numerous, interesting, and picturesque are the excursions in the neighbourhood. But we, bound for the savage grandeur and bleak heights of the North Cape, could not stop short in this laughing, luxuriant, and comparatively luxurious spot. So when the good steamer turned round on her onward journey, we accompanied her.

Some hours later in the morning we reached Christiansund, an important town, built upon three islands, forming an immense amphitheatre of hills so placed as to afford the town a natural and secure harbour. This is one of the most picturesque spots on the way to the North, and to-day it was doubly so. A subdued excitement seemed to possess the place. Huge branches of trees were hung in many directions, and all had the appearance of an approaching gala. But we soon found that the fête was to be nothing less solemn than a funeral. One of the chief men of Christiansund had died, and was about to be buried. His body was to be conveyed across the waters of the bay to the church, where the funeral ceremony would take place.

The day was intensely hot: the sun poured down his rays from a cloudless sky: not a breath of air stirred in this landlocked, hill-sheltered bay. All nature seemed to rejoice in sunshine and prosperity. The houses on the slopes, one above another, looked white and tranquil. Nothing could be less in harmony with the ceremony about to take place. Not an object reminded us on this glorious day, so instinct with life and beauty, that death and decay are the common heritage of all.

In the distance, on the opposite side of the bay, a crowd of people could be discerned, quiet, motionless. A landing-stage was decked with green boughs and garlands, terminating at the water's edge in an arch of green leaves. At the foot of the landing-stage some eight or ten boats were waiting.

Suddenly there was a slight stir in the crowd. The coffin was being borne on men's shoulders down to its appointed boat. A few moments more, and the cortège set out. The first boat contained the musicians, and anything more sad, solemn, and mournful than the dirge they played could not be imagined. It was distressing in its wailing gloom and misery. A certain occasional discord mingled

with the harmony, the very embodiment of despair and heartbroken sorrow.

Immediately following the musicians was a boat richly decorated with garlands of leaves and flowers in the form of a canopy, that might rather have decked a bride than the dead. Below this gorgeous and beautiful canopy, covered by no pall, cumbered by no trappings, reposed the coffin. The boat had all the appearance of a triumphal barge.

The sight was one of the strangest, most interesting, most impressive I had ever seen—perhaps partly from its very novelty—this quaint mode of burying the dead. For a quarter of an hour we watched the procession in its slow, stately, and solemn march. The

THRONDHJEM CATHEDRAL.

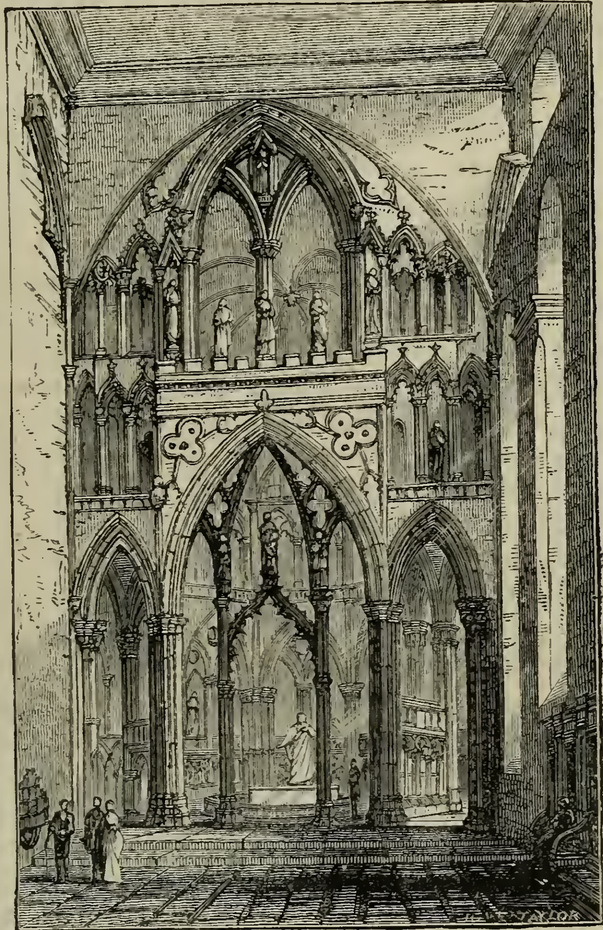
oars were muffled, and not a sound marked its progress save the wail of the music, which never ceased its melancholy strains. Every time the discord came it jarred the feelings and shot a shiver through the frame that no self-control could resist. On and on they went, boat after boat, that one containing the coffin always most conspicuous, the eye ever reverting to it with a mournful fascination.

The procession passed onwards until it entered a narrow canal between the islands and was lost to view. Less and less distinct, slower and slower grew the wailing sounds of the music, until they ceased altogether. Then we knew that the procession was landing, and was about to make its way on foot to the church.

Somehow a little of the brightness had gone out of the sunshine. All this should have taken place with skies weeping in harmony with the feelings of the mourners. This laughing sun,

this gorgeous aspect of nature, must have seemed almost to mock the hearts of the smitten. And yet, to us who looked on, it no doubt made it infinitely more solemn. A state funeral in Westminster Abbey, with all the glitter of pomp and ceremony, the stirring strains of the "Dead March," had never impressed me as did this simple procession. It threw a certain association over the mind in connection with Christiansund that will never fade. This water-funeral remains amongst the most vivid and distinct, most interesting and most solemn recollections I have kept of Norway.

Yet the practical and the emotional, the sublime and the ridiculous, the spiritual and the temporal, for ever go hand in hand, in what, according to Die Vernon, the good vicar's wife would have called this "'varsal world." No sooner had the melancholy procession passed out of sight, its effect yet full upon the mind, than the captain beckoned me to the other side of the ship, over which he was leaning with what looked very much like an eye to a bargain.



INTERIOR, LOOKING EASTWARD.

At the foot of the ladder was a boat filled with splendid lobsters, and the price asked was fourpence apiece: the orthodox charge for a good lobster in Norway. Not a few of them quickly changed hands. Indeed, from Bergen to Throndhjem we half lived upon lobsters; but from thence to the North Cape we saw them not. Salmon in abundance and daily; but the Norwegian salmon lacks the flavour of the English. If a fine Severn fish were put before a Norwegian, I am not sure that he would know what to call it. It is generally so where nature is very abundant in her supplies; as, for instance, where peaches and apricots grow thickest in the orchards of France, and are the least luscious of their species.

Leaving Christiansund, its melancholy but interesting associations,

we steamed towards Throndhjem. The journey was interesting at every point. To the S. W. of Christiansund is the Island of Averöen, and in a mountain overlooking the village of Braemnaes is a cavern said to be the largest known cave in Norway, the opening of which is 40 feet wide, and the interior 280 feet high. We were continually steering about the islands; now stopping at some small station, and taking in bales and boxes that for the most part were sent off in boats from the shore, and now steaming onwards again: but during the whole time very close to land and sometimes in very shallow waters. The air was warm, yet bracing and exhilarating; full of that lightness which accompanies a rarified atmosphere, and forbids the indulgence of melancholy, or what Dr. Johnson would have called ' the vapours." Let no one who wishes to indulge, like Harvey, in morbid meditations, or to cherish a pessimist's view of life, venture into these latitudes. His moods and misanthropy will fall from him in spite of himself, and he will see all things in a new and more healthy light.

Evening grew apace and night came on, but darkness fell not. As we approached nearer to the region of the Arctic Circle, darkness fled away. It was difficult to realize time; and when at midnight we could read as plainly as at midday, the world seemed to have got out of joint. The effect was unfamiliar and a little embarrassing Especially we did not know when to turn in, and once more felt very juvenile, going to bed by daylight.

To-night we had sunset, certainly: and here it may be remarked that the greatest effects, the most gorgeous colourings, are not those of the midnight sun, which never disappears, but rather the effects of those latitudes where the sun dips below the horizon and soon returns. It was always immediately after sunset that we had those wonderful and vivid skies, where each moment saw a change that startled one with its beauty.

So was it with us this night before reaching Throndhjem. The sun sank to the horizon, then shot below it, and the whole of that sky became suffused with a glowing, glorious crimson light. Clouds flecked with gold floated in mid-air; triumphal cars in which angels might have wafted departed spirits to the skies. Streaks of crimson almost like an aurora borealis shot upwards into the heavens. Where the sun had disappeared, seven beams, a crimson aureole, ascended, changing colour momentarily and deepening to a blood red. In the East an emerald green, calm and beautiful, seemed to contrast with all this fiery yet most beautiful effect. The water took up and reflected all the colours of the sky, and all the land was bathed in a rosy light.

But to-night the sun went too far down, and all the beauty faded from land and sea, and the fierce passion of the sky died out; but no darkness came; the pale green light in the east lived through it all. Towards one o'clock the steamer passed through the narrow

channel of the Throndhjem waters into the broad bay; passed the fort of Munkholmen, that had once upon a time been a monastery; and immediately the ancient capital opened up its long line of houses upon the shore, its background of green hills, steeped to-night in the intense repose and solitude of twilight gloom; its churches uprearing their heads above the houses of the town, the venerable cathedral in their centre keeping guard over them like a good shepherd watching his flocks by night. Onwards, a little further, until we reached the landing-stage of the steamers alongside the town: and just as the clocks struck one in the morning, with gradually increasing light, we dropped anchor and the ship was at rest.

So were not we. It had been impossible to turn-in during the changes, before and after, of the glorious sunset: and when all that was over, we were so near Throndhjem, that with a desire that was half a weakness, we felt unable to go below until we had caught our first glimpse of the home of the ancient kings of Norway. But now when increasing daylight and the approaching sunrise should have brought us back to the world, we went down: and so, like the children in their play, did things by the rules of con*trairy*. The vessel would stay the whole of the next day (or rather that day) at Throndhjem, and we had time before us for seeing the capital. If we wished to have energy also, it was time to seek it in repose.

Some hours later, when we went up again on deck, the world was astir, the sun already high in the heavens, pouring down life and light upon everything—and, it may be added, intense heat. As we went down the gangway on to the road, one might almost have fancied that a subterranean fire was burning beneath, and would soon reach the surface. The fire, however, was overhead, and increased in intensity as it neared the meridian. The streets of Throndhjem that day were passable only to such as, like ourselves, had but the one day to devote to them.

The town has little in itself to attract attention. Though founded about the year 1000, it has so often been destroyed by fire that few traces of its antiquity remain. The streets are wide and regular, and the houses for the most part built of brick or stone: thus the wooden aspect, so characteristic of Norway and so quaint, is here found wanting.

So far one is a little disappointed in Throndhjem. It has held an important place in early Norwegian history. One's ideas of it have been formed in imagination at the impressionable age when Andersen's Tales are devoured in implicit faith. The mind in connection with it is imbued with a vision of all that is old and much that is miraculous—from a fairy-tale point of view. Therefore, awakening to the discovery that the ancient town, with its rich, grand, rolling name, its tradition of wise men—the most northern of the large towns of Europe—would not be out of place in any of the nearer, even the most southern towns of this quarter of the globe, gives rather a rude shock

to the feelings: bewilders the imagination, disturbs the boundary mark between fact and fancy, and causes a little of the romance attending this wonderful and beautiful country to melt away: just as everything is at present melting away under the influence of the fierce midday sun.

We found ourselves in the market-place: a large, wide square from which the four leading thoroughfares of Throndhjem open out. It was as modern as anything you could wish to see. This morning it was half covered with booths and stalls, the buyers and sellers not even clad in any special costume to render them distinctive or picturesque. At the end of one of these thoroughfares stood the cathedral, the great and special attraction of Throndhjem; its glory, as it is that of Norway itself; the one solitary piece of architecture that it possesses.

LOWER FALL.

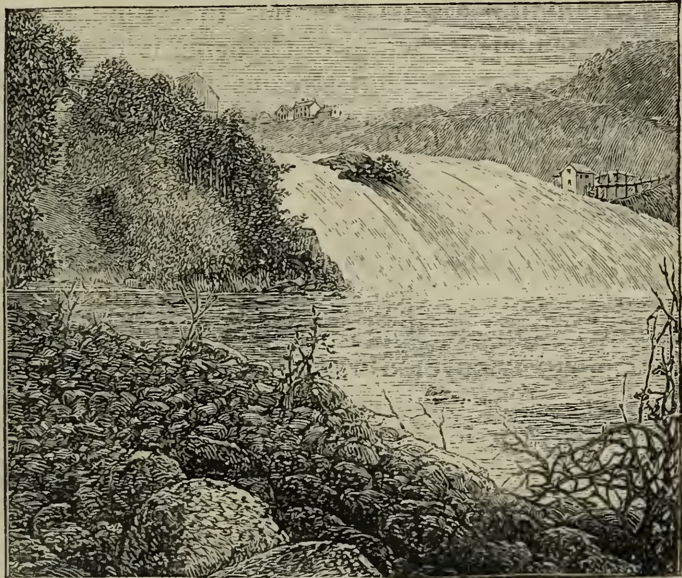
But only in its first impression is Throndhjem disappointing. The cathedral makes up for a great deal, and, once visited, memory fastens upon this piece of antiquity for its association with the ancient capital.

And again, though the actual situation of the town is not so picturesque and quaint as that of Bergen, yet the neighbourhood of Throndhjem is full of beauty; more luxuriant and fertile than anything we had yet seen in Norway. It is situated at the mouth of the Nid, and during the first four centuries of its existence was called Nidaros. Throndhjem signifies "The Throne's Home." It is here that all the kings are crowned. But at the union of Sweden with Norway it ceased to be the capital, the seat of Government, and the Royal Residence. So far its glory has departed.

But they could not remove the cathedral, which remains as a last vestige of that ancient glory. It has long been undergoing repair, and will probably remain in this transition state for years to come. We can no longer see it in the beauty of its age, and presently it will appear only in the light of its restoration. We have but to call to mind our own restored cathedrals—such, for instance, as Canterbury—to know how far the one beauty falls short of the other. For if

age destroys, it also gives a charm entirely its own, a beauty beyond all compare, full of romance and refinement, which takes you at once back to the early ages of the world: days when there were giants in the land, not of stature, but of intellect: and when there was leisure and opportunity to raise such temples as the world will not see again.

Like the town itself, the cathedral has several times suffered by fire. It is now a mixture of different styles of architecture, the Norman being the earliest and most prominent, but more ornamented than any to be found in England. On first entering the church, the different periods, Norman, Byzantine, and Gothic, strike the eye at once with startling effect. At present the interior is so boarded off for repairs, and so cut up into divisions, that all sense of space and grandeur is lost. At the first moment you are greatly disappointed. It is only when you begin to examine the tracery of some of the work, the noble proportions of the arches, the delicately cut niches, the small but beautiful chapels, that you begin to see what it might have been at one period of its history, and what it may yet partly become.



UPPER FALL.

About the exterior, too, there is not that imposing effect, that unity of idea, seen in our own cathedrals. Before it the mind finds itself neither mute nor transfixed, as before buildings so perfect as the cathedrals of Notre Dame or Amiens, or Westminster Abbey. The church, cruciform in shape, is built of a dark blueish stone obtained from the neighbourhood, unromantic in tone as the slated roof of a London house. At the first moment the eye is rather startled by quaintness than gratified by beauty. But gradually the different portions begin to harmonise, and, noting the beauty of much of the work, you end by being to some extent charmed. The octagonal, bulb-like cupola, which added to the character of the building, has been removed to give place to a small, tame spire, whilst the flying buttresses are too thin and delicate to be in harmony with the rest of the structure. The centre tower, once crowned by a spire, has now only a small, squat roof of slate, which dwarfs the whole edifice, and offends the eye by its want of proportion.

The north doorway, and indeed the whole of that part, is still perfect, and the work is very fine. But the south side is most satisfactory as a whole, because the most harmonious: the least tampered with. Here we lingered long, going back in imagination to the days when pilgrims came in flocks from all parts of Europe to the shrine of St. Olaf, and wore away the stones in their devotion: until, in the course of time, a new era gave place to a higher and more enlightened state of things, and the establishment of the Lutheran creed in Norway turned the pilgrim tide towards other lands.

Entering the cathedral, the first thing to arrest attention was a large figure of the Saviour over the altar, in white marble: a copy of Thorvaldsen's masterpiece, and presented by him to the church. From the blocking up of the arches, little of the interior could be seen at one time. No doubt when all is finished it will be an imposing building for its size, but that time is probably yet distant. Like the famous cathedral of Cologne, it can only progress as funds fall in, and these golden streams in a country such as Norway are less rapid and abundant than the silver streams of her mountain torrents. The wealth of the people is in inverse ratio to their goodwill.

Coming out from the coolness and gloom of the interior, to the broad glare of the sun, we were just in time to see a funeral issuing from the mortuary chapel attached to the cathedral, but having a separate entrance. The grave was only a few feet away. The coffin was completely covered with flowers, which were lowered with it into the grave. The minister was dressed in the picturesque costume of the country: a long black robe, and round the throat a snow-white Elizabethan ruffle, which gave solemn dignity to his appearance. The mourners were dressed in black, and stood round the grave, looking very matter-of-fact, and by no means grief-stricken. The minister gave a short discourse; they sang one or two hymns in very composed, perfectly controlled voices; all was then over, and they departed. How different from the ceremony we had seen at Christiansund, and how far less impressive! Later on in the day, when strolling again through the cemetery, we saw that the flowers had been raised from the coffin and placed beside the still open grave. They were all fastened to a frame, and it gave one a slight shock to find that they were artificial, and that the unrealities of life must follow even in the great reality of death.

The neighbourhood of Throndhjem is favoured by nature. Behind and beyond the town lie sleeping hills and cultivated fields and wayside banks rich in wild flowers. Villas and country houses are embowered in trees that gladden the eyes of an Englishman. For here the grim fir gives place to wide-spreading branches, and, amidst others, the chestnut stands out conspicuously. In the neighbourhood are two wonderful falls, for which we started in the afternoon in a large, rumbling, heavy barouche with flaming cushions,

and a pair of horses almost as heavy as the carriage, and a coachman who was the biggest man we had seen in all our lives, in Norway or elsewhere—all supplied by the hotel.

We rattled over the stones, awaking echoes in the almost deserted streets, and were soon galloping over a white road, raising clouds of blinding dust. The drive itself would have been sufficient recompense, without the grand falls at the end. Behind lay the town, in a hollow, hot and sleepy. Surrounding us were hills, green and fertile, and verdant slopes: almost an English pastoral scene: houses, white and imposing, stood out in contrast with green lawns and waving trees. Ascending, we looked down, to the right, upon the Nid, that ran over its rocky bed in white foam and froth, hurrying impatiently towards the sea, as if tired of its own existence. Then turning into another road we descended as rapidly, and all at once came upon the first of the two great falls. The carriage drew up at the blacksmith's forge, and we, passing on to a platform, found ourselves within a few feet of the water.

Its beauty and grandeur had not been exaggerated. With an overwhelming roar the river suddenly leaped in its bed a distance of eighty feet, an immense volume of water, out of which stood enormous rocks. It was 122 feet wide, and the spray ascended in huge clouds. It was a glorious sight, the torrent, force, and noise of the water almost overwhelming. The forge buildings added not a little to the picturesque scene—their blackness standing out in strange contrast with the white foam, than which Nature has nothing whiter, surpassing even the purity of snow itself.

The second fall was further on, and our Jehu, leaving his horses in charge of the forge, conducted us part of the way. A steep rough road, leading through a small plantation, landed us on a level with the bed of the river. Huge boulders and loose stones did their best to stay our progress; but in the end, looking up, there before us was the second and yet more magnificent fall. Leaping a depth of one hundred feet, over four hundred feet wide, this mass of water amazed one by its wonderful strength and beauty. Broken in the middle by an immense mass of rock, the upper part seemed divided into two cataracts, which united again in falling. Nothing could exceed it in grandeur; in volume of water it was far beyond anything we had yet seen in Norway.

We stood long watching this seething mass pouring itself with a sound of many thunders into the lower bed of the river, the spray ascending in columns that the rays of the sun tinged with all the hues of rainbow. Down and down the water rushed, with that ceaseless flow, that never-ending roar that drives some people to madness. We stayed only just long enough to grow bewildered, and then went back over the boulders and the stones, jumping from one to another, sometimes missing and splashing into the shallow water. Up through the plantation, and at the forge we found our lumbering vehicle.

It would have done well for the state carriage of some bear-hunting Norwegian baron, and might certainly have dated back to the deluge, whilst our son of Anak ought to have lived in the days when there were giants in the land.

So we went back to Throndhjem by the way we came, and presently found ourselves at the top of the hill, overlooking the town, the harbour, and the far-off sea. Once more we rattled through the streets, with a noise that almost rivalled the thunder of the waterfalls, and the coachman put us down outside the graveyard of the cathedral, in order that we might take one more long look at the old gray walls. A short walk down the broad street, through the market, now free of booths and stalls, buyers and sellers, and we found ourselves within the Britannia Hotel: a pleasant house, as becomes its name: a Parisian building, as befits the honour of an ancient capital. But the dinner they gave us was excellent only in its charges. We were but three of us—the third a German officer who had joined the ship at Aalesund, and accompanied us to the North Cape. Table d'hôte was over, and probably they were not equal to two great efforts in one day. No exception could be taken to the dining-room, which, panelled with polished pine, was altogether cool and comfortable.

Later in the evening we found ourselves once more at our rallying point—the now familiar decks of the "Michael Krohn." A goodly number of passengers had joined, most of them English, and all bound for the North Cape. Every berth on board was now occupied. The comparative repose, the sacred feeling of semi-retirement, we had enjoyed since Wednesday: which had been so pleasant, and had made the journey up to this time as quiet and orderly as if we had been in our own yacht: was at an end.

At midnight the last passenger was on board; the last box of cargo in the hold; the gangway was withdrawn; the whistle sounded for the third time, the anchor was weighed, and the paddles turned in the water. In the pale light of the midnight sky we started off once more on our journey.

HARRY MARTIN'S WIFE.

By G. B. Stuart.

"I'M afraid I've finished all my yarns," said the Lieutenant, thoughtfully drawing a match across the sole of his boot as he spoke, for we were smoking in the verandah of his mother's house at Southsea.

"Then tell us a true story," I suggested innocently.

The Lieutenant took no heed of my impudence, but pulled away at his pipe for full five minutes, in a manner which was supposed to assist the deepest reflection. Presently he began:

"Did I ever tell you how I got Harry Martin's wife for him?"

"No!" very incredulously from everybody; and from a chair in the background, "I should think Captain Martin was perfectly well able to get a wife for himself."

"There you are wrong," said the Lieutenant, so superbly that we all felt abashed, and humbly begged for the story.

"Believe it or not," asserted the somewhat mollified sailor, "but I can assure you it's as true as—as true as—Old Boots!"

This was the Lieutenant's usual formula before beginning one of his wonderful adventures, and it never failed to convince us—outwardly, at least; for who can withstand the undeniable existence of old boots? Having thus successfully closed all interrupting mouths, the Lieutenant graciously proceeded to recount the following episode in the life of Mrs. Henry Martin:—

"The *Valeria* was lying in the bay at St. Michael's, one of the dullest holes we ever put into in all my experience. Harry Martin was first lieutenant and I was second. Cripps was our captain—a good old sort enough, only he bothered us rather with reading out sermons on a Sunday, for he was a rigid Presbyterian, and was for ever inveighing against the errors of Rome. Rather a queer line for a thoroughgoing sailor to take up, wasn't it?

"Of course I could get frequent leave when I wanted a run on shore, but I didn't much care about taking it, for really there was nothing earthly to do in the place. I had a bad leg at the time, I remember, the remains of a frightful hack at football when we played the *Excellent* and beat them into fits, in this very place, the autumn before; so I wasn't up to much walking, and couldn't visit the places beyond the town which Martin was always talking about and sketching.

"By-and-by I began to notice that though he spoke of the general beauties of the island scenery, he appeared by his sketch-book to haunt one spot almost exclusively—the convent of Santa Agata, on

the top of a hill just behind the town. There were pictures of Santa Agata from all points of the compass. It was only to me, as an old chum, that he showed those pictures; and it wasn't long before I got out of him, by dint of a little chaff and a little judicious sympathy, that he was madly in love—or fancied he was, which is just as bad, every bit, while it lasts—with one of the sisters at Santa Agata. Why, you might just as well have been in love with the moon, for all the response you could get to your finest feelings, if you centred them on a Spanish nun. And so I told Martin, for I had been through the very identical same case myself at Vera Cruz, aboard the *Rapid*.

"'But, Jim,' said Martin quietly, looking quite shy and red in the face, for he was an awfully modest man and not half as well seasoned in these matters as I am: 'suppose there has been some response?'

"'You don't mean to say you've spoken or corresponded with her?'

"For answer Martin pulled a little packet of letters out of the breast-pocket of his jacket, tied with a piece of brand-new blue ribbon which the poor old duffer must have bought for the purpose.

"By degrees the whole story was told. He had seen Doña Dolores for the first time three weeks before, when he had strolled into the convent, at the visiting hour, to buy some of the nuns' famous lace for his people at home. That was how the acquaintance began: by looks of admiration on the one side and apparent appreciation of them on the other. After this Martin confessed he was always buying lace every visiting day, until the old gorgoness who assisted at the lace-selling began to grow suspicious and changed her companion for another sister more of her own calibre than pretty little Dolores. With the latter, however, our precious first lieutenant was by this time on pretty intimate speaking terms, and by means of a market-woman or a mule-girl, or some such emissary, managed to carry on a correspondence of frequent notes.

"I stared in astonishment when he told me all this, but really, there are no lengths that a shy man won't go to when once he's roused. Of all lovers, I've heard a girl say, there's nothing to come up to a shy man when he's in earnest.

"Well, so far the affair had gone and there it had stuck: for who was to say what could be the end of such a hopeless attachment? Hopeless, in so far that there was no chance of the girl ever being released from the convent, which, she now intimated to Harry Martin, she cordially hated. She was an orphan and had a lot of money, and though she had not taken the vows as a professed sister, you might just as soon expect a shark to leave hold of your leg when he had once grabbed it, as the Priests and the Sisters of Santa Agata to let poor Miss Dolores out of their clutches. There was nothing to advise Martin to do but to cut the whole affair; not see the girl again, but just keep close by the ship until we got our sailing orders, which most of us were hoping for every day. It's a thing sailors have to do, all

the world over, for one *can't* marry everybody, and it's astonishing to find how in a short time you don't want to.

"But you should have seen the fury Martin got into when I suggested this everyday course to him. He talked about honour and Christian feeling exactly as if I hadn't got either one or the other. Upon my word if he hadn't been my senior officer, and such an old chum, and such a big fellow, too, I should have knocked him down for what he said. At the same time I was sorry for him, for by this time I saw he was in earnest in the affair, so when he had quieted down a bit I said to him: 'What do you say to a rescue?'

"He jumped as if he'd been shot, and seized me by the hand. 'Do you really mean it, Jim? Will you lend a hand to help her out?'

"'Are you going to marry her?' I asked, severely: 'for it's all very good fun rescuing the young lady, only goodness knows what we're to do with her afterwards. You may be sure St. Michael's will be rather too hot to hold her or us if our share in the matter gets wind. You won't be able to marry nearer than Lisbon, and I don't exactly know how you're to get her there, either, unless the boss gives her a passage, which perhaps is a little too much to expect. It might interfere with the efficiency of his first officer.'

"Poor Martin stood speechless, for though he had jumped at my suggestion, and evidently had considered the possibility of rescuing Dolores from her prison, his plans had here evidently stopped short. He had not reflected that the English Consul would never marry them in the teeth of the Spanish authorities, who would probably tear us to pieces for meddling with one of their ewe-lambs.

"Well, Martin may be a very smart officer—indeed, there is no doubt about that—and he may have been a red-hot lover, but he certainly was not much of a strategist. So while I was maturing the plan, in which I was now almost as much interested as he, I set him to write to the lady and formally offer her marriage, to be arranged for and carried out as soon as ever she could be conveyed safely to Lisbon: always provided that she herself could elude the vigilance of the sisters, and join her lover outside the convent walls on an appointed evening. Back came her answer through the medium of old Carmen of the market, a friendly old hag who carried vegetables up to the convent every day. The escape would be difficult, but not impossible. Carmen was to leave certain doors and windows of the back premises unlocked, and Dolores was to slip out at the time appointed. But, oh! were the English señors certain that she would not be caught afterwards, for she knew that if she were the penalty would be death—or next door to it.

"Meanwhile, I had been laying out the whole plot, and very prettily I had dovetailed one thing in with another. There was an old Irishwoman, married to a Portuguese Jew fruit merchant, who

lived in the Jews' quarter of the town. I had heard her tongue going one day like a mill clapper, as I passed by, and there was no mistaking her accent. I often used to stop and have a chat with her about the beauties of Queenstown, which she upheld against all comers. What her religion was I never discovered, for she held the priests in as great detestation as Captain Cripps himself; whilst she spoke with high disdain of her Jew husband and his religious exercises, though she allowed he had more religion than a "Pratestant." But she was a good old creature in the main, and her house, though rather an unsavoury retreat, was the only safe asylum I could think of where Dolores might be concealed until the Lisbon steamer could carry her off from St. Michael's.

"Perhaps you'll ask why didn't we postpone the adventure altogether till the very day of the Lisbon steamer's sailing, but this we did not dare do, for the *Valeria* was under orders to sail at a moment's notice, and at any minute the orders might come and the *Valeria* weigh anchor, leaving the poor little nun unrescued on the top of the hill. In my heart of hearts I shouldn't have thought this any great misfortune, for I was well aware that what we were undertaking was a terrible risk, and like enough to land us in no end of difficulties; but once entered on the undertaking I was not going to draw back, and the heartfelt gratitude of Martin for my co-operation, combined with the enthusiasm of old Mother Zachary when I let her by degrees into the secret, kept up my courage for the adventure. I couldn't divest Madame Zachary's mind of the idea that I was really the principal in the affair, and I had to undergo a considerable amount of chaff and much Hibernian humour before I managed finally to arrange that Martin and I were to bring the young lady on a mule to her house on the night appointed, where she was to hide the runaway, and provide a disguise for her in which she could be hustled on board the Lisbon steamer, accompanied by her hostess as duenna.

"Once safe in Lisbon, the girl could be placed with friends of Martin's (we had been hanging off and on thereabouts for six months or so, and knew all the English residents in the Portuguese capital) until the marriage could take place, and Mrs. Martin be sent home to England. We did not anticipate any further trouble would be taken about her if she once got clear of St. Michael's, and Martin, unlike some other poor fellows that I could mention, could afford to marry whom he pleased.

"Everything was well in train. The night arrived, and Miss Dolores was appointed to make her exit from the Convent at half-past eight precisely. Martin and I were to be in hiding outside, with mules to carry us down the hill by a circuitous route to the Jews' quarter —a deserted part of the town, where Mother Zachary and her fruit merchant lived.

"But at the last moment came a terrible hitch! When Martin and

I applied for leave on shore for the evening, old Cripps told us that he intended dining and sleeping on shore himself, at the Consul's, and he could not give leave to both his senior officers to absent themselves the same evening. We could decide between ourselves which was to remain, but one must certainly do so.

"We dared not show the Captain how dreadfully we took his sentence to heart, but withdrew with our usual bows, looking unutterable things at each other.

"'You must go,' whispered Martin; 'I'm no good at all; I should lose my head and spoil it all. You *must* go, Jim, old fellow, if you're still game for it, though goodness knows how I shall get through the time till I know you are safe!'

"There was nothing for it but for me to go as Martin said, for he was so excited he would have 'boshed' the whole thing. So, by-and-by, having given the Captain, in his full-dress togs, the precedence by about half an hour, I was rowed ashore, just about sunset, and told my men to be ready to take me off again to the *Valeria* at ten that evening. I went round to the Plaza and hired a mule, avowedly for a ride into the country: and a miserable brute I got, for all the animals were out except this one, at the consular dinner party. I dawdled about the town for a while: then, after the Angelus had finished singing and the dusk began to creep down, I turned my beast's head up a narrow side street, which led to the very walls of Santa Agata.

"There was scarcely anyone about, for the natives have an idea that the hour after sunset is unwholesome in the outer air; so I made my way up the street unnoticed by anyone, except that at a turn of the road I saw the sharp eyes of Carmen, the market woman, glancing at me, first suspiciously, then knowingly, as she descended the hill with her empty baskets piled on her back. Very soon I was safely landed at the appointed spot, a thick clump of coarse elder bushes which grew close under a small stone window belonging to some outer buildings of the convent kitchen department. The window was a good bit above my head, and so deeply imbedded in the thickness of the wall that it was only by standing well out from the building that I could see into the aperture, which was secured on the inside by a screen of wire trellis-work, such as is often used over larder windows.

"This was the opening which Carmen was to have loosened, and sure enough, after a short spell of waiting, I could plainly hear a rustling and rummaging inside. Then a hand pulled back the screen, and a minute after, something soft and black, of no particular outline whatever, filled up the window frame, and came creeping outwards towards the edge of the wall. 'Are you ready?' asked a soft voice, and almost before I could reply, something jumped bang into my outstretched arms. I declare to you she was not much bigger than a good sized kitten. Such a little bit of a

thing as Martin's Dolores I never saw in my life. For my part, I like them tall, and broad too," observed the Lieutenant, in the confidential rather than the narrative strain; "but this Dolores was a wonderful beauty though there was so little of her.

"She was a bit frightened and shy at first, especially when she discovered, by catching hold of my whiskers, that I was not Martin, who shaved clean in those days. But very soon I had got her on the mule and explained matters in my best Spanish, and we were creeping stealthily down the hill the best of friends, and Dolores, who was not more than seventeen, apparently in childish high spirits at the success of our enterprise.

"But though she had done her part so easily, I didn't feel at all sure that the adventure was ended. There were lights moving to and fro at the upper windows of the convent, and at any moment her presence might be missed, whilst the open window, with its piled stools and boxes on the inside, would declare which road she had taken.

"Just at this juncture, the confounded mule, that up to this had behaved himself pretty decently, began to tack about in a manner simply fiendish. He was all over the road at once, and you never knew whether his head or his heels would be uppermost. I suppose it was the girl's clothes that excited him, unless the beast was in league with the priests, and was doing his little best to stop the affair—those Spanish mules are artful enough for anything. Added to this, Miss Dolores got frightened, and I could hardly keep her from screaming out; and my leg, which had not done so much work for a long while, began to ache and throb so that I could scarcely keep up with the mule's vagaries.

"We hadn't made more than a quarter of our journey, when I saw plainly enough, by the sudden appearance of lights and torches in front of the convent above us, that the little sister's escape was discovered, and that the holy ladies were in hot pursuit. I wasn't so frightened of the ladies themselves, for I flatter myself I have rather a knack of managing *them*, but I had an unpleasant idea that they might have called in the assistance of hardy peasants armed with pitchforks, the thought of whom I did not relish so much.

"In vain I dug my dirk into the hindquarters of the mule: we could not keep the pace: and soon cries and noise behind us in the darkness, told us that our pursuers were close upon us. At the top of the steep vineyard path I seized the end of the nun's black cloak, and wrapping it round her head, to prevent her cries being heard—for she was by this time quite beside herself with fear—I jumped off the mule and dashed with her into the vineyard which edged the road on either side with stumpy thick bushes.

"The mule, released from restraint, and maddened by a last prod from my dirk, galloped with astonishing clatter down the narrow road, followed almost instantaneously by a shouting mob of people, all in pursuit of what they believed to be the heretic and his captive.

could not help chuckling as they tore by, the old jackass leading the way at a speed to which I had been vainly urging him all the evening.

"But there was no time to be lost, for the road which the pursuers had taken was the one that led straight to the entrance of the Jews' quarter, and it was clearly impossible to try and make that port. I had not a moment to reflect, or probably I should not have dared to do what I did. Raising and disentangling Dolores from her heavy cloak, I half dragged, half carried her across the vineyards, down to the seaboard, and thence, by the quickest and quietest road, to the steps where I had told the men to meet me with the boat. It was lying in waiting, for the big clock of the cathedral had just gone ten, and without ceremony I tumbled my living bundle into it, and jumping in after her, gave the word to be off.

"Not a minute too soon—for the quay was all at once alight and alive with people and lanterns. The news of the escaped nun had just reached the town, and I saw my old enemy the mule being dragged into the Plaza and surrounded by a crowd of gaping Spaniards, who seemed to expect he would open his mouth and tell them what had become of the runaway. Our boat did not altogether escape notice, for someone ran along the quay with a lantern, and cast a long bright flash across our course; but we had pulled through it before anyone could have recognised that the dark mass in the stern of the boat was the lost lady.

"My men pulled on in steady, stony British silence, just as if their officers were in the habit of making a dash for it every two or three evenings a week, with some young lady or other. But I was beginning to feel horribly uncomfortable as to the reception Captain Cripps would give me and our fair visitor, and I recollected with relief, that for this night at all events, he was safely disposed of. I thought it best to give the men my version of the story: so, before we reached the *Valeria*, I told them, in the most businesslike manner possible, that the young lady was detained against her will in a convent, and had appealed for protection to the British man-o'-war. 'Where she'll find it, lads, of course!' I ended, with a confidence which I'm bound to say I was very far from feeling.

"Wasn't I glad just to find myself safe aboard the *Valeria* again, handing over Dolores, who by this time was quite frightened and cowed into silence, to my superior officer, as in duty bound, and retiring a bit aft myself until their first greetings should be over. Then I came forward and explained briefly how it was that the plan of boarding Mother Zachary in the Jews' quarter had fallen through, and exonerated myself for taking the dangerous step of bringing the girl to the *Valeria*, which would in all probability be searched the first thing next morning by the local officials with a warrant from the English Consul.

"Naturally the presence of the lady could not be concealed from

the other officers and the ship's company, most of whom were already agog to know who was this mysterious female who had suddenly appeared on the quarter-deck. Martin, calling the men together, gave them much such an explanation of the affair as I had made in the boat, keeping his own and my special part in the business cleverly out of sight, and leaving each of his auditors with a pleasing impression that it was in consequence of his own remarkable honour and gallantry that the poor distressed Spanish girl had flown for protection to the men of the *Valeria.*

"Martin then conducted Doña Dolores to his own cabin, where she was entreated to make herself as much at home as possible, for though an untoward accident had marred the completion of our plans for her safety, there was not a man on board the ship that night who would not prevent her return to the convent if necessary with his life. Martin was to turn in along with me, but though I was almost dead beat, it was a long time before he would let me get to sleep for discussing a hundred different ways of concealing the young lady during the search which we knew was inevitable next day, and for appeasing the wrath of the Captain, a rigid disciplinarian and martinet, which was only one degree less terrible. I fell asleep in the middle of the discussion, and Martin, I believe, went up on deck to star gaze, or else stationed himself on guard outside his own cabin-door, within which he had cautioned the girl to remain until something was decided for her safety.

"I was roused out of what seemed only like half an hour's sleep by the knock and entrance of Mat, one of the mess waiters: a clever, handy chap, whom I had several times thought of taking into our confidence when the rescue scheme was at first undeveloped. Having coughed and hemmed once or twice, and fidgetted about with my things, which lay in a heap on the floor, as I had kicked them off at night, Mat looked at me very knowingly and said, pulling his forelock:

"'If you please, sir, don't you nor the first officer be in any taking about the young lady. With your permission me and some of the other chaps have a plan which'll beat the Papishes hollow. Just you give us leave, sir, and the thing's done, and the young lady as safe as a bird, sir.'

"'But what's your plan?' said I, for I was beginning to feel I'd done enough in the concern, and would willingly shove off the rest of the responsibility upon Martin, or Mat, or anyone who liked to take it.

"'Music, sir,' said Mat, coming confidentially nearer, and chuckling so that I could hardly make out what he said. 'We'll receive the gentlemen, or deputation, or what not, with all the ropes manned, and the colours flying, and the band playing on deck, just as if it was the Admiral or the Dook himself.'

"'Well, and what then?' I asked rather crossly: for I couldn't

quite see the point of his wonderful reception, nor how it was to relieve us of anxiety on the score of Dolores' and our own safety.

"'Why, the big drum, sir!' said Mat, triumphantly, as if now he had mentioned something so crushingly conclusive that all further explanation was unnecessary. 'I plays it, as you know, and I'll play it to-morrow, but not so hard as to hurt the young lady inside, sir!'

"And in the big drum Dolores was actually concealed next morning when old Captain Cripps, as innocent as a lamb of what had occurred during his absence, conducted a strong party of priests and police officials over and into every nook and corner of the *Valeria* in search of the missing nun. We were all in fits of laughter while the old fellow did the honours of his vessel, and the Spaniards' faces grew longer as their search proved fruitless and unavailing. They left not a cranny unnoticed, while the band played gaily on deck, and the big drum appeared to do quite as much duty as usual, though the broad grins of the faces of some of the bandsmen, and the preternatural solemnity of Mat's countenance might have led anyone to suspect that something was up.

"Martin was of course introduced to the visitors as first officer of the ship, and one old priest asked him suspiciously if this were the usual state of things on board an English vessel, band playing and flags flying as if for a holiday?

"'Oh, no,' Martin answered coolly; 'we saw that the Captain was bringing off a boatload of distinguished visitors the first thing this morning, and I instantly set about having the ship dressed and the music playing to do honour to their arrival!'

"The old chap couldn't but be pleased at this compliment, and at last they all cleared out, making a thousand apologies for having for an instant suspected any of our honourable number of complicity in the nun's escape. We heard them as they left deciding to make for the opposite side of the island, where dwelt a wild tribe of fisher people who might have given the girl shelter. How we laughed as they were rowed ashore! Although there was still old Cripps to tell, which to my mind was the worst part of it all, our spirits began to rise with the success of our last move.

"The bandsmen cleared up their instruments and retired, and Dolores was huddled back into Martin's cabin, where breakfast was spread, and the key turned on her. I believe the Captain was the only man on board his own ship who did not see the whole transaction: but he was tremendously taken up with our immediate sea-going orders, which had just arrived, and the anchors were to be weighed and the *Valeria* off to Lisbon without an hour's delay.

"We all had to look alive that morning, and I declare it wasn't till we sat down to dinner in the afternoon, by which time we were almost out of sight of St. Michael's, that I had time to think of the little prisoner in Martin's cabin; though to judge from his moony

look Martin had never thought of anything else. Naturally the conversation at the Captain's table, at which the senior officers likewise dined, turned upon the examination of the morning, and in answer to a mute appeal from Martin opposite, who was unable to say a word, I boldly asked old Cripps, pointblank, what he would have done if the poor little girl *had* run for refuge to the *Valeria* from the tyranny of the priests.

"'Done, sir!' thundered the old gentleman, spluttering over his grog in his excitement, 'I'd have done what every other Christian and officer and gentleman would have done; given the poor little creature shelter and protection from the rascals that were hunting her, and a chance of becoming a sensible British Protestant! Why, by jove, when those smooth-faced blackguards went sneaking over my ship this morning and I had to palaver and speak civilly to them, I just wished the girl *had* been aboard, that I might have had a hand in saving her. I'll warrant you we'd have managed to keep her out of sight!'

"Martin gave a gasp, like a whale coming up to blow, and jumping up from table unceremoniously rushed out. In a moment he was back again holding the little nun by the hand.

"Of course old Cripps couldn't say anything, after the manner in which he had committed himself beforehand. And though he gave us a tremendous jawing about the serious risk, &c., we had run, I believe he enjoyed the lark as much as anyone: especially as his part in it didn't begin until all the danger was over. I'm not sure that he would have liked driving that jackass down the vineyards: but he was wonderfully polite to Doña Dolores and made her as comfortable and welcome as possible, lent her some sermons to read, which she took very demurely, and evidently felt he had scored one to himself off the Pope by that move. We got into Lisbon the next day and the girl was handed over to the English chaplain's wife, who rigged her out for her wedding with Martin, which took place a few days afterwards.

"After that she was sent home to Martin's mother at Southampton, and I believe she went to school for a bit; anyway, Martin got his promotion shortly and left the service to settle down in Hampshire with Madam. And a rare little handful he's found her, I believe, for she can't help flirting any more than she can help breathing, though I really think she likes old Harry Martin best in the main.

"Now you may argue," concluded the Lieutenant, putting his pipe back permanently into his mouth and speaking through one corner of it, to signify that his tale was nearly finished: "you may argue that marriages are made in Heaven, and I devoutly hope Providence is settling a good match for me up aloft, but you'll allow, after listening to this yarn, that I had a pretty good lot to do with getting Harry Martin his wife!"

THE ROMANCE OF A SONATA.

A Tone-Picture.

(Op. 81, BEETHOVEN : "*Les Adieux, L'Absence, Le Retour.*")

LES ADIEUX—"Lebewohl!" so it sounded—calm and tender, not hurried, scarcely even passionate, for it was not unprepared; though if calm, it was with the calmness of despair. And yet there was a bright gleam of hope in our farewell—a gladdening thought of probable return; but it was only a distant glimmer, and for the present all we knew for certain was that we must part from each other, and he from the home that he had loved so well.

We had often talked it over; we had even pictured the moment to ourselves, as we lingered in the silent summer evenings, together watching the setting sun as he sank behind those hills whose beautiful heights seemed to keep watch around our home. And once, as we saw the valley suddenly light up, and one last bright ray shoot along the distant range, and then, as the glory faded, the valley relapsing into a shadowy, half-solemn gloom, I had turned, and throwing my arm round my brother's neck, I exclaimed, "Just so will life look to me, brother, when you are gone away!"

But he tenderly made answer: "Then what will it be for me, Schwesterlein, for whom not only the brightness will have vanished, but not even the quiet valley will remain!" And then I had felt ashamed, for I knew how fondly he had clung to the dear old home, and how every nook and corner of that sheltered valley was graven on his secret heart, while I, in my grief at parting from *him*, had scarcely given *it* a thought!

And yet I, too, had loved it well! I, too, had cherished it for itself, as well as for its associations with those dear ones who had lived with us there, and who now sleep in peace, resting in its quiet "Gottes-acker." But what would it henceforth be to me without my brother—my one companion from my cradle? What a rush of precious memories accompanied this thought! What pictures of the many beauteous, spirit-haunting scenes which together we had witnessed from these sunny slopes, or down in yonder vale; of banks where the soft spring breezes had guided us in our search for violets; of shingly brooks into which we had waded for dragon-flies and yellow lilies; of fields, golden with cowslips, or thickly covered with the fragrant new-mown hay!

And all this for him had possessed such a wondrous charm; and for me—yes, yes—for me also; and now ——

But he, looking far out into the distance, overlooking all the valley, and keeping his earnest gaze fixed on the light beyond, murmured only this one word, "Lebewohl!"

And thus it was that we each pictured it—silently, each in our own heart. Did we picture it very differently? I think not; at any rate, to each of us it meant the same.

But yet it was a very different thing when we came to say it in reality. How much of life seems to have been gathered up into that one short hour! How much it is possible to live through in a few brief moments!

"Lebewohl!" was at first all we would either of us say, and we smiled as we said it through our tears. And then how long, how fully we once more talked together, strengthening each other in our cherished though still uncertain hopes, until at last we grew more really calm, and then, with one long, long embrace, whispered for the last time our wistful "Lebewohl!"

But to me it seemed, as I watched my brother's retreating figure disappearing fast into the grey horizon, as though a sound came to me wafted from those dear blue hills—perhaps it was but an echo of my own thoughts, but it sounded strangely like those sweetest of all words, "Auf wiedersehen!"

L'Absence.—Since then life has gone on very quietly, but the weeks and months have seemed so long!

My days went on wearily enough at first, for I longed always for the absent brother, and there were moments when the longing grew into such an utter yearning, that I would stretch out my hands to the darkness, exclaiming bitterly, "If this must be my life, oh, then let me die!" For I had not then discovered that even in solitude there can be rest.

But a letter from my brother did more than anything else to cheer me. He had seen much, and done much, it said, since we parted, but at first nothing seemed to give him any real pleasure, for at the bottom of all lay the remembrance of home and of the "Schwesterlein" (so he always called me), and yet he could not say he felt himself alone.

"I am not lonely," he wrote, "for have I not the memories of my dear ones with me? and does not the Schwesterlein share everything with me still? I am not happy, for that the longing wish for home prevents—neither am I wholly sorrowful—so my refuge is in hope; let the days go by cheerily or sadly as they will, at last must come the hour when I shall return again, and when once more the Schwesterlein shall be folded in her brother's arms! Heimweh, Sehnsucht, Hoffnung—there you have my present mood—and yet I will not say I am not sometimes restless!"

Ah, yes! brother mine! "sometimes restless!" and I too; only I think "restless" is far too weak a word!

Still, that dear letter comforted me much, and after it, by degrees, I sank, as usual, into something of my brother's mood.

But long-continued absence is hard to bear, and I am often sick

at heart! Five long years have passed since that sad "Lebewohl!" Will he then never come?

Le Retour.—Hurrah! to think that we should actually be here again, together once more in the dear old home!

Oh, how gladly I went out to meet him! how my heart leaped at the thought of his entrance!

For days previously I had made journeys to our favourite glens, once going many miles, to bring from a distant copse certain creepers which I knew only flowered there, despoiling banks and hedges of their treasures to deck the porch and house for this dear brother. The sky had never seemed so blue, the sun had never shone so brightly as when all nature made music in my heart that day!

And how we laughed and sang together in our glee—a bystander would have surely thought us mad!

And yet at heart we were each of us grave enough; for somehow smiles and tears are very near akin! Maybe the five long years had taught us that—or maybe we had discovered music's secret; at any rate, I know, as we each spoke of what the other had passed through, memory repeated sadly a long-past "Lebewohl!"

"Ah, Schwesterlein," said my brother, "it is the same, and yet not the same! We were as near them far away in the distance as we are here beside their graves!"

And there we stayed and talked, till the evening shadows began to play around us. And when at last we retraced our steps and entered again our dear old home, we both felt that the peace of that silent "Gottes-acker" had settled in our hearts, and thenceforth to us both joy and sorrow would be ever joined with hope.

"What!" I think I hear some young voice exclaim, "did the Sonata really mean all that? I thought a Sonata was something dry and difficult, that only some quite grown-up person could understand?"

My dear young friend, who gave you such a notion? Even if I were as young as you, I think I would try to understand our friend the Sonata better. But "all that"—is it then so very much? You will not think so by-and-by, when you come to know its author, for even where we say much, Beethoven means always more.

But if then you still think it "dry," shut up the piano, and try to do your very best in some other study that you love, for you know music is, after all, not the only art, and if you will still reverence her, and will not treat her carelessly, that love of her which you have tried to gain will lead you perchance to love some one at least of her sister arts.

And above all, remember what Beethoven himself has said: "We must be something if we would appear something;" and for this we must work—often very long and patiently.

F. S. B.

"NOT A WORD, MIND, TO DINAH ANN!"

"NOT a word, mind, to Dinah Ann!"

Dinah Ann herself, the speaker's wife, having strolled down the garden in the sweet stillness of the summer night, heard these suggestive words as the gig pulled up at the gate, and her husband descended from it. She was a pleasing little woman of seven or eight and thirty, with dark brown eyes, a bright, fresh face, and a natural propensity to take her own way, in the house and out of it. Drawing back from the gate behind the well-kept hawthorn hedge, she waited for what was to come next.

"Not a word, for your life, mind, to Dinah Ann!"

"No fear!" replied a voice, which she recognised as that of her brother, Harry Leete; "*I* know what women are. She'd be for—for revolutionising the house, and herself too, once let her get an inkling of this. No fear, James! Take care, on your side, that you don't lose that—or let Dinah Ann find it."

"I'll take care. When are you coming to smoke a quiet pipe with me? I shall want your advice as to ——"

"One of these evenings," interrupted the lawyer, as he drove on up the lane. "Good-night!"

James Harbury, substantial farmer and agriculturist, came through the gate, and turned to fasten it. Had he turned the other way, to the left instead of to the right, he would have seen his wife, standing against the hedge as close as she could stand, almost *into* it. He did not see her, and went straight up the path to the house. When his footsteps had died away, Mrs. Harbury wound her light summer gown over her black silk apron, caught hold of her lilac cap-strings, lest the cap should fly off, and ran swiftly up the narrow side-walk, got round to the back, went through the house, let drop her gown, and entered the sitting-room, all calmly, nearly as soon as her husband.

"Got back!" she exclaimed, with quite a look of surprise.

"Just come," replied the farmer; "Harry drove me in his gig."

"What brings Harry up here in his gig at this time? and why did you not come back with Hall?" enquired Mrs. Harbury, who liked to be at the beginning and the end of everything.

"Harry had to come," said the farmer, who seemed to be walking about rather restlessly—and who never thought of such a thing as refusing to satisfy his wife's questions. "He got a message from the Down Farm, to go over there without loss of time. I thought I might as well come with him, Dinah Ann. As to Hall, I left him stuck in the tap-room of the 'Tawny Lion;' he didn't order his gig to be ready before ten o'clock."

"Just like Peter Hall! You'd have taken the reins yourself, James, I reckon, had you come back with him."

"Oh, he'll not get as bad as all that! But, I say, Dinah Ann, it's a sad thing about Partridge at the Down Farm. A day or two ago he went out with his haymakers—and you know what a man he is to work, when he does set about it—got into a heat, and drank a lot of cold cider. It struck to him, for death, they say; and Harry is gone to make his will."

"What a dreadful thing!" exclaimed Dinah Ann, who had a feeling heart, with all her curiosity.

"Ay, 'tis. I think I'd like a snack of cold beef, Dinah Ann, though it is late. I got talking to your brother in his office, and missed my tea; so I've had nothing since one o'clock dinner. While Phœbe puts it, I'll just go and take a look at White Bess."

"White Bess is all right," said Mrs. Harbury. "So much better that Evan thinks you might have ridden her in to-day. No need to go and see her now."

"Better, is she? I should like to give her a look."

He took up his hat, which still lay on the table, and went out. Mrs. Harbury's eyes followed him; they were full of speculation, and her mind also.

"I don't believe he is gone to look at the mare," soliloquized she. "He'd not disturb her, now he hears she is all right. And how absent and fidgetty he seemed! There is some mystery agate—and I should like to know what it is. I wonder whether—I should not think—no, I should *not* think he can have stolen out to meet somebody," she concluded, her tone dubious, in spite of the stress laid on the "not."

Stepping lightly into the kitchen, and giving her orders to Phœbe about the supper-tray, she caught up an old waterproof cloak that hung in the back passage, threw it on, to hide her light dress, and crept out after her husband. It was a very light and beautiful night; in fact, it could not be said to be yet as dark as it would be—and that is never dark in the fine nights of summer.

"For him to lose his tea," ran her thoughts, "of all things! It most be some uncommonly urgent business to induce James to forego a meal of any kind. I do wonder what secret they have got between them. 'Not a word, for your life, mind, to Dinah Ann,' cries he. 'No fear,' answers Harry, '*I* know what women are—and she'd be for revolutionising the house, and herself too.' Yes, *that* I should; but it's them I should revolutionise, not myself," she emphatically pronounced. "It may be that old love-affair cropped up again!—that woman who threatened to bring an action for breach of promise when James married me. Perhaps she has been writing letters to him? 'Mind you don't let Dinah Ann find it,' says Harry. Or perhaps—perhaps James has been foolish enough to let her meet him! Harry, not a married man himself, and a lawyer,

would lend himself to any earthly thing without scruple. All lawyers do."

This rural district, remote from the haunts of wily men of the world, was given over entirely to farmers and farming interests: simple-minded and simple-mannered people, who lived out their uneventful lives in the routine of daily duties. The small market-town of Northam, four miles distant, was sleepy and primitive, never awakening from its slumbers save on the weekly market-day. It had its parson; its doctor; and its lawyer—Harry Leete; all three of them being nearly as simple as the farmers. Not simple in point of intellect, it must be understood; but as to life and manners.

This, Thursday, was market-day. James Harbury had gone to it, in the gig of a brother farmer, Peter Hall, his own mare, which he either rode or drove generally, being sick. He was a tall, slender man of nine-and-thirty years, very fair, with exceedingly handsome features and mild blue eyes, looking as unlike the popular notion of a farmer as a man could look, and presenting a marked contrast to his agricultural neighbours. So far as appearance went, none of them, poor or rich, could vie with James Harbury, and his temper and his bearing were alike gentle.

He had one fault—though perhaps all people would not call it a fault—love of money. That he was one of the "warmest" farmers in the district, was universally believed, and the most saving of men. *Too* saving, his wife would tell him—and where was the use of it, she would ask, considering she had neither chick nor child?—and every now and then she would make the money fly, for she was a dear lover of smart attire, and of having pretty things about her. James would wince, and bid her to be careful; but he never went the length of telling her she had spent too much. He was fond of her, and she of him.

"Neither chick nor child." In that fact had lain a sharp sting. They had been married eight years now, and the sting was wearing itself away. Time softens all things. He had never given her cause for an unhappy thought—until to-night. He had never had any secrets from her, except that he never could be brought to tell her what the exact sum was that he was enabled to put by at the end of each year. Dinah Ann Harbury did not care for that: she knew that, however much it might be, it was all for her.

But she did care for this: this mysterious secret which had come to her hearing to-night. She knew how good-looking James was, how universally he was liked by man and by woman, and what a kind heart he had—she put it, "soft"—and something like jealousy began to torment her spirit.

When James came in again, the supper-tray was at one end of the table, and Dinah Ann, an unusual light in her eyes, sat at the other end, near the lamp, having taken up her knitting. The farmer's

general manner was easy and placid, though he had certainly seemed restless after leaving the gig, but now he was calm again.

"Well," she said, as he cut himself a slice of the cold boiled beef, "and how did you find White Bess?"

"Oh, she seems comfortable," he replied, looking round for the mustard-pot.

"You deceitful villain! You know you did not go near the stable," thought his wife. "You are sure you think so?" she added, aloud.

"Ay. White Bess will be all herself again to-morrow, Dinah Ann."

"It's more than I shall be," thought Dinah Ann, "unless I can come to the bottom of this."

He ate his supper nearly in silence, like a man who is mentally preoccupied. And he enjoyed it, too, for he was very hungry.

"James, do you ever hear anything now of that Emma Land?"

James Harbury laid down his knife and fork in surprise at the question, and looked across at his wife, whose face was bent over her knitting.

"Do I ever hear anything of Emma Land!" he repeated. "What can make you ask that, Dinah Ann?"

"What can make me ask it? I don't know. The query happened to come into my mind. Why should I not ask it?"

"There's no sense in it—that I see."

"But *do* you?"

"Do I what?"

"Ever hear of her?"

"Why, you know she went out to—where was it?—the West Indies, I think—to her friends there—ever so long ago. Nigh upon eight years it must be. You know she did, Dinah Ann."

"But she may write from the West Indies. Perhaps she does. Does she write to you?"

He shook his head to imply a negative, and occupied himself with his supper again. Emma Land had once upon a time been a somewhat sore subject between them, for Dinah Ann *was* jealous in the old days.

"Do you ever see her, James?"

"See who?"

"*You* know. Emma Land."

"I can't think what has put all this into your head to-night, Dinah Ann. How is it?"

"But do you?"

"Do I what?"

"See her."

"Why, how *could* I see her?" returned he, in a sort of helpless tone, that his wife fully thought was put on. "She is in the West Indies, and I am here."

"She may not be in the West Indies now."

"I don't know where she is. She's there for all I know—and I'm sure it does not matter."

"'Ask no questions, and you'll hear no stories,'" thought his wife, quoting the line familiar to her in her school-girl days.

"I should not at all wonder, James, but Emma Land *has* come back again."

"May be. Two or three years ago we heard she had married out there ——"

"Who heard it? Who said it?"

"I know I heard it; I remember it quite well. But as to who said it, I forget that—your brother, I think. That she had married a cousin."

"Oh! Not that *that's* unlikely, for she was ready to marry anybody. She'd have married you, you know. She laid traps for you."

"That's about true, I believe; but I did not fall into them, Dinah Ann." And, laughing good-naturedly, James Harbury turned from the supper-tray to reach his pipe. Dinah Ann rang the bell, resumed her knitting, and fell into an unpleasant reverie.

A few days passed away, things going on smoothly at the farm. Dinah Ann had recovered her temper—at least, she displayed no signs of its being ruffled. James Harbury was as usual, save that at times he seemed a little absent and thoughtful. One afternoon he went up-stairs to change his every-day coat for a better one.

"Where are you going?" cried Mrs. Harbury quickly, as he came down again.

"Only into Northam. I shall be home early."

"Into Northam! It's not market-day."

"No; but I've got a little business there—about those sheep, you know, Dinah Ann. I shall get them at my own price, after all."

"Of course you will. I told you so all along. But I do wonder you could not wait until to-morrow."

"Oh—market-day's always a bustling day; one forgets half one's business, or has not time to do it. Anyway, I thought I'd go in this afternoon."

"I *should* like to go with you, James!"

Mr. Harbury received the impulsive wish with a blank look, and had no ready answer at hand.

"I want to buy a new silk gown, and to order a best cap, and ever so many other things. Yes; I will go with you, James. I won't be five minutes getting ready."

"But—Dinah Ann—not to-day. I can't take you this afternoon. You shall go to-morrow, instead."

"*Why* can't you take me?"

"Business," he shortly replied. And, his gig being just then brought round, White Bess in the shafts, he got into it without more ado and drove away, calling out good-bye to his wife.

"I'll be even with you, Mr. James," nodded she.

The sun was setting when he drove in again and round to the stable yard. Leaving his horse and gig with Evan, he was crossing to the house when his attention was caught by a huge volume of black smoke puffing out of the chimney of a narrow building that was formerly made to serve as brewhouse and wash-house, until the larger one was built. As it was out of use now, was not in fact used for any purpose whatever, or entered by anybody from month's end to month's end, Mr. Harbury naturally thought of fire. He rushed to it like a madman.

In the fire-place under the furnace a fire blazed away, upon which more coal had recently been thrown. Whiter than death, James Harbury made one frantic move towards it, while a yell of what really seemed like terror broke from him. Another yell succeeded, and still another; then he collapsed utterly and fell upon a low wooden stool in wild despair.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Dinah Ann, who had been stooping over some blankets in the far corner. "What in the world is the matter? Is it spasms, James? Let me run for the camphor."

"Camphor indeed!" exclaimed the unhappy man. "Bring poison, rather. Poison. You've ruined me."

"He's off his head," was her pitiable suggestion. "Let me rub you, James. Where is the pain? In the chest?"

He flung his arms around in all directions, so that she could not get to his chest, or to any other part of him. "Who lighted this fire," he gasped.

"Phœbe lighted it. I ordered her. The flue in the proper wash-house has taken to smoking frightfully. The blankets are to be washed to-morrow and will be put in soak to-night. But what is the fire to you, James, that you should be put out about it?"

"It's everything to me," he faintly answered. "Five hundred pounds has been burnt up in it."

Rising from the stool—and Dinah Ann wondered the creaky old thing had not come down with his weight—he hastened indoors, sat down by the table and buried his head upon it. She found him so, his face hidden in his hands.

"Now, James, you just tell me what all this means—if you are not quite out of your senses. Come! I intend to know."

"Yes, you may know it now," he said, lifting his face and its despair. "I had placed in the fire-place of that old furnace, in my old green pocket-book, five hundred pounds in bank-notes. And—and they are burnt! They are burnt, Dinah Ann!"

Dinah Ann paused. "Where did the notes come from?"

"From your brother—to me. A long while ago, years before I knew you, I lent a friend over four hundred pounds. He ran away with it to Australia, and I lost my money, and set him down as a rogue. But he is not so dishonest as I thought him; he has made

his fortune out there and is back again, in London now, and last week he transmitted the debt and interest to your brother for me, five hundred pounds. I brought the notes home the night Harry drove me here."

"And now just tell me, James, how you could think of putting bank-notes into such a place as a furnace fire-hole?"

"I did it for safety. Nobody ever went in there, and the furnace was never used."

"Safety! Was there not your bureau, upstairs in the bed-room?"

"*That's* never locked."

"Why, it's always locked."

"Anyway, the key is never taken out of it."

"Ah, I see what it is—you were afraid I should see the money and want to spend it."

"And so you would, Dinah Ann—a sum like that coming unexpectedly," he meekly rejoined. "Bonnets and frills, and fresh chairs and tables—you'd not have known where to stop."

"Well, I must say, James, you have been rightly served for your want of confidence. No husband ever has a concealment from his wife, if she's a good wife, but he is sure to be paid out. It *is* a loss, though, five hundred pounds!"

He groaned. "My business in Northam this afternoon was to consult with your brother about a good investment for it."

"What's this?" asked she, placing before him the identical green case—with the bank-notes inside it. James gasped.

"Dinah Ann! My dear Dinah Ann!"

"Ah, it's my dear Dinah Ann now—and where would you be without me? I have given you a good fright, however. Don't you conceal a thing from me again, James."

"I don't think I will," he said. "How has it all come about?"

"Why, I have just been playing a little as well as you. I was at the gate last Thursday night, and heard what you said to Harry as you got out of the gig. It excited my suspicions and my curiosity."

"But what did I say?" asked the farmer, really not remembering between the excitement of the past misery and the present happiness.

"'Not a word, mind, to Dinah Ann. Not a word, for your life, mind, to Dinah Ann!'"

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

// THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1880.

THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER XXII.

RESCUER AND RESCUED.

IT seemed to be a perilous situation: lying on the boat there, alone and insensible, without certainty of rescue. But help had come: and when Miss Winter opened her eyes to consciousness, the first sight she awoke to was the face of Edward Conroy, bent tenderly over her. Kneeling on one knee, he was chafing her hands gently; and at a little distance stood two of the Easterby boatmen.

"You are better now," said Mr. Conroy.

"Yes, I am better now," Ella repeated mechanically. Her mind just yet only recognised one fact, that Conroy was by her side. He assisted her to rise. When she stood up and looked round, all the events of the afternoon flashed across her mind in a moment. What happy accident had brought Conroy, of all people in the world, to her rescue? But it was not a time to ask questions: that could be done afterwards.

"The sooner we get ashore the better," said Conroy. "Are you well enough to venture?"

"Quite well enough," answered Ella with a rush of tears. "A little while ago I thought I should never set foot on shore again."

"But what became of the boat that brought you to the wreck?—and what has become of Mr. Stone?"

"The rope that held the boat became unfastened and the tide carried it away," she slowly answered after a long pause.

But Hubert Stone?—she mentally asked herself, what could have become of him: was he below still? Conroy repeated the question. He had heard from Mrs. Toynbee that it was Stone who had rowed Ella to the wreck.

and children hurried down to the shore. They crowded round Ella when she stepped out of the boat and greeted her with low, heartfelt cheers. Then she broke down. Her tears came hot and fast, and for a little while she could not say a word to any of them. A fly was soon obtained from the inn, and Ella was driven to the Hall. As they neared it, she looked at Conroy, who sat opposite to her.

"Please not to say anything to Mrs. Toynbee about what has occurred," she said, "or that you had to fetch me from the wreck. She will hear it to-morrow, of course; but really I feel that I could not bear questioning to-night."

And most adroitly did Conroy parry Mrs. Toynbee's remarks. The row on the sea had been longer than Miss Winter had expected, he said, and she was very tired.

Little sleep did Ella get that night. However tired she might be, her mind was intensely awake and excited; and the cold grey dawn was stealing into her room before she closed her eyes in forgetfulness. All through the night the wind blew in great gusts round the old house, the rain smote like whips on window and casement, and the thunderous beat of the sea on the low, sandy beach, grew louder and more loud as the dark hours slowly dragged themselves away. It was a great storm: and one inmate of the Hall at any rate, apart from Miss Winter, had her rest broken by it.

This was a stranger, named Betsy Tucker, who had entered the Hall as an additional servant a week or two before, the place having been procured for her by Mrs. Keen. The mother of this young woman had once lived at Nullington; she had recently died, and the daughter wrote to Mrs. Keen, who had been a companion of her mother's in early life, to ask if she could find her a good situation; upon which the landlady spoke for her to Miss Winter, hearing that a third housemaid was needed at the Hall.

The girl, who knew nothing of the superstitious reports rife at Heron Dyke, slept in a room by herself. On this night she could not get to sleep for the noise of the wind: suddenly, during its pauses, she heard, or thought she heard, footsteps pacing the corridor outside her door. Much startled, the girl held her breath, and became convinced she was not mistaken: she heard them distinctly. They came and went several times, once or twice they were accompanied by a low moan. Betsy lay working herself into a fever.

She could bear this in the dark no longer; so she struck a match and lighted her candle. Then, as she was sitting up in bed listening to the footsteps, she heard them stop close to her door, and saw the handle of the door move: some one was turning it from the outside. For the moment she forgot that she had locked it; she screamed aloud; and, throwing her arms out of bed in her terror, upset the candle and was left in darkness.

"You may be sure there was no more sleep for me all night,"

said Betsy, when relating this to her fellow servants the following morning. "But now—who could have been there? I heard the steps and I heard the moans, and I saw the handle of the door turn: it's as true as that I am here to tell you."

Such was the story she whispered. Her awe-struck listeners thought of Katherine Keen, but not one of them mentioned the name. Betsy slept alone, and they would not frighten her unnecessarily.

Early in the day came tidings that the *Seamew* was no longer to be seen. As predicted, the brig had gone to pieces during the gale. Ella shuddered when the news was told her: could it be that Hubert Stone was still on board? Several planks and some broken spars were washed ashore in the course of the following tide.

The moment Ella had awakened that morning, the warning spoken by Hubert rang in her ears: "What you hold, you hold by fraud: a dozen words from me, and Heron Dyke would know you as its mistress no more." Surely, she reasoned, they could be the words of no other than a madman!

Nevertheless, they haunted her. What—she could not help asking herself—what if they were true?—what then?—*was* there any hidden secret?—any fraud connected with her succession to the property? She could not think it possible. Still, do what she might, she did not get them out of her mind. Last night, in the joy of her deliverance from a cruel death, and under the glad influence of Conroy's presence, she had thought but little of them; but this morning, when her mind was fresh and clear, they were branded on her memory as if with a red-hot iron.

Nothing was seen of Hubert at the Hall that day, and Miss Winter made no enquiry respecting him. She thought it not unlikely, after what had passed between them, that he would have the grace to absent himself for a little time. Conroy had spoken of the keg of spirits and the horn drinking-cup he saw below—in fact, she had seen them herself; she felt little doubt that Hubert had imbibed some, which in a degree might account for his ill-behaviour, and that he was now ashamed of himself. It would be impossible to retain him as steward at the Hall, but Miss Winter could recommend him elsewhere. Meanwhile she did not intend to speak of what had passed, but to bury it in oblivion. It was not a pleasant thing in any way, either to speak or to think of.

Mr. Conroy was at Heron Dyke betimes on the morning after the visit to the wreck. He was anxious to hear that Ella had suffered in no way from her adventure: at least, that was what he told Mrs. Toynbee, for Miss Winter was not yet downstairs when he reached the Hall; but there may have been some other motive in his mind of which he did not choose to speak. What a glad light leapt into Ella's eyes when she walked into the room and saw who was there! Conroy's earnest face brightened as if with a sudden burst of sun-

shine, while he took her hand for a moment and enquired after her health. Truth to tell, Ella had a slight headache this morning, but not for worlds would she have owned to it. They sat and talked about the gale and other matters, but never alluded to the adventure on the wreck, Mrs. Toynbee interposing one of her little commonplaces now and again; and so the time wore on till luncheon.

"Won't you go out for a short walk with me, Miss Winter?" asked Conroy, as they rose from the meal. "You have no idea how delightful the park is after last night's rain."

"Delightful!" exclaimed Mrs. Toynbee. "Why, the footpaths must be in a complete puddle."

"So they are, madam. But, none the less, I maintain that the park this morning is delightful."

"And there's still enough wind to almost carry you away; and the rain may recommence at any moment!" persisted the lady.

"Those are facts it would be useless to dispute," rejoined Conroy equably.

"On such a day I am sure Miss Winter would be far better indoors."

"Nay, I think it just the day to be out," said Ella, with a blush and a smile, "and I have thick boots, you know, Mrs. Toynbee. A little wind, a little sunshine, and the possibility of a shower: what more could any reasonable creature wish for? Mr. Conroy, I shall be ready in three minutes."

Mrs. Toynbee shrugged her shoulders in mild protest, but she said no more.

The paths in the park were certainly very sloppy and the wind when they faced it almost took away their breath, but what cared those two for such trifles? they but served to enhance the charms of their walk. Conroy took a turning that led to the shore. "Not that way, please," said Ella, with a slight shudder. She did not care to look upon the sea again at present; so they turned their faces another way, finding a dry and sheltered walk, where they were free from the impertinences of the wind, by the edge of the plantation of young larches which covered a piece of rising ground to the left of the Hall. Here they paced backwards and forwards for upwards of an hour.

The rain last night had washed the atmosphere so that even the most distant objects looked sharp and clearly defined. Away over the sea, the sun streamed down through a rift in the grey, low-hanging clouds, that widened out one minute till a glimpse of blue sky could be seen beyond it, and the next contracted its fleecy walls again till nothing was left save a thin shaft of blinding light that smote the water like a golden spear. Faint resinous odours were wafted fitfully from the plantation; in the hollows of the footpaths tiny pools of rain-water shivered in the cool September wind.

Ella seemed in a peculiarly happy mood. Why she should be so

she could not have explained even to herself, for had not Conroy told her that he was about to go away for an indefinite length of time, and was not the echo of Hubert Stone's mysterious words ringing in her memory? But so it was. She could no more account for her gladness than a child can for its fondness for play. Had she any faintest premonition, had her heart secretly warned her, that a momentous instant was at hand? Be that as it may, Ella found fifty different things to talk about, and seemed nervously anxious not to let the conversation flag for a moment. She had all sorts of questions to ask him about Spain, the country and the people, as though she had never read a book about it in her life. She hoped that Conroy would not run into any unnecessary danger, and now and then at intervals he must send her a little sketch of some place that he had visited, just to prove to her that he was still alive. She had often had an idea that she should like to learn Spanish, and had been told that it was nearly as musical as Italian. She would buy a grammar and dictionary at once; it would be a capital occupation for the long evenings of the coming winter; and when Mr. Conroy should return in spring she should doubtless be able to greet him in the choicest Castilian.

Suddenly Ella paused in her talk to stand still. The clock over the Hall stables was striking the hour. "I did not suppose it was so late," she exclaimed. "I should have thought that the old clock was an hour fast but that I know how painfully accurate it always is. We had better return. After what happened yesterday, Mrs. Toynbee may be sending the bellman round the village to cry me as lost."

"Give me ten minutes more and then we will go," said the young man. "Who can tell when we shall see each other again?"

Ella tacitly assented, and they took a turn or two in silence. All her high spirits seemed suddenly to have deserted her.

"Before leaving you I have a few words to say to you: it was to say them that I have come all the way from London,"—and Conroy took one of her hands in his as he spoke thus, even as he had taken it last evening in the boat. Ella's heart gave a great bound, she drew in her breath with a half sigh and trembled from head to foot.

"Ella—may I dare to call you so?—I could not go away without telling you how I love you, without telling you that I have loved you from the moment I first set eyes on you that evening last year at Mrs. Carlyon's, and that I can never cease to love you while I live! I could not go away—Ella, I *could* not—without asking you whether I may come and claim you as my wife when I return."

He held both her hands by this time and was gazing down fondly into her face. She had turned very pale when he first began to speak, but by the time he had done two blush-roses burned in her cheeks. Tremors of love, and joy, and happiness unspeakable

thrilled her heart. She was standing with downcast eyes, and she stood thus for a little while after he had ceased speaking. Her breath came and went quickly, the tears were rising. Another moment and she had lifted her glance to his. Her lips were quivering with emotion, but from her eyes, love—love not to be mistaken for anything else—looked out at Conroy through a mist of tears. Not one word did she say; there was no necessity to say it. That one look told Conroy all he cared to know. He folded her in his arms, he pressed his lips to hers, he whispered words in her ears sacred to her alone.

As they were walking slowly back arm in arm through the park, Conroy broke the thrilling silence. "Do you know, cara mia, what the world will call me? It will brand me as a fortune-hunter, and say that I should never have sought you for my wife had you not been the mistress of Heron Dyke."

The words sent a shock through her, like a dart. Was she the mistress of Heron Dyke? She was not, if there were truth in what Hubert Stone had declared to her. Her lover's constancy might be put to the test before long in a way he little dreamed of now. "You can afford to smile at anything the world may choose to say," she answered. "So can I, so long as I have vanity enough to think that you care for me, for myself alone."

"But that I had the fear of your broad acres before my eyes I should have spoken to you long ere this," he answered. "Had your uncle been a poor man, or you not his heiress, I should have asked you at his hands last autumn."

How sweet the words sounded to her—how true was their ring! —and after what that other man had said!

"Suppose that when you return from Spain, you should find that I am no longer mistress of Heron Dyke!" she cried impulsively. "Suppose you should find that, by some misfortune or other, I am poor instead of rich? What would you say then to your intended wife?"

"I should say, 'The fact has made me one of the happiest fellows alive.' I should say, 'Let us marry at once and have a humble little home of our own.' I should say, 'I am glad that your riches have taken to themselves wings; it is only fit and proper that a man should work for his wife.' I don't think," he added, "that I could love you more than I do now, but somehow you might perhaps seem closer to me if you came to me as the beggar-maid went to King Cophetua."

Ella sighed. It was happiness to hear him talk thus; and yet his words brought to her a sting of pain. How glad she would be to endow him with every worldly good—and who seemed so fit to be the master of Heron Dyke? And yet, perhaps—who could say?—he might love her all the better if she went to him in a cotton gown, with a simple flower in her hair.

"But what makes you talk as if Heron Dyke and you were about to part company?" he presently asked.

"Perhaps we may be: I cannot tell," she answered, a cloud as of trouble passing over her face.

Conroy saw it, and looked perplexed. He bit his lip.

"Pardon me, Ella, but I do not see how anything of that kind could come to pass. Your uncle was too shrewd a man not to take every proper precaution in a matter so gravely important."

Ella did not answer for a few moments, and when she spoke it was with hesitation. "Might there not be such a thing as a flaw in the title?"

Conroy started slightly. "In his title, do you mean? I cannot think of anything more improbable. Have you any reason for suggesting this?"

"Here we are at home," said Ella hurriedly, for they had reached it. "I cannot tell you anything more, and you must please not ask me to. In any case, whatever happens, I trust that I shall be enabled to do my duty."

"That I am sure you will always do," responded Conroy, warmly. "Remember," he added in a low tone, "that in good fortune or evil fortune my love for you can never change."

They were standing under the porch, not yet having rung. She looked up with a shy sweet smile as he spoke. The opportunity was too tempting to be resisted; he might not have another one for ever so long. He was an audacious man in many ways, and before Ella was aware, his arms were round her and his lips pressed to hers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NOTHING VENTURE, NOTHING WIN.

MARIA KETTLE returned from Leamington in mourning. Mrs. Page was dead and had left Maria two thousand pounds. "Better than nothing of course," grumbled the Vicar; "but she might just as well have made it three or four thousand while she was about it." He had always thought she would. Maria was truly glad to get back home again, and she told nobody about her little fortune. She and Ella met like sisters who had been long parted. What a number of things they had to say to each other, yet each shrank from speaking of that which lay closest to their hearts. Maria said nothing about her semi-engagement to Philip Cleeve, while Ella did not mention Edward Conroy. It seemed such a little while ago since they were mutually affirming that they would never marry—or at least not for many years to come; and yet, after all their grand resolutions, when put to the test, they had proved no stronger-minded than the rest of their sex. Each felt slightly ashamed to think of all this; yet, strange to

say, neither of them would have exchanged her present bondage for that past freedom. But a great blow was about to fall on Maria.

The more the Reverend Mr. Kettle puzzled over the loss of his purse, the more inclined he was to connect Philip Cleeve with it in some way. He did not absolutely say to himself that Philip had taken the purse, but it was strange how the young man's image always came into his mind in connection with the loss. It may be that he owed this feeling to Dr. Downes.

He and Dr. Downes, being fellow sufferers, for the Doctor had never heard more of his gold snuff-box, had got into the habit of talking with one another. Talking begets talking, and perhaps the old Doctor said more than he had meant to say. Anyway, one day the Vicar heard for the first time about Philip's frequent visits to the billiard-room of the Rose and Crown, and about the high play with Lord Camberley and others that went on at the Lilacs.

"What a young idiot he must be!" exclaimed the indignant Vicar: and Dr. Downes nodded assent.

"And if there's anything between Cleeve and your daughter, as I fancy there is," added the old man, "I should put my veto on it—at least for the present. Master Philip has fallen into bad ways, that's quite evident, and even if these ugly suspicions about him should turn out to have no foundation in fact, he ought to alter very much before he is fit to marry so nice a girl as Maria."

The Vicar ruffled his white hair with his fingers, and could not help admitting that the Doctor's view was the right one. There had been a sort of tacit agreement between himself and Lady Cleeve that one day the two young people should marry, provided they cared sufficiently for each other: and—and he believed they did care. It grieved him to see his old friend's son going so far astray; but his duty to his daughter was paramount, and other considerations must give way to it.

After Maria's return from Leamington, the Vicar spoke to her, entering upon the subject abruptly.

"Maria, I hope there is no foolish engagement between you and Philip Cleeve?"

Maria's heart began to beat. "There is no engagement, papa."

"But something has passed between you, has it not? He has said something to you, eh?"

"Philip certainly spoke to me before I went to Leamington; but, papa, there is not an engagement."

"Should he speak to you again you must give him no encouragement; none whatever. Understand that, Maria."

Her poor heart was throbbing fitfully. "But—but why, papa?"

The Vicar told her why. Of the billiards at the Rose and Crown, and the high play at the Lilacs. "There were other things," he added, "which he should not speak of"—meaning, of course, the Doctor's gold snuff-box, and his own purse.

"It seems to me that he must be becoming a practised gambler, Maria," wound up Mr. Kettle, "playing as he does with rich men like Camberley and Lennox. They can afford it; Philip can't. Putting all that aside, he is not progressing in his profession; so what likelihood is there of his making a home to take a wife to?"

"Mr. Tiplady has some intention of taking him into partnership; Philip told me so."

"I take it that Tiplady is far too shrewd a man to do anything of the kind."

Maria sighed. "We may be misjudging him, papa."

"We are not misjudging him. Don't I tell you there are other reasons why you should have nothing more to do with Philip?—matters which I do not choose to speak of openly."

"It seems rather hard, papa, that I should be asked to condemn Philip without knowing what he has done."

"Good gracious, Maria, have I not given you reasons enough? Could he become your husband without a radical alteration in his mode of life? As for the other matters I hinted at, the less said about them, at present, the better. I hope with all my heart that things may not turn out so bad as they seem."

"Then all Philip's promises to me before I went away have proved of no avail," mourned Maria to herself. "He still goes to the Lilacs, he still frequents the billiard-room. Why has he not more strength of mind? And what are those mysterious hints which papa threw out of something still worse? Oh! Philip, Philip!"

That there must be some weighty cause, apart from what she knew, to make her easy and tolerant father speak so severely, Maria felt assured of. She never thought to rebel at the mandate; but it seemed to her that Philip grew all the dearer to her heart.

She had a speedy proof that the Vicar was very much in earnest. He gave orders in the household that whenever Mr. Cleeve called he was not to be admitted. Philip did call; again and again; and at last he understood that the door was closed to him. It made Philip very angry, and he set himself to waylay Maria out of doors.

One morning he met her suddenly in a pretty green lane just outside the town, and had accosted her before Maria well knew he was there.

"Good morning, Maria," he said, stopping her and holding out his hand. What could she do but put out hers in return?

"Good morning," she rejoined.

"I was sorry to hear of Mrs. Page's death; it must have been a mournful time for you. You have been back a week, have you not?"

"About that."

"And I have called at the Vicarage nearly every day, only to be denied to you. Mr. Kettle is not to be seen, and Miss Kettle is not

to be seen, are the answers I get. Of course I can only conclude that I am no longer welcome. Now, Maria, what is the meaning of it?"

Maria was thoroughly distressed. She knew not what to say: tears sprang to her eyes. How dear he was to her! How his very voice thrilled her as he spoke! It seemed like a taste of heaven to hear it again.

"Papa thought it best that you should not come to the Vicarage for a little while," she murmured—and the words seemed nearly to choke her.

"But why? What have I done? Why am I to be tabooed in this way?"

"Papa has heard—has heard things," stammered Maria. "He says you are frequently to be seen at the billiard-table; he has heard that you are addicted to high play with men like Lord Camberley and Captain Lennox. And—and he says they may be able to afford it, but you cannot—which, of course, is true. Oh, Philip! have you forgotten the promises you made to me before I went to Leamington?"

Philip changed colour, and bit his lip. He began tracing some hieroglyphic on the gravel with his cane.

"Papa asked me whether there was any engagement between us," continued Maria. "I told him that there was not, but that you had spoken to me before I went away. He then said that everything between us must be broken off, at least for the present; you best know why, yourself, Philip."

"That I have been weak and foolish, Maria, no one knows better than myself," he candidly answered. "But I don't think I have deserved to be treated quite so harshly."

It was on the tip of Maria's tongue to say, Papa seems to have something against you more than I have mentioned, though he would not tell me what: but after a moment's thought she stopped herself. "Papa is not in the habit of treating anyone with undue harshness," she remarked aloud.

"I think he is harsh to me. Why, Maria—but perhaps I had better see your father himself and have this matter out with him," he broke off in his usual impulsive style.

Maria shook her head: she knew that his seeing her father would bring forth nothing—except unpleasantness.

"It would be of no use, Philip," she answered, sadly. "Papa would only say to you what I have said—putting it perhaps in stronger terms."

Philip went into a passion. "What right has Mr. Kettle to set himself up as a censor of my morals and conduct?" asked he with a heightened colour.

"No right at all, I suppose, in one sense of the word, nor does he profess to do so," was Maria's grave reply. "But one thing he has a

right to do: to think of me and of my welfare. Don't you see that, Philip?"

Philip fumed and frowned, and slashed at an unoffending nettle with his cane. They had been walking slowly onward in this unfrequented lane, where they were free to talk without observation.

"Am I to consider our engagement at an end?" demanded Philip, after a few moments' silence.

"There has been no engagement, as you are well aware," returned Maria in a low voice.

"*You* know quite well what I mean. Am I to look upon it that all is at an end between us?"

"Papa says so. He thinks it will be best so."

"And you, Maria?"

A moment's pause; then in a very low voice: "I think as papa thinks. You know I *must*, Philip."

Again they walked slowly on, without speaking. Presently Philip resumed.

"That I have been thoughtless and foolish, I have already admitted to you, Maria; but I verily believe that matters would never have gone so far with me had there been an engagement between us. I should then have had something definite to look forward to—some hopeful end to work for. As it was, what you said to me at our last interview seemed to take the heart out of me: it did, Maria. You would not even let me write to you. I seemed to lose my anchorage altogether."

"But oh, Philip—is not that a very weak confession to make?"

"It is. I grant it."

"And after all your promises."

"I have not forgotten them. The truth is, Maria," he burst out passionately, "you are the only person in the world who can save me from myself. When I am with you I am strong, when I am away from you I am as unstable as water. Were you my wife, you could mould me as you would: were you even my promised wife, I should be a very different man."

Maria had no words at command, but she gave him a glance out of her tearful eyes which conveyed a world of love and tenderness.

"I will make no more promises," continued Philip, with a bitter laugh. "In my case they only recoil on my own head. I will abide by your father's behest for the present, and keep at a distance. But only for the present, mind. I shall still look upon you as my future wife. Nobody can deny me that much."

Maria sighed. She felt that he was not meeting this trouble quite right on the whole.

"Wait a little while, Maria, and you shall see what you shall see. I hope to be able to prove both to you and your father that—but, no, I said that I would make no more promises," he abruptly broke off again, "and I will not."

They were at the end of the lane. Before them was a gate, with a stile, leading into some fields and high grounds that overlooked the town. Maria stopped. "I must go back. I have come too far already," she said. Philip took both her hands and gazed fondly into her eyes. Then, before she was aware of his intention, or had time to offer any resistance, his arms were round her, she was pressed to his heart, and one burning kiss was left upon her lips. Next moment, without a word, he was gone, vaulting lightly over the stile and away into the meadows beyond. With hot cheeks and a beating heart, Maria retraced her steps to the town.

"What was it that she would see by waiting a little while?" she presently began to ask herself. Philip had spoken with significant meaning.

The two hundred pounds won by Philip Cleeve on Patchwork, at the Newmarket Spring Meeting, had to a great extent recouped him for his gambling losses. But some months had passed away since then, and his capital had again been dipped into pretty deeply. For one thing, he was less frugal in his habits than of old. His mother's allowance no longer sufficed to find him in clothes and pocket-money. His tailor's and bootmaker's bills were twice as heavy as they used to be, and of late there was no more fashionably dressed young man in Nullington than Philip Cleeve. At one time he had been content to play billiards for sixpence a game, but nothing less than half a crown a game would do for him now. He went to the Lilacs once a week, sometimes oftener, and although he no longer joined the card-table so frequently as in those earlier days, preferring to talk with Mrs. Ducie or turn over her music, yet he could not keep aloof from play altogether, and it was no unfrequent thing for him to find himself minus ten or fifteen sovereigns when he reached home. In short, by the beginning of September his capital had again shown a very serious deficit. More than once Captain Lennox said to him: "What a pity it is that you did not lay every sovereign you could scrape together on Patchwork. You will never have such a chance again." And Philip agreed with the Captain that it was a pity.

One day at the Lilacs, a little while previous to this present time, Philip found a printed paper on the table, which, for want of something better to do, he took up and glanced over. It proved to be a prospectus of the Hermandad Silver Mining Company, Colorado. Philip was surprised to see the name of his host, Captain Lennox, among the list of directors. "Why, Lennox," he said, "I was not aware that you went in for anything of this kind."

"It helps to kill time and gives me an excuse for running up to town now and then," answered Lennox. "Besides, these things bring one in contact with a lot of men who may prove useful."

"I presume that the Hermandad Mining Company is a prosperous concern?"

"My dear fellow, as yet it is in its babyhood: it has only been launched a few weeks. That it will prove a very prosperous thing, I never for one moment doubted; otherwise I should not have allowed my name to appear to it, nor should I have invested in it so much of my spare capital."

"Colorado seems a long way to send one's spare capital to," remarked Philip.

"A long way in this era of telegraphy? Pooh! There's no such thing as distance now-a-days. Besides, the board has its own expert out there—a very clever young mining engineer—and his reports may be thoroughly relied upon. We know pretty well what we are about."

Philip was of opinion that the Captain knew pretty well what he was about in most of the concerns of life. "I suppose that every now and then one of these silver mines really does turn out to be a gold mine in one sense of the phrase," he observed.

"Now and then!" said Lennox, with a lifting of his eyebrows. "All I know is that there are two mines within a little distance of ours which are paying their lucky proprietors between thirty and forty per cent., and I know of no reason why the Hermandad should be poorer than its neighbours. All we want is more capital for its proper working; and that we are now about to raise. There will be no difficulty in doing *that*."

Mrs. Ducie came in, and nothing more was said. But Philip's dreams that night were all about the Hermandad mine; and it ran far more in his thoughts next day at the office than did his duties.

Two days later Philip saw Lennox again. "By-the-by, about those Hermandad shares?" he said. "What are they each? I don't see them quoted in the Money Article."

Captain Lennox smiled. "No, you don't see them in the market—at least so far as the general public is concerned; they are too choice a commodity to be there. We—I and my co-directors—intend to keep them for ourselves and our friends."

"What are they?" repeated Philip.

"Twenty pounds each. Five pounds payable on allotment and another five pounds in two months' time."

"Leaving ten pounds to be called up later on."

"There will be no further calls: the first and second will amply suffice for all expenses. Our profits will begin almost from the very day the machinery gets into working order."

Metaphorically speaking, Philip's mouth was watering. Thirty per cent.! The words had rung like sweet music in his memory ever since he heard them. "I suppose that even if an outsider were desirous of investing a little spare cash in your precious shares, there would be no chance of his being able to do so?" he said.

"Um—well—I daresay there are still a few left. Are you speaking for yourself?"

"I've got that two hundred by me that I won on Patchwork," answered Philip. "I might venture to speculate with that."

"To be sure you might," nodded Lennox. "I am going up to town the day after to-morrow: if you like, I will see what I can do for you. Just as you please, you know, Cleeve: I have no interest in your decision one way or the other."

"I am aware of that. It is very good of you. Let me see: Twenty shares at five pounds a share would be a hundred pounds. That would leave me the other hundred to pay the second call with."

The Captain laughed—a little contemptuously, Philip thought.

"You are indeed a timid speculator," he said. "In these matters my motto is, 'Nothing venture, nothing win.' In your place I should invest the two hundred pounds right off. But of course you know your own business best."

Philip coloured and stammered. "You are certain that there is no likelihood of a third call being made, Lennox?"

"As certain as I am of anything in this uncertain world," was the answer. "And then, you have always the option of getting out of your bargain by selling."

"Well, I will think of it," decided Philip, "and see you again before you go."

He did think of it, and the thought dazzled him. The end of it was that he put a cheque for two hundred pounds in Lennox's hands half an hour before that gentleman started for London.

An anxious and feverish time for Philip was that which followed. His sunny, easy-going disposition led him to look on the bright side of most things, but there were times and seasons, generally during the lonely hours of darkness, when he thought with a dread sinking of the heart of what he had done. The second call would go a long way towards exhausting his remaining capital, and should the mine, after all, turn out a failure, he would be a ruined man.

But more often his thoughts flowed in a brighter channel. The Hermandad shares would go up—up; as he had heard of other mining shares going up. At the proper moment he would sell out and realise his capital. Then with a swelling heart he would go to the Vicar and say to him: "I have come to ask your daughter's hand in marriage. I am about to become Tiplady's partner, and I have a home to take my wife to, equal to the one she is leaving." What a sweet revenge it would be on Mr. Kettle's harshness!

CHAPTER XXIV.

HUBERT STONE'S RETURN.

Mr. Conroy departed for London immediately after that momentous walk with Ella Winter, which would never be forgotten by either of them. There was a last pressure of the hands, a last look into

each other's eyes, and he was gone. She wished their engagement not to be spoken of at present, and he willingly complied.

The days wore on. When three had passed, and there came no tidings of Hubert Stone, old Aaron grew somewhat perplexed. What could he mean by absenting himself? That so good a swimmer and strong a man, as Hubert was, had failed to reach the shore, no one who knew him entertained any fear of. Where was he, then?

On the fourth day Aaron presented himself before his mistress, who was alone in her own sitting-room.

"No news yet of that scapegrace lad, ma'am!" he said, a quaver of trouble in his voice. "He must have swum off to get succour for you, Miss Ella, as it was his duty to do: but heaven alone knows where he's got to."

Ella smiled. She believed Hubert to be perfectly safe and quite able to take care of himself, but she wished to set the old retainer's doubts at rest.

"Be at ease, Aaron. After a feat like that your nephew would naturally need some recreation; I daresay he has gone away for a few days' holiday. We shall see him back again shortly."

"What I can't get out of my head is this: that he might have been left on board. And oh, my dear young mistress, that night the wreck went to pieces in the gale!"

"He was not left on board, Aaron; rely upon that: and one of the boatmen, you know, saw him swimming towards the shore. It must have been he; nobody else was out. Believe me," impressively added Miss Winter, "there is not, so far as I believe, the slightest cause for alarm. Hubert is gone away, perhaps on business, combining that at least with pleasure, and you will soon have him at home again. Such is my opinion, and I have good grounds for it."

Aaron felt reassured. He acknowledged that it might be so. "Not but what the careless young jackanapes ought to have told me before he went, Miss Ella!" he urged.

"Or to write to you," replied Ella.

But as more days passed on and Hubert neither came nor sent, other people as well as Aaron began to wonder; and the question, what could have become of him, made the chief topic of the neighbourhood. That he had undertaken this bout of swimming to obtain succour for Miss Winter, none disputed, and Ella did not undeceive them. The real facts, there could be little doubt, being these. Upon Hubert's forcing the closed door and finding Miss Winter senseless on the deck, he must at the same time have seen the little boat coming to her rescue. Fearful that her first word might be to denounce him, and probably feeling heartily ashamed of himself, he plunged into the sea to swim ashore, not choosing to stay and face the scene.

But on what part of the shore had he landed, and where could he be staying? What had become of him? Aaron and his wife grew strangely uneasy: if anything were detaining him, business or else, surely he would write, they said to one another.

"He has not got so much as a clean shirt with him—or a collar," lamented Dorothy. "What *can* he do without them?"

"Oh, drat the shirts and collars!" retorted Aaron, not less crusty and contradictory than usual. "As if he couldn't buy himself things o' that sort!"

There came a relief to their fears. Dr. Jago, hearing that the old people were becoming seriously alarmed, avowed that Hubert Stone had got safely to land that night, after his swimming-feat, and had made his way at once to his house. He put on dry clothes, some things of the young man's happening to be at the Doctor's, borrowed a little money of him, and went away again, saying he had business at a distance.

"And why couldn't you have told this afore, sir?" grumbled Aaron, when he had heard Dr. Jago's narrative.

"Because Hubert asked me not to mention it until he was back again," replied the little doctor. "But I thought it might be better to do so now, as he stays away so long and you seem to be getting into a fever over it."

"Do you know where he went to, sir?"

"No, I do not. He is all right, depend upon it, Aaron; he'll be turning up one of these fine days."

"All the same, he might have writ to me just a line," contended the old man.

Miss Winter was nearly as anxious as Aaron for the return of Hubert. She had determined to question him further upon that strange assertion he had made—that she had no right to Heron Dyke—and to insist upon a full and explicit answer. A thought crossed her mind sometimes that possibly Hubert might be fearing this very questioning, and was staying away in consequence.

And the time again rolled on. Three weeks came and went, and Hubert Stone remained to them all as one dead.

"He does not return, Miss Ella," cried Aaron to his mistress one morning; and there was a worn, pitiful look on his face that she had never seen before. "Dorothy's fretting frightfully: she will have it, something dreadful has happened to him, and that we shall never set eyes on him again."

Involuntarily there came into Ella's memory what Dorothy had told her about the dread apparition seen by her that midnight in the shrubbery. She herself had no faith in such superstitious fancies, but she could quite understand the hold they would have over the mind of a woman like Dorothy Stone.

"It is strange," she replied, "I grant that; and, as you say, he might have written. Still, had any harm befallen him you would

surely have heard of it from one source or another. I have felt no fear since I heard the report of Dr. Jago."

"But he stays so long, ma'am."

"We can only go on hoping for the best. Young men have sometimes strong fancies for roving, and they do not always think of those to whom their absence or silence may cause grief."

"He's gone to London, mayhap, that wild place, and won't come back till he's parted with his last shilling," suggested Aaron, anxious to snatch a morsel of comfort anyhow. "I'd once a fling of that sort myself, ma'am, when I was a young fellow, only I got no further than Norwich. They thought I had drowned myself; and father, he had Wippenham Pond dragged for me."

"Let us hope that Hubert's freak may prove no worse than yours," said Ella cheeringly. "Wait a moment; don't go; I want to speak to you."

Failing Hubert, Miss Winter had made up her mind to question Aaron whether he knew anything or not, for her suspense was becoming intolerable.

"Aaron," she began very gravely, "when your grandson Hubert was on board the wreck with me that afternoon, now three weeks ago, he told me something which made a very great impression upon me at the time, and which I cannot forget since. It is in my mind every hour of the day—a source of annoyance. As he does not return, I must question you."

Aaron gazed at his mistress. She thought he looked uneasy.

"What he said was this: 'A dozen words from me, and Heron Dyke would know you as its mistress no more. What you hold, you hold by fraud.' Now, Aaron Stone, I ask you, as my uncle's old and faithful servant, to tell me what meaning was hidden in your grandson's words, when he spoke to me thus."

Aaron's face was turning livid; he stood a picture of abject terror. Twice he essayed to speak, and twice no sound came from his dry lips. Miss Winter noted the emotion.

"What he knows—if there is anything to know—I think you must know; and I ask you, Aaron, what he meant."

"I know no more than the dead what he meant," gasped the old man in a husky whisper. "He must have been mad—mad!"

"Can you attach no meaning to his words?"

"None, ma'am; none whatever. He must have been quite mad."

"No, he was not mad I think. He spoke those words as a truthful man speaks. It seemed to me then, it seems to me still, that there was truth in them: though I don't know how much."

"Miss Ella," cried the old man eagerly, "you know what has been said—that a keg o' spirits was on board below. Hubert must have got to it."

That this was to a certain extent true, she believed; but not that he had taken sufficient to induce him to invent such a thing.

"His mother died in an asylum, poor thing," resumed Aaron, catching up his labouring breath; "and at times—only at times, you know, ma'am—I have not been able to rightly make him out, and I've fancied that he might have a touch of her complaint and wasn't altogether his own master. It must have been so that afternoon."

Aaron's hands trembled like those of a man afflicted with palsy, and the muscles of his face twitched convulsively as he spoke. His mistress could scarcely find in her heart to question him further.

"And yet it was a very strange assertion for Hubert to make," she said, speaking gently. "He stated distinctly that I held Heron Dyke by fraud. Now, were such the case, Aaron, you, as my uncle's almost confidential servant, must surely be aware of it. Hubert would not know what you do not, especially of a grave secret."

"That he'd not," affirmed the old man. "I knew more of the Squire's secrets, Miss Ella, than any man living. Were he alive this moment he'd tell you so."

"Then there was—there is—no fraud, as far as you are aware?"

"Certainly not, ma'am. How would it be possible?"

"That I cannot guess."

"Look here now, Miss Ella, there *couldn't be*. The Squire's will was drawn up by Lawyer Daventry, and signed by himself in the presence of witnesses. Everything but a few legacies was to come to you, as he had meant it to all his life. Fraud, ma'am! if he had left it away from you one might talk of fraud; not as it is. No, no! That wretched lad—and won't I give it him!—was in one of his wild fits when he said such words, not rightly accountable."

Could Miss Winter say more? She asked Aaron no further questions, but let him go. Still, in her own mind she could not feel satisfied. What brought that look of terror into Aaron's face when she repeated to him Hubert's words? Why had he trembled to that strange excess? and why had his emotion been so great?

And the more Miss Winter strove to assure herself that there was no cause to fear things were not honest and straightforward, the less she thought them so, and she resolved to speak to her uncle's lawyer, Mr. Daventry. Walking into Nullington, she found him at his office, and saw him alone.

"I have come to seek your advice on what seems to me a very important matter," she began, when she was seated. "I could not rest without coming to you."

"I need hardly say, my dear Miss Winter, that I am entirely at your service," he replied.

"It has been intimated to me that fraud of some kind has been at work in connection with my inheritance of Heron Dyke," she continued, having previously determined to avoid if possible the mention of Hubert's name. "I am precluded from telling you in what way this information reached me; but it was declared to me, in unmis-

takable terms, that I had no more right to the property than you have."

Lawyer Daventry's eyebrows went up in utter surprise. He drew his chair a little closer to that of Miss Winter, and began to bite his quill pen meditatively, as he waited to hear more.

"You, Mr. Daventry, had the management of all my uncle's most important affairs. You drew up his will; you were, I believe, present when he signed it; and you, I am sure, would not lend yourself to deceit of any kind: tell me then what, in your opinion, this information can mean."

"My opinion, Miss Winter, is that there is not an iota of truth in it. The chances are that it will turn out to be nothing more than an attempt to extort money."

"It will certainly not prove to be that," replied Ella, decisively. "On that point I can speak with confidence."

"You will not tell me who it was who gave you this information?"

"I would rather not; at least, at present. It was—I think I may say," she added somewhat hesitatingly—"an old friend."

"A very queer friend, it seems to me. He must have had a motive: what was it?"

"Pardon me," she rejoined, "but that is not the question. Let us assume, if you like, that the motive is not altogether unknown to me. What then? We are still no nearer what I want to know: whether it is possible that there can be any truth in the allegation."

"But the motive might be a malicious one. In which case ——"

"Pardon me again, but the point is this," she interposed. "Is there anything within your knowledge of my uncle's affairs which would lead you to believe that the slightest possibility of fraud, in connection with my inheritance of his property, can exist?"

"No. It does not appear to me that the slightest possibility can exist of anything of the kind," continued Mr. Daventry. "I drew up your uncle's will in accordance with his instructions and his well-known wishes, and the will was duly signed and witnessed. Had he died before his seventieth birthday, the will would have been worthless, so far as the estate went; it would have lapsed to the other Gilbert Denison. Your uncle's savings you would still inherit, but not Heron Dyke. On the other hand, if he lived over his birthday, the property would be yours beyond possibility of dispute."

"And, as you can testify, he did live over it," returned Ella, feeling relieved.

Mr. Daventry smiled. "My dear young lady, I could not testify to anything of the kind. We lawyers are cautious men. As I did not see your uncle subsequent to his birthday, I could not testify to it."

"But others saw him! Others know that he lived over it!" cried Ella with a kind of gasp.

"Undoubtedly. I spoke only of my own personal knowledge."

"When did you see him last?—how long before his death? Perhaps you don't remember?"

"I remember perfectly well. It was on the 24th of November, the day he signed his will. I went to the Hall by appointment, with one of my clerks, and I was struck by the change I saw in the Squire. To me he looked like a dying man."

"But surely you saw him after that?" cried Ella, in surprise.

"No, I did not. I went up to call once or twice, but did not get to see him. That doctor, Jago, would admit nobody; and the last time the Squire sent out a curt message to the effect that when he wanted me he would send for me. On the 28th of April, early in the morning, a peremptory message came for me ——"

"Then you did see him subsequent to his birthday," interrupted Ella.

"A moment yet, please. I did not see him: I had gone to London the day before, and was not back. This answer was despatched to the Squire. He would not wait; Webb must go if I could not, came back the mandate; and by ten o'clock in the morning, Webb was at the Hall. He is my managing clerk, as you are aware, himself a qualified solicitor. He knew nothing much of the Squire's business, not having then long joined me."

"Did he see my uncle?"

"Oh, of course. The Squire was in bed; frightfully feeble, as it seemed to Webb. He wanted his will read over to him, and a short codicil added—which was done, and signed."

"Did Mr. Webb think him much changed?"

"Webb had never seen him before. He thought he looked curiously ill and feeble, so far as he could see of him in the darkened room. The Squire lay on the pillow, his black velvet skull-cap on, and his long white hair straggling on each side his shrunken face. Webb, describing this to me when I reached home at night, said he looked like a fine old picture. His voice had sunk to little more than a whisper; but his mind was clear, nay, vigorous."

The tears rose to Ella's eyes. She could see, in imagination, her poor uncle lying there.

"No, my dear young lady, rely upon it, there's no flaw in your succession to Heron Dyke," concluded the experienced lawyer. "My advice to you is, think no more of the affair. There's nothing in it, save, as Shakespeare says, 'A pure invention of the enemy.' Set your mind at rest."

Ella, somewhat reassured, though not wholly, went on her way. She could not forget the intense truth that had shone forth in Hubert Stone's countenance and tones. That *he* believed what he asserted had been to her mind entirely apparent.

It was a few days subsequent to this visit to Mr. Daventry, that Miss Winter was engaged to take afternoon tea at the Lilacs. Some

ladies were forming themselves into a committee for the purpose of ameliorating the condition of the poor of Nullington during the ensuing winter, and they were to meet that afternoon, Thursday, at Mrs. Ducie's. However, Miss Winter could not go, some friends having come to the Hall, unexpectedly, from a distance, and she sent Mrs. Toynbee to represent her.

So the new carriage from London, that had been so great an eye-sore to old Aaron, conveyed her thither in state. Mrs. Toynbee enjoyed her afternoon immensely: she met Lady Cleeve, Maria Kettle, and other ladies with whom she had a slight acquaintance, who were already there. As Miss Winter's representative she found herself and her opinions deferred to, which was what she liked. Moreover, Mrs. Toynbee had some extraordinary news to tell, and was bursting with its importance.

Not until quite the last did she get a suitable opportunity; so much close discussion of the business in hand had taken place. Philip Cleeve had come in then; his mother had asked him to call for her. He was the only gentleman present, Captain Lennox having gone to Norwich. A remark made by some one gave the opportunity to Mrs. Toynbee.

"We had a most startling adventure at the Hall this morning," began she: and at the word, startling, the whole company fell into silence, and looked up. "Several rooms at the Hall, as I am given to understand, have been shut up for a great number of years; it was the late Mr. Denison's pleasure to keep them so ——"

"Is Katherine Keen found?" interrupted one of the listeners, in excitement.

"Katherine Keen! oh, dear no," returned Mrs. Toynbee, stiffly. "In one of these unused rooms there stood a curiously-carved escritoire, or bureau, of polished black oak, a family heirloom, the panels of which bear the date of 1714. Miss Winter took a fancy to examine this relic, for so I may term it; she had it removed to her morning-room, and to-day, after breakfast, she set to work to examine its contents, calling me to her aid. They proved to be nothing more valuable than a number of expired leases, and other papers connected with the farm property. But while thus engaged we made a very curious discovery. By some means or other, probably from the accidental touching of a hidden spring, a secret recess at the back of the escritoire was suddenly exposed to view."

"Oh, dear, how delightful! A secret recess!"

"We were, as you may imagine, on the tiptoe of curiosity in a moment. I was, and I could see that Miss Winter was: she had seemed to me to be searching for some particular document, by the way she examined all the old papers."

"And what did you find in the recess?"

"What we found, hidden away from the light for it is hard to

guess how many years, was a huge mass of jewels," replied Mrs. Toynbee in slow and important tones.

"Jewels! good gracious!"

"Beautiful jewels. Rings, brooches, necklets, earrings, bracelets, and lockets; nearly all set with precious stones of inestimable value. Of course their setting is sadly old-fashioned; that will have to be attended to."

The ladies went into fresh excitement. One and all exclaiming they should like to see the jewels.

"What have you done with them, Mrs. Toynbee?"

"Miss Winter has put them back into the cabinet. At the lowest estimation, the stones alone must be worth a thousand pounds."

"Articles of that value ought to be at the bankers'," remarked Philip Cleeve. He was standing by the mantelpiece, a little apart from the circle. An anxiety bordering on restlessness sat in his countenance, sufficiently apparent to one of those around him—Maria Kettle; and his hand, which had met hers on his entrance, felt dry and feverish.

"I daresay Miss Winter will send them to the bankers' in a few days' time," said Mrs. Toynbee in answer to the remark. "But she wants Mr. Daventry to see them first, and he is not at home. She ——"

"Daventry is in London," interrupted Philip. "He won't be back till the beginning of next week—Monday or Tuesday."

"True," assented Mrs. Toynbee. "I called at the office as I drove in, and found that only Mr. Webb was there. Miss Winter—really she is an ultra-scrupulous young woman—does not feel sure whether the jewels rightly belong to her; she will do nothing with them before she gets Mr. Daventry's opinion. Until then they will remain where they are, untouched."

"I hope they will be safe," laughed Philip.

"Safe!" echoed Mrs. Toynbee: "why should they not be safe? They are where they have been lying hidden all these years. None of the servants have been told of the discovery; not even old Aaron and his wife."

"By the way," cried Margaret Ducie, lifting her head from the pencilled notes she had been making of the suggested plans for the relief of the poor, "has that relative of theirs, young Stone, turned up yet?"

"Not yet," said Mrs. Toynbee. "Nobody can imagine where he is staying. We think he must be unavoidably detained somewhere—though it is strange he does not write to say so."

The meeting and conversation recorded above took place on Thursday afternoon. On the following Monday morning old Aaron Stone proceeded, as usual, to open the doors and windows of the Hall—for he would not allow that duty to be performed by anybody

but himself. At an unearthly hour, as the maids considered it, whom he obliged to be also up in readiness for their work, old Aaron would be on the move. As he was on this day; there was only just light enough yet for him to see his way about.

After unbolting the outer doors, he first turned into Miss Winter's morning room, as it was called, which opened from the large hall. The moment he entered it, he saw that some one had been there before him. The lower sash of the window was thrown up, one of the shutters had been forced open, while sundry papers scattered about the floor betrayed that the escritoire had been visited. Aaron knew nothing about the jewels that had been found and left there; but the evidence of robbery was enough for him. Hurrying up to Miss Winter's chamber, he aroused her from sleep with his news. She partly dressed herself and followed him down.

Her first thought was of the jewels, and she proceeded to examine the secret recess. Yes, it stood open. The jewels had disappeared; they were stolen. But not another article in the room, save the bureau, had been touched.

Whilst his mistress was slowly gathering in these particulars, Aaron opened the other shutter, and stepped over the low sill into the garden. The hard gravelled path came close up to the window, so that he had little hope of finding any footmarks which might serve as a clue to the thief, or thieves. But Aaron, glancing keenly about, saw something lying under a holly bush, a little distance away, that for the moment caused his heart to stand still. To his old eyes it almost looked like Hubert; Hubert lying on his back.

The sleepy maids were beginning to come downstairs then. One of them; it was Betsy Tucker; entered the morning room, and stood half-dazed at what she saw. The window open, papers scattered on the carpet, her mistress, partially dressed, standing before the bureau, and Aaron hastening down the gravel path outside.

A low cry, growing into an agonised shriek, burst upon the girl's ear and that of her mistress. It came from the old man. He had dropped on one knee and was trying to lift what was lying there: Hubert Stone. Ah, never more, never more would he be lifted in life. His wide-open eyes, staring upwards, saw nothing, his form was rigid, his hair wet with the night's dews. He had been dead some hours, stabbed by some villain through the heart.

(To be continued.)

A SWAN'S SONG.

'Mid lilied reaches of the Thames we guided
Our boat—content, serene.
If heart with heart e'er mingle, undivided,
That day nought came between
To break the spell that bound us, as we glided
Thro' dappled gold and green.

You sang! There was no other sound in Nature,
Thro' all the woods of June—
The great heat stilled each voiceful woodland creature
That golden afternoon:
Till your voice broke the calm; with Love for teacher,
You sang a quaint, old tune.

You ceased. Ah, was it Echo long a-dying,
That sad, sweet, wailing note?
Each over each, the lilies idly lying,
Rocked with our drifting boat—
While, with hush'd breath, we heard the death-song sighing
From a wild swan's white throat.

We saw no form, but from the greenwood's centre
Uprose the wild, clear cry:
Perchance such strength in death's dark hour was lent her
To reach and pierce the sky;
Perchance the Paradise she longed to enter
Rolled open to her eye.

* * * * * *

Hush'd breath, clasped hands, full hearts, thro' summer even
Our light boat sought the shore,
As Charles's Wain, with all its star-points seven,
Drove through the golden floor.
Ah, love, we two have had our glimpse of Heaven—
A joy for evermore!

G. B. Stuart.

GENTLEMAN STEPHENS.

I.

A SUMMER'S afternoon was freshening into evening when a man rounded the top of a mountain in the West of England, and began its descent. Over his shoulder he carried a knapsack, and his clothes were such as a mechanic might have worn.

He was of middle height and rather slightly built, and his features were fine and striking if not particularly handsome.

The path which he followed overhung a ravine in the hill-side, and revealed, from a height of some eight hundred feet, a portion of the valley at the mountain's foot. Where the view first opened a species of platform invited to a moment's rest, and the traveller, yielding to the temptation, flung himself against the bank and took a survey of his surroundings.

On his left lay the ravine; on his right, some yards below him, a miserable kind of shanty, scarcely worthy the name of cottage, was built out of the rock, with a little clearing and some fir trees round it, the latter giving it something of an Alpine character. It had probably been some shepherd's temporary abode, abandoned from its inclement situation, for the padlock that roughly secured the door was rusty, and little glass remained in the crazy windows. The hills opposite stood across a rather narrow valley, and suddenly lowering their crests in the north-west, left an opening like a gully through which the wind might work its will. Below smiled the valley in pastoral repose, a small scattered village in its midst, and a peaceful looking little church standing between the homesteads of the living and the graves of the dead. A fair June sunshine lay on everything, and the hay-fields were ripe to harvest.

The traveller gazed upon that scene as if he could never tire of its beauty. One might have pictured him a wanderer come back again to his childhood's home, but although he had only landed from America the week before this, after an absence of some fifteen years from his native land, he had never seen this spot before.

It were impossible to say what worked the spell. Stephens, for so our traveller called himself, was only dimly conscious at this moment of the fascination on him, but he knew afterwards that a determination came on him at first sight of that valley and those mountains to stay his steps among them, and ask of them a home after all his aimless wanderings.

Stephens gazed on, tired after a long day's walk. One minute, only the pathetic bleating of the sheep and lambs answering each other in contrasting cadence, and the ever monotonous, ever changing mur-

mur of the "burn;" the next came footsteps down the path, and he looked up and saw above him perhaps the most beautiful face it had ever been his good fortune to behold.

Its possessor was a country girl in peasant dress, with petticoat short enough to show a well-turned pair of feet descending, with the ease of familiarity, the mountain path. Her dress and figure were neat, she knitted as she came along, and her face might have been the ideal of a poet. Beauty that borders on perfection must always be rare, and it is strange in what capricious nooks Nature sometimes disposes of her favourites. The beauty of this girl was not even rural. The exquisitely moulded features, delicate complexion, oval face and tiny ear, might have graced any court, and the deep-grey eyes looking out from under black curled lashes and bent brows would have rivalled any diamonds their owner could have worn.

"Good evening to you," she said, with the well-bred ease of a mountaineer, as she passed, scanning a little curiously so unexpected a thing as a stranger in that lonely spot. Stephens returned her greeting, and she passed on without a pause; but it was not in human nature not to try for a second look at that fair face.

"Can you tell me whether this path will take me to the village, and whether there is an inn there where I can get a night's lodging?"

The lovely face turned back and looked up at him, all the lovelier that a rather deeper colour than before was on her cheek. She gave him his directions, however, without the least embarrassment, while he drank in her beauty in observant silence, detaining her when she had done by another question that he might well have answered for himself.

"Does anyone live here?" he asked.

"There? oh, no; no one has lived there for a long time, it is so rough up here. Good evening to you, again." And with a pleasant nod the mountain Venus went on her way.

Meanwhile Stephens threw himself at full length on the grass, with his hands clasped behind his head, and thought of his half-vagrant life in America, and his vague plans for the future, both prospects darkened over by the shadow that brooded for ever, and must brood, at his heart. It was a sad story, and his one of those strange careers, seemingly borrowed by fact from fiction, that now and again vary the uniformity of a conventional world. His hands might well be finely shaped; his head might well be nobly set; his features, despite the ravages of a wild life, might well bear still an aristocratic stamp that could never be eradicated, for this man in working dress, inured to a life of vagabondage and toil, was an earl's son, and the descendant of a long line of noble ancestors.

But in spite of what some might have considered this happy accident of birth, he had not been fortunate in his parentage. His father was a reckless man, bent only on pleasure, devoid of principle, and cold-hearted and harsh towards his family, while his

mother had failed yet more in winning the affections of her children. To extreme worldliness of practice she joined religious opinions of the most narrow and forbidding type, so that the sons, whose delinquencies she was always lamenting, grew up hating the very names of penitence and reformation, and, in short, all the spiritual teaching to which they had been subjected. The children were six in number, and it is to be hoped that each of them found out for him or herself in after life that the teaching alone was at fault, and that the thing taught was beautiful, pure, and of good report. This man stretched now on the grass had something in his face to make one think that, despite his apparent degradation, he had not been wholly behind in this recognition.

Stephen St. Hilary Farquhar Pierrepoint was the youngest son of Lord Hazlemount, and when on his leaving school his father had procured a commission for him in a certain crack regiment, he washed his hands of him and left him to himself. Inheriting something of his father's wild and extravagant tastes, and delighted with his freedom, Stephen at once proceeded to sow his wild oats with an unsparing hand, and by the time a couple of years had passed over his head, he found his affairs in a constantly increasing state of embarrassment. He feared and shrank from the anger of both his parents; from his father's violent temper, and his mother's reproaches, that he knew so well would be mingled with self-glorification at having prophesied no good of him from his earliest years. To stave off the evil hour of confession of his reckless extravagance, he had borrowed a certain sum of money from a friend, but soon after, the friend being himself unexpectedly hard pressed, recalled the loan, and Stephen, knowing the money spent, and dismayed at the idea of failing his benefactor, knew not what step next to take.

Among some of Stephen's friends a gambling mania had of late prevailed, and into that unfortunate fascination he had been drawn, when one day came that was never to be forgotton through all his after career.

He was at cards with some of his brother officers and several others. The play ran high, Stephen's losses were considerable, his desire to win at least enough to pay his friend was passionate and pressing, and still the luck was against him. Then the temptation and the weak moment came together, as they are ever apt to do, and Stephen fell. He saw an opportunity to gain by cheating, took it, won, was watched throughout, and exposed on the instant. It was all the work of a few minutes, but the old life was over from that hour.

The camel-swallowing laws of honour are strange things, right in the abstract, but often mercilessly severe in individual cases. This ever-to-be-deplored offence of Stephen's was no representative act. He had never in his life cheated at any game whatsoever before, and never, oh, never, bear him witness, was that sad error of his life

repeated, but not one among those assembled gave the unhappy boy (he was little more) the benefit of the doubt. Horrified at his own action, he had no word to say in self-defence, and in his poor young face, white and wild with remorse, terror and shame at what he had done, they read only guilt. Stephen had to leave his regiment, and truly it was the black cap of execution they put on, and a sentence of death to a mortal life they then pronounced.

The nightmare darkness of the days that followed always seemed to him, in looking back, the very abomination of desolation. He wrote to his mother, pleading for forgiveness, but the letter he received from her in return did not encourage him to go to her for comfort. His brothers and sisters stood one and all aloof. The black sheep of the family, in spite of his unfortunate slip, had a warmer heart than any of them. Perhaps of all the conduct of his relations he found the rough-handed punishment of his father was easiest to bear. True, he cut him off with a shilling and declined to see him, but he paid his debts, giving him also his passage-money for America and a certain sum wherewith to start him there: bidding him from henceforth either drop the family name or cease to disgrace it. Ashamed and sorrow-stricken, and well-nigh broken-hearted, the poor youth took the former alternative as the safer course, and he had been known as Stephens through all his American career.

Into the details of that career there is no need to enter. It was not strange that, brought up as he had been, he should have no great predilection for any work in particular, and he had adopted no fixed line of action.

He had wandered much from place to place, tried his hand, not without credit sometimes, at a score of crafts, done many wrong things and more foolish, but from one thing he abstained with rigid determination—he never again gambled for a great sum or a small. Not from any fear of his own weakness: for some witness in himself (God's often acquittal under man's verdict) told him that nothing could ever again make him sin in that particular: but lest his very heart should die at memory of that past hour of degradation.

Who suffers passionately and to repentance, has the seeds of a noble life in him; and although there was not much to show for it in the erratic and vagabond life he had sunk to, the harvest of it sprang up in the nooks and corners of his character and doings, to be noted by Him in whose eyes no man is an outcast.

At last a longing to return to the old country came upon him with force he could not resist, and he obeyed its voice. But although it was the "heimweh" of the Germans, the "hiraeth" of the Welsh that moved him, it was of country, not of home. To Castle Pierrepoint he never would return. Both his parents had died in the prime of life during his absence. His eldest brother, now Lord Hazlemount, was married and his reign well begun; the other brothers and sisters were all scattered and married, and he had no reason to believe that

any one amongst them would extend him recognition, much less welcome, should he now appear before them. He had brought back with him from America the fruits of a lucky enterprise to the amount of a few hundred pounds, but whether to invest them profitably, or whether to live on them in comfort until spent and then "buckle to" again—go back to America and work for more—was all undecided yet. A kind of interlude had come into his life, as it will sometimes to most of us, in which it seemed impossible even to think actively an any subject. All he had settled was that until some plan resolved itself in his mind he should pass as a labourer in search of work, and take any employment that offered.

At last the sunshine faded quite away, and rising and descending to the cottage he took a long survey of the interior through the broken windows, half-smiling as he did so at an idea that entered his mind—an idea not to be dismissed, it appeared, without some consideration. The survey over, he set himself to the task of the steep descent of the mountain, and, that accomplished, proceeded to the village to find a lodging for the night.

II.

The hay harvest had just begun in the valley, and labourers being rather scarce, Stephen found, without difficulty, employment now at one farm, now at another. He was well up to his work and liked it, the people were not more rough than might be expected, and very good-natured, and the weather was perfect.

In the rows of haymakers were many pretty girls, getting more or less sunburnt under their quilted bonnets or straw hats, and among them Stephen was not slow to recognise the lovely face he had first seen beside the mountain cottage. The talk and merriment of the haymakers flowed on as fast as their rakes moved. Sometimes Stephen worked among their merry-hearted, ever advancing and receding file, sometimes took his turn among the more silent mowers, putting in a word now and then, but for the most part letting fancy set his thoughts as she pleased to the rhythms of the scythes. From the unmown meadows near, the landrail's untranslatable *rasp-rasp* came in persistent and most sweet discord, bringing thoughts of cool retreats among the long grasses and waving blooms so soon to be sacrificed to the prostrating scythe.

Stephen rapidly made acquaintance among the haymakers, and, under cover of universal attentions among the women, contrived to come pretty often into the vicinity of the belle of the field. At first he seldom addressed himself to her directly, but watched the effects on her of his words to others, and waited until she gave him a look from her violet eyes, and a dimpled smile or laugh in payment for his jests. Then he would go away, for a while contented. But it is dangerous to play with stimulants, and he knew it from the beginning.

He soon found out her name was Mary Tannett, and in that scene of familiar work and play it was not difficult to discover something of the character of those around. That hers was eminently lovable was soon apparent. She was industrious and good-tempered, merry alike with the girls and little children, and, it must be confessed, not less so among the men, although never transgressing the bounds of modesty. Nature had been prodigal in her gifts to Mary, both of person and disposition ; if it had also made her aware of her power over men, and something of a flirt, was it greatly to be wondered at, or severely to be blamed ? She had heaps of lovers, and, as far as Stephen could see, gave a certain amount of laughing and innocent hay-field encouragement to all alike, and had no objection to adding a new-comer to their list. Before a week was out, he was flirting with her vigorously—whether in jest or earnest he did not ask his fate to tell him.

Although Torsfoot was a quiet little hamlet, there was coming and going in it as it goes in the world, and strange workmen were no unusual feature there, as employment to such was often given in mines and quarries near.

The marks of good-breeding about Stephen did not wholly escape the shrewdness of the villagers, and he came to be known among them as Gentleman Stephens, and to have sundry little favours shown him as time went on. One of these was of a peculiar kind. That nook among the mountains, where first we beheld him, had not lost its fascination for Stephen, and when he saw that he could get work enough to suit him over the summer months, he asked, and obtained permission to carry out the idea with which it had inspired him, and inhabit the deserted cottage: giving it as a reason for doing so that the fresh air and freedom of the mountains were more suited to him, used as he was to a settler's life, than the confinement of the valley. There was truth in this, and little risk in granting the request. Since, had Stephen been the most accomplished thief in the world, there was nothing to abscond with in his new abode, except the bare materials of the cottage; an old bedstead, and a couple of benches, that were fixtures in it. Nor did he trouble himself with any furnishing beyond the merest necessaries. He took nearly all his meals in the village, coming down from his eyrie in the early morning to his work, and toiling back again under the stars or through the moonlight of that fine summer, with a spirit that had more and more to unburden in the solitude of his self-chosen exile.

It is well to live at times midway between the village and the stars, taking counsel from each in turn, and thus it was revealed to Stephen, clear as daylight, what in reality he had come to seek. He had long been outgrowing an aimless, wandering life, and if his development had been slow, it had been complete. He asked at last to be led to a better and nobler existence, and had the rare wisdom to divine it might be found best for him now in a safe and settled home, however lowly, in harmless industry and a manly

adherence to a standard of right that insensibly had grown higher from year to year. It was well. But beside that discovery, what was this sweet unrest and darling hope that had also sprung to life? Out of that purposeless pause in his life a purpose was growing, and the garland of hay-field flowers wherewith he had laughingly bound himself turned by a magic touch into fetters not to be broken without cost and pain.

Just as on the day of his arrival there he had recognised in the placid burn and breeze possible agents of destruction, so now in this summer love of his he saw possibilities of satiety on the one hand, and disappointment on the other. Prudence was not a Pierrepoint characteristic, but Stephen knew now that he faced a risk. He had preferred a wandering life hitherto to any other: might he not, if he married Mary, and settled in this village, find the monotony become unbearable when joined with uneducated surroundings, and unrelieved by the change and adventure of a colonist's life? Doggedly something in him replied that if he did the deed he would take and bear the consequences somehow. From his own estate he had fallen for ever, and marriage was alone likely to have attractions for him in the case of a sweet, pure girl like Mary whom he really loved. Surely something of an elevation, something of refinement and happiness might be found in a union with her, and love would bridge the inequalities between them? Yes, and again yes. And yet, should he after all his years of hard experience risk his happiness on a woman's word, believe a woman's smile, and trust her faith?

Danger was easily realised, prudence easily invoked on the mountains, but some Thessalian magic had surely been wafted to that valley strong to undo his resolutions. In spite of his meditations overnight it needed but to find that Mary, owing to her mother's illness, was one day absent from the hay-field, to make the desire to seek her almost uncontrollable. It was only a small obstacle in his way, but Stephen, like all warm lovers, felt an obstacle was there only to be overcome.

By this time Stephen had been over a month in the place, and the harvest was now being finished. He had learnt the ways of the people pretty well, and knew enough of Mary's habits to be able to follow her in the evening to the field where she milked her cow. She looked more lovely than ever as she received him, glad to see one of her late companions come to enliven a dull day. The beauty and the gladness combined were too much for him. Stephen threw wise resolutions to the winds, and his heart sprang to his lips before he had well settled what to say.

Mary protested, refused to listen, and rebuked his overboldness (stranger that he was) in making such a request. Overboldness in a lover, pleaded Stephen, was a good fault, so was there any other thing against him? Was she engaged? It might or might not be

so. Mary grew shy, evaded direct answers, bewitched the cow into troublesome antics, cumbered Stephen with all the milking utensils to carry, and finally escaped from him into the cottage, where he forebore to follow, respecting the presence of the invalid.

Baffled and puzzled as to the real reason of the refusal, but by no means disheartened, Stephen passed back into the lane and met there one of the haymakers going home, a rake over his shoulders.

"What are you always after that girl for?" said the labourer. "There are plenty of others to be had for the asking, and they say she is engaged to William Morpeth."

"And who is William Morpeth?" said Stephen, turning with his counsellor to lean over a gate, and catching a wisp of hay that hung on the hedge, to twist idly round his fingers.

"He works now at Bailey's farm on the hill yonder," said the man, "but he belongs here, and very poor folks they are. His father is bedridden and lives in the cottage by the Tannetts' over there. Some says she has given him her word to marry him, but the Morpeths' is a poor house to go to, and they could never get married yet."

No later than next day Stephen Pierrepoint and William Morpeth met face to face. Each took special note of the other, as was not unnatural, since Stephen recognised in William the first formidable rival in Mary's affections he had yet encountered, while many officious voices had apprised William of the stranger's attentions to his sweetheart.

William was not a rival to be despised. Ten years on the right side of Stephen, he was a handsome young fellow, dark eyed and dark haired, with a red and brown complexion that recalled latitudes more southern than that of Britain. He was warm-natured, too, and full of merriment and insouciance, and Stephen could not help confessing to himself that William had one of those characters that have a particularly marked personality, so that he caused a sensible difference in the work and play of the harvest, whereas many had come and gone there, making no especial mark. William's superabundant life and spirits made his entrance to a group to be followed pretty certainly by laughter and "daffing," and the frequent call for him among the men made it plain that he could put his hand to the various tasks going on with good effect. They said he had been a treasure to his master at Bailey's farm, and knew more of crops and stock than the farmer himself, but he would soon be out of place, as this master gave up his tenancy at Michaelmas and his servants would be dismissed. Waiting for the corn harvest to begin, William had come home for a short stay, and took the good the gods gave him in the harvest gaieties with alacrity. Both Stephen and he were particular favourites among the women, and the chief object of their attention might have been considered to divide her favours very evenly between them.

A desperate strength rose up in Stephen's soul, the excitement of competition acting on him with a tonic power. If only to be avenged on his former life he must win Mary. He would bring good out of evil, turn the ill consequences of the past into friendly agents, if only he might take this girl, good and pure as she was bright and beautiful, to his heart and hearth.

Oh, the thoughts that arose in Stephen's heart as he sat on summer nights outside his cottage, the purification that came out of the yearning, the noble aspirations that sprang from his love! Only those who have fallen can know the joy of an uprising, or what it is, in retracing painfully past errors, to find with glad surprise the road of repentance opening suddenly on green pastures and fair new beginnings. The Jacob's ladder of his dreams joined earth to heaven in a way that the assurance of his best self told him was no romantic or impossible fancy, and, if William was to be sacrificed, he could not accept the notion that Mary's love could be to that careless young fellow the thing of moment and salvation it had become to himself.

But days passed on and Stephen was not wholly satisfied with the result. When others were by, Mary would laugh and chaff with him, if he challenged her, as much as ever, but he could rarely secure her for a tête-à-tête. When he did she was shy and silent and eager to escape: whereas he had surprised her more than once strolling through the lanes with William in tranquil talk, or leaning against the ricks with him in some undisturbed nook, or lingering by the stiles, left behind by others going home.

So time passed on until all Stephen's passions were at fever heat, and the hour came at last when he felt he might seek his fate again at Mary's hands without this time being precipitate in doing so. William had gone back to his work, but not easy at leaving a rival behind him, he returned on every leisure evening he could get, to haunt Mary's neighbourhood and keep an eye on Stephen's movements.

It was a dewy August evening. Here and there in the valley, meadows thick with corn sheaves made picturesque variety amid the green of the harvested hayfields, while the later corn waved its seas of brown gold in triumphal ripeness. Blackberries in fruit and blossom trailed over the banks, nuts were ripening on the hedges, but Stephen looked on none of these things as, with concentrated resolution and hope in his face, he passed out of the village and through the fields that gradually rose towards the ascent of the mountain.

By a stile that looked out on a lane Stephen made a halt, and, leaning against it, looked somewhat musingly up the lane down which he expected Mary shortly to pass. She had been doing a day's needlework at one of the cottages, and he knew the hour of her returning. He was there to-night to win a wife, nay, to win what seemed to him the salvation of his wild career, or else——but he did not give a name to the alternative.

Down the lane came Mary, but Stephen stepped back into the field with a muttered exclamation, for at her side was William. Something warned Stephen that he could not trust himself just then to meet his rival without mischief coming from the encounter. He stood back against the hedge to let them pass, himself unseen, uncertain what course he should then proceed to take. But the Olympian gods had prepared for themselves a little tableau on this August evening among the dews, and were not to be baulked. Stephen heard the advancing steps and voices drawing nearer, and as he caught the substance of the words his face grew eager.

"Stop here," said William, as they neared the stile; "now or never we must have it out"—and they came to a stand leaning against the rails. Stephen stood irresolute, out of sight, but within hearing; then the conversation began again, and his resolution was taken. He had done many wrong things in his life, and he did one more now, for he stood still where he was, and William and Mary spoke on.

"You say you care for me," said William, "and I have always believed and trusted you, and been willing to wait; but one may play at that game too long, and a new face may take a girl's fancy more than an old one."

"Your face is none so old as Gentleman Stephens'," said Mary, with a laugh.

"I don't care," said William. "You talk plenty with him whatever his face may be, and how can I tell what the fellow says to you when you are alone. I can never get much sense from you about it."

"You have no need to care about that after what I told you just now," said Mary. "Some people would not take it so light, I can tell you."

"Mary," said William, putting his arm round her waist, a movement she half resisted and half allowed, "I do not take it light; but listen here, my dear, for I did not tell you all just now. I would not vex you by being jealous and doubting you, no, not about no one, if I could stay here and fight it out fair with that fellow. If I could only take Bailey's farm I should be afraid of nought. We would get married at once, and I know I could make it pay if only I had enough to make a start."

"They were saying up at Reeves' the other night that you had a wonderful notion of farming," said Mary.

"To be sure I have," said William, with naïve seriousness. "There would be no fear for me if only I had money to put into the land; but where is it to come from? I can only make a little here bit by bit, and maybe it will be five years to come before I get enough to do it."

"Well, we can wait," said Mary; "we are young enough to do that yet awhile."

"Not I," said William. "I am tired already of waiting, and my

mind is made up. I mean to go to California and try my luck there for a year or two, and I'm going right away this autumn. Nay, Mary, you are never going to cry," said he, although his own voice was husky enough.

"Oh, William, William," said Mary, "you will never, never go away and leave me all alone?"

A sob broke from her with the words, but when she would have sunk her face on her hands, William drew it instead to his shoulder. He spoke no more than she did for a minute or so, and when he did his voice had that preternatural clearness about it that reminds one of the fleeting sunshine of a showery day.

"Come, come, Mary, cheer up. It is nothing to cry for. I will be back before you well-nigh think I am gone. There are fine fortunes to be made out there, and what's to hinder me from making one? We shall not want a very large one, I take it, to begin life with, anyway, and it will be a first-rate thing for me to see a bit of the world before settling down. There are many ways out there, besides the gold-digging, of making money, and when a man has his mind set on it as I have he finds them out. Why, I have heard them say that at games—cards and such like—a man may put a small sum of money down and gain back in one evening more than we earn here in a twelvemonth."

"But don't some say it is wicked to play cards for money?" said Mary.

"Some do; but it is all nonsense. What is fair for one is fair for another; it is all on the square. I will not bring you back one penny that is not fairly my own, and if it will come by working I would rather get it that way; but if I cannot I shall try some other dodge."

"Oh, William, you have no call to think of any of them. You said yourself last Easter you would never be jealous of Will Massey again; and there is Dick Bradshaw going off to London, if it's him you mind."

"No, Mary, you know very well it is not Bradshaw or Massey that I mind about now. It is that confounded Gentleman Stephens that is driving me wild. He is not one of our sort, bad luck to him. Gentleman or not, he has a way with him that you women seem to like. You are not plain with me about him, Mary, as you are about the rest."

Mary was silent. William struck his foot impatiently against a stone.

"I daresay I am a fool for my pains," he resumed presently, "to go away and give him such a chance, but I must have that money, and there is no other way. I will get it in whatever way I can and come back. If I find you have played me false and forsaken me for him, it will be only one more fellow gone to the bad, I suppose, and on his head be the curse of it." He clenched the

gate with his hands fiercely as he spoke, love and jealousy, those old authors of a thousand tragedies, tearing at his heart.

"William," said Mary, in a subdued voice, "I will tell you the whole truth about Gentleman Stephens if you will listen now."

"Well," said William, and he put his head down on his arms to listen.

"He asked me to be his wife a month ago," said Mary, "and I said 'No,' but that's not it, for he has been just the same since then, and maybe means to ask again. I like him, William, there's no denying that; I shall always like him; but I could never marry him if he asked me a hundred times; never, never. Perhaps it is because he is so much older than you and me, or perhaps it is what you said just now about his not being of our sort, and that he is, as they have been saying, a gentleman in disguise, but I can never speak comfortably with him when we are alone; there seems the world between us somehow. It is easy enough to talk and laugh when others are by, he is so amusing, and you know I said I liked him."

"Yes," returned William, rather sullenly, "you need not tell me that again."

"Well, but that is all. It was nice to have him notice one so much more than the rest," said Mary frankly; "and no one can help seeing he is a very nice man, but I could never marry anyone I did not feel at home with. He is nothing in the world to me like what you are—only just my friend."

"And what am I to you?" asked William. Mary did not reply, but the look she gave her lover was enough, and he took her triumphantly in his arms.

A few days later the head of a well-known banking firm in the neighbouring county town gave audience to a stranger whose mission and whose manner set the banker pondering, as being somewhat at variance with his self-assigned character, which was that of a working man. The result of the conference was that a sum of money, amounting to several hundred pounds, was lodged in the banker's hands, to be paid over at once to William Morpeth, accompanied by a few written words, unsigned, and which ran as follows:

"Your conversation on Friday evening was overheard by one who had no right to listen, but whom it concerned in a way that need not be mentioned here, but which you will both know. He sends this sum of money, in apology, as a parting wedding gift to you and your bride, and hopes it may come useful to stock the farm. If you think it at all necessary to repay the giver, you can do so in this way: never play cards, or anything else for large sums of money, in case you should be tempted in a moment of weakness, as many another has been before you, to some deed of dishonour which you may vainly repent for the remainder of your days."

It was not difficult for William and Mary to conjecture from whom

that money came, and deep were their gratitude and compunction in doing so. With conjecture, however, they had to be satisfied. After receiving his wages on that Saturday morning, Gentleman Stephens had vanished from Torsfoot and the mountain hut as suddenly as he had come.

III.

It was November, and a storm of wind and rain from the north-west had been driving for days over Torsfoot. The fern on the mountain side was brown, and the rain hung like tear-drops on the sere plumes that had once been so beautiful. The grass was soaked and slippery with wet, and the torrent leaped down the ravine from point to point like an athlete whose sport was turned into desperate earnest.

Down over the mountain brow came, once more, Stephen Pierrepoint, and stood, as he had stood that day in June, to look upon the valley. Its aspect was changed indeed since then. Swamped, swelled, and browned with rain, white mists hung in shrouds on the mountains, with breaks here and there through which the headlands loomed out in sterner outlines from their isolation. Yet was there beauty in that wild scene for eyes that could see it. Stephen too was changed. He was thin and pale, and the thought intruded itself on him, although impatiently repressed, that he had over-rated his strength for the journey he had taken that day. He was here this time not to stay, but only to take a farewell look at the place where he had known so much happiness and so much pain—a matter of sentiment only, but one too strong for him to resist.

He knew that William and Mary were married ere this, and comfortably settled on Bailey's farm, thanks to the money he had given them. But he had no wish to meet or speak with either of them again, now that anger against the one was over, and love for the other must be foresworn. Yet he was here—here like an unlaid spectre, back at the spot where he had seen her first, and which had fascinated him with a spell which had carried in it love, and suffering, and doom. Looking at the cottage, he thought of the last night he had passed there, and the conflict he had gone through during sleepless hours of agony never to be forgotten. Again his love yearned for requital, again his pride rebelled at thought of his rival's triumph, again generosity rising above self was moved to pity for the lovers, and again the collapse of the new life he had dreamed of brought him face to face with the loneliness and failure of his own career.

In that chaos of feeling one resolute determination had alone maintained itself—a resolution formed quickly while yet he leaned against the hedge, an undreamt of listener to the loves and troubles of William and Mary, for Stephen's was one of those natures whose generous impulses are sentinel to all others, the first to be challenged, however

soon after less laudable passions might awake. This determination had also been the one that had resolved itself into action, for, as we have seen, a few days later Stephen had bestowed all his worldly goods on the pair whose loves had cost himself so dear, saving them from parting and temptation, and cutting off from himself any possible advantage that William's absence might have brought.

With characteristic imprudence, Stephen had given well-nigh all he had to give, reserving only to himself enough to keep him from absolute want while seeking work elsewhere. And Fortune, who ever loves to take us at disadvantage, had dealt badly with him ever since that deed of Quixotic generosity. At last life itself had been threatened. He had fallen ill of an intermittent fever, and although he had struggled through it in the hospital of a certain town and recovered, it was with a much reduced fund of strength that he had started again on his wanderings.

Worst of all, his spirit was more broken than anyone looking at his face would have believed, for we players in the comedy of Life must often give the lie to our heart's experience thus. The present was weary, the future a blank, while the events of the summer seemed to have happened long ago to some other self who had died and bequeathed but a barren heritage to the self of to-day. So he settled to leave England and return to America, and work and wear away his days there as best he might in harmless if uninteresting monotony. He had wandered south, but began retracing his steps to Liverpool as soon as the doctor had given him his dismissal from the hospital. He chose the route that passed near Torsfoot, but nevertheless kept up a deception with himself, with some success, that he had no intention of visiting it on the way. Even this very day he had made no provision for doing so; yet when he came to the spot where the ascent of the mountain began he turned to it at once, leaving the main road to do so, and giving up the chance of reaching the next town that night. He had taken a meal that morning at a way-side inn, but the fare was coarse, and Stephen's invalided appetite had turned from it in disgust, so that the landlord told him he was a cheap customer to feed. Stephen ascended the mountain, naturally, on the opposite side from that he had come over on his arrival from Liverpool, and he found by degrees the difference was not to his advantage. The ascent was gradual and very deceptive, with many downs and ups to toil over, and the sun of the brief November day was just setting as he stood at last on the knoll above the mountain cottage.

He was weary from want of food as well as from the laborious miles he had trodden that day, and it would take him yet some time to reach the village if he made up his mind to go there for food. Indecision kept him irresolute, and as he waited one of those stormy but beautiful gleams that often break through a wet day at sunset, burst on valley and hills around. Great imperial clouds, armaments

of another sphere, piled themselves one on the other in gloomy and ever-changing grandeur; between them the spaces of sky were almost green, and the parting sun looked down in triumph to see how sad the world could become without him. It was a brief pageant. Scarcely had the gold passed from the hill tops than the clouds, too, like deposed autocrats, lost the splendour of their borrowed glories, and stood out threatening and black; the dusk gathered quickly, and the wind at intervals swept in gusts across the mountains. The rain began again, and Stephen came out of his reverie with a sudden start. Yes, he would go down to the valley and seek the food he so much needed. The next step showed him what the knoll he had stood on had concealed. The torrent of the ravine had sent out a tributary arm, that, breaking across the path, made descent, or approach to the cottage, a matter of some difficulty. Stephen's practised eye measured both the difficulty and the best means of coping with it with quick accuracy.

Avoiding the path, he descended the grassy slope, crossed the broken edges of the brawling stream, sure-footed as ever, and then—suddenly stretched his full length on the ground with an exclamation of pain.

For a few minutes there he lay, and then with difficulty regained his footing on the slippery ground, and leant on his stick, which luckily had not rolled beyond his reach. Even with its aid, progress was extremely difficult, for he had not only sprained his right ankle severely, but injured the knee as well. The question which had so recently perplexed him was simplified now. The descent of the mountain to-night was impracticable, and he might think himself lucky that the cottage was close at hand to yield him an asylum. Slowly and painfully he reached its door, pushed open the rough latch and entered.

It was just as he had left it, except for the removal of a few things which the neighbours had taken away. But the scanty furniture had that weird look about it which belongs alone to the furniture of long uninhabited rooms—as if it had been at no good before the opening of the doors, and only resumed innocence and immovability when brought under man's scrutiny once more. The fancy struck Stephen with a melancholy feeling of repulsion as he entered, but he had no leisure for fostering it, as at first his hands were full lighting a fire, and attending to his hurt as best he could. Darkness had fallen ere his tasks were completed. He secured the door, and arranged himself with what comfort he could on the settle by the fire, into the dismal flames of which, rising fitfully from the damp wood, he gazed as earnestly as if he read his fortune there. He was faint and weary with pain and fasting, for beyond some water he had procured from the spring, there was absolutely nothing for him to eat or drink. The night was very dreary, the rain beating incessantly upon the thatch, and the wind, which had fallen, returning once again to try

the strength of the door. The darkness outside found its way into the cottage, giving mystery to every corner, and lurking in secret places, as if it watched to seize on Stephen when the protection of the fire should be withdrawn.

Was it wonderful that he sat there in dejection? Under the most favourable circumstances, pain and prostration of strength can bring desolation of soul that words are poor to express, and Stephen was in the wilderness now with none to sustain or cheer him, his portion in this world summed up to him in three bitter words: want, suffering, and loneliness. Love had seemed near him but a few short months ago. Even now the smiling image of the most beautiful face he had ever seen looked at him from the fire. But there, as so often before, ill fate had followed him, and he who might once have aspired to the noble ladies of rank and fashion, had failed to win the heart of a rustic bride from her rustic lover. Foiled, foiled! Was a curse to rest on him for ever for the sin of his youth? Was there no love for him in heaven or earth that could make some amends for the dreary road he had trodden and must tread? No answer of peace and promise spoke out of his heart, and Stephen leant his head on the rough arm of the settle, a discouraged and well-nigh broken-hearted man. This intensity of sadness was followed by a stupor from which the pain of his ankle roused him, and, seeking the bedstead in the corner of the cottage, he flung himself down upon it. The fire had gone out—but it was no matter, for weakness, damp, pain and hunger had done their work, and Stephen was soon tossing in the heat and restlessness of fever. At intervals, consciousness of his present surroundings returned, but for the most part his mind was over-ridden by the disproportionate fancies of delirium, and it was morning ere he slept.

He woke in the afternoon faint and exhausted, got up and opened the door and reviewed his situation. It was not cheering. The pain and swelling were great in his leg, so that the walk across the cottage was with difficulty accomplished, and to attempt the descent of the mountain was impossible. He shouted with a somewhat enfeebled voice as he looked down through the mists at the distant village, but from the height at which he stood, the chances were poor indeed that he would be heard, and there was little likelihood that any would be on the mountains at this time of year, and in such weather. None came, and darkness fell again. The second night was an exaggerated repetition of the first.

On the third afternoon when Stephen dragged himself to the door he fainted with the pain. By degrees the air revived him, and he came to himself. The spring was close at hand, he reached it and drank a draught of water, then leaning against the bank he looked down wistfully once more upon the village. He did not shout to-day; he did not look expectantly around as if for help. He only looked at the village and the churchyard, at the hayfields of last summer, and

at Bailey's farm upon the opposite uplands, with its pretty house sheltering safely from the winter's rages among ricks, and orchards, and pleasant pastures. Stormy clouds were hurrying past the sun, but his lowering beams lingered lovingly on that happy spot. Stephen's face had grown terribly wan, and there was a strange look on it as he narrowly scanned the familiar view, in spite of the weariness that was on him. He had dreamed and thought much of Mary during that past night: much too of old tender memories of childhood, and of his parents, brothers and sisters: memories from which even his sad experience had not excluded him. He thought too of other things, but those thoughts went up straight to Heaven and left no record on earth. He was too weary to look out long, but turned his gaze from the sheltered homes of the valley to the desolate cottage. The intense chill of fever was on him, but there was no more wood left to light the fire, and only the hardest of couches waited for his pain-racked limbs. Nevertheless he went in calmly and shut the door.

"William," said Mary Morpeth that evening to her husband as they sat at their comfortable tea, "there was smoke again to-day in the mountain cottage. Perhaps Gentleman Stephens has come back. Let us go up to-morrow and see."

"That we will," said William. "I should like to shake him by the hand more than most men. I reckon it is all along of him we are sitting here so comfortable to-night. We will go to-morrow."

As darkness fell the wind began to howl among the orchard-trees of the farm, but it was up on the mountain that its towering strength expended its full force. It raved and rioted about the cottage as at some coveted prey, and each blast that rode up from afar came with voice of fate, or fury, or prophet of ill.

The spirit of the mountains was abroad, the thunder pealed to the echo, the torrent went leaping down the rocks. Hark! a louder blast than ever came up through that tunnel in the hills, gathering over-mastering force as it careered along. It reached the mountain, tore along its side, and with a loud ha, ha! dashed in the door of the cottage and entered.

For some minutes all was confusion, and everything borne in by the wind, or light enough inside, danced a Walpurgis eddy in the centre of the floor. But something in the cottage awed that revel into silence by its presence, and by degrees the wind let go its partners in the dance and slunk away like one abashed or defeated. It was the presence of Death. Stephen Pierrepoint lay dead upon the bed, and as the lightning played upon his face it revealed there a mysterious look of triumph and rapture.

Foiled was he? condemned? forsaken? his yearnings after a better life mocked and rejected? Not so, never so. Only sometimes, when such longings are sincerest, God, while accepting the end, rejects the means we have chosen and leads us to it in His own way—it may be by a sharp straight path of agony, but be sure it is the nearest way

home. It may be that all Stephen had dreamed of love and purity and renewed excellence in the mountain cottage under the summer stars, was granted to him in full abundance when his spirit passed in that November storm.

They came up next day to the cottage and found him there, and both William and Mary shed loving tears of compassion as they looked on the thin white face of the dead man.

In his pocket-book they found, with other papers, one giving full particulars as to his family. It was signed by his name, Stephen St. Hilary Farquhar Pierrepoint, and they had no difficulty in recognising the handwriting as that of their benefactor.

The clergyman of the parish wrote to Lord Hazlemount, acquainting him with the death of the black sheep of the family; but that nobleman was busy entertaining his friends for pheasant shooting, and had his hands altogether too full to attend much to the news. He certainly broke up the party, all, to a few old friends, and despatched a younger brother to attend the funeral and take possession of the very little Stephen had to leave. As for bringing back the sheep into the family fold, even for interment, it was out of the question. It would be only to open up again that most unfortunate affair, and incur besides such a lot of unnecessary expense.

So Stephen was allowed to sleep under the yews of Torsfoot Churchyard, within sight of the mountain cottage and of Mary's home.

As for the unfortunate affair alluded to above, there is among the many pathetic tales of Hans Christian Andersen, one in which the heroine's vanity for her red shoes leads her into much folly and sin, afterwards followed by repentance and suffering. At last she died: "and then in Heaven," the writer concludes, "no one said a word about the little red shoes." I think that *there* Stephen Pierrepoint has been forgiven too.

ABOUT NORWAY.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland."

A REMARKABLE peculiarity amongst the Norwegians is their apparent ability to do without sleep during the long light nights of summer. At midnight, or at two or four in the morning, they seemed as wide awake as at mid-day. This was so generally the case, that at last I began to wonder whether they took any sleep at all during these months: making up for it, like the tortoise, by burrowing out of sight when the cold and darkness of winter began their reign.

To some extent we were also afflicted with this same malady of insomnia. Night after night the constant daylight and ever-shifting scenes robbed us of all wish and ability to seek the rest Nature has provided for her children. And even in slumber, when tardily wooed and won, there lurked an unpleasant consciousness that it was still broad daylight. Thus when, in due time and place, there came a return to one's natural state of darkness, it met with the welcome reserved for an old friend.

We left Throndhjem about midnight. Twilight wrapped the town and the surrounding hills in silence: twilight that was neither that which precedes darkness nor dawn, but was of a more distinctly weird, unearthly aspect than either. This truly was "neither night nor day." It cast a pale shadow upon the faces of the little crowd of Norwegians on the lower decks, who had escorted their friends to the boat: friends bound for one or other of the ports at which we should touch on our way northwards.

The Norwegians are wonderful people for saying farewell. For so unemotional a race they characterise their partings by a large amount of demonstrative enthusiasm; wringing of hands and embracings, huggings and claspings, multiplying themselves ad infinitum. So was it to-night, until the captain, half laughing, half impatient, would wait no longer, and blowing the whistle for the third time, ordered the gangway to be withdrawn. Upon which ensued last embraces, tearings asunder, and a scramble for shore. Then all grew suddenly quiet, old men and women, young men and maidens, as they watched us depart: a pale shadow, as I have said, cast by this mysterious twilight upon their ghostly faces. As the men bowed solemnly—as only Norwegians can bow—they might in the silence of this weird light have been saluting phantoms of another world. Half instinctively one looked eastward, expecting that this light not of earth, had thrown back the closed portals, and opened to one's second sight a celestial vision. All above, however, was blank though lovely space.

We hurried out into the broad waters, and were fairly away. The

town receded, the crowd diminished and disappeared, the vision faded, and we went below; night and darkness now left behind us.

Some hours later, when once more on deck, all sense of mystery had departed with the twilight. The broad, blazing sun was steeping everything in a golden mist that would soon lift and give place to intense noon-day heat. The rocky, barren coast, looked full of beauty and repose in this rarefied air. All that morning we were winding in and out of islands, through narrow channels, where we could almost touch the land on either side, and where the emerald water was so transparent that one longed to plunge into its cool shallows and pluck the treasures that lurked below. Every now and then, as the rocks and islands opened out, we came into full view of the sea, calm and beautiful, hazy with heat, and sparkling with countless sun flashes.

Passing at length through a narrow space, we stopped at Roervik: a picturesque spot more really Norwegian than anything we had seen since leaving Bergen. The houses, overhanging the water and on the slopes, were many of a bright red that harmonised well with the vivid green of the hills in the background: hills so artistically grouped, so full of graceful outline, that it was difficult to believe their arrangement accidental. The boats, painted red and green, lying about the little harbour, added to the liveliness of the scene; whilst intensely clear and rarefied air threw over all a charm few can realize who have not felt and seen it. One's ordinary life and breathing seemed suspended; the days passed here must not be counted as days in which we grew older: time was not. Like the sun on the dial of Ahaz, our lives went back ten degrees. It was dreamland: and, for the time being, we were dream people.

We landed two quaint Norwegian carts, took on board a boat-full of boxes, and started on our way to Gudvik: a little spot far less picturesque than Roervik. But in this shimmering atmosphere, this air that almost seemed to endow one with the powers of flying, every place was beautiful; the smallest house or boat, a speck upon the horizon, the most trifling detail, all became interesting.

After leaving Gudvik we found ourselves for a time more in the open sea. Here we encountered many porpoises, that dodged about and shot under our bows with amazing swiftness. When the first was seen, an excited cry of "A whale! A whale!" was raised. The passengers charged from one end of the vessel to the other, and some of the ladies who had been taking a siesta, hastened up the staircase, with an agonised cry of "Where? Where?" fearing the monster might disappear unseen. Then the porpoise obligingly rolled into sight again for a moment, amidst a universal cry of "There he is!" The ladies excitedly congratulated each other, whilst the men, with a dignity befitting the sterner sex, merely exchanged glances that seemed to say they had not come up to the north seas for nothing.

All this time I had been on the bridge with the captain, and we

were both wicked enough to enjoy the scene and to make no sign. But presently, when more porpoises appeared and crossed our path, a young and pretty American girl who had been silently cogitating for some time, delivered herself aloud of this monstrous and seditious reflection :

"Do you think, sister, that the whale was only a porpoise after all ?"

Soon after this little diversion, looking out to sea, we espied what at first was taken to be land and rocks. But as we looked the vision changed and shifted, expanded and contracted, and we soon saw that we were looking at a mirage. For a second time all was excitement. Marvellous as the great whale had been, this was still more so, and certainly was more curious and beautiful. Only in the most intensely rarefied air does the mirage show itself. The water everywhere reflected a white heat and glare ; and between us and the mirage the air seemed to waver and vibrate. Rocks and trees were distinctly outlined, now shooting upwards to considerable height, now as suddenly dwarfing. The most curious reflection was that of a vessel in full sail, reversed, so that the masts pointed downwards. Here at last was the phantom ship ready for the dream people : perhaps the vision that the little pale-faced crowd at Throndhjem had seen and bowed to in the weird midnight light.

These mirages seldom occur, even up in these latitudes, and whilst some of the men belonging to the vessel declared it to be a sign of fine weather, others affirmed the contrary. The captain, on being consulted, replied with the spirit of a Delphic oracle : "After a mirage I have known it fine, and I have known it wet." Upon which the deputation withdrew with relieved faces, whilst the captain whispered to me : "More often wet than fine, but I would not say so." Perhaps he was right not to cast even the shadow of a gloom upon that most glorious day.

And now in the distance, rising out of the water, we saw the celebrated mountain of *Torghatten*, which possesses a natural tunnel through the centre, showing, even from the ship, a large square opening with a background of sky.

We steered for the mountain, which rises, a gigantic mass of 800 feet, out of the water. The shore at the foot of the mountain is rocky and shallow, and only in fine weather is it possible to land. To-day of all days had been made for the expedition, and towards evening we dropped anchor and went ashore in the ship's boats.

We scrambled on to the rocks jutting out of the water, and so on to land. Terra-firma it could hardly be considered. The chief officer was best acquainted with the bearings of the place, and under his guidance a few of us got safely on to the slopes and began to climb towards the tunnel. Others more self-willed and independent would follow their own course, fell into bogs and marshes, and were finally glad enough to be brought round into a safer pathway.

It was a steep climb of some 400 feet to the tunnel, the way overgrown with tangle and wild flowers. At length we reached the mouth of the cave. An enormous hole or tunnel about 60 feet high at the entrance startled us at the first moment by its huge proportions. The sides were so flat and perpendicular that they might have been cut by human ingenuity. The ground or floor of the tunnel was rough and uneven, strewn with immense rocks and boulders that in the course of ages have fallen from the roof. Few ventured to the other end; the gloomy journey of 530 feet was too rough, and even perilous for want of light, to be undertaken. Yet a few of us went through, and one solitary lady even got half way. Then her courage

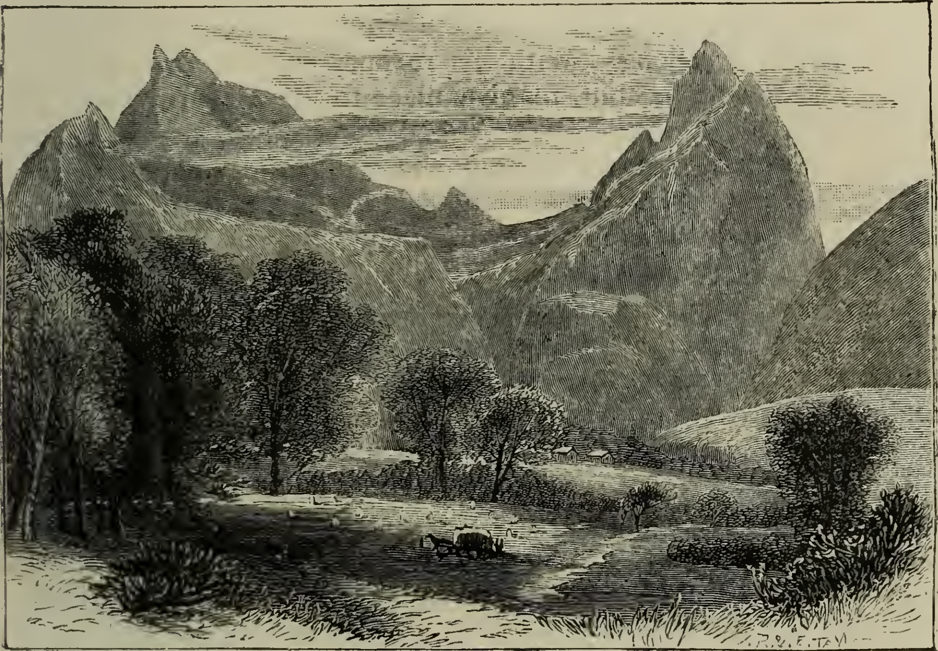
A LONELY SPOT (ROMSDAL).

vanished, and she with it. The tunnel is 60 feet high at the east entrance, nearly 200 feet high in the centre, and 250 feet at the west opening.

From the further end, looking upwards was like gazing into the roof of some grand cathedral of nature; a temple in which the Druids might have performed their mystic rites to the chant of an ever beating sea. Far down at our feet was a tiny house and harbour, and a few boats lying peaceably at anchor. A stone in the wall to our left bore the name of Oscar, and above it a crown, traced by the king's hand. The sea from this elevated point was inexpressibly beautiful, calm as a mirror, expansive, and gaining the repose of evening.

A young flaxen-haired Norwegian who had landed with us had startled us by flying through the tunnel, jumping from rock to rock and stone to stone, almost with the speed of an arrow and the sure-

footedness of the deer. How he did it in the gloom, never pausing a moment, and never missing his mark was a marvel to everyone but himself. He returned almost as quickly. They were now beckoning to us from the other entrance, their forms standing out against the clear background of the sky, the captain's voice with a far-off sound hastening us onwards. But we had not the gift of the flaxen-haired lad, and could attempt nothing in the way of speed over these rough places. A. and Lieutenant X., our German friend, the stoutest yet most active of our party, started to go round the mountain instead of returning through the tunnel, and the chief officer with difficulty persuaded them to abandon the attempt. They



ROMSDALSHORN.

would certainly have been left behind to await our return from the North Cape.

Once more at the entrance of the tunnel, we were glad to see the steamer awaiting our return in patience. Riding at anchor, and floating like a cork upon the waters, she looked a beautiful object, full of life and grace. To reach the foot of the mountain, enter the boats, and once more find ourselves on deck, was a short and easy task. Our visit to this mountain island in the far north had been a very pleasant experience in our journey.

We were soon on our way to the next station, Quello. Again like a golden ball, the sun went below the horizon and the sky was suffused with rosy light. The land, islands, and water—all was steeped in crimson. Where ripples came they came in flashes of red. The sky seemed to reflect almost all the prismatic colours, from crim-

son and dark violet to the purest aqua-marine, loveliest of all tints. Again streaks of flaming crimson flashed across the heaven, changing with every moment. It almost seemed as if these glorious phenomena of nature—I can call them by no other name—spoke to the world in a language for which words were unneeded. If volumes were written about these glorious sunsets in the North Sea; if all the superlative adjectives were exhausted in their praise; description would yet fall infinitely short of their beauty. To those who really enjoyed them and felt their full power, it was only possible to gaze in silence—and, if it might be, in solitude: nothing before you but this grand, almost incomprehensible glory, filling you as much with reverence as with delight.

To-night, though not yet within the Arctic Circle, the sun did not disappear for very long. With his reappearance this multitude of shades and tones died out, to give place to the more certain light. Before this, Lieutenant X. and A. had gone down, and indifferent for the time being to the romantic and beautiful in nature, were pledging each other in nothing nearer to nectar than Norwegian beer. It was hard lines upon Herr X., this voyage. When he joined at Aalesund every berth on board was taken, and they had to make up one for him in the saloon, in company with four or five other passengers. Therefore turn in at what hour he might, he had to turn out again the next morning at six, in order that the saloon might be prepared for breakfast. It was hard lines, I say; but I never found anyone take life so good-naturedly; take the rough with the smooth so amiably; submit so patiently to small encroachments upon his rights: encroachments that are quite sure to take place where many passengers are met together, and some, perhaps, exact a little more than their due. Rather an exception to his race, Herr X. was full of gentleness and courtesy. Our chief companion during the voyage, by his intelligent remarks, his keen appreciation of scenery, his humour, and his readiness to join in the laugh against himself in his mistakes in speaking English, he contributed not a little to its enjoyment.

Sunday morning proved as beautiful as ever, the sky as cloudless: so far the mirage had brought no ill-fortune. But the captain had said that if bad weather came it would not be for three or four days. Coming up on deck we found ourselves at anchor at Halsound, an English settlement given up to the timber trade. In this little bay, with the mountains close upon us, we were scorched by the heat and blinded by the glare. Yet the place was quaint and pretty, and from the stacks of pine-wood in the timber-yards came a refreshing scent, wafted to us by the gentlest breeze in the world.

A melancholy incident here cast a temporary gloom over the passengers. Just before breakfast the second steward came up and informed me that one of the steerage passengers had just died. A young man of twenty, who had joined the ship at Christiania, in the

last stage of consumption: so ill that the doctor had feared he might not live to reach home. But he was so anxious to do so that he declared he must risk it: he could not die without seeing once more his father and mother. He had been laid on a bed between the decks, and never came up again. During the two days he remained in Bergen he remained below. Suffocated with heat and longing for air he lay, his cry the whole time, Oh! that he might live to reach home! None of the passengers on board knew what was taking place. The whole thing had been kept secret; and the steward got into trouble for telling the fact when all was over.

The father had happily come to meet his son and joined him at Throndhjem. Thus for the last twenty-four hours of his life he was not alone. On the Sunday morning, still longing for home, and almost within sight of it, he died. At Halsound, where we stayed for some hours this Sunday morning, they made him a rude coffin of deal planks nailed together, and laid him out ready for landing at the next station, the home he had so yearned for, and where we were due in the afternoon.

It was a very pretty village this Halsound, shut out from the sea, lying in a sheltered nook. The hills around were beautifully wooded, and patches of snow lay in the crevices and on the tops of the more barren mountains, glistening and gleaming in the sunshine; a strange, tantalising sight to those who were melting with heat down here in the valley. The stacks of timber sawn into white planks, told us how the people passed their lives and earned their daily bread. A good deal of this we shipped, but the coffin was passed quietly on board through the side of the vessel, unseen by most, and left between the decks with its mournful burden.

About twelve o'clock we went off again, and steaming out of the narrow water were soon once more amongst the islands, with the broad sea beyond. Almost the whole time the coast at our right hand was wild and barren, but very grand; often rising to the dignity of mountain heights, huge walls and precipices of granite with sharp outlines and long undulations, continually diversified and changing form as the steamer ploughed her way through the waters. Yet though there was much sameness, monotony there was not: this very diversity of form and outline was full of interest, and kept awake the attention.

About three o'clock we reached the poor fellow's home who had died just six hours before. A boat came alongside, and the father got into it. The rough coffin, covered by a small sheet, was gently placed in after him. Bowing gravely to the captain, the man went off with his burden. We watched the boat until it touched the shore; watched the old mother come out of her cottage and down the rocky slope; saw her throw upwards her hands and her apron in an agony of despair, as she learned that neither look nor clasp would ever again greet her from her beloved son.

It was a relief to turn once more northward from this melancholy drama to the brighter scenes around us, where all nature sparkled and danced with life and gaiety, and seemed to call upon us to rejoice with her in her happy mood. Just twelve hours after this, at 3 a.m. on Monday morning, we crossed the Arctic Circle, and at the same moment passed the Hestmand on the Island of Hestmandö, or "Horseman's Island," taking its name from the huge mountainous cliff which rises out of the sea, and is supposed to resemble a rider on horseback plunging through the waters. From one point of view the resemblance is somewhat remarkable, even to the head and cloak of the rider.

TORGHATTEN (Portion of Interior of Tunnel).

The scenery now became more wild and grand than ever for a time. High mountains covered with snow, whose numberless peaks were tinged with the rosy light of morning, seemed really to stretch backwards into space, whilst amidst them reposed the enormous Svartisen glacier, the blue ice and white snow eternally there, reposing together, yet never mingling and defying the hot rays of the sun. This enormous snowfield is said to be six miles in length, and from two to four in breadth, and covers a mountain plateau 4,000 feet high, whose glaciers stretch almost to the sea-shore.

About 11 o'clock on Monday morning we reached Bödö, landed and posted letters. A small, quiet town, of growing importance. This might be seen by the large modern wooden buildings that looked very flourishing, and stood out in magnificent contrast with the small and not very clean-looking huts and cottages forming the older portion. Behind the town stretched long, flat, uninteresting

fields. The streets were almost deserted; perhaps because it was mid-day and the people were at their dinners; perhaps because the intense heat and glare were not to be lightly encountered even by the natives. So when the ship's whistle warned us that time was up, we were ready to return. These short landings upon terra firma were pleasant interludes in the voyage. The sensation of steady ground beneath the feet can only be appreciated by those to whom a long spell of sailing has rendered it unfamiliar.

Leaving Bödö, we started for the Lofodens, and reached them about 10.30 p.m. On our way we again passed many porpoises, but

TORGHATTEN (From the West).

no one attempted a second time to raise a cry of WHALES. The passengers, on the contrary, rather passed them over in silence, and looked the other way, as if it was felt they had been imposing on one another, and "making believe," though without the courage of the pretty American girl to say so. After all, are we not every one of us children of a larger growth, "making believe" all through life; laughing most when we are most sad; shutting our skeletons out of sight, and pretending the closet empty; putting black for white and white for black, sweet for bitter and bitter for sweet; acting so well that at last we sometimes come to impose even on ourselves?

But let us turn to realities: those wonderful realities, the Lofodens. Here at any rate is neither change nor imposition, nor make

believe. As I saw them last year, so, readers, you may see them next. Unchangeable, unchanging. And what a marvellons sight they were. As we approached they stood out boldly before us; rising out of the midst of the sea; massive, granite mountains; a long, unbroken range, with sharp cutting peaks that might have done duty for grand cathedral towers. The whole range, indeed, might have stood for one vast cathedral of nature " measureless to man." High, perpendicular walls, bold and barren, peaks jagged and sharp, rising 4,000 feet above the water; rocks bare and savage, or covered with green lichen only visible on a near approach. The entire length of the Lofoden Islands is about 130 English miles, possessing an area of 1,560 square miles, and a population of 20,000 inhabitants. But as we approached nothing could be seen but this wide, towering, peaked wall of granite. For all sign of life and labour, we might have been hastening to an unknown, untrodden land.

The sun shot down behind these high peaks, the sky became flushed with crimson, the islands tinged with red. The whole view was something almost too glorious for earth. Before us these wild mountains, behind us those snow-hills stretching into space, equally flushed with rosy light. Yet it was some disappointment to see the sun disappear behind the Lofodens. Though there would be no real sunset, and therefore the midnight sun, we should see no sun at midnight. Practically for us the sun had set when he went out of sight.

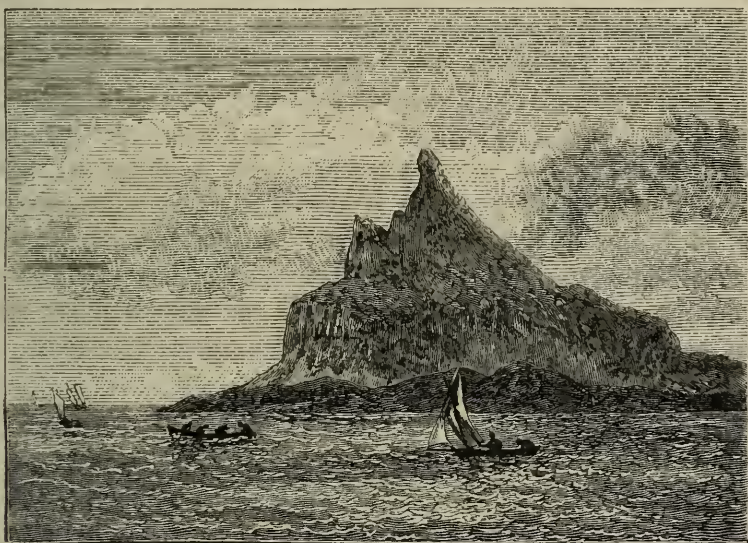
So we contented ourselves with watching the marvellous tones and colours that enveloped us like a glorious heavenly light—or, at least, of some unearthly paradise. The most gorgeous Eastern imagery and imagination could do no justice to these flashing, flickering, changing lights and shadows, the opals and violets, the greens and reds, the rose-coloured tints that flashed and sparkled in earth, sea, and sky, in the very air itself, as if the heavens had been one vast diamond reflecting its countless rays around.

The colours deepened over the Lofodens, which stood out sharply like some northern Dolomites, yet grander in their situation and entirety: revealing themselves, as they did, at one glance. Presently we got close upon them, and steered into a little harbour, where some of the romance was taken out of us by the fearful smell of dried fish which came wafted on the wind: breezes fancy could no longer look upon as rose-coloured or scent-laden. Huge stacks of fish lay upon the rocks, and strings of them were drying in the wind. Above all this, on one of the low green hills, a youth in quaint Lofoden costume was playing upon a pipe, and evidently serenading us. It was a sylvan, musical sound, and the youth lying idly upon the brow of the hill might almost have been an Arcadian shepherd: only that in Arcadia they never could have had this intolerable smell of fish to take the romance out of everything.

But what was our surprise in this far northern island, to hear this

disciple of Pan go through the airs of *Madame Angot!* It was incongruous and out of place. Pan, and the reed, and the Lofodens, all immediately dissolved in a vision of hot London streets, crowded theatres, and unwearying organ-grinders driving one to madness with their inquisitorial horrors. But as we steamed away, with our complement of dried fish in the hold, he returned to his quaint Norwegian melody, dismissed us with a pleasant recollection, rising upon his feet as we receded, and blowing more lustily until we were wafted out of hearing.

At 1.30 in the night, we all landed at Kobervaes, one of the stations in the Lofodens, for the pleasure of a midnight walk, and to see the ruins of the place, which had recently been partly burnt



HESTMAND.

down. Black and charred remains met our sight. An oil factory had taken fire and spread quickly to tenements too ready to fall a prey to the flames. It must have been a strange, sad sight, to have watched the blaze in this out-of-the-way spot. The flames could only be kept from spreading by knocking down some of the buildings, and making a wide gap between the fire and the rest of the village.

That midnight walk in that far-away island left a strange feeling behind it. Night only by courtesy, for here, in the regions of the midnight sun, we had not even twilight. We were steaming amongst the Lofodens all the next day: one of the loveliest, most curious, most interesting days of the whole passage: in and out of sounds and harbours of indescribable beauty, amidst waters dazzlingly transparent: sometimes suffocated by the smell of dried fish, and sometimes choked by the still worse smell of an oil factory, where the black smoke poured out of the chimneys in dense volumes, and darkened our beautiful air for the time being.

On the Tuesday night the midnight sun was really seen for the first time. We had been steering amidst sounds and harbours, and peaks covered with eternal snows, full of the utmost beauty. The sun went downwards in its course, and we watched the changing colours in all their gorgeousness. Then, nearing the horizon, the sun seemed to hover for a moment in mid-air, crept a little parallel with the horizon, and commenced his upward course again.

Nothing could be more certain than the change of colouring between the sun setting and the sun rising; the distinctly different effects of light and tone; though the sun never even reached the horizon. Yet it was palpable and mysterious. Was it because in the one case the light gradually but imperceptibly decreased, and in the other gradually increased again?

We had left the Lofodens when we saw our first midnight sun effect, and were steering for Tromsö, a quaint northern town in the neighbourhood of the Lapps. It was to be almost our last halting-place before reaching the North Cape: where I hope to land the reader in the next paper; but not, if possible, in such weather as we then encountered. The most cruel, cutting wind; the most blinding storm of snow and sleet; the most lowering leaden sky that could possibly have greeted unhappy mortals in the broad light of mid-night, any tenth of July, in this nineteenth century of grace.

HIS SUNLIGHT.

Who hath not stood upon some mountain height
And watched the earth, mist-mantled, grey and cold,
And longed the veil to lift, and see unfold
A thousand beauties to his wondering sight?
When lo! the sun has risen with magic might,
The mists have melted—mountains grand and bold,
Fair dimpling vales, and many a peaceful fold,
All, all are sparkling in the morning light.
Of us the type; while wrapped in selfish ease,
Who can discern in us the Godhead's plan?
Seeking none other than himself to please,
How poor, imperfect, dark, the soul of man!
But once *His* glorious sunlight pierces through,
The mist is gone, and Heaven disclosed to view!

E. L.

MY FIRST SITUATION.

By Lois Selbon.

I WAS nineteen, well born, and, as I was constantly being told, beautiful. But what was the use of it all? I was an orphan and poor. My brothers were both married, and though kind in their way, I felt that I could not be dependent upon them.

My education had been excellent, and through it I determined to work. "You are very young, Margaret," said the kindest of my sisters-in-law. Which was true in England, but abroad nineteen is a most respectable age. Besides, each day would rectify that failing more and more. My advertisements for a family in Germany who might require the services of a young lady of many accomplishments and irreproachable family, brought me three answers. I picked out the one that sounded kindest and of which the post-mark was farthest from home, for my brothers' pride was great. It was from a Countess Dahlen. She required a young lady to teach English, French, drawing, and music, to three girls and a boy of various ages, to talk English at odd hours with herself and the Count, and to make herself generally useful and agreeable. Salary to be given: 30*l.* Also the young lady was required directly.

The latter point decided me. I closed with the offer, bid good-bye to my friends, wished a rather sentimental adieu to my native land, and then steadily turned my eyes out to sea, as we steamed into the Channel on our way to Hamburg.

I got as far as Berlin very comfortably. A letter was awaiting me at the Ladies' Pension, to which I had been directed, begging me to meet the Countess Dahlen and her daughters at the East Prussian Railway Station the next morning at eight o'clock. They would all hold their pocket-handkerchiefs in their hands, and I was to do the same.

I was quite ready to start next morning when I was told my droschky was at the door. Preceded by all my goods and chattels, I ran downstairs in excellent spirits and ensconced myself in my droschky, looking forward with some curiosity to meeting my countesses. I was especially anxious to be in good time, for I felt punctuality was an excellent quality in my new career.

What was my disappointment, therefore, to find myself, ere long, at the very end of an immense line of droschkies, four abreast, walking their horses at a snail's pace and occasionally stopping altogether. But by degrees we got on a little, and, meanwhile, I peered into every carriage around for something white. At last! In

the row farthest from me, there are ladies waving handkerchiefs surely. In my excitement I got up for a better view, and found to my chagrin that it was only a baby in white dandled by its nurse. Sitting down again, I noticed for the first time a droschky abreast of mine, occupied by a single individual. This individual was watching me and smiling; that is to say, his lips were smiling, but his eyes were laughing unmistakably, and laughing at me! For the first time I felt that I was alone. How often to be felt again that day! Insulted and angry, I sat down with my back to the ill-mannered stranger, determined to look into no more droschkies, let them be as full of ladies with handkerchiefs as they would.

Soon after this we began to draw up to the station. In a minute my door was pulled open and my luggage seized by a porter. I had no choice but to run after him. In the large entrance-hall I insisted upon his putting down my things, much to his discomfiture, for he was on the point of throwing them into the weighing machine. The crowd of arrivals swayed and surged around me, but though I scanned each face and figure, I tried in vain to recognise the countesses.

Time passed, and I began to feel and, probably, to look anxious and uncomfortable.

"Can I be of any assistance to you, mademoiselle?" said a very pleasant voice behind me, in excellent English.

I turned round gratefully, and encountered the laughing eyes of my neighbour in the next droschky. He had dared to laugh at my anxiety, and my pride rebelled at this insult from a foreigner. I turned very red, and said, indignantly: "No, thank you; I am waiting for friends." He bowed low, and as he moved away I thought I detected the same smile lurking about his mouth. But the crowd was thinning fast—the clock pointed to within five minutes of the hour—what was I to do?

"The Fräulein had better let me take her ticket for her; the ladies have probably been missed in the crowd, and are already in the train; they will all meet at the great junction, where many people have to get out."

This came from the red-capped station-master, who had come up to me, and to whom I had explained my position. "One minute more and the ticket office will be closed," he added, as he saw me hesitate.

"Well, take it, then," I replied, bewildered and perplexed. I was ignorant of the Dahlens' hotel, and, not knowing whether I ought to go or stay, I let his advice carry the day.

The die was cast now, at any rate, for in less than a minute I found my ticket taken, my luggage weighed, and myself being hurried off to my carriage. Whilst the guard and the porter actually lifted me in, I caught a glimpse of my neighbour of the next droschky, looking out of a window higher up.

The train was slow and the stations endless. However, the happy moment arrived at length, when a guard opened the carriage door, shouting, "Gorswald—all change here for Woltersdorf," and out I jumped. Before I could assure myself that all my luggage was out the train was off again. I looked round eagerly. An old woman was hobbling off with a basket, a lady was being embraced by a tender husband, and my neighbour of the next droschky was disappearing within the door of exit towards the town. That was all. No countesses—no one expecting me—nothing! A hot mid-day sun, an insupportable glare, and not a creature who knew one word of English! My courage began to ebb a little, still I mustered all my German and began to explain my perplexities to the station-master. As soon as I got to Graf Dahlen's name, the official's hitherto perplexed face brightened up at once.

"Graf Dahlen!" he cried; "Ja, ja,"—now he knew all about it. "It is to Woltersdorf the Fräulein wishes to go, of course. The Herr Graf lives close by, I know. I will see that the Fräulein gets there." And with this comfortable assurance the station-master politely picked up my bag and showed me the way to the waiting-room.

"In half an hour, Fräulein, the train will start for Fries. May I order you some coffee?"

No, I would have nothing: I was disappointed, tired, and hot. It was evident that now I must give up all hope of meeting the countesses, and make the best of my way to my new home alone. The actual necessity was not as pleasant and did not look as easy as the prospects of getting there "somehow" had been in the morning.

In less than half an hour the polite red-capped station-master was back again. "Now, Fräulein, the train will be up directly. You will get to Fries at six o'clock, and then an omnibus will take you on to Woltersdorf, should the Count not send his carriage all the way to Fries."

"But I never heard of an omnibus," I protested as well as I could: "and are you quite sure about the name?"

"Quite," returned the official rather curtly. "And if the Fräulein heard nothing about the omnibus it was because the Herr Graf is going to send his carriage all the way to Fries." With a polite touch of his cap, he handed me into the train, wished me the stereotyped "prosperous journey," and closed the door.

The afternoon wore on even more slowly than the morning had done. When the Fries station came in sight it seemed as if I had seen the last of Berlin, and heard the last English words from my neighbour of the next droschky more than a week ago.

Once more I was turned out, and the train flew on. This time the station consisted but of a single house and a few sheds. One look showed that no one was here to meet me, for I could take in a mile of country round at one glance. A long, low, hideous conveyance,

labelled "Omnibus to Woltersdorf," was drawn up close to the line, in case any unhappy mortal should wish to ascend into its cavernous interior. I was ushered to its door by an individual, who, to judge from his appearance, did all the dirty work of the station of Fries: and all the clean work for the matter of that, for he was the only living being visible around, with the exception of his dirty little dog who trotted at his heels. Having deposited my luggage on the top, and me in the interior of the vehicle, the Fries man-of-all-work mumbled some unearthly sounds, whilst his dog looked up and barked. I shall never forget the shaking and the misery of that vehicle of torture, the omnibus between Fries and Woltersdorf!

At last there are twinkling lights in the distance and Woltersdorf comes in sight, with its tall church steeple and square-towered town-hall standing out against the evening sky. "At last! Here I shall find some friendly face and voice to tell me what to do." And more dead than alive, I opened the heavy omnibus door and got down the steep steps stiffly, more like ninety than nineteen. The omnibus had stopped at the little post-office to deliver letters, and beneath its orange-coloured lantern stood the postmaster—burly and full of official dignity.

"Any carriage here from Graf Dahlen's?" I managed to say.

"No, Fräulein," was the curt reply, accompanied by a long rude stare.

"But I am expecting Graf Dahlen's carriage," I reiterated. "The ladies of the family were to meet me in Berlin, but I missed them."

Not a word more could I make the postmaster understand. In a few minutes various postboys and idlers had collected round the door, staring and laughing and whispering to each other.

Angry and provoked, I said at last in the plainest German I could muster: "Can you give me a carriage? I must go to Graf Dahlen's at once."

Something like a smile of intelligence broke out upon the burly man's face, and he slowly replied: "A carriage? Ja, ja, and a nice carriage too. Jacob, here, bring out the half-chaise and put the Schimmel into the shafts. The young lady wishes to be taken to Graf Dahlen's immediately."

Meanwhile the lurid sunset was fast giving way to dark, ominous looking clouds, that came up quickly from the East, black as night, making the West orange-colour by contrast. There was a great lull in the atmosphere: not a leaf stirred, and it was oppressively close. I would not go into the little waiting-room, for it was stifling, and I dreaded the look and manner of the host too much. So I anxiously kept out of his way, and walked up and down the silent market-place, musing over my day rather sadly. What would they be like, these countesses, when I got to them? My reverie was brought to a close by Jacob driving up his half-chaise to my side. And then I found out that a "Schimmel" meant a white horse in Germany.

"Now get up, Fräulein," was his unceremonious address. "Your things are in already."

I clambered up a thing resembling an iron ladder more than carriage steps, and managed at last to get into my seat under the large hood. When I was settled and the apron buttoned up comfortably all round, I found that my "half-chaise" was not at all an uncomfortable kind of vehicle. The air was refreshing to my poor hot head, aching as it was, and it was a comfort to get away from that odious postmaster. Jacob was rough, but seemed a good-natured creature in the main. Just as we rumbled out of Woltersdorf the first great heat drops began to fall, and night came down suddenly and laid her pall upon all around. We could hardly see a step before us.

"Why do you not light the lamps, Jacob?"

"Never light lamps," was the civil rejoinder. And I saw it was best to trust the Schimmel and ask no more questions.

It was eight o'clock, and in half an hour more a hurricane came up, the precursor of the storm. Now the rain fell in torrents, and the great poplars by the road-side swayed to and fro like saplings. But of this we only caught glimpses, as ever and anon the blue forked lightning lit up everything round about—only to leave us in greater darkness than before. What with the roar of the thunder, the crashing of the trees and the whistling of the wind, it was an awful night: one that I shall never forget. Jacob cursed and swore at his horse. The poor Schimmel was much alarmed and stumbled wofully in the dark, although Jacob had led him for the last half-hour, lest we should have some accident with all the fallen branches lying in the road.

"Lights at last!" I cried out in delight; "that must be Dahlsburg," and I peered out into the darkness to try and see something of the place. But nothing but distant specks of light, growing bigger every moment, could I see, until a flash of lightning revealed to me—no Castle Dahlsburg, but only a way-side inn, before which Jacob now pulled up, amid many imprecations at the thunder and lightning and weather generally. It was a bitter disappointment, and when Jacob came round and said, "Will the Fräulein get out?" I only answered, "No; how much longer to Graf Dahlen's?"

"A good hour or so; it depends upon the storm," and Jacob disappeared within the inn-door, from which issued sounds of boisterous merriment and song. My heart fell. Alone, in a strange country, before a way-side inn at night, with a storm raging above me—it made me shiver a little in spite of the warmth of the night.

Jacob soon reappeared and we continued our journey. Just as the storm was over, and the moon was beginning to disperse the clouds, we turned into a gate, and drove on towards a long, low pile of buildings, in which not a light was visible.

"It must be midnight, and they've all gone to bed!" said Jacob.

I grasped my card-case tightly in my hand, and found my teeth chattering and my voice very shaky, when, in answer to Jacob's loud peal at the bell, after much unbarring and unlocking, a drowsy-looking man opened the door, saying in a grumbling voice: "Well, whatever is the matter this time of night? Ach, Jacob! you, is it? We are all in bed and fast asleep," and he showed evident signs of closing the door and continuing his slumbers.

But before Jacob could answer I managed to say: "Is the Countess Dahlen here?" and held out my card.

"The Countess is not here, but the Count is," added the man musingly. "He is in bed, though, and fast asleep. Must I go up?" The latter was addressed to Jacob, as if for advice. That worthy shrugged his shoulders, and winked and blinked with his eyes—perhaps only at the lamp by which I was being inspected. I cut the matter short by saying peremptorily, "Take this card up immediately." The drowsy man opened his eyes wider than they had been yet, stared hard at me, but withdrew at once, not, however, without carefully closing the door behind him.

Each incident of my day had seemed to be worse than its predecessor, but the ten minutes I had to wait for my messenger's return, put the crowning touch to all. Floods of thought came rolling in upon me. Petted, admired, made much of till so lately—now alone, neglected, insulted, left to wait at midnight for admission to the house where I was to earn my bread! "How unkind, how selfish of them to treat me so: not even to let someone sit up for me! and after not keeping their appointment this morning!" It did seem a hard lot.

Suddenly much rattling down a staircase, swift steps across the hall, and the sleepy porter, now with a smiling countenance, opened the door quickly, unbuttoned the apron, and letting down the steps, said:

"The Herr Graf begs a thousand pardons, gracious Fräulein, that you should have been kept waiting an instant. Unfortunately he is in bed and asleep, or he would be down to welcome you. He only came home himself a few hours ago. The Countess is not here. The Herr Graf will explain everything to the gracious Fräulein to-morrow. Meanwhile I am to take the gracious Fräulein to her room—and here it is, a nice room, is it not so? The Countess especially likes it." By this time my loquacious companion had got himself quite out of breath, and me into a pretty little bedroom on the ground floor, not far from the front door—and, to my astonishment, he was lighting the candles for me, after telling Jacob to deposit my luggage in the hall.

"I think the gracious Fräulein will find all she wants; this room is always kept ready for unexpected guests." ("Then I am unexpected after all," I thought.) "What does the gracious Fräulein command to eat?"

"Nothing, thank you." I had biscuits in my bag—dear English

biscuits; I quite loved them, they were a bit of home—but I longed for rest too much to be able to eat and drink.

"Then I wish the gracious Fräulein a very good night." With which words the guardian of the house closed the door behind him, and I was left to my own thoughts and devices. First I carefully reconnoitred the walls, to see that there were no hidden arras doors, or traps; then I locked the door and tried to open the window. Alas! the room was on the ground floor, so I could not venture to leave the long French windows open, for fear of the beasts that I heard barking, and lowing, and champing close by: not to mention the buzzing of the mosquitos, that poured in towards the light.

When sleep came to me at last it was accompanied by feverish dreams, in which railway accidents and countesses wrapped in winding-sheets, and grinning postmasters and drunken rioters were mixed up with visions of home. But curiously enough, whenever the dream was wildest and the danger most imminent, the smiling eyes of my neighbour in the next droschky rose up between me and destruction. The pleasant, frank face, looking earnestly at me, was the last thing I saw before I was roused by a low tap at the door.

I started up in bewilderment. Where was I? By degrees yesterday's adventures came back to my mind. The sun was high in the heavens. How late it must be! what would my employers think of their new governess? Another tap and a simultaneous opening of the door, which I thought I had locked so well the night before. I stared at it, slowly turning on its heavy hinges, quite prepared to see the gentleman who had ushered me into my bedroom only a few hours before. Instead of this, a small black-robed figure made its appearance; from under a neat white cap, two bright eyes peered at me wonderingly and inquiringly, and the little person said softly, "May I come in, gracious Fräulein?" at the same time holding out an immense square letter with a large red seal. Having received permission, she closed the door and came close up to my bedside, as if to satisfy herself of my actual existence. "The gracious Fräulein will doubtless excuse me; but the Herr Graf said the gracious Fräulein would require the carriage at 11 o'clock. It is now ten. The Herr Graf had to leave before sunrise this morning: sudden business called him away. Before leaving he told me to give up this letter directly the gracious Fräulein should awake." And the little woman handed me the missive most respectfully.

"The Count also said that the gracious Fräulein would probably prefer her breakfast in her own room after yesterday's fatigues," she continued. "Shall I bring it in now?"

"If you please," I answered, feeling more and more bewildered every minute, and the little figure glided out of the room. Why should the "Herr Graf" send me all these messages? and whatever could I want the carriage for at 11 o'clock? I looked at the letter in all possible ways. It was addressed in a good firm hand to Miss

Margaret Alford. At last I opened it and read the following, in excellent English :—

"Madam,—I feel extremely sorry that the great similarity of names between my brother's post town and my own, has resulted in your being subjected to the annoyance of being directed to Woltersdorf instead of to Wellersdorf. I can well understand a foreigner being deceived by the sound. As unfortunately I am obliged to leave home almost immediately, I cannot have the honour of welcoming you personally, but shall leave orders for the carriage to be in readiness to conduct you to Schloss Dahlsburg at 11 o'clock to-morrow morning. You will get there towards evening, and a telegram will precede you, so that you will be expected and heartily welcomed.

"Yours faithfully,

"HARRY, COUNT DAHLEN."

The date was one o'clock of the previous night.

The letter dropped from my hand. A mistake! I had come to the wrong house after all! This was not Dahlsburg, and I must begin a second day's wanderings in search of my "family." Tears of pride and mortification sprang to my eyes. To think that I should have to be beholden to strangers for hospitality! and why did the Count do it all? Perhaps there was no Countess—at which thought I felt particularly uncomfortable—but more probably she was too great a lady to think of the affairs of a poor little governess.

At this moment my unpleasant reflections were interrupted by the little black figure reappearing with a tray, which she placed upon a table close to my bedside, begging me to eat, as the way to Dahlsburg was long. But no—I would not touch a crumb in this house into which untoward circumstances had forced me. I would dress with lightning speed and be off. Scarcely, however, had I finished my toilette, than youth and a healthy appetite asserted themselves. I sat down contrary to all my intentions, and made a hearty breakfast, after which things began to assume a somewhat brighter hue. It suddenly occurred to me that, after all, it was kind of this "Herr Graf"—to whom I was an utter stranger, and who could not know that the mistakes were not my fault—to lend me his carriage and make all these arrangements for me. I was sorry I could not thank him, but there was not much more time for reflection. Another rap at the door. This time a loud rap.

"Does the gracious Fräulein command the carriage?"

The gracious Fräulein did command the carriage. Quickly stuffing all my little odds and ends into my bag, I put on my hat and was at the front door just as the carriage drew up before it. The coachman touched his hat, my friend of the night before, now in a neat brown livery, helped me in; the little old housekeeper in black stood at the door, and wished me "a prosperous journey," and off we were: out of the gates and down the road, out of sight of Warburg

before I had time to feel sure that I was not a second Cinderella being whirled away in the Prince's carriage to unknown regions of bliss. But no, it was I myself, Margaret Alford, travelling along in a luxurious carriage, drawn by a pair of splendid black horses, trotting along as fast as they could on the road to Woltersdorf.

Not long and the little roadside inn came in sight. It looked very commonplace in the broad sunlight, yet the recollections of last night made me shudder a little on passing it. A little while longer and we were at Woltersdorf. We drew up at the little post-house. There stood Jacob ready to water the horses. He did not recognise the occupant of the carriage, for the sun was in his eyes, but off went his cap in an instant to the carriage and the horses.

In ten minutes the coachman was ready to start again, and we were soon bowling along the splendid roads, from which last night's storm had cleared all the dust.

II.

Sunset again, and with it the coachman points out Castle Dahlsburg before us, with a background of hill and forest. An imposing edifice it looked, and it brought back the reality of life to me with a rush. It was Cinderella going home after the ball. No more independence; no more travelling about in luxurious carriages; no more will of my own. I must become a dependent—there lay my destination close before me. Entering a governess's career looks so easy in the distance, but it is so very thorny in reality!

My heart beat loudly as we approached the gates of Schloss Dahlsburg. The building was large and massive, forming three sides of a large quadrangle, with a grass plot in the middle. We rattled in over the stones, making a great deal of noise. I wished that my entrance might have been more modest. But soon all my thoughts were centred on my coming reception by some ladies who came out on to the steps as we turned in at the gate.

"They think friends are coming—what a pity for me," I thought, skrinking back into my corner. "How I wish I were at home again!" And then we stopped, and two young girls of about fourteen and sixteen ran down the steps and opened the carriage door.

"Welcome to Dahlsburg," said a voice in English, with a very foreign accent. "My dear Miss Alford, how glad we are to see you at last!" And my hand was taken as I reached the steps by the lady who had spoken. She was tall and stately, with a kind face and very sweet manner.

"Marie," she called out to the elder of the young girls: "Marie, bring in Miss Alford's shawls, dear child, and order her trunks to be brought up to her room at once." Then I knew that I had got to the Countess Dahlen at last, and all my anxieties and fears vanished before her kind face on the doorstep there and then, never to return.

"How tired you must be, my dear; and"—she stopped in the middle of the great hall we were crossing, and took my hand in hers—"it is all through a mistake, and I am more in fault than anyone. I ought to have gone myself to tell you we were going to start by a later train; instead of that I sent my brother's servant. We have long been afraid that he is not trustworthy, and now he has proved himself what we thought. You never received my second letter, did you?"

"Never," I replied.

"Ah, I thought that was it! I hope you will forgive us, dear, and that we may be able to make you forget all the unpleasantnesses of your journey. Could you sleep last night? My brother-in-law telegraphed to us that you had been wrongly directed, and that you had got to Woltersdorf instead of to Wellersdorf. I do think the name ought to be changed." And so the kind lady went on talking till we reached my room.

"I hope you will be happy here, and stay with us a long time, my dear," were her parting words, as she was about to leave the room with her daughter.

I went up to her, and took her hand within my own. "It is more like coming home than anything I could have imagined," I was just able to say, for I had a choking sensation in my throat that took away my voice. How good everyone was to me! How different from what I had expected!

III.

A WEEK passed. Nothing could exceed the kindness of all the inhabitants of Castle Dahlsburg. I had plenty to do, but I liked that, and my pupils and I were fast becoming friends. I had told my adventures to the assembled family on the evening of my arrival, and elicited both laughter and tears—real tears from the Countess Dahlen. "Poor child," she said, stroking my hair; "what escapes you had through that mistake! Thank God, you fell into good hands." After which my journey had not been reverted to again.

One morning I was greeted at breakfast with cries of: "Miss Alford, Miss Alford, Uncle Harry is coming to-day: ar'n't you glad? We are," said one of the little boys. "He is so jolly, and does speak good English, doesn't he, mamma? Better than papa even."

"They both speak well, dear; and no wonder, when your grandmother was English. That is why I want you all to speak English especially well, you know."

The Countess was called out of the room, and we all dispersed to our several avocations immediately afterwards. When lessons were over, Marie and I went out for our usual walk. We crossed the garden to get into the village, and then Marie found out that she had forgotten a book she wished to take to a sick woman.

"Run back, dear; I will wait here for you," I said, and back she ran.

She was gone longer than I expected, and I stood looking over the low hedge into the road. Presently I heard steps approaching. Long quick strides they appeared to be, and up came a gentleman with a large straw hat on, completely shading his face. He carried a good stout stick in his hand, and had walked fast and far, to judge from his dusty appearance. He was just about to pass the spot where I stood, when a bark from Marie's little terrier made him look up. Off went his hat in an instant, and with the laughing eyes and the pleasant smile I remembered so well, my neighbour of the next droschky bowed to me, and passed on. It was all the work of a moment. I had barely time to return the pleasant greeting, before a turn in the road hid him from my view. I know not why, but when Marie came back with her book, I cared to talk about the incident as little as I had cared to mention my rude neighbour of the next droschky when narrating my adventures.

On our return, we saw a travelling carriage driving up the road before us. The next minute it turned into the Dahlsburg gates. "There's Uncle Harry! I thought it was his carriage," cried Marie. "Dear Miss Alford, do let us be quick; I think I must run." And off set Marie, tearing along the road at a great pace. I followed more demurely, making up a little German speech of thanks the while for the hospitality shown me at Warburg, and thinking a good deal of this morning's encounter with the stranger of the laughing eyes. I was so much engrossed in my thoughts, wondering if ever he would cross my path again, that I had nearly got up to the steps where I had seen the kind Countess and her daughter awaiting me on the evening of my arrival, before I saw Marie, with all her brothers and sisters, coming down towards me with a stranger in their midst.

"Here she is," they cried. "Uncle Harry wants to be introduced to you, Miss Alford."

"Now that you are no longer in need of any assistance, I hope you will allow me to introduce myself," said the pleasant voice, that was still ringing in my ears. I looked up, and beheld my friend of the next droschky.

"You Count Harry Dahlen?" I exclaimed, my astonishment making him laugh and the children stare.

"Count Harry Dahlen at your service, at all times and in all seasons, though you do not make it easy to serve you," he added with a smile, and bowing low.

Then everything I had forgotten in my surprise and pleasure, rushed back upon my mind. My curt answer in Berlin; my arrival at midnight and arousing the Warburg house; my turning its master out before dawn; for I saw it all now intuitively—and then the kind requital on the following day! My sentence of thanks died away

upon my lips, and I stood before Count Harry like a silly school-girl at the mercy of her master. Again he came to my rescue, chivalrous knight that he was, and asking me if I were not home-sick, he led the conversation far away from Germany and gave me time to overcome my evident confusion. We walked round and round the grass plot, as we often did towards evening, and then the Countess Dahlen came out and joined us, but Count Harry still kept by my side.

It is long since I left Castle Dahlsburg. They were all so good to me when I went home! "There will never be another Miss Alford for us, dear child; how we shall miss the bright face," said the kind Countess, when she kissed me on the very step where I had seen her first a year before. "But Warburg is not far off, and you have promised to come and see us often."

"That she shall," came from the pleasant voice that had haunted my dreams ever since that eventful morning at the Berlin station. So far off now! "That she shall! This shall be her first visit after I bring her home from England this day six weeks. This day six weeks, young lady, remember that; and no delays for trousseaux and that kind of thing," he added energetically.

And thus it happened that I came to live at Warburg after all. It is barely three years since I saw it first, but I often think that it must have been in some previous state of existence—life has so changed for me. Harry says, he knows that his real life began the morning he saw an anxious little face ("lovely," the silly fellow persists in putting it) peering eagerly into every carriage, and then looking so proud and distant at the offer of help from a stranger, notwithstanding its perplexities. He says he knew instinctively who it was that came up to his door on that stormy August night—even before he had assured himself of the fact by peeping over the banisters to see the owner of the anxious little face conducted to her room. He felt even then that a change had come to his life. And he laughingly adds that he shall henceforth be a firm believer in love at first sight.

ADELAIDE PROCTER.

ON the 30th of October, 1825, the first cry of a baby girl was heard in a house in Bedford Square. Though the house was a poet's house, there was nothing especially musical in the sound, and no one thought of predicting that, from that little new-born infant, was to flow forth a sweet ripple of song, that was to make many minds bright, and many hearts glad.

It was little wonder that the tiny maiden, whose small feet were soon trotting about the poet's home, grew to have a taste for literature. Her father murmured over half-polished lines as she sat on his knee; her mother discussed a new book as she bent to tie her darling's sash; men, whose names were known all over Europe, stroked her pretty curls, and were her willing slaves and playfellows in many a merry game. Such a taste she did acquire as easily and insensibly as other children acquire a liking for using their tongues and limbs.

Thus little Adelaide, the daughter of the man with two names—Barry Cornwall they called him in the thousand homes where flashed in, like a watched-for, friendly meteor, the fire of his verse; Procter they called him in the few privileged homes where his voice was a loved, familiar sound—thus little Adelaide grew on, breathing in high mental culture with the very air and sunshine, breathing in, too, a pure atmosphere of noble thought and generous, lofty feeling, until she began to show a most decided turn of mind towards what were to be the pursuits of her future life.

When Adelaide entered the school-room, she soon showed a remarkable brightness and quickness in all her intellectual faculties. The moment she began to take in hand any branch of learning, her mind went straight into the heart of it with a needle-like sharpness and precision that often surprised her teachers. Directly one new acquirement was made, her restless little brain at once longed to rush on to another. When the kingdom of French grammar had been successfully won, she passed on to storm the stronghold of the German declensions; when the dancing lesson was over, she was quite ready for her music-master. In this early stage of her story, as in its later chapters, there was nothing so contrary to Adelaide Procter's nature, as sitting down with folded hands by the way-side of life. Her memory was strong and capacious; nothing that she read and learned seemed to come amiss to be stored away in it. It took in, and retained, with equal ease, the first books of Euclid, and the last sprightly shred of verse she picked up from the pages of her favourite annual.

Yet it must not be supposed from all we have said of Adelaide Procter's activity in study at this early age, that she was a silent,

grave girl, who was always wrapped up in a cloud of book-learning; such would be a very false picture of her bright, winsome, gracious youth. No laugh was merrier in its clear music of ringing gladness than hers; no foot bounded more freely and lightly across the grass, when her parents took her for long happy expeditions on golden summer days into the country; no saucy, tricksy girlish tongue was more ready with playful fireworks of fun. Her presence at this period in her home was, for the whole household, one ray of sunshine, and cadence of cheery melody.

One picture taken from these early pages of Adelaide Procter's history stands out clear and bright before us. A loved and honoured guest is expected in the house in Bedford Square to-day; we can read this in the quiet joy that sits enthroned on Barry Cornwall's brow; in the eager earnest movements of the mistress as she hastens hither and thither; in the important looks and meaning smiles of the servants; they even strive to make little Adelaide a thought prettier than usual, if that is possible, by putting her on a fresher and fairer frock than common. At length the door-bell rings, the master hurries out with words of glad, yet reverent welcome: a minute after a tall, spare, elderly man, with a brow that looks as if it were the native palace of genius, with eyes that turn in deep tenderness on the most commonplace things in God's creation, as though they could pierce to an inward and spiritual beauty in each, was standing in Mrs. Procter's drawing-room.

The sympathetic talk rolls on from theme to theme, now grave, now gay, changeful as the lights and shadows on the sea in spring time, until by-and-by the trio, host, hostess, and guest, are disturbed by a soft tap at the door. In an instant a little figure is gliding up the room; her movements are very noiseless, as though she were treading in a consecrated place; there is awe in her face as she turns it towards the stranger, and yet there is a great, wondrous light in her eyes.

The guest stretches out his hand kindly, but at first she takes it very shyly, and stands with downcast eyes and blushing cheeks; but gradually his voice and looks draw her closer and closer, until at length she is sitting on his knee, telling him in simple, childish phrase that she does so love some of his poems, and can repeat such and such a one by heart. As he listens, a prescience of what she is one day to be rises up within him, and William Wordsworth speaks words of steadfast yet tender teaching, that to her dying day will not be forgotten by Adelaide Procter.

Other men of mark besides Wordsworth were counted among the friends of Adelaide Procter's early childhood. Her young face, with heart and mind twinkling in every feature, was a joy to look upon, and they delighted in it, as well as in her bright, merry talk, which very soon began to sparkle with wit unusual for her years. Charles Dickens was one of the most frequent and well-loved of these visitors,

and one whom Adelaide early grew to regard with warm liking; but though he was to be the first person to usher her into the realm of print, he had no notion at this period that any talent for poetry was in her.

Thus time passed on, till Adelaide had crossed the boundary between girl and woman. She had a face that shone with the beauty of the soul; she had an intellect that rejoiced in the use of its own keen faculties; she had a heart that burned to right the wronged and lift up the fallen; she had eyes that looked deep down into the dark places of human life with a pitying angel's gaze, which, steadfast in its own radiant purity, can weep for the erring and the misled. Her religious feelings and convictions had always been very earnest, bringing themselves into the practice of her daily life, and writing themselves there in acts of self-denying love and mercy; her brilliant imagination and starry faith had always made her inclined towards the gorgeous and rich in outward form of worship. She had a favourite aunt who was a Roman Catholic, and when she was about twenty-five she joined the Romish communion, of which she was a firm and reverent member till the end of her earthly life.

At length the music, that had been long slumbering in her nature, woke up and found its way into verse. Daughter of an author as she was, and used to the society of authors in familiar daily intercourse, she naturally enough began quickly to cherish a longing to reach the ear of the public. But how was this to be done? Her refined and sensitive feelings shrank from the thought of any of her father's literary friends taking her poetry into their magazines merely out of civility, while in reality they found no merit in it, and regarded it as a dead-weight which friendship forced their periodical to carry. By-and-by, however, she resolved what she would do.

One day Charles Dickens, as he sat in the office of "All the Year Round," making his way through the mass of papers that lay on his table, was attracted and surprised by the singular merit of some lines which had been sent him. Such a discovery is always a refreshment to an editor, as he wades among the slough of manuscripts which surround him, and he glanced eagerly at the name with which the verses were signed. It was "Mary Berwick." Dickens had never before, to his knowledge, either heard this name or seen it in print, but there was the ring of true poetry in Mary Berwick's lines, be she whom she might, and so they were inserted in the next number of the magazine.

Months went on, and "All the Year Round" had frequent contributions of Miss Mary Berwick among its contents. Dickens, however, knew simply nothing about her, except that she wrote a legible hand, that he always, by her own wish, addressed all communications to her to a certain circulating library in the west of London, and that when he sent her a cheque she acknowledged it promptly, but in a very short, matter-of-fact way.

At length, one winter evening, when Dickens went to dine with the Procters, he happened to put in his pocket, to show them, the Christmas number of "All the Year Round," which was just coming out. He called their attention especially to what he said was a very pretty poem by Miss Mary Berwick. The author of "Pickwick" remarked, to his astonishment, that these simple words of his were received by the whole family with much suppressed merriment. He could not in the least make out what was in the wind, but he took it good-naturedly, supposing it to be some home Christmas joke, and asked no questions. Next day the mystery of the unaccountable mirth of last night was cleared up in a letter from Barry Cornwall to Dickens. Mary Berwick was Adelaide Procter. And from that time forward Miss Procter took an acknowledged place among English poetesses.

A very bright episode in Adelaide Procter's story was a visit she paid about this time to the Roman Catholic aunt before mentioned, who was now living in a villa near Turin. With all the lively earnestness of her character she threw herself into the study of Piedmont and its people. She climbed the mountains with the active grace of a chamois, and seemed to tread on air, as she reached the free glory of the summits; she made her way into the homes of the villagers, and sat chatting in the porch of the Presbytère with the good Curé, or laughed and played with the dark-eyed children in the sunny gardens. Her whole nature was poured out in enjoyment of the new world around her, her whole spirit seemed to sparkle with brilliant animation. Her letters home at this period were a reflection of her state of mind and feeling, and overflowed with graphic description and many-coloured fancies.

After a long stay in Piedmont, Miss Procter went back to her London home, where there was always a full choir of love to greet her. She continued to write poetry that made its way with power and sweetness into English brains and hearts, but she did not give up her life to literature alone; she did other and noble work for her fellow men. Her graceful form and sympathetic voice brought light and music to the wards of many a hospital; the children in the ragged-school looked up into her face, to see at once the mother and the playfellow in her eyes; the sick and dying, in chill, gloomy garrets, knew and blessed the ministry of her gentle hand. In every work of mercy with which the heart of the great city throbbed her name was among the first; in scenes of sin, in scenes of wretchedness, she stood radiant in her Christian love, as one of God's brightest seraphim, holding up the cross for eyes darkened with guilt or sorrow to gaze upon. She laboured earnestly for her own sex, not with the female emancipation cry upon her lips, but with the genial heart of a true woman, who knows what women want, and would make their field of usefulness at once higher and wider and holier.

Yet with all this far-spreading work, which was ceaseless in its un-

wearying effort, and with all her devotion to her art as a poetess, devotion which is proved by the tuneful sweetness of every line she wrote, Adelaide Procter never gave herself the airs of a woman of business, who had no time to give to friendly intercourse in general society. There was no more popular guest in London drawing-rooms than she, her manners were so modest and gracious, her wit was at once so playful and so bright. Her old girlish readiness of tongue never forsook her, and her quickness in lively repartee shone often like the harmless flashes of summer lightning. In her home she was still the sunny fairy she had been in her early youth; wherever she went among her relations and closest friends it was as a refreshing breeze gliding into the house; her whole nature was as far from anything morbid and self-absorbed as a silver moonbeam is from the artificial light of a closely curtained ball-room.

It was a life rich in many-sided work for God and man, but it was a life which could not fail sooner or later to wear out the body in which the loving, eager, active spirit dwelt. Her whole being was put into everything she did; her whole heart went out in sympathy towards all she helped or lifted up. It was impossible but that such pouring-out of herself must tell upon her physical constitution. The picture of her earthly meridian is a very lovely picture, it is so full of warmth and light and softly blended colour. But, alas! too soon it fades. Gradually the sweet face grew haggard, gradually the brisk step grew slower; they strove to make her spare herself, but they might as well have striven to keep the wind from blowing, or the streams from running. Active work was a law of her nature. She continued to write poetry and to struggle bravely to help others, hiding, all the while, pain and weakness with a merry laugh or a cheery word, until, at length, not even her strength of will and high spirit could keep her up any longer, and she was obliged to give up from sheer want of bodily power.

For a year and a quarter she lay on her bed, sweetening and brightening the heavy time for herself and all around her by words of faith in God and words of love to man. There was never a sound of complaint in that sick room: there was no invalid's selfishness there to cast a shadow; it was all one long unbroken strain of patience and cheerfulness. Her lively interest in the good of others did not flag, her smile made still sunshine for those who loved and watched her; the playful words of days of health were still often upon her lips.

At length, when she was thirty-nine, the angel came to bear her up to God. Softly she bade her mother raise her, and the loved arms, that had been her refuge in every childish sorrow, were around her neck. Then, with the brightness of heaven already in her face, she whispered a word of farewell, and went to her Father above.

Alice King.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF IT?

THE world is almost divided between two kinds of people, those who make wonders out of nothing, and ignore all the discoveries of science, and those who dwell so securely within their own narrow knowledge, that they forget the vast domain that no human mind has yet explored, and feel wiser than Shakespeare, and quite sure that there are *not* more things in heaven and earth "than are dreamt of in *their* philosophy." They refuse to any new fact the courteous entertainment Hamlet advised, when he said, "as a stranger give it welcome." But there still remain a few, not credulous, but patient, such as would have listened when Galileo propounded his new theories of the earth's motion, or Stephenson planned his first railway-engine. It is to such that I wish to tell my little story, every incident of which happened, exactly as I shall tell it, to people who are still living—I myself, the least really concerned, strangely happening to hold in my hand the gathered skein of which most of the real actors have but a single thread.

I was not in the first scene. It is laid in a London drawing-room about the year 1864. The dramatis personæ consist of an old gentleman and his daughter, whom we will call Mr. and Miss Escott, and a young minister, whom we will know by the name of the Rev. Thomas Clark. The three were discussing Spiritualism, which was just then rather prominently before the public. Their individual views on the subject were then, as I have since learned, much what they remain to-day, and may be briefly set forth thus:

Old Mr. Escott was inclined to believe implicitly in the theory of disembodied spirits acting through media, by table turning, automatic writing and the like, and in his enthusiasm was eager and persistent in his investigations.

On the other hand, Miss Escott, a highly cultivated and thoughtful lady, preferred to hold her judgment in suspension. Had seen wonderful things quite beyond her power to explain, but did not think them therefore incapable of explanation. Had had some singular personal experiences. Believed that people in dealing with the matter should feel something like a man trying an unknown and unlabelled medicine-chest in which there may be deadly poisons.

The Rev. Thomas Clark had not very definite ideas on the matter, having recently come from the country, and not having seen or heard much of it, but his opinion was that the strange results were brought about by occult and unconscious action of human minds one upon the other.

While this conversation was going on, a visitor was announced as "Mrs. Amory," and there came into the drawing-room quite a young

lady, evidently new to matronly dignities. She had a sort of prettiness, which was not beauty, and certainly owed nothing to intellect or strength of character. The pouting red mouth would grow shapeless and animal as soon as the freshness of youth had departed, and an enemy might have called the wide blue eyes vacuous, though friends called them "pathetic." If she had taken off her hat, she would have revealed that the back of her head was mean and poor. Yet ninety people out of a hundred, looking at her, would have said, "What a lovely girl!" For her complexion was delicate, her abundant hair bright and waving, and her figure tall and elegant. Kind-hearted Miss Escott made a sort of pet of her, and had a curious faith in her possibilities. For just as she held a cheap reputation for beauty, so she held another for genius. She could do so many things, almost well, apparently without labour or effort, that one felt inclined to wonder what she could do with these.

Her name and Mr. Clark's were murmured over in the ordinary manner of society introductions, and old Mr. Escott whispered aside to the young clergyman that she was an orphan, and had recently married into the family of a distinguished artist. She took a seat beside Caroline Escott, and presently the conversation returned to its former channel.

She entered into it with gusto, taking sides warmly with Mr. Escott, who was delighted to find such a champion. She asserted her own "mediumistic powers," which she had known for a long time, and which at one time she had practised considerably, but which she had been forbidden to exercise by the people with whom she had lived before her marriage. Mr. Escott, delighted at such an opportunity for convincing his sceptical clerical friend, instantly proposed an experiment, and brought forward a small table, at which he seated her and Mr. Clark to await "a message," either by "raps" or "automatic writing" as the "spirits" should suggest. The "spirits" were not long in coming to a decision, and, if I recollect rightly, they chose automatic writing—for I will not be precise on any point of which I am not quite sure, and this interview, remember, was only reported to me some years afterwards.

A very little more waiting brought forth a message. I could never get the exact words of this message. From all I could ever gather it was of the ordinary kind, conveying a rebuke to Mr. Clark as to some of his mental attitudes. Nothing more. Everybody arose, confirmed in their pre-conceived opinions. Mr. Escott was delighted, and Caroline Escott and the Rev. Thomas as doubtful as ever, though in widely differing ways—the lady being serious and feeling cautious of unknown possible dangers—the gentleman inclined to treat the affair with ridicule and banter. Mrs. Amory went away almost immediately, and was, she says, never sure of her fellow-sitter's name, and remembered him only as a "young minister."

I must repeat that all I know of this interview is what was

reported to me after the lapse of nearly ten years, when sufficiently significant circumstances made it memorable to three of its actors. From each of these three I heard its story, and though two of them had certainly never seen each other from that time, their reports did not vary.

In the course of the following few years, the young man got involved in sundry theological discussions which caused him to leave the very narrow sect to which he had originally belonged. He would be thought but a mild heretic to-day, but even ten years ago heresies on very minor points were held serious matters. And the young man continued for a long time adrift, without any charge of his own, but occupying himself with helping such ministers of divers dissenting persuasions as did not repudiate his assistance.

It was at this time (about 1872) I was first introduced to him by Miss Escott. The story of the courage with which he had given up his charge and cut himself adrift on the world for conscience sake was naturally interesting. But the man himself did not suggest a hero. He was a quiet-mannered, rather sleepy-looking individual, given to converse with an affectation of strong special interest in his interlocutor. He used this mannerism with everybody, old or young, male or female, quite impartially. Nevertheless, when it happened with young ladies, it laid him open to a suspicion of philandering: that is to say, their friends suspected this, while the young ladies themselves felt adored.

He did not stay long in London at that visit, and while he did stay he lived in the Escotts' house. Mrs. Amory was not in London at the time. That I know. For at this date I had known her for many years, and Caroline Escott for two or three.

He left London to take ministerial duty in a quiet little inland town in Scotland. He was to take charge for a year, during the absence of the regular minister. Probably he found his position dull enough. He lived in lodgings and necessarily spent most of his evenings alone. His reflections, too, could not have been of the liveliest. He had no real outlook in life, and he was engaged to a minister's daughter, whose father demurred to the young man's theological opinions.

It was in the course of this year that Caroline Escott, with whom he constantly corresponded,—they being old family friends—received from him a very remarkable letter. Wisely or unwisely, but very naturally and very fortunately for this story, she showed that letter to me.

In that letter he narrated that one evening—that of the third Friday in October—sitting as usual at his tea, and beguiling his solitude with a book, he looked up suddenly, and on the opposite side of the table saw the figure of "the young lady with whom, many years ago, I tried a spiritualistic experiment at your house. Probably you have forgotten the incident," he wrote, "as I have forgotten the

lady's name, but you may possibly know who I mean when I add that I recollect your father telling me that she had then recently married the kinsman of a famous artist. I forget the celebrity's name as well as the lady's." He went on to say that, looking at the figure, he knew it was not real, and that, without any pretence of hearing a voice, "it gave him to understand," by some strange transfusion of ideas, that the person it represented was utterly and entirely miserable, and in great danger. "Do you still know the lady?" he wrote, "and can you tell me whether there is any basis for this vision, or whether it is as wild and incomprehensible in matter as in manner?"

Now Caroline Escott is a simple straightforward person, with more faith in human nature than subtle knowledge thereof. Her own walk in life had been clear and above-board, and probably she had never known a trouble which she would not, under fair circumstances and for reasonable cause, have frankly admitted. She took an early opportunity of seeing Mrs. Amory, and asking her whether, for the sake of psychological investigation, she could throw any light on the Rev. Thomas Clark's vision. He gave its very date—had she been ill at that time, or depressed, or worried by having to make a decision about any important matter?

Mrs. Amory laughed the idea to scorn. She had been as she always was, she said. Nothing had been wrong either within herself or in circumstances around her. Caroline Escott wrote to me, rather dismally, that here was another instance not only of the uselessness, but of the absolute misleadingness of these strange phenomena. She wrote similarly to Thomas Clark, and he was sorely disturbed to have been the victim of so deluding a phantom.

In the January of the following year the Rev. Thomas Clark came to London to engage in unsectarian mission-work. We saw a great deal of him in our houses, and I was more than ever convinced of his weak character and subtle brain. Yet he was patient and faithful in the discharge of his duties, and kind and sympathetic to his poor people. I have known him take down his own railway rug to wrap a sick child, whose need he had only known when it was too late to procure a blanket. But one always felt his lack of force. He was the leaf which is blown by the wind, not the wind which blows. It is curious that, though he came of a good English stock, he had an oriental face and might easily have passed for one of themselves among the fate-believing "sons of the Prophet." I often wondered whether the love-affair of some Crusading forefather could have left its mark on the breed, both in face and blood.

About this time Mrs. Amory began to pay me marked attention. We seldom visited each other—indeed, I may say we never did so. I had not been in her house since my own marriage and she had never been in mine. Our meetings were casual ones at the house of a mutual friend. I could never help feeling a sort of liking for her,

and yet I had no faith in her. She was always kindly and even complimentary in her manner and remarks, and yet I always left her feeling unhappy. Years had not produced a favourable effect on her. She continued to look curiously young; time, instead of giving her lines and wrinkles, had only given her flesh and coarseness. She did not look like the middle-aged woman she was, but like a blowsy girl. She resembled nothing so much as a bulgy rose, gathered after wet weather. She had suspended all exercise of her pretty gifts, and people no longer said what she might be, but what she might have been.

She began to draw me away for tête-à-tête talks. Caroline Escott's name was often brought into the conversation. Presently she began to ask if I knew a friend of Caroline's—a gentleman engaged in mission work. I answered, cautiously enough, you may be sure, that I did. She had seen him once, long ago; and from something she had heard lately he seemed a very remarkable person, she said. I rejoined that he appeared to me an ordinary, harmless young man. Not at all ordinary, she thought. Would I tell her his name? It was so awkward to have to speak of him as the "the gentleman I met years ago." I told her I presumed she meant the Rev. Thomas Clark. The name recalled nothing to her, and she began to rehearse one or two points of personal appearance which she could remember, that we might be sure we were talking of the same person. I was certain there was no mistake about it, but was inclined to change the conversation.

Why she chose to make a confidante of me, is another mystery of this mysterious story. Our acquaintance, though long, had been of the most superficial kind. She had always given me to understand that, from her point of view, I was an unromantic, hard-headed creature to whom sentiment would seem folly, and from whom weakness need expect no quarter. Yet then and there, boldly and in haste, for fear of interruption, she told me the story of Thomas Clark's vision, as Miss Escott had related it to her, adding, "Of course I told her it was all nonsense, there was nothing in it. But there was. What it gave him to understand was true."

I suppose my rejoinder was characteristic. I could not help pitying her manifest distress, but neither could I refrain from saying, "Are you sure that your feeling is not the result of the fact? Is it not possible that you are magnifying some ordinary feeling of depression because you have heard that, by some accidental coincidence, some incomprehensible phenomenon connected itself with you?"

"No," she said; "and even you could not think so if you knew all. But I was not going to admit this to Caroline Escott. I don't think I should like Mr. Clark to know, and yet I should so like to see him. Is he often at your house?"

"Yes," I said, quite determined, even at that stage, that no meet-

ing between them should take place with my knowledge. And I added what was quite true : " He comes at all hours; we can never reckon on his visits."

" I wish you would come and stay a day with me," she said. " You remember what a nice long day we had once before you were married? Come again and have such another. I am by myself the whole day, from the time Mr. Amory goes to office till he returns, and I am so dull. I have no real friends."

She looked mournful enough. I was touched to think of the bright, pretty girl whose life had seemed so sunshiny in bygone years, when mine had been hard and stern enough. And she had always had a smile and a pleasant word for me then. And now I was so happy, and she seemed so wretched, that I felt as if I had somehow wronged her. I promised to go, and she fixed the day and hour.

I have little more story to tell. I paid my promised visit, and was with her from noon till about six in the evening. I can only say that, for months after, the memory of that day remained with me like a black wall drawn across the sunny fields of my life.

For six hours, with scarcely a moment's pause, did that unhappy woman pour out the miserable story of her life. There had been unfortunate circumstances, no doubt, but even the most pitying eye could not refuse to see that the one pervading misfortune had been her own weak, wilful, wrong-headed self. She spoke with utmost bitterness of some for whom she still outwardly professed honour and love. Without doubt her early life had been considerably misguided and wasted : much that had been intended as kindness had been cruelty, because misdirected; but over and over again one felt that a true and vigorous nature would have found sweet nutriment where she turned all into gall and wormwood. Of later years, her days had dragged on in apathetic indifference, without one warm affection or one real duty—a seething storm within her, and utter stagnation without. An outburst was sure to come, sooner or later. It came in the October of the vision. But here my pen must pause. It is not for me to tell a story of weakness, and shame, and sin, that was poured into my bewildered ears in an agony of remorse that should be as sacred as any seal of confession. Suffice it to say that there came a point when she had to choose between all that makes life worthy, or all that makes it shameful. She chose rightly. She said so. She did not deny the sin of her heart; but she swore, with blinding tears, that it never passed into her life. In such a mist of degrading misery had she been lost, that she could not recall the exact date when she had the terrible choice. She could remember that it was on a Friday in October, but whether it was the second or third Friday she could not tell.

That was an awful day; but it came to an end at last, and as I walked home in the sweet peaceful sunset of early spring, I felt as if

I had awakened from a horrible, fevered nightmare. I have often seen Mrs. Amory since, but never by a single word has she alluded to the secret which she knows lies between us. But in crowded drawing-rooms, where she has been moving about with her lazy, sumptuous gracefulness, taking the sentimental view of everything, I have often felt her suddenly watching me.

She never again met the Rev. Thomas Clark. We are all scattered now; and when I think of the minister's circumstantial story of the phantom of a woman he scarcely knew, and of the circumstantial verification thereof, known only to myself, I can but ask the question of my title—"What is the meaning of it?"

MIZPAH.

"The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another."

A BROAD gold band engraven
With word of Holy Writ—
A *ring*, the bond and token
Which love and prayer hath lit.
When absent from each other
O'er mountain, vale, and sea,
The Lord, who guarded Israel,
Keep watch 'tween me and thee.

Through days of light and gladness,
Through days of love and life,
Through smiles, and joy, and sunshine,
Through days with beauty rife:
When absent from each other,
O'er mountain, vale, and sea,
The Lord of love and gladness
Keep watch 'tween me and thee.

Through days of doubt and darkness,
In fear and trembling breath;
Through mists of sin and sorrow
In tears, and grief, and death,—
The Lord of life and glory,
The King of earth and sea,
The Lord, who guarded Israel,
Keep watch 'tween me and thee.

A. E. G.

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER, 1880.

THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHO DID IT?

NEVER as long as Ella Winter lives will she forget the picture that imprinted itself on her brain, instantaneously as though it had been photographed there, at the moment when, startled by Aaron Stone's cry, she stepped out of the window of the sitting-room. On the borders of the lawn, at the foot of a large holly-bush, the leaves of which glistened brightly in the morning sun, knelt Aaron, his rugged features working convulsively, his trembling arms twined round the unconscious form of one who lay there in all the moveless majesty of death. One glance at the white set face, and Ella knew that the wanderer, whose absence had caused so much speculation, had come back at last, but that whatever secrets he might have in his keeping would remain secrets still, and would never be whispered in mortal ear. The pulses of her life stood still as she gazed in her shock of bewilderment.

The old man's voice broke the spell: he saw her standing there. "Oh, ma'am, my dear young mistress, it is my boy! My boy come back to me—dead. There has been murder done here!"

A shudder ran through Ella. Murder! Was it true?—Or, was old Aaron demented?

She rushed indoors to the sitting-room, ringing its bells as they had never been rung before: and then she sank into a chair. Never had Ella Winter been so near fainting.

The servants came running in, and she strove to collect her thoughts. Some one ran to the huge bell that rang in the stable yard, and sounded a peal upon it. It brought forth the coachman, Barnet. John Tilney came up with one of his men.

Barnet satisfied himself that Hubert Stone was really dead, also

that he had in all probability been murdered ; he then sped back to his stable yard, and saddled a horse to ride forth in search of a doctor. Fetch the nearest doctor you can find, had been Miss Winter's gasping order to him, and he hastened to obey it. By his own orders the groom rode forth on another horse to summon the chief-constable from his office at Nullington.

The frightened maids had gathered round Miss Winter, when Dorothy Stone appeared in the doorway, tying with trembling fingers her cap-strings. The bells and the commotion had startled her, but she did not know what had happened. At sight of the patient furrowed face and the dim blue eyes, just now full of anxious wonder, a great pity took the heart of Miss Winter, and the tears filled her own eyes as she went up to the old woman and led her away. No need for her to know the terrible news just yet.

Mrs. Toynbee next appeared upon the scene : she had waited to dress. Her first act was to order the white-faced servants away to their duties ; her second to speak with John Tilney. It was by her directions that he and his two men—for the other man had come up now—carried the ill-fated young fellow into a room on the ground floor. Then, with much tact and gentleness, Mrs. Toynbee succeeded in persuading Aaron, who seemed half-stupefied with grief and horror, to allow himself to be got into his own apartments by Tilney. Nothing more could be done till the arrival of the doctor and the police.

Dr. Spreckley and Mr. Chief-Constable Wade reached Heron Dyke together, driving over in a gig from the Rose and Crown. The first thing they did was to look at the dead. That Hubert Stone had been murdered a very slight examination sufficed to prove. He had been stabbed through the heart with a stiletto or some other sharp instrument. The disordered state of his attire, as well as the condition of the trimly-kept gravel walk, showed that he had not met his fate without a struggle : some sharp encounter must have taken place.

But what had brought him there? Why had he come back to Heron Dyke in the night-time?—or perhaps it might have been at the first glimmer of dawn. These were the questions that ran around. Miss Winter's thoughts, which she kept to herself, ran in somewhat a different groove. Might he not have come back by train the previous day, she asked herself, and intended to call on her in the evening, and been afraid or ashamed to do so, and so lingered about the grounds until it was too late? Too late also to get admittance to his old lodgings at the lodge? and so he had paced about during the night hours, and had disturbed the thief or thieves in the act of rifling the bureau? Miss Winter's mind lost itself in troubled conjectures.

Examination showed that a hole had been cut with a diamond in the window of the room where the jewels lay, the window been opened, and the shutters forced from their hinges. The bureau

must then have been opened by means of a chisel, or other blunt instrument, and the jewels stolen from their receptacle. Most probably it was at the moment the burglar was leaving the room with his booty that he was encountered by Hubert Stone; perhaps seized by him. How the probably unequal struggle had ended was but too terribly manifest. Apparently nothing in Hubert's pockets had been touched. His watch, chain, and leather purse were all there, but no letters or papers of any kind from which a clue might be obtained as to his recent movements, or to the place from whence he had come.

"His watch has stopped at twenty minutes past two," observed Dr. Spreckley, who was making this examination with Mr. Inspector Wade. "And that may have been the time of the fatal occurrence, poor fellow. What's in here, I wonder?"

The doctor was opening the gold locket attached to the watch chain, as he made the last remark. And it was as well perhaps, all things considered, that the Inspector did not hear it—that he had turned momentarily away. For, inside the locket, was a portrait of Miss Winter. Dr. Spreckley's eyes opened, in more ways than one.

"Presuming rascal!" he involuntarily cried, apostrophising the unconscious dead. "My poor young man, you must have been more silly than I gave you credit for. I'll take possession of this, any way: no good to let the world see it," he decided, as he dexterously removed the likeness and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket.

"What's that?" asked the Inspector, coming back.

"Only this," said Dr. Spreckley, exhibiting the empty locket.

That the person or persons who committed the robbery had also committed the murder, appeared perfectly conclusive to Inspector Wade; and so he informed Miss Winter, with whom he requested an interview. Of course she had herself drawn the same conclusion. He then asked Miss Winter whether she had the slightest suspicion with regard to the honesty of any of her servants. It was quite evident that the thieves must have had some acquaintance with the house, and knew the exact spot where to look for the jewels, and they had apparently made no attempt to obtain any other booty.

Miss Winter replied, in most decisive terms, that she had not the slightest reason to suspect the honesty of any person about her. "But, indeed," she added, "it is impossible that any of the servants can be guilty. They were not even aware of the existence of the jewels; much less of the place where they were deposited. No person whatever knew of it save myself and Mrs. Toynbee."

The chief-constable, who had a pencil in his hand, passed it once or twice thoughtfully across his lips. "Pardon me the remark, Miss Winter," he said, looking up, "but may I ask how it came to pass that you found no safer receptacle for this valuable amount of property than an old bureau in a sitting-room on the ground floor—

and which has a window opening to the ground. Any tyro of a burglar could force an entrance in ten minutes."

"But," she objected, "how was any burglar to know that such property was there?"

"It seems, madam, that one, at all events, did know it. It—pardon me—seems like throwing temptation in a thief's way."

"Their being deposited there, and also that such jewels were in existence, was an entire secret between myself and Mrs. Toynbee," she replied. "Had it not been so, I should have removed them to a safer place. If you will listen a moment, Mr. Wade, I will tell you how it all came about, and how the jewels were found."

He listened as she related the facts: how she had caused this long-unopened old carved bureau to be brought downstairs to her morning room, that she might search it for certain papers relating to the estate, which she fancied might be in existence. She failed to find the papers; but, to her intense surprise, she found, in a secret drawer, this large quantity of jewels. Mrs. Toynbee was present, and she had warned her that nothing must be said to the servants. Mrs. Toynbee fully agreed with her. After examining the jewels, they were replaced in their hiding-place, until she could see Mr. Daventry, and talk with him.

"It is impossible," concluded Miss Winter, looking at the inspector, "that the facts can have transpired."

Mr. Wade, somewhat mystified, made no reply for a moment or two. He did not give in.

"But you cannot fail to see, madam," he urged, "that the fact of your having found the jewels must have leaked out somehow, as well as a knowledge of the place where they were placed. This burglary was no mere happy-go-lucky affair; it was evidently premeditated—carefully planned beforehand."

"It certainly does seem like it," admitted the young lady. "But I assure you I cannot understand it. Mrs. Toynbee ——"

"I think I had better see Mrs. Toynbee."

Mrs. Toynbee was called in; and came, full of nervous trepidation. She had been sitting upon pins and needles, as old Dorothy Stone would have expressed it, ever since Mr. Wade had been shut in with Miss Winter. The inspector noted her aspect, and took the bull by the horns. He did not say to her: "Madam, have you mentioned the fact to anyone that such jewels were found?" he said, "To whom did you mention it?" Her colour went and came; her heart was beating; her trembling fingers could not hold the needle—for she had some wool-work in her hands.

"I am afraid that I have been very thoughtless and foolish," she began, her voice shaking. "Of course, I quite understood that no mention of the jewels was to be made in presence of any of the domestics, but it never struck me that the prohibition was intended to be a general one. You may remember, my dear Miss Winter,

that I went to the Lilacs, in your place, on Thursday afternoon, to the tea-party. And—and, somehow—we ladies were all talking together; one topic led to another—and—"

Mrs. Toynbee broke down, from sheer nervousness.

"And you told of the finding of the jewels, and where they were deposited," spoke up the inspector.

"It was led up to," she said, excusing herself in the best way she could, and hardly able to keep from tears. "The ladies had been saying to me that I must find a country life very much lacking in excitement, after the metropolis; to which I replied that we were not always destitute of excitement, even in a country life; and I—I then did speak of the jewels. But who was to imagine," she added, plucking up a little spirit, "that even the smallest danger could exist in mentioning it to ladies. They are all well-known; as trustworthy as we are."

"Do I gather, madam, that only ladies were present," said the inspector. "No gentlemen?"

"It was a meeting for ladies only," replied Mrs. Toynbee. "One gentleman came in towards the last—Mr. Philip Cleeve. He came to fetch his mother. I remember he made a remark to the effect that the bureau was not a very safe place to leave the jewels in."

"A very sensible remark to make, under the circumstances," returned the inspector drily. "Madam, can you give me the names of the ladies who heard this news?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mrs. Toynbee; "we were not many—eight or ten, or so." And she succeeded in remembering all the names.

They were all well-known gentlewomen—all trustworthy, as the inspector had reason to know and believe.

"One of them must have mentioned it abroad, in the hearing of some dangerous ears," he said to himself. "Madam," he added, aloud, to Miss Winter, "I will not detain you further at present; but I may need to see you again."

"Whenever you will, Mr. Wade," she sighed. "It is a dreadful thing altogether—and very mysterious. It seems to me we have had nothing but painful mysteries for some time now at Heron Dyke."

The chief-constable glanced rather keenly at Miss Winter, in answer to this, and took his leave. As he closed the drawing-room door Mrs. Toynbee's suppressed tears burst forth.

"I am heartbroken, my dear," she sobbed—and, in truth, she did seem bitterly repentant: "Perfectly heartbroken to think that any thoughtless remarks of mine should have conduced in any way to this terrible catastrophe. I never thought that anything I might say in a moment of confidence ——"

"I should not have thought there was much danger in it myself," interrupted Miss Winter, kindly. "Do not distress yourself. Though they must have talked of it again, you see; and so it must have got about, and come to the knowledge of improper people.'

"Oh, dear!" wailed Mrs. Toynbee. "Yes, that is how it must have been. I wish I had known nothing about the jewels!"

Leaving her to her repentant sorrow, Ella went to see after poor Mrs. Stone.

Dorothy—she knew the worst now—was in her own sitting-room, leaning back in an easy chair before a good fire, attired in her Sunday gown and cap—a soft black twill, trimmed handsomely with crape; a cap of white net and black gauze ribbon—for they were yet in deep mourning for the Squire. Perhaps some vague idea of its being a sort of holiday—for the old woman would do no work that day—had induced her to put these best things on.

At Dorothy's age the outward signs of great emotions last but for a little while. Tears may come, but they do not flow so plentifully as in youth: the springs are deeper down, and more difficult to reach, and when found are sometimes almost dry. As age creeps on, and one or another of our loved ones drops silently from our side, it seems but such a little time till we hope to see them again, the period of separation is so short. As they are, we ourselves shall so soon be that we cannot mourn their loss with that intensity which we should have felt in youth, when the plains before us stretched to a limitless horizon, and our heartstrings were responsive to the slightest touch.

The young mistress sat down beside Dorothy, and took one of her withered hands between her own. That soft, warm, caressing touch unsealed again the fountains of the aged heart. With her other hand she lifted a corner of her black silk apron to her eyes, forgetting perhaps that it was not one of every-day linen.

"What a handsome, brave lad he was, Miss Ella!" she cried. "Fit to be a lord's son, any day; and with as bold and masterful a spirit as any gentleman need wish to have: and now to think of him lying there, white and cold, and dumb—he that had a laugh and a ready word for everybody. Alack! alack! if I could but be lying there instead of him!"

"My poor Dorothy! I do indeed feel for you."

"I knew when I saw the headless horses and the black coach that night in the park that there would be a death among us before long," she continued; "but I little thought my own bright boy would be the one to go. Ah! we never know; we never know. Though he was ill that night with his throat; and that might have whispered to me that the apparition was for him."

"Dorothy, do not dwell upon such things."

"Miss Ella, trust an old woman who has had a vast experience of life. Such signs and tokens are not sent for nothing, though some folks may laugh at you for heeding them. They are warnings from another world," added the old woman solemnly, "and some day it may be made plain to us why they are sent."

An inquest was held; some evidence was taken; and then it was

adjourned for a week that the police might have time to make further investigations. They could not, as yet, learn that one suspicious person had known of the jewels.

Of all Miss Winter's friends, the one to make himself most busy was the Vicar of Nullington. An idle, easy-going man in general, Mr. Kettle could be aroused in a case like this: all his sympathies were with Miss Winter, and his curiosity was on the alert.

"After all," he observed to that young lady, one day when he was sitting with her to discuss details, "after all, the most mysterious part of the affair is not the sudden appearance of Hubert Stone on the scene. I daresay he could readily account for that, poor fellow, if he were living: perhaps he got in by the mail train on the Sunday night, which you know passes at nearly one o'clock in the morning, and did not care to knock people up. No, the mystery lies in how the information, as to the hiding-place of the jewels, reached the cognisance of the rogue who stole them. And really, as Chief-Constable Wade justly observed, it would seem next to a certainty that the thief must be someone who had an intimate knowledge of the premises of Heron Dyke. You must see that, my dear, for yourself."

"I fear I do," sighed Ella.

"So far as people's recollection serves, Mrs. Toynbee mentioned simply that the bureau had been removed to your morning-room: Miss Winter's morning-room. Now, how should a common thief know which was Miss Winter's morning-room? It is only since the Squire died and your return that you have made it such."

"True," assented Ella.

"And, altogether, taking one thing with another, I feel inclined to think it might not have been a common thief who took them."

Ella lifted her eyes quickly. "Have you any suspicions?—of any one in particular?"

"No, my dear; no," he answered slowly; and, she thought, dubiously. "We can but wait for that. Perhaps Wade may ferret out more particulars."

But, on this same evening, when the Vicar was at home, safe within the four walls of his study, he dropped a word or two that nearly scared his daughter out of her senses. Somehow he had caught up a doubt in his own mind of Philip Cleeve.

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Maria, in an accent of indignant horror.

"I don't say it was he, Maria; I should be very sorry to do that, or to breathe a syllable of this doubt to any one but you. Still I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that things with regard to Philip do look somewhat suspicious—and Dr. Downes has long thought so."

"Papa, papa!" she repeated.

"See here, child. In all the mysterious robberies that have taken place, and puzzled us for the past eighteen months, Philip has been present, beginning with Mrs. Carlyon's jewels. He was at her house

the evening they were stolen; he was with Downes when he lost his snuff-box—he was with me when my purse disappeared. And, egad, if you come to that," added the Vicar, speaking rather unguardedly in his heat of recollection, "he was with Lennox and Freddy Bootle in London the night they lost things—the one his watch, the other his money."

"This is dreadful," gasped Maria. "Papa, it is not true; it cannot be. I would answer for Philip with my life."

"Very unwise of you, my dear. I have not finished. When that ridiculous woman up yonder,"—pointing his finger in the direction of Heron Dyke—"blurted out the story of the jewels at Mrs. Ducie's, and where they were deposited, Philip Cleeve heard her; he was the only man present. I don't accuse him, I say, Maria, but I cannot get these truths out of my mind."

And, for answer, Maria burst into a flood of distressed tears.

The funeral of Hubert Stone took place, and was attended by half the population of Nullington. Old Aaron was chief mourner. On the coffin lay a wreath of exquisite flowers, placed there, before it left the Hall, by the hands of one by whom the past had been forgiven.

A day or two later the jury met again. Nothing fresh had transpired. The police found out that Hubert Stone had come by train from London on the Saturday; he had stayed at a small inn a mile or two away until the Sunday evening, and then went out. From that hour he had never been seen alive, so far as could be traced.

The verdict returned was wilful murder against some person or persons unknown. Rewards were offered for any discovery; one by Miss Winter, another by Government.

Dr. Spreckley had taken an opportunity of giving to Miss Winter the likeness he had taken from Hubert's locket. "So foolish of the young man," he lightly remarked: "but I fancy he had as great a reverence for you, his mistress, as he had for the Squire."

"Yes," said Ella. "Thank you. Thank you very much, dear Dr. Spreckley," she earnestly added. And she put the bit of cardboard in the fire there and then.

Ella had some intimate friends living close to Norwich: the Cursitors. Old Colonel Cursitor, he was hale and hearty yet, and the Squire had been companions in early life. Some of them came over and insisted upon carrying Ella back with them for a week. And she was glad to yield; to get away. Mrs. Toynbee took the opportunity to get away also, and went to stay with her sister in London.

This need not have been mentioned, but for a little matter that occurred during their absence. The servant girl, Betsy Tucker, was taken ill. Her symptoms were those of fever, and old Aaron protested that she should go out of the house. "A pretty thing if the Hall is to be filled with typhus and what not!" he growled—for Hubert's death did not seem to have sweetened his temper. "A nice climax to things that would be!"

"Let her come to me," cried Mrs. Keen, briskly, in whose hearing this was said; the landlady having gone to the Hall to see the girl. "I am not afraid it's going to be anything infectious; I don't think it is. I knew her mother, you may remember, Mr. Stone."

Aaron closed with the offer at once. And the first news that greeted the mistress of Heron Dyke, returning from her week's visit to the pleasant city of Norwich, was that Betsy Tucker was ill of fever; and that she had been sent out of the house by Aaron, to get well, or die, at the "Leaning Gate."

Miss Winter showed herself to be very angry at the removal. But the thing was done.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHAT PRISCILLA PEYTON HAD TO TELL.

In a cheerful room at Heron Dyke, with the morning sun shining upon it, there sat two young women, busily plying their needles: Miss Winter's maid, Adèle, and a dressmaker, one Priscilla Peyton. Priscilla was a homely, pleasant-featured person, between thirty and forty, who had often been employed at the Hall. They were making a morning gown for the Hall's mistress.

"What am I to do?" suddenly cried Priscilla. "It is impossible to get on without cord. I thought you would be sure to have some up here, or I'd have brought it with me."

"We generally do have it—plenty of it, but it was all used up last week, Miss Peyton," replied Adèle; a steady, dark young woman, who spoke English and French equally well.

Miss Winter came into the room at this juncture, and the difficulty was revealed to her. She said Adèle had better go to the nearest shop, one at this end of Nullington, and buy some cord.

But to this order the dressmaker looked as if she would like to demur. "What is it, Priscilla?" asked Miss Winter. "Can you not spare her?"

"Well, ma'am, the truth is I shall be waiting for that frilling she is hemming."

"Oh, I will finish that for you, Priscilla," readily replied the young lady: who had a natural aptitude and liking for work.

She took a seat by the window; and Adèle departed in search of what was required. Hemming quickly at the strip of cambric, Ella talked the while to Priscilla Peyton, whom she had known—and esteemed—for years.

"It is some time since you were at work here, is it not, Priscilla?" she remarked.

"Well, it is, ma'am. With so many more maids in the house, Mrs. Stone gets done for her what I used to come to do. The last time I was here at work was when you were abroad, Miss Ella, and the poor Squire was lying ill."

"Did you see him?"

"Oh no, ma'am; oh no. Nobody used to see him then, save the doctor, and that. I was here the best part of a week, mending gowns for Mrs. Stone, and making her a new one. It was only about a fortnight before the Squire died."

Ella sighed. Priscilla Peyton, bending over her work, spoke again.

"I used to think, sitting in Mrs. Stone's parlour, how much I should like to see him once again; yes, I did, ma'am. I said so one day to Eliza; and she answered me that I might just as well wish to see the inside of the moon—that for months and months nobody had been admitted to see the Squire but those that had the pass-keys."

Ella, looking up from her work, stared at the neat brown hair and the neat white cap of the young woman, bending over hers, as if she were asking some solution to the words.

"Pass-keys!" she repeated. "What were they?"

"Keys that would open the green baize doors which the Squire had put up to shut out his rooms from the rest of the house, and which were always kept locked night and day, ma'am," replied Priscilla.

"And who kept these pass-keys?"

"There were four of the keys, ma'am," Eliza said, "and four people had them, one each. Aaron Stone and poor Mr. Hubert, who is just gone; Dr. Jago had one, and the nurse."

Ella paused. "Of what nurse do you speak? My uncle never had a nurse."

"Indeed he had, Miss Ella. It was a Mrs. Dexter: sent for from London by Dr. Jago."

A nurse from London! This was the first time Miss Winter had heard of the existence of such a person at the Hall. The revelation was not palatable to her.

"How long was this Mrs. Dexter at the Hall—do you know, Priscilla?"

"It was a good while, ma'am; though I can't say exactly. I think she was here before Christmas—I am next to sure of it. Why yes—I remember now," quickly added the young woman; "she came in November. I was up here one wet November day; and while I was drying my petticoats at the kitchen fire, Phemie whispered to me that she thought the master must be worse, for they had got a London nurse in the house."

"Did this nurse remain with my uncle till the last?"

"She did, ma'am. She left the day after his death, in May."

Miss Winter said no more; she was thinking. Why was the presence of this nurse in the house kept from her?—for kept it assuredly had been. Why and wherefore had the woman's name never been mentioned to her, or the fact of her having been so long at the Hall? Her uncle had not spoken of her in his letters, or Hubert Stone in his notes.

"I saw Mrs. Dexter take her departure," resumed Priscilla, as a bit of gossip. "A lovely May morning it was, and I had gone to the station to see my little nephew off by the London train. Mrs. Dexter drove up in a fly, with a trunk and a little black bag that she carried in her hand, and I saw her get into the train. It was but the day after the Squire died; the bells were tolling for him."

And of course but two or three days before Miss Winter's return. And yet no one inmate of the Hall had informed her that this nurse had been there! It was altogether very strange.

"Did you say, Priscilla, that people at the last were not admitted to see my uncle, save those who had the pass-keys?"

"Ma'am, not for months and months. Eliza told me she did not believe a soul had been allowed to go in to see him since the past November. No matter who came—the Reverend Mr. Kettle, or any other of the Squire's old friends, they were never let go in."

"I wonder why?" involuntarily exclaimed Miss Winter.

"That I couldn't say, ma'am. Nobody could, I expect, save Dr. Jago. It must have been frightfully lonely for him, poor sick gentleman. He was never seen at all, or his footsteps heard, or the sound of his voice, Eliza said. To the girl it seemed just as though he were shut up in a living tomb."

Miss Winter asked no more questions. That something, and of set purpose, had been hidden from her; some drama enacted within those walls of which it was intended that she should know nothing, she fully believed. And there came rushing into her mind Hubert Stone's words—that if the truth were known she was no more the owner of Heron Dyke than he was. Again and again she asked herself what the truth was, and how it could be brought to light.

Ella carried her trouble to Mr. Kettle, her uncle's friend of many years. She sat with him in his study, Maria being present. She revealed to him her doubts; she hinted at Hubert's strange assertion on the wreck; she repeated what Priscilla Petyon had said, and then she appealed to him to advise her what she ought to do next.

The Vicar was not remarkable for penetration or sagacity, but he was a kindly, well-disposed man where his own ease and comfort were not in question, and if his words were sometimes weak and ineffective, he could, when required, put on a very wise and solemn air, which in itself was a comfort to those who sought his advice. But he really did not see what advice he could give now.

"I was, myself," he said, "more surprised and hurt than I can tell you that for some months before my old friend's death I was denied all access to him—I, who had been in the habit of calling at the Hall at least once a fortnight, ay, and oftener, for the last twenty years. When I found myself rebuffed one time after another, I could hardly believe that it was the Squire's own personal wish that I should not see him, although they assured me it was so. Old Aaron would usher me into a room with as much politeness as he was

in the habit of showing to anybody, and would take in my message. Back he would come; or else Dr. Jago, or that sly-looking, smooth-tongued nurse, or perhaps Hubert Stone. But, no matter who came, each had the same tale to tell. The Squire had had a worse night than usual, or he was asleep, or he was too weak to-day to see anyone: whatever the excuse might be, I was never allowed to see him. It was the source of very considerable pain to me at the time, and I expressed myself rather strongly about it in my letters to Maria."

"There *must* have been something in all this—don't you think so, sir?" returned Ella. "Something to conceal."

"It seems like it, my dear; it used to seem like it to me. But I do not see what it could be; and I am sure I cannot imagine anything that could tend to peril your inheritance."

"Nor I," said Ella, "I wish I could. I mean I wish I could see any solution by which these doubts could be set at rest. The will was quite in order; Mr. Daventry tells me so ——"

"Having been drawn up by Mr. Daventry, you may be sure of that, my dear," interrupted the Vicar.

"The only one thing, he says, that could possibly render it invalid, is my uncle having died before his birthday," continued Ella.

"And we know he did not die before it. He lived nearly a month after it."

"I—suppose—he—did live?" spoke Ella, with much hesitation.

"Did live!" echoed the Vicar, in surprise. "Why of course he did. People saw him and spoke with him. Don't you know that the other Mr. Denison's lawyer and his clerk came to the Hall two or three days subsequent to the Squire's birthday, and had an interview with him?—saw him; conversed with him. How could they have done that had he not been living? The Squire went into one of his passions, it was said, dashed his beef-tea, cup and all, into the fire, and abused the lawyer to his face."

Ella could not help a smile. "Yes," she said, "I was told of that."

"Then, what else is there to fear? For anyone to come to you and say that if certain facts were known to the world you would not be mistress of Heron Dyke, seems to me sheer nonsense—if not malice. Were I in your place, my dear Miss Winter, I should certainly trouble myself no further in the matter."

Ella shook her head. "All these arguments seem so sound, so true—and yet I cannot feel satisfied. I am at a loss to know what more to do."

"Do nothing," said the Vicar decisively. "I think you must attach an exaggerated importance to the words. Some designing rascal it must have been who spoke them—wanting to swindle money out of you. Give him into custody should he apply again."

Remembering how impossible it was that he could apply again, a sad shade passed over Ella's countenance. The Vicar saw it: and of course mistook it. He knitted his brow.

"Take my advice, my dear Miss Winter, and rest satisfied," he said. "Do not try to create a mystery where none exists, save in your own imagination."

There was no more to be said. The Vicar's reasoning and advice had been much like Mr. Daventry's. Ella wished she could feel as secure as they felt.

She and Maria went out together. They were going to the Leaning Gate. As it was now decided that the fever of Betsy Tucker was not an infectious one, and as the girl was said to be getting weaker, Miss Winter considered it was her duty to go to see her. Maria had been more than once.

"What do you think, Maria, of the advice your father gave me—to let this doubt of my inheritance rest, and be satisfied?" questioned Ella, as they walked along. "Oh, that I could see my way to a little more light!"

"Light does not always come when we ask for it, or when we fancy that we need it most," answered Maria, "and yet it generally comes at the time that is best for us. You must hope that it will do so in the present case: that is, if you still feel there is something hidden that you ought to know."

"That is just the feeling which I cannot get rid of. Were you in my place, Maria, what would you do?"

"I hardly know," answered Maria slowly. "It seems to me that you are bound to leave no stone unturned in your efforts to discover the truth, and this none the less, perhaps indeed rather the more, that the truth when revealed may prove disastrous to you from a worldly point of view."

"I can only wait for more light," said Ella with a sigh. "The difficulty is, how to get the light—where to look for it."

"I perceive that," said Maria. "You can but wait and watch. Here we are!—and there's poor Mrs. Keen."

Betsy Tucker was in bed, the victim of a distressing kind of low fever. Dr. Spreckley hoped to bring her through it, but he was not sure. After turning and tossing for hours incessantly, as Mrs. Keen informed them, she had now sunk into a troubled sleep. They stood by the bed in silence, looking at the sick girl's crimson-fevered cheeks.

"She is light-headed at times," whispered the landlady, "fancying herself back at the Hall. She starts up in bed, ma'am"—turning to Miss Winter—"crying out, 'Hush! there are the footsteps in the corridor again! And now,' she'll go on, 'they are trying the door. See! see! the handle moves!' and with that, ma'am, she sinks back on the pillow and buries her head under the clothes. For my part," concluded Mrs. Keen, "I cannot help thinking it was that night's fright which has brought on the fever."

"To what do you allude?" asked Miss Winter. "Has she been frightened?"

"Why yes, ma'am. But I thought you knew of it, or I'd not have spoken. It was talked of a good deal at the Hall. She was badly frightened."

"In what way?"

"It was the night of the storm a few weeks ago," replied the landlady, vexed to have alluded to this before Miss Winter, as it seemed she did not know of it. "Betsy could not get to sleep for the noise; and between the gusts of wind, when all was momentarily still, she heard footsteps walking about the corridor outside her bedroom door. After a time she struck a light, and then, so she says, she distinctly saw the handle of her room door turn this way and that, as though somebody was trying to get in; but she had locked it on going to bed. She came down here to tell me of it the next day, and I tried to persuade her that it was nothing more than her own idle fancies that had frightened her, till at last she got quite out of temper with me. It must have taken great hold of her mind, I'm afraid, by the way she talks of it in her wanderings now."

"I never heard anything of this," remarked Miss Winter. "But I cannot understand why Betsy need have been so much frightened. She might have guessed that the footsteps were but those of one or other of the maids, unable to sleep for the storm. And what more natural that they should turn the handle of her door, intending to see after her?"

"Yes, ma'am," assented Mrs. Keen, looking down.

"If I were to allow myself to be frightened by all the unaccountable noises I hear in the night at the Hall, especially when the wind is high, I should never care to sleep there again," continued Miss Winter. "I have no doubt that all old houses are alike in that respect, especially when many of the rooms are empty."

"Where is Susan?" interposed Maria, breaking the pause of silence.

"She is gone out to do some errands, Miss Maria. Susan is a famous help to me in nursing Betsy."

"Susan was always very gentle and patient," remarked Ella.

"And always will be I hope, ma'am," responded Mrs. Keen. "She is a girl that has very little to say for herself, as you know, young ladies. On most points she seems as sensible as other people are, but now and then her mind seems to go vacant, just as if it couldn't quite grasp what you are telling her; and her memory is not always to be trusted. But she's a dear good girl in helping me in the house; I don't know what I should do without her."

"Does her sister's disappearance seem to prey upon her mind as much as it used to?" and Miss Winter unconsciously lowered her voice as she put the question.

"I don't believe it is ever out of her thoughts," answered the landlady. "I know quite well what Susan is thinking about when she sits perfectly still, as she will sometimes do for half-an-hour together, staring straight before her, but without seeing anything.

Katherine's name is never mentioned in her presence now. I think it best," continued Mrs. Keen, her eyes filling with tears: "though, Heaven knows, my poor lost darling is rarely out of my own thoughts."

"You will, of course, see that Betsy Tucker wants for nothing, Mrs. Keen," said Miss Winter, as the landlady attended the young ladies to the door. "I was very much vexed, as I have already told you, that she should have been sent away from the Hall: she should not have been had I been at home. Everything requisite for her shall be sent to her from my house, and one of the maids shall come this evening to watch by her for the night. We must not have you laid up."

"Oh, ma'am, please don't think of me. I am strong, and used to work. All my anxiety is lest we should not bring her through."

"Dr. Spreckley assures me that he has still good hopes of her. And he is, you know, skilful and attentive."

Ella glanced at the little garden as they left the door. That which had looked so bright and pleasant in the summer had now little to show in the faint November sunshine but bare branches, empty beds, and footpaths strewed with withered leaves.

"I think Mrs. Keen must be mistaken in fancying Betsy Tucker's illness has arisen from the fright she got the night of the storm," observed Miss Winter, after they had walked some little time in silence. "It is incredible that the mere hearing of footsteps in the corridor, and seeing her door tried, should have terrified her to any extent. What ought she to have thought but that some of the maids were walking there, alarmed at the storm."

"I will tell you more, Ella," said Miss Kettle. "The girl was very much frightened at the time, I believe; though there can be little doubt the impression would have worn off but for something which she unfortunately heard a day or two later. Two of the others were conversing about it, not knowing that she was within hearing; they said to one another that it must have been the ghost walking at night—the ghost of Katherine Keen."

Miss Winter's brow knit angrily. "Who were these servants?"

"Eliza and Phemie. They had cautiously kept it from the girl; and her hearing it was quite an accident. Betsy, it appears, believes in ghosts; and she confessed to Mrs. Keen she had never had one proper night's rest since, from fear."

"I suppose Mrs. Keen told you this, Maria?"

"Yes. The first time I went to see Betsy."

Miss Winter sighed. "I do not see what help there is for it all. That is the worst of it, Maria."

"It is so bad," replied Maria gravely, "that at times when speaking of it, or hearing it spoken of, I turn shivery, as if I believed in the ghost myself.—Here comes Susan."

The young girl, pleasant and placid-looking, was advancing with a basket of marketings. They stopped to speak to her. Miss Winter

told her she was going to send one of the maids down to sit up with Betsy, and was passing onwards, when the anxious, appealing look in the girl's wan face arrested her.

"Did you wish to ask anything, Susan?"

"Oh, ma'am, if I might!—if I might!"

"Certainly you may. What is it?"

"I want to find out where they took Katherine to," spoke the girl in an urgent whisper. "Perhaps *you* know, ma'am; you are the mistress; and whether she is alive or dead."

"My poor Susan, I know no more about it than you do. I wish I did!"

Susan clasped her hands. "I wonder how much longer we shall have to wait?"

"It may be, Susan, that we shall never know. It may be intended that we shall not know."

Susan shook her head. "I think it will all be known by-and-by, ma'am. Perhaps I shall be the one to find it out. I often wake up in the night and hear Katherine calling to me, only I can't tell where the voice comes from. I hear it oftenest in the larch plantation at the back of the Hall when the moon is at the full. But when I try to follow her voice I get bewildered with the strange fancies that seem to be dancing and whirling in my head; and sometimes I hear a laugh close behind me, and then I hurry off home and go to bed and repeat hymns one after another till I get to sleep."

"There, run home now, Susan; your mother is waiting for you," interposed Miss Kettle with authority—for it was always best to cut off promptly these dreamy visions of Susan.

Ever obedient, Susan hastened towards the Leaning Gate, the far-away, spiritual expression dying out of her eyes. The others walked on, Maria with her gaze on the ground.

"Look opposite, Maria. There is some one you know."

Maria looked across the road, and saw Philip Cleeve, who appeared to be just as much absorbed as they were, his head bent in deep thought. He looked like Philip grown twenty years older—Philip without his elastic tread, his quick walk, his cheerful smile and greeting for everyone whom he knew. Not until he had nearly passed did he perceive Miss Winter and Maria. Happening to raise his eyes, he started, hesitated, flushed to the roots of his hair, lifted his hat, and hurried on.

Maria, too, flushed painfully, and a grieved look came into her eyes as she gravely acknowledged Philip's salutation, and walked on by Miss Winter's side.

"You and Philip have not quarrelled, I hope, Maria?"

"Quarrelled—no," answered Maria with a sigh. "But he does not come to the Vicarage now; papa has forbidden it."

"He looks changed somehow."

"So I think. He spends, I believe, too much time in the billiard-

room, and report talks of high play at the Lilacs with Lord Camberley and others. All these things distress me greatly."

"Naturally—if you feel a special interest in him," remarked Ella.

Again Maria's colour deepened. "Just before I went to Leamington he asked me to be his wife."

"Did you refuse him?"

"For the time being."

"And you have not yet made up your mind to accept him?"

"No. How can I? I could never make up my mind unless papa's will went with it."

"Perhaps Philip is vexed—disheartened: and so flies to these foolish courses?"

"I don't know," sighed Maria. "It would show great weakness of mind, would it not?"

"People in love are said to be not always accountable for their actions. Poor Philip! But you love him still?"

"I never quite knew till lately what he is to me," answered Maria in a low voice. "I have tried not to care for him, and ——"

"You find that you, too, are a little weak-minded?"

"I suppose so. But he never passed me in the street before without speaking."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MALACHITE AND GOLD.

Of all days in the week, Saturday was the one most longed for by Ella Winter. The reason was that it always—or nearly always, for now and then there was a breakdown or a delay somewhere—brought her a letter from Edward Conroy. These letters were her greatest comfort in her perplexities and troubles. She read them and re-read them till she knew all their sweetest passages by heart. How she longed for his return that she might tell him everything!—for in truth she sometimes felt that the burden laid upon her was almost more than she could bear without help. Were he but here to share it with her! Absence had enabled her to read her heart in all its entirety, had endeared his image to her more day by day. Mr. Conroy was not expected in England until spring; but towards the end of November there came a letter, the contents of which filled his mistress with unexpected delight. Conroy's mission in Spain was nearly at an end, and he might be expected home in three or four weeks—in time, it might be, to eat his Christmas dinner. He did not tell her that latterly her letters had filled him with so much uneasiness that he had requested his employers to relieve him of his duties abroad, or that he had wisely made up his mind to ascertain for himself, and as quickly as possible, the exact state of affairs at Heron Dyke.

Little by little the popular excitement in connection with the murder and robbery at Heron Dyke began to subside, especially as

all the efforts of the police resulted in no fresh discoveries. People had talked and wondered till there was nothing left to talk and wonder about. Fresh topics and other interests began to claim their attention. The newspapers had ceased to comment on the case, and there seemed every probability of its adding one more to the long list of undiscovered crimes.

One day Mrs. Toynbee, who had been shopping in the town, brought home a piece of news. Someone had told her that Dr. Jago was about to leave Nullington, the reason for his departure being that he had bought a more lucrative practice elsewhere. This set Ella thinking. Would it not be well, she asked herself, to see this medical man before he went away, and try whether she could not elicit from him something of that which she wanted to know? He had attended her uncle to the last; he must be acquainted with all that took place inside Heron Dyke during the time she was away; if any fraud had been at work it could hardly have been kept a secret from him. She disliked Dr. Jago, but it seemed to her that she ought not to let him go away without seeking an interview with him.

Next morning she finally made up her mind; so the pony chaise was ordered round and she was driven into Nullington. Calling at the Vicarage on her way, she took Miss Kettle into her confidence.

"Am I doing right, Maria, think you?"

"Yes, I think you are."

"Then you must accompany me. You have no objection?"

"Not the least in the world."

Dr. Jago was at home; and the young ladies, leaving the carriage with the groom, were shown into his consulting-room. Turning round from a case he was packing, the doctor changed colour, as if from annoyance, when he saw his visitors. The transitory expression passed, however; he greeted them civilly, apologising for the disorder of the place, and invited them to sit.

"I hear that you are about to quit Nullington, Dr. Jago," began Miss Winter, as she took the chair he placed.

"True, madam," he replied. "I have purchased a more lucrative practice in London. What can I have the honour of doing for you?"

"I have called to ask you a few questions, Dr. Jago. I hope you will be able to answer them."

The doctor bowed.

"I was abroad, as you are aware, at the time my uncle died," she began, "but you saw him, I believe, in your medical capacity, up to the day of his death?"

"Yes," he replied. "I saw Mr. Denison daily; and I was with him when he died."

"The end, when it did come, was very sudden."

"Both sudden and unexpected," returned the Doctor. "I was utterly taken by surprise. I knew, of course, that Mr. Denison's

disorder could have but one termination, but I had no thought that the end was so near. The heart suddenly failed in its action, and—and all was over. Only a few hours before, when I was with him, I had detected no cause for fear."

"You are aware that previously to last Christmas—in October I think it was—Dr. Spreckley, who had attended my uncle for twenty years, and who ought to have known his constitution if it were possible for anyone to know it, gave it as his decided opinion that Mr. Denison could not live far into the new year—if so long as that."

"Mr. Denison himself informed me of that opinion."

"And yet your skill prolonged his life until nearly the end of May?"

Dr. Jago bowed again, but said nothing.

"Then you, although a much younger practitioner than Dr. Spreckley, must have pursued a very much more efficient mode of treatment with your patient than that adopted by him?"

Dr. Jago shrugged his shoulders, leaned forward in his chair, and smiled faintly. "I have not the slightest wish in the world to disparage Dr. Spreckley," he said, "but it may be that he is a little old-fashioned in his ideas; it may be that he has hardly grown with the times. Medicine has made great strides during the last twenty years, and a middle-aged country practitioner, unless he be a great reader and a man of inquiring mind, would find many things taught, and many theories demonstrated in the schools of London and Paris, which were hardly as much as mooted when he was a young man."

All this seemed only fair and reasonable. In any case, Miss Winter was not prepared to refute it. She paused for a moment or two before she spoke again.

"It may or it may not have come to your notice, Dr. Jago," she said, eyeing him steadily as she spoke, "that there are certain reports flying about the neighbourhood—reports unpleasant to all concerned, but which you could no doubt put an end to if you chose to do so."

"Reports! About what, Miss Winter?" he asked quickly.

Ella paused: it seemed somewhat difficult to frame words for what she wanted to say.

"I hardly know how to put it," she said with a frank smile. "People have in some way picked up a notion that there was some deceit or fraud at work in connection with my uncle's death."

"Oh, do they?" was all the answer the Doctor made, speaking carelessly.

"It is said that for some months before Mr. Denison died he was immured away from everyone except three or four people; that he was kept under lock and key; that all his old friends were denied access to him. Also, that at the very time my letters from home informed me he was growing stronger day by day and week by week,

a strange woman, some London nurse, was in the house, in regular attendance on him. People naturally ask why there should have been all this mystery unless there was something to hide. They even go so far as to hint that the master of Heron Dyke did not live to see his seventieth birthday."

Dr. Jago, despite his evident efforts, could not avoid changing countenance as Miss Winter spoke. His face turned sallow; his eyes fell. Suddenly he rose and opened the door.

"Is that you, James?" he called out. But no one answered.

"I beg your pardon," he said, resuming his seat, and quite calm now, "I thought I heard my servant knock. About this business, Miss Winter. If one were to take heed of all the idle tales set afloat by ignorant and foolish people, one would have little else to do. The late Mr. Denison was an eccentric man in many ways, as you yourself must be well aware. He was a man of strong individuality and of crotchety temper: a man who did very few things in quite the same way as ordinary people do them. There were, besides, certain peculiar features in connection with the disposition of his property, which were well known in the neighbourhood, and which acted as a magnet to the curiosity of the world. These points being granted, we have at once a foundation for the most ridiculous of fancies and of exaggerated gossip; but if we quietly set ourselves to sift these rumours, what do we find?"

Ella did not speak.

"If you will allow me, Miss Winter, I will take the case as stated in your own words. You say that for some months before Mr. Denison died he was immured away from everyone except three or four people, and kept, as it were, under lock and key. Granted; but it was done entirely at his own request. You perhaps remember something of that queer crotchet he had in his head that the precincts of the Hall, and even the Hall itself, were haunted by spies set on to watch him by certain people—his relatives, I believe, but of that I know little. This notion seemed to take fuller hold of him as his birthday drew nearer. He insisted on having his rooms shut in from the rest of the house, he decreed that only a very few individuals, those whom he could implicitly trust, should have access to him. None of the ordinary servants were to go near him; for aught he knew, he would declare, they might be spies. It was an hallucination I combated as far as I was able; but contradiction, especially on this point, only irritated him. More than once it brought on one of his fits of passion, and so undid, or partially undid, the good I was striving to do him in other ways."

This was quite feasible, probably true, and Miss Winter bowed her head in acquiescence. The Doctor resumed.

"As regards Mr. Denison's old friends being denied access to him, I must take on myself a certain measure of blame for what may seem a somewhat arbitrary proceeding. From the first I gave Mr.

Denison to understand that if he adopted my mode of treatment, perfect quiet and seclusion were essential to its success, and he agreed with me without the slightest demur. But I did not at first deny him the sight of friends; it was only after the visits of some of them, when I saw how much it excited him, that I was obliged to do so. I begged him to allow his rooms to be closed to all visitors: had he admitted one he must have admitted others: I showed him how essential it was that he should be kept strictly, perfectly quiet; and he agreed. He would agree to anything, he said, if I could only succeed in keeping him alive over his seventieth birthday; and I certainly did succeed in doing that."

"Did he require the services of a nurse?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And was it necessary that she should be a stranger?"

"In my opinion he ought to have been supplied with a properly trained nurse long before I sent for one. An old woman, had in haphazard from the neighbourhood, would have been useless. No one, except we medical men and those invalids who have tried them, know how invaluable is a really qualified nurse in a sick room."

"I believe that," said Ella hastily. "But—why was it that the fact of this nurse having been at Heron Dyke was never mentioned to me? Neither in the letters I received from home, nor when I returned to it, close upon the departure of the nurse, was she as much as named to me."

Dr. Jago shook his head. "I cannot enlighten you there," he answered. "*I* did not keep the fact from you. I neither wrote you letters nor saw you on your return. There could be no reason whatever, so far as I know, why you should not have been privy to it. What reason could there be? Possibly it may have been one of old Aaron's crotchets—for he had as many as his master—that you should not be told."

Possibly it had been: but Miss Winter still felt in a fog, plausible though all this was.

"Can you assure me, Dr. Jago, that the seeing one or two of his oldest friends would have been absolutely detrimental to my uncle? Say—for instance—the Vicar."

"Papa thought it very strange: he thinks it so still, that he was always denied admittance," interposed Maria, speaking for the first time. And the Doctor turned sharply to her with a slight frown, as though he had forgotten her presence.

"I cannot say it would have been fatally detrimental, but it might have been," he observed, in answer to Miss Winter. "He himself knew the danger of excitement, and he was as anxious as I was to guard against the possibility of it. With regard to the other report you have mentioned, Miss Winter—that Mr. Denison did not live over his seventieth birthday—it is, upon my word, too ridiculous a one to refute. Mr. Denison was seen by many people later and

talked with; talked with face to face. Webb the lawyer saw him and spoke with him about his will. Those other lawyers, men from London, had an interview with him. He was seen by no end of people, musicians and others, on his birthday night. In the face of these facts, how is it possible—pardon me the remark, Miss Winter—for you to give ear for a moment to so absurd a rumour?"

She sat in thought, not answering.

"Where was the deception—where the fraud?" he resumed. Indeed, where was the necessity for employing any? The great object of Mr. Denison's life was attained. He had outlived his seventieth birthday and the property was his own to will away. Fraud! It is an assertion that brings with it its own contradiction."

There was nothing more to be said; nothing more, evidently, to be learned from Dr. Jago: and with civil adieux on both sides the ladies took their departure, the Doctor attending them to the pony carriage and handing them into it. At that moment Dr. Spreckley passed on horseback; he stared profoundly, as much as to say What on earth do you do at that man's house?—and he almost forgot to salute them.

Miss Winter sat in deep thought as they drove away. That Dr. Jago had displayed nervousness, not to say agitation, when spoken to, she had not failed to observe; it had tended to deepen her conviction that something was hidden which it was intended that she, of all people in the world, should never know. And although his assertions afterwards had seemed perfectly reasonable and convincing, she could not get rid of an uneasy suspicion that the Doctor, metaphorically speaking, had been throwing dust in her eyes. Any way, she was as far off as ever, if not farther, from arriving at the truth.

"What do you think of Dr. Jago?" she abruptly asked Maria.

"I don't like him at all, Ella. His words are plausible enough, indeed too plausible, but he seems thoroughly insincere. He is a man whom I should always mistrust. Have you questioned your servants?"

"Only old Aaron. And I can get nothing from him. His reasoning is in substance the same as Dr. Jago's. Maria, I feel *sure* that some trickery was at work."

"I should ask the maids, Phemie and Eliza, whether they noticed anything strange. They must have been about the house much during all the time."

"I think I will. It has crossed my mind to do so, but I feared they would only make my questions into a source of gossip."

Miss Kettle paused. "Tell me exactly what it is you suspect."

"I do not know what to suspect; except that I have a strong idea of some unfair play having been enacted. There lies my difficulty. But that it seems so impossible, and so dreadful an idea besides, I might say that my uncle did *not* live to see his birthday."

Maria shivered slightly. "Oh, Ella!"

"It is the bent my fears are taking," whispered Miss Winter. "And in that case, you know, I am not the owner of Heron Dyke."

"Then who is?" gasped Maria.

"My late uncle's cousin. The other Gilbert Denison."

That same evening, Miss Winter had the two maids, Phemie and Eliza, before her, and questioned them of matters respecting the Squire's last illness. What they had to tell was little more than she had heard from Priscilla Peyton. For several weeks or months previous to the 24th April no one in the house, except the four people who were admitted behind the green baize doors, ever saw or heard anything of the Squire.

"Had you reason to think he was *very* ill?" asked Miss Winter.

"Ma'am, we could tell nothing," replied Phemie. "He might have been dead and buried for weeks and weeks, for all we saw or heard of him. Eliza and I used to say how strange it was: often we listened, often and often, but never got to hear him; never so much as heard him cough. Before that Mrs. Dexter came in November, I sometimes took his sago or his beef-tea to him, but never afterwards."

"How was it that you never mentioned to me that Mrs. Dexter had been here? Was it accident?"

"No, ma'am, it was Aaron;" and Miss Winter could not help smiling at the turn of the sentence. "The day before you were expected home, he ordered all in the house not to talk of Mrs. Dexter: he thought it might trouble you to hear that the Squire was so ill as to need a professional nurse."

"I suppose you never penetrated beyond the green baize doors, after they were put up?"

Phemie glanced at her fellow-servant. "Eliza did, ma'am, once. You had better tell of it, Eliza."

"Tell me all, Eliza; do not be afraid," said Miss Winter kindly, for the girl looked confused.

"If you please, ma'am, I was in the passage one day, and saw both the doors on the jar," began Eliza. "I thought it no harm to go in a few steps; but I went cautiously, thinking Mr. Stone must be there. However, I saw nobody; and then I thought Mrs. Dexter must have left them open by mistake, before she went out. She had gone into Nullington in a hurry, saying she must see Dr. Jago."

"Well? Go on, Eliza."

"I ventured in a little farther, and a little farther," continued Eliza, speaking freely now. "Everything was silent. I said to myself that perhaps the Squire was asleep, and then I thought that I should like to see him once again. The first room I came to was Mrs. Dexter's; it had been made into a chamber for her. I turned the handle softly, pushed open the door, and peeped in. There was her bed in one corner, and by the fire-place was her little round table and an easy-chair. From this room I went to the next, which

was Mr. Denison's sitting-room. The door opened without making any noise. I peeped in. There was no one there. The Squire's chair stood by the hearth, but it was empty, and there was no fire in the grate: it had the look of a room, ma'am, that had not been occupied for ever so long, and somehow I turned away with a chill at my heart. The next room was the Squire's bedroom. I don't think I should have ventured to open the door of this, but I found it open already. It was standing ajar. I listened for the sound of Mr. Denison's breathing, supposing that he was asleep, but I could hear nothing. Then I pushed the door a little further open and looked in. If you'll believe me, ma'am, he was not there. No one was there."

"He must have been somewhere in the room, Eliza."

"He was not indeed, ma'am. The room was empty. I could hardly believe my eyes. I walked across it to the window and back again. The room was all tidy, like one that is not in use; not as much as a book was about, or a chair out of place. The bed was made and the curtains folded upon it."

This news sounded wonderful. Ella could not speak.

"I felt quite frightened, ma'am. I said to myself what has become of the master? And I can't fathom the mystery of where he could be, to this day."

"There was a room beyond my uncle's—a dark, unused room," spoke Miss Winter. "Did you enter that?"

"No, ma'am. I tried the door of it, but it was locked, and the key gone. But the Squire, ma'am, would not be in there—in a locked-up lumber room. I said to Phemie afterwards——"

Eliza stopped suddenly and coloured. Her mistress bade her continue.

"Well, ma'am, when I was telling Phemie of this strange thing, I said to her that the thought had come over me when I saw the empty bed and no trace of him in the room, that it looked just as if the master had been spirited away like Katherine Keen."

To this Miss Winter said nothing. "Was it discovered that you had been in?" she asked.

"No, ma'am, never; and this is the first time I have talked of it, except to Phemie. I pulled the baize doors to after me when I came out, and they shut with a snap. By and by, back came Mrs. Dexter; she asked at once in the kitchen for the Squire's beef-tea, and took it away with her. But, ma'am, what I cannot imagine is, where the Squire was all the time."

Miss Winter could not imagine, either, and lost herself in unfathomable conjecture. After a few more questions, she dismissed the maids, charging them not to speak of this.

The girl, Betsy Tucker, grew worse rather than better; and, notwithstanding all that skill and good nursing could do for her, Dr. Spreckley began to despair of her recovery. Miss Winter was startled

one afternoon when Adèle came to her and said Mrs. Keen was asking to be admitted. "Show her in, Adèle," said Miss Winter, in a low tone. She was afraid the girl was dead.

"No, ma'am, and I don't think she is any worse," replied the landlady, in answer to the dread question. "If anything, she's perhaps a little better. She don't wander quite so much, and that I take to be a good sign. What I have made bold to interrupt you about, Miss Ella, is another thing."

"Sit down while you tell it me," said Ella.

"Thank you, ma'am. This morning, Betsy, who was quite herself, though very weak, asked me to put the small trunk, which came with her from the Hall, upon the bed, so that she might find something," began Mrs. Keen, taking the chair indicated. "It was a pocket she wanted; and we were sometime finding it, what with her hands being feeble and me not knowing what it was like—white or coloured. Out of the pocket, when we had got it up, she drew out this tiny packet, ma'am, and said would I take it myself up to the Hall and give it safely to Miss Winter."

The little packet was neatly folded in tissue paper, tied round with narrow pink ribbon. Ella, rather wonderingly, opened it. Amidst some folds of cotton wool, lay a gentleman's sleeve-link. It was of malachite and gold, of curious and very uncommon workmanship. Miss Winter had never, to her knowledge, seen it before. "What is it?" she asked. "Why do you bring it to me, Mrs. Keen?"

The landlady explained. "Betsy's mind is in trouble about it, Miss Ella," she began; "great trouble. It seems that the morning poor Herbert Stone was found, Betsy, after all was quiet, and the police and other people had gone, was outside there. She saw something shining on the gravel, and picked it up. It was this trinket; she thought it very lovely, she tells me; and on the impulse of the moment she picked it up and put it in her pocket, thinking it would be a pretty present for her sweetheart—who is no other than David Sweet, the joiner's son. And I suspect, ma'am, though she has not said as much, that it was just to be near him she took a situation over here."

"Very possibly," assented Miss Winter. "But she ought not to have concealed or kept this."

"It is that which is tormenting her now, ma'am. She couldn't rest till I had brought it to you and told you all. The girl says, and I can but believe her, that in the night, when she was in bed, she saw the wrong she had done, and repented of it, but was afraid then of confessing. All kinds of foolish fancies visit us in the night, as you know, Miss Ella, and she says an idea came into her mind that if she confessed what she had done and produced the trinket, she might, perhaps, be accused of having been mixed up with the robbery. So she wrapped and tied it up, and has kept it hidden in her pocket till now. All her cry since she came into her right mind is, 'If Miss Winter will but forgive me!'"

"Yes, yes; tell her I forgive her, Mrs. Keen. It seems to me that when we do wrong, our own conscience brings to us our worst punishment. And I am truly glad that the girl is getting better: I will call and see her to-morrow. Have you disclosed this to anyone, or shown the link?"

"Indeed no, ma'am; not even to Susan. It was not my place to do so."

"Keep it quite secret still," said Ella. "For aught we can tell, this link may afford some clue to elucidate what is, as yet, so dark."

The landlady took her leave, and Ella locked the trinket safely up for the present. On the following morning Mrs. Toynbee received a letter calling her away from Heron Dyke. Her sister in London had met with an accident, and begged her to come up for a few days, if she could be spared.

"Go by all means," said Ella, in answer to Mrs. Toynbee's tearful looks, as she put the letter into her hand. "Take the mid-day train. Lonely? Well perhaps I should feel a little lonely under recent circumstances if left to myself; but I will get Maria Kettle to stay with me. It will do her good: she is anything but well."

Maria was suffering from the effects of a severe cold, caught one bitter night when returning home from visiting a sick pensioner. Ella drove to the Vicarage and brought her away. Maria would have said no, but her father said yes.

The next day she seemed not at all better, very poorly and feverish. Whilst Ella was dressing for dinner Maria came to her room, asking to be excused from dining: she felt hardly well enough to go down, especially as they should not be alone.

Only Mr. Daventry would be there. Ella had met him that morning and invited him to come: she was uneasy about many things and wanted to talk to him. "You shall lie down here, Maria," said she, pushing her dressing-room sofa close to the fire, "and have some tea sent up. Adèle shall get it for you."

Maria lay down on the sofa, wrapping a shawl about her head, and drank the tea. After that, she fell asleep. Ella was glad to hear it, as it left her evening free for Mr. Daventry.

The old lawyer took his departure at nine o'clock. For a few minutes Ella sat over the fire, musing on the advice he had given her—to be still for the present; not to take action on any point. From this reverie she was aroused by the sharp and sudden opening of the door. Maria Kettle stood there, staggering in, rather than walking, her face white, her eyes full of terror.

"Oh Ella!" she gasped.

Ella sprang to her feet, her pulses quivering. "You are worse, Maria!" she cried, "sit down here."

"No, it is not that; not that," moaned Maria, sinking back in the large arm-chair, but recently vacated by Mr. Daventry. "I have seen Katherine Keen."

"Katherine Keen!" breathed Ella, her lips suddenly becoming dry. "Impossible!"

"I should have said the same myself ten minutes ago," returned the sick girl, as she strove for composure. "But when I tell you, Ella, that I have seen her, and that I am in possession of my senses, I think you must believe me."

Ella Winter shivered, as though a cold wind were passing over her. Kneeling down, she put her arm round Maria's waist. "Tell me about it," she whispered.

"I got warm after I had the tea, and soon fell fast asleep," said Maria, in a voice hushed and trembling. "I knew nothing more until I awoke, suddenly and completely, with the strange feeling, which most people have experienced at one time or another, that someone was bending over me. My eyes opened widely as though of their own accord; and there, bending down and gazing earnestly into my face, was the face of Katherine Keen."

"Maria!"

"I recognised it in a moment. The room was bright with firelight, and I could not be mistaken. There was the fair hair, with the soft appealing eyes and the sad and serious look in them that I remember so well."

"Did you speak?"

"For a moment or two we gazed at each other; then I think my lips formed her name, but whether any sound came from them I cannot tell. The next thing I knew was that she was no longer there. I started up and saw a black-robed figure vanish through the open doorway and the door close noiselessly behind it. For an instant I thought I should have died."

"Black-robed," repeated Ella mechanically, remembering that this apparition had been always so described.

"She was in black from head to foot. Something black covered her head, which she held with the fingers of one hand under the chin. With her disappearance I sprang to the door, opened it, and rushed into the corridor."

"After her! You had courage, Maria."

"I had no courage. I was too terrified to remain alone, and was hastening to you. She was not to be seen; she had disappeared. A lamp was burning at the farther end of the passage, but the passage was quite empty, quite still; not a sound in it, save the beating of my own heart. Oh Ella! I have heard of the dreadful mysteries of Heron Dyke, but I never thought to witness anything."

"Yes, Heron Dyke has no doubt its unhappy mysteries; has had them for some time now," sighed Ella, catching up her breath with a sob. "And I know not how to solve them."

(To be continued.)

THE BURGOMASTER'S DAUGHTER.

By F. E. M. Notley, Author of "Olive Varcoe."

I.

I NEVER liked that young Baron. All the neighbourhood ran after him, each one vieing with the other who should *fête* him most, and among these our Burgomaster was the most eager.

The old Château de Resteigne had remained tenantless so long that it was perfectly delightful to have guests coming and going to it; and horses and carriages, and smart servants in livery, sprinkling the road with gay colours, and all kinds of jollity. Yes, it was delightful, and it was no wonder our good Burgomaster was carried away in the stream.

He was a widower, of about forty-five, with an only child, a daughter, whom he adored and spoiled. But then he spoiled her in his own way, and this was not always her way.

Lucille Warenne was a very pretty girl, having none of the roughness and hardness of the forest about her; indeed, if anything, she was too delicate and too fair; for which reason, perhaps, she did not please the small Ardennais gentry around her. Hence, at the age of twenty-two, she was still unmarried, and without a lover, unless we count the négociant's son, a steady young man of thirty, who stuck to business, and stood behind his father's counter daily. There were whispers that Lucille liked him, and would fain receive him as a suitor, only her father had set his mind obstinately against the match.

Our Burgomaster's failing was pomposity, an overweening idea of his own importance; and, consequently, of his daughter's also. Jules Bastoigne, the négociant's son, was not good enough for Lucille; he looked higher for her, and intended she should marry a gentleman. Nothing so tended to make the poor girl unpopular among both old and young, as this absurd pretension on the part of the father; and it was doubtless this also which deterred Jules Bastoigne from making his proposal in form. A proud and silent man, he preferred to endure a hopeless love rather than suffer an insolent refusal. In fact, either way, his love was hopeless; but then, if unspoken, it was at least spared the pang of wounded pride.

Thus affairs stood, when the young Baron d'Harscamp took it into his brainless head that he would like to spend the summer at his ancestral château in the Ardennes. The place itself was not inviting: it looked like a long range of English stables adorned with Moorish-Spanish towers, speaking of the time when the Spaniards were masters of the land. The gardens were a wilderness, the ter-

races a ruin, but the woods above and around were glorious, and the summer weather, the clear, sparkling air, the bright blue sky, all lovely and wondrous exhilarating.

The rooms in the château were large and lofty, and comfortably furnished with a quaint mixture of modern appliances and ancient tapestry, old cumbersome arm-chairs, and foxes and wolves' skins for carpets. His visits of ceremony over, the Baron gave pic-nics and balls to all the neighbourhood. And these had a piquancy in them wanting to other parties, inasmuch as they were presided over by a charming young nobleman, handsome, and a bachelor.

II.

"So Monsieur Warenne has gained the dearest wish of his heart," said one old lady to another; "he will really have a gentilhomme his son-in-law."

"A gentleman! Of what are you talking, my dear? The Baron means nothing by these attentions to Lucille. And if the poor girl had a sensible man for a father, instead of a fool, he would not allow her name to be compromised by these flirtations."

"Then you think the Baron is not in earnest? Monsieur Warenne, you know, is rich; he will give his daughter a good dower."

"Rich! Yes; but he is a brewer; and you don't know the Baron as I do. He is horribly proud of his lineage; he has 'blue blood' in him; he is more than half a Spaniard."

"Hush! Here he comes, and Lucille with him. Ah! they have not seen us." And both old ladies gathered in their skirts within the bower in which they sat, and craned beneath their necks to look after the young couple, who sauntered down a long alley of lilacs and seringas.

The scene of the talk was the wilderness of a garden at Resteigne, and the time was the day of a grand fête-champêtre given by the Baron to his friends.

The Belgians are a straitlaced people. They carry their ideas of propriety to such an extreme length that pure-mindedness is a thing unknown. Floating, therefore, in society of all classes, is a vast amount of scandal of the coarsest kind. The restrictions of an etiquette so strict that it borders on the immodest, do not encourage innocence either of thought or of speech. Hence it can be imagined with what horror these Belgian Mrs. Grundys beheld the pale and pretty Lucille Warenne strolling down the leafy avenue alone with the Baron d'Harscamp—no, not quite alone, here is her father leisurely following her; but then he is not near enough to hear their conversation; and the Mrs. Grundy of Belgium being an exceedingly pious and moral old lady, demands that every word an innocent girl utters shall be distinctly heard, and all her actions shall be properly spied into.

"Ah! do you see? He offers her his arm, and she positively takes it. Shameful!"

"This is going too far!" cried the senior old lady, in a state of excitement. "I used to take the girl's part, but I give her up from this day."

"And Monsieur Warenne is not troubling himself! He is looking up at the crows instead of watching his daughter," said the other, in great disgust.

Unconscious of the remarks made on the impropriety of her conduct, Lucille, thinking herself quite safe, since her father was with her, walked on in innocent happiness, bashfully pleased by the attention paid to her by the Baron. It was so new, so delightful to meet with a gentleman—a real gentleman—a man so different from any she had ever seen. Jules was very well, and was certainly very good-looking, but then he had not the charm of manner, the delightful ease of the Baron; and the dear, good papa hated him; while papa adored the Baron, and would be so glad if——

The Baron offering her his arm checked Lucille's thoughts. She did not quite like this attention, it was a little too familiar, so she hesitated, and looked at him timidly.

"The ground is so rough," he said, with a most delightful smile, and an air of deep respect. So after a little flutter Lucille put the tips of her fingers on his arm, and walked on silently. A few steps more, and his hand fell on hers. Frightened, she would have pulled it away, but his fingers had too firm a grasp of her little palm to enable her to succeed in this. "Why not accord me so small a privilege, Lucille?" asked the Baron, in his most insinuating voice. "Think for how short a time longer I shall have the happiness of seeing you. I am obliged to quit the Ardennes in a month."

Lucille was no simpleton; she did not believe he was "obliged" to go; and, even if that were true, he could come again. Or, were he really in earnest, he could ask her to be his wife, and take her with him. So this last speech of his was a failure, and she very decidedly drew away her imprisoned hand.

"Why do you leave so soon?" she said. "Have you found the Ardennes dull?"

"Dull! when I have had you by my side! No, Lucille, I have been too happy. How shall I manage to forget you?"

Lucille longed to ask if it was necessary to forget her, but she did not dare say this, the more especially as the Baron's ardent gaze of admiration, fixed on her face, was covering it with blushes. She was just the girl to please a swarthy man like him. Beautifully fair, with blue eyes, and a profusion of amber tresses, and yet quite unlike that type of fairness which he had seen in Flanders, and which is generally joined to a figure too ample for beauty, Lucille seemed to him the very perfection of grace and loveliness. "You do not answer me," he said, in a low tone. "Shall you be sorry when I go away?"

"I shall be very sorry," faltered the girl, timidly. "But you will come again?" she added, with a quick, anxious gaze.

"Yes: to find you married to Bastoigne, or some such odious creature! No, I could not bear that. I would rather not see the château again." He spoke vehemently, and poor little Lucille began to tremble. She had rather liked Jules once—poor Jules!—but he had never talked to her like this. She knew nothing of love-making, and she wondered whether this was the way in which gentlemen proposed. Perhaps he wished to make sure she loved him before he spoke to her father.

"I shall not be married to Monsieur Bastoigne, or—or to any one when you come again," she stammered.

"And you will be glad to see me, if I return next year?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes."

The Baron d'Harscamp looked round hastily—Monsieur Warenne had disappeared—then he threw his arm round Lucille, and pressed his lips to her cheek. The unwonted liberty brought a rush of colour to her face, which, receding, left her pale as death.

"My dearest girl," whispered the Baron, "your father did not see us—do not be frightened."

This speech brought Lucille to her senses. "I am not frightened, Monsieur le Baron, at seeing my father."

As she said this, she freed herself from his embracing arm, and turned to retrace her steps. She was alarmed, then, to see to what a lonely part of the park she had allowed herself to be led, and how far she was from the noise of the music and the company.

The Baron walked by her side, filling her ear with expostulations and reproaches; but she was frightened, and did not heed him. A thousand tongues seemed already to hiss against her, and she felt terror-stricken, and as a child in the grasp of a wolf.

"Oh, why did you bring me down here, so far from all the company? This is cruel, monsieur."

"Your father was with us a few moments ago," said the Baron. "Do not be alarmed. We shall find him directly, and we will all three go back to the garden."

He had given the Burgomaster the slip a few minutes before, but now he was really anxious to find him, as he was very far from wishing to expose Lucille to remark. She, however, poor girl! was so nervous that she truly wanted soothing and help.

"Mademoiselle," said the Baron, dropping all his tenderness very suddenly, and addressing her with the utmost respect, "you must come this way. Your father is here, I assure you."

She was running in the opposite direction, and he took her hand kindly as he spoke. At this moment, two ladies—the same whom they had passed in the bower—emerged suddenly from a group of shrubs, and a hard dry voice said, sarcastically:

"Apparently, Mademoiselle Warenne has lost her way?"

"No, no," returned Lucille; "I was looking for my father."

"And I suppose Monsieur le Baron is helping you to find him," said the other lady, with a little laugh.

"Pardon, madame," said the Baron, with great politeness. "I have but this instant quitted the Burgomaster. He and I have been smoking together. Mademoiselle, will you allow me to conduct you to Monsieur Warenne; he has been asking for you."

He took off his hat with a low bow, and walked away still conducting Lucille by the hand.

"And your guests have been asking for you, monsieur," said the elder lady, in a sharp voice.

"My dear," observed the other, "he told that falsehood very neatly. Upon my word, he is a gallant man, and a gentleman. As for the girl—psha!"

Nothing could equal the contempt with which she broke off her sentence, and snapped her fingers in the air.

After this it availed little that Lucille found her father placidly smoking beneath a large tree, and taking his arm, she returned thus to the company, with the Baron walking by the Burgomaster's side, expatiating loudly upon things in general. The dragons were not thus to be taken in. A girl—a respectable girl—had been positively left by herself for five minutes with—oh, horror!—a young man, handsome, agreeable, and above herself in rank! What was the world coming to?

For the rest of that miserable fête-day, the women all looked grave when poor Lucille passed them, and the men smiled.

"Oh, father, why did you leave me?" she said, as she clung, half crying, to his arm.

"My dear child, I did not leave thee. It was thou and the Baron who left me. I was admiring a fine ash—a singular ash—and, when I looked round, lo! you were both gone! And the Baron—what did he talk of, my pet?"

"I'll tell you another time, father—not now."

True to this promise, she related every word of the Baron's conversation to her father, on their return home; and the poor pompous Burgomaster rubbed his hands in immense delight, and thought of the intense pleasure he should feel in hearing Monsieur le Baron d'Harscamp address him meekly as "Mon père." This was his dream, while poor Lucille wetted her pillow with tears.

III.

Many days passed by before the Burgomaster and his daughter heard any of the scandal whispered round their name, though poor Lucille *felt* it impalpably, even in the very air around her.

During this time the Baron called nearly every day, smoking and

chatting with the Burgomaster, and casting, as usual, glances of admiration on the fair and delicate girl, who sat blushing beneath his gaze. She spoke to him but little, having implored her father not to leave her for a moment; hence the handsome Henri d'Harscamp could but throw as much love and flattery into his large brown eyes as they were capable of holding, while he kept his meerschaum between his red lips in silence. He brought flowers, however, and little offerings of fruit, which were all laid at the feet of Mademoiselle, with the humble, yet proud air of a prince doing homage to his queen.

One day, among the flowers, Lucille found a little crisp note twisted adroitly round a rose.

"Can I never speak to you alone, ma belle?" he wrote. "I am weary of smoking meerschaums with your father. Do let me see you somehow. Thine ever,—HENRI."

With a face burning with indignant blushes, and vexed tears falling from her eyes Lucille read this.

"He knows he has only to ask me to be his wife, to see me when he will," she said, in passionate sorrow. "Is it for me to tell him what to do? Can I lower myself to that?"

She passed through an agony of indecision; she waded through a sea of tears and bitterness; her soul was wounded in a terrible conflict, before her pride gave way to love, and she wrote him a tiny note in return:

"MONSIEUR LE BARON,—I cannot see you except in my father's presence. If you love me, you have my permission to speak to him. "LUCILLE."

A cry broke from her very heart as she folded this. Why was he so cruel as to force her to write thus?

The next day she counted the minutes by heart-throbs, as she anxiously, passionately hoped either for an answer, or a visit from the Baron; but the morning wore on to noon, and the noon to evening, without a word. Then her father, with an air more pompous than usual, took his hat and went out. She knew he was gone to the Château. He came back a shade paler, and with a slight tremble about his hands and lips.

"Don't fret, darling," he said to his daughter; "the Baron is gone—he is called away suddenly to Paris; his sister is dangerously ill. But in the midst of all his haste, he found time to write to me."

"To you, father!" cried Lucille, clasping her hands in sudden hope. She was pale as a snow-drift, and her face looked strangely shrunken.

"Yes, to me," said the Burgomaster, huskily: "just to say good-bye, and he hopes to see us again next summer, when he means to come back to the Château, and bring workmen for all kinds of improvements."

"Oh, father! I hope he will never, never come to the Ardennes again!"

She burst into bitter weeping, and hid her face in her hands.

"Nonsense, my dear! don't cry; the Baron will write to me from Paris, and when he comes back in the summer, it will be to make thee his wife."

Lucille shook her head, and fleeing to her own room, she wept there, till tears and cries were exhausted. "Gone! and gone without a word! Gone, leaving me defenceless, to the evil tongues of the world."

This was all she could say to herself, over and over again. And indeed it was true. The Baron's position, his name, his power, had thrown a sort of shield over her while he was still here; but being gone, the coward reptiles made their spring without fear, and stung her to the heart.

The doctor in a few days gave a party, to which the Burgomaster was asked, but his daughter's name was not included in the list of invitations. He tore it in two, and returned it to the sender. But others followed suit, and soon the unhappy girl found herself more bitterly alone than if in a desert.

"Never mind, darling," her father would say. "When the Baron comes back in the summer and marries thee, these grovelling snakes will come and lick thy feet."

This was now a fixed idea in his poor pompous, self-sufficient head, and it would take a rude shock indeed to remove it.

While all this was going on, Jules Bastoigne continued to plod at his work. But now, when he found Lucille left alone in the little town, in which the Burgomaster was, or ought to be, the centre—now, when he saw her acquaintance pass by on the other side, and day by day he watched her face grow whiter and whiter, the man roused himself, and came out a hero.

He took a sudden journey, and for a week was absent from his post.

Jules Bastoigne take a holiday! Wonder of wonders, earthquakes would come next! Perhaps he was gone to be married.

Jeannette, the maid, told Lucille this last piece of conjectural gossip one evening, when Jules had been absent about a week. The girl sighed, then flushed a little, and thought sadly, how happy she might have been, if she had never seen the Baron, and if her father had only liked poor Jules.

At this moment the Burgomaster's man-servant flung open the salon doors, and announced,—"Madame and Monsieur Bastoigne."

Lucille sprang up, and came forward, trembling, to receive Jules and his mother.

Madame Bastoigne was the very picture of an Ardennais. Comely, robust, brown, and strong both in mind and body, she reigned paramount both in house and store. She was queen, Jules was

prime-minister, and Monsieur Bastoigne was a little lean clerk, who kept the accounts, sat in a corner, and wore slippers all the day long.

"You look ill, Mademoiselle," said Madame, kindly. "I hope to see you better soon. I wish to speak to your father."

"He is here," returned Lucille, in a low voice. She was trembling in every limb, and she was glad when Jules opened the door for her, and, bowing profoundly, covered, as it were, her escape.

The Burgomaster, as he entered, stared first at his visitors, then, in his best patronising manner, he begged them to be seated, and seemed to wait, like a great man, to know what he could do for them. Madame did not keep him waiting long.

"I came, sir, on behalf of my son, to demand the hand of your daughter in marriage."

Monsieur Warenne's fat, florid face turned white with amazement, and he kept silent from sheer anger.

"I have loved her for many years," put in Jules, with a firm, steady voice. "And now, when friends fall away from her, it is the right time, as it seems to me, for a true man to prove his affection."

"Sir," spluttered the Burgomaster, "my daughter has no need of friends in this miserable little town. She will have plenty of friends at Brussels and at Paris."

Madame Bastoigne seemed about to speak, but Jules looked at her imploringly, and she held her peace.

"I am much obliged, I am sure, for your offer of marriage," continued Monsieur Warenne; "but are you aware that my daughter will have a dot of one hundred thousand francs, and with that fortune I expect her to marry a gentilhomme."

"Whatever you give to Lucille, my husband and I will give to Jules, franc for franc. We make no brag, but our till is not empty."

"I don't intend my daughter to have anything to do with tills," returned the Burgomaster, swelling more and more with importance. "Allow me to consider this matter at an end."

"You refuse my son?" said Madame Bastoigne, growing a little pale about the mouth.

"I do: I have nothing to say against Jules; he is a very worthy young man, but not a fitting person to be my son-in-law."

"Now tell him, mother," whispered Jules.

"Monsieur Warenne"—and Madame Bastoigne rose to her full height—"I look on you with pity. You are deceiving yourself, and you are ruining your daughter. Already there is not a man in the province who will ask her in marriage except my son."

"I don't want your son—I don't want any fripon in the province!" sputtered the angry Burgomaster.

"And I ask her," said Jules, "because I love her, and because I believe her to be a most innocent and unjustly maligned lady." He was greatly agitated, but repressed his emotion, as his mother laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"I repeat, Monsieur,—'*except my son,*' and he has persuaded me to come hither, and ask you for her, this *once;* but he knows that, refused now, I will never come again. And before you say No, listen to what I have to tell you. You think Monsieur le Baron d'Harscamp means to marry your daughter. Well, Jules was too honourable to stand in the way of her advancement, so he went to Paris, and saw the Baron, and asked him the question in a straight and honest way."

"How dared he?" cried the Burgomaster, now white with fury.

"He dared for Lucille's sake. And he told the Baron what people were saying about the poor girl here, and he begged him, as a gentleman, to come back instantly, and marry her, and crush these insolent slanders beneath his feet. Or if he could not marry just yet, he entreated him to write and state his intention to make Lucille his wife, and so save your child from breaking her heart, beneath the venom and cruelty of her calumniators."

"Well," cried Monsieur Warenne, eagerly, "I know he answered like a gentleman."

"He laughed in my face," exclaimed Jules, starting up, and breaking the bonds of his calmness. "He said he never had the slightest intention of marrying Mademoiselle Warenne, and he was not aware his intentions to her had ever passed the bounds of civility. His own marriage had long been arranged with his cousin, Mademoiselle de Bretiselle, and it would take place in the spring."

"It is false!" roared the Burgomaster.

"Patience, mother—never mind him," said Jules, putting his hand on that lady's lips.

"Hear me out, Monsieur Warenne. I told him, on hearing this, that his intentions *had* passed the bounds of civility, and he had compromised a young lady's happiness and acted like a scoundrel. He interrupted me with an insolent laugh, and a lying declaration that Mademoiselle Lucille had received his civilities very willingly; and if they had been a little warmer than necessary, the fault was hers and yours, as you had both encouraged him, the young lady with her eyes, and the papa with his words. He did not speak Lucille's name twice: my fist fell on his insolent lips before he could utter it, and I knocked him down, and left him screaming furiously for his servants."

"You knocked down Monsieur le Baron d'Harscamp?—you knocked down my—my son-in-law that is to be?" stammered the enraged Burgomaster. Poor man! he was certainly mad on this point.

"I had that honour," said Jules, folding his arms a little theatrically, as we should think in England.

"Then there's the door, sir. I never wish to see you again in my house. As if it was likely the Baron would tell *you* what his intentions are towards my daughter!"

"Come away, Jules," said Madame Bastoigne, in an irritated tone. "Pride comes before a downfall, and his will be great."

"One moment, mother," pleaded Jules, and he turned his earnest, handsome face towards the Burgomaster.

"Monsieur Warenne, I entreat you to consider how long I have loved Lucille. If you send me away now, I shall go a broken-hearted man, for I have promised my mother never to come on this errand again. If you will give me your daughter, I will defend her with my life against these slanders; and my love for her, my tender, lasting, patient love, will make me a dutiful son to yourself."

Madame Bastoigne curled her lips proudly on hearing these words; but there were tears in her eyes, as she walked to the door—tears of admiration and of love for her son.

"I have nothing to say to you," said the Burgomaster, still foaming with importance and rage. "Go, sir!"

He pointed to the door, and Jules, whose face worked with an anguish past speech, followed his mother silently.

IV.

The Burgomaster was greatly agitated all that evening, but he said nothing to Lucille till the next day. Then with great scorn and bitterness, he related to her the honour that had been done her by Jules, his own refusal of the offer, Jules' journey to Paris and conduct to the Baron—suppressing, however, that gentleman's impertinent speeches, and his intended marriage.

Lucille, always delicate, broke down before all this. Through weeks of long, dull, lonely pain she had borne the mortification of seeing herself isolated and insulted; and now, as her father's words poured hotly over her, she wrung her hands together, with a low cry, and fell down fainting at his feet. She was carried to bed, and a distant doctor was sent for, who pronounced her very ill.

It was with the hysterical cries of his daughter yet in his ears, that our pompous Burgomaster sat down to pen a long letter to the Baron. In it, he utterly repudiated Jules Bastoigne and all his deeds; while, with injudicious zeal, he commiserated his noble friend on that assassin's vile assault; then he assured him that he believed no single word the fellow had said; and lastly, touching with pathos —for here, truly, his heart was wrung—on his daughter's illness, and the cowardly attacks on her good name, he implored the Baron to speak out at once.

There was no answer for three weeks,—three weeks, during which Lucille lay ill of low fever. Then there came one, in black and white, a true and elaborate announcement of the marriage of Henri, Baron d'Harscamp, with the beautiful and noble Isabella de Bretiselle, daughter of the Comte de Bretiselle.

By the same post, there arrived a courteous letter, full of regrets

for all mistakes, sorrow for Mademoiselle's illness, and best wishes for her recovery, and happiness with Monsieur Bastoigne—whom he designated as a very "noble fellow," and in every way worthy of Mademoiselle Lucille, whose goodness, beauty, virtue, &c., he admired and venerated with all his heart.

The Burgomaster put this letter—which was written throughout in a coldly civil, but gentlemanly tone—in his sick daughter's hand; and then, giving way to all his mortified feelings, he laid his head by her side and shed tears.

Lucille threw her arm around him. "Don't weep, father; I don't care in the least for this—this Baron's marriage. It was a folly indeed on my part."

She took the blame on herself, not reproaching him for the imprudence and mistaken pride that had thrust her on the Baron's notice. But when, with trembling fingers, she took up the paper of announcement, and read the names of the bride and bridegroom, her tears fell fast, and these grew bitter indeed as she slowly perused the letter.

"Oh, father! you have tried to force him to take me! You have *asked* him to marry me! how could you—how could you—so bitterly humiliate your child?"

She was so weak, that this shock brought on a nervous attack, which utterly prostrated her strength and courage. She lay from day to day almost like one dead; silent, broken-hearted, uncomplaining.

And outside her lonely sick-room the detractors still wagged their tongues, and shook their heads, and stood aloof from her. All but Jules. He came beneath her window often, and, standing bareheaded, prayed for her with all his heart.

One evening, as father and daughter sat together—she propped up with pillows in her chair—he told her this, and she wept.

"Poor Jules!" she said, as tears fell slowly on her white, worn cheeks. "I could have loved him once, father!"

"Then you shall love him again, darling," cried the burgomaster, catching at hope. "I have only to hold up my finger, and he'll be back."

He held up his finger, he held up his whole hand, but Madame Bastoigne showed no sign of relenting. And without his mother's consent, what Belgian or Frenchman can marry? Moreover, Jules was a man of his word; he had made his mother a promise, and he was bound to keep it.

And now the poor distracted burgomaster did at last what he should have done at first. He sent to the paternal wine stores at Liège for his own mother.

She was the most wiry, leathery, capable little mummy I ever knew. She was sixty-five, but she looked younger than her son; and she could dance about upon her small feet all day long, from kitchen to parlour, to cellar and shop, without the slightest signs of

fatigue. As to the pompous burgomaster, he was the meekest of children in her presence; and it was as good as a play to see him ordered about, and hear him responding—"Oui, ma mère," to every word she said.

"A pretty pass you have brought your daughter to, Alexandre Warenne. You have ruined her health, her reputation, and her peace of mind; and all to gratify your abominable pride."

"Oui, ma mère."

"Well, now, if she doesn't die, she must go into a convent; there's no other fate open to her."

"O mother, mother!" And the poor Burgomaster broke down with a great cry.

"Unless she chooses to marry the man whom I can get for her."

"But, mother, she likes young Bastoigne."

"Bah! What business has a girl to like anybody but her father and mother, and grandmother? Besides, the Bastoignes won't have her."

"But if you could manage them, mother?" To this humiliation was the Burgomaster come now.

Madame Warenne smiled superior. "A nice way to manage them, to let them think that I am come here to coax them back! No; let me do things my own way, please. Nobody in the Ardennes will take Lucille now, but I know a man at Louvain who will be glad to have her. He is a little consumptive, and the ugliest human being that ever walked; ten women have refused him, and he is getting now to despair of a wife. I'll go to him next week."

Quite aghast, the Burgomaster argued and expostulated, but ended by giving in. No one, in fact, argued very long with old Madame Warenne.

Under her care Lucille got better; the brisk and cheery presence of the little woman acted like a restorative; and no sooner was the invalid able to travel than she whisked her off to Spa. And this she did without having lowered her flag in the least to the Bastoignes, although she permitted Jules, as a great favour, to come and take leave of Lucille. She knew the girl's pale innocent face would haunt him, and shake his promise to his mother.

As for Lucille herself, she could not hear of Jules' generous journey to Paris, and all his love and devotion, without being touched. It seemed to her that the scales were fallen from her eyes, and in Jules she saw the true gentleman, for whom her heart had yearned so long. And so through these thoughts her love went back to him in a better and more trusting way than of old; it went back in sure confidence and esteem of his character. But these feelings were hopeless, for Jules had promised never to ask her to be his wife again, and her father had repented, and humbled his pride in vain. Thus there was nothing left for her but submission to the fate which his pride and her own vanity had brought on her.

At Spa she was introduced by her grandmother to Monsieur

Gilbert Rennelon. He was truly the ugliest man in Europe; not deformed, but ugly from simple ugliness. Even the plainest and most dowerless of spinsters had felt obliged to refuse him. And this man, to Lucille's horror, her grandmother had fixed on to be her husband. The poor girl expostulated and wept in vain.

"Your good name is damaged, no other man will have you, and it is only by marrying that you can get back again to your place in the world. Monsieur Rennelon or a convent—that is your alternative."

Thus this unhappy marriage was decided on, and this poor victim to evil tongues returned to the Ardennes looking like the wreck of herself. The miserable burgomaster, as he bore her from the carriage in his arms, trembled with an agony of contrition. This was his doing. O, why had he refused Jules Bastoigne? Why had his insane pride made him break his daughter's heart?

Madame Bastoigne watched her son's face from day to day, and saw it growing sterner and whiter, with a look of restless fever about the eyes that alarmed her. But what could she do now? It was too late to relent now Lucille was going to be married.

It was Lent, and the marriage was fixed for Easter, but M. Rennelon was to make his first appearance in the Ardennes during the last days of Lent, and he was to be the Burgomaster's guest until the wedding. Old Madame Warenne was at her son's house, taking the whole management of affairs into her own hands, and great were her preparations for the wedding-feast.

At length the bridegroom arrived in splendid state, with bran-new carriage and horses. But, unluckily, the horses were untried, something frightened them, away they tore, and away went the bran-new carriage to utter smash and destruction. They picked up the poor bridegroom from the ruins, and carried him into his intended father-in-law's house, with his ribs broken, his brain shaken, and his left leg hanging useless.

He was ill and helpless, and cheerful through it all for a long, long while. Never had any Belgian, before or since, such an opportunity for studying his future wife's character as he had, and did.

Easter passed away, and Trinity was nearly come, before—leaning on a crutch—M. Rennelon showed his exceedingly ugly face among the Burgomaster's flowers. It was an uglier face than ever—it was a thin white face now—in fact, a dying face—not to be seen above ground much longer.

He called Lucille to him in the garden—she had grown very fond of him, fond as if he were her brother, and leaning on her arm—for he liked the girl, and was glad to have her help—he broke to her, very gently, that he was a dying man.

"You are better," cried Lucille, in a trembling voice. "See how well you can walk."

"My leg is better," said the ugly man, "my lungs are worse. I may die any day."

Lucille looked at him with tears in her eyes.

"You will be sorry for me," he said, kindly; "but you do not love me. I never expected it. I have proposed to many, but you, Lucille, are the only woman that accepted me, and I am grateful. I thought, after years of kindness, to make my wife love me; but you see, it is not permitted to me to make that experiment."

"O don't be grateful to me," said Lucille, sobbing, "I don't deserve it. I promised to marry you because——"

"I know all about it," interrupted the poor bridegroom, wistfully. "You perceive, Lucille, I have been unhappy myself, and that has made me read the hearts of others. But, then, Madame Warenne was quite frank with me; she told me your whole history before I proposed to you. 'There's a girl,' she said, 'who will be grateful to you for marrying her—a girl who will give you in the end a sincere and pious love.' And so you would, Lucille, I know that."

As he said this, he fought with a natural pang of the human heart; he stifled the regret for all he lost in dying. Then he continued more firmly:

"I have been wise enough, Lucille, to keep one secret from the world—my great wealth. I was determined, if women refused me for my ugliness, they should not accept me for my money. I meant to surprise my wife with all I would do for her, in return for her love. My dear, when you marry, you will not come to your husband undowered."

Much astonished—for her bridegroom was thought to be a man of very moderate means—and much moved by his words, Lucille, after some little agitation, spoke out to him all her heart.

"If you die," she said, "I shall go into a convent. Jules Bastoigne will never ask me again to be his wife, and he is the only man who has ever loved me, or ever will love me. I feel, too, that, disappointed in this affection, the world can give me nothing but sorrow. I only grieve for being forced to leave my father. A religious life else is the best refuge for me."

Thus this betrothed couple conversed, one of death, the other of a living death beneath the veil.

"Whatever may be your fate, Lucille, remember always that your sisterly affection has cast a little sunshine on my path," said the ugly man, in the patient voice peculiar to him. "Until I knew you, child, no woman's voice had ever spoken to me in kindness. My mother was ashamed of me, and sisters I had none."

Lucille put her hand on his, and bent forward to hide her tears.

A few weeks more, and the ugly man was taken home to Louvain and buried there, amid the tears of many poor, insignificant, unknown people to whom he had been kind. If Lucille had been told at Christmas, when she accepted him, how she would weep for him at Trinity, she would have disbelieved and wondered. Therefore, we

perceive that all dislike is only ignorance, and "to know is not only to forgive," but often to love also.

The news of the ugly man's wealth astonished the world. It was so wonderful that a creature so ugly should not have embellished his features with gold—that he should to the very last have tried to get loved, or, at least, tolerated, for himself. Ah! what a mistake!

The exact terms of his will were not divulged; but it was known that Mademoiselle Lucille Warenne had two millions of francs. Hence there was a nine days' wonder for the world when it was announced that this young girl, who lived in deep seclusion, refusing the visits and the friendship now that had been denied to her in her sorrow, was about to become a novice in the Carmelite convent near.

The steady, plodding man, who had loved her through good and evil, heard this, and looked imploringly at his mother.

"Look you, my son," she said; "I would go to-day, but she is so rich now. We refused when the Burgomaster beckoned; he will say now it is the money has brought us back. I am too proud to bear that."

"So am I," returned Jules. He said no more to his mother, but the fever in his eye burned brighter, and his cheeks grew hollow.

Thus things stood when old Madame Warenne, like an adroit general, came to the rescue.

V.

It was time she came, for it was Lucille's last Sunday at home, and her father, grown old and grey before his time, followed her piteously with his eyes whenever she moved from his side.

"My doing—all my doing," he murmured to himself, as he caught her wistful smile, or saw the tear which, in spite of her resolve, would sometimes flow unbidden. "I have spoiled your future, Lucille. I have condemned you to this. O, my dear, dear child, what shall I do when you are gone? I shall soon die."

At this moment Lucille threw her arms round his neck, and they wept together.

Yet he did not try to shake her resolve. He knew if any man sought her now it would be for her money, and she would refuse all such offers. And when he was dead and gone, it would be better for her to be safe in a convent, than to face the world alone, a single woman.

"It is very unfortunate," said Madame Warenne, "that poor M. Rennelon died. You see, if any *parti* presented himself for Lucille now, he'd declare off when he heard the terms of the will." This speech was made after supper, when Lucille was gone to bed.

The Burgomaster heaved a deep sigh. "That's why I wrote to you to come. That's why she has resolved to take the veil."

"No, it isn't," said Madame, drily. "She has set her heart on Jules Bastoigne, and she'll be glad —— "

"Ah! those Bastoignes!" interrupted the Burgomaster. "It seems hard that Lucille's money —— "

"A likely thing!" exclaimed the old lady. "No, indeed! I didn't persuade ce cher M. Rennelon to propose to Lucille for that. I mean to bring those people to their senses. That's what I'm here for."

A gleam of hope illumined the poor Burgomaster's face; but he dared not ask his mother the plan of her campaign.

The next day Madame walked into the Bastoigne magasin, and presented herself at that counter where Madame Bastoigne presided. She had some troublesome wools and beads to match, and civil to her, as to any other customer, Jules' mother aided in the process.

"Your son is looking ill," said Madame.

"Yes," returned the other, a little huskily. "Here is the green shade."

"Thanks. But M. Jules, I expect, will soon be in excellent health. Money cures most ailments." This was said with intense sarcasm.

"What does Madame mean?"

"Really! Is it possible you don't understand my meaning?" Witheringly sarcastic this.

"Certainly not, Madame."

"Oh, indeed! You are quite ignorant, that you are driving a poor unhappy girl into a convent, in order to enrich your son?"

"Madame, you insult me." And Jules' mother grew white to her lips.

Now Madame Warenne knew the Bastoignes were in complete ignorance of M. Rennelon's will, but she went on in an indignant tone.

"You'll never make me, or anyone, believe you are not *quite* aware that your son Jules gets every sou of Lucille's two millions if she takes the veil."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Madame Bastoigne, clasping her hands.

"And it is honourable and honest—is it not?—to take advantage of a girl's inexperience and romance—and love—yes, I own it; she loves your son—in order to enrich one's own family. But two millions are worth a little dishonour. Yes; this is the pink shade. Thanks."

"Of what are you talking?" cried Madame Bastoigne, who was now ghastly pale.

"I am telling you what you already know, that my granddaughter is about to take the veil, in order to give your son two million of francs."

"It can't be! It shall never be! He won't touch her money!"

"It won't be hers when she is a nun; it will be his. After all, I suppose Monsieur Rennelon had a right to do what he liked.

"Am I going mad?" said Madame Bastoigne. "As I live,

Madame, I understand nothing of this. Come and explain it to me, I entreat you." She passed round the counter, and led the way to the sanctum beyond the warehouse. Madame Warenne followed.

"Do you really say you know nothing of M. Rennelon's will?"

"Nothing! Nothing!"

"Then I have done you an injustice," said the lively little mummy, in a more genial tone. "But when I explain the facts, you will see it is an injustice, which the whole world is likely to do you."

Thereupon, in rapid words, she told that M. Rennelon had left Lucille his two millions on condition she married within a year of his death. If she remained single, it was to go to certain hospitals; but if she took the veil it was to go to Jules Bastoigne.

"And she becomes a nun to give it him," concluded the little woman in a dry tone.

"But she can marry!" cried Madame Bastoigne, aghast.

"Unfortunately, M. Rennelon has *named* the person she is to marry, if she wishes to keep the money. If she weds any other, it goes to the hospitals."

"And this person —— ?"

"Is, again, Jules Bastoigne."

For a moment Jules' mother was speechless; she trembled violently, and stretched out her hands like one clutching the air.

"What is to be done?" she said, at last, with shaking lips.

"It is for you to say, Madame," returned Grandmamma Warenne. "Do you intend to let my grandchild bestow two millions on your son, by immuring herself in a convent?"

"No! no! O why was I not told of this before?"

"I thought you knew it." This was a story, of course. "But even if you did not, Lucille could not well inform you of it. After what had passed, it would have had the appearance of flinging herself at your son's head. And I suppose *my* son hadn't sense enough to tell you. As for Lucille, the poor girl has done her best. She has waited nearly a year. You have had every chance given you to behave honourably, but I suppose Jules prefers the money without the wife, and Lucille freely gives it to him. She might remain at home, you know, and let the hospitals have it, but in her romantic love she has resolved —— "

"Hold, madame! I cannot bear this. Jules! Jules!"

The young man, much amazed at the tone of his mother's voice, crossed the warehouse hastily, and entered the parlour.

"Jules, Lucille Warenne goes into the Carmelite convent to-morrow for love of you. She takes the veil to give you her fortune, which, by Monsieur Rennelon's will, is forfeited to you if she becomes a nun. This cannot be, my son. Go to her, and say I wait here to ask her to be my daughter."

With face flushing to burning crimson, Jules gazed first at his mother, then at Madame Warenne.

"Go," said that triumphant old lady. "You will find Lucille in the garden."

Flinging the ledger which he held to the floor, Jules went.

"I vowed I would never ask Monsieur Warenne again for his daughter," said Madame.

"But you can ask *me*, I suppose," cried the lively old lady, rising, and embracing her vanquished foe with great fervour. "I am the head of the family, and the proper person to ask; and I give my consent right heartily."

The two families dined together that day, and to tell what that meal was would require words eloquent as an angel's tears of joy. In fact, there are no such words, either in pen and ink or in dictionaries; the words that could tell it lie deep in human hearts, too deep even to be spoken by the tongue.

"And to think," said the beaming and humbled Burgomaster, "that we could have had this happiness so long ago—if we had only had sense enough!"

"Well," observed Madame Warenne, "I could have put you all to rights sooner if I had liked, but if ever people deserved to be made to suffer a little you all did! But for me, I should like to know where your pride would have carried you! To tell the truth, I think I had a little to do with the making of that will," concluded the old lady, slily.

Shall I finish here? No; I will tell you one thing more. Jules Bastoigne is a great man now. He became a deputé, or member for his own province; he signalised himself greatly in parliament, and rose to a high position—rose rapidly; his genius for business, his energetic promptitude, his calmness and clear-sightedness, being qualities that *tell*.

Now transport yourselves to the magnificent salon of an ambassador at Bruxelles, and overhear with me this short dialogue.

"Who is that graceful and beautiful woman?" asks a languid lady, of a weary and irritable aspect—"I mean the one leaning on the arm of the celebrated deputé."

The languid lady is Madame d'Harscamp. Her husband puts up his eye-glass, then drops it, with a sudden change on his pallid, fashionable face.

"That is the celebrated deputy's wife, Madame Bastoigne. Yes, she was, and is, very beautiful."

With a weary sigh, he lets the eye-glass fall from his fingers, and the air of the room being suddenly oppressive, he is glad to find himself left alone, as the guests crowd round Lucille and her husband.

The Burgomaster, from his nook in the Ardennes, looks on his son-in-law's career with the utmost satisfaction.

"After all," he says, "I did succeed in the great object of my ambition; my daughter has married a *gentleman*."

ABOUT NORWAY.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND."

LAPPS.

IN the Lofodens Nature having put forth all her strength, seems to have become exhausted with the effort. No scenery between these islands and the North Cape can compare with them in grandeur and sublimity. You steam onwards reluctant to leave regions so magnificent, so desolate and remote; forming a little world apart, distinct and different from anything else encountered in these high latitudes. They become henceforth to the imagination less realities than scenes from fairyland, and memory recalls them as objects seen in a dream.

A dream made up of gigantic rocks peaked and pinnacled; jagged outlines sharp and piercing; surrounded by gorgeous colours, skies tropic-hued at midnight, flashing, jewelled waters, and eternal daylight. More tangible were the bays and sounds that opened up abruptly, ran a little way into the land, and disclosed small settlements green and sheltered; mossy slopes that stood out in contrast with the barren outer walls of these matchless islands of the North.

We steered into one of these bays forming a natural harbour. For once the people of the settlement were asleep in the broad midnight light. The steamer sounded her whistle. Every little house was closed; silence reigned, deep as that upon the summit of the peaks. Not a creature stirred; not a dog barked; not a window opened in answer to the signal. It might have been the abode of the Seven Sleepers, or an infected spot abandoned by every thing of life. Half-a-dozen times the whistle sounded, the echoes went multiplying up into the hills, and still the good folk heeded not. There was cargo to land; but, as the captain observed, it would keep. It was impossible to stay here for ever; so, out of patience at last, he went off again. The drowsy people might wait for their goods until the return journey: perhaps by that time they would have awakened.

Soon after this we left the Lofodens, steered across for the island of Tromsö, near the mainland, and reached it about eight o'clock on the Wednesday morning. The steamer had to wait here some hours, and everyone landed in detachments. Herr X., with his white umbrella, accompanied us in the last boat, and together we inspected the town.

Tromsö is very picturesque. Green hills, sometimes snow-tipped, surround the harbour, and the town is built at the foot of the slopes. The streets are wide and straight, and there is an air of great prosperity about the place: a sort of semi-pretence to fashion surprising in a spot so far north, after a long interval of fishing settlements, or towns that pretend to nothing. The ladies of Tromsö walked about in costumes that might have owed their first existence to London or Paris—the ladies that crossed our path. For in all these towns, Throndhjem included, it was singular how few of the inhabitants declared themselves. Tromsö with its 6,000 people, might, for all we saw of them, have contained less than 600.

Outside the town we came upon a family of Lapps, sitting upon a green bank, quietly eating their breakfast. Two men, a woman, and a little child. They were very small, with brown, withered faces and high cheek bones; the men without beard or whiskers, one of the distinguishing marks of the Lapp. There was a good humour and gentleness about them, a merry sparkle in their blue eyes, which redeemed their faces from the unpleasantness of that peculiar type—the low-caste features: small up-turned nose, wide mouth, and no particular development of brain. They talked to us in some unknown jargon; hard metallic voices, shrill and squeaky, men and women alike; rattling out their words so sharply that they sounded like a shower of stones falling upon a pavement. They had reindeer skins for sale, and red shoes or moccasins, turned up at the toes.

The Lapps have a great eye to a bargain; have learned already the art of asking more than the value of their wares, and more than they intend to take. They will impose upon you if they can, and the cunning not to be mistaken in their little sharp faces is sufficient to put you upon your guard. They did their best this morning to drive a bargain with us, but not caring to be encumbered with a host of things during our walk, we were proof against their seducing offers. As soon as they found they could sell us nothing, either at their price or our own, they grew sulky, turned their backs upon us, squatted down around their kettle, and would not be persuaded to give us another look or word. In short, they behaved like children. Nevertheless they were much impressed by Herr X.'s white umbrella, as well as by a puggaree one of us wore upon a straw hat. This puggaree had been a source of frequent amusement to the natives in different places, though it can scarcely be an uncommon article of costume amongst the travellers visiting Norway. At one of the stations we were especially entertained by a native on shore pointing

it out to the chief officer, asking whether the wearer was a woman, and if this was the ordinary dress of the English ladies. The officer, without replying, came up laughing at the question, and the native was left in a very confused and uncertain state of mind.

THE LAPP HUT—AS WE SAW IT.

Tromsö is the capital of Finmark, that portion of Lapland that belongs to Norway. It is the seat of the bishop, and boasts a cathedral : a small, unpretending building, built of wood. A young Norwegian who, with his wife, had accompanied us from Throndhjem, landed here, to be ordained the following day by the bishop, and to devote himself to a missionary's life amongst the Lapps. This

indeed was courage and self-sacrifice; the pleasures, luxuries, and bare comforts of life all resigned; for the sake of labouring amidst a race with whom one could have nothing in common, were it not for the one common bond of death, and the awakening of the soul to the life beyond. After our short English service on board on the Sunday a small collection had been made for the good of his cause, and when the little box was handed to him, he replied in grateful tones: "You English are so loving!"

Leaving the Lapp family to lose their appetite and recover their good humour, we proceeded to reconnoitre the streets of Tromsö.

SLEDGING.

Some of them looked green and lively, the mountain ash and wild cherry tree planted on either side, like a boulevard. Passing by the cathedral, where next day the ordination would take place, we went up a long, white, dusty road, and turning into a small plantation of birch trees, reached a pavilion, whence we obtained a splendid view of the surrounding neighbourhood. The bright, sparkling water lay sleeping in the broad sunshine, land-locked by the hills, whose graceful outlines undulated against a background of sky. In the harbour were boats of many countries, if one might judge by the flags that fluttered in the breeze, and enlivened the scene not a little. Most picturesque of all, out in the middle of the water, our little steamer, the *Michael Krohn*, was unloading cargo on the one side and taking it in on the other. The town lay below us, and we looked

down upon blue and red roofs, and white and yellow wooden walls. Far away again on the one hand stretched the blue waters of the sea; on the other, hills ran up into the land. In the valleys between dwelt colonies of Lapps, with their herds of reindeer, and one of these colonies we were to visit on our return from the North Cape.

Immediately surrounding us, the small plantation of birches rustled, murmured, and glinted in the hot, scorching sunshine. Herr X., with his white umbrella, was to be envied, in spite of the green lining, which threw a cadaverous hue over his amiable features, and gave him quite the look of a resuscitated ghost—though one of ample proportions. In the wood, at our feet, was a small cottage, and its inmates were evidently flitting. At this moment they were away: the building was empty, and part of the furniture was scattered about the little garden. Who were they, these people, and what were they like? What had their life been in this little tenement? What was it going to be in the new house they were bound for? Were they as happy and contented as they ought to be in this quiet spot, away from that world where life is more or less a "fitful fever"? Probably they knew not the extent of this privilege.

Life might indeed have ended in fever, as we wended our way back to the steamer, for the heat was an exaggerated repetition of Throndhjem. Herr X., in spite of his umbrella, grew red as a lobster, whilst A. got cross, declared that it was too much of a good thing, and pathetically asked us to go and choose him a cool spot in the churchyard for his remains. But we survived it: as we generally do survive everything in this world, even the impossible. A few hours later on, and how we longed for some of this now despised heat! It is always so. We are continually sighing for what is not. Discontented and ungrateful mortals, we make our own troubles, murmur at our self-imposed burdens, many of which exist only in imagination. Perhaps the liver has to answer for a great deal. Better that than the heart.

Leaving Tromsö to its heat and repose, we started for Hammerfest, the last town to be called at on our way to the North Cape, and the most northern town in the world. No sooner had we left Tromsö than, to our infinite regret, the weather changed. It grew cold and unsettled; the sky clouded over; the water at times was rough enough to clear the decks, and to send most of the passengers below. The scenery became tame. Barren cliffs, neither grand nor interesting; especially now that a cold mist crept about them, in the intervals when rain fell not and clouds hung low.

That night we had no sun, no grand sunset effects: all romance had disappeared for the time being. An amiable passenger assumed a red blanket by way of extra covering, and being ritualistically inclined—or, as he put it, "an advanced High Churchman"—a rosy flush of pleasure suffused his cheeks when it was suggested that he looked very like a cardinal, and wanted only the red hat to be per-

fect. So pleased was he at the idea, that henceforth he seldom appeared without his red blanket, which, worn now on the cross, and now on the square, gave an interesting variety to his appearance.

We reached Hammerfest the next morning, and landed to walk up a valley in search of reindeer. It was a cold, wet morning; but people will go through the greatest hardships in life for their own pleasure, and no one thought of staying behind on account of the rain. To do so would have been madness; but to go forward, get drenched, catch rheumatic fever, or at least a terrific cold—this might be risked. So all went forward.

Hammerfest seemed to consist of one long, straggling street, built on the slope of the hill. It is noted for its cod-liver oil factories. Without exaggeration, it may be asserted that upon landing we were almost knocked backwards to the earth with the smell. Anything more awful and terrible cannot be imagined. Every time we passed a factory out came pocket-handkerchiefs, and the whole party took to their heels as if pursued by the incarnation of evil, all dignity and grace recklessly abandoned. Never will those Hammerfest smells be forgotten; they are still too much even for remembrance.

However, we survived this also, and reached the entrance to the valley. A stony, barren vale, absolutely void of verdure and vegetation, with a rough path, up which we began to toil in search of reindeer. Everyone, it must be explained, was reindeer mad. Up and up we went: to our right a running stream, with a miniature sluice and a small mill, something like a Shetland mill, for grinding corn. But the road was difficult and toilsome, and the valley had no beauty of its own to reward these pilgrims sacrificing at pleasure's shrine. It was wide and long—very long. The mountains fell away in gradual slopes of barren rock and stone, here and there covered with patches of lichen. Where the slopes were not rocky they were marshy; and a scream would now and then be heard, and an unhappy mortal might be seen gradually disappearing—like Mephistopheles through the trap-door. Unfortunately, no flames issued to warm our benumbed members; and the interesting feminine screamer of course received timely and masculine rescue.

But to-day no reindeer—perverse animals!—appeared. This was the tragic element in the excursion. After walking for an hour and more, it was time to return. We did return, philosophically consoling ourselves with the idea that disappointment is the lot of man.

A. and Herr X., however, went on to the top of one of the slopes, and when they returned declared they had come upon a whole herd of reindeer, who had stared at them, and made friends with them in the most entertaining manner. Upon which the rest of the passengers felt themselves aggrieved; said that what was fair for one was fair for another, and that it was very unhandsome behaviour on the part of X. and A. not to have turned back with the rest. People will be a little unreasonable when smarting under disappointment,

and there is no help for it. It is human nature, or at least a certain phase of human nature. They whom it thus affects feel themselves martyrs or injured mortals, and naturally turn their resentment upon those who have given rise to the emotion. For my own part, I was silent; but perhaps, like the historical bird, I thought the more; for I found myself wondering whether X. and A. had really and indeed seen this wonderful herd of friendly deer. But no doubt I did them an injustice.

At the foot of the valley was a small, low hut, with one diminutive window to admit the daylight, or rather to make darkness visible within. It contained two tiny rooms, or compartments, black with peat smoke, and redolent of the odour. The people, like the rein-

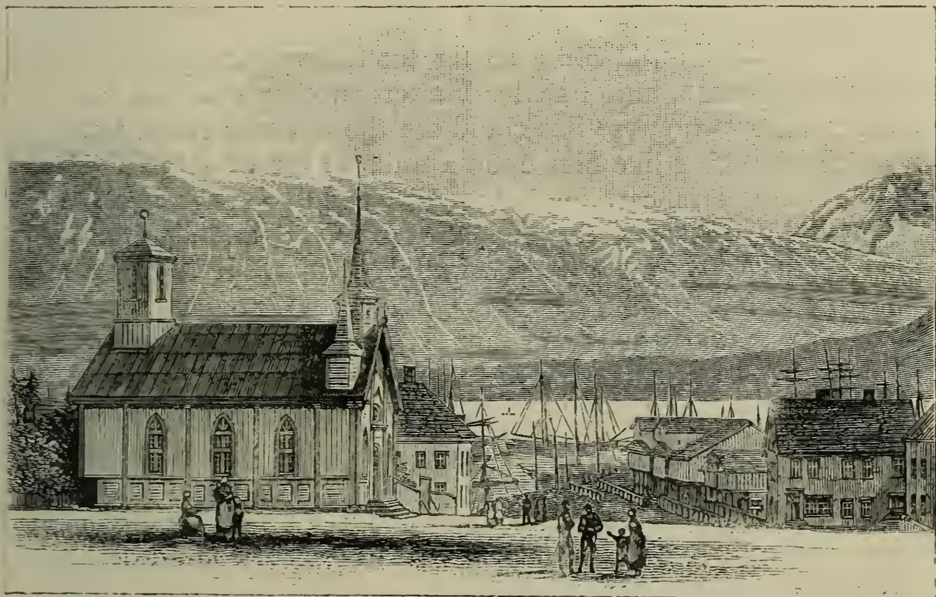
THE NORTH CAPE.

deer above, seemed quite friendly, and invited us to enter and reconnoitre. In the inner room a woman was rocking a baby done up like a mummy; one or two children played about the earthy floor, very dirty, and therefore very happy. Without, it was cold and dismal; within, it was cold and yet more dismal. But the people seemed contented and comfortable; they knew, and consequently wanted, nothing better; and the man was quite a handsome specimen of his race.

Next we charged past the oil factories in a body, and found our way to the post-office. There, happiness and home letters awaited us, after more than a fortnight's silence: home letters that made up for the weeping skies. Finally, we all laid siege to a fur shop, and everyone bought according to his ability, or the mania that was upon him. Then back to the steamer, thankful that in spite of the smells of Hammerfest, we were not dead yet. At three o'clock in the after-

noon, we started for the North Cape; though, alas, with faint hope of any midnight sun.

Between Hammerfest and the Cape, the outlines of the coast were grand, and occasionally majestic; the weather was cloudy, but the rain had obligingly ceased. As we approached our journey's end the wind rose, and the cold grew bitter. The sea, too, became rough, and everyone, except Herr X. and myself, went below. We remained on deck, braving the elements, regardless of the lurches that every now and then unceremoniously sent us spinning from one side of the vessel to the other, chairs and all, as if we had been a couple of barrels. The waves washed against the sides, broke over the decks, and drenched us with spray; but we were sublimely in-



CATHEDRAL CHURCH, TROMSÖ.

different to these small discomforts. Nearing the North Cape, bold outlines of rocks, one headland after another of rude and savage grandeur, confronted the sea: barren surfaces, as befitted rocks and headlands looking straight towards the North Pole: headlands that marked the commencement of the Arctic regions.

Yet, though down in the Christiania fjord the sea freezes intensely in winter, up here at the North Cape it freezes never. Icebergs are unseen here, though some people imagine the contrary, and the mean temperature of the land and water is very even. This is due to the influence of the Gulf Stream. The extremes of cold must be sought further inland and further south.

At length, about eleven o'clock at night, the fine, bold headland of the North Cape loomed into view. Very soon we entered the water in front of it, that forms half a bay, and the vessel dropped her anchor. It was a cold, gloomy night: not a rift pierced the clouds

that hung like a pall over the heavens, shutting out all the glorious effects of the midnight sun and midnight glory we had come so far to see. Before us was the North Cape, an almost perpendicular ascent of nearly 1,000 feet. And there, far up the height, wending their slow and stately way, evidently anxious to get out of our sight, was a long string of reindeer, passing over the frozen snow that lay to the left, disappearing one by one over the mountain top. This frozen snow showed plainly that if the sea at the North Cape does not freeze, as much cannot be said for the mountain heights. Nothing could look more picturesque, weird, and lonely than this solitary herd of deer in these desolate regions of the far north, unmolested, many of them, perhaps unseen, by man.

Though there was no chance of any midnight sun, yet it was clearly everyone's duty to land and mount to the summit of the North Cape. Had we not all come so far for this very purpose? So the boats were lowered, and one load after another was put on shore, and soon those who were last could see the advance guard toiling upwards, and looking like flies upon a wall. Last of all struggled up two or three sailors, carrying between them fuel for lighting a fire at the top, a kettle of water, and a hamper containing champagne, brandy, and coffee, for those who might wish to refresh themselves after their arduous labours. It was hard lines enough to reach the top unencumbered, and these men, staggering under the weight of their burdens, might almost have drawn tears of sympathy from a stone.

After a long and severe tug, we at length stood on the top of the North Cape: a large, flat area of table land, detached from the mainland by a few yards; the surface covered by a soft moss or lichen which yielded to the tread and made walking no easy matter. Anything more wild, barren, bleak, bare, and desolate could not be conceived. As we set foot upon the summit, the wind blew up a very hurricane across our path, and hail, snow and sleet came down with such force that it almost cut our faces. It was impossible to keep warm even by walking quickly, and the wind having it all its own way, blew us about as it listed. Straight across the top, over nearly a mile of ground, we struggled and toiled to its extreme northern point. Gifted with miraculous vision, we might now have looked upon the North Pole.

But in place of the grand midnight sun: most sublime sight, when seen from this lonely spot; the very ends of the world, as it were: in place of the gorgeous tints and tones that should have illuminated earth, sea, and sky with Eastern richness: behold nothing but a dull, sombre, weird, mysterious midnight light that was nor light nor darkness. Over all the sky hung that dark pall of clouds; the wind searched out and crept into our very bones; the hail and the snow and the sleet ceased not their reign.

Down a steep, perpendicular wall we gazed into the gloomy, sullen water, with a feeling that made one creep and draw back. Going as

near the edge as possible, we picked up pieces of white stone to bring away as trophies: mementoes of our expedition to the North Cape, which, at this moment, was a failure. Everyone's teeth chattered with cold. One lamented that he had not brought up his cardinal's blanket; another declared he felt paralysis gaining upon him. Everyone's jaws, I say, chattered in quite a laughable way, and everyone's face turned pale. As for the ladies, whilst braving it all with dauntless courage, they were to be pitied: it was an unfit experience for them. Yet they loudly (you will always find the weaker the cause the louder the tone) declared that it was quite delightful and refreshing: whilst some so far parleyed with conscience as to say they preferred this frightful wind and raging storm to the glories of the midnight sun.

Struggling back to the other side of the Cape, we found the sailors and the stewards trying to light a fire and boil the kettle; but trying in vain. They had taken up half-a-dozen different positions behind huge rocks, but wherever they went the wind went also, and no fire could live through it. So the ladies drank champagne out of wine-glasses, and some of the gentlemen had a little brandy to restore circulation and ward off paralytic attacks; but for the most part no one took anything at all. To all intents and purposes the servants had had their trouble for nothing. Nevertheless, next morning the stewards handed round a little bill to each of the passengers, ladies excepted, of 5*s.* 7½*d.* for "Refreshment at the North Cape." Some protested and paid; others, remembering that the men had really worked hard in the common cause, paid without protesting. When matters came to be investigated by the protestors, it turned out that sundry bottles had been broken in the transit, but how broken and how disposed of it was thought advisable not to consider too closely.

Frozen, half petrified, quite drenched, altogether uncomfortable and wholly miserable, everyone now prepared to go down the mountain. It looked a formidable undertaking, and I, for one, wished myself safely on board the steamer: the only thing of life and animation visible on the great wide waste of waters. In twos and threes, small groups, or solitary units, the little band of martyrs toiled downwards.

To our right was a large patch of frozen snow: the very patch over which we had watched the string of reindeer in their majestic walk, as they followed each other like sheep. Upon this stood the chief officer of the *Michael Krohn*, but, knowing his ground, he had taken care to make two deep indentations. Less wise than he in such matters, or perhaps more thoughtless, I walked on to the top, and immediately began a sliding process without any chance of stopping. In rolling over precipices, one's fall may be broken by a friendly root or tree, but the snow does not put forth anything of this sort. There was, however, a living branch at hand, in the shape of the chief officer, and as I was flying past he caught and landed me on terra

firma. But for his timely help I should have gone down more quickly than pleasantly, and probably never have had the chance of a second visit to the top of the North Cape: a chance, indeed, that I should pause seriously before accepting in any case. It will bear doing once, but I am doubtful about a repetition. Even the reindeer had found the summit too much for them, for when we were fairly on the level of the table-land they had disappeared as completely as if they had borrowed the magician's carpet and transported themselves to the North Pole. There the weather might have been more genial: it could not have been less so.

When the first boat-load shot off from the shore, Captain Bjornstad dressed the ship and fired a salute as a compliment to his passengers, and as they went on board the flags were dipped, to go up again when the second boat-load pushed off from the shore. This was repeated until all were on board, and about two in the morning the ship weighed anchor. A very few yards out at sea and we stopped again; this time for the pleasure of a little deep sea-fishing. The lines were long and strong, and a large baited hook was dropped into the water. At a certain length the line was held between the finger and thumb, and, jerked sharply upwards, certainly played havoc with the fish. Very soon large codfish strewed the decks. This lasted about an hour, and then the sport was abandoned. Towards 3 a.m. we were fairly under way for Hammerfest, and reached it on Friday morning after breakfast. Torrents of rain were falling; the air was icy cold, and no one felt inclined to land.

Saturday morning early we reached Tromsö, and went ashore at 8.30, to visit a settlement of Lapps with their reindeer. The captain had telegraphed our arrival: for, as the deer have to be collected and brought down from the mountains, it is necessary to give notice of an intended visit.

It had rained all night in torrents, and it rained still. But this had not quenched anyone's thirst for the marvellous and the uncommon, and no one dreamed of staying behind. More than an hour's walk was before us. The road to the settlement led through a birch wood, up the Tromsdal, or Valley of Tromsö, and the path in many places was almost impassable. Muddy, slippery, sometimes over ancles in wet, and sometimes coming to a dead stand before some literal slough of despond, we gradually made way, and even enjoyed the excursion. By-and-by the rain ceased for a little, and the air became at once less cold and disagreeable. The valley was picturesque; in broad sunshine, blue skies, and a dry path, the walk might have been almost magnificent. On either side the slopes of the valley grew the birch trees, looking quite luxuriant for Norway. The valley itself stretched far upwards, and seemed to terminate in a friendly meeting of the mountains: where, for those who cared and had time to explore, no doubt a grand pass would reward the enterprise.

But our journey came to an end long before that point was gained,

and once more we were met by disappointment. After the heavy rains the Lapps thought no one would visit them, did not collect the reindeer, and were not prepared for us. In the centre of the valley we came upon two of their huts or tents, and with these and the people, and a view of the interiors, we had to be content. Two or three families—generations, it might be, of the same parent stem—dwelt in the first tent; men, women and children. At one end over a great fire a pot was boiling, hanging from a tripod: a similar arrangement to those we have seen in gipsy camps in England. Lying on the floor, wrapped up like mummies and almost smothered in bed-clothes, yet sleeping comfortably, were two or three babies, whilst as many dogs filled up spare corners. The Lapps are very fond of their dogs, and treat them with as much consideration as the Irish do another and less interesting animal. The place was dirty and untidy, but perhaps the dirt was not so much the fault of the inmates as of the peat smoke.

The Lapps were glad to see us, from interested motives. They were small, dried-up little people like Dutch dolls, with twinkling, intelligent eyes, and, in spite of their ugliness, something in their faces that drew out our sympathies. One thought immediately of the young missionary, and with these specimens before us, evidently capable of being awakened to better things, no longer wondered at his devotion and self-sacrifice: a life, it might almost be called, of self-immolation. With a wife to halve his troubles and double his joys: to help him onwards with the support it is woman's province to minister to man—the support of quiet endurance and patience under difficulties, that in time surmount all obstacles—it was possible that their life might be contented and even happy.

But in our case the Lapps thought only of selling their little wares to the highest bidder. They brought forth their hidden treasures: grey slippers made of reindeer skin, turned up and pointed at the toes, and smartly bound with red: spoons carved out of the reindeer horn and rudely engraved with the figure of the animal: cleverly done for people whose knowledge of carving could only be intuitive. These, and reindeer skins, they pressed upon us at large prices, and were evidently prepared to bargain for hours. They are greedy of gain, these Lapps, in their small way, and only want the opportunities of their more civilized brethren in the capitals of Europe to be as extortionate. This failing, however, exists only amongst the Lapps who live near Tromsö, and are exposed to the temptations of frequent inroads from travellers on their way northwards.

One little girl came up and stared at us; and, to see what the mother would say, I offered to purchase the child in place of slippers. At first the woman did not understand: or rather she thought she had misunderstood: a puzzled look came into her small but intelligent blue eyes; then a half-terrified expression as she feared the child might be taken from her in spite of herself. At last,

seeing the nature of the demand, her face beamed with smiles, and going over to her husband, amidst small convulsions of laughter, she explained to him with intense fun and merriment the offer that had been made to her. Finally, she threw her arms round the little girl, and, looking up, shook her head, decidedly intimating that such a bargain was out of the question.

None of these Lapps were more than four feet high, ill-shapen in body as they were aboriginal in face. Certainly their dress showed them off to the least advantage. But it was picturesque in its ugliness, and in harmony with the people and their surroundings. Rude trowsers or leggings of reindeer skin, tied round the legs with cord, and a long coat or blouse of the same, tied round the waist: warm clothes, no doubt, but stiff, shapeless, and by no means handsome. The women were dressed much in the same way, and the smooth faces of the men made it sometimes puzzling to distinguish between them.

At length bargains were terminated and curiosity was satisfied. For my own part, sufficiently encumbered with a pair of shoes, I wondered what would have been the consequence if the woman had taken me at my word and sold the child. Luckily the maternal instinct (and indeed the paternal, too) is one that may be almost reckoned upon all the world over. Herr X. invested in some skins, which one of the Lapps packed in a sack, threw over his shoulder, and accompanied us on our return to the steamer: a quaint and curious little figure.

Disappointment at not seeing the deer having been energetically expressed on our first arrival, two of the Lapps went off and disappeared amongst the hills. We now caught sight of them struggling and toiling down the mountain side with two of the animals. The more they pulled the ropes one way, the more the animals tugged and struggled the other, until we thought their very horns would come out. Large and beautiful these horns were, and so were the eyes; but the deer, shedding their coat, did not look the romantic and lovely creatures of one's imagination. They were so wild, too, that the softness of the eye was turned to fierceness. They refused to stand still for a moment, and started at the least touch. On the whole their more familiar acquaintance was voted a mistake. They had looked far more grand and majestic travelling over the snow at the top of the North Cape. There, in full freedom, unrestrained, and in the beauty of their heads, crowned with magnificent horns that stood out like the branches of a tree, the grace of their movements and general appearance was not to be mistaken.

The men who had brought down the two reindeer — it had not taken them ten minutes to do the work—demanded fifteen shillings in payment, a sum representing amongst the Lapps about ten times the amount it does with us; and because only ten shillings was given to them, they went off into a diminutive but very decided rage, bubbled up and boiled over, and made as much chattering as an

old market Jew under similar treatment. In fact, they would not be comforted, or consoled, or pacified, and, had they been London cabmen, could not have abused us more.

So we parted from the Lapps, and wended our way through the birchwood towards the steamer. Every now and then Herr X. gave a backward glance to the little Lapp who steadily followed with his lawful property—for it had been paid for in the hut. But the little old fellow showed no disposition to run off. Though they do not hesitate to charge double for their goods, in all other respects they are no doubt honest and sincere enough. They are a curious race, now somewhat dying out; and they must be seen amongst their own hills and valleys, in their own tents, in the midst of their habits and modes of life to be appreciated.

We reached the steamer before twelve o'clock; another half-hour saw us once more on our journey, dull skies, pouring rain, bitter cold prevailing. As long as this lasted, the pleasure of the voyage was over. Ladies put up their sketching materials, and, like the Innocents Abroad, took to their diaries with an energy that would have set Mark Twain prophesying. They looked inspired and important, compared notes, and so managed to kill time. The major portion of the community smoked, talked, took long sleeps to make up for lost opportunities, and began to think that the end of the voyage would be the beginning of happiness. It was coming; slowly, perhaps, but surely.

LOVE.

Softly she comes, her garments trailing light,
Like silvery ripples on a moonlit sea;
Oft know we not she's here, so silently
She stealeth on us, veilëd from our sight,
Like some sweet fragrance borne on summer night,
From hidden blooms which all around us be:
We feel her presence, though we may not see
Or know from whence we draw our strange delight.
A word, a touch, may thrill us and reveal
Her form as in a flash of lightning clear;
At Love's sweet shrine we cast ourselves and kneel
Trembling, in worship, she has grown so dear:
We fear to lose what took us long to find,
And wingëd Love by flowery chains we bind.

E. L.

A STORY OF THE SEA-SHORE.

SURELY she was one of the fairest of fair women, as she stood before the small mirror of her little chamber, brushing out her bronze-brown hair, and threading it through and through with her comb and her supple fingers, until it floated over her shoulders and down her back like a gilded banner of finest silk. Sometimes it was her whim to wear it so, especially on those days when she had taken a morning plunge in the sea.

Then, when her simple toilet was complete, she glanced finally at the mirror, and smiled at the bright image reflected in it. A dazzling, bewildering, alluring image it was, despite the plain fresh print robe, girded at the waist, with only a bit of white at wrist and neck, and a spray of green seaweed twisted in the lovely hair.

The plainest and the poorest of apparel could not have dimmed the lustre of those wonderful, fathomless eyes, could not steal the luscious bloom from those rare, sweet lips, or alter the marble beauty of the whole exquisite face. The loosely girded robe only seemed to display the grace of her rounded figure; no young duchess, in all her gorgeous apparel, ever moved with more queenly grace than did this beautiful, inexperienced girl, Serena Moncton, the fisherman's daughter. It was what Hugh Moncton pleased to call himself—a fisherman—but he was not as the common fishermen of the place for all that.

Serena, taking a last look at herself, ran down the narrow stairs, and turned into the wide, sunny kitchen of this cottage by the sea. Her father was much addicted to sitting in it, rather than in the adjoining little room, be-carpeted and be-ornamented, that he called Serena's parlour. The door stood open to the beach, and to the sea beyond it, and Moncton sat looking out and smoking his pipe as he did so. Morning, noon and night would that pipe be in his mouth; it seemed to be his chiefest solace. He was a thin, stooping man, with a look of care on his face, and iron-grey hair. His dress was exactly that of the working fishermen of the place, save that the blue clothes were all whole, and not patched.

"Going out, Serena?" he said, as she passed him.

"I thought I'd go over and see how the poor widow Janes is, father," she turned back to say. "I have not been yet to-day."

"Ay, go, child. If the—— Who's this, coming up?"

"It is Tom Reece," she answered, after glancing round. And she came back into the kitchen again.

Great, big-hearted, fair-faced, but somewhat simple Tom Reece, halted at the open door. He had a flat basket of fish in his hand,

and he loved Serena Moncton with the first and best love of his honest heart. He was a well-to-do young sailor-fisherman, owned a good house and a large share in a fishing schooner, and a larger share in a merchant vessel that traded to the ends of the world. He had already a nest-egg of savings laid by, and was the best match in all Transea. But the old dames shook their heads, and declared him a fool to go making love to that white-faced, flighty Moncton girl, who was not good enough for him, and was half a lady, while scores of steady girls, who would make the best of wives, were holding their hearts in their hands, and all but asking him to take them.

The fisherwives might gossip, and the young maidens might simper: it was all to no purpose. Tom Reece's heart was not to be so easily shaken from its allegiance. It was bound and fettered by the bronze-brown locks, the bewildering eyes of Serena Moncton, and he could not get it free. Neither did he wish to. And there she stood now, right in his very sight, dazzling him with her beauty.

"Is it you, Tom?" cried the elder man, in a warm tone, as though the young fellow brought his welcome with him. "What's that fish for?"

"I thought I'd take a few up to Sennet's. He's bad abed to-day, and she'll be glad of it."

"Bad through his own fault," retorted Moncton: "he has been drinking again."

"'Tis so, I believe," acknowledged Reece, who was too kindly natured to blame the worst sinner. "But it's hard for *her*, poor thing! and a mouthful o' fish, if there's none in the cupboard, mightn't come in amiss."

"I doubt if there's bread in the cupboard, let alone fish," returned Moncton. "Sennet has spent his last ha'penny, you may be sure."

"A fine day, Miss Serena," spoke Reece, as he was turning away, courage having failed him to speak before. In the presence of this love of his he was timid as a bleating lamb.

"Fine enough," she answered carelessly, and pretended to be busy at the table.

"What is your grievance against Tom Reece, girl?" questioned her father, as the fisherman went away.

"Grievance, father? I have none," she replied, calmly and steadily.

"You don't encourage him at all; rather repel him, as it seems to me. Don't you like him?"

"Yes, I like him very well—very much. He is as worthy as he can be; I know that."

"Then why do you give him no encouragement? You can't be off seeing, Serena, that his thoughts are fixed upon you."

"I—don't know, father, that I—care to give him encouragement," she replied, with hesitation. "I have seen that you wish me to give it."

"I do wish it," said Moncton, putting down his pipe to face Serena. "You are the greatest coquette in Transea, and you'll be safer married than unmarried. And who is there in all the place that you'd like to mate with, save him?"

"Why, of course there's no one, father. I should like to see any of the others dare to think of it," added Serena, craning up her pretty neck.

"You'd send 'em to the right-about. Just so. It comes back to what I say—there's only Reece."

"Only Reece *here*. But—I may go out into the world sometime—who knows, father?"

"Never!" emphatically pronounced Moncton. "The world has not used me well enough to induce me to seek it again; and you may be sure I shall not let *you* go into it. It is full of naught but deceit, and fraud, and falsity. For your own sake, child, you must keep away from the world."

Serena sighed. A wish came over her to go out into this world that was so unknown to her: not but that she feared it too, for her father's opinions and counsels held with her their due weight.

"Give ear to the wooing of Tom Reece, Serena. You can't do better. He is honest, and kindly, and gentle, and would make any wife happy. Stay in Transea; trouble and excitement and sorrow won't touch you here. If you must go a-roving later, ask your husband to carry you with him on some long voyage or another: he makes them, you know, in that big merchant-ship of his."

"Father, I do believe that you are tired of me!—that you want me gone from you!" exclaimed the girl.

"Not so," he quietly replied. "I should like to know that you are safe in a husband's hands; one able and willing to take charge of you. I could smoke my pipe at home here without care then, Serena, and be at peace."

Serena said no more. She went out to see the sick woman she had spoken of, Widow Janes, walking along with an unusually slow and thoughtful step. It was evident that her father wished her to marry Tom Reece; intended her to marry him; but something in Serena's heart cried out against it.

Eleven years ago a stranger had made his unexpected appearance at Transea; a pretty little girl of seven years old being with him, and also a staid and rather elderly woman, that the simple fisher-people set down as his aunt or mother. He settled himself in one of the prettiest cottages in the place, and he bought a small fishing-vessel, and made himself into a fisherman. That he was not a brother of the craft, his mistakes and his ignorance proved; and the hearty fishermen, after laughing good-naturedly a bit, showed him how to manage his vessel and what to do. He evinced his gratitude by making them a few useful but not costly presents: but he told them nothing about himself. Who he was, or what his station in life had

been, or where he came from, Transea did not get to learn; he might have dropped from the moon. His name was Moncton; and that was all they knew. Simple and not curious, the matter was welcome to rest for them. They rather liked the silently civil and generous man who had come to make his home among them, and they loved the little golden-haired Serena, who had the manners and the speech of a little lady. They knew no more of him now, eleven years later, than they had known then; and they had ceased to remember that he was not one of themselves; while Serena had grown up among them, and she and her beauty were something to be proud of.

Eleven or twelve years before, Hugh Moncton had been a prosperous merchant in one of the largest towns of Scotland. A commercial crash came, and his house went, with many other houses. That might not have been much; he must have borne the reverse of fortune, as others had to bear it; but, unfortunately, something not quite straightforward in recent dealings oozed out, and his bankruptcy was called a fraudulent one. That, even, he might have surmounted in time; but a worse blow was to fall. His wife, a heartless, frivolous, fashionable woman, deserted him. She would not stay to share poverty and disgrace, not she, and one morning she was missing; she had run away, *and not alone!* The blow, coming close upon the other blows, pretty nearly killed Hugh Moncton: he became a wanderer on the face of the earth—saw the remote, insignificant fishing village of Transea, went back to fetch his dear little prattler, Serena, and her nurse, and settled down in it, there to do battle with his troubles, and to hide himself and his shame.

"I never loved you," his wife wrote to him, in the moment of her departure: "I loved elsewhere, Hugh; but they made me marry you for your gold. Now that the gold is gone, I do not see that I am obliged to continue bound to you; and I bid you farewell. Take care of the child: I may not carry her with me. Do not sell her for this world's goods when she is of an age to marry. Do not bring her up, as I was brought up, to think them the one only thing worth living for in life.—S. M."

It seemed to Hugh Moncton that all the fires of the lost could not equal the dreadful pain that tore at his heartstrings and burnt itself into his brain in that one first hour. But for the helpless child, who ran about the house calling for "Mamma, mamma!" he would have run away himself—or he might have rashly taken his own life. But he did neither. He lived, as people do live, in spite of the terrible and crushing blows that fall upon their quivering hearts. He sold what personal trifles were left to him, and turning his back upon the great, noisy, wicked city for ever, he sought out that distant, retired, dreary place by the sea, and there buried himself and his little Serena. The old nurse, "Nana," as Serena always

called her, a good woman of superior culture, went with them: he would not have known what to do with the child without her. A small income, which no reverse of fortune could deprive him of, remained his; and the fishing had been entered upon as an occupation, rather than a source of gain.

And there they had lived: and Serena had grown to womanhood in this strange little community, knowing not that she had been born to anything better. The few books he had taken with him, alone of all his possessions, he used for her instruction: he could not let his child grow up in ignorance, and he taught her, from these volumes, chemistry, philosophy, botany, and she became versed in these, and was, so far, learned beyond her years. She spoke English with a refined accent, she wrote it perfectly; she could do plain sewing and dainty bits of fine work; and nature had taught her to draw. But her father told her nothing of the world: he let no works of fiction and romance fall into her hands, or aught that could breathe to her of what he so carefully guarded her from. He saw with dull pain how, day by day, her face grew more and more like that *other* face, and he vowed a vow that he would keep her shut out from the world and from temptation. Grandeur and riches for her he coveted not; he believed she would find more true content in this humble sphere than in that to which she was born. The little annuity he enjoyed would die with him, and he hoped with all his heart she would marry Thomas Reece.

And yet he himself might have gone again into the world had he pleased, some of the impediments to it having been removed. His erring wife was dead; and the taint of having dealt unfairly by his fellow-men was removed from him. The partner who had been associated with him in business, had been detected in deeper crime, and had then confessed that it was he, himself alone, who worked the wrong; that Hugh Moncton had been entirely innocent. Nothing, however, would tempt him away from Transea: in that homely little hamlet he would live to the end. The faithful Nana had died a few months ago; and he felt her loss greatly, especially for his daughter's sake.

Serena paid her visit to the widow Janes, talked to her a little, read to her a little, and when she left her she walked down to the greensward that skirted the beach. Her head was still full of what her father had said: and perhaps it was an unlucky thing that Tom Reece should chance to come along just then, and join Serena.

Standing side by side with her, the soft murmur of the sea sounding in their ears, and its rippling waves almost ascending to their feet, he spoke out his love for her for the first time, and in his blundering, awkward, but true and kindly way, asked her to be his wife.

Not even a trace of colour came into Serena's delicate cheek. A slight frown contracted her brow. Tom's homely speech and manner had always annoyed her; this afternoon it jarred upon her strangely.

She was not surprised at his proposal; she had expected it some time, for she knew he loved her. Did she love him?—love him, she meant, enough to say "Yes"? She asked the question of her heart, as she stood there, and she could not answer it.

"You don't speak to me, Serena."

"Truth is, Tom, I do not know what to say. I don't love you—I think you must have seen that; but I—I——"

Tom Reece turned his anxious, honest blue eyes upon her as she stopped. He was not bold enough to speak; he waited.

"I was going to say that I do not dislike you, Tom. I like you very well; you are so true and good. But yet"—returning to the one fact that would not quit her—"I do not think I love you. I feel not the least bit of love for you—none in the world."

"But if you like me," he returned, greatly agitated, "if you like me well enough to be my wife, Serena, the love might come afterwards. My love would bring forth yours."

"I suppose it might," she dreamily said, gazing out to sea from under her large straw hat. "Well, Tom, if you will take me as I am, I will say 'Yes.' I know my father wishes it."

"God bless him for that!" exclaimed Tom, and he raised Serena's hand to his lips, and kissed it as gently as the first gentleman in the land might have done. "Then, my dear, you promise to be my wife?"

"Yes, I do; I promise it faithfully. And, now that I have made up my mind to the idea, I shall get to like it," she added, half to herself; "it was only the uncertainty before that held me back. But, Tom, it must not be just yet."

"When you will," he answered, in his gratitude. "My darling love, your pleasure shall be mine in all things. I thank you, and"—lifting his glazed hat—"I thank God!"

They stood together, hand in hand, looking out over the sea in silence. Tom had stolen her left hand into his, and she did not withdraw it. Just then wheels were heard approaching; they drew apart, and turned to see what was coming.

A very handsome open carriage, drawn by two spirited greys, had turned on to the grass. An elderly man held the reins, and a young man sat at his side—a young man and a stranger, who turned his handsome and refined face upon Serena, as they whirled by, and looked her full in the eyes. It was but for a second, yet the girl flushed to the temples, and her heart thrilled with a strange and novel sensation.

Tom's voice broke the spell. "There's a party of gentlemen staying at the hotel up yonder; I suppose these are two of them."

"Is there?" said Serena. "How very good-looking they both were!"

"Those fine gentlemen, with nothing to do, are often that."

"Born in the purple," remarked Serena.

"Born in the what?" Tom had turned his honest and surprised eyes upon her.

"He does not even understand that," she thought. "It is a saying my father sometimes uses, Tom," she said, laughing, "to denote those of high birth."

"Those of high birth" were nothing to Tom Reece and Serena just now. They paced hither and thither on the greensward, talking of themselves and of the future. Serena confessed she should like to go out and see the world; Tom said he would take her out to it as soon as she was his wife.

"Oh, Tom, there's the bell!" she exclaimed, as a little bell from the fishing mart tinkled out and aroused them. "It is five o'clock, father's tea-time; he will wonder what has become of me."

They turned to walk towards her home; and just then the same carriage came bowling down on its return. The elderly gentleman pulled up.

"Can you tell me, my man," he said, while the younger one lifted his hat to Serena in silence, "where a certain piece of high land that is called the Beacon is situated? We cannot find it."

"It lies a mile or two on the other side the village," replied Tom. "You cannot well miss it, from its height. Anyone will direct you."

"Thank you: we went the wrong way then. Thank you very much," repeated the courteous man, and drove on.

And Serena's lovely face had been full of blushes the whole short minute of the stoppage. For the extremely handsome and refined younger man had given her glance after glance of respectful admiration; and he lifted his hat again as they drove away, as he might have lifted it to some high duchess. And Serena, as though she had totally forgotten that her lover was there, walked away homewards with a fleet foot, leaving him to himself, and never giving a glance behind her.

Tom heaved a sigh, as he bore across the grass to his own home —which lay inland, at some little distance.

"She is rather strange," he said to himself. "I have never understood her. Quite different from the fisher-girls about here."

Tom might well say so. She *was* different.

"She's strange, the women say, strange and romantic—whatever that last may mean," thought the simple-hearted sailor. "It will be all right though, now she has promised to be mine; and I am at rest. Serena would never go from her promise. One thing is sure and certain—though she does not love me yet, she loves nobody else."

"Father," said Serena, as she went indoors and nestled down by his knees, "I have promised to marry Thomas Reece Are you pleased?"

"Ay, that I am," murmured the father, stroking her bright hair.

"He is a good man, Serena, and your life with him will be peaceful and happy. Do you love him now, my child?"

Serena paused. She was open and truthful by nature. "Father, I don't altogether know what is meant by 'love.' When Polly Dunn used to haunt the landing-place to watch the boats, tide in, tide out, for the sake of seeing Jim Atter, and crept about after him ashore like his shadow, and then threw herself into the sea and got nearly drowned because Jim chose another sweetheart, it was called love. People said she went mad for love. Well, I'd not follow Tom Reece if I were paid to do it; I'd not *care* to, so I can't have any love for him. I have told him I have not one bit."

A heavy frown contracted Moncton's brow. "You *told* him that?"

"Of course I did. I told him I *liked* him, and that was the most I could say. Oh, he was quite satisfied with that, I assure you; he said the love would come later—after we were married."

"Ay, ay," said Moncton, reassured: and he spake no further.

Phœbe, their young serving girl, was bringing in the tray. As Serena sat down to make tea, her mind was busy. Love! she thought to herself, what *was* love? Could it be that there was something called love, beyond what she felt for Tom Reece? She did like him very well; she esteemed him for his good qualities, his kindliness and his honesty, though she did not like his plain manners and his rustic accent. Poor child! had she been allowed to read books of fiction, or to mix more with the girls of the village, the truth might have been plain to her, its signs clearer. Novels and romances are great helps in awaking the subtleties of the human heart.

Tom Reece came in the next morning to talk with Moncton of the long-dreamed-of marriage. Serena heard her father propose the month of October, and then she ran out to the beach to be alone. The air of the house seemed suffocating; strangely oppressing her. Leaping into a little boat that belonged to her father, she let it drift about with the incoming tide; but did not unfasten it. Sitting there, her face bent upon her hand, she fell into a reverie, gazing out on the quiet ocean. Such a dreamy, strange reverie, and though not twenty-four hours betrothed to the man who was to be her husband, he had no part whatever in her dreamings. She wondered again about the world which she had never seen; about the lands over the ocean, and the people who inhabited them; and then she fell to thinking of the handsome gentleman who had passed her last evening, and recalled his fine-featured face, with the fair hair tossed off his forehead in wavy curls.

Just then she heard the splash of an oar; and, looking up quickly, she met the deep, blue eyes of the hero of her dreaming fixed full upon her face, as he shot by her in a light skiff. Once more that nameless thrill shook her whole frame—and with a strange tumult in heart and brain, she stepped on shore and hastened home. Tom

Reece was still there; but she ran up to her chamber without speaking to him.

The stranger meanwhile reached the landing-place close by, and resigned the skiff to the young fisherman from whom he had hired it, Peter Janes, the widow Janes' son.

"Who was that young lady seated in a boat there as I passed?" he enquired. "Yonder she is now, running swiftly along the plage—or whatever you call it."

Peter, a civil, pleasant young fellow, turned his head. "That! Oh, that be Miss Serena, old Moncton's girl," he said.

"And who is 'old Moncton'?" continued the stranger with a smile.

"He be one of us fishermen, sir."

"*Indeed!*" cried the gentleman in a tone of surprise. "She looks like a lady."

"Well, and we call her half a lady, sir; she baint altogether like one of our fisher-girls," returned Peter. "Her father have got about the best boat in the place, and four or five men in it—with a mate to overlook 'em, in case he don't always care to go out hisself."

With the morning, Serena was out early, and strolled to the beach again. She had been restless all night, and craved for the fresh free breezes of the sea. Barely had she stood a minute, facing it, her straw hat shading her brow, when the sound of footsteps caused her to turn her head. Coming towards her on the white sands, was Peter Janes, the handsome stranger by his side.

"Good morning, Miss Serena," cried Peter's cheery voice.

"Oh, good morning, Peter," she returned, a deep blush rising to her face, for those blue eyes were again fixed upon it.

"Introduce me—tell her who I am," whispered the stranger imperatively to Peter. And Peter obeyed, but did it sheepishly.

"This be Mr. Ernest Loraine, son to Mr. Loraine, what be stopping down yonder at the hotel, Miss Serena. He asked me to tell you."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Serena, but my friend Peter has not told you correctly," spoke the stranger, laughingly making the best of the awkward words. "I am Ernest Loraine, it is true, but I am not Mr. Loraine's son; only his nephew." And he ventured to touch the slender hand and bow over it; and once again Serena felt herself blushing like a carnation under the ardent gaze of those wonderful eyes, blue as the sky above them.

"You'll find the skiff all ready, sir," cried Peter, who was going out fishing with his mates and could not linger. "You've only just to unhook it from the post when you go off, and fasten it when you come in again."

"All right; and thank you, Peter," cried Mr. Ernest Loraine.

Peter went off whistling. Mr. Loraine stopped talking to Serena, apparently regardless of the waiting skiff. Serena, on her par

that it was breakfast-time, just as she had forgotten the tea-hour the previous afternoon, when love-making with Thomas Reece. Suddenly she remembered it, and ran off with nimble feet.

"I am wonderfully surprised at this little Hebe," thought Ernest Loraine, as he strolled back to breakfast at the hotel, which was newly built, and stood just beyond the other end of the village. "And yet not so surprised," he added in contradiction, after another moment, "for it was impossible to think of her as one of these ignorant fishing-girls: her appearance carries 'lady' with it beyond all dispute. She is delicate as any lady in the land—and she speaks as we do—and she appears to be educated. Where's the riddle, I wonder?"

"Well, Ernest, had your half-hour's row?" cried Mr. Loraine, accosting him from the door of the hotel, where he stood lounging, with two or three other gentlemen.

"No, uncle, not yet. I shall go later."

"Sensible man! When you young fellows get as old as I am, you'll have learnt that the best thing to take first is breakfast."

Ernest laughed and put his arm within his uncle's as they turned to the breakfast-room. The two were deeply attached to one another: and Ernest was his heir.

That was the beginning of the acquaintance. Ernest Loraine did not let it end there. He sought Serena's society; he walked with her upon the beach, he rowed with her in Peter's skiff, and he dropped in occasionally at her home. Hugh Moncton did not repulse this stranger from the outside world, whom he met at first accidentally. He grew to like his companionship; he would sit and talk with him for hours upon subjects to which his lips had long been strangers; at last he seemed to watch for his coming. He never thought of him in connection with Serena. It's true she would sit by, listening, but she rarely spoke; and Moncton knew nothing of the strolls upon the beach or the other out-door meetings. Now that Serena was engaged and had given her promise to Reece, he deemed her perfectly secure and safe. And so the dangerous companionship for Serena went on: and Mr. Moncton grew to like the young man so greatly that he imparted to him what had never before passed his lips—his own history.

"I knew she must have been born a gentlewoman," thought Ernest Loraine. And his attentions to her were redoubled, for he loved her passionately, with a pure and honest love. But when the truth burst upon Hugh Moncton, it nearly drove him mad.

One morning when he was down in the market, where the superfluous fish, not sent off by train, was sold, two old sailors, who had ever been his good friends and comrades, took him aside to tell him, believing it to be their duty. His pretty lass, who was to have been Tom Reece's wife, was spending all her leisure time with another; the rich and handsome young blade at the hotel. And Tom Reece

—whether he was blind to it, or whether he gave in to it, they did not know—walked about like a man whose heart was broken, and looked dazed.

Serena sat alone when her father entered; she was stitching a wristband for one of his homely coloured shirts, and humming a love tune to her own heart.

"Girl!" he exclaimed, so hoarsely that she did not know his voice, and she started in terror at his stern white face. "Girl, I have heard it all! Your name is being bandied about the market-place, and my eyes are opened. Fool that I have been!—ever to let that wolf from the black and evil world enter my fold! Oh, you may stand and stare, you deceitful girl; the blood of your mother runs riot in your veins; you are false to the core of your heart! Pledged to Thomas Reece, you are suffering the insidious attentions of another, and are become a town's talk."

"Father!" she gasped in faint accents, bewildered with the accusations, "father ——"

"Be silent," he sternly interrupted. And there and then, in his deep excitement, he poured forth to her the history of the past: of her mother's treachery and his own wrongs: which had been so long withheld from her.

"And you," he wound up, his voice broken with sobs, than which nothing can be more sad to the human ear, "you whom I have striven so to shield from the world, from the knowledge of sin and evil, you to turn out at last like *her*—deceitful, false! I wish Heaven had taken me before I lived to see it!"

"Father, hush!" cried Serena, in solemn tones, while her face was rigid as death. "You must not judge me so harshly; there is no cause for it. I have done nothing to merit your censure. I *do* love Ernest Loraine, he and my own heart have taught me what love is; I *have* walked with him on the beach, been with him on the sea, Peter Janes rowing us; but he has never spoken a word of love to me; never one word that you might not hear. He has been a courteous companion to me, a pleasant friend; nothing more; and, though I have learned to love him, the fault lies not with him, but with my own weak heart ——"

She broke down with emotion. Her father, his stern brows bent upon her, never spoke.

"I do not forget that I am betrothed to Thomas Reece," continued Serena. "I promised to be his wife, and I will keep my promise, and be true to him. This has been a delightful dream, and I could not help yielding to it: but it is over. Father, you need not doubt me; though I have, as you have just told me, my mother's face, I can yet be faithful to the man I accepted for my husband—and I will be."

He heaved a great sobbing sigh of relief. "You *will*, Serena?"

"I will, father; heaven helping me."

Down upon the beach went Serena, knowing that she should there find Mr. Loraine—that he was waiting for her.

"Now for a sail," he called out. "The water has just a pleasant breeze on it, and Peter and his skiff are ready." But the next moment he saw her strangely-changed face.

"Hush!" she breathed. "There will be no more sails for you and for me. People are talking of it, and my father is desperately angry; and I—I have not been behaving well to Thomas Reece. You know I am betrothed to him."

Mr. Loraine caught her hand as she would have turned from him, "Thomas Reece!" he cried in scorn. "You cannot stoop to mate with *him*."

Her face flushed painfully. "Yes," she answered, "I shall keep my word."

"But I cannot spare you, Serena," he said in agitation. "I want you to be my wife. If I have not spoken before, it was because I could not make it right with my uncle; but that is done now. My love, my love! you cannot think of being any one's wife but mine."

"Don't, don't," she cried wildly. "I must not, I dare not listen to you. My word is passed to him and to my father, and I will never forfeit it."

He caught her in his arms and kissed her passionately on cheeks and lips. She tore herself away, and broke into sobs of anguish.

"It must not be; it must not be. Farewell, Ernest! farewell for ever."

That night, standing at the gate of their little cottage in her dumb agony, she saw Tom Reece steal up. Her first impulse was to run in and shut herself up from him; her next, to stay where she was. Whatever it cost her, she would not be cruel to him. The terrible play must be played out; and perhaps in time—in time—she might learn to bear.

"Serena, I have wished to talk to you for some time," he began, a tender compassion on his sad and suffering face. "I can't be off seeing that you have shunned me lately; that your time has been given to another—the gentleman, who is so high and speaks so fair. What it has cost me I'll not enter upon; but, my dear, your happiness is more precious to me than my own: and I'm come now to say that I won't stand in your way. Who am I that I should set up my own feelings against yours, or let yours be sacrificed to me? So, Serena, my dear one, I give you back your troth: and I'm going away on a voyage, not to be in your way—and I know God will comfort me in time."

How the generosity touched her! She burst into tears, and clasped his hands.

"No, Tom, never; you are mistaken. It's true that he has dazzled me a little, and I've been so thoughtless as to walk and talk with him. But I have said good-bye to him for good now, and I will be your wife as I promised."

"Not at the expense of your peace," he returned, nearly choking with emotion, as he twined her fingers nervously within his.

"It would be at the expense of my peace and my father's too, if I did not. I will be your wife whenever you please, Tom."

And for the second time that day Miss Serena Moncton felt strange kisses on her lips. She ran up to her chamber and there sobbed out her perplexity and pain.

Mr. Ernest Loraine was a man of right feeling in the main. Finding she was absolutely engaged to this sailor, he brought his chivalry to bear, and quitted Transea. The next move in the drama was made by Serena's father. Tom Reece was going out in command of his own vessel for a month or six weeks' voyage, and he, the father, said the wedding should take place before his departure.

How Serena fought against it, her heart alone knew. Her entire love was Ernest Loraine's, her esteem only her betrothed husband's. To marry him at all would be dreadful; to marry him so soon, worse than death. She won over Tom to her side; sobbing and sighing like a maid bereft. He could not withstand that; he only lived to please her.

So, though Mr. Moncton held to his mandate, it was decided that the ceremony should take place only in the hour of Tom's departure. Bridegroom and bride they should be made; but they would bid each other farewell at the church door, and Serena would go home with her father and live there until his return, when she would take up her proper abode in her husband's home.

In the mellow light of a September day, when the month was on the wane, Serena Moncton stood in the little church at Transea, surrounded by her father and a very few humble friends, stood hand in hand with Thomas Reece, and there they were made man and wife. A strange shiver shook her as he clasped her to his manly breast in the dusky porch, and left his parting kisses on her lips.

"My dear one! mine at last! You will be true to me, Serena; you will not forget me?"

"I will be true to you, husband, for ever and for ever. Forget you? No, there's little fear of that."

His vessel, the *Bluebell*, and the tide were waiting for him, and he had to make the best of his way onwards; he could not linger. A small feast was prepared at Moncton's and half-a-dozen village guests assembled to partake of it. The young bride could not swallow a mouthful: no wonder, said the women, when she had been obliged to part with her loving bridegroom.

The day over and the people gone, Serena escaped to her room. There she breathed a long breath. A wife!—his wife! it all seemed like a horrible nightmare. At least for one month she was free: perhaps for a week or two over that: and after that she must—she must make the best of things and pray to the good God to help

her to hide her agony, so that no one, least of all her husband, should suspect it was there.

The days went by, all too fast. October was a lovely month that year, bright with sunshine. Serena grew white and thin, and her eyes began to shine with unnatural brilliancy. The yearning thought was ever crossing her—If she could but die!

November in at last! The *Bluebell* still lingered; but one day, it was the sixth, news came that she was nearing the port; would certainly be in by morning dawn. That night poor Serena crept to bed, shivering in speechless misery. She buried her face in the pillows, sobbed aloud, and prayed to die.

Exhausted by the violence of her emotion, she at last fell into a deep sleep. Suddenly the wind got up and shrieked and howled around the cottage. Black clouds, looming up, hid the stars. The sea roared sullenly and tossed its dangerous billows aloft. Then a blinding sheet of lightning filled the room, followed by a crash of thunder that seemed to shake the house.

It awoke Serena. Starting up, she found she had slept two hours; had slept through the dreadful rushings of wind. The storm raged fearfully now; she could not lie in bed. Striking a light, she got up and dressed.

"Father," she cried then, opening her door. "Father!"

No voice answered. She ran across the passage to his room, and found that it was empty, the bed not yet slept in. Phœby heard her, and came to the foot of the stairs shivering. The girl had been terrified from the beginning, and sought refuge at the kitchen fire.

"Is my father out?" asked Serena, going down.

The master had been out from the first, Phœby answered. Some ship was in distress and the men had come to call him.

Serena paced the house restlessly. A nameless horror seemed to hang over her, she knew not of what, but she could not shake it off. Ten, fifteen minutes dragged by. The storm was decreasing, the thunder dying away, the wind lulling. Presently Serena heard footsteps, as of several men walking together, and approaching the house. Phœby opened the door; Serena, sheltering herself from the still fierce gusts, stood behind her. Her father was the first to enter.

"Serena, what do you do here?" he cried, speaking hurriedly. "I thought you were in bed. Go away, child, go away: this is no sight for you. Run away, Phœby."

"Father, what is it?" she steadily asked. "What burden is it those men are bearing?"

Ah, she soon knew. The *Bluebell* had been wrecked; its captain was fatally injured, and they were bringing him to the cottage as being nearer than his own home, which he might not have reached alive. A doctor pressed in to do what he could; but nothing could be done for Thomas Reece in this world.

Lying on a mattress in the little parlour, Serena bent over him, and took his helpless hand. Others went out and left them together. Were they not as good as man and wife? He was fatally crushed, but his face was not injured.

"Don't grieve, dear," he panted, as her tears fell fast. "I know you did not care for me, perhaps you never would, and may be the good Lord God has taken me in mercy to you. All these weeks that we've been separated, I've prayed to Him night and morning to think of your happiness and not of mine. Kiss me, darling; we shall meet in Heaven."

Oh, the brave, loving, gentle heart! Serena's passionate tears and kisses fell on his cold lips. "Too good, too good for this world," she murmured. "God is taking him to a better."

Well, he died, and was buried; and there's little more to add. Serena mourned for him in true repentance, and went often to put flowers on his grave.

Summer had come round again before she saw Ernest Loraine. Walking her melancholy walk one day upon the sands, she met the blue eyes that had once been so lovingly fixed upon her. He lifted his hat and spoke calmly, hoping Mrs. Reece was well.

Serena burst into tears; she could not answer. He then noticed that she wore mourning.

"Have you lost your father?" he hastily enquired.

"Not my father; my husband," she sobbed. "It——it is a sad tale; please don't ask me to tell it you."

They parted. But in the course of the day, Mr. Loraine heard all from Peter Janes. Serena had never been a wife, and poor Tom Reece had been killed by the falling of the mast in the shipwreck.

"Surely you will let me now address you!" Mr. Loraine said to her the next day in her father's house. "There cannot be any impediment now."

"Talk to me about it when October comes in," she answered, with a blush and a smile. "Not before."

And accordingly never a word did he speak to her. But they wandered on the heath together, and sat on the rocks, and whispered in the moonlight. But not of love. In October, Ernest Loraine spoke to Moncton.

"I suppose there's no help for it," growled the father. "I've done what I can to keep her out of the world, but it seems she must live in it after all—and fill, I take it, a foremost position in its frivolities. As soon as December comes in, you may marry; not earlier," continued this arbitrary man. "November was the month in which poor Tom Reece met his death; I'll have you both respect that."

TOM CONLAN'S TRYSTE.

BY LETITIA MCCLINTOCK.

"SPAKE the words afther me, Mary; sure they're gey an' easy. Come now, darlin', this is what ye're to say, takin' my han', an' lookin' me in the face :

> "I gie to thee my plighted troth,
> My faith an' troth an' my right han'—
> That if you'll marry nae ither woman,
> Then I will marry nae ither man."

A couple who were poor, as their coarse dress testified, but rich in youth and love, stood close together on the chapel road, half-way between Massmount and the little village of Tamney, so engrossed with each other that they did not notice the groups of men in grey frieze, and women in scarlet homespun, who passed by.

It was in the dead of winter, and piercing winds swept across the Lough, causing the dark water to crash upon the shingle almost at their feet. Masses of heavy cloud hung low in the heavens, resting on the gigantic mountains on the further side of Mulroy; the boats that had conveyed part of the congregation to mass were dancing up and down at the end of the pier beyond the chapel, and their passengers were assembling in the graveyard, which bristled with rude, black wooden crosses. The chapel, a large, plain building, had in itself nothing to attract the eye, but its situation on a mount overhanging the Lough was picturesque in the extreme.

Women were keening, their piteous wail rising above the wind, and the bell was tolling, for a coffin was being carried into the graveyard. This was the reason that the horses were still fastened in a long row to rings in the wall; that the empty boats rocked at the pier, and that our young couple lingered in the distance.

The youth must needs accompany the party in the last boat, his home lying beyond the hills that loomed so darkly on the opposite side of the Lough. He heard the women keen and clap their hands; he heard the ominous tolling of the bell—but he heeded these sad sounds very little: his heart was warm with love, and his hopes brightened the gloomy landscape.

He was so young! It did not grieve him to think that he must live in an obscure corner of Donegal all his life—that he must work hard winter and summer, and that the best fare he could hope to earn would be oaten cake and buttermilk, potatoes and salt herring, with a morsel of bacon on Sundays and holidays. Perhaps he did not look forward at all, but was satisfied with the present, so long, at least, as Mary's plump hand lay in his own.

"Weel, dear, ye hanna said the words yet," said he, bending his handsome head to look under the hood of the cloak at her down-cast face. "Sure, Mary, you like me? The whole townland o' Tamney allows that we're sweethearts, an' it's true we ha' been speaking since we were that big," putting his hand on a level with Mary's shoulder.

"Ay, Tom, dear knows I like you!" replied the maiden, glancing at him with a charming mixture of affection and coquetry in her grey eyes. She knew she was bonnie in the estimation of the country youths, who always prefer her style of good looks, viz., red cheeks, black hair, and sturdy, well-rounded figure, to the most intellectual or refined beauty.

"Mick Scanlon and that Duggan boy has been trying to spake to me, an' I wouldna' look at ane o' them; but I'm time eneugh—sure I'm weel done for wi' the mistress: dinna be for marrying yet, Tom."

"God send me patience!" ejaculated the wooer: "that's what you've said any time these four year, when I fleeched you to fix the day. It's aye 'the mistress,' an' 'ye couldna' think on laving the mistress.' I know Mrs. McGarvey's gude, an' very gude, an' we've a right to respect her, for she showed you great gratitude, but she wadna' be agin your taking me at last an' at long."

"No, then, that's nae word o' a lie," said a cheerful voice, and Mrs. McGarvey joined them. She was a pleasant-looking middle-aged woman, whose comfortable dress told of easy circumstances.

Mary had never had any other mistress, or, indeed, any other mother. Exactly eighteen years previously, the good woman, going out to her cowhouse one evening, had discovered a small bundle lying near her threshold. A pitiful wail proceeded from the bundle, which she unfolded, and saw little Mary, so enfeebled by cold and hunger that she could scarcely cry. The widow carried the poor foundling into the kitchen, and fed and clothed it before her vast, warm chimney. Her youngest child was almost the same age as the stranger: she nursed them together. The child turned out grateful. She loved her mistress and the children dearly, and tried to serve them in every way. She worked indefatigably—milked the cows, made the butter, knitted the socks, and patched the well-worn garments of Joe and Willy, Ann and Matty.

She was ten years old when Joe went to America, and Mrs. McGarvey found it necessary to hire a lad to herd, and make himself otherwise useful on the farm. Tom Conlan, then a little fellow of twelve years old, was the son of a small farmer who lived across the water, almost opposite Massmount in a straight line, but a considerable distance away among the hills. Tom's father was glad to let one of his large family begin to earn wages, so the boy became Mrs. McGarvey's servant and Mary's companion. A dear friendship arose between the two children, which gradually, as the years went on, ripened into something more tender than friendship.

When Tom was eighteen he was summoned home to the farm across the water. One of his brothers was dead, the other gone to America, and he was required to assist his father in working the little farm. He then asked Mary to marry him, and in reply she said she loved him dearly, but could not think of leaving her mistress just yet. Over and over again, during the two following years, had the persevering suitor made his way to Tamney, to ask the same question, and to receive the same answer; but he was now resolved to make a last appeal to the young girl's affection, and should she remain obdurate, to threaten to break the net she had cast over him.

"You see, Mary, my father says we maun hae a woman in the house: there's twa pigs now, an' a big whean o' turkeys, forbye the hens to look after, an' we'er ain meat to mak' ready, an' he's aye threeping on me to get married. If I dinna bring a wife to the house, he'll hire a servant."

Mary was beginning her usual excuse, when Tom interrupted her indignantly: "If you say 'N-o' this time, Mary, I'll never ax you again. By the Blessed Virgin and all the saints——"

"Whisht, then, whisht!" cried Mrs. McGarvey, laying her hand on his arm, "Mary 'll no say thon foolish word. Where would she get a boy like yoursel'? Not in the townland o' Tamney, I'm thinking. An' I maun die some day an' lave her: she be to look out for a wee spot o' her ain then."

The kind woman turned from the lover to her dear foundling, and said, fondly, "Ay, dear, you ha' been a gude daughter to me since the day I found you a wee starved crathure at my door-stane, an' I know you'd stop wi' me if I said the word; but I dinna say it, Mary. You maun join the world (*i.e.*, marry) soon or syne: better soon nor syne! Tak' this decent boy, that likes you weel, an' has the snug place to tak' you till, an' my blessing go wi' you!"

With her grey eyes somewhat dimmed, Mary kissed her mistress, and then restored her hand to Tom's hearty clasp: "I spake the words now," she said:

> "I gie to thee my plighted troth,
> My faith an' troth an' my right han',—
> That if you'll marry nae ither woman,
> Then I will marry nae ither man."

"There it's for you. Now, yours to me!" Tom plighted his faith to her with earnestness.

"Dinna break it!" cried she, gaily; "dinna be slipping awa' before the wedding-day. He's plenty to say anent my promise, Mrs. McGarvey, but maybe it's himsel' will rue, an' be off to America," and she glanced laughingly, but with a well-satisfied expression, in the young farmer's handsome face.

Tom did not smile at her banter; he seemed too thoroughly in earnest to jest. "I strange very much that you'd be that foolitch, Mary. I'll be wi' you, as sure as that day dawns."

During their conversation the funeral service had been performed, and the boats had all set out from the pier. The rough country ponies had been unfastened from the rings in the wall, and, a man and woman upon each, were being ridden homeward as fast as their double burdens would admit; for the piercing wind had fallen, and the heavy clouds were coming down in snow.

"Come to dinner wi' us, an' we'll fix the day, an' notice his reverence, Father Dan," said Mrs. McGarvey. So Tom dined at Tamney, and before long everything was arranged. The wedding was to take place on the following Wednesday. The snow was still falling thickly, when Tom tore himself away, and, much against the advice of his friends, set out for the ferry. He declared that they had no reason to fear for him; that he knew the way well, and must certainly get home that evening, as he would have little enough time to prepare for his bride's fitting reception.

The snow was several feet in depth next morning, but notwithstanding outward gloom and cold, the preparations went on merrily. Mrs. McGarvey hired a fiddler: she unhooked her finest flitch of bacon from the beam before the kitchen fire: she ordered a piece of beef, and she sent her son to a shebeen house to bespeak a huge jar of poteen.

Wednesday morning arrived, and found a blithe stir in the farmhouse. The boys and girls, friends of the bride, who were to accompany her to chapel, were there in their Sunday dress. They had come singing and joking over the crisp snow, now so frozen as to afford pleasant walking; and as they looked round at Mrs. McGarvey's bountiful preparations, and complimented Mary upon her dress and her good looks, they began to wonder that the bridegroom did not appear, for the bridal train could not set out for Massmount until he came. So great had been the bustle all the morning that Mrs. McGarvey had forgotten to milk the cows at the usual hour; she now repaired to the cowhouse, with her gown tucked up, and carrying the piggin and milk-can. Poor Mary, a little annoyed by the remarks of the young people, found out her whereabouts, and followed her.

"I canna help stranging that Tom's no here yet," was her mistress's greeting.

"Ay, that's what they're all saying," replied the bride, letting a tear fall upon the fine white ribbons of her new bonnet.

"Dinna tak' on, dear," said Mrs. McGarvey, observing the signal of distress, "dinna tak' on, for he'll be here in a wee minute surely."

"There he is, coming to the byre," cried Mary, in a very different tone.

"Where, dear?" asked the mistress, looking up, bewildered.

"Why there—there in the doorway."

"I dinna see him; there's nobody there, Mary, darlin'."

"No, for he's just gone awa' to the house, an' he didna speak to

me," said Mary, half-puzzled, half-angry. "If that's the way wi' Tom, there's plenty of ither boys wad be proud——"

"Whisht, dear," interrupted Mrs. McGarvey, "we'll gae into the house an' hear what he has to say for himsel'."

Mary stood in the lively kitchen like one utterly lost in painful bewilderment.

"What is it, jewel?" asked her mistress.

"What ails you, Mary?" cried the guests, crowding round her.

"Tom was in thon corner amang ye all when I came in; what gars him hide fra me? I can tell him I'll no tak' it too weel," said Mary, wrapping her arms in her new shawl, since she had no apron to twist.

"Tom? Why, girl, he didna come in at all at all. You can search if you plaze, but we'll hold you Tom isna in this house," replied the young people with one voice.

"There again!" cried she. "There, standing at the dresser."

All followed the direction of her eyes, but saw nothing. Fear laid his chilly hand upon the company, and there was a dead silence until Mary drew a long breath, and sobbed, "He's gone now; the blessed saints preserve us! Something has happened to Tom." So saying she sank upon the creepie in the chimney corner, and cried bitterly.

A message was sent to the priest to tell him that there could be no wedding that day, and then the neighbours consulted what was to be done next. They were much frightened, but did not like to lose the good dinner, and it would be a sin to leave the jar of poteen undrunk; so they decided on staying to console the bride.

Just then steps came to the door, and Tom's father and uncle appeared. They came to ask if anything had been heard of Tom, for they had not seen him since the Sunday morning, when he set out for chapel, saying he meant to spend the day at Mrs. McGarvey's. They had not felt uneasy until Tuesday, thinking that he had probably been prevailed upon to remain at Tamney until the snow should cease to fall; but when Tuesday dawned brightly, and the ground was frozen hard, they began to wonder at his non-arrival.

The whole assembly spoke together, relating the events above described, and poor Mary continued to weep.

"He's met wi' an unfair death—my son's no more," said the father. "Come, Dan," (to his brother) "we maun raise the counthry an' mak' a search for him. God comfort you an' me baith, my lass!" And laying his horny hand on the poor girl's head, he departed with dejected steps.

The dinner was eaten, and the whiskey drunk, and the guests, in a merry condition, went off to a neighbour's barn, taking the fiddler with them. Mary put on her working dress, and helped her mistress to wash the dishes.

During the rest of the week Tom appeared to her once or twice a-

day: he never remained very long, not more than a minute or two, and continued to be invisible to others. The boatman declared he had rowed him across Moross Ferry on Sunday evening, and had watched him climb the mountain road, and disappear over the crest of the hill; but there all trace of him was lost, and enquiry was alike in vain.

On Saturday, however, a rapid thaw set in, and in a lonely part of the road where the snow had drifted, Tom's body was found. Whether he had succumbed to sudden illness, or feeling weary had sat down to rest and been overtaken with drowsiness, would never now be known. He had a decent wake and funeral, and was buried in Massmount with much keening, and cry of plover, and clanging of the bell, and it was hoped that his poor soul would now have rest.

But Mary pined away. Still in the glow of the evening fireside, in the byre, and in the field, he came to her, and to her only.

She put on her cloak one day, and went to consult his reverence, Father Dan.

"Does the appearance look angrily at you, my poor girl?" asked the good priest, when he had listened attentively to her story.

"Na, na, yer reverence, Tom couldna look angry at *me;* but whiles he looks dull like, an' whiles in a troubled way."

"There's something on his mind that's keeping him from his rest, Mary: it might be that it's the promise he made you that's troubling him. If you take my advice you'll release him from his troth. Here, take this book with a morsel of the blessed bread wrapped in the cover, and the next time you see him, hold the book out to him, and ask him to tell you what's on his mind. If he catches hold of the book he'll speak; but anyway you will see him no more."

Mary took Father Dan's advice. The next time Tom appeared, she held out the book, and said, "Tom, dear, for the love of God tell me what's keeping you frae your rest?"

The spectre moved slowly backwards while she continued to hold out the book, and his eyes were fixed anxiously upon her face.

"You couldna keep the promise, Tom, dear," she faltered, trembling with agitation. "I wish you could get to your rest! I release you frae your troth."

As she said the words a smile seemed to brighten Tom's face, and while she gazed upon him, the appearance gradually faded, and was seen no more. But Mary drooped and pined, and died within the year. There came a day in bleak November, when the Tamney women meeting one another, asked, "Have you heard that Mrs. McGarvey's Mary has just got to her rest?"

"Ay, neighbour: God send she has made a gude change the day!"

THE ARGOSY.

OCTOBER, 1880.

THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. CHARLES PLACKETT IS PUZZLED.

"MIND, Ella, you have promised to come to me in London during the autumn, and to stay for a fortnight at least," had been Mrs. Carlyon's last words to her niece when she was leaving Heron Dyke: and, in making the promise, Ella Winter had fully intended to fulfil it. But the autumn was drawing to a close, Christmas would be here before long, and the visit had not been paid. Circumstances had prevented it.

But in those circumstances there seemed to be a lull now; and Mrs. Carlyon took advantage of it. She wrote a pressing letter to Ella. The cold weather was setting in, she said; her cough was becoming troublesome, and she had nearly made up her mind to go to Hyères: but nothing would induce her to go anywhere until she had seen her niece again. By return of post Mrs. Carlyon received an answer. Ella would pay the visit at once. On the following day she and Maria Kettle, whom she begged leave to bring with her, would quit the Hall for Bayswater.

Change, as Miss Winter knew, would be good for Maria. It might not be amiss for herself. Truth to tell, Miss Winter had been more disturbed by her friend's positive assertion of having seen Katherine Keen, than she cared to acknowledge even to her own mind. Maria Kettle had a fund of practical good sense, she was not at all romantically inclined; and Ella could not pooh-pooh her account, strange though it might be, as she probably would have done that of an uneducated or superstitious person.

Maria's account did not stand alone: it was impossible for Miss Winter not to recall how strongly it was corroborated. She herself had never forgotten her visit to Katherine's room, when she found the

face of the looking-glass so mysteriously covered up. There had followed the positive assertions of the two maids, Ann and Martha, that they had seen Katherine—and both of them had known her well—looking down at them over the balusters of the gallery. After that, came Mrs. Carlyon's fright; although in her case no face had been seen, but only the presence of a mysterious something which had brushed past her in the dusk and vanished. Neither could Betsy Tucker's revelation, that she had heard footsteps in the corridor outside her bed-room on the night of the storm, and had seen the handle of her door turned, and the fright to the girl in consequence, be entirely ignored: for, after it came to Miss Winter's ears, she had made enquiries of her servants and could not learn that any one of them had been in the corridor that night. They had all been too much terrified by the storm, they declared, to quit their beds. Ella did not, would not, think much of this incident. The old house was full of strange noises, especially in stormy weather, and she herself, by giving way to her fancies, could readily have got into the way of believing that she heard footfalls and whispers and rustlings, for which she could not account, almost every night of her life.

But the strange assertion made by Maria Kettle was a very different matter; Ella could not help attaching more weight to it than to all that had gone before: and the extraordinary belief of poor Susan Keen, that her sister was alive and in the house, occurred unpleasantly to her mind. Could it be? Could it by any possibility be true that Katherine Keen was still alive, that she was hiding somewhere in the old Hall, and came out into the dark corridors on occasion to frighten people? Was it in very truth she herself, and not her spirit, that had been seen at different times? Ella's heart ached as it had never ached before. No, not even when the girl disappeared and could nowhere be found; though from that day life had never been quite the same to her. The dreadful uncertainty as to what had become of Katherine had added tenfold to the pain of losing her, and now, after the lapse of so long a time, it seemed as if the uncertainty would never be cleared up. But what if she had been alive all this time; alive, and close by?—What if she had never quitted the roof of the Hall? Ella Winter's good sense urged her to reject such a theory as utterly untenable, certain difficulties presenting themselves palpably before her; but it urged her equally to reject that other theory of supernatural visitations. Between the two she knew not what to think. That Katherine had really been seen the evidence seemed conclusive. But had she been seen in the flesh, or in the spirit?

When a problem is put before you, which you find it impossible to solve, however anxious to do so, it is sometimes wise to lay it by for a while and turn the attention to other things, trusting to Him and "the unforeseen" to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. Thus did Ella Winter in the present case. She was puzzled and

distressed; and was growing a little bit nervous besides. Appetite failed; the long dark nights oppressed her, sleep gave place to wakeful restlessness, and she began to be afraid of sleeping alone. Therefore it was with a sigh of relief that she answered Mrs. Carlyon's invitation; and for the first time in her life she was not sorry to lose sight of the chimneys of Heron Dyke as the carriage whirled her and Maria Kettle away to the station.

Mrs. Carlyon had a surprise in store for her niece, as Ella discovered on the second evening after her arrival in London. Knowing her aunt's fondness for company, but being herself in no humour to enjoy it, Ella had pleaded for no large parties during her stay; that they should dine quietly en famille, and spend rational evenings. To this Mrs. Carlyon had readily agreed, stipulating, however, that the rule should be relaxed in favour of two or three people who might be called friends of the family. "In short, my dear," Mrs. Carlyon had said, when talking of it the day of Ella's arrival, "I promise not to introduce you to a single stranger except one."

"Except one!" repeated Ella.

"Yes, except one. A very nice old gentleman who is between sixty and seventy years old. You won't surely object to *him!*"

Ella laughed. She thought she must not hold out against any gentleman of that age, but rather welcome his acquaintance.

But Miss Winter was very considerably taken aback when, on the following evening, her aunt led her up to a little, lean, finical-looking old man, who wore the attire of a by-gone age, a brown wig, a long bottle-green coat, and curiously fine-frilled cambric-linen, and introduced him: "Mr. Gilbert Denison of Nunham Priors."

For a moment or two Ella could find no word to say. She had unconsciously pictured Mr. Denison as a very truculent sort of individual; as what her uncle would have been with all the more disagreeable points of his character intensified; as a man who employed spies, and who would shrink from nothing in his endeavours to do his kinsman harm. Yet here before her she saw a very harmless-looking old gentleman indeed, with a puckered-up, comical, yet honest and kindly face, and dark, vivacious eyes that seemed brimming over with amusement at her evident discomfiture.

Mr. Denison took her hand with an old-world air of gallantry and touched it with his lips. "Enter the First Robber," he said, with one of his whimsical smiles. "I hope my ferocious appearance does not frighten you, young lady. You will get used to me better by-and-by, my dear. Why do you look so surprised? I cannot tell you how pleased I am to meet you."

He made room for her on the sofa by his side. "Say now, I am not the sort of looking person you expected to find."

Ella smiled charmingly. Somehow she had taken a great and sudden fancy to him. "I had always thought of you as being so different," she said.

"As an ogre, no doubt," he rejoined, with a comical nod. "I know. Poor Gilbert! he had his curious fancies, and one of them was to abuse me: I'm as sure of that as if I'd heard him. My dear, I cannot tell you how pleased I am to meet you. Confess now, that you had expected to see some dangerous kind of fellow in me: one that bites, eh?"

"No, indeed," returned Ella. "I am surprised because I had no expectation of seeing you."

"And you find me a worse hobgoblin than you imagined?"

"I do not find you one at all," she said, taking the place beside him.

"Well, well; a certain personage is said not to be so black as he is painted; let us hope that it will prove so in the present case. Ah! what a pity it is that Frank's not here to-night!" he added, abruptly.

"Your son, Mr. Denison?" asked Ella, her serious dark-blue eyes bent full upon him.

"Yes, my son; my will-o'-the-wisp, my ne'er-do-weel, the plague of my life," answered Mr. Denison. In his short, sharp sentences, and abrupt turns, Ella was put strongly in mind of her uncle.

"I should have been greatly pleased to meet him," she said. "Is he away from home?"

"Away from home!" exploded the old gentleman. "He's nearly always away from home. I never know to a thousand miles where to lay my finger on him. He might be a gipsy for restlessness. He is always gadding about from Dan to Beersheba. An incorrigible young fellow—a rolling stone that will never rest anywhere. I wish to goodness he would get married to some woman who knew how to tame him and make him settle down at home!"

Ella felt amused; her face showed it. Mr. Denison shook his head and frowned.

"Now, why couldn't Frank have married you, for instance?" he suddenly asked, after a brief pause.

This amused her more. "Dear Mr. Denison, I fear it would be altogether beyond my powers to tame so inveterate a roamer," she quietly said.

"Not at all—not at all. You are just the sort of woman to do it."

It seemed rather doubtful to Ella whether this ought to be taken as a compliment. "It would have been so satisfactory, you know, to have had all the property in a nutshell—yours and mine," added the old gentleman. "Not that Frank need covet money: I shall be able to leave him some. But Heron Dyke ought to have been his—after me: he is nearer to it than you are. My dear, you have too much good sense, as I can see, to take offence at an old man's crotchets, and I am speaking to you as friend speaks to friend."

"I hope you will always so speak to me," warmly interrupted Ella.

"So I wish Frank could have known you—and taken a fancy to

you, my dear. But I fear it is too late in the day to hope for anything so desirable. Frank never was particularly wise, and I have a sort of suspicion that what he would call his affections are engaged elsewhere: have thought it for some little time."

"Then I'm sure there can be no chance for me," cried Ella, merrily.

"Well, well; anything's better than his bringing over a black woman for a wife, and that's what I used to be afraid of at one time," continued Mr. Denison, nodding his head and his brown wig.

"I hope Frank will find his way back home in spring," he resumed, after a pause. "If you are in town about that time, Mrs. Carlyon and I must contrive to bring the pair of you together. There may be a chance yet. I don't suppose the young dog has forgotten how to make himself agreeable to the ladies, and he is considered not at all ill-looking—very much like what I was when younger."

This tried Ella's gravity a little. "As I think I said before, I shall be pleased to make your son's acquaintance," she said, demurely.

"But whether Frank comes home or not, my dear, I must have you down at Nunham in spring. You will find many things there that you have never seen before and will have little opportunity of seeing elsewhere. You are intelligent as well as sensible, and I feel sure that you will be interested."

Next to picking up a bargain in the auction rooms, nothing delighted Mr. Denison more than to secure an appreciative listener while he descanted on the rarity and value of some of his favourite curiosities; and this he found in Ella. Ella on her part was very glad to have met him. He was a man to esteem and like, despite his eccentricities: and she felt thankful to know that the breach in the family, which had existed so many years, was healed at last. Her face flushed as she recollected that if the fear, tormenting her latterly, had grounds, Heron Dyke was not hers, but Mr. Denison's.

She did not see him again during her stay in London, for he went away to Nunham Priors. Ella was by no means certain, had he remained, that she should not have imparted to him all her doubts and fears. He and she were alike honest, wishing always to act rightly.

Her own stay in London only extended to a week: she did not like to spare more time from home at present. The week passed pleasantly and quickly; and both she and Maria Kettle returned to the Hall in better health and spirits than they were in when they quitted it.

Gossip in remote hamlets and small country towns, more especially if the subject of it be some well-known personage, grows and spreads with a rapidity unknown to the rankest tropical weed, and Nullington was no exception to the rule. It had now become matter of common talk in the town, that there was something mysterious and unexplained with regard to Squire Denison's death. How or whence

such an idea originated, or what the mysterious something might be, people did not care to ask : and if they did there was nobody to answer. Facts that are only half known, or that are wildly guessed at, have always more fascination for ordinary minds than uncompromising truths that stand boldly out in the light of day, and which anyone can examine for themselves.

The Nullingtonians seized on the rumour with avidity, and one may be sure that it suffered nothing from loss or diminution in its transit from mouth to mouth. It was not long in reaching the ears of Nixon, the agent whom Mr. Plackett had formerly employed to report to him respecting the state of Mr. Denison's health, and the general progress of matters at the Hall. Nixon had been away from Nullington for a time, possibly prosecuting enquiries elsewhere, and these rumours greeted him on his return. Putting aside any pecuniary benefit he might gain, Nixon was naturally a man of prying and inquisitive disposition; nothing pleased him better than worming out the secrets of other people. He went about the town asking guarded questions of this person and the other, trying to put the various fragments of gossip together and trace them to their fountain-head. Altogether, he contrived to make out something like a coherent whole: upon which he favoured the London firm, Messrs. Plackett, Plackett and Rex, with a long and confidential letter.

The letter brought down Mr. Charles Plackett, Nixon meeting him by appointment at the railway station. The two had some private conversation together.

"What we cannot understand in your report is this one item," observed Mr. Charles Plackett: "that Miss Winter herself suspects some fraud has been at work, and is as anxious to have matters investigated as we could be."

"I assure you, sir, I believe it to be so," affirmed Nixon. "My information on this point came from a sure source."

"Well, I intend to go to see her," said Mr. Charles Plackett.

Nixon opened his eyes. "To go to see her, sir! What, at Heron Dyke?"

"Yes. Why not? It is the only step I can take: and, whether it brings forth fruit or not, I shall at any rate see how the land lies with regard to herself. If she is, as you think, anxious for the investigation, she is a good and honourable young lady; that's all I can say."

Mr. Charles Plackett took a fly and drove over to Heron Dyke. He sent in his card to Miss Winter, and was at once admitted. Ella was alone. Maria Kettle had returned to the Vicarage, and Mrs. Toynbee was not yet back from London. Ella knew that the Placketts were Mr. Denison's solicitors, and she supposed this gentleman had come to bring her some message from him. That idea however, was at once dispelled.

"I am come here this morning, Miss Winter, upon rather a

curious errand," began Mr. Plackett in his cheerful, chirruping way. "But before going any farther, it may be as well to say that I am come without the knowledge of my esteemed client, Mr. Denison, of Nunham Priors. In fact I am adopting a most unusual course with a lawyer; I am venturing to intrude upon you entirely on my own account."

Miss Winter bowed. "I shall be pleased to hear anything that you may have to communicate," she said frankly.

Mr. Plackett paused. "I am somewhat non-plussed in what way to begin," he confessed, with a smile.

"A difficulty, I should imagine, that does not often arise with gentlemen of your profession," observed Ella, courteously.

The little lawyer laughed. "I believe you are not far wrong there, Miss Winter. Perhaps my best plan will be to plunge at once in medias res. I may say, then, that some disquieting rumours have reached our ears—and when I say 'ours,' in this instance I mean my own—having reference to certain events which took place in this house during your absence abroad. The events I allude to, are the illness and death of the late Mr. Denison. What we have heard would almost lead us to imagine that deception of some kind, if not fraud itself, was at work in the case: and—and——"

He paused. Ella waited.

"Frankly speaking, Miss Winter, I have heard a report that these rumours have reached yourself; and I am here to ask you—but pray do not answer the question unless you feel fully at liberty to do so—whether that is a fact?"

"Yes, it is," she freely answered. "I have heard the rumours."

"Ah! Just so. Thank you very much for your frankness. I presume, however, that you attach very little importance to them?"

"On the contrary, I attach very considerable importance to them. I do not say they are true; far from it; on the other hand, I do not know but they may be. The doubt renders me very uneasy."

"Really now! I'm sure there are not many young ladies like you, for truth and candour. But—pardon my presumption—may I ask whether you have been able to trace the rumours to any foundation? Perhaps you have not tried to do so?"

"I have tried," replied Ella. "I have used every effort to track them back to their original origin; though it is not, of course, much effort that lies in my power to make."

"And the result, madam—if I may dare to ask it?"

"There is no result. None. I cannot discover whether they are worthy of belief, or whether they are fabrications. That certain unnecessary precautions were observed during my late uncle's illness—green baize doors put up to shield him from the household; friends never admitted to him; a mysterious kind of professional nurse had down from London to attend him—is true. But those about him, Dr. Jago and old Aaron Stone, explain all this away with perfect plausibility."

Charles Plackett mused. "No, of course not; there was not much you could do," he remarked, apparently speaking to himself.

"An individual, whom I will not name, warned me that Heron Dyke was not legally mine," resumed Miss Winter. "I was startled, as you may suppose; but I could elicit nothing further. Nothing but what I tell you—that I held Heron Dyke by fraud."

"Dear me!"

"I did not know whether to believe it, or not; I do not know now. I carried the tale to Mr. Daventry, and I spoke also to my uncle's old friend, the Vicar of Nullington. Neither of them attached the smallest credibility to the charge; they almost ridiculed it. Mr. Daventry says that nothing whatever could deprive me of Heron Dyke, save my uncle's not having lived to see his seventieth birthday. And several persons saw him and conversed with him subsequent to that date."

"I did, for one," remarked Mr. Charles Plackett. "Well, I don't see that there's much to be done. You say you will not give up the name of the individual who ——"

"No," she interrupted. "And if I did give it, the end would not be answered. He—he—is no longer here; he could not be questioned."

"It is one of the most puzzling questions I ever had to do with, madam. Heron Dyke is a fine property. You would not like to give it up."

"I would give it up to-day if I were sure it were Mr. Denison's. I wish I was sure—one way or the other. If it is not mine it must be his, and he would have every right to it. Does he know of this doubt?"

"Not a word."

"I met him a short while ago, when I was in London. He came to my aunt's, Mrs. Carlyon. I took a great fancy to him."

Mr. Charles Plackett smiled. "And he took a fancy to a certain young lady—if I may say as much. He called at our office the next day, before returning to Nunham Priors. What do you think he said, Miss Winter?—that he did not so much regret the loss of Heron Dyke now, when he saw what charming hands held it."

Ella rather shrank from the compliment. "I and my interests are as nothing, Mr. Plackett, in comparison with arriving at the truth. If fraud and deception have been at work, it is to the advantage of everyone that they should be exposed and frustrated."

Mr. Plackett gazed on her glowing face admiringly. "If everyone thought and acted like you, my dear young lady," he said, "I am afraid that the occupation of us poor lawyers would soon become a thing of the past."

"That would be a catastrophe indeed," responded Ella, with a laugh.

A little more conversation ensued. One word leading to another,

Ella confided to him what the servant Eliza had told her—that she had penetrated beyond the green baize doors, on one lucky occasion when they were left unguarded, and had found the Squire's rooms empty: Mr. Denison was nowhere to be seen in them. Nay, more; the rooms and the bed appeared to be unoccupied.

Mr. Plackett, though evidently much surprised, could still make nothing of it. He sat fingering his grey hair—a habit of his when in thought. Ella finished by enquiring what more she could do.

"I really fail to see at present that there is anything more you can do," he answered. "And I am quite sure that not one person in a thousand would do as much as you have already done."

"Are you sure it was my uncle you saw," she enquired, speaking on the moment's impulse, "when you were here two days after his birthday?"

Mr. Charles Plackett paused, revolving the question. "I thought I was sure," he said. "Although I had only seen Mr. Denison twice before, and that some years previously, he certainly seemed to me to be the same individual, naturally much wasted and changed by illness. One thing I perfectly remembered: the beautiful cat's-eye ring he wore. Yes, I think it could have been no other than Mr. Denison—and no other temper than his. You heard, probably, of the passion he went into?"

"And threw away his beef-tea, and broke the cup. Truly I cannot imagine anyone doing that, save my uncle."

"I must say that I have not been so thoroughly puzzled by any case for a long while," remarked the lawyer, as he rose to depart.

And, puzzled, Mr. Plackett was destined to remain; at least for some time yet to come. If Miss Winter had looked to benefit by his advice, she was disappointed. He had no advice of any consequence to offer. He could only thank her again for her frankness, and say that he would consult with his client, Mr. Denison, and, with her permission, write to her in the course of a few days. Then, declining refreshments, he left the Hall, much more disquieted in his mind than when he had arrived at it.

But within an hour of the lawyer's departure, Miss Winter had something else to think about than his promise to write to her. There came a telegram from Edward Conroy. He had reached London, and hoped to be at Heron Dyke on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FRUITLESS ERRAND.

Matters with Philip Cleeve were not progressing quite to his satisfaction. Upon going down to breakfast one morning he was surprised to find his mother down before him. A notable thing; for Lady Cleeve was seldom able to rise early. Philip kissed her fondly.

"This is a rare treat, mother," he said. "It seems like old times come back again."

She pressed his hand and smiled tenderly in his bright, handsome face. "I want to have a little talk with you before you go out, Philip. I sat up for you last night, but you came home late."

"Ah, yes, to be sure," replied Philip hurriedly, very conscious that he was too often late. "I went round to George Winstone's lodgings, and the time slipped away"

"So long as you were enjoying yourself, dear, it was quite right," answered Lady Cleeve. In her eyes Philip could do no wrong.

"And what is it, mother, that you have to say to me?" he asked, carelessly taking up a piece of toast and playing with the butter knife. He was growing vaguely uneasy already.

"I met Mr. Tiplady yesterday," began Lady Cleeve: and Philip put down the knife without using it. His heart sank within him. "I had to call in at Wharton's about my broken spectacles, and there I found Mr. Tiplady having a new key fitted to his watch. We came away together and I took the opportunity of reminding him of his promise, given so long ago, to take you into partnership. He had by no means forgotten it, he said, and was willing that the question should be brought to a practical issue as soon as I pleased. Of course you will not take a full share at present: he intimated that: only a small one. But it will be a very great thing for you, Philip; and you can afford to wait."

Philip made no comment upon this. Lady Cleeve continued.

"I thanked him for his generosity. It *is* generous of him," she added, "to admit you with only a poor thousand pounds——"

"He does not want money," interrupted Philip, resentfully. "Tiplady is as rich as can be—and he has nobody to come after him."

"He is none the less generous; many men in his position would not take in a partner under several thousands of pounds," returned Lady Cleeve. "What I wanted to tell you was this, dear—that he will probably speak to you to-day. There need not be any further delay. Mr. Daventry will draw up the deed of partnership, and nothing will then remain but for you to pay over the money."

Philip rose abruptly and pushed back his chair. Then he turned and gazed through the window to hide his emotion. "You have not done breakfast, dear," cried Lady Cleeve in dismay. "You have eaten scarcely anything."

"I have done very well indeed, thank you, mother," he answered from the window. "I have one of my headaches this morning."

"Poor boy! the news is a delightful surprise to him," thought Lady Cleeve. "Philip is just as sensitive as he used to be."

Philip got away from his mother and the house as quickly as possible, walking along the road like a man in a dream. The thousand pounds, or the greater portion of what was left of it, had gone out of his hands to Captain Lennox. Or, rather, to that blessed

company that the Captain was just now so eager over. Early though it was, Philip must see him; and he bent his steps towards The Lilacs.

As he went along, the thought struck him that he had not seen Lennox about very lately. The last time Philip called, he was told by the man-servant that the Captain had gone out for the day, and Mrs. Ducie was ill with a cold.

It was a servant-maid who answered Philip's nervous ring at the house this morning. Her master was in London, she said.

"In London!" exclaimed Philip. "When did he go?"

"Rather more than a week ago, I think, sir," was the girl's answer.

"I want to see Captain Lennox particularly," rejoined Philip.

"I daresay he will be back soon now, sir. I've not heard that he means to make a long stay this time."

Philip pondered. "Can I see Mrs. Ducie? Ask her to pardon the early hour and see me for a minute—if she will be so kind."

"Mrs. Ducie can't see you now, sir," dissented the maid; "she is not up yet. Her cold keeps very bad, and she hardly comes down at all."

"Can you take a message to her?"

"Oh yes, sir, I can do that. Her breakfast is just gone up."

"Give my kind regards to Mrs. Ducie, and ask her if she will tell me when the Captain will be at home."

The maid ran upstairs and soon came down with the return message. Mrs. Ducie's very kind regards to Mr. Cleeve, and she had not the least notion when. Not for a few days, she thought: as his last letter, received yesterday, said nothing about it.

Philip turned away from The Lilacs as wise as he had gone, hardly heeding which way he took, save that it was from the office instead of to it. Knowing what he knew, he asked himself how it was possible for him to face Tiplady's enquiries? Out of the twelve hundred pounds given him by his mother so short a time ago, to be held by him as a sacred trust, only a balance of eighty-five pounds remained in the bank.

It is true that if Captain Lennox's prognostications respecting the splendid future of the Hermandad Silver Mining Company should prove to be correct, Philip Cleeve would more than recoup himself in the whole sum which he was now deficient. When Lennox first bought the shares for him, he had assured Philip that no further calls would be made, but despite this assurance two heavy calls had since had to be met, for "expenses"; calls which had gone far towards exhausting Philip's remaining resources. Captain Lennox had made no secret of his own disappointment and annoyance, but he was as sanguine as ever of ultimate success, and he had put it so strongly to Philip whether it would not be wiser to double his venture, rather than forfeit the sum already invested, that the latter had agreed to meet the calls, although not without a sadly misgiving heart.

As matters, however, had now turned out, he must find Lennox at once and show him the necessity for the shares being disposed of without delay. In that, Philip anticipated no difficulty, as the shares were so much sought after. Or else he must get Captain Lennox to go with him to Lady Cleeve and Mr. Tiplady and explain to them how well the money was invested, and persuade them that, in view of the splendid profits sure to accrue before long, it would be folly to sell out just now. Evidently the first thing to be done was to find Captain Lennox.

A little comforted in mind by the fact of having arrived at some sort of a decision, he made his way with hesitating steps to the office. It was a relief to him to find that Mr. Tiplady had started by an early train for Norwich, and would not be back till night. This gave Philip breathing-time, for which he was thankful.

Getting his dinner away, he spent the evening with some friends; and was careful not to reach home until sure his mother would be in bed. That night, on his sleepless pillow, he decided on his plans.

Early in the morning, before Lady Cleeve could be downstairs, Philip snatched a hasty breakfast and went out. He left a note for his mother, in which he told her that he had to go suddenly to London on business, and she was not to be surprised or alarmed if he did not return till the evening of the following day. Then he despatched a nearly identical note to Mr. Tiplady, which Philip thought a clever hit. Lady Cleeve would take it that he was away on business connected with the office; while Mr. Tiplady would be sure to imagine that it was on some affairs of his mother he was despatched to London. Making his way to the railway-station, Philip caught a passing train, and was whirled away to the metropolis.

When in London, Captain Lennox generally stayed at his favourite hotel, the "Piazza," in Covent Garden; this Philip knew, and he drove there direct from the station. The urbane individual who was fetched to answer his enquiries, and who had more of the look of a church dignitary than of a head waiter, told Philip that, although Captain Lennox was, as he surmised, frequently at the hotel, he had not been there lately. For the past six weeks, or so, they had not seen him, neither were they in a position to afford any information as to his whereabouts. All that Philip could do was to dissemble his disappointment and go.

This seemed to Philip a worse check than the one at The Lilacs the previous morning. Halting in the street, he bethought himself what he could do—where look for Lennox. Only one place presented itself to his mind: and that was the office of the Hermandad Company. It was situate in the City, New Broad Street. If he did not see the Captain there, he should at least hear where he was to be found. But Philip thought he most likely should see him.

Half an hour's drive in a hansom cab took him to Broad Street; and to the proper number, at which the cabman readily drew up.

But Philip could not so easily find the office he was in search of. On a large board outside the doorway were painted up the names of some thirty or forty different firms or companies, each of them occupying offices in the same building. Philip at length discovered the name he wanted, the last but two on the list, and was directed to mount to the third floor.

On the third floor—and a very dingy, unwholesome-smelling floor it was, for the building was an old one—he found the Hermandad office. Philip's imagination had led him to fancy the offices of so important a company as rather grand and great: this did not look like it. The door was shut, and he could not open it. He knocked again and again, but without response. While wondering at all this, and standing to think what he could do next, an opposite door was opened, and a sharp-looking youth came out.

"Nobody at home here apparently," remarked Philip, pointing to the door. "What's the best time to find them in?"

"Don't know," answered the youth, twisting his mouth impudently. "Nobody been here for a fortnight, save a boy to fetch letters."

"Nobody been here for a fortnight!" exclaimed Philip.

"Nobody else. Not likely. Silver-mining company, hey! Oh, Jemima!"

Philip could have wrung the boy's neck.

"Be you one of the green uns?" continued he. "Lots of 'em come. No use, though; not a bit; only have to go away again. Fishy—awful! Next akin to smashing up."

With these strange remarks, the boy shot off, sliding down the banisters; leaving Philip feeling sick at heart.

The Hermandad mine had evidently failed, and its company come to grief. A suspicion stole over Philip that Captain Lennox might be more hardly hit than the world suspected, and was keeping out of the way.

What to do, he knew not. Was there anything that he could do next, except go back home and reveal everything to his mother? He had tasted nothing all day, save his morsel of breakfast; and, although he had no appetite, he felt so faint that he knew he must take refreshment of some kind if he did not wish his strength to break down. Turning into the nearest restaurant, he called for a glass of wine, and tried to study the carte; but the names of the different dishes conveyed no definite ideas to his mind. "Bring me anything you have ready," he said wearily to the waiter; "a basin of soup will do." And then he lay back in his chair and shut his eyes.

The waiter had just put some soup before him, and was about to take off the cover, when Philip started to his feet with an exclamation. "By heavens! I never thought of that!" Staring around, he sat down in a little confusion: for the moment he had forgotten where he was. The waiter looked askance at him, to discover whether he was mad.

But the fact was that Philip had had what seemed to him nothing less than a flash of inspiration. He had suddenly remembered that there was such a person as Freddy Bootle in existence. Why not go to him in his trouble? Freddy was rich, and as kind-hearted as he was rich; he was not the sort of man to allow a friend to sink for want of a helping hand: in any case Philip felt sure of his sympathy and advice. Eating his soup with some degree of relish, he paid, and drove off in a hansom to Mr. Bootle's rooms in Bond Street.

Philip felt desperate. Especially at the thought of having to reveal his folly to his mother, and her consequent distress. That seemed worse than the loss of the money itself. Never had his conduct, his almost criminal weakness, presented itself to him in so odious a light as now. Had the money been absolutely his own, had it been bequeathed to him by will or come to him by any mode other than that by which it had come, he could have borne to lose it with comparative equanimity. But when he called to mind the fact that the sum which it had taken him so short a time to dissipate was the accumulation of long years of patient pinching and hoarding on the part of his mother, that it represented many a self-denied luxury, many a harmless pleasure ruthlessly sacrificed, and that all this had been done to ensure the advancement in life of his worthless self, he was almost ready to think that the sooner the world were rid of him, the better for everyone concerned. How could he ever bear to face again that mother and her thoughtful love?—how witness her pained face when he should declare his folly? *Must* she be told? If only Freddy Bootle would give him a help in this strait, what a different man he would be in time to come!

It was a break in the bitterness of his thoughts when the cab drew up at Mr. Bootle's lodgings. Philip was not kept long in suspense. An elderly man answered his knock and ring. The elderly man was sorry to say that Mr. Bootle was in Rome at present, and was not expected back till after Christmas.

"Was there ever so unlucky a wretch as I?" murmured Philip to himself as he turned, more sick at heart than ever, from the door. His one and only hope had failed him.

The short winter day was drawing to a close, and the lamps were being lighted as he turned into Piccadilly. He wandered about aimlessly for some time, into this street and that, stopping now and again to stare into a shop window, or at the unending procession of vehicles in the busier streets, and then wandering on again without seeming to see anything.

All at once he was startled into the most vivid life. Coming towards him, but yet a little distance away, and with several of the hurrying crowd between them, he saw Captain Lennox. The light from a shop-window shone full on his pale, strongly-marked features, and there could be no mistake. Philip sprang forward eagerly, and the sudden movement seemed to have the effect of attracting the

Captain's glance towards him. For one brief moment there came, or Philip thought there did, a gleam of recognition into those steel-blue eyes; the next, they and their owner were alike hidden by the intervening crowd.

Philip Cleeve shouldered his way along more roughly than he had ever done before: in a few seconds he was standing on the exact spot where he had seen Lennox, but that individual was no longer visible. He had vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed him up. Philip stared about him, like a man suddenly moonstruck, unheedful of the jostling and elbowing of the passers-by. Up the street and down the street he gazed, but no Captain Lennox was to be seen. What *could* have become of him?

"Surely he need not hide himself from me!" thought Philip. "We are both in the same boat."

Looking about for the Captain in a sort of amazed doubt, Philip saw that he stood close before the open door of a large drapery emporium. Was it possible that Lennox had taken refuge inside? No sooner did the thought flash across Philip's mind, than he marched boldly into the shop. There were several people there, customers and assistants, but no signs of the man he was seeking. A civil assistant came up, to ask what they could serve him with, and Philip frankly avowed the cause of his entering. A friend—a gentleman—had suddenly disappeared before he could reach him: he could only think he had entered the shop.

"Very possibly," the young man replied: and as he was not to be seen in it now, he might have passed through it, and left by the opposite door.

Then Philip saw that the shop was what might be called a double one; that is to say, that it had a door and window opening into another street. Had Lennox walked in at one door and out at the other, without stopping to purchase anything? It was the conclusion Philip came to. He recognised the uselessness of further pursuit of Lennox. It was clear that the Captain had purposely evaded meeting him: the reason for such evasion was not far to seek. Philip purchased a pair of gloves, and then pursued his aimless way, weary and downcast.

Where should he go, and what should he do? He knew not, and he did not greatly care. He was there alone in the huge wilderness of London, without one living creature that knew him or that cared for him. It was not too late to take the last train home; but he had a fixed repugnance against taking it. Why hasten to meet his mother's reproachful eyes, and Mr. Tiplady's incisive questionings? And yet, if he stayed the night in London, he must face those ordeals on the morrow. What could the morrow bring him, more than to-day had brought? Still he wandered aimlessly on, through one mile of street after another, his thoughts brimming over with bitterness at the recollection of all his mad folly. What now to

him but mad folly seemed those nights at The Lilacs when, flushed with wine, he had staked his mother's savings on the turn of a card, and had seen the gold, hoarded by her for his sake, swept almost contemptuously into the pockets of such men as Camberley and Lennox, who, the moment his back was turned, probably sneered at him as a jay parading in peacock's plumes? What now to him, but folly, seemed the spells which he had allowed to be woven round him by the witcheries of Margaret Ducie? In his heart of hearts he had never really cared for her, however much at the time he might fancy that he had—not even when her hold over him had seemed the strongest. And now, when he looked back, she assumed in his thoughts the semblance of one of those specious phantoms, lovely to look upon, but who seem sent only to lure weak-minded fools to destruction.

Poor Philip! from the burning thoughts within him rose next another phantom. Nothing specious about *her*, but pure and saint-like as a lily steeped in dew—the image of Maria Kettle. Had he indeed lost her? He knew now how much she was to him; that he had never loved but her.

Yes, she was surely lost to him for ever. He would have no home to take her to, and no prospect of winning a position for himself: a life of commonplace drudgery, of separation from the only woman he had ever loved, or could love, was all that now lay before him.

Still onward, ever onward, went he in his pain. "Oh, my darling, you might have saved me if you would!" he cried. "You might, you might!"

Still onward, ever onward. From tower and steeple the hours were clanged out one after another, but he heeded them not. It was close upon midnight when he found himself standing on one of the great bridges that span the Thames. Far away into the blackness on either side of him the great city spread itself out, seeming to his imagination, at that hour, like some huge monster that was slowly settling itself down to sleep. Silently below him ran the sullen river, stealthily carrying its dread secrets down to the sea. Here and there a few feeble lamps mocked the darkness.

Philip Cleeve stood and gazed over the parapet into the black-flowing stream below. How many unhappy men might not have flung off life's bitter burden at that very spot? How easy the process! A leap, a plunge, a minute's brief struggle, and then the deep, deep sleep that knows no waking. Could it be really wrong to throw away that which was no longer of value, which had become a burden? The question kept coming back to him, like a thing that bears a fascination. He could hear the faint lapping of the tide against the piers; and, the longer he gazed down at the water, the more it seemed to whisper to him of peace and rest, and a quiet ending to all his troubles. Why not quit a world in which there no longer seemed a place for him? Why not?

Ah, why? Philip knew he was not honest in asking it.

Suddenly there arose a sound behind him, as of the quick patter of feet. Before Philip had time to interfere, before he well knew what had happened, a female figure, scantily clad, and with hair flying to the winds, had sprung on one of the stone seats, and thence on to the parapet. For one brief instant she stood thus, dimly outlined against the starlit sky; then, with hands clasped above her head, and a low, wild cry, she sprang headlong to her death.

A little crowd gathered, as if by magic, where there had seemed to be scarcely anyone a minute before. Faint at heart, dizzy with the sudden horror of the thing, Philip Cleeve fell back from the rest. What were his little troubles compared with those which must have driven that poor desperate creature to destruction? The black, sullen river had suddenly become hateful to him, and he made haste to leave it far behind.

CHAPTER XXX.

COUNSEL TAKEN WITH MR. MEATH.

Anxious revelations, were those, which Ella Winter had to pour into the ears of her lover! For he was by her side now, not to leave her for long together again. The cloud, which during the last few months had been lowering over her life, was lightened at last; the burdens which had been growing too heavy for her to bear, were lifted now upon shoulders stronger and more able to sustain them. Suspense and distress lay around still; but, compared with what had been, she walked in sunshine, gladness in her eyes and in her heart, and Love's sweet whispers in her ears.

Edward Conroy took up his quarters at the hotel in Nullington, whence he walked over frequently to Heron Dyke. Mrs. Toynbee, back at the Hall now, was not slow to perceive the state of affairs. She wrote to her friend and patroness, Lady Dimsdale, that she was afraid she should have to look out for another home before long: for, unless she was much mistaken, Miss Winter was about to marry. The gentleman, she was good enough to say, was a very pleasant, nice-mannered person, named Conroy; but it seemed to her a great pity that Miss Conroy had not chosen someone more nearly her equal in the social scale.

The weather was mild and open for the time of year, and Conroy and Ella were much out of doors. During these rambles the conversation turned upon the past affairs—and many a consultation took place as to what could be done to bring all that was dark to light.

There was so much of it—taken as a whole. So many points that presented their own difficulties. The doubt as to whether Ella was the legal inheritor of Heron Dyke; the disappearance of Katherine Keen, and the superstition that arose out of it; the

murder of the ill fated Hubert Stone, and the robbery of the jewels: all these were matters of grave perplexity, upon which no light had yet been thrown.

Edward Conroy was puzzled by it all—just as Mr. Charles Plackett had been. He seemed never to tire of questioning Ella on this point and on that, and made notes sometimes of her answers: but he was none the nearer seeing his way to any elucidation.

"Have you fully calculated what the result to yourself will be if it is discovered that fraud has been at work?" he said to her, when they had been speaking of the doubt as to Heron Dyke.

"Fully," replied Ella.

"Home, money, and lands pertaining to the estate—all will go from you."

"I know it. But would you have me act otherwise than as I have acted?—have kept the doubt to myself?"

"Not for worlds."

"I think—I think, Edward, you are as anxious to discover the truth as I am."

"More so."

"Although it be against your own interest. After all, it may be that you will have a penniless wife, compared with the rich one you expected."

"So much the better. She will owe all the more to me, and the world cannot then say that I have married her for her fortune."

"As if you cared for anything the world might choose to say!"—and to this remark Mr. Conroy slightly laughed in answer.

He had not been more than a day or two at Heron Dyke, when Miss Winter put into his hands the malachite and gold sleeve-link which Betsy Tucker had sent her by Mrs. Keen. Betsy was recovering slowly from her illness; all danger was over.

"I should like to see the young woman, and question her," observed he, turning the link about in his hand, as he examined it critically.

"There will be no difficulty," said Ella. "Betsy has been out for one airing, and she can come here. Why do you look at the trinket so attentively? Have you ever seen it before?"

"Never. But it is one of rather remarkable workmanship."

A fly brought Betsy Tucker to the Hall. There, in the presence of Mr. Conroy, she was requested to point out the place, as nearly as she could recollect it, where she had picked up the link. It was within a few yards of the spot where Hubert Stone was found. The girl had nothing more to tell, and sobbed out her contrition for her fault. Miss Winter was everything that was kind; but Mr. Conroy, speaking sternly, warned her not to disclose a word to anyone about what she had found, or there was no telling what the consequences to herself might be. The girl, with many tears, promised faithfully to keep the secret, and seemed only too glad to be let off so easily.

The sleeve-link had not belonged, so far as could be ascertained, to Hubert: whether it had, or had not, been the property of his assailant, was another matter. If so, it must have been wrenched from his sleeve during the scuffle; and, as Edward Conroy shrewdly saw, it proved that the assailant was a gentleman. No man in an inferior station would be likely to wear such a link.

"I shall run up to town to-morrow," said Edward Conroy to Ella, when the interview was over and they were alone.

"To town! For anything in particular?"

"And take this malachite-and-gold trinket with me," he added. "If this link can be traced out to its owner, it may lead to some discoveries."

Mr. Conroy accordingly went to London. This, it will be noted, was within two or three days of his first arrival at Heron Dyke. He returned from London the following day, having put matters, together with the sleeve-stud, as he informed Miss Winter, into efficient hands. Taking up his abode, as before, at Nullington, he passed a good portion of his days at Heron Dyke.

Months before this, Conroy had heard tell of the strange disappearance of Katherine Keen; but only now was he made aware that the Hall was supposed to be haunted by her presence. He listened to the story of how the two maids, whom Aaron Stone had afterwards discharged in consequence, had positively asserted that they saw her looking down at them from the gallery; he heard the story of Mrs. Carlyon's fright, and of Maria Kettle's strange experience not long ago. The evidence, taken collectively, was too strong to be ignored, despite his inclination to take that course.

"I wish the ghost would favour me with a visit!" he heartily exclaimed. "I would do my best to put its unsubstantiality to the proof."

"I know not which would be the worst: to find that Katherine is in the Hall in the flesh—that she is not dead, as her poor sister believes, or that it is haunted by her spirit," breathed Miss Winter in answer.

"Have you any objection to my exploring this north wing?" he enquired, after a pause of thought.

"Not the least. I should be thankful for you to do so."

Mr. Conroy lost no time. That same afternoon he ascended to the north wing; and did not come down until he had visited every nook and corner of it. Room after room, passage after passage, closet after closet, he examined, and satisfied himself that no person or thing was hidden in them. Taking the precaution to lock the doors, he brought the keys away with him.

"Troubled spirits never walk by daylight, I believe," remarked Mrs. Toynbee to him. She had never relished the superstitious tales. "We must look for them by dark, Mr. Conroy, if at all."

"That is just what I mean to do," replied Conroy.

And accordingly he took to rambling about the north wing in the dusk of evening, in the hope that, one time or another, he should encounter the supposed ghost. He would sit for half an hour at a time, silent and immovable, in the darkest corner of the gallery, with no company but the mice busy at work behind the wainscot. "I may have to wait for weeks," he said to Ella, "but if there be any ghost at all, I shall be sure to see it by-and-by."

One evening when dusk was creeping on, a certain Mr. Meath arrived at the Hall, a telegram to Conroy having given previous notice that he might be expected; and he was at once admitted.

The stranger was the chief of a well-known enquiry-office in London: it was to him that Conroy had confided the sleeve-link. He was a tall, lanky, angular-boned man of sixty, with dyed hair and a slow, deferential smile. He always dressed in black, as being the most becoming wear for a gentleman, and that he invariably looked the latter Mr. Meath was fully persuaded; whereas he had in fact more of the air of a prosperous undertaker than of anything else. In his peculiar profession he was known to be a shrewd and practised man.

He was shown into one of the smaller drawing-rooms. No sooner had Edward Conroy entered it and sat down, than Mr. Meath arose and satisfied himself that the door was really shut, and that no one was hidden behind the curtains.

"Excuse these little precautions, sir," he said with his deferential smile, "but I have more than once had occasion to prove the value of them."

"Oh, no doubt. Your telegram stated that you had some news for me, Mr. Meath," added Conroy.

"I have some news for you, sir—news which may prove of importance. Before proceeding any further in the matter, I thought it would be as well to let you know the result already arrived at, and take your instructions with regard to future proceedings."

Hitching his chair nearer the table, Mr. Meath drew forth a little box from one of his pockets. "Here is the sleeve-link," he said, as he opened the box. "You have doubtless observed, sir, that it is of rather a curious and uncommon pattern?"

"Yes. If you remember, I said so when I saw you in town."

"On examining this under a powerful glass," continued Mr. Meath, "I presently detected what I felt nearly sure could be nothing less than the private mark of the firm that had manufactured it. I took the link to the foreman of a large firm of jewellers with whom I had had some transactions previously, and he at once confirmed my view. 'There could be no doubt it was the manufacturers' mark,' he said. The question was—who were the manufacturers?"

"He did not know?"

"He did not know, sir. But he thought he might be able to find out, if I would leave the link with him for a couple of days. Which I agreed to."

"And did he?" asked Mr. Conroy.

The private-enquiry officer solemnly nodded. "At the end of the couple of days he sent for me, sir, and told me he had discovered the private mark to be that of Messrs. Wooler and Wooler of Piccadilly. An eminent firm—as perhaps you know, Mr. Conroy."

"I have heard the name."

"To Messrs. Wooler I accordingly went, disclosed as much of the affair to them as was necessary, and stated what I wanted to know. They were most obliging, and at once promised to consult their books. Yesterday they sent for me. They had found from their books that the sleeve-link I now hold in my hand was one of a pair which, together with various other articles of which they were good enough to furnish me with a list and description, had been supplied by them about four years ago to a certain Major Piper, then living at Cheltenham. May I ask you, sir, whether you happen to be acquainted with any such gentleman; or whether he is known in this neighbourhood?" concluded the speaker, after making a brief pause.

"I am not. And I cannot tell you whether he is known in the neighbourhood: I am nearly a stranger to it myself. But I can enquire of the ladies here," added Conroy, rising to quit the room.

He returned, saying that Miss Winter did not know anyone of the name. Mrs. Toynbee did. She had met a Major Piper once or twice in society; but not lately; and she believed him to be a highly respectable man.

"I have the Major's address at Cheltenham in my pocket-book," said Meath; "or rather what was his address four years ago. It is quite possible that he may have gone away from the town, or have died in the interim."

"Very possible indeed," answered Conroy.

"It rests with you to decide whether you think it worth while to proceed any farther in the case. If this Major Piper be still at Cheltenham, there will not be any difficulty in finding him: if he is not, there may be, especially should it turn out that he is what we call a shady individual. Difficulty, and also expense."

"Having gone so far, I certainly think we ought to go farther," answered Conroy. "Are you not of that opinion yourself?"

"I am, sir: but, as I say, it is for you to decide. We have got hold of a clue of some sort. Whether it will lead us up to what we want to know, time and perseverance only can prove."

"I certainly think Major Piper ought to be found. As to expense, I gave you carte-blanche for that when I was in London."

"Then I will proceed in the matter without delay," said Mr. Meath, rising. "And I hope, sir, I shall shortly have something further to report to you."

"But you will take something before you go away," said Conroy, ringing the bell.

Putting down the hat he had taken up, Mr. Meath acknowledged that he would be glad of something. A tray of refreshments was brought in; and presently he departed as silently as he had come.

A few days elapsed, during a portion of which Edward Conroy was away upon his own affairs. Close upon his return, Mr. Meath again made his way to Heron Dyke, calling, as before, in the dusk of the evening. Miss Winter had grown anxious as to the result of enquiries; and she told Edward Conroy that she should like to be present during the interview, if there were no objection.

There was no objection, Conroy said, and took her into the room with him. They all sat down together.

"I have been more successful than I ventured to anticipate," began Mr. Meath in his slow way—which Edward Conroy somewhat impatiently interrupted.

"Then you have found Major Piper?"

"I have found Major Piper, sir: I had very little difficulty in finding him. He is not at Cheltenham now; he is at Bath; though Cheltenham is his general place of residence. Major Piper is a retired Indian officer, well known and respected."

And the account of the interview may possibly read less complicated if related as it took place, instead of as repeated by Mr. Meath.

He saw Major Piper at his lodgings at Bath: a little man, who had one of his gouty feet swathed in flannel. Mr. Meath disclosed his business, and put the malachite-and-gold sleeve-link into his hands. The Major recognised it at once, and smiled with pleasure.

"Ah," said he, "I don't forget this. It formed one out of a dozen, or so, small articles of value which disappeared from my dressing-case at Cheltenham under mysterious circumstances. It was about—yes—about four years ago. I had bought the jewellery in London, intending it as a present to my nephew on his twenty-first birthday. However, the very evening before it was to have been sent off, the things disappeared from my dressing-case."

"Had you any suspicions as to who could have taken them?" enquired Mr. Meath.

"No, I was utterly nonplussed: and am so still when I think of it," answered the Major. "I had some friends that night at my rooms, just enough to make up a couple of rubbers, all gentlemen of position who were more or less known to me. Early in the evening, when telling them what I had bought for my nephew, my man Tompkins brought in the dressing-case at my desire, and passed round the jewellery for the different guests to look at. After that, Tompkins took it away and put it back where he had found it—in one of the deep drawers in my dressing-table, but without locking it up; not, indeed, seeing any necessity for doing so. He——"

"I presume, sir, your man was trustworthy?" interrupted the listener.

"Perfectly so. Tompkins had been with me for years in India

and is with me still. The loss troubled him, I think, more than it troubled me. Not, of course, that I cared to lose the things."

"Did any of the gentlemen enter your dressing-room during the evening?"

"Dear me, yes. It adjoined the sitting-room, and some of them were in and out. Candles were alight in it. Well, the next day, when the small case of jewellery came to be looked for it was nowhere to be found; nor, so far as I am aware, has anything been heard of it from that day to this."

"Sir," said Mr. Meath, "was it possible that any person could have had access to your dressing-room in the course of the evening, while you and your visitors were busy at the card-table?"

"No, that could not be," answered Major Piper. "To get access to the dressing-room they must have passed through the room where we sat; or else through a little ante-room on the other side the dressing-room, and Tompkins sat in the ante-room the whole evening long."

"Did you put the matter into the hands of the police?" enquired Mr. Meath.

"I had it enquired into privately by the police," replied the Major, "but I would not allow it to be made public. On the one hand it was impossible for me to suspect my servant; while on the other I did not choose to have it thought that I suspected any of my guests. It was a most disagreeable affair and worried me a good deal at the time. I was always hoping that something might turn up: but I suppose it has grown too late in the day to expect it now."

"I don't know that," said Mr. Meath. "This sleeve-link may prove the connecting link between your robbery and the still darker crime recently enacted at Heron Dyke: that is, it may lead to the discovery of both perpetrators, who may prove to have been one and the same man. Will you, sir, oblige me with the names of the gentlemen, so far as your memory serves, who made up your card-party on the night of the loss."

"There can be no objection to my doing that," said the Major; "and I hope with all my heart it may prove of use to you. I can tell you every name; for the night and its doings lie with unfaded impression on my memory."

Mr. Meath took down the names from his dictation, as well as the date when the robbery occurred. They all appeared to be men of standing; most of them of undeniable connections.

"Two of them, Dr. Backhouse and my old comrade, Sir Marcus Gunn, are dead," remarked the Major. "Of the others, two are living in Cheltenham; one lives abroad, attaché to an embassy; and one or two have passed out of my knowledge. They may be living anywhere: the world is wide."

"Will you point out those one or two to me," asked Mr. Meath—and Major Piper did so.

Such was the substance of the narrative Mr. Meath had now to relate at Heron Dyke. "I have brought the list of names with me," he added to Mr. Conroy when he finished. "Perhaps, sir, you and this lady will be good enough to look at it, and to tell me whether any one of the gentlemen is known in this neighbourhood."

Edward Conroy took the paper handed to him, and ran his eyes over the list, but without the least expectation of finding on it any name that he should recognise. Mr. Meath watched him with a kind of suppressed eagerness.

"'Admiral Tamberlin,'" read out Conroy in a muttered tone, "'Dr. Backhouse, Sir Gunton Cleeve'"—and before speaking the next name, he came to a dead standstill. Mr. Meath, the suppressed eagerness still in his eyes, smiled grimly to himself when he saw Conroy's start of surprise.

For a moment Conroy stared at the name, which he had not yet spoken, in speechless amazement. Then, recovering himself, he passed the paper to Miss Winter without a word, simply pointing with his forefinger to the name.

"Oh, impossible!" exclaimed Ella, her tone full of fright, her face turning white as death.

"Madam," interposed Mr. Meath, detecting her emotion, "it does not follow that because a gentleman may have been wearing these sleeve-links now, he was the one to steal them from Major Piper. The thief may have sold them, and he bought them legitimately."

"But, see you not, sir," cried Ella, grasping the case mentally, "that if this gentleman made one of the Major's guests that evening, and it was he who lost the link in the struggle here with Hubert Stone——"

She paused, unable to continue. Mr. Meath slowly nodded his head. "Yes, madam, I see the difficulties—if this gentleman is indeed known here——"

"Known here! why, he lives here," interrupted Ella. "Oh, Edward, it cannot, cannot be!"

"My dear, you go to Mrs. Toynbee," whispered her lover. "Say nothing to her. Leave me to deal with this."

"But, Edward—surely you will not accuse him!" she cried aloud.

"Of course I will not. It may be that this dreadful suspicion can be cleared away. Mr. Meath"—looking at that able man—"must make it his business to ascertain first of all, if he can, whether grounds for accusing him exist." And, opening the door for her to pass out, Conroy resumed his seat at the table.

Again Mr. Meath left the Hall as quietly as he had entered it. Edward Conroy joined the ladies, and found that not a word had been spoken to Mrs. Toynbee. He stayed to dine with them.

The winter afternoon had deepened to a still, close evening, when Mr. Conroy once more took his way to the north wing—for his

watchings there had not ceased—before quitting the Hall for the night. The incident of the afternoon had disturbed him greatly, while Miss Winter felt thoroughly upset. His thoughts were bent upon it as he passed silently through the passages: of Katherine Keen this night he never once thought. Perambulating the still and deserted corridors, his mind utterly preoccupied, he came last of all to the gallery. He knew every nook and corner of the wing by this time, and could find his way about it in the dark almost as readily as by daylight. In one corner of the gallery was an old oak chair, and on this he now sat down, almost without being aware of what he did. Meath's news was working in his brain, bringing him disquiet and perplexity.

He might have sat for five minutes or for twenty, he could not tell which afterwards, when the deathlike silence that brooded over the place was suddenly broken. All at once a low, sweet, wailing voice spoke through the darkness—a woman's voice, with tears in it: "Oh! why don't you come to me? How much longer must I wait?"

Only those few words, and then utter silence again. Conroy started to his feet with an exclamation of surprise. He had been so immersed in his sombre meditations, he was so utterly taken unawares, that he was altogether at a loss to know from which direction the voice had come, whether from the right hand or the left, whether from above or below. He stood without moving for what seemed to him a number of minutes, hoping to hear the voice again, or the sound of footsteps, or some other token of a living presence; but in vain he listened. He heard a far-away door clash faintly in another wing of the house, but nothing more. He was alone with the silence and the darkness.

By-and-by, when convinced that his remaining there longer would be useless, he went slowly down the dark, shallow stairs which led below. It would never do to tell Ella in what manner he had been disturbed. She had enough of other troubles to occupy her thoughts at present.

None the less was Edward Conroy determined to fathom the mystery of the north wing; if it were possible for man to fathom it.

(*To be continued.*)

A MURDERED POET.

By C. E. Meetkerke.

WHEN the Archbishop of Paris, delicately and with all due deference, reminded Talleyrand, upon his death-bed, that he had taken several false and contradictory oaths, Talleyrand replied that all good Frenchmen had taken as many of the same quality *for the glory of France.*

We are not told if the reply was considered to be satisfactory: but it was given at a time when many original notions were adopted, and when, much as the glory of France might have been enhanced by lying and faithbreaking, it was still more exalted by a costlier outlay: the lavish expenditure of valuable lives. Bloodshed set the seal upon every new move and ratified every fresh engagement. Laws were inaugurated with massacres, and the price of bread was settled at the point of the bayonet. Humanity ceased to be of any weight in the scales, and the touching truism of the patriot Van de Weyer: "If I were dead I should have to be replaced," was the conclusion reached with comfortable alacrity by the heads of factions.

"If a man died, he had to be replaced." Neither was there any want of readiness on the part of the victims; they rushed recklessly upon destruction and fell with all the warmth of fanaticism; like martyrs in a heroic cause: "they fell and wished to fall."

But there was one notable fact concerning the July days of 1830. When the list of the dead was made out, hardly a single well-known name appeared upon it. The movement had been so sudden, so spontaneous, so exclusively the work of the masses, that no time had been allowed to assemble the greater men whose co-operation would have been certain: many who properly belonged to it did not appear till the revolution was nearly over; those who were already distinguished, it was said, arrived too late; those who were not, retired too soon. Amongst the latter was George Farcy, poet and scientist. He retired too soon, with a bullet in his chest, from the ranks of the combatants—from the ranks of thoughtful, industrious, well-educated men. Time had not yet matured him or given him his place: and it was only his personal friends who looked forward to his future and knew that he could have served his country in a much more satisfactory manner than by an inglorious and unprofitable death.

They erected a monument upon the spot where he fell: they painted portraits of him: they published his poems; and one, more appreciative than the rest, thought tenderly and sadly how it would have been with him if he had lived; what he would have thought; what he would have felt: coming to the conclusion that he had done well to die.

George Farcy was born in Paris, in 1800, of a poor and obscure family. His parents dying whilst he was yet a child, he was put to school, and as soon as he was sufficiently advanced, to the College of Louis le Grand.

In 1819 he was entered at the Ecole Normale, and remained there until the institution was abolished in 1822.

For these years all that was known of the orphan boy was that he was patient, steady, and industrious: he studied much; distinguished himself in the classes and gained the good opinion of all who came in contact with him; but he was alone in the world, and no one knew what he felt or suffered, enjoyed or desired. An extreme and unalterable reserve, a great timidity and sensitiveness of nature, rendered intimacy with him very difficult, and never altogether thorough and absolute. He never spoke of himself, of his views, his wishes, his ambitions. Independent of sympathy and support, he verified the saying that great men, like great mountains, are often crowned with icebergs. Fate may seem to have been cruel to him, but by rendering him a solitary, she made him a self-reliant man. Unshackled, unspoilt, untamed by the debilitating sweetnesses of family ties, he had strengthened himself with the strength that comes of freedom, and won an energy only to be learned by isolation.

When the Ecole Normale was broken up, Farcy took up his abode in the Rue d'Enfer, near to his old preceptor, Victor Cousin, steadily following up his philosophical studies. To resolve the questions: What can I know? What ought I to do? For what may I hope? was supposed to be his vocation. His friends assumed that his taste, his education, his natural talents lay all in this direction, and that he was born to follow up the spiritualistic tendencies which had emanated from the Ecole Normale.

He was a lover and a writer of poetry, but very doubtful of his own genius. "I could not bear it to be said of my verses: 'They are not so bad after all,'" he wrote to M. de Viguier; which was, however, just what was said when the poems were published. They were thought to be wanting in brilliancy, in freshness, in harmony; but the feeling was honest and deep, and the impression produced, that of a mournful and resigned stoicism reviewing life regretfully but still without complaint. Time, and a less self-contained and solitary life, might doubtless have imbued them with a different tone; and if it be true that a man cannot make himself a poet, it is equally so that if poetry be born in a man it will bloom out of him, however long and systematically it may be repressed. George Farcy was educated to be a philosopher, persuaded himself to become a politician; but if he had not thrown away his life—(for the glory of France)—it is very possible that science and politics would have ultimately made way for poetry, and that he would have emancipated himself from all that was merely a growth, and held in the long run to that which is an inspiration.

It would appear that it was no easier fifty years ago than it is now, no easier in France than in England, for a young man to obtain fortune and independence by his own sheer energy and talent. Honest and liberal-minded servants were not acceptable in government offices, and could not hope for the most modest employment.

Farcy was offered a situation as tutor in a Russian family of distinction, and he accepted it. But though it was the best possible opportunity of making himself acquainted with a hitherto unknown world—the world of fashion, pleasure, and luxury; although it was the very opportunity he had desired, his shy and untamed nature suffered severely under the fetters. He rebelled against the want of equality and freedom of the position, and described himself with an exaggerated bitterness as smarting under galling and dishonourable chains.

Returning to literature as a means of subsistence, he undertook a translation of Dugald Stewart's "Elements of Philosophy," to which he appended an able exposition of various difficult and delicate psychological questions. It was said of him by his associates that he was a Scotchman in logic and in looks, and that no more minute description could be given of him: fair, light-haired and blue-eyed, he was reserved by nature; short and concise in conversation; acute and accurate in habits of thought.

Having at last succeeded in procuring the sinews of war, he emancipated himself from social and literary bondage, and betook himself, free and untrammelled, to the land of scholars, lovers, and poets—to Italy. The grand desolation of Rome, its sublime silence—its memories—its ruins—penetrated and absorbed him. He could hardly tear himself away from its vast melancholy plains, its gloomy villas lost in the darkness of their pines and cypresses; but to Rome modern he would have nothing to say. "I am not at all struck dumb," he wrote, "either with St. Peter's, or the Pope, or the cardinals, or the ceremonies of the Holy Week, the Easter benediction always excepted."

Passing on to Naples, a new life opened before him. Ischia—the isles, the bay, the sea, were all a dream of enchantment. He would remain for days and days together hidden in orange groves with Petrarch, André Chénier, and Byron, sometimes composing verses of his own, which he would send off to Paris, beseeching from his friends a frank and honest criticism.

Passing through Florence, he saw Lamartine, and having no letter of introduction, he sent some verses with a note, which he described afterwards in writing to M. Viguier as being as cavalier as possible, lest the great poet should take him for a pedant or a sycophant. Lamartine welcomed him cordially, and encouraged him to pursue his poetical career. In 1827 he returned to Paris on his way to Brazil without communicating with anybody.

He had engaged, with little wisdom, in an enterprise from which he

hoped to realise a considerable fortune, but was even at the moment of undertaking it so little certain of success that he was afraid of advice and remonstrance.

The scheme failed, and in a year's time he returned to France, and all that was ever known about his absence was the fact that it had brought him nothing but disappointment—that he had been taken in and cheated. He was very reserved in his communications on the subject, it being his constant maxim, "If you wish your secret to remain a secret never confide it, for why should another be more discreet than you are? Your own confidence is always an example and an excuse."

He had left his country a boy; he returned to it a man. The somewhat harsh and positive tone which is the sign of youth and ignorance, had given place to a calmer, wider, more benevolent manner of thought. He was more tolerant, more ready to hear, to examine, to be convinced. The picture of a man who has received a liberal education, as drawn by Professor Huxley, serves well for that of Farcy. He had been so trained in his youth that his body was the ready servant of his will to do with ease and pleasure all that as a mechanism it is capable of. His intellect was a clear, cold, logic-engine, with all its parts of equal strength, and in smooth working order, ready, like a steam-engine, to be turned to any kind of work, and spin the gossamers as well as forge the anchors of the mind. He had learned to love all beauty, whether of nature or art, to hate all vileness, and to respect others as himself.

In a journal found after his death were traced some sad reflections on the solitariness of his existence, which give some description of his habits of reverie.

"I can now," he wrote, "pass the whole of a fine night alone, walking about and dreaming, without remembering that night is the time for rest, without being the least desirous of following the example of those around. It is a state of progress upon which I congratulate myself. I believe that years, in taking from me more and more the need of sleep, will augment this power which seems to me most favourable for those who desire to occupy the mind. Thought comes to me at such moments not only as a truth but also as a sentiment. There is a calm, a sweetness, a sadness in all that is around which penetrates the senses; and this sweetness, this sadness falls truly drop by drop upon the heart like the freshness of evening. I know nothing that would be so sweet as to wander at that hour with a beloved woman."

But this was just the happiness to which Farcy never attained: no loving life had ever taken possession of his own, or taught him how better to exist than in speculations, contemplations, and dreams. The political world was divided and subdivided into coteries, salons, and schools. Farcy looked on, a calm, almost an indifferent, spectator. In poetry and in art, he sought for the beautiful, the perfect, the

true—for that which came direct from the heart and went straight to it. In politics he was disposed to take the liberal side, the cause of the people, believing in the dogma of human perfectibility.

He lived peaceably and apart, a simple uneventful life, and lost in metaphysical and moral meditations whilst the laws were being promulgated which led to revolution. The last thoughts written in his journal appear to have been dictated by a presentiment: "Everyone," he wrote, "is an artist charged to carve his own likeness on his tomb, and every act of his life imprints one of the lines which compose it.

"Nature alone decides if it should be the statue of a man in youth, maturity, or old age. All that we have to do is to take care that it should be beautiful and worthy of all eyes."

At the beginning of those frantic July days, as soon as he heard that Paris was in arms, he left his happy solitude in the valley of Aulnay, and hastened back to the Rue d'Enfer. He was advised to prudence, but replied, "Who should be sacrificed but the men who have neither wife nor child?" The movement in the streets was still uncertain. The French nation was ready to rise against the Court party and the Roman Catholic priesthood, but they had neither capable leaders nor any decided line of action. The Royal troops occupied the Champs Elysées, and were firing down the Rue de Rohan when Farcy entered it with an attacking party. He was one of the first to fall, struck by a bullet in the middle of the chest. M. Littré, at whose feet he fell, had him carried a few steps into a wine-shop, and a young surgeon who was at hand did all he could to save him, but in vain. He was perfectly calm and collected, and when they asked him if there were anyone he wished to see, he answered "No one." Once only, when a greater tumult was heard in the streets, he expressed a fear that the people might be worsted; re-assured upon that point, he closed his eyes and never spoke again. His body was conveyed to Père la Chaise, and buried there with the rest of the victims of July, 1830. And upon a memorial stone erected on the place where he fell was written:—

A la Mémoire de George Farcy:
Il adorait
La France, la Poésie, et la Philosophie.
Que la patrie conserve son nom.

JACK LAYBOURNE'S INHERITANCE.

By Joyce Darrell, Author of "That Charming Count."

I.

My sister Kate and I were—well, over twenty, and we disposed of ample means. We availed ourselves of these two circumstances to do a great deal of travelling about the Continent. One early summer, on our way through Switzerland, from Italy to England, we decided to make acquaintance with the beautiful Zimmer Thal. For this purpose we engaged a carriage to drive us from Thun to Aigle, and on the particular afternoon when my story opens, we were already within six hours' journey from the latter place.

The scenery had been lovely, but now it was—as Monsieur de Talleyrand would have said—*pas si bien*. We had reached a high point among the green Alps, where these presented somewhat bare and rugged crests, worn quite bald in parts from the recent slipping of the snow. Small patches of this still lay about in these first days of July, and the stillness of the lofty places was broken and made musical by the thousand babbling brooklets sent down the hillsides by the ice still melting far above. The few châlets dotted about were deserted, for the inhabitants had migrated to mow the first hay lower down in the valley. In these higher regions the grass of the sloping pastures wore the fresh delicious verdure of earliest summer, and was thickly gemmed with wild flowers, whose fragrance floated upwards like incense through the pure air.

Our immediate destination was the Hôtel du Sceptre, a châlet-pension perched on a high table-land, and whose sole *raison d'être* was the fact that it made a convenient halting-place between Château d'Œu and Sepey.

"Have you quite decided to go on to Aigle, to-morrow?" asked Kate, after a pause of somewhat drowsy contemplation. My sister was placid and a little lazy. The consequence was that the administrative portion of our common life fell upon me.

"Of course!" I said. "What shall we delay for? If Sepey were not so stuffy, I should have gone on there this evening, for I believe this place we are going to stop at offers no attractions. It's one of the cheap pensions affected by British widows and old maids."

"Well! we are British old maids ourselves," replied my sister, in her comfortable monotone. Finding nothing to say in answer to this that would not have sounded fatuous, I held my peace. And presently the carriage stopped. The Hôtel du Sceptre was exactly what I expected it to be. It summed up the whole region in itself. There were half-a-dozen poor châlets near it, but they had nothing to do

with it, and were not numerous enough to constitute a separate neighbourhood.

A short but level drive led up to the pension, which was surrounded by a garden, where the lilacs were just fading and the laburnums just coming into bloom. An obsequious landlord and a ruddy-cheeked maid or two came running out to greet us, and several smooth, discreet-looking heads, unmistakeably English, appeared at the windows and inspected us.

Half-an-hour or so after our arrival the tea-bell rang; for, of course, as in all places of the kind, the dinner-hour was early. On descending, we found the usual long table, covered with cold meat, mountain strawberries, whipped cream and a line of teapots. Established at the same were many ladies and a few men. The fragments of conversation which reached our ears had reference chiefly to the various excursions undertaken that afternoon. Kate and I as new-comers were relegated to the foot of the table. Here I found myself beside a lively old maid who seemed to think herself very fortunate in having somebody new to talk to.

"We have been almost the same party for three weeks," she remarked, "and I for one began to despair of seeing a fresh face. I daresay you wonder what attraction the place has in any way; but the truth is it is supposed to be good for the nerves, and people come here to make what the natives call the 'cure.'"

"And are all these people nervous invalids?" I asked in some alarm.

"No," said my companion with a smile, "some—as, for instance, myself—are rich in nothing *but* health. Have you never remarked that there is a class of English people who seem to have been created solely to pass their summers in the Canton de Vaud? That little widow there opposite to us—the one with the two daughters—knows every pension, I do believe, for thirty miles around, and she declares that this is the most endurable of them all."

"How lovely her daughters are!" I exclaimed, a new direction given to my thoughts by the winsome faces thus suddenly pointed out to me.

"Tell her that and you will win her heart!" said my loquacious companion. "Her pride in her children is intense, though she does her best to hide it. She is one of your inscrutable North of Ireland folk, full of queer, warped pride and warm affections, and a bristling reserve. If you praise her girls, she looks a trifle drier and stonier, and takes an early opportunity of rendering you some service."

"You seem to be a student of human nature," I observed, amused.

"My gossip shocks you, perhaps?" quickly asked Miss Lowndes, for that, as I afterwards discovered, was her name.

"By no means!" I answered. (Had I been frank, reader, I should have replied that I adored gossip!) "On the contrary, I should

like you to tell me something more. Who is the foreign gentleman on the other side of you, who appears so attentive to the most striking of the beauties?"

"Oh, that," said my neighbour, lowering her voice and looking a little grave, "is a Russian prince. His name is Sobranowski. He is a married man. His wife is not returned yet from her walk. Yes—as you say—he is *very* attentive. People have sometimes even talked. But occasionally he transfers his attentions for a day or two to the youngest daughter, the little dark one. I don't think *she* cares about them much. But the other is a regular flirt. Pretty creature! It is perhaps not to be wondered at. But her mother ought to make her draw the line at married men—don't you think?"

"Certainly," I replied briefly, but a little coldly. I liked gossip, but was careful always to object to scandal.

"That is what *I* say," continued Miss Lowndes with renewed briskness, apparently taking my curt answer for cordial assent. "But she is one of those mothers who think that their children have a birthright of impeccability in great things—is Mrs. Laybourne."

"Laybourne!" I exclaimed. "Did you say Laybourne?"

"I did," answered Miss Lowndes, with obvious interest in my eagerness.

"And," I continued, "the youngest daughter—what is her Christian name? Do you happen to know?"

"Her Christian name is Rita."

"Kate!" I said, turning rapidly to my sister, "do you see that girl opposite?"

"The brilliant blonde who rattles away at such a rate in French?" asked Kate.

"No—no!" said I, impatiently, "the smaller one with big, black eyes and wavy chestnut hair, and a pale, sweet, rather wistful face."

"What a poetical description!" replied Kate, with a good-humoured sarcasm that was habitual to her. "Yes! I see the young lady. Have you constructed one of your usual elephants concerning her? She looks a little grave. Have you made up your mind that she writes sonnets? Supposing she should turn out to be only dyspeptic!"

"You are very witty," said I, majestically. "It must be the mountain air. I have heard of its having a surprising effect on some constitutions."

"Ah! You must be taken seriously, I see," said my sister. "So —— who is the girl?"

"Jack Laybourne's cousin."

Kate sat suddenly bolt upright in her chair, as if she had been pulled erect with a string. "*The* cousin?" she asked breathlessly.

I nodded.

"Good gracious! What a pity Jack is not here," was her next remark in a voice of genuine regret.

"There are railways and an international post," I said oracularly. "Before the week is out I shall have managed to get Jack here."

"You are a wonderful woman," said Kate. "I believe you could work even a greater miracle than to inveigle a British officer into a pension where there are not half a dozen men and the dinner is at one."

"The only thing is, we shall have to stay here ourselves until Jack has proposed," I remarked, thoughtfully.

"Then," answered Kate in a resigned tone, "we must devoutly hope that he will be quick about it."

You must know, reader, that Jack Laybourne was, so to speak, a protégé of ours. Not that he was poor, for he was in actual receipt of two thousand a-year, and potential possessor of many thousands more: nor weak, for he was six-feet-one, and broad-shouldered and bronzed by tropic suns: nor feckless, for he was a gallant, dashing soldier, and a fine fellow in every way. But, notwithstanding all this, we considered ourselves to some extent responsible for his destiny, and we were very anxious to prevent his spoiling it.

His father, Edward Laybourne, a man of dogged and sturdy Northumbrian type, was the son of a working man, who by toil and energy had risen to independence and even wealth. For a long time Edward was his only child, the others having died in infancy.

At last, when Edward was fifteen, another son was born and christened Charles; but it was such a puny, sickly creature as to cause recurrent surprise to everybody as the weeks lengthened into months and found it still alive. "Everybody" said, however, that it would never get through its teething; and its father was so convinced of the truth of this prophecy, that in speaking of his family he invariably ignored the baby altogether, and, finally, died quite suddenly without making the smallest provision for it. Barring a none too liberal annuity to his wife, the whole of his property was bequeathed to Edward, in whose future energy and business talents he expressed the utmost faith.

That this faith was amply justified later circumstances proved, for on the foundation of his father's wealth Edward, by the age of forty, had built up a mighty fortune; and in his neighbourhood (which was also ours) he enjoyed the fame and influence of a social potentate. The idea of associating his brother in his riches never seems to have occurred to him for a moment. He sent the boy to an expensive school, bought him later a commission in a crack regiment, and made him a munificent allowance.

Charles Laybourne, on his side, appeared quite contented with his condition of financial dependence, and perfect harmony reigned between the brothers until one fatal year when they fell in love with the same woman. This was Alice Kynge, the daughter of an ancient but impoverished house, whose family had persuaded her to engage herself to the wealthy manufacturer. If not happy, she was resigned, until she and Charles discovered that a warmer feeling than fraternal

affection had grown up between them. Loyalty and honour might have been eventually triumphant over passion had not the secret of the lovers been betrayed to Edward by an anonymous letter, informing him of the one clandestine meeting which they had allowed themselves. A scene of the most violent description was the result; and Edward so overwhelmed the offenders with insult and abuse as to render futile the subsequent attempts of friends to bring about a reconciliation. Charles, deprived henceforth of all pecuniary assistance from his brother, married Alice, and exchanged into a regiment under orders for the West Indies. Here his young wife succumbed in a very short time to the climate, and he, after three years or so of lonely misery, married the widow of a brother-officer, with a tiny daughter and the modicum of an income. And five years before my meeting with his daughter Rita he had died—poor to the last and the victim of a lingering disease.

Edward had also married. His angry vanity was soothed, at the time of Alice's desertion, by the astute attentions of a lady, no longer young, and allied to the noble family from which the bride-elect sprang. The marriage was not happy, and Edward, disappointed and embittered, conceived a vehement hatred against the "pampered aristocrats" whom he considered incapable of appreciating him. On the death of his wife he severed himself completely from her kindred, and jealously debarred them from all intercourse with his boy. He became a violent Radical, and lost no opportunity of defending every incendiary social theory of which the application could not interfere with his personal well-being. His great subject was the selfishness of family claims. Thunders of applause greeted him at working-men's meetings, when he announced that he could easily conceive himself "disinheriting the mere individual, his son, in the interest of the glorious entity—Humanity."

We were the Laybournes' nearest neighbours, and during his mother's lifetime we had always seen a great deal of Jack. As a curly-headed little boy, in the days when Kate and I were still in the school-room, he was the constant playfellow of certain infant nephews and nieces of ours. Jack was a stalwart young officer, still in the first pride of his epaulets, and one of these same nieces, Lily, was a pretty, delicate girl of eighteen when the old playfellows met once more, and, unfortunately—fell in love! The situation would perhaps be more accurately described by saying that Lily fell in love with Jack, and the young man, shy and secretly ardent, gave himself up very willingly to be worshipped. He had been starved of affection all his life, poor fellow! for his mother had cared little for anybody but herself, and his father, uneasily conscious, I suppose, of a certain superiority of nature in the lad, carped at him perpetually as a "fine gentleman." It may easily be imagined what was Edward Laybourne's rage on hearing that his son had engaged himself to the penniless scion of an aristocratic stock. He raved like a madman—with the

only effect, of course, of causing Jack to think that Lily was absolutely indispensable to his happiness.

In the midst of all this our niece fell ill; was pronounced, alas! consumptive, and ordered to the Riviera for the winter. Kate, Jack and I went with her. But we had not been at San Remo many weeks when a telegram summoned Jack to the death-bed of his father. The old man was already unconscious when his son arrived, and he died a few hours afterwards. On his will being opened, it was found that his last act had been of a nature difficult to define—whether as one of malignant caprice or of tardy and imperfect justice. A codicil offered three alternatives to Jack. To marry Lily and see all his father's money go to various associations for the regeneration of society. To renounce Lily and enjoy a life-interest of £2,000 a-year in the property, of which the bulk should be applied to the foundation of a Working-Man's University. Or, finally, at the end of those ten years, or at any time within that period, to marry his cousin Rita Laybourne and enter into full possession of the paternal estate.

This astounding will amazed the country side. Several people sought to explain it by senile dementia, and advised Jack to dispute it. But this he refused to do, seeing nothing in the document inconsistent with his father's character.

As soon as the will was read, Jack, of course, wrote to Lily declaring his immutable resolve to marry her if she would consent to share his poverty. A secret theory of mine concerning my niece's character gained confirmation from her mode of receiving the news of her lover's fortunes. For two days she was quite silent on the subject, and then she remarked that she would not like to be a hindrance to Jack's career. The sentiment was unimpeachable, and was most prettily expressed. Why then did I feel that in so speaking she was thinking less of Jack than of herself?

I fancy that he, with the quick instinct of a loving heart, had the same impression; for I saw a grieved look in his eyes after his first interview with his little fiancée on his return. But they never came to any rupture, for, as the winter wore on, it was evident that our Lily was dying. She of course did not think so, but clung to the hope of recovery with all the pathetic faith of the consumptive.

"In the spring—when I am well—we will talk of marriage," she would say to Jack. "But for the present, remember, we have given one another up."

But in the early southern spring, when the tulips brightened all the fields where the anemones had bloomed before them, our Lily drooped and died. Her hand was in Jack's at the last, but she had been very cold to him in those latter days; and I think he felt, as he stood by her grave, that touching as was the early extinction of the gentle young life, yet her death had probably saved him from the experience of a deeper pain.

He went abroad again immediately, and we had not seen him for three years. Now he was in England once more, for his regiment had been ordered home, and we had been looking forward with great delight to meeting him in a month or so at the house of a mutual friend in Scotland. Kate and I—like the true women we were—never could think of Edward Laybourne's will without a pang of regret at the fine fortune probably lost to his son. For Fate ordains things in such a crooked way as to render it very likely that, if ever the cousins met, they would find one another mutually repulsive. We had often wondered what Rita Laybourne was like: we feared she might be commonplace, and we were almost positive she was hideous. And one day, when laughing, I said that if we ever saw her, we should find her disfigured by a hump or a squint, Kate gravely answered that for her part she should be thankful if it were no worse. Hence our excitement when we found ourselves face to face with the object of all this speculation.

That night, before going to bed, I wrote to Jack telling him (Heaven forgive me!) that Kate's health and mine required us to make a longer sojourn in Switzerland than we had anticipated. This would prevent, I added, our fulfilling the promise we had made to meet him in Scotland; as in another fortnight we were due in Wales at the house of an aged and invalid aunt. Under these circumstances, I begged him to take a run over to see us. And I described our actual quarters in terms of such imaginative enthusiasm that the landlord himself, could he have read my letter, would have gone raving mad with amazement and delight.

II.

Jack—dear, warm-hearted fellow—answered by return of post that he would join us as quickly as possible. I set myself in the interval before his arrival to cultivate the acquaintance of his aunt and her daughters. It was not very easy work. The mother was just what my shrewd acquaintance, Miss Lowndes, had described her—a stiff, dry little Irishwoman, who was only to be thawed at all by some praise of her children. Of these Rita, who, of course, alone interested me seriously, was a little shy. But her timidity was winsome rather than otherwise, for it had no awkwardness about it, and seemed to be on the surface merely. She showed frequent flashes of decision and character, in which I recognised the Laybourne blood. She had a soft voice and graceful ways, and, though generally a thought too grave for such a mere lassie, she had a sweet, fresh laugh, like a merry child's. Altogether I was greatly attracted by her, though rendered uneasy at times by a circumstance presently to be mentioned.

The eldest girl, Gertrude Cameron, had little thought but for her

flirtations. As far as Prince Sobranowski was concerned, these, though intermittent, were sufficiently marked to bring down upon her the facile censure of the pension. All the women wondered why "the mother did not interfere."

But Mrs. Laybourne evidently never dreamed of thinking that her beautiful eldest-born was not more than a match for a phalanx of Lovelaces. Moreover, she was not, I think, insensible to the triumph of seeing a prince (though he was only a Muscovite one) at her darling's pretty feet.

As for the distinguished foreigner himself, he knew what he was about extremely well, and combined fascination with prudence to a degree that I have never seen equalled. Just when he had brought things to such a pass with one sister as to banish sleep from the pillows of the most virulent among our scandalised spinsters, he would suddenly make a complete transfer of his attentions to the other. On such occasions, reader, *I* became all eyes and ears—of course in the interests of Jack.

But my little Rita was so quiet that, although I thought she shrank from Sobranowski, I never could be quite sure. And another person who, it struck me, was as puzzled as myself, was the Russian's wife.

The Princess was a podgy, pretty little woman, with bright watchful eyes like a bird's. Into these glancing orbs there leapt occasionally a spark of very human anger, as they roved from one of the fair sisters to the other. I imagine the poor thing had no very happy life of it with her brilliant spouse; but used her vigilant jealousy with some effect at times to keep him a little within bounds. I hated the man, and felt a great temptation often to warn Rita against him. But I feared that with so young a girl the interference of a stranger might do more harm than good; and I understood how difficult it was for her in her inexperience to ward off the skilful and subtle, but never intrusive, attentions of a consummate flirt. But I longed very much for Jack to come: and at last he did.

We were nearly all in the garden, looking out, as usual, for the diligence which brought, not only the hotel its guests, but the guests themselves their letters. The sound of its jingling bells was the most welcome one of the day to our famished ears.

Who so pleased as my sister and I when on the top of the vehicle we saw a stalwart form, and discerned a white-teethed smile of welcome, in a bronzed and manly countenance further set off by the candid folds of a puggeree?

We met with such enthusiasm that for ten minutes all the lady spectators' heads wagged with curiosity and excitement.

"Come!" I said boldly, after I had shaken hands. "We are not the only people from whom you are to receive a welcome here. Unless I am much mistaken, here is your aunt, Mrs. Laybourne," and I led him up to that lady.

The widow turned livid with excitement. I had purposely said nothing to her of Jack's coming, thinking it best that it should take both her and Rita by surprise; and it was evident from her emotion now, that I had not miscalculated the strength of her interest in this—her first meeting with her nephew.

Jack for an instant was also disconcerted, but he soon recovered, and wrung his aunt's hand with a warmth that left little to be desired on the score of cordiality.

"Me daughters!" said Mrs. Laybourne faintly. "Rita—Gertrude."

"So this is Rita!" remarked Jack—not very brilliantly, it must be confessed—and his kindly smile became a little constrained, while his glance rested with a troubled though gentle expression, first on the slender white fingers that lay in his sinewy palm, and next on the graceful little head that just reached to his shoulder.

The child was sedate—but that was all the better. She murmured a few words of greeting, and only the faint flush that mounted to her cheek betrayed that she was more moved than usual.

"We have so often wished to know you," said the beauty who next advanced, smiling, grăcious, bewitching, with a black velvet toque on her golden hair, and a bunch of gentianellas in the waistband of her white dress.

"You are very kind!" exclaimed Jack quite earnestly, and immensely struck. So struck indeed that for that first evening I trembled lest all my plans should melt into thin air—dissolved by the sparkle of Gertrude Cameron's eyes. And Mrs. Laybourne must have been pursued by the same fear, for the serene apathy with which she generally regarded her girls' proceedings completely deserted her, and she made various well-meaning, but particularly clumsy attempts to divert Jack's attention from her elder, and transfer it to her younger daughter. In these efforts she was, sooth to say, seconded by neither of these; and I noted the delicate reserve of Rita's manner with increasing approbation.

The next morning Mrs. Laybourne was evidently still in a state of suppressed excitement, and on hearing that a large party of us, including Jack and her daughters, were starting for a climb, she announced her intention of accompanying us. I heard Rita vainly urging her not to do so, and recalling the advice of some doctor in Paris. But her mother was obstinate, and joined us, keeping a sharp eye on Gertrude.

Our destination was a lake, high up among the mountains. The path to it was long and very steep, winding through fir-woods and past green sloping meadows. As one toiled upwards the flora gradually changed, until the presence all around of the deep red Alpine rhododendron revealed the region where winter and spring had still wrestled for dominion, while the corn began to ripen in the valleys, and the tiny cups of the lilac-blossom strewed our garden-

walk. And even yet, in these middle July days, the snow lay in a dazzling sheet round the lake, whose upper surface was frozen hard, while below the ice the water slumbered in translucent depths of intensest blue. Our bald disjointed chat was silenced for a moment by the pure, mysterious air, and the stillness of the solitude was unbroken but for the cawing of some rooks in a clump of firs below. The valley was filled with gleaming silver mist; to the right rose the long, sharp ridge of the Dent du Midi, amethyst-hued, and in the far distance stretched the noble line of the Savoy Alps—the rose of morning still upon their glittering crests.

"Isn't it pretty?" said a young lady.

"Ain't it jolly, just!" remarked an appreciative youth.

And so the spell was broken. The young people began to snowball one another, and the elders scrambled about as well as their respective years would allow them, and gathered wild flowers.

"Oh mother! Look at mother!" suddenly cried Rita, in a sharp tone of terror, and sprang to Mrs. Laybourne's side.

The widow had sunk upon the ground in a sitting posture, and, deadly pale, with her hand pressed to her side, was painfully gasping for breath.

"Oh! please let her have air!" said Rita imploringly, as everybody gathered round in consternation. "It is her heart. She should never have taken this walk."

Of course everybody had a suggestion to make. The English offered to fetch wine, and the foreigners eau sucrée.

"Somebody must go to the nearest châlet and fetch a chair and find two men to carry her down in it," said Rita rapidly, and with clear decision.

I was struck, even at that moment, by her self-control and tone of instinctive authority.

Jack and several others went off for the chair and the men, all of which were soon there. Mrs. Laybourne, very slowly and with infinite precautions, was conveyed to the pension, and there carried to her room. Her daughters installed themselves beside her. A doctor was sent for from Sepey, and the pension inmates stood about in consternated little groups until he arrived. He ordered quiet, and did not conceal the possibility of danger.

This incident dashed everybody's spirits, and, to make matters worse, the next day the weather broke and for about a week the most dismal dulness reigned. We had nothing to do but enquire a dozen times a-day after the invalid, and watch the storms sweep up the valley.

It was magnificent to see the huge mass of drenched mist and sulphurous cloud roll onwards, reft at rapidly recurring intervals by the swift scimitar of the lightning; but I venture to think that the most poetically attuned soul grows weary of a thunderstorm which lasts a week. At the Hôtel du Sceptre, at any rate, almost every-

body grew sick of the sight of almost everybody else's face. Jack was horribly bored, but he felt that it was his duty to wait and see if his aunt recovered. He consequently borrowed all the books in the house, and smoked like a factory chimney.

But even Alpine rain stops some time; and there finally dawned a day when brilliant sunshine once more illumined hill and dale. On the same occasion Mrs. Laybourne was pronounced convalescent.

Late in the afternoon, finding myself well-nigh alone in the house, through almost everybody having gone for an excursion, I started for an "airing" before supper.

There was a châlet high on a rise behind the house, whither at sunset I usually betook myself for a cup of warm milk. A winding and very gradual ascent led to it. The greater portion of this walk was visible from the house, but there was one part, planted with trees and furnished with rustic seats, which was quite hidden from the windows of the hotel, although the ground above commanded a full view of it. To this retreat I directed my steps, and on arriving there I found Rita Laybourne. I had hardly exchanged a dozen words with her for a week, and was consequently quite glad to see her. Nevertheless, it instantly became evident to me that she by no means returned the compliment. When I came upon the scene she had been standing with her back towards me, apparently intent on watching something in a meadow adjoining—which meadow, I should mention, could be reached by a détour from the back exit of the hotel. At the sound of my step she started, turned, and regarded me with a disturbed and annoyed air. I swept the meadow with an enquiring glance, but detected nothing alive in it save a couple of jackdaws on a tree. Not much enlightened by this discovery, I fixed my eyes on Rita's embarrassed face. "I thought you were not coming out," she exclaimed, with a kind of desperate bluntness. I remembered then that, after dinner, she had taken an opportunity of asking me, as I thought, casually, if I meant to join the walkers, and I had answered that I had letters to write and should not stir from my rooms until supper-time. Puzzled by her manner now, and a little resentful of it, I replied curtly, "I changed my mind," and so speaking I installed myself with great deliberation on a bench.

"Are—are you going to remain here?" questioned Rita, not even taking the trouble to conceal her dismay.

I stared at her with the utmost astonishment.

"Won't you go for the milk?" persisted the girl, beginning nervously to furl and unfurl her parasol. "They are milking the cow now, I think. The girls went by with the pails twenty minutes ago."

"And supposing I don't wish for any milk to-day—what then?" I retorted sharply. Why on earth did she wish to get rid of me? I was becoming more heated and suspicious every minute. Instead of answering me immediately, Rita gave another glance in the direction of the meadow; then, with a quick movement of her

person, masked the view of it from me. It was plain that she had seen someone coming. *Who* could it be? Jack was gone with the walkers; so, as far as I knew, was that hateful Prince; in fact, the only member of the male sex left at home was the parson, whose respectable grey head I had just seen at his own bedroom-window. Surely Rita had not made an assignation with *him?*

"You have not answered my question, Miss Laybourne," I observed glacially. "May I request to know the cause of your sudden kind interest in my milk-drinking?" To my horror, Rita burst into tears. "Good heavens!" I exclaimed, rising.

"Oh, please go! dear Miss Greville, please go!" said the poor little soul, checking her sobs with a violent effort and clasping her slender hands entreatingly. "I am not doing any harm—indeed I am not. But there is somebody coming whom I must speak to—and *alone.*"

"Of course, I will go if you wish it," I said slowly, softened by her distress. At the same time I tried hard to see into the meadow, although in vain; Rita—naturally—not being transparent.

"And you won't look back? Promise me you won't look back," continued my companion, more and more excited.

"What do you take me for?" I cried irritably. "I am not in the habit, Miss Laybourne, of prying into my neighbours' concerns—whatever their nature."

Having delivered myself of this boast, I flatter myself that I walked off with a very successful assumption of insulted dignity. But to be frank with you, reader, I own that neither Lot's wife nor Bluebeard, nor Psyche at midnight, nor Orpheus leaving Hades, nor anybody else since the world began, ever endured such tortures of unsatisfied curiosity as I. Puzzled and angry I dragged my leaden feet along, envying each bird as it flew and each grasshopper as it leapt in the direction of that forbidden arbour. As I neared the last rise of all, where there was a seat, I, though not the least tired, felt aggrieved to think that I could not even rest there without looking straight down upon Rita. What, then, was my agitation, on coming upon the bench, to find that it was already occupied by no less a person than Princess Sobranowski. This fact in itself, not so very novel, was rendered remarkable by her expression and her attitude. For—crouching forward with clenched hands, frenzied eyes and distended nostrils—she was absorbed in contemplation of—*the arbour!* There was no doubting the direction of her fixed glance, and my heart nearly jumped into my mouth. The instant she perceived me, she gave a short laugh, with scant amusement in its tones—a laugh of fury! "Tenez, madame," she said, without altering her position or removing her eyes from IT, "I am glad you are come. Look and see what your immaculate English mees are capable of!"

What would you have done, reader? *I looked!* And there was the Prince holding Rita's hands, drawing her towards him as she

shrank back, shaking his head, stamping his foot, and indulging in every manifestation of excitement and entreaty! As he advanced, she retreated; as she tried to free her hands, he took them in both his own; as she averted her face, he bent so low before her that I thought the next moment would see him on his knees at her feet.

These movements were repeated several times, the actors in the scene, meanwhile, becoming so excited that their voices, although not their words, were audible to us. Madame Sobranowski all this time was keeping up a running fire of sardonic commentary: "C'est ça! hold her hand—she pretends to timidity—ah, la coquine!—not wicked only, but expert—What a charming tableau!—my husband is eloquent!—doubtless he weeps, the crocodile!—he had best not kneel—he is getting fat, it won't be so easy to rise!—cette mees!—cette candide jeune fille! How well she leads him on! His prayers enchant her—I wonder how long she wishes him to continue!—I should like to hear him—it would be an agreeable novelty!—Grand ciel! quel supplice!" Her voice rose almost to a shriek as she pronounced the last word, and the sound of it must have reached the ears of the couple below. For they looked up, and then started apart as if shot.

Flinging out her hands with a gesture of despair that was absolutely dramatic, Miss Laybourne turned and fled like a startled hare. The Prince made one step after her; thought better of it, glanced upwards, and, with marvellous impudence, lifted his hat to his wife and me! Then, jauntily replacing this, he thrust one hand in a dégagé manner in his pocket, and proceeded slowly to mount in our direction.

The fat Princess, with inconceivable agility, started off to meet him, as red in the face as a turkey-cock, and gobbling very like one. To my ears, of course, there was nothing but sound and fury in her rapid string of Russian expletives, but it is certain I should be doing these a great injustice if I hinted that they signified nothing! My heated imagination now suggested that the only possible next act to the drama would be the scratching out of the Prince's eyes at the hands of his outraged consort. Not being anxious to assist at this catastrophe, I too turned tail, but in an opposite direction, fleeing upwards to the châlet. Arrived there, I mechanically drank off my glass of milk—it would be difficult truly to say *why*. I should have drained a cup of hemlock just then with about as much consciousness of what I was doing. But I suppose it was a relief to do anything. And then I went home, hurried to my own room and sat down to think.

As calm returned to me, better ideas regarding Rita presented themselves. She had distinctly said, on begging me to leave her, that she was doing no harm. It was evident from her attitude throughout the whole interview with the Russian that she had listened to him with reluctance and refused him some request. What this request might be I was at

a loss, on any favourable hypothesis, to imagine; but it occurred to me once or twice that it might have some relation to Gertrude. It is true, this view did not afford me any very great consolation, for what right or justification could Rita have to aid or abet in any way her sister's flirtations? And that she was not discouraging them seemed plain from her manner towards the Prince, which, though agitated and cold, had not been angry. I could make nothing of the business, and was quite worn out with perplexity when summoned down to tea.

The walkers had returned tired, talkative, with blistered faces and voracious appetites. I took my seat at the table; Jack, who divided Kate and me, was already on one side of me; the still empty chair (I wished it could never have been filled again!) of Prince Sobranowski on the other. Presently Rita, who sat opposite to me, glided to her seat, bowing to me, at the same time, with a timid but deprecating rather than guilty air. Gertrude did not appear, as Mrs. Laybourne could not yet be left alone. Next, with his usual martial step, in marched the Prince. *His* manner was slightly amused and sarcastic. He was humming an operatic air in a low, unconcerned tone, and had the effrontery to break off in that occupation to wish me "Bon soir!" Somebody enquired if Madame Sobranowski were not coming. "My wife is not very well," said the wretch composedly. "She suffers sometimes from the nerves." Several people expressed sympathy at this announcement; but their condolences had hardly left their lips, when a door opened violently, and the very invalid in question bounced in. She swept up to the table, and took her place without a word. Traces of recent commotion were still upon her face, while the quiver of her lips, and the smouldering fire of her eyes, showed that very little would suffice to provoke a fresh explosion.

"It strikes me," remarked Jack, confidentially, "that our amiable foreign friends have been indulging in some conjugal amenities. The Prince must have a roughish time of it on such occasions—don't you think?"

"Yes, indeed!" I answered fervently, remembering my afternoon's experience. "We cannot call *her* winds and waters sighs and tears—any more than Cleopatra's."

"We were afraid we should not have the pleasure of seeing you this evening, Princess," said Jack, speaking across me politely, to my infinite alarm. "Monsieur Sobranowski led us to fear that you were unwell."

"I am very *ill*, monsieur," answered the Princess, furiously. "But I chose to come down."

"For heaven's sake, hold your tongue!" I whispered imploringly to Jack, who turned purple in his efforts not to laugh.

At this moment Miss Lowndes, I could not but think with some slight secret malice, observed across the table to Rita: "I am going

away to-morrow, positively, and shall call upon you this evening to fulfil your old promise of performing for me a Russian dance with Prince Sobranowski."

I expected the Princess to hurl her plate at the audacious speaker, but she only gave a kind of angry growl, like the low roar of a caged lioness.

"It must be impossible for an English girl to do that kind of thing well," said I abruptly, a remark of which the implied rudeness caused everybody to stare at me.

"Mademoiselle Rita was taught by a Russian, I understand," remarked Sobranowski suavely. "You need consequently be under no fear, chère dame, of your accomplished nation not being successfully as well as charmingly represented."

Of course, I hoped Rita would decline to perform the dance; but after a very little hesitation she consented. We had two salons, one large, the other small. The latter communicated with the first by a door over which was draped a velvet portière. Everybody came into the larger room to look on at the dancers. I, the usual musician, was asked to play a polonaise of Chopin; but on my flat refusal, somebody else was found to do it. At the first notes the Princess, who was livid, abruptly left the room. To my vague alarm, I noticed—and I think I alone noticed—that she reappeared immediately in the small salon, and with a stealthy step and furtive air hid herself in the shadow of the curtain, and, from thence, watched the proceedings.

I had never seen a "Russian" dance before, so I do not know how to call the one I witnessed then. But I fancy it was only a kind of polonaise danced by two people instead of by many.

Rita, with one hand on her hip, and her face upturned to her partner's, danced round in a measured step. Sobranowski, bending his head above her with a devotional air, clasped her other hand in his left, while with his right he executed a pantomime descriptive of admiration and entreaty. They both marked the time with a recurrent clack of their heels, and quickened the pace somewhat as the dance went on. Rita, with parted lips and flushed cheeks, looked unusually pretty. Her slight figure made a charming contrast to the tall frame and gallant bearing of the Prince.

They had been three or four times round, and found themselves exactly opposite the inner drawing-room door, when one of the sharp stops so characteristic of the polonaise occurred. At the same moment Sobranowski dropped on one knee and raised Rita's hand to his lips. This was the end of the performance, and everybody burst into applause. But at the same moment, and above the clapping of hands, rang out a sudden, shrill yell of execration. And just as the Russian was preparing to rise, with a spring like a panther his wife was upon him.

"Donnez! donnez! Infame! The letter! I will have the letter!"

she shrieked, in maniacal tones, keeping her husband down with one hand and clutching wildly at Rita with the other. The girl, as white as death, got away from her and retreated to the other end of the room. We, looking on in mute amazement, could see no letter, but noticed that she kept her left hand pressed tightly down among the folds of her dress. The Prince, meanwhile, had at last succeeded in leaping to his feet, and now seized his frenzied, struggling wife by the wrist—holding her so and (I really think) swearing at her in Russian.

"*I will* see that letter!" cried the poor woman in French, making frantic efforts to free herself, and beginning to sob like an angry child. "Madame! speak to that girl!" (this to me). "Monsieur! (turning to Jack) you are her cousin: will you encourage her in this infamy?"

Jack, like every other spectator of this extraordinary scene, had stood till now dumbfoundered. At the Princess's appeal, however, he roused himself with a kind of start, and did the best thing that could be done under the circumstances. Advancing towards Rita, he said, with ready tact, and in a grave but not severe manner: "I feel sure that this is all much ado about nothing. But as Princess Sobranowski is so excited, you had better surrender this letter—if letter it be. Give it to me, and I will tear it up before your eyes."

"No! no!" interposed Madame Sobranowski, vehemently. "You shall not tear it up. I must read it."

"It is my cousin's property, madame, and without her permission nobody can read it," said Jack, coldly. The Princess, wilder than ever with baffled rage, was again about to protest, when Rita, for the first time, spoke: "Somebody must read the letter," she said in clear, low tones. "I cannot rest under the aspersion which Princess Sobranowski has cast upon me."

"Then let *me* read it," cried Jack eagerly.

"But it is to be a secret—mind!" said Rita, with a curious mixture of girlish naïveté and proud determination. "If you are satisfied that I am blameless, that must be enough for everybody." And she laid a little pink missive in his hands. Jack walked with it to the lamp and unfolded it, amid a breathless silence, only broken by the weeping of the Princess, who had subsided into a jelly-like heap on the sofa, and was indulging in hysterical tears.

The note was apparently very brief, for Jack's eye travelled down it in a moment. Without a word, he deliberately refolded it; extracted his portemonnaie, placed the letter inside it, put his hands into his pockets, and—faced the tantalised spectators with the most unconcerned air in the world!

"I trust that you are content, monsieur!" observed the Prince, with an uneasy laugh.

"Perfectly so," answered Jack. "Miss Greville, won't you play

the 'Blue Danube'? Rita, I insist upon your waltzing with me: you are positively the colour of a sheet."

And in another five minutes all the younger people were dancing, and everybody else was digesting as well as each one could the respective emotions of curiosity, agitation, or rage evoked by the just-enacted scene.

The next morning, as Kate was looking out of our sitting-room window, she suddenly called to me, "Look here!"

I looked, and there were our two young people, Jack and Rita, walking up and down the garden absorbed in confidential conversation!

"Let us make haste to finish our breakfast and go down to them," said Kate, with the frankest curiosity. And so we did.

"I am glad you are come," cried Jack brightly, advancing to meet us. "I have persuaded Rita—though with a great deal of trouble—to let me put *you*, if no one else, into the secret of last night's scene. It is necessary for her own sake that somebody should know the truth; so you had better begin by reading this famous note, which will explain everything to you," and he gave us the fatal pink missive.

I opened it eagerly, and Kate read it over my shoulder. It was in French, and translated ran thus:

"Mademoiselle,—I will do as you desire; but I supplicate you to afford me a few hours' respite. I honour your sentiments both as regards the respectable lady, your mother, and your—alas!—too lovely sister. My heart is broken. Nevertheless, I will obey you. Only to-morrow it is impossible, and you must bear with me a brief space longer. You are young, mademoiselle, and though so intelligent and, permit me to add, so fair, you are inexperienced in the ways of the world. Yet you must know that without money the most heroic enterprises fail. Consequently, to accomplish the great sacrifice you impose upon me, and which I, although anguished, accept, I must be allowed to remain here until the prosaic arrival of Thursday's post. I present my respectful homage.

"Prince Sobranowski."

"Of course you understand the mountebank's little game!" remarked Jack, with an air of ineffable disgust, as I handed the letter back to him.

"He had been carrying on for some time with Miss Cameron a flirtation that assumed at last quite serious proportions. Rita, here" (there was certainly a new inflection of tenderness in Jack's voice as he mentioned his little cousin's name) "had several times shown her disapprobation, and then the fellow had exerted himself to pacify and deceive her, by protesting his great esteem, his unalterable respect, and all the rest of it. But Rita began to suspect that there was even a clandestine correspondence going on, and yesterday she

acquired proof of it, for she met Justine, the little housemaid, in the passage, looking rather guilty and hastily trying to pocket a letter to Prince Sobranowski in Miss Cameron's handwriting. That young lady, on being remonstrated with, showed herself most violent and reckless of consequences. She protested that there was no harm in the correspondence, which had only been resorted to because Princess Sobranowski's 'senseless jealousy' made all pleasant conversation with her husband impossible. Rita asked to be allowed, under these circumstances, to read some of the innocuous productions, but with the sole result of increasing her sister's excitement. Determined then to put an end to the affair at any cost, and not daring to agitate her mother, she found out Sobranowski, and insisted upon his meeting her yesterday afternoon in the arbour, where she hoped to be able to speak to him undisturbed by stranger eyes or ears, and unnoticed, above all, by his wife. She chose the hour when Mrs. Laybourne least needed her, but, being pressed for time, as well as agitated by her previous scene with her sister, she betrayed, on meeting YOU, Miss Greville, there, a distress of mind which she felt must have given you a very false impression. The rest you know."

"But," said Kate, with her practical curiosity, "I do not yet understand quite what Sobranowski thought he would gain by his note to Rita, nor why he should have chosen that clumsy way of conveying it to her."

"As to that," answered Jack, "it is obvious that the object of his note was simply to gain time. Rita—who seems capable of measures of quite an alarming energy," said the young man, with a smile: "Rita had declared to him that unless he cleared out of this the very first thing this morning, she would denounce him without mercy to his wife. I imagine that was a very alarming prospect. He probably hoped to avert it, and yet to be able to remain on by stipulating for three days' delay—three days in which he counted upon his eloquence to appease Rita and convince her of the groundlessness of her fears. As to the manner in which he gave the note, that is explicable on two hypotheses. Either he had had enough of trusting to housemaids, or he wished to force Rita to take it, which she would not have done had it been conveyed to her by a messenger."

"And what are you going to do?" I asked presently. We had tried, of course, like the gushing old maids we were, to pet Rita a little. But we had soon desisted, for it was evident the child did not like it. "What are you going to do?"

"Kick the beggar out of the house," responded Jack curtly.

"Alas! only metaphorically, I fear," said I laughing, "but in any case—go and do it."

Jack went. He reappeared shortly, looking very triumphant and rather pugnacious.

The Russian had talked at first about his honour, and suggested settling the matter with a pair of pistols. Jack, however, answered

that he should have the greatest objection to fight, but not the smallest one to horsewhip him. On this the Prince, probably mindful of his opponent's youth and inches, elected for a retreat in preference to a beating.

"He has sent down to Sepey to order a carriage, and before two hours he will be off. I told him that if letters came for him I would forward them to any address he liked to mention. But as he only smiled superciliously, it is clear that his pretended need of roubles was a flight of Calmuck fancy," wound up Jack.

"So he is really going," exclaimed Rita, adding gratefully to her cousin: "What should I have done without you?"

"You see, you want someone to protect you, for all your pluck," he replied, looking very much inclined to kiss her.

"The real truth is," said I, "that you ought to have put the matter in Jack's hands from the very first."

"Yes! Why didn't you? You know I am your cousin," observed Jack.

"You are my cousin, of course," said Rita, blushing rosy red.

"Well?" said the young man.

"Well?" said the young lady, and got no further.

"Jack, you are a greater goose than I always thought you," interposed Kate. "Anybody but a British officer, six-foot-two in his boots, would understand that you and Rita are *too much cousins*."

"Unfortunately we cannot make ourselves anything less," replied Jack, with much gravity. And the obvious rejoinder remained unspoken—for the moment.

But one evening about a week later, Rita and her cousin lingered so long in the starlit garden that my propriety took alarm, and I thought I would refresh myself by a little turn.

Jack no sooner caught sight of me than, to my infinite discomfiture, he darted forward and took me into a fervid embrace.

"I am sure I am very glad," I said, when the cause of this reception had been explained to me. "But, I own, I cannot guess why you should think it necessary to kiss *me*."

"I beg your pardon," said Jack, merrily. "You can surely, however, make allowance for a fellow who has just recovered his inheritance."

BETSY AND I ARE OUT.

Draw up the papers, lawyer, and make them good and stout;
Things at home are cross-ways, and Betsy and I are out.
We who have worked together so long as man and wife,
Must pull in single harness the rest of our natural life.

"What is the matter?" say you. Ah well, that's hard to tell!
Most of the years behind us have passed by fairly well;
I've loved no other woman—she no other man,
But it seems we've lived together as long as we ever can.

So I have talked with Betsy, and Betsy has talked with me,
And we have told each other we can never more agree.
Not that we charge on the other any terrible crime;
But for years has this been gathering, a little at a time.

To begin with, there was temper: we both had that for a start—
Though we never had suspected 'twould rend us two apart;
I had my various failings, bred in both heart and life;
And Betsy, like all quick women, was somewhat given to strife.

The first thing I remember on which we disagreed
Was something concerning Heaven—a difference in our creed.
We argued the thing at breakfast—we argued the thing at tea,
And the more we argued the question, the less did we agree.

And the next that I remember was when we lost a cow;
She had died quite unexpectedly—the question was only—How?
I held to my own opinion, and Betsy another had;
And when we had done disputing, we both felt rather mad.

And the next fall-out that came, it was started in a joke;
But full a week it lasted, and we neither of us spoke.
And the next was when I scolded because she broke a bowl;
And she said I was mean and stingy, and could not have any soul.

And that china bowl kept bringing dissensions in our cup;
And that poor old cow was always on each side coming up;
And the Heaven we argued so much about no nearer to us got,
But it gave us a taste of something that surely of Heaven was *not*.

And so the thing kept working, lawyer, and always the self-same way;
Always something to argue, and something sharp to say:
And in would come the neighbours, a contending army strong,
And lend their kindest service to urge each side along.

And there have been days together—and many a weary week,
When both of us were angry, and both too proud to speak:
And I've been thinking and thinking, the whole of the Spring and Fall,
If we can't live kindly together, why, better not live at all.

And so I have talked with Betsy, and Betsy has talked with me,
And we have agreed together, that we shall never agree;
And what is hers shall be hers, and what is mine will be mine,
And you'll put that in the agreement, and give it to us to sign.

Write on the paper, lawyer—the very first paragraph—
Of all the farm and live-stock, that she shall take her half:
For she has helped to earn it, through many a weary day,
And it's nothing more than justice that Betsy should have her pay.

Give her the house and homestead—a man can go out and roam;
But women are helpless creatures, unless they have their home.
And I have always determined, and never failed to say,
That Betsy should not want a home, when I was taken away.

There's a little handful of cash that brings in yearly pay;
A few hundred pounds, or so, laid by for a rainy day:
It's safe in the hands of substantial men, and easy to get at;
Put in another clause, if you please, and give her half of that.

Yes, I see that you smile, sir, at my giving her so much;
I might have made lower terms; but I take no stock in such.
True and fair I married her, when she was blithe and young,
And Betsy was always good to me, except that she had her tongue.

I then was young as you are, though not so smart, perhaps:
For me she threw over a lawyer, and other dandy chaps;
And all of them were flustered, and fairly taken down,
And I for a time was counted the luckiest man in town.

Once, when I had a fever—I shall never forget the time—
I was not myself, I think, and my hands were like heated lime;
Never a minute went by that Betsy was out of sight;
She nursed me with tender care, and sat by me day and night.

And if ever a house was tidy, and ever rooms were bright,
Her house and rooms were always that, no matter how clear the light:
No, I do not complain of Betsy, or any of her acts,
Excepting when we've quarrelled, and told each other facts.

So draw up the draft of the deed, lawyer; and I'll go home to-night,
And read the agreement to her, and see if she finds it right;
And then I'll see about selling the half of the stock I keep;
And out in the world I'll go, alone, and with weary feet.

And one thing put in the paper; it before to me didn't occur:
That when she hears of my death she shall bring me back to her,
And lay me under the yew-tree I used to think so blithe
When she and I were happy, before we thought of strife.

And when she dies herself, I'd ask her to lie by me,
And, lying together in silence, we doubtless must agree.
And when we meet in Heaven, we'd not perhaps think it queer
If we loved each other better, for that we have quarrelled here.

W. C.

ABOUT NORWAY.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND."

IT is a melancholy but very positive fact that the pleasure of a voyage to the North Cape is entirely made or marred by that most uncertain element, the weather. With cloudless skies and soft breezes, nothing can be more delightful than this winding about rocks, islands, and mainland, day after day; each day, each hour bringing fresh scenes of beauty and interest before the traveller: glimpses also of various people of the country, with the quiet occupations that form the even

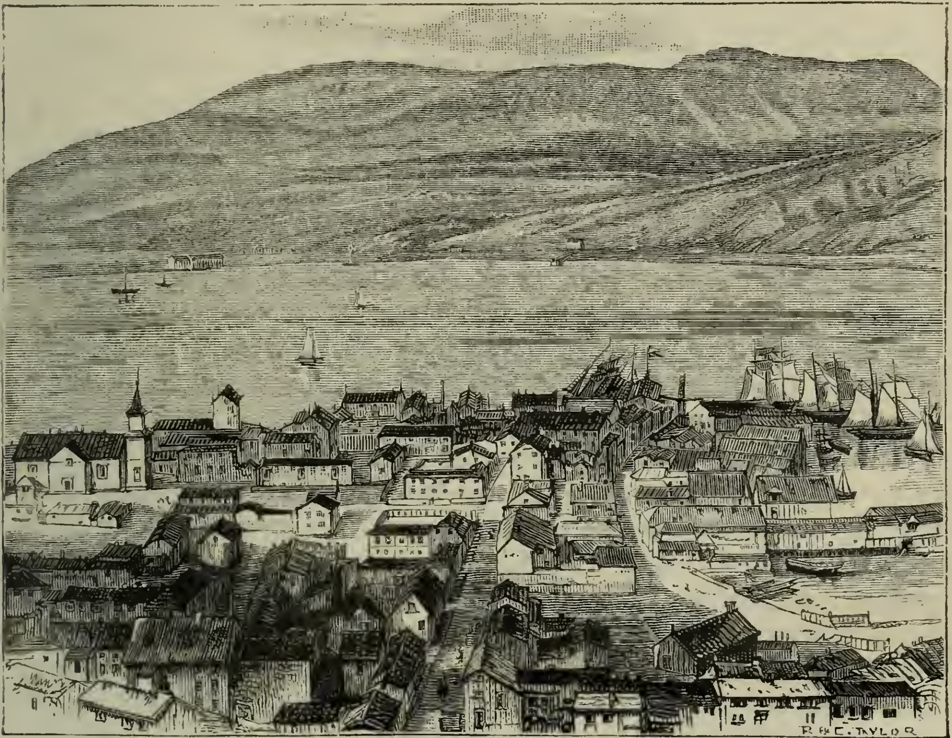
SVOLVAER, IN THE LOFODENS.

tenour of their lives. Nothing can be grander or more sublime than the gorgeous sunsets which envelop earth, sea, and sky, until the very air seems to flash with myriads of rainbow-tinted hues, lovely and almost palpable to the touch.

And once within the Arctic Circle, the night that has no sunset, no darkness: where no longer " the evening and the morning " make a day: where night seems to have fled for ever, and eternal noon has risen upon the world: this, too, if it has its disadvantages, has also its special and rare charm. The days pass in a dream of beauty and glory. Watching the changing tints as the sun nears the horizon which it does not reach: watching again the subtle changes of tones as the sun suddenly shoots upwards and silently announces that its course is run: warning of the flight of time more mysteriously and surely than the midnight clang of iron that tolls from

some lofty tower its own sad tale: the mind thus occupied never grows weary of dwelling upon effects that will not shape themselves into words, for they are subtle as the chameleon, delicate as the bloom upon the wing of a butterfly, and seem to partake as little of earth as the rainbow itself.

Day after day, the same tones, the same glories meet the eye, but you are no more familiar with them than you were at the beginning, and you watch for them as eagerly and anxiously as when they first struck upon you with astonishment. At last you feel that, for a time, earth has been left behind: you have entered some celestial paradise, more beautiful than dream or imagination



HAMMERFEST.

ever pictured. So ethereal and unearthly is the whole effect that you dread lest a day or an hour should bring out of the east a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, which shall expand and cover the heavens, until all these glories give place to a sort of death in nature.

And the change comes. As you look back upon the dream of sunshine and beauty that has been with you day by day, and compare it with the desolate skies and black clouds, the bitter winds and drenching rains in which there is no dream, but a great deal of stern reality: despair falls upon the spirit, melancholy and weariness mark you for their own, and you long for the end.

So it was with us. On reaching the summit of the flat table-land of the North Cape which stretched around, covered with rein-

deer moss and rough gorse that sank in as we walked over it, had the wind only been in a contrary direction, instead of cutting hail and freezing cold we should have found a glorious sun, brilliant skies, stretches of Arctic sea glowing with reflected midnight tints, a warm, balmy air. But that unfortunate mirage, so beautiful in itself, had announced the fate that awaited us, and sad was the disappointment.

Nor did this untoward state of things cease with the North Cape, and the return journey became in consequence inexpressibly tedious. The fact of our vessel being as much a cargo as a passenger ship now grew unpleasantly apparent. Going up to the Cape, when everything was new and strange; every step of the way fresh ground, giving rise to a succession of rapid impressions; calling at the different stations had been not one of the least pleasant of the recurring incidents of the voyage. But now that cold and rain had succeeded warmth and sunshine, these frequent stoppages became wearisome to the last degree. And in returning, the ship seemed to have an unlimited amount of cargo to take on board, so that every now and then almost half a day would be lost at some small uninteresting station, whilst the hold was gradually being filled with dried stockfish, and the unhappy passengers were half poisoned with the smell that haunted them henceforth with too close a constancy: a familiarity that bred a very decided aversion.

We left the North Cape on the Thursday night: the word night being a mere manner of speech, for it was distinguished from the day only by the revolution of the hours, not by the alternations of light and darkness. And yet much that we now saw was in reality new ground: for, as far as was possible, the steamer was so timed that those places passed in the night in going were passed in the day in returning. Thus, had the weather only proved propitious, all would have been well. But Friday passed, and Saturday, and still the skies wept. Sunday morning was gloomy, but the deluge had ceased. Before some of us were up the ship stopped at Sandtorvholm, and most of the passengers had landed to inspect the church of Throndenaes in the neighbourhood: said to be one of the oldest and most curious churches in Norway. In about two hours' time, or rather more, they all returned enraptured with their excursion.

Have you ever observed, reader, that if anything is going on in which you have been accidentally left out: such for instance as a long-planned picnic, or an excursion like the present: everyone in returning, with malice prepense, will outvie everyone else in glowing descriptions of the irreparable loss you have sustained: until at last you are ready to send yourself to Coventry for your untoward fate, and your friends to Halifax for their too evident effort to excite your jealous regret. So it was in this instance. When the passengers had returned to deck, mounting the ladder with more or less dignity, according to the bent of each mind, all tongues were loosened in a

full chorus of praise of what they had seen and done: the charming road; the luxurious vegetation; the quaint church; the curious fish-faced people. One of the party, indeed, with the true ring of small venom in his voice, remarked that it was the most glorious walk he had ever enjoyed in the whole course of his existence. We were led to suppose that we had missed the very gem of the voyage. Perhaps the most amusing part of the whole thing was, that shortly before the return of the absentees, A. had said with a laugh: "Take notice that they will come back full of raptures, full of supreme pity for those who were left behind: we shall have missed the most glorious thing out." So when his words came to pass he turned with a quiet "I told you so."

But the glowing description so worked upon the feelings of the two American ladies that wailing and lamentation ensued on their part. Possessing, in their knowledge of human nature, the harmlessness of the dove but not the wisdom of the serpent, they accepted as literal and undisputed fact every word that was said, and were almost beside themselves with remorse. The Captain, who happened to be standing near them, could not resist their appeals and offered to land them in their turn. The ship was not yet ready to start; they might land, see the church, and go on to the further shore; whilst the vessel would round yonder point and put in to pick them up. This was very satisfactory, and too kind an offer to be refused. So the ladies hastily got ready, and being unprotected, A. and I offered to accompany them. We started, a small and select party, with two boatmen to put us ashore and act as guides. After a short row we landed and commenced our walk.

It certainly was a very pleasant one, though it did not merit all the praises lately sung in its favour. A long undulating road led us between low green banks adorned here and there with small clusters of birch-trees and stunted shrubs: evergreens that refreshed the eye after the monotony of the sea: but we saw nothing more "luxuriant" than this. There was a lightness in the air at once buoyant and refreshing. To our left the sea plashed soothingly upon the beach. Out upon the blue waters the ship was still taking in her cargo. We felt rather like being cast upon a desert island, and wondered what would become of us if the vessel went to one part of the island and we to another, so that we finally missed one another. It was quite an alarming thought, and the ladies turned pale as they gave utterance to it and clung to each other for consolation—as we all turn to those who have the first claim upon our affections when trouble lays his rude hand upon us. But we had faith in our amiable captain, and this thought restored tranquillity to their agitated minds.

Presently we came to a few scattered houses, and looked for the inhabitants, who, in this and other parts of this northern coast, are said to resemble fishes, from the fact that they have little else to live upon. We detected no resemblance, but as only two or three people

crossed our path our experience was limited. Whether it was merely the quietness of the Sunday that reigned, or whether this deserted aspect of affairs was the normal condition of the village, we had no means of ascertaining. Our guides were amiable, but even less intelligent than their kind, and as they could not speak a word of English they might have been dumb as well as stupid. Once or twice when we particularly wished to be enlightened upon some subject we endeavoured to make ourselves intelligible by signs, but humiliating failure was the result. It was only when, later on, we rested at an inn, awaiting the arrival of the boat, that, asking them if they would like some beer, they responded by signs as full of intelligence and acquiescence as need have been.

Passing through the village, we came upon a more barren spot

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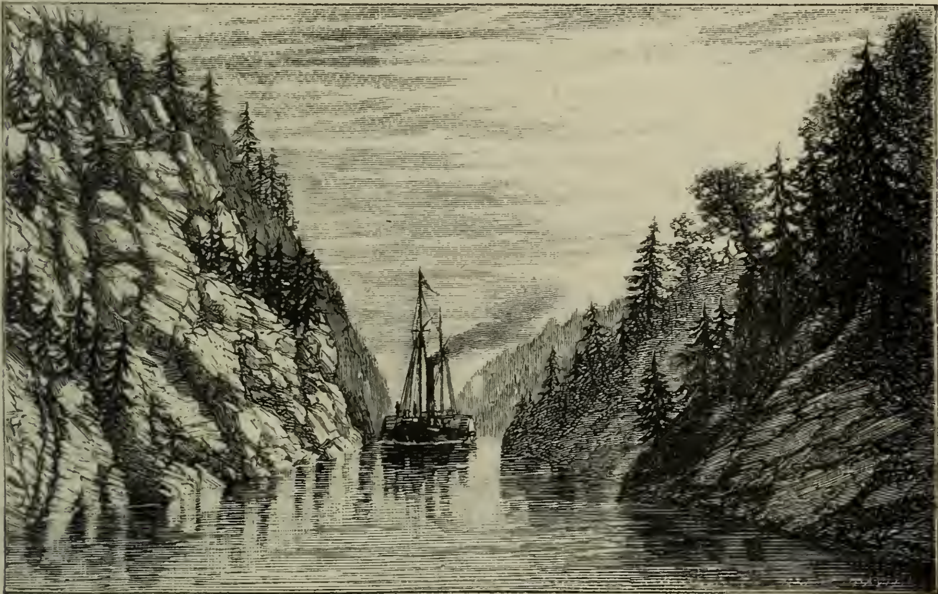
overlooking the sea, in the midst of which stood the church of Throndenaes. It is a curious monument of antiquity, and was once the chapel belonging to a monastery. Of the latter all trace has disappeared. Near the church was the "priest's house," and out came two young boys, probably the priest's sons, with the keys of the church. The interior of the building was small; quaint and curious rather than beautiful. Over the altar were some closed pictures, and the boys swung back the shutters on hinges that seemed ready to fall to pieces, and disclosed old and hideous daubs all out of drawing and perspective, impossible faces and extraordinary contortions, which the youths proudly exhibited as priceless treasures. A pulpit black with age was in the middle of the church, and dark ancient pews were amongst the interesting relics of antiquity. A small opening led into what must once have been a sacristy, with an old stone that no doubt held holy water in the days of the monks:

whilst a railed partition up a narrow, quaintly-carved staircase might have secluded nuns at their devotions. In this little place, only a few feet square, one could stand and go back centuries in imagination, to an age when men chanted their matins and their vespers, held their feasts and their fasts, and measured time not by events but by the rolling hours: with only their little quips and cranks, small quibbles and jealousies amongst themselves, to vary the endless monotony of their existence. "The world forgetting, by the world forgot."

It is a quiet and desolate enough place now; then it must have been the very embodiment of a living tomb: a death in life. And for that matter the monasteries of to-day, buried in those far-off



On our Way Southward.

solitudes, amidst the eternal silence of dark, gloomy forests or lonely mountain heights, are no better. It is all a living death. Go, for instance, to the Monastery of La Chartreuse. Watch a monk creep out of his cell with stealthy tread and disappear down the long cloisters until the far-off gloom hides him from view, whilst he goes on his way, it may be to perform some penance. See them all gliding out of their cells at midnight, a long, solemn, silent, mysterious, cowled procession, each carrying a lantern which obscures yet more the surrounding darkness and lights faintly their footsteps only: footsteps that make no sound in the long, cold, stone corridors, and find no echo in the distant arches. Watch them gliding into the dark chapel, each taking his seat and placing before him his lantern: all done as silently as if they were hooded ghosts: listen to the melancholy chant of the midnight mass, which sounds more like a requiem for the dead than the prayers and praises that should animate the

living: and see what a mistake it all seems; what a waste of life; what a gloomy, incomprehensible state of things: as I have said, what a death in life.

In a little gallery at the west end of the church at Throndenaes there was a small organ that looked as old as the building itself. We went up and inspected its jet-black keys, struggled through the loft and struggled out again, and finally left the church. The boys locked the door, and went off triumphantly with a half krohn apiece, which, however, they examined critically and commercially before they tore away to their home. We continued our walk, and by-and-by came to the little inn close to the sea-shore, where we took refuge from the rain that now began to fall, and waited for the reappearance of the steamer. It was a quaint and interesting little place, and the man and woman of the inn seemed anxious that we should make ourselves comfortable and at home. They showed us over their kitchen, brought us biscuits and Norwegian beer, made coffee for the ladies, and talked and chattered just as if we could understand what they said. Whilst the boatmen in an adjoining room emptied their bottles, and looked the picture of contented happiness.

After waiting for about half an hour—just as we began to think the Captain had forsaken us after all—the steamer rounded the point and steered for the land. We bade farewell to the good people, who accompanied us to the little slanting pier, up which the water was washing, and getting into a boat were quickly rowed to the vessel. Once on deck the guilty consciences of our fellow passengers were apparent. Everyone's face was turned the other way, seemingly looking out for whales or sea-serpents, and no one asked us how we had fared. Had we not landed at Throndenaes its praises would have been sung in our ears to the end of the voyage: as it was, not a word was said about it: it sank into unmerited oblivion. For we had in truth much enjoyed our excursion; had seen more and gone further than those who had landed in the early morning; and lastly, had carried away a vivid and pleasant impression of the people at the inn and the half-hour we had spent there.

Monday we were once more at the Lofodens, winding in and out amongst them the whole day: enjoying again those grand and glorious peaks and pinnacles, snow-capped and, to-day, somewhat cloud-capped too. About seven in the evening we finally left them. As we did so, the clouds rolled away like a scroll, and once more restored us to the glories of sun and sky and warm breezes which had now been four days absent from us. Once more as we receded from them, they stood out in all their grandeur and magnificence: immense cathedrals of stone built by no human hand, rising out of the great waters. A halo of glory surrounded them this evening as the sun neared, then sank below the peaks; all the more vivid for the late gloom and darkness of the skies. All nature was flushed, and all the glorious

tints of an arctic night once more surprised and awed us by their beauty. The sea "took up the tale" and reflected back the most brilliant hues. The last vision of the Lofodens dwells in the memory as a dream almost of a celestial paradise.

Crossing the Vestfjord we landed at a small station, and mounted a hill in the hope of gaining a good view of the midnight sun. But at the actual moment—when it ceases to descend, runs an instant along the horizon, and then rises upwards again—we did not see it. The now far-off Lofodens for once were in the way.

Tuesday morning, to everyone's joy, was brilliant with sunny skies. At 4 a.m. we passed Bödö, where we had landed on the journey northwards, and it seemed quite an old familiar friend to us. At eleven we passed again the grand snowfield with its splendid glaciers, crossed the Arctic Circle and passed the Hestmand, and so glided from the regions of the midnight sun. Towards evening we passed the mountain of the Seven Sisters; a grand cluster rising nearly 3,000 feet high, with seven peaks. At five o'clock we reached Sannesöen; a lovely spot with low hills bathed in sunshine, surrounding a small harbour full of boats. On the land was a small, brown, picturesque church, with a little tower surmounted by a species of dome-spire that looked as if it might be shut up like a telescope. From this place we had a grand view of the Seven Sisters: those gigantic granite mountains, whose peaks rose up so sharply, with long curves between.

During the night we had passed our old friend Torghatten, where we had previously landed and climbed up to its wonderful tunnel. Wednesday rose cold and cloudy, but cleared up towards evening, as we passed through a narrow channel with just width enough for the steamer. It was a wonderful and very lovely spot, and we glided through pale green transparent waters, surrounded by lonely hills and mountains. Then the channel opened up into a magnificent natural harbour, and we passed through quite a fleet of vessels riding at anchor, painted in gay colours that reflected themselves in the calm waters. This was one of the prettiest sights of a voyage that had been crowded with beautiful sights and impressions.

The evening wore on to night: night that was now very decided twilight. In the middle of that night Throndhjem was reached. Here a few of the passengers landed and we saw them no more. Before we were up in the morning, the ancient capital was far out of sight, and the second visit we had wished to pay the cathedral had to be deferred to some future occasion. Thursday morning, in cold and cloudy weather, we made Christiansund: but how different was the aspect and impression of the place from that first morning when we had seen it in all the glorious sunshine and all the picturesque solemnity of the water funeral! Now we were only too glad to leave it and make way. At 9.30 that evening, when the clouds had all cleared away and a brilliant sunset was once more charming us beyond words, we

entered the beautiful Moldefjord with its luxuriant slopes, and steamed up to the town. Molde, as seen that evening, bathed in all the glorious hues of sunset, could never be forgotten. The opposite hills, including the giant Romsdalshorn, were flushed, and in the rosy light looked far more like dream mountains than realities. The town itself, so beautifully situated, with its fertile and towering slopes in the background, almost wooed one by its aspect to bid the steamer farewell and become more intimately acquainted with its charms. The situation was lonely, as is the situation of almost all the towns on the Northward journey; but it is a loneliness probably that strikes only the traveller, not the inhabitants. Home is home, no matter where, no matter what; be it in the centre of a busy capital, or situated in some lonesome valley, or perched upon an isolated rock. On the journey upwards we had landed some people at a small far-away spot, of which one might have thought them the sole inhabitants, so utterly gloomy and deserted was this little island in the midst of the sea. Yet when they came in sight of it rapture had seized them, and here evidently they found their happiness.

In Molde one could easily imagine happiness: it would be more difficult to picture the contrary. But the traveller has somewhat to rough it in the way of accommodation. Here we lost more of our passengers, including the two American sisters, who were courageously travelling about alone, in search, like everyone else, of new scenes and impressions: laying up a store of memories for a time, be it near or far off, which is sure to come to all, if they live long enough: a day when travelling has lost its charm, and the exertion is not worth the reward. Many a man, like Sydney Smith, has lamented that his opportunities for travelling only came to him when he was too old to enjoy them. Therefore, O young man, take thine opportunity when it comes unto thee: for opportunities seldom come twice to any man, and that which is neglected passes away into the womb of time, never to return.

Our opportunity for visiting Molde had not come, and we steamed onwards again. As we passed the hotel, the American ladies waved a farewell from their windows, and then all faded from sight. At one o'clock a.m. we reached Aalesund. The gloom, but not the darkness, of night was spread over the little town, for as yet we had not returned to the regions of positive obscurity. The town was steeped in solemn quietude. In situation it is one of the most picturesque of the towns on this coast. The houses appeared well built, and were grouped, many of them, on the slopes of the hills, made picturesque and almost romantic—for Norway—by trees which grew about them, and relieved the barrenness that is but too apparent in many of these places. The inner harbour ran up between the houses and was separated from the outer by great locks. Through these came boats with cargo for the steamer, and a boat-load of passengers bound for Bergen. Far away beyond the town we

caught sight of grand mountains whose peaks seemed to repose in the sky: the range of the Langfjeld. As we looked, the first flush of dawn tinged them with unearthly beauty; and as the sun crept upwards towards the horizon, the tone crept downwards over the earth, until at length the whole town was bathed in crimson light, the windows reflected a red glow, and the gloom brightened into the first glories of early morning.

Aalesund is a town of about 6,000 inhabitants, comparatively new but prosperous, carrying on a thriving trade in codfish with Spain and Italy. The fish are caught in nets which are sunk far down in the sea, their position marked by green glass buoys. When hauled up, the nets often break with the weight of the cod-fish, which abound in these waters. But though the town itself is of recent date, the surrounding country has many associations in connection with the ancient history of Norway. Not far from here was the castle inhabited by the famous Rollo, founder of the duchy of Normandy, and ancestor of William the Conqueror.

LAPPS.

Here we bade a reluctant farewell to our pleasant travelling companion Lieutenant X., who was landing at Aalesund with the intention of crossing the famous Justedal glacier, the largest and grandest in Europe. He left us in one of the shore boats, and toiling up the hill was lost amongst the houses of the sleeping town. We saw him no more.

We too departed, and all the next day were winding about the islands and between the rocks that cross our path as we approach towards Bergen. Again we passed the entrance to the Sognefjord, called at the various stations, revelled in the warmth and sunshine that gilded this our last day's journey, and about ten o'clock at night rounded the point that brought us immediately in sight of Bergen.

Now, returning to scenes almost familiar, we realised that our journey to the North Cape was a thing of the past. We had seen the midnight sun; for days had been without sunset; and though the culminating point—the midnight sun at the North Cape itself—had been a failure, the journey on the whole had been a success. Looking backward it was a source of the pleasantest recollections. Better still, one felt strengthened and invigorated in mind and body by the pure air, the changing scenes, the variety of impressions in which for seventeen days we had revelled. The wet and gloomy days had been dull and tedious, it is true, but, like the small failings in a life that has gone from us, they were remembered no more.

Bergen, as we approached it in the glow of evening, looked more picturesque than ever, with its quaint houses rising one above another on the green slopes of the hills that towered in three distinct masses: whilst the harbour, crowded as usual with shipping, ran far up into the town, between modern warehouses, and ancient buildings with gable ends, and an old fortress that was being whitewashed inside and out and prepared for an approaching visit of the King.

Fortunately for us, we had telegraphed from the last station for quarters at Holdt's Hotel, and they had reserved for us the one large room at their disposal. Many of the passengers were walking about for hours afterwards, seeking rooms, and finding them at length with great difficulty, if they found them at all: for Bergen, between travellers and the near approach of royalty, was full to overflowing. One of our passengers, with his three ladies, was amongst the unfortunate number: and to add to his distress, he lost part of his luggage in landing. Some of it got taken to one place, and some to another. We had not been five minutes at the hotel, and were talking to some acquaintances we had chanced to meet, when down he came like an avalanche, and began searching amongst the new arrivals for his lost property. Amongst other rooms he entered ours—we had only gone into it ourselves in the darkness—and there, sure enough, was one of his bags upon a chair. He pounced upon it, glared at us suspiciously, looked under the beds, behind the door and beneath the table, but found no more. Finally he went off, evidently persuaded in his own mind that we had laid violent hands upon his chattels. But in our hearts we could find only pity for him. We were comfortably quartered at the hotel: he had been less fortunate: and there are few things more trying to the temper than having to perambulate the streets at the midnight hour, dead beat, in search of a place in which to lay one's weary head and aching limbs.

Midnight, too, was now midnight in reality. On our return to Bergen we had the luxury of darkness for some hours: a luxury few can realise until they have paid a visit to the North Cape, and crossed within the Arctic Circle during those long weeks, when, for these latitudes, there is "no night."

SIR CECIL'S RIVAL.

I.

THE Hon. and Rev. Augustus Fordyce meeting with the preferment that befitted his noble family connections, if not his talents, the parish of St. Jude's, Briarford, was left for some time without a vicar. The vacant living was finally accepted by the Reverend Frederick Spenser, who came down at once to inspect his future sphere of labour, and who as quickly delivered himself of a few sentiments without reserve. Before the new incumbent had been four-and-twenty hours in the parish, every soul knew that serious changes were impending.

"The truth is, there is so much to be done that I hardly know where to begin," explained Mr. Spenser with the most engaging candour, as, propping his back against a high painted pew, he glanced over the church from east to west, from roof to pavement, in his quick, decided manner.

If the newly-appointed vicar did not know where to begin, it was clear that he did not know where to end. But at last a day came, when the church had been half rebuilt and wholly refurnished, and he himself entered at the tail of some twenty or thirty little white-robed boys, that the soul of the Reverend Frederick Spenser knew peace. It was a pleasing spectacle, but that did not dispose of the awkward problem of the unsettled bill of all these pretty things. Mr. Spenser addressed himself to the difficulty with his characteristic energy, and with the aid of his adherents, who were many and warm, he soon cleared off the greater portion of the debt. Undisguised begging in the form of a subscription list in the first place, and in the second a concert given by amateur musicians, zealous but incompetent, had effected this; and it was now proposed to wipe off the remaining incubus of debt by the proceeds of a bazaar.

The weather favoured the scheme. Lovelier day never dawned than that twentieth of June, the appointed date. While still early, all the town of Briarford and half the county were pouring in and out of the mimic fair. Midway through the afternoon a fresh arrival in the hall attracted some attention. This was Sir Cecil Thorpe, who, upon attaining his majority some six or seven years back, had come into one of the finest estates in the county. Where fortune has bestowed her smiles, there the world will also lavish its favour; so now, upon Sir Cecil's approach, bright faces grew brighter, grim lips relaxed, and anxious brows smoothed. The stall-holders exerted themselves to good purpose; for at first it seemed as though a veritable goose laying golden eggs had come to the sacrifice. But

there was a certain method in Sir Cecil's liberality. Sauntering slowly up the room, he paused at each stall in turn; but having spent a reasonable amount with such readiness as to awaken great hopes in the breasts of fair saleswomen, he was not to be induced to lay out any further sums. His refusal was laughing and pleasant; but he invariably passed on remorselessly to the next emporium of cushions and teakettle-holders.

Only upon reaching the head of the room, which was occupied by two stalls, did Sir Cecil depart from this judicious course of action. At the first of these tables he came to a decided stop, and lounging across it, spoke with familiar ease and brevity to the handsome girl with bold eyes, and bolder tongue, who presided there.

"How do you do, Adelaide?"

"Quite well, thank you; but I have no time to-day for frivolous conversation."

The young lady's manner, however, belied her words; for, permitting an old gentleman, upon whom she would have swooped three minutes earlier, to pass unscathed, she leaned over the improvised counter, ready for any extent of chat. They were cousins, Sir Cecil Thorpe and Adelaide Dudley; and his sunny blue eyes and pleasant smile had long ago won Adelaide's heart. Unaware of his spoil, Sir Cecil only thought of her as a sharp sort of girl for a fellow to talk to, and was especially glad to find her now in this desert, where were few of his kind.

Sir Cecil Thorpe glanced at the articles before him, lifting one or two, then flicking them contemptuously aside.

"Who is the young lady to the right?" he asked at length, dropping his voice a little. "She does not seem to be doing a very brisk trade."

"Poor Miss Spenser! no; I suppose she knows but few people," said Adelaide Dudley carelessly.

"Oh! that's Miss Spenser, is it?"—"And a deuced pretty girl she is," he thought, but did not say. "I understood the Reverend Frederick was expecting his family to take up their abode with him, and they have apparently arrived," he added aloud after a minute's interval. "How many more such household deities has he?"

"His household deities, Cecil, as you term them, are two in number; this sister and his mother. Spenser, senior, would seem to have departed this evil world," Miss Dudley ended with flippancy.

At this juncture a strong party of customers claimed Miss Dudley's attention, and under cover of the distraction Sir Cecil Thorpe glided away to seek "fresh fields and pastures new." He had not, however, sauntered on half a dozen paces before he heard a manly voice behind greeting him.

"Glad to see you here, Sir Cecil!"

"Hallo! Spenser, how do you do? Yes, here I am, doing my

duty like a man. I am almost, but not quite cleaned out, and I propose to finish the process here," rejoined Thorpe.

Nothing could have fallen out better.

"My sister," said the Reverend Frederick. Then turning to the young lady he added: "Ethel, Sir Cecil Thorpe is anxious to get rid of some burdensome cash." Having performed which ceremony, Mr. Spenser went his way.

At the informal introduction two soft dark eyes were lifted shyly for a moment, and a faint sea-shell pink tinted the most innocent, lovely face it had ever been Sir Cecil's lot to behold, as Miss Spenser gravely inclined her head. Then her slim hands sought for, and laid out before Sir Cecil Thorpe smoking caps and such other articles as might be supposed to be useful to a young man, in a quiet almost apologetic manner, and without one word of the fluent recommendation that would have fallen from Miss Dudley's lips under the same circumstances.

"What am I to buy? Please tell me."

"What do you wish for?" asked Miss Spenser, in a soft low voice that matched the tender grace of her face.

"There is such an embarrassment of riches that I shall leave myself in your hands; have you any conscience?"

"I *should* have none to-day."

"Have you made heaps of money?"

"No, I am rather unsuccessful. It is my fault, I daresay. My mother should have been here to help me, but she is laid up with a bad headache."

"Indeed!" said Sir Cecil, upon the whole rather glad of the old lady's absence, and wishing Miss Spenser would again raise the broad white lids that so jealously curtained her lovely eyes.

"I am stupid at this sort of thing. Do you think I shall sell half?" asked Miss Spenser, eyeing her piles of wares with an air of pensive speculation.

"I don't know; but the case looks pretty hopeless, does it not? Never mind, it is quiet to chat; I've been knocked almost into little bits in the crowd: I assure you that I've sustained severe injuries. May I come round there to rest?" asked Thorpe eagerly, pointing to some chairs behind Miss Spenser's stall.

"No, certainly not," answered Ethel, laughing softly.

"It is very hard; I'm sure my exhaustion must be written upon my countenance."

His subterfuge—if subterfuge it were—was successful. Miss Spenser's glance was instinctively raised to his face, and Thorpe took a deep satisfying draught of the beauty of her eyes.

"You don't look very bad," answered the girl after surveying his handsome, stalwart looks. "At all events, you may not have one of these chairs; but there are some benches in the middle of the room."

"Thanks; but I prefer my physical sufferings to banishment."

Their acquaintanceship was progressing hopefully. In the beginning Sir Cecil Thorpe kept turning over a few of the articles on the table, as though laboriously striving to make up his mind which he should appropriate to himself; in reality intent upon watching for the vagrant colour that came and went in the girl's clear cheeks, and laying stratagems for the pretty dimples that danced for a moment about her mouth, transforming its usual aspect of meek gravity into an emblem of innocent mirth.

Miss Spenser's method of conducting business rather amused Sir Cecil in contrast with Adelaide Dudley's sharpness in that particular. Miss Spenser served people with what they asked for, or had a strong desire to possess; received their money, counted out their change to them gravely and carefully, and then permitted them to go on their way rejoicing.

"Miss Spenser, when the flies walk into your parlour," advised Thorpe, regarding the anxious expression of her small countenance "you should not let them go again so easily."

"But how am I to keep them?—I want dreadfully to make at least a respectable sum."

Sir Cecil laughed at this high flight of ambition. "Of which I see as much prospect as of my being made Emperor of China," said he, twirling round a small piece of worsted work, which he had picked up, to the destruction of its pink-and-white beauty.

Thorpe was sorry for his words and laugh when he saw the concern deepen upon her childish countenance, and, compassionating her distress while utterly unable to comprehend it, it occurred to him, that perhaps he might help her to dispose of some of her articles.

Just then a prosperous farmer's wife came up, and Sir Cecil regarded her as a favourable subject for experiment. This lady, reaching out a huge hand cased in a black kid glove of unimaginable dimensions, took up one thing after another, examined it at all points and laid the article down again, dissatisfied. Sir Cecil glanced up and down the stock of fearful and wonderful creations before him to find something of the uses of which he might have some slight idea. Finally, he pitched upon a pair of slippers.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Webster! How is your good husband?"

The woman turned at the sound of the genial voice, and, recognising her landlord, dropped him a respectful curtsey.

"Are you looking for a bargain, Mrs. Webster? Here's a pair of shoes; charming things!"

Mrs. Webster took the slippers from his hand, and finding the ticket, read aloud, "Ten and sixpence. Not much of a bargain, are they?" asked she in a polite tone of deprecation.

Thorpe laughed with perfect good-humour. "Too bad of you, Mrs. Webster, to use my own words against me! Well, they are the greatest comfort in the world and cheap at any price;—I've a pair, and wear them every night."

"La! Sir Cecil, you are not telling me the truth now!" cried the dame laughing; but she tucked the "greatest comfort in the world" under her fat arm, and handed him the money.

"You have not told me how Mr. Webster is. Is he here?" asked Thorpe, detaining his victim with polite conversation.

"No," she answered, taking the attention seriously; "he's not here, sir; he's busy with the hay."

"Then I am sure," said Sir Cecil adroitly, "so good a wife as you are will not go home without a present for him."

"La!" cried Mrs. Webster again; this word of doubtful etymology being that lady's favourite channel for emotion: "Webster'd consider all these things a pack o' rubbish,—meaning no offence."

Sir Cecil, artfully suppressing the fact that his sentiments quite coincided with those of the absent gentleman, called upon Miss Spenser to find a suitable offering; and so a pair of muffetees were disposed of; and then, after one or two further inflictions, this first martyr was permitted to escape.

"There, Miss Spenser," said Thorpe, handing her a couple of sovereigns,—and never had money, not even an unexpected "tip" in his hardest-up days at school, given Sir Cecil Thorpe so much pleasure as those two pounds. "But remember I don't lend my valuable assistance through any consideration for you, because I think you richly deserve your misfortunes." His auditor glanced up, startled; but the young man's laughing eyes reassured her; and the white lids with their heavy fringes were dropped again instantly: perhaps Ethel had read something more than amusement in Sir Cecil's gaze. "It is simply in the interests of the committee that I take all this trouble, and out of regard for my friend Spenser."

That first commercial success was followed by many more; and the little pucker of anxiety was getting smoothed out of Ethel's fair face, as she watched the rapidly-increasing piles of coin; and the bright smiles with which he was thanked, was reward enough to Sir Cecil for his exertions. He had not lived eight-and-twenty years in the world without learning that pincushions even had merits when recommended by a wealthy baronet beyond what they would have possessed if extolled by less powerful lips. Although, to be just to the world, a large portion of the favour always ready for Sir Cecil Thorpe was due to the inherent nobility and kindliness of his nature, of which his pleasant, gracious manner was but the natural outcome.

At eleven o'clock upon that same night Sir Cecil Thorpe, having at length had some dinner, sat alone over his wine in the great dining-room of Thorpe Hall casting up accounts, and he found himself—

Plus: One cushion with a lion from Central Africa; another with a parrot from Brazil; a third with arabesques from South Kensington; and a fourth with flowers from every land: three footstools, in subject also zoological, ornithological, and floral; six smoking

caps, any one of which would have excited the envy of an Eastern potentate; and sundry other things, as to the names and uses of which he was completely ignorant.

Minus: A great deal of cash, and—that trifling organ, his heart.

II.

JUST two months later, the Vicarage drawing-room one evening wore an unwonted aspect of life and festivity. A fat living was Briarsford, no stinted stipend requiring careful outlay, and the house was a good and pretty residence. The drawing-room was as pleasant a room as rich hangings of a tender, delicate hue, and a wealth of flowers with their living beauty and warm fragrance, could produce. As a rule, only Mr. Spenser and his mother and sister were there to enjoy its luxury; but things were different upon this evening, for it was the appointed date of a feast, to which they had bidden their friends and neighbours. The feast was eaten, and the gentlemen, quitting the wine, had just rejoined the ladies. They had not, however, yet settled into their places, but stood huddled rather like a swarm of bees in the neighbourhood of the door, each probably intent upon selecting the special situation that seemed most desirable in his eyes. Sir Cecil Thorpe had not the least doubt where he should come to anchor; but he intended to take up his position by a strategical movement. Possibly it was a guilty conscience that made him so cautious, or, perhaps, he only dawdled to enhance his enjoyment by anticipation—as we handle a long looked-for letter before breaking the seal, or watch the wine beading round the untasted glass: perhaps he waited for an invitation from the soft eyes, whose every expression he knew so well now. Whatever the motive, however, his hesitation cost him his pleasure, for while he stood aloof, a young man—the only bachelor present besides himself—dropped into the vacant chair at Miss Spenser's side.

Thorpe muttered to himself very strong language upon perceiving the usurpation. Too much disgusted to seek amusement elsewhere, he retained his former station at the head of the room, supporting himself with one arm against the mantelpiece, while he surveyed the company cynically. Seated on a *causeuse* close to him, gossiping with a crony of hers, Miss Burton, was Adelaide Dudley; she had her back to Sir Cecil, so that he could only look down upon her jet black hair wrapped round a stately head, and just catch the shimmer of her yellow silk dress. Their host, the Reverend Frederick Spenser, was seated at a table beneath the chandelier, engaged in turning over a book of photographs for Mrs. Daglish, whose most salient points, her fat and her flaming complexion, were thrown up to highest effect by the crimson velvet robe in which she was attired. Mrs. Daglish was good-nature itself, and she had the highest regard for her clergyman; but she was selecting all his nearest relatives to make uncomplimentary remarks upon, being as regularly over-

whelmed with confusion and colour when her mistakes were discovered to her: so that, what with the blazing chandelier above, her dress, and her accession of colour consequent upon her maladroit criticisms, there seemed to be a fair prospect of her departing this present world, like Peter Simple's mother, by spontaneous combustion.

Dr. Daglish, the small meek husband of this lady, was amusing himself harmlessly with a microscope, well out of everybody's way at a side-table. While, at the other end of the long apartment, sat their hostess boring old Mr. Dudley, Adelaide's father, until the tears almost stood in his eyes. Worthy Mrs. Spenser had only two topics of conversation—missions and horticulture: Mr. Dudley scarcely knew a daisy from a rhododendron, and he would not have cared if all the heathen with the parsons to keep them company, had been at the bottom of the sea. Sir Cecil, who had had a considerable experience of Mrs. Spenser's fluency upon both subjects, wondered with which she was edifying the old squire. Missions, he presently concluded from the fact of the good lady counting on the tips of her fingers, which he knew to be her method of checking her interesting statistics.

But the group to which the young man's eyes turned oftenest, and with constantly-increasing irritation, was that right opposite to him but at some little distance away. The magnet that drew his gaze, his angry and ever angrier gaze, was Ethel Spenser, a lovely vision of youth and innocence in her dainty white raiment. Her dress was of muslin, plain and simple; one deep-red rose burned in the soft dusk masses of her hair, while its fellow nestled warm and rosy amidst soft lace upon her bosom. Other ornament or smallest touch of colour had she none; yet could no woman present compare with her in appearance, as Cecil Thorpe but too well knew: and her exceeding fairness seemed to be taking effect upon her attendant swain, for he kept edging nearer as the evening passed, and growing more earnest in his attention; this result was only natural, the unavoidable effect of her charms, so her companion's admiration and absorption were not to be wondered at; but it was truly maddening to their spectator to watch Miss Spenser's growing interest in the conversation.

The two hapless young people were in truth merely discussing pictures, but the poor baronet could not tell that. He could only see Ethel's sweet face flushing and paling, and the dark eyes glancing up with the innocent wondering look that had charmed away his own heart.

Sir Cecil Thorpe had just concluded that he would go and talk to his cousin Adelaide; talk with interest and empressement, so as to make Ethel suffer some of the pangs of jealousy that he was enduring; when some words of Miss Dudley's and her friend's caused him to pause in the execution of his amiable endeavour.

"Yes, she has a lovely face," said Miss Burton in a slightly lowered voice, and, from the furtive glances cast in her direction, it was patent that Ethel Spenser was the subject of their remarks. "But, innocent as she looks, she seems to understand the art of flirting."

"Innocent!" echoed Adelaide scornfully. "She is as deep a coquette as there is in England. I have seen something of women, and I can tell you that that girl, with her babyish face, is full of wiles, and a desperate flirt, as anyone can see."

Miss Dudley, in speaking thus, was well aware that she had an auditor in Cecil Thorpe, and she also knew how rankling a thorn she had planted in his breast. Honourable and steadfast himself, he would be intolerant of the slightest shade of levity in a woman; and, moreover, there was a dark page in his parents' history that had cast its shadow over his youth, and would cause him to resent what another man would call but venial.

The next moment, breaking in upon the gossip of the girls and Thorpe's wrathful reflections, came an interruption from their hostess: her voice was borne along the room in pathetic appeal.

"Frederick, will you come here a moment?"

But her son did not seem to hear across the waste of Mrs. Daglish's fat shoulders; so Mrs. Spenser was compelled to try the other member of her family.

"Ethel!"

Thereupon Thorpe sprang to the rescue; he had become quite domesticated in the house from the frequency and duration of his visits, and it was always his impulse to be kind and attentive.

"What is it, Mrs. Spenser? Can I be of service?"

"No, thank you—Ethel," said her mother, turning now to that young lady, who had at length come forward. "I wish you would go to the conservatory and fetch me that new orchid to show Mr. Dudley." The missions were apparently used up, and horticulture reached.

Sir Cecil interposed, saying that he would get the flower, and he begged ceremoniously that Miss Spenser should not be troubled: but the latter had already passed into the conservatory.

"Will you allow me to reach it, Miss Spenser?" asked he, coming up to Ethel as she was in the act of stretching out her hand to gather the blossom.

Upon hearing the freezing tones of his voice Ethel turned in surprise, and thus met his stern regard, matching the accents in which he spoke.

"Thank you, I have managed," answered she with quiet dignity.

"It was such a pity for your very interesting conversation to be interrupted," said Thorpe, with what he intended to be cutting irony.

"Not at all; I was glad of the change."

Ethel's innocence was disarming, and Thorpe had no intention of

suffering in silence, so he resorted to plainest protest. "How could you go on with that detestable puppy in the manner you have been doing all the evening?"

"What have I done wrong?" asked Ethel, the sweet mouth beginning to droop, and the tears to gather in her dark eyes. The poor child was ignorant as to the nature of her offence, but it was not the less upon that account a cause of dismay.

Sir Cecil was in part mollified by her penitence and her loveliness, as she stood there in her great beauty, looking up at him in meek appeal. "Ethel, don't you know that you belong to me?" demanded he, grasping her hand without any regard for the valuable flower-specimen.

Ethel saw the passion in his face that was bent over hers, heard it in his thrilling tones, and she turned quickly away, but she was quivering under the infection of his excitement.

Perhaps her trembling silence and swift averting of her countenance satisfied Thorpe better than any speech; for he drew her towards him whispering, "My darling, do you love me? Am I so blessed?"

The next moment a sound close at hand startled them. What smote upon their ears was the rustle of a woman's dress advancing, and it was followed by a sharp and clear voice in peremptory summons.

"Miss Spenser, are you coming?"

The foolish young people had but just time to start asunder when Miss Dudley made her appearance, rounding a pyramid of tall plants.

"I came to seek you," said that lady, with engaging candour, quite mastering the situation with those cold shrewd eyes of hers. "I think Mrs. Spenser is waiting for that flower, but I will carry it to her; it would be a pity for you to shorten your botanical studies."

"As you like," said Sir Cecil, fronting the intruder daringly, his handsome face flushed and triumphant.

But Ethel had already flown off to the drawing-room.

III.

The course of Sir Cecil's love had up to this time been of an even, prosperous character, one uncalculated to rob him of sleep or appetite; but upon the night following that brief scene in the conservatory, slumber was banished from his eyelids by the fever of passion that burned in his veins. Giving speech and utterance to his love seemed to have awakened it to more conscious existence—an activity of life that would not allow to its subject repose or calm. So with the dawn Thorpe arose; and at ten, having with difficulty restrained his ardour till that hour, he ordered his dogcart to drive into Briarford. The golden corn was waving in the fresh breeze; the many-tinted woods and flashing river lay bathed in the glorious light of the morning sun; but it was of none of these things that Sir Cecil was thinking; it was

none of the comelinesses of Nature that brought the light into the young man's eye, and the smile about his mouth. As he was being swiftly borne through that fair scene Thorpe's mind was centred entirely upon the coming meeting with Ethel Spenser: he was picturing her shy consent to be his wife, and planning how he would extort from her sweet lips a confession of love—the confession that her soft eyes had made many times.

Just as Sir Cecil Thorpe reached the Vicarage door it was thrown open from within, disclosing Mr. Spenser, who was preparing to issue forth. That gentleman would not have permitted a prince of the blood to delay him in a parochial duty, far less a young man who was constituting himself into a regular member of the household; so now he only paused to fling wide the door of the morning-room, and excuse himself briefly.

"How do you do? Walk in; perhaps you will excuse me as I am going out on a matter of urgency."

Sir Cecil would have excused him for all time with the most absolute content: the estimable clergyman was not the person whom he wanted. But, glancing round the room into which he had been so summarily shown, Sir Cecil found it also empty of his divinity. The apartment was quite vacant, an unusual circumstance, for it was the ordinary family sitting-room at that period of the day.

One of the French windows which opened into the verandah stood ajar, and Thorpe advanced to look if Ethel had stepped out into the garden, as she would often take occasion to do if her attention were attracted by a specially-alluring rose, or a flower in need of tying up; anything in fact that would furnish a plea for straying forth into the early sunshine. But Miss Spenser was nowhere in sight, and Thorpe was turning again within doors to wait, with what patience he might, when his glance fell upon the davenport, which had been very evidently drawn up to the window that the writer thereat might enjoy the morning air.

Miss Spenser had apparently been interrupted in the midst of epistolary labours. There was a pen laid down; a carnation tied together with a fern-leaf:—seeing the little bunch the young man smiled to himself, he could so well picture Ethel placing such between the folds of her innocent notes,—on the blotting-pad was a letter just commenced, and beside it one that had come through the post, the empty envelope of which had fallen to the ground, the superscription being like the handwriting of the note bold and dashing. Peculiarly so.

"That fellow must have a small tree felled when he wants a new pen," said Sir Cecil to himself with a light-hearted laugh, as he picked up the envelope from the carpet and put it back in its place on the desk.

The next moment Sir Cecil's face had turned of a ghastly hue, and a word of bitter meaning and emphasis burst from his lips.

What was there in that simple scene to cause this excitement? Enough. In the glance which Thorpe had had of the open letter in laying down its cover upon the table, some words in the large black characters had been apparent to him. They were the conclusion:

"And now good-bye, dearest and sweetest.
"Ever, your own loving
"BEVIS TREHAWKE."

There could be no mistake; the syllables in that bold, decided writing stood out as clear as daylight, burning themselves into his brain, and there beside them, her delicate caligraphy offering a strong contrast, was Ethel's reply.

"MY OWN DARLING BEVIS,—I have had your letter and kissed it a hundred times; would that it had been your dear self— " At that point Thorpe stopped; even in so terrible a moment the instinct of the gentleman rose to prevent his reading words meant for another, and clenching his teeth and hands in his fierce wrath, he strode away to the other end of the room.

"The coquette!" he muttered, grinding his teeth in his bitter sense of betrayal. Ah! was not that what those women were saying last night, those women to whom, had they been but men, he would then have given the lie. It was true—women knew each other more truly than men could do; and they had seen the guile, the wickedness that lay behind that fair face. Thereupon a vision of that "fair face," its crystalline transparency, its childlike purity, rose before his eyes, and he groaned aloud.

"Oh! Ethel, Ethel, do you know what you have done? Why have you thus betrayed me?" the young man cried despairingly: then his mood changed, and recollecting the ardent sentiment of the letter, he laughed in scorn and derision. "Bah! it is sickening; and I, fool that I was, thinking how I might teach those shy lips to frame the words, 'I love you.' Truly, they are practised enough already!"

Sir Cecil's sad and bitter thoughts were broken in upon by a slight stir and the rustle of a woman's dress on the floor above: a picture of Ethel in her sweet and tender beauty floated before him, and he felt that if he were once to look into her innocent eyes and meet her tender confiding smile and faint blush, with which she was used to greet and welcome him, he should either gather her, frail and false as she was, into his arms, or reproach her with madder upbraidings. So he turned and left the house; never more to enter it.

IV.

How severe to Sir Cecil Thorpe of all men, was the blow of discovering that his idol was only clay, and very coarse clay, it would be impossible to describe. All things became a weariness to him: life had lost its savour. His course alone was clear; he must quit Briarford, both as unspeakably distasteful as the late scene of his dream of happiness, and a possible meeting-ground at any time with his fair false love. Therefore he set his house in order and set out on uncertain travels; perchance in the varied spectacle and constant change of life, he might learn to forget.

It is curious to note the several cures that different men adopt for the relief of that malady, grief: some think it may be drowned in dissipation, and these, losing it, lose themselves also. Some address themselves to work with all their might and main; and these are right, for work is the great assuager of every evil under the sun. Others again try to outrun their troubles which, though, mostly mount behind, and pursue wherever their victims flee. Of this latter class was Sir Cecil Thorpe. The first refuge that suggested itself to his mind was flight; but if he had entertained any great hopes of recovery from the regimen, he was disappointed. In actual experience he discovered that classic lake and mountain, and monument of hoary antiquity were as vanities, and but weariness to him, for the persistency with which one fair face kept thrusting itself ever before his vision, wringing his heart with old memories, or pictures of what might have been.

At last, after six months' fruitless wandering, Thorpe felt his steps irresistibly drawn towards home, and one evening when the March winds were blowing high he found himself once more at Briarford. Early next morning he sent for his bailiff and for a week or two occupied himself energetically in looking into various business matters. But it was again the old experience. His former weariness clung to him, and the farming and live stock and county doings, which had before yielded him such pleasure and interest, had become like all else dull, stale and unprofitable. By the end of the month, the whole life was intolerable; and he resolved to go abroad again, running up in the first instance to town for a few days, and there letting chance determine whither his steps should next be turned.

Upon the morning prior to his departure, Sir Cecil started to look at some cottages in course of erection upon his property. As he stumped along the country road giving a critical glance occasionally, nothwithstanding the broken state of his heart, at his park wall on the one hand and some open land of his on the other, his ear was caught by a peculiar sound. When his attention was first attracted, these sounds were distant but growing instantly nearer—in another minute he recognised the noise as that of a horse tearing along the highway as fast as hoofs could be laid to the ground; and he had but

just time to draw aside when a riderless horse shot past. In the momentary glimpse he had of the mad creature before he was lost to sight in a turn of the road, Thorpe noticed that the vacant saddle was a lady's. In much concern he turned back; and, retracing his steps, was shortly upon the scene of the accident: coming up just in time to see a young lady pick herself out of the ditch that bordered the way.

"Are you hurt?" exclaimed Thorpe, and the abrupt question was all that he could articulate in the breathless state that he was in as a consequence of his run.

"No; I don't think I am," the victim of the mishap replied. "No, not at all," added she, more emphatically after balancing herself experimentally upon her feet for a moment.

"You are sure of it?" asked Thorpe, looking at the girl with anxiety as she stood there before him on the sodden, wintry turf.

"Yes, quite: I got a slight shake; but I am all right again." Saying which the stranger seated herself with great composure in the hedge.

Sir Cecil picked his way over the wet ground to her side. "Can I be of any service?" enquired he in his kindly, pleasant tones.

"Thank you, but I think not," answered the girl looking up from her occupation of endeavouring to restore some form to her hat, and revealing to Thorpe a pleasant, fresh young face with frank grey eyes and a rather wide mouth. "My groom will be up in the space of half-an-hour or so, and he must find my horse for me."

"You don't mean to say that you will mount that animal again?"

"Of course I shall! Why not? I am not a bit the worse for my tumble;—except," added she, as she pommelled vigorously at her head-gear, "that I have spoilt a hat, and shall take home a small estate in mud."

"The land is mine; let me assure you that you are most welcome to all that you have appropriated," said Sir Cecil smiling, and much amused by this easy and self-possessed young lady.

"Yes, you are Sir Cecil Thorpe, are you not?"

"Precisely."

"I saw you last week driving up the High Street—in Briarford, I mean. You were behind as handsome a pair of chestnuts as I ever saw; they attracted my attention, and then it was that I learned who you were."

Thorpe felt a natural curiosity as to whom his new acquaintance might be, and considered himself entitled now to the information. "And I have the pleasure of speaking to—?" said he in a tone of interrogation.

"Miss Bevis Trehawke," said the girl, supplying the hiatus.

"'Bevis Trehawke!'" gasped Thorpe. "What—what do you mean?"

"I told you my name, that was all," answered the young lady, fixing her eyes wide with astonishment upon Sir Cecil's flushed face.

"I beg your pardon," said Thorpe, endeavouring to collect himself—hearing that name spoken, that hated name which had wrought such havoc in his life, had completely unnerved him. "I beg your pardon, I did not follow your remark; of whom were you speaking?"

"I said who I was; nothing more. Did you not put the question to me?"

"You are called Bevis Trehawke—just that?"

"Yes, you seem surprised; but it is the name that always goes with Trehawke Castle. I get the name with the property from an uncle."

"Indeed!" was all the response Sir Cecil made. He was lost in thought; could there have only been a simple mistake at the bottom of that past unhappy business? He must know more.

"You cannot have been long in this neighbourhood?" said he suggestively.

"Oh! I am but an importation, a transient dweller in these parts: I am paying a visit at the Vicarage; Miss Spenser and I are old school-friends."

"I have the pleasure of knowing Miss Spenser; indeed all the family. Are they well?" asked Thorpe endeavouring to speak unconcernedly, as though of ordinary acquaintances.

"I have never heard Ethel speak of you," said the downright young lady addressed, at the same time taking a quiet survey of her companion's features.

"Nevertheless they *are* old friends of mine," said Sir Cecil with some irritation, feeling the colour rising into his face under Miss Trehawke's steady regard.

At length she turned her glance down again to the whip she was twisting in her hand, and replied to Thorpe's first enquiry. "Well, Sir Cecil, Mrs. Spenser and Frederick are well; but Ethel is very ill, fading slowly out of life."

"No, no," said Sir Cecil, as soon as he could recover from the shock of Miss Trehawke's words. "It may be serious, but you are exaggerating her state."

"I wish I were, but in my opinion she is dying. Nothing rouses her, nothing interests her."

"I hope you may be mistaken—I hope you may be mistaken," said Thorpe, a sickening pain fastening itself upon his heart.

The silence which ensued was only broken by the arrival at last of the groom. Sir Cecil then roused himself.

"You will permit me to drive you home, Miss Trehawke? Your servant could carry a message to my place; and a carriage be here in a quarter of an hour."

"Thanks, no," was the reply of that spirited young lady. "It is necessary to Sultan's education that I should mount him again."

"Defer the improvement of Sultan, and allow me to have the pleasure of seeing you home; will you have the chestnuts?"

"Oh! they are not to be resisted," said Miss Trehawke, sparkling with interest now. "I should like to try them."

Sir Cecil tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, upon which he scribbled a line or two, then handing it to the man he despatched him on his horse with instructions to be quick. The groom having disappeared at a sharp gallop, Thorpe proposed to Miss Trehawke that they should walk along the road to meet the carriage, which could not be long in reaching them. He was right, for they had not proceeded far on their way before they heard the sound of rapidly-approaching wheels.

"The darlings!" exclaimed Miss Trehawke, observing critically the action of the handsome pair of horses which drew the phaeton. "Let me drive."

"By all means, if you wish it," said Thorpe laughing at her enthusiasm.

So the reins were given into Miss Trehawke's hands, and under her effective Jehuship the short journey was soon accomplished.

"Come in," said she to Thorpe, peremptorily, as she pulled up the horses in masterly style at the Vicarage door. "Mrs. Spenser ought to be very much obliged to you for looking after her troublesome visitor."

"Not at all," answered Thorpe, but he gladly followed his fair companion into the house, where he was at once marshalled into the morning-room—the pleasant parlour with the French windows opening on to the lawn which he had cause to remember so well.

Miss Spenser was seated there alone. "Ethel, here is Sir Cecil Thorpe," announced Miss Trehawke, preceding the young man up the room.

Thorpe was eagerly advancing, when from sheer amazement he suddenly came to a stop. This pale shadow was not his fair, bright Ethel, whom he had loved at first sight. It was Ethel, but so wan, so slender, so changed that Thorpe might well doubt her identity. The beautiful eyes, dilated with astonishment, that were lifted for a moment to his, alone seemed to belong to the girl's old self. Thorpe was too much shocked at the change to speak at once, but his first surprise over, he was extending his hand to Miss Spenser according to form, while Miss Trehawke began an animated recital of her morning's adventure as an explanation of Sir Cecil's appearance. Both received an abrupt check; for Ethel, who had risen from her seat in an attempt to greet the visitor, suddenly swayed upon her feet and would have fallen, had not Sir Cecil sprung forward and caught her. Miss Spenser had been overcome with faintness, and it was a perfectly senseless figure that Thorpe the next moment laid down upon the couch where the poor child had been reclining previous to his entrance.

Thorpe thought of nothing, he was conscious of nothing; he obeyed only the impulse of his full heart bursting with love and pity, and casting himself down by the unconscious girl's side, he fell

to kissing her pale lips and brow, her hands and her dress unceasingly: as though a wanderer famished, he would never be satisfied.

A remark in Miss Trehawke's calm tones presently recalled the young man. "That may be an efficacious treatment for a fainting fit, Sir Cecil; but I think, if you will allow me, I will try some more usual remedy."

Thorpe, upon that, arose to his feet with some celerity and so met Miss Trehawke's amused glance. "Shall I ring for assistance?" stammered he guiltily, feeling as though all the blood in his body were collecting in his face.

"I think not," said Miss Trehawke, as she bent over Ethel. "You will find some water on that side-table; get me a glassful."

Thorpe brought it, and helped her next to chafe the invalid's hands, and otherwise restore her, so that in a little while signs of returning life were apparent.

"Move a little farther away," Miss Trehawke then bade her somewhat incapable, but zealous assistant. "There is something in all this that I do not understand."

Sir Cecil was quite ready to add the apprehension of the present mystery to Miss Trehawke's stock of knowledge, and he was commencing an explanation, when she motioned to him to be quiet; and the next moment the sick girl spoke in her slow soft tones.

"Are we alone? I fancied—" she began, sitting up and looking around her anxiously.

Sir Cecil stepped forward. "Are you better, Miss Spenser?"

"Yes, thank you. I fainted, did I not?" asked Ethel. Adding hurriedly, while a crimson flush overspread her cheeks, making her more like her old self, the fair image that Sir Cecil had carried in his heart through many a varied scene: "I am very weak; a slight exertion, or—or surprise, overcomes me."

Then Miss Trehawke struck into the conversation to inform Ethel how she had been thrown from her horse and Sir Cecil came to her rescue, and the dreadful state she was still in, and it was quite time that she assumed more civilised attire; saying which, and her fresh face smiling at them brightly from beneath her bent hat, she went her way. Scarcely had the room door closed upon her than Sir Cecil Thorpe commenced his pleading.

"Miss Spenser—Ethel—can I hope that you will listen to me after the mad folly with which I have acted?"

"I do not know what you mean, Sir Cecil," answered the girl, endeavouring to still the throbbing of her heart, and to speak with cold dignity.

"Ethel, you know that I loved you from the first moment that I saw you, and I had some hope that my feelings were in a measure returned. To win you for my wife had become the dearest ambition of my life, when suddenly an event occurred which made me suppose that you had been only coquetting with me and deceiving me. In

a mad haste and passion I rushed away from England, but I could not forget you; and I find to-day that my suspicion was all a mistake: will you forgive me?"

"'A mistake,'" murmured Ethel, her breath coming in laboured gasps. "Why should you suspect me?"

Thorpe thereupon explained to her the occurrence of his seeing the letter with its extravagant expressions of affection, and the effect it had had upon him.

"It might have been very silly; it is a foolish habit with all school-girls," said Ethel, colouring slightly with a childlike feeling of mortification; "but I do not see much harm in it."

"Her name—so peculiar," muttered Thorpe, heartily ashamed of himself now

"I daresay it sounds odd to strangers, but I am so used to it that it never seems but quite natural to me.—Dear Bevis, she has been such a true friend to me."

"My darling, you are too good and too innocent for this wicked world. Never mind; look up and tell me that for my faithful love you will forgive me my stupidity. Do you care at all for me, Ethel? Will you let me come to see you, and, when you are better, carry you away?"

Miss Trehawke, entering a very few minutes later, found two people with warm faces and lit-up eyes respectively seated upon chairs at an unexceptionable distance apart, but there was something unadjusted in their position which caused that astute young lady to divine that those chairs had been but hastily assumed. And, indeed, Sir Cecil Thorpe must have come to a very good understanding with Miss Spenser, for shortly afterwards there was a gay wedding in Briarford, upon which occasion Miss Trehawke flirted so audaciously with the youthful pastor of St. Jude's that it was opined it would not be long before a second match was made

But it might have been only idle fancy, for when Sir Cecil broached the idea to the new Lady Thorpe as they were being whirled along to the coast in an express train, she was quite indignant.

"Oh! no; Frederick means to lead a single life; he holds ascetic views and is entirely devoted to his work."

Sir Cecil laughed in a sceptical fashion.

"But if he were to marry," persisted Ethel, "it would not be to anyone like dear Bevis, who is very nice but enjoys the world and all that sort of thing. Frederick would think only of her help, and would choose some good woman—a 'sister,' or that kind of person."

"My dear," said Thorpe, smiling still, "your brother will marry as other men do, and, I am afraid, from no loftier motive than *love*."

THE WINDS OF GOD.

Blow, soft Spring wind!
Out of the amber west, when down the sky
The shadows slowly creep, and Heaven's lit lamps
Speak ev'ning nigh!
Fan with thy living breath the rousing earth,
And let thy voice tell to all drowsy hearts
The year's new birth!

Blow, Summer wind!
When, after days of drought and sullen heat,
Out of the heaped-up clouds there comes a sound
Like echoing feet!
While from the distance, borne on breezy wings,
The rain descending on the thirsty plain,
Its beauty flings!

Blow, Autumn wind!
Out on the yellow woods and stubble lands,
Stir the brown brake and scatter thistledown
With myriad hands!
Sleep after labour, after turmoil rest:
By strength and weakness, yea, by life and death,
The world is blest!

Blow, Winter wind!
Out o'er the tumbling sea roll cloud and mist;
Roar through bare branches, striking wizard notes
Where'er you list!
Driving the ships; and in and out of all
Working God's will—who, from the frozen seas,
Came at His call!

Blow, Breath Divine!
Beyond the depths of the uncounted host,
Beyond the mystic circle of the sky,
Come, Holy Ghost!
Lo! hatred, blasphemy, and sin aspire
To raise their devil-thrones amid the gloom,
Come, quenchless fire!
Yea! and the world is buried still in night,
And loud and long thy watchmen warn in vain—
Come, Living Light!

R. AND E. TAYLOR

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THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

By the Author of "In the Dead of Night," "Under Lock and Key," "Brought to Light," etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A STRANGER AT THE ROSE AND CROWN.

MRS. CARLYON sat in the breakfast-room of her pleasant house at Bayswater, planning out in her own mind the route she should take on her journey to Hyères, for which place she intended to depart ere many days had elapsed, when the morning letters were brought in. One of them was from her niece, Ella Winter. Mrs. Carlyon opened it, and sat transfixed at the news it contained: nothing less than an avowal from that young lady that she was engaged to be married to Edward Conroy.

The shock and surprise sent Mrs. Carlyon into Norfolk. She gave orders to her maid, Higson, to prepare for their instant departure. "And it is just as well that I should go on another score," she told herself, as she stepped into her carriage to be driven to the station: "to ascertain whether my niece has relinquished that most absurd idea of hers—that she is not her uncle Gilbert's legal inheritor. What a ridiculous world we live in!" So that evening, Mrs. Carlyon, with her maid, arrived at Heron Dyke—without notice.

"Your letter, Ella, took my breath away," she began, hardly allowing herself a moment for greetings. "Has this engagement really gone so far that it cannot be broken off?"

"Who wants it to be broken off, Aunt Gertrude?" returned Ella.

"What?—Consider, my dear—a newspaper reporter, for Mr. Conroy is neither more nor less than that. A very nice gentlemanly young man, I admit, and one who has made himself a name in a certain way, but scarcely a match for the heiress of Heron Dyke."

"I am not going to marry for ambition, aunt, but for—for——"

"Love, I conclude you would say. Love may be all very well in its way, but why not have combined the two? Your husband ought to be at least your equal in position. I am very much disappointed."

"I am sorry for that, aunt, and so will Mr. Conroy be."

"My dear! Surely you will not be so foolish as to tell him," cried Mrs. Carlyon, hastily. "What I say to you is strictly between ourselves. I like Mr. Conroy very well—I like him so well that I should not care to hurt his feelings, although he has ambitiously cast his eyes on you."

"I am afraid, aunt, he could not help liking me. He said so."

"I daresay! Well, that may be true. If he were but well-connected—or a landed proprietor, say—or even a rising man in the law courts—or, in short, almost anything but a newspaper reporter, there is no one I would sooner see you marry. But as he is ——"

"I am quite satisfied with him as he is, Aunt Gertrude. And you must please remember," added Ella, with a quaint little smile, "that it was at your house I first met him. Don't you remember with what empressement you introduced him to me?"

Mrs. Carlyon fidgeted in her chair. "One may be gratified to receive a person as a visitor," she said, "but it does not follow that one cares to make him a member of one's family. As to that evening, I have hated to think of it ever since, for it was when my jewels were stolen, and now I shall hate it still more. But, to return to the point: you, the mistress of Heron Dyke ——"

"Am I the true mistress of Heron Dyke?—or, rather, shall I continue to be?" interrupted Ella.

"I will not hear a word of that nonsense," flashed Mrs. Carlyon. "My dear, I speak of you as you are: and I say that it is positively not seemly for a young lady in your position to wed a poor newspaper reporter."

Ella put her arms round her aunt's neck and kissed her. "Worldly-wise maxims do not come with a good grace from your lips, Aunt Gertrude," she whispered. "You must let me be happy in my own unambitious way."

Mrs. Carlyon sighed. How differently the young and the old look at things!—and how impossible it is to reconcile the views. She supposed she should have to put up with this. Ella was her own mistress, under no control.

"Is it quite irrevocable, my love?"

"I think so, auntie dear. You can ask Mr. Conroy."

Irrevocable Mrs. Carlyon found it to be. After a short while given to private lamentation, she resolved to make the best of it with a good grace. One very powerful advocate in her mind was Edward Conroy himself. She could not help liking him, admiring him. After frankly telling him that she did not approve of the match on account of his want of position, but that she could not and should not take any steps to hinder it, she became pleasant with him as before.

Conroy received the rebuke with becoming humility: but he did not offer to relinquish Miss Winter.

Mrs. Carlyon determined to remain at Heron Dyke. With Mr. Conroy at the Hall every day, she considered it her duty to be at hand to afford proper countenance and support to Ella. Mrs. Toynbee was all very well, but she was not a relative: and duty was duty with Mrs. Carlyon. Her cough must take its chance this winter. It was possible that the bracing air of the east coast might prove as beneficial to her in the long run as the sun-warmed but relaxing breezes of Southern France. And so she settled down in the old house, to stay there as long as might be expedient.

When Mr. Charles Plackett was at Heron Dyke, he had promised Miss Winter to write to her as soon as he had communicated with Nunham Priors. Instead of Charles Plackett writing, Mr. Denison himself wrote: and the following is what he said—

"Nunham Priors.

"My dear young Kinswoman,—You have often been in my thoughts since I saw you in London, now some weeks ago, and I look forward with great pleasure to your promised visit to me at Nunham Priors next spring.

"When in town last week I saw my lawyer, Charles Plackett, who gave me a long account of his visit to you at Heron Dyke. That visit was undertaken by him solely on his own responsibility and without first consulting me: as he ought to have done. I have the utmost confidence in Plackett's good sense and business qualifications, but whether I should have sanctioned his visiting you for such a purpose is a question I do not now enter upon. What has been done, cannot be undone; and all I can now do, my dear, is to thank you, and express to you the admiration I feel for the frank and candid spirit in which you met his enquiries. As I told Plackett, many people under such circumstances would have shown him the door: I myself should probably have done so.

"Were I in your place, my dear young lady, I should stir no further in the matter respecting which Plackett called upon you. You have done everything that honour demands, and more than could be expected of you under the circumstances. Moreover, it appears to me that—though I admit one cannot help entertaining doubts—any further investigation would probably bring forth no results. Let the affair rest: that is my advice to you. I have no particular ambition to be the master of Heron Dyke, especially now that I have learnt to know and love—aye, love, my dear—her who is its mistress. I have fortune enough and to spare, both for myself and that scapegrace boy who will succeed me. Why crave for more? A very little while and I must leave it, however much or however little it may be.

"Don't forget that I shall expect you at Nunham Priors in spring, and so for the present no more

"From your affectionate kinsman,

"GILBERT DENISON.

"P.S.—I am expecting Frank home in a week or two. I shall try to chain him by the leg until you come. I am anxious that you and he should become well acquainted with one another."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Conroy, as he read this letter with an amused smile, for Miss Winter handed it to him when he came to the Hall on the morning she received it. "It is evident Mr. Denison has made up his mind that you should fall in love with this mythical son of his."

She nodded.

"After all, Ella, would not that seem to be a most sensible arrangement? It would unite the two branches of the family and concentrate the property of both. What a pity you have given away your heart to the wrong man!"

"I begin to think so too," gravely answered Ella. "It may not be too late to reclaim the heart and give it as you suggest."

"It is never well to be rash. Had you not better await the return of the wandering relative? Perhaps he might not value the offering."

"But if he should value it?"

"He may not value it as—as its present possessor does."

"I daresay he would, sir."

"In that case, and you wish to reclaim it, you shall have it back."

Ella glanced up. "Do you mean that? Is it a bargain?"

"Undoubtedly." And Mr. Conroy appeared to speak without reservation.

"Is he tiring of me?" thought Ella.

"Shall you take Mr. Denison's advice, and let the matter of the succession drop?" resumed Conroy, after a pause.

"Certainly not. You would not wish me to, would you?"

"No. I think if any fraud was enacted, it should be traced out and exposed. I have always said so. But, do you know *why* I have chiefly wished it?"

"Why have you?"

"For your own peace, my love. I see you will have none until the matter shall be set at rest."

"That is true; that is true," she impressively answered. "But, oh, Edward, what can we do? What can we do more than we have already done?"

"Nothing—that I see at present. It does not much matter, one way or the other."

"Do you mean that my title to the estate, or non-title, does not matter?"

"Not much, I say."

"I do not understand you this morning, Edward."

Conroy smiled. "You will understand me better sometime."

"That I am sure I never shall—if I am to marry that young Denison."

"Yes, you will, despite young Denison," returned Conroy, the same provoking smile still upon his lips.

It was known that Mrs. Ducie had been suffering from a severe cold. Suddenly, without bidding good-bye to anyone, she started for London: with the object, as was understood, of obtaining better medical advice. Nullington hoped she would obtain that, and be restored to health, for she was rather a favourite.

Mrs. Ducie did not return; and the next piece of news heard was that her well-known miniature phaeton, together with its pair of ponies, had been bought by Lord Camberley and presented to his aunt, the Hon. Mrs. Featherstone. From this, gossips argued, Mrs. Ducie's return to Nullington seemed a somewhat problematical event. Captain Lennox—who appeared to have taken up his abode in London, paying The Lilacs a flying visit now and then, in by the night-train and away again in the morning—was questioned upon the point. He said Mrs. Ducie continued very unwell indeed; he was not sure but she would have to go abroad. It might have been from this item of problematical news that a report got about that the Captain was also about to leave Nullington. He himself neither denied it nor affirmed it: it would depend, he said, on his sister's health.

One evening, when the Captain had come down for a rather longer stay than usual now, he went into the billiard-room at the Rose and Crown. Lennox was a man who could not exist without society, or spend an evening at home with no company but his own.

After the Captain had played a few games with young Mr. Sandys, of Denne Park, and was about to quit the hotel, the landlord, Butterby, drew him aside.

"Can I speak with you a moment, sir?"

"Well?" cried the Captain, shortly.

"Pardon me, Captain, for asking; but would you mind telling me whether there's any truth in the report that you are about to leave The Lilacs?"

"What if there should be, eh?" asked the Captain, with a quick, suspicious glance at his questioner.

"Why simply this, sir," replied the landlord, "that I think I know of somebody who might take it off your hands, furniture and all."

"Oh, indeed! Who's that?" asked the Captain.

"A Mr. Norris, sir, who is stopping in the hotel. He says ——"

"What's his business here?"

"Nothing in particular, sir: halted here promiscous yesterday:

been going about a bit to see places. He's not a gentleman by any means," added the landlord. "I hope I know a gentleman when I see one, Captain; but he seems to have plenty of money. Retired from business, I should put it. Says he should like to settle down in this part of the country, for it takes his fancy, and is on the look out for what he calls a 'quiet little shanty' that would suit himself and his two grown-up daughters. So I thought, Captain, that if ——"

"I understand," interrupted Lennox in his quick way. He paused for a moment or two, biting his lip, his eyes bent on the ground "He looks awfully ill," was the landlord's unspoken thought, as he stood watching him. "But I suppose he goes the pace when he's in London. It's sure to tell on a man in the long run."

"It might be worth my while to see this Mr. Norris in the morning," said Lennox, breaking out of his reverie. "To tell you the truth, Butterby, I *have* some notion of leaving Nullington."

"So we heard. But I'm sorry to hear you say so, sir."

"Nothing, however, is settled at present. You see, my sister finds this part of the country a little too bleak for her, and I myself have been out of sorts for some time. We have some idea of travelling for a year or two. I shall see how she is when I next run up to town. We may perhaps come back here, after all."

"We shall miss you, sir, if you don't," spoke Butterby.

Captain Lennox looked undecided: as if he could not make up his mind. A minute or two passed before he spoke.

"You might take an opportunity, Butterby, of sounding this guest of yours as to what kind of place it is that he really wants. The Lilacs might be too small for him, or too expensive—it might not suit him in many ways. In that case my seeing him on the matter would be useless. I will look round in the morning about ten o'clock, and then you can tell me the result."

With that, Captain Lennox adjusted the camellia in his buttonhole, lighted a fresh cigar, linked his arm in the arm of young Sandys and went his way.

Captain Lennox was punctual. The clock was striking ten the next morning as he walked into the bar of the Rose and Crown.

"Mr. Norris would like to see you, sir," began the landlord. "I had a little talk with him last night; and, from what I can make out, if you can come to terms yours will be just the place to suit him. He's a little bit odd in some of his ways, but a pleasant party enough when you come to converse with him."

"You can show me to his room."

Mr. Norris was a tall, ungainly, big-boned man, dressed somewhat after the fashion of a middle-aged country squire of sporting proclivities, with cutaway coat, gaiters, blue-and-white necktie and high collar. But his clothes sat awkwardly upon him, and he seemed ill at ease in them. He rose up from the breakfast-table as Lennox entered the room, and waved him to a chair.

"Proud to see you, sir," he said. "Shall be at your service in two minutes. Am late this morning."

"Don't hurry yourself," said Captain Lennox, politely. But Mr. Norris rang the bell and had the tray taken away. He then drew his chair a little nearer the fire, so that he might face his guest, and spread his big bony hands out to the cheerful blaze.

"I'm told, sir, that you have a little shanty you are about to vacate," he said, "and as I'm in want of something of the kind we may perhaps strike a bargain."

"Possibly so, Mr. Norris. But it might be waste of time to go into any details before you have seen the place. I may tell you that there are three years of the lease still to run, and that I should like the furniture to be taken at a valuation."

"All right, Captain. If the place suits me we shan't quarrel about terms, I dessay. When shall I pay you a visit?"

"The sooner the better. I am due in London to-morrow. How would two o'clock to-day suit you? You would then have time to look over the cottage before dusk, and you might favour me with your company at dinner afterwards, if not otherwise engaged. It may take some little time to talk over preliminaries."

"All right, Captain. At two sharp I'll be with you."

Mr. Norris was as good as his word. A fly deposited him at The Lilacs at the time appointed, where he found Captain Lennox waiting. The Captain went with him over the premises. Mr. Norris made a very minute inspection of the place, peering into every nook and corner, and examining every cupboard and pantry in the house. About the condition of the furniture he did not seem to trouble himself. "It's good enough for me and my lasses," he said, with a wave of one of his large hands, when Lennox observed that he was afraid the drawing-room carpet was rather well worn.

Last of all the garden and grounds were thoroughly perambulated. "I like everything I've seen," said Mr. Norris as they went back indoors, "but before giving a final answer I must hear what my two lasses have to say. It's to be their home as well as mine, you know, Captain. Just now they are in the West of Ireland, but they'll be back in a week from to-day."

"In a week, eh?".

"Perhaps you don't care to wait so long as that for my answer?"

The Captain replied that a week more or a week less was a matter of very slight importance to him. So it was left at that.

When dinner was announced, Lennox sat down with his guest and was studiously polite, though he did not seem to be in much humour for talking. Mr. Norris, however, so far as he was concerned, did not let the conversation flag, while doing ample justice to the good things before him. He allowed no hint to drop as to what his profession in life had been, or was now; but from certain things he said Lennox came to the conclusion that he was a man who had seen a

good deal of the world and had been acquainted with several phases of life of a more or less curious kind. Dinner over, young Sandys and three or four other men dropped in; there was an adjournment to the smoking-room, and after a time some one suggested cards.

"Do you play, Mr. Norris?" asked Lennox with an air of languid interest.

"When I was a lad at home we used to play loo and speculation for nuts at Christmas time, and since then I've sometimes played a rubber of whist, but nothing more," answered Mr. Norris with his broad smile. "Still, I'm no spoil-sport, and if one of you will only give me a lesson or two I'll do my best."

Mr. Sandys undertook the part of Mentor and found his pupil a most apt one. Presently he said rather drily, "And now, I think, Mr. Norris, you will be quite able to take care of yourself." At which Mr. Norris nodded his head.

During the early part of the evening the luck seemed decidedly against him: but by-and-by his lost sovereigns began to find their way back to his pocket. It appeared to be a peculiarity of this Mr. Norris, that whenever he sustained a more severe loss than ordinary he leant back in his chair and gave vent to a hearty guffaw; whereas, when the cards happened to be in his favour and the pool fell to him, he looked as glum as a judge. Young Sandys stared at him through his eye-glass as though he were some strange animal who had found his way there by mistake, while Captain Lennox's cold, keen glances began to be directed more and more frequently towards his guest. It was dawning on the Captain's mind that Mr. Norris was perhaps not so much of a novice as he had tried to make himself out to be. At the close of the evening he rose from the table a winner to a small amount.

Norris was the first to leave. He bowed his awkward bow to the company generally, and shook hands with the Captain.

'Everything shall be settled in a week from now," he whispered, with a meaning look. "Rely upon that. Good-night."

"Queer fish that," said young Sandys, as the door closed on the lanky figure. "Where the deuce did you pick him up, Lennox?"

"I'm glad he's gone," said Lennox, with an air of weariness, as he dropped into a chair. "The fellow is after this place—if I should make up my mind to leave it."

"I say, old fellow, how jolly bad you look to-night!" continued the speaker, staring hard at Lennox.

"Yes, I'm altogether out of sorts. These horrible English winters are enough to kill anyone."

Captain Lennox was indeed glad that Mr. Norris had gone, and he would have been well pleased were he never going to see him again. He had contracted a great dislike for him, for which he could give no reasonable account to himself; a sort of dread, which had grown deeper and deeper as the evening had advanced.

And he could not shake it off. His dreams that night were troubled ones: through the whole of them the tall, gaunt figure of Mr. Norris loomed ominously. Even in his sleep he felt that he hated him.

Next morning the Captain rose unrefreshed, and started by an early train for London. He was thinking that he needed a different air from the English air just as greatly as his sister did.

It was at the Rose and Crown that Mr. Conroy stayed when at Nullington. He and Norris had once or twice met on the stairs and passed each other as strangers. On this evening, however, when Mr. Conroy was just about to go to rest, a tap came to the door of his sitting-room, and Norris appeared at it.

"I thought I'd just see whether you had retired yet, sir, having a word to say to you."

"Ah, is it you, Mr. Meath," said Conroy. "Come in. You have some news for me, I presume. What is it? Sit down."

"The news I have at present, sir, is this: that I have made some curious discoveries respecting the antecedents of the gentleman who goes by the name of Captain Lennox."

"*Goes* by the name! Is it not his real name?"

"Well, sir, he has gone by a lot of names in his time; but which of them's his real one is best known to himself."

Mr. Meath drew out a small memorandum-book and opened it. "Ten years ago," he began, "Lennox was passing under the name of Blaydon. At that time he was tuner to a large pianoforte firm in London. This situation he lost because a number of valuable articles were missed from different houses to which he was sent. We next hear of him, under the name of Perke, as book-keeper at a fashionable hotel in Mayfair. Here also some robberies were perpetrated, but whether by him or not I am not in a position to assert. In any case, he lost his situation before long. After this he appears to have gone abroad for two or three years, and was seen in Paris, Brussels, Homburg, and other places. In some way or other, probably by successful gambling, he seems to have feathered his nest pretty considerably. We next find him at Cheltenham."

"At Cheltenham!" involuntarily exclaimed Conroy.

"At Cheltenham, sir. He has become Captain Lennox then, and is a very great swell. Being Captain Lennox and a great swell, he is of course above petty peculations, unless some very tempting chance offers itself, as in the case of Major Piper's jewel-case. By his skill at cards and billiards he contrives to make a very comfortable income. He entices young men of fortune to his rooms and there fleeces them. Do you follow me, sir?"

"Quite so."

"It would appear that he at length takes up fears that Cheltenham might become too warm for him; and he wisely beats a retreat from it before any suspicion touches him. Accompanied by his sister, Mrs. Ducie, he comes to Norfolk and takes The Lilacs on a

five or six years' lease. It would seem a curious, out-of-the-way place to come to," remarked Mr. Meath, looking off his note-book for a moment; "but no doubt Lennox knew what he was about, and I have very little doubt that the scheme has paid him handsomely. He must have known that there were many young men of family in this part of the country, some of them with more money than brains, and Captain Lennox having more brains than money was exactly the man to adjust the difference. It is a pity, sir, a great pity," added Mr. Meath, with a solemn shake of the head, "that so clever a rascal did not stop short at plucking pigeons, and leave the darker paths of villany untrodden. He might have gone on living as a gentleman and among gentlemen for years to come."

Edward Conroy had been thinking. There were some discrepancies in this history. "You speak of Lennox as a tuner of pianos and a hotel clerk, Mr. Meath; but he is undoubtedly a gentleman, one of education and in manners. I think he must have been born one."

"Little doubt of that, sir. 'Tis but another edition of the old story, I take it. Well-connected parents, expensive bringing-up, perhaps good launch in life—perhaps not good, through lack of funds: then temptation, weakness, ruin. Repudiated by friends; or perhaps friends gone. Then another start under a fresh name and from a lower rung of the ladder. Ah, sir, such cases are unfortunately all too common. This is a queer world, yet men must live in it."

Conroy silently assented. "How far, do you suppose, Mrs. Ducie has been implicated in these unpleasant matters?"

The private detective shook his head. "Sir, I can't answer that. We have made no discovery against her as yet; neither do we care to push any. She is much attached to her brother, and she has clung to him in her sisterly affection. It can hardly be that she has lived with her eyes shut; any way, as to his making money by fleecing the world at cards. Whether she has known of worse things, I can't say. If so, one could not expect her to denounce him: but she must have walked upon thorns. Her husband was an officer in the army; he died young, and left her with a fair income—which is hers still. People like her, and she has some good acquaintances. So has the Captain, for that matter."

"What do you purpose doing next?" asked Conroy.

"Well, sir, my next move—though I don't say when it will take place, either this day or that day—will be to apply for a search-warrant, and go quietly over The Lilacs: into every hole and corner of it."

"With any particular object in view?"

"Yes, sir, a very particular one. I hope to find there a malachite-and-gold sleeve-link, to match the one that was found upon the gravel at Heron Dyke."

Conroy smiled: this appeared to him to be so improbable a hope.

"You cannot expect to find it. Knowing, as he must have known, that he had lost the one sleeve-link in the struggle with Hubert Stone, Lennox's first care would be to effectually hide its fellow."

"Let me tell you, Mr. Conroy, that the chances are he *didn't*. These criminals are always making some fatal mistake. And that's a very common one—the not doing away, effectually as you are pleased to term it, sir,—and it's an apt word,—with the proofs that might destroy them."

CHAPTER XXXII.

TOGETHER AT LAST.

SUNDRY matters had been taking place concerning Philip Cleeve which might well have been told previously. It was on a Wednesday morning that Philip started for London; on business, as Lady Cleeve was led to suppose, connected with Mr. Tiplady's office. On Thursday evening Lady Cleeve waited up to welcome her son's return. But he did not come.

"He must be staying in town to spend the evening with Mr. Bootle," she said to herself. "I shall have a letter in the morning."

The morning brought neither letter nor message from the truant, and Lady Cleeve sent her breakfast away nearly untasted. "After all," she thought, "seeing that he will return to-day, he probably hardly thought it worth while to write."

But when Friday evening passed away and still Philip came not, and when Saturday morning's post brought her no letter, then Lady Cleeve became seriously alarmed. Business might, of course, be detaining him; she knew that; but why did he not write? And Philip, as she believed, was so ultra-dutiful.

"I will send to Mr. Tiplady, and risk it," she thought. She would have sent to enquire before, only Philip had so intense a dislike to be what he called looked after. Once, when he had stayed away at Norwich a day or two beyond the time of coming home, she had gone herself to the office, and Philip was angry about it.

"Bridget," she said, calling to the maid who had waited upon her for many years, and who was as well known at Nullington as Lady Cleeve herself, "you shall go and enquire at the office when they expect Mr. Cleeve to come home. You can say, if you like, that I am a little uneasy at not hearing from him."

Away went Bridget, in her warm Scotch plaid shawl and black coal-scuttle bonnet. Mr. Tiplady was standing at the office-door, looking up and down the street. Bridget gave her lady's message.

"Lady Cleeve sent you to me to enquire about the movements of Mr. Philip," cried the architect, after listening. "I was just going to send to ask Lady Cleeve the same question."

This famous architect, renowned in more counties than one, was a

kindly, unpretending man, small and slight, and chary of speech in general. He took off his hat to push back the few scanty grey hairs left on his head as he looked at the servant.

"My lady thought, sir, that you must know what was keeping Mr. Philip so long in London."

"I know nothing about it, Bridget. I don't know why he went. His absence is causing us some inconvenience."

Bridget, who was much in her mistress's confidence, could not make this out. "He went upon business for you, sir, did he not?"

"Not at all. Mr. Best here got a note from him on Wednesday morning, saying he had to run up to town on a little business, but should be back the following day. We have heard nothing of him since. Make my compliments to your lady and tell her this."

Lady Cleeve became actively alarmed now. All sorts of dire forebodings filled the mother's heart. London was a place beset with dangers in many ways: she had heard, and fully believed, that hardly a day passed but somebody or other was lost in it, and never heard of again.

Sending out to order a fly, she was set down at the office. Mr. Tiplady was in his private room then, and handed her to a seat.

"I would be only too glad to tell you what is detaining him, if I knew," said the little man kindly. "We supposed he had gone up upon some matter for yourself. Lost?—lost? no, no, dear Lady Cleeve; don't imagine anything so improbable as that. Philip is quite old enough to take care of himself."

"But what can he have gone to London for? And why should he have made a mystery of it?"

"Well, to say the truth, that's what I cannot quite understand. Best said a word to me this morning—he got it from young Plympton, I fancy—that Philip had been embarking money in some speculation, and—— Do you know anything about it?"

"Nothing," said Lady Cleeve.

"I'll call Best in," said the architect. But, upon going into an adjoining room, he found that Mr. Best had stepped out. So he brought in Richard Plympton. This young man, who had been placed in the architect's office as an "improver," was brother to Mr. Kettle's curate, and was a great friend of Philip's.

Young Plympton, after shaking hands with Lady Cleeve, told what he knew, thinking it right under present circumstances to do so: that Philip had bought some shares in a rich silver-mining company, the Hermandad, and that he had gone up to town to see if he could not sell out again.

"Oh," said Mr. Tiplady, "embarked money in that, has he? I heard that same mine spoken of yesterday—quite incidentally."

"It is a very rich mine, is it not, sir?" cried young Plympton with enthusiasm.

"Very!" drily responded the architect.

"Captain Lennox got him the shares, sir. He is one of the directors, and has gone in for it himself largely."

"Sorry for him," cried Mr. Tiplady. "The mine has come to grief."

"No!" exclaimed the young man, opening his eyes widely. "You don't mean that, sir! Then"—a thought striking him—"it must be that which has been keeping Lennox so much in town lately."

"Ay, no doubt. That will do, Mr. Plympton. I wonder whether Philip has risked much upon this worthless thing?" added the architect to Lady Cleeve, as his clerk withdrew.

"It is sad news for me," she sighed, wiping her pale face. "We can soon ascertain, by enquiring at the bank how much money he has drawn out. Anything is better than that he should be *lost*."

"Of course," smiled Mr. Tiplady. "Still I don't myself see why this matter should be keeping Philip in London. It has been known to the public some days now. Shall I make the enquiry at the bank for you, Lady Cleeve?"

"If you will take the trouble. I shall be much obliged to you."

"I may want your authority before they'll answer me. I'm not quite sure, though: they know me for Philip's good friend."

It was arranged that he should get into the fly now with Lady Cleeve. The driver was directed to stop at the bank. Mr. Tiplady went in, and came out with a serious face.

"Will they not answer you?" cried Lady Cleeve.

"Oh yes; they made no difficulty about that."

"Well? How much has he drawn out?"

"Nearly every pound he had there."

So poor Lady Cleeve had to go home with her anxiety augmented, instead of lessened. Suppose Philip, in his dismay at the loss of all his money, should—should have done something rash!

Saturday wore itself away. The look on the mother's face was pitiful to see. She sat at the window which faced the entrance-gate, looking for one that did not appear. And when dusk had closed in she still sat on in the same spot, listening in the dark with straining eyes for the well-known footfall that was so long in coming.

Sunday morning came and with it the postman, for there was an early postal delivery on that day at Nullington. But there was no letter from Philip. Dr. Spreckley was in the act of brushing his hat preparatory to setting out for church, when in rushed Bridget. Her lady had suddenly been taken with one of her old attacks, and the Doctor must hasten to her.

Dr. Spreckley had another patient on his hands at that time—the Reverend Francis Kettle; he was laid up with gout. When Dr. Spreckley called there after church, he mentioned Lady Cleeve's illness to Maria.

"She had been getting on so well lately," he lamented. "Anxiety of mind has brought on this attack; nothing else."

"Anxiety of mind?" repeated Maria.

"Yes; all about that harum-scarum son of hers. He went to London on Wednesday last, and has never been heard of since. She is in a fine quandary, I can tell you, fancying some dreadful harm has come to him."

"But why should harm come to him?" asked Maria, her heart beating wildly.

"Why, indeed! He does harm enough to himself without its coming to him gratuitously. Been and spent all his money; made ducks and drakes of it."

"Oh!" gasped Maria. "*How?*"

"How!" returned the Doctor. "Well"—looking at Maria's tale-telling countenance—"been embarking a lot of it in some precious mining scheme, and the mine has blown up."

Maria went to Lady Cleeve's that afternoon. She found her very ill. Maria hid her own fears and forebodings, and spoke cheerfully and hopefully; although every now and then a blinding rush of tears would come into her eyes when she thought that perhaps in very truth she should never see Philip more on this side the grave. More than ever before, she seemed to realise how dear he was to her heart.

How many days of this terrible anxiety went on, neither of them cared to number. The Vicar was getting better now, though still confined to a sofa in his room, and Maria spent much of her time at Homedale. One morning there arrived a telegram addressed to Lady Cleeve. She signed to Maria to take the paper.

"No. 6, Maxwell Terrace, Wandsworth, London.

"From PHILIP CLEEVE.

"I have met with a slight accident, which will detain me in London for a few days yet. It is nothing serious, so do not be alarmed. Another message to-morrow."

"Thank heaven! my boy still lives. And yet it is strange why he has not written," mused Lady Cleeve, stretching out her hand for the paper. "He says, 'Another message to-morrow!' Why send a telegram when, if he were to post a letter this evening, it would reach me in the morning? He must be worse than he wishes me to know of; he must be so ill that he cannot write. He may be dying. And I cannot go to him!"

"I will go to him, dear Lady Cleeve!" said Maria, with a lovely flush on her cheeks.

"You, my dear!"

"Yes, I. I can go: papa is almost well now."

"But, my dear child, will it do for *you* to go? You——"

"I am his promised wife, and who has more right to be by his side at such a time as this than I have?" She flung herself into Lady Cleeve's arms, and the two wept together.

Maria lost no time. Before the astonished Vicar could say Yes or No, before he quite understood what the matter was, she was on her way to the railway-station.

A cab stopped that same evening at No. 6, Maxwell Terrace. Miss Kettle alighted, knocked, and enquired for Mr. Cleeve.

Before the servant had time to reply, a white-haired, ruddy-faced gentleman came out of a side-room. "Come inside, come inside," he said, as he peered at Maria through his spectacles. "Yes, Mr. Cleeve is under this roof. He is my guest, you know; and you, I presume, are some relation of his?" he added, as he led the way into the parlour. "Perhaps his sister?"

"No, not his sister," faltered Maria, the difficulties of her position suddenly presenting themselves. "I am not related to him."

"Not related to him!" repeated the old gentleman, gazing at her. But there was something so benevolent in the ruddy face, so kindly in the honest eyes, that Maria took heart and courage.

"I am his promised wife, sir," she said simply. "There was nobody but me to come."

"His promised wife, now! Bless my heart, but that's very nice, do you know. I never had a promised wife; I often wish that I had. My name's Marjoram, my dear—Josiah Marjoram, late of Bucklersbury, City; now retired, with nothing to do—nothing to do. It's hard work, though, sometimes."

"But about Philip—about Mr. Cleeve, sir?" said Maria, earnestly. "Is he very ill? I was to send a telegram to his mother if I got here in time. How was he hurt?"

"Sit down, my dear, and I will tell you all about it. It was as gallant a thing as ever I saw. I was standing at my drawing-room window one afternoon, whistling to myself, and thinking about nothing in particular, when all at once a hansom cab came dashing round the corner at a most furious rate. A little child was running across the road: it stumbled and fell: upon which a young man, who happened to be passing, and whom I had not noticed before, dashed into the road and seized the child in his arms. But he was too late; the cab was over him. The child escaped with a few bruises, but the young man was—well, let us put it, rather badly hurt. 'Take him to the hospital,' called out the people, running up. 'The only hospital he shall go to is my house,' I said to them: and into it he was carried. We found a name on some cards in his pocket-book, 'Mr. Cleeve,' but no address, so that I was unable to communicate with his friends."

"And he was too much injured to give you the address!"

"Just so: he was not sensible. But he is getting better now; oh, very much better," added the old gentleman briskly. "As a proof of it, it was he who dictated the telegram to Lady Cleeve this morning. My doctor and the one from London both say that with care we shall soon have him on his legs again now."

"I should like to see him, sir, if you please," said Maria faintly.

"So you shall, my dear; so you shall, when I have spoken to the nurse. Meanwhile, my housekeeper, Mrs. Wale, a good, motherly old soul, shall show you to your room, to take your bonnet off. We prepared it for his mother, thinking she might come."

The old housekeeper came in curtseying. She supposed Maria to be Lady Cleeve's daughter. Maria took off her travelling things, and was then ready to see Philip. Mr. Marjoram opened the chamber door for her. She caught sight of a white face on the pillow, and two preternaturally large eyes, that stared at her as if she were a visitor from the dead. She bent her face on his.

"Oh, my dear one!" she murmured. "Thank heaven, I have found you at last!" And Maria made up her mind that she would not leave him again.

On the morning after Philip's first wretched night in London, when he was somewhat restored to common sense, he resolved to return to Nullington and confess his bereaved condition to his mother and to Tiplady. There was no help for it. But he thought that he ought once more to go to the Hermandad office in the City, and ascertain, if possible, whether the silver-mining prospect was absolutely hopeless.

The place was still shut up, and Philip could hear nothing. In coming away he met a gentleman whom he had seen at The Lilacs, an acquaintance of Captain Lennox and Mrs. Ducie. This gentleman had also put some money into the mine, and had come down to the City on the same errand as Philip.

"Lennox? No, I can't tell you where he is; I've not seen him here lately," he said, in answer to Philip's question. "Lennox is as hard hit as we are, I expect; worse, in fact. He may be staying with those friends he has at Wandsworth: he is there sometimes."

"Can you give me their address?"

"Why yes, I can. I spent an evening or two there with Lennox in the summer."

Philip took the address, and went to Wandsworth. He found the people, but could not hear anything of Captain Lennox; they supposed him to be at Nullington. It was after leaving their house that Philip met with the accident.

When Philip had gained sufficient strength, he poured into Maria Kettle's ear all the story of his folly and ruin, the latter culminating with these dreadful mines. He was yet so weak and ill that when he had done he cried like a child. Maria pressed his hand to her soft, warm cheek, and soothed and comforted him.

"I think sometimes, Maria, that if you had not cast me off all this would not have happened," he continued; "and yet how weak and foolish I have been all through, no one knows better than myself."

"I will never leave you again," she murmured, with scarlet cheeks: and they sealed the promise with a kiss.

"I shall always say, Maria, your father was very hard to me."

"Yes. But—the truth is, Philip, he has had more on his mind than he would speak of," she returned. "It was about ——"

"About what?" panted Philip, as she stopped.

"I am almost ashamed to mention it."

"You must tell me, now that you have begun to."

"Papa took up a notion that you were somehow concerned in those robberies which took place: his own purse, you know—and the Doctor's snuff-box—and the jewels."

Philip's large eyes grew larger as he stared at Maria. "Not that I stole them? You can't mean that!"

"I fear that he was afraid you did. Dr. Downes was also."

Philip lay without speaking, entranced in astonishment. Presently he burst into the strongest laugh his feeble state allowed.

"What a joke, Maria! They could not believe such a thing of *me*. I am Philip Cleeve."

The words imparted their own assurance. Though Maria had never needed to be assured.

"Did *you* think this?"

"Oh, Philip! Don't you know me better than that?"

"My dear, yes. Forgive the question. You say you will never leave me again, Maria: I bless you for that. If we could but be married here, and now, so that no adverse fate might ever more part us! Here and now!"

Maria's vivid blush was the only answer.

"But how could we live, now that our future is marred?" continued Philip. "As Tiplady's partner, I could have ensured you a good home; but the money which was to have secured that position, the twelve hundred pounds, is gone for good."

"I have two thousand pounds that I think you have not heard of, Philip," she said, in a low tone as she hid her face. "Mrs. Page left it to me. We will pay some of it over to Mr. Tiplady, in place of that which is lost."

"Maria!"

"Yes," she answered. "I have been intending it ever since I knew you were getting better. Do not fret after the money, Philip. Captain Lennox is worse off ——"

"Hang Captain Lennox!" interjected Philip. "But for him I should never have got into trouble of any kind."

"He had embarked, it is said, a great deal in this mine," added Maria. "People fancy that it is his loss in it which makes him think of giving up The Lilacs."

Romantic though old Mr. Marjoram showed himself to be, it yet may have surprised him to be told that the two young people enjoying his hospitality had determined to get married as soon as possible, while Philip still lay ill and helpless—if he, the kind, old gentleman, would only help them to accomplish it.

"Oh ho," said he. "Well, with all my heart. Your parents have destined you for one another from childhood, you tell me."

"That's quite true," said Philip, from his pillow.

"Philip will need careful tending for a long time to come, as you know, sir," spoke Maria, with soft red cheeks and downcast eyes; "and no one can tend him as a wife can. If you, sir, would be at the trouble of procuring a special licence for us, and—and Philip and I thought if you would not mind our being married here quietly some evening ———"

Tears twinkled on the old gentleman's eyelashes. He drew Maria to him and pressed her to his heart, and she cried a little on his shoulder as she might have done on that of her father. Mr. Marjoram wished that Heaven had given him such a child.

Thus it fell out that, a few days later, a quiet wedding took place in the drawing-room of No. 6, Maxwell Terrace. Philip was lifted out of bed that day for the first time since his accident, and lay on a couch while the ceremony was performed. He looked desperately white and ill, poor fellow! but the light of perfect content shone in his eyes, and the old sweet smile that used to mark the Philip Cleeve of old days came and went continually on his lips. Mr. Marjoram gave away the bride; and his sister, a charming maiden lady of fifty, came all the way from Hertford to countenance the ceremony. And the old state of things then went on again. Poor helpless Philip lay in bed, and Maria waited on him.

But he seemed to get rapidly better now. And when sufficiently well to leave the good old man's hospitable roof, he and Maria went to a quiet seaside place lying on their way to Norfolk, that Philip might inhale the refreshing sea-breezes for a few days before returning home. At present he and his wife would stay with Lady Cleeve.

She, Lady Cleeve, was thankful in her heart for all that had happened, now that it had led to all this happiness. The Vicar, making up his mind at first to be very stern and high and mighty, broke down at the first interview. For one thing, his mind was at rest as to Philip's fancied participation in the robberies. Too much proof had been found at The Lilacs by Mr. Detective Meath, to admit of suspicion against anyone but Captain Lennox.

Dr. Downes snuff-box had turned up first. It was supposed the Captain had been afraid to get rid of it too quickly. Most of the jewels lost at Heron Dyke had been found there; and—the fellow sleeve-link of malachite-and-gold.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE DUSK OF EVENING.

NEVER had the good people of Nullington been so startled out of the ordinary quietude of their lives, as during the Christmastide to which

events have now brought us. The marriage, under somewhat romantic circumstances, of Philip Cleeve, with the coming home of himself and his bride, was but as a tame episode compared with the startling revelations in connection with Captain Lennox.

Both Captain Lennox and his sister had vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed them up. They had been traced to London, but there the trail was lost, and it had not hitherto been found again. Lennox had never come back to complete the arrangements respecting the letting of the cottage to Mr. Norris. Something must have aroused his suspicions, and some-one, probably one of his own servants, must have sent him timely information respecting the execution of the search-warrant. In any case, he was nowhere to be found after that day. Mr. Meath was at fault; the general police were at fault; and meanwhile the cottage remained in charge of the police.

Christmas at Heron Dyke could not well have been spent more quietly. Conroy was away for a few days about this time. Mrs. Carlyon and Ella went into the town occasionally to see Maria and Philip, and that was about their only dissipation.

"It must have been Captain Lennox who took the jewel-case out of my dressing-room that night at Bayswater," remarked Mrs. Carlyon one day. "And to think I could not get rid of an uneasy suspicion that it might have been poor Philip Cleeve who had taken it!"

Ella looked up in surprise. "Philip Cleeve!" she exclaimed.

"Well, yes; I am ashamed to say so, Ella. One day, a few weeks after the loss, when Captain Lennox was in town and calling upon me, he enquired whether the jewels had been found. In talking of the affair, he dropped a word—it was little more than one—which somehow turned my thoughts to Philip. The Captain caught it up again—as if he had let it drop inadvertently, and I did not pursue it. Since then, when I have heard at times how fast Philip was supposed to be spending money, at cards, billiards, and such like, that inadvertent word has returned to my mind doubtfully and most disagreeably."

"Do you suppose Captain Lennox wished you to think he accused Philip?"

"No," replied Mrs. Carlyon. "I think he wanted to instil a slight doubt of his possible guilt into my mind, so as to more completely throw any possible suspicion off himself. That is how I fancy it must have been."

"Aunt Gertrude," said Ella, musingly, "I wonder whether it was Captain Lennox who stole Freddy Bootle's watch and chain that same night—and then made out that his own purse was likewise stolen?"

"Nothing was ever much more sure than that," said Mrs. Carlyon. "The man must have lived by these peculations. And to think what a gentleman he was through it all!"

Conroy came back. And whatever minor elements of disquietude might make themselves felt now and again, there was a certain sweet fulness of content about Ella's life just now, that nothing could seriously affect. She had won the sweetest guerdon a woman can win, and all things else, whether pleasing or displeasing, seemed dwarfed in comparison with that one supreme fact. The more she saw of Conroy the more she seemed to find in him to love and appreciate. Day by day the choice she had made approved itself more fully to her heart. Even Mrs. Carlyon, now that she was domesticated daily with Conroy, no longer wondered at what she called Ella's infatuation.

It had been arranged that the marriage should take place early in spring. Ella wished to delay the event until the doubt as to the date of her uncle's death and her own rightful inheritance of the property should be cleared up; but Mr. Conroy urged that that was no good cause at all for any delay.

"Suppose," she said to him one day, "that after we are married, it should be discovered that I am not the true heiress, and Heron Dyke goes from me?"

"Well, what then?" he answered. "We should still have enough for comfort. You possess some income that is indisputably your own; and I daresay I could match it, in one way or another."

"By your newspaper work?"

"By that or other things. I have given up the newspapers for the present: am not sure that I shall take to them again. Be at rest, my dear, and trust to me. We shall be able to keep up a modest home, and a cow, and a pony carriage. What more can we want?"

"You are laughing at me, Edward."

"No, indeed. I only wish you not to be troubled about this property. It may be yours; or it may not be."

"I fancy you think it is *not* mine?"

"I fancy that if everybody possessed their legal rights, it would turn out to be at this moment Mr. Denison's. But we have yet no proof of that, and it may be that I am mistaken."

"The shortest way would be to give it up to him at once."

"My dear, Mr. Denison would not take it."

"Do you know Mr. Denison?"

"I have seen him. I know that he is a straightforward, honourable man."

Ella sighed. She wished the doubt could be solved. Mr. Conroy wished the same, though perhaps in a less ardent way. He held a secret conviction that Aaron was at the bottom of the plot, if there had been a plot.

Harsh, crabbed, and unsympathetic as was Aaron Stone both by nature and training, the shock of his grandson's sudden death, following not so long after that of the Squire, had not failed to leave its traces behind. In a few short months Aaron seemed to have grown

a dozen years older. He would have liked to follow his mistress about much as a faithful old mastiff might have done, gazing from the doors when she was in the grounds, moving restlessly about her chair at dinner. To Conroy he had taken umbrage, and would mutter to himself that a stranger man had no business at Heron Dyke : the best of 'em were but spies. "What do he do up in that north wing so much ?" soliloquised the old man in the homely speech he was pleased to indulge in when off duty. "I see him, evening after evening, a-creeping softly up and a-creeping down again. What do he do it for? What's he looking after? Do the young mistress know of it, I wonder? Who can answer for't that he warn't in that theft o' the jewels? Yah! Spies!"

Of all the inmates of the Hall, the one least tolerant of Aaron's crotchets and failings was Mrs. Carlyon. On occasion she spoke of them.

"It is partly your fault, Ella: you give in to him so. Look at that senseless fancy he has taken up of having no men-servants in the house but himself! And you fall in with it."

"We have enough maids for the work, Aunt Gertrude."

"I am aware of that—I suppose we have not much less than half-a-score here, including your maid and mine. That is not the question. In your position, mistress of this grand old place, it behoves you to keep men-servants, as other people do. But because Aaron sets his face against it, you ——"

"It is not that, aunt," interrupted Ella. "What I thought right to do I should do, in spite of Aaron; believe that. It is the uncertainty in which things are that causes me to live quietly. Once I hear—if I ever do—that I am the rightful owner of Heron Dyke, you will find me make all changes that are suitable."

"This is a queer thing, Miss Ella," exclaimed Aaron, overtaking his mistress one afternoon in the new conservatory, "about that Captain Lennox. He must have been the villain who destroyed my poor boy. Ah, ma'am, but it's a terrible world!"

"I fear some of us find it so, Aaron."

"To think of it! Captain Lennox! But I never liked him, ma'am. I never liked that sharp, foxy face of his."

Ella mentally wondered whom the old man *had* liked.

"I mistrusted him, Miss Ella, from the first time I saw him. When a man talks to you so soft and silky-like, as the Captain did, and at the same time fixes you with such a pair of cruel, hungry-looking eyes, it is best to have nothing to do with him. I set such a man down as dangerous."

Miss Winter had herself always felt a secret distrust of Lennox without knowing the reason why. Perhaps, as Aaron had said, it was the contrast between his smooth, dulcet tones and the expression in his cold, hard-set glances: any way, she had never taken cordially to Captain Lennox.

"Your wife seems poorly to-day, Aaron?" she resumed, purposely quitting the other subject.

"She's more idiotic than ever," retorted Aaron, in an explosive tone. "I beg pardon, ma'am, but the old woman be enough to wear one's patience out."

Dorothy Stone seemed to live in a chronic state of fear. What was it that she was afraid of, her husband would angrily ask her—and the most he could make of her trembling answers was, that she was afraid of the "ghosts." Heron Dyke had become a fearsome place, she would say: any night she might meet Katherine Keen in the passages; or, maybe, the dead Squire. Aaron, quite beside himself with wrath at all this, threatened to shake her. Miss Winter would reason with her now and again; but the old woman's life had become a trouble to herself.

What little pleasure (a sadly negative one) she ever found in it was when she recalled all her grandson's perfections, and her past love for him. To this, she found sympathising listeners in the maids.

"Where was there another like him?" she would say, from the easy chair before the fire in her own sitting-room, a huge black bow on her muslin cap. "So bold, and handsome, and high-spirited—he was fit to match with any gentleman in the land."

"And so he was, ma'am," would make answer Phemie or Eliza.

"When was that vision of the hearse and headless horses ever known to show its warning for the poor and the serfs?" she would continue: "but it appeared for *him*."

For it was generally believed that not often was that dire portent visible to mortal eye except when the scion of some great family was about to be summoned hence; thus, as Dorothy looked upon it, the vision must be regarded as a species of honour. It was for Macbeth alone that the witches worked their spells and brewed their potions; their business lay not with the rabble rout that called him captain.

But there came an hour when, pondering upon these matters, it occurred to Edward Conroy, a shrewd reasoner, that more might be in this nervous terror of Dorothy's than she allowed to meet the eye. *What* was it that she was afraid of? He asked himself the question. Sitting by the blazing fire in her own parlour, or in the kitchen bright with sunlight, people around her within beck and call, it could not be that she feared to see a ghost there—that poor Katherine Keen in the spirit would walk in to confront her. Yet, that Dorothy would, and did, sit there often in the day-time in unmistakable terror, could not be disputed.

"Ella, how much does Dorothy know of the circumstances of your uncle's death?" Mr. Conroy took an opportunity of enquiring.

"Indeed, I cannot tell," replied Ella. "I have not liked to question her. I daresay she knows no more than we know."

"Um—that's as it may be. She was *here*, during all the time."

"Oh, yes, she was here."

"Rather a queer notion that of hers, which I hear she has taken up," continued Conroy after a long pause; "that she may meet the Squire's ghost if she goes near his old rooms at night."

"Dorothy was always so silly in that way. You have some motive, Edward, in saying this?"

"Yes, I have been watching Dorothy—waylaying her when she steals out to that little patch of herbs which she calls her own garden, and turning in at other times to her sitting-room, ostensibly to hold with her a bit of chat—and she gives me the impression of a woman who has something on her mind; something that will not allow her to rest. I don't mean her superstitious fancies. It is a more tangible fear—unless I am mistaken."

"A few days ago I found her crying and trembling," said Miss Winter. "She told me she had dozed off in her chair over her work and had had a dream which frightened her."

"Did she tell you what the dream was about?"

"No. Except that she thought she saw my uncle in it."

"Ah! It strikes me he is on her mind rather too much. I wish, Ella, you would put a few questions to her about the Squire, and let me be present."

"Not questions to alarm her, I suppose?"

"My dear, if she knows of nothing wrong in connection with that time, how could they alarm her?"

"True. I will ask her to-morrow morning. She shall come in to take my orders instead of my going to her."

The next morning, Dorothy, full of her cares for dinner, for she was still the housekeeper, and bustling enough in the early part of the day, was summoned to Miss Winter's presence. Mr. Conroy had come to the Hall betimes that day, and sat at the back of the room reading a newspaper.

Ella quietly gave her orders: and Dorothy received them intelligently as usual. In her own department as housekeeper, the woman was capable yet. "Is that all, Miss Ella?" she asked.

"All for now. I think of having a few friends to dinner soon; Mr. Philip Cleeve and his wife, and the Vicar; and Lady Cleeve, if she is able to come. Just half a dozen or so, besides ourselves—but I will talk to you of that to-morrow."

"Yes, ma'am," assented Dorothy, about to move away.

"Wait a moment," said her mistress. "I wish to ask you a question or two, Dorothy, about that Mrs. Dexter: the woman who nursed my uncle, as I hear, during his last illness. I wish to see Mrs. Dexter. Can you tell me where to find her?"

Dorothy's hands began to tremble as though she had been suddenly smitten with ague. She threw a look at her mistress so frightened and imploring, that the latter almost regretted she had spoken, and then she glanced beyond her at Mr. Conroy: but he seemed to see nothing but his newspaper.

"Where could I find Mrs. Dexter?" repeated Miss Winter.

"I don't know anything about Mrs. Dexter, ma'am," Dorothy whispered forth then in a twittering voice. "Nor do I ever wish to know."

"You did not like her, then, Dorothy?"

"I did not like her, ma'am."

Miss Winter rose. "Sit down, Dorothy," she said kindly; "you need not be put out. There, sit in that chair. And now tell me why you did not like Mrs. Dexter."

The trembling woman wiped her lips. "I can't tell why, ma'am. I didn't, and that's all I know. When she first come here with Dr. Jago, I was finely put out; hurt, if one may put it so. My nursing had been good enough for my master up to then, and I thought it might have been good enough still. I told the Doctor my mind."

"Dorothy," continued Miss Winter, after a pause of thought, "I have never questioned you about my uncle's death. The subject was a painful one, and I was more deeply grieved than I can express that I was not allowed to be here at the time. Did you see him up to the day of his death?"

"No," gasped Dorothy.

"When did you see him last? How long before he died?"

Again that same imploring look: but no answer.

"You must tell me, Dorothy."

"Not for weeks and weeks, ma'am," spoke the woman then, but with evident reluctance.

"That was strange, was it not?—considering that you were always so great a favourite with Uncle Gilbert."

Dorothy lifted the corner of her clean white linen apron, and wiped her face with trembling fingers. She seemed to gather a little courage. "When he had that Mrs. Dexter, ma'am, he didn't want me, I take it. She didn't let anybody go near the master."

"She kept him shut up behind the green baize doors, and would not let him be seen by anyone: that is what you mean?"

"That was just it, ma'am," assented Dorothy more eagerly.

"But they let you see him after he was dead—you who had been his faithful servant for so many years? Surely they let you look for the last time on that dear face so soon to be hidden for ever?"

"Not even then did they let me see him," she cried. "No, ma'am, not even then. It was cruel—cruel." She sighed and let fall her apron. All this was beginning to frighten her. Miss Winter stood in front of her.

"There was nothing going on behind those green baize doors, was there, Dorothy?" she asked in expressive tones, her eyes gazing straight into the woman's; "nothing that they wanted to keep from you, and from everyone?"

Dorothy flung up her arms with a sudden gesture of dismay. "Oh, mistress, ask me no more for heaven's sake!" she cried. "I know nothing; I have nothing to tell."

"*Nothing?*" repeated Miss Winter.

"No, ma'am, nothing." And the poor shaking woman looked so distressed as she crept to the door that Miss Winter let her escape.

"Ella," cried her lover quietly, rising from behind his newspaper, "it is from that woman we must get elucidation. She knows more than she dares to say. I am right: it is this trouble that is preying upon her mind."

"Certainly her manner is suggestive," assented Ella. "But look at her distress: how shall we get anything more from her?"

"We must consider of that," said Conroy.

"Of one thing I am persuaded: that she would never tell me what is not true."

"Under ordinary circumstances, no; I believe that. But she may be forced into it by Aaron and the rest of the conspirators."

"Oh Edward! Conspirators! Poor old Aaron!"

"Well, my dear, time will show. If that old man has not a weighty secret on his back, tell me that my name is not Conroy."

For a few days, after this, things went on in their usual state of quiet monotony: perhaps we might say *dis*-quiet, in the minds of some of its inmates. Dorothy went about her duties in a dazed manner: but nothing more was said to her.

Gradually, finding herself let alone, the scare, which seemed to have taken up its abode permanently on her face, began to leave it. "The young mistress must see that I can tell nothing," she told herself, "and she won't frighten me again by asking me to. Why should innocent folks suffer for the guilty? If that Dexter woman and that horrid Jago had but never come anigh this miserable house!"

Late one afternoon, when the bright sun had set and the dusk of the January evening was drawing on, there was heard a soft knock at the outer door which opened from the kitchen corridor into the shrubbery at the back of the Hall.

Dorothy was in her own room, adjoining the kitchen, the door between them standing partly open. She sat in the firelight, doing nothing; save idly watching Phemie, who was preparing her tea in the kitchen. Aaron and the coachman had driven off to Nullington in the dog-cart, to despatch some matter of business for Miss Winter.

"Wasn't that a knock at the shrubbery-door, Phemie?" asked Dorothy, raising her voice.

"Well, I thought I heard something," replied Phemie, the only servant at the moment in the kitchen. "I'll see directly, ma'am. It's only Jem."

Before Phemie could finish buttering the muffin she had been toasting, the gentle knock was heard at the door a second time. Phemie ran along the short passage and opened it. Expecting to see only the gardener's boy, she started back in some alarm at sight of the strange figure confronting her. Standing between the two lights,

one ruddy and home-like that streamed out of the kitchen doorway, the other pallid and ghastly that was dying slowly in the western sky, Phemie saw a tall and fierce-looking woman, tawny-skinned, and with bright black eyes. A scarlet kerchief was bound round the tangle of her black hair; a faded scarlet shawl was draped round her figure and knotted behind. Thick hoops of gold were in her ears; rings glittered on her yellow fingers. A gipsy fortune-teller without any doubt, as Phemie, after the first moment of surprise, at once felt assured. She had seen women attired somewhat like her in the country lanes round about. In her astonishment she did not speak. But the stranger did.

"Don't be afeard, honey. I am only an honest gipsy woman who has lost her way. I want to get to Nullington. Being uncertain o' the road, I thought I'd make bold to turn aside here and ask it."

"The road's as straight as you can go," answered Phemie.

"Ah, but it's you that have a pair of wicked bright brown eyes, my lass," whispered the gipsy; "it's you that will make some fine young man's heart ache. Cross the poor gipsy's hand with a bit o' silver, and she'll tell you your fortune true and fair."

Phemie would have liked her fortune told very well indeed: but she glanced back in the direction of Mrs. Stone's parlour beyond the kitchen. "I daren't do it," she answered: and tried to shut the door.

By this time two or three of the other girls had come up, and were gathering around. There ensued some laughing and giggling.

"I want to tell your fortunes," said the gipsy, touching one and another in a persuasive, friendly manner. "I heard there was some pretty young women at this place, and I came to it o' purpose. Take me into your bright kitchen there." And she walked boldly into it. The giggling servants followed her, and one of them dexterously drew to the door of Mrs. Stone's parlour. Phemie hurried in with the tea-tray, which she arranged on the round table; and in going out shut the door.

Bright sixpences were brought forth, hands were crossed with the silver, and the credulous girls listened to their "fortunes." Presently Dorothy Stone, sipping her tea and eating her muffin in quietness, became aware of some unusual sounds, as of murmurings, in the kitchen, interspersed with smothered bursts of laughter.

"What can it be?" thought Dorothy. "They be always up to some nonsense when Aaron's away."

Opening the door, she looked out upon the scene: the wild, formidable gipsy woman seated in her scarlet trappings; and half a dozen of the girls standing round her. Dorothy, very much startled at the moment, shrieked out, and the girls looked round.

"What be you all at there?" she called out in a tremor. "Who is that? Sally, this kitchen is not your place: what do you do in it?"

The kitchen-maid, who had been addressed because she was the

tallest and biggest, turned her laughing face. "Oh, missus, do ye not be angry now. We be only having our fortins told. She do say as my man'll be a soldier, and I'll have to ride on the baggige waggin."

"I order you to be gone," said Dorothy to the gipsy, her quavering voice marring the implied authority in no small degree. "Go out of the house at once: how dared you come into it?"

The gipsy woman rose, showing her large white teeth, and strode to the door of the inner room. "Let the poor gipsy tell your fortune, good mistress," she said, with smiling lips and a curtsey.

For once Dorothy was roused to anger. "Go away, you bold woman," she cried shrilly. "Don't attempt to tell your lies to me. You have told enough to those silly girls."

The gipsy's face darkened, she strode a pace or two into the room. "I have been telling lies, have I? Well, then, let me tell the truth to you." And, bending her tall form, she whispered a few words rapidly in the old woman's ear.

Dorothy's face turned ashy white as she heard them. She sank back in her chair with a low cry.

"Is that the truth, or is it not?" asked the gipsy.

But Dorothy could not answer. She could only stare tremblingly and helplessly at the fortune-teller.

The gipsy turned to the wondering maids. "Shut that door and leave us together," she said in an imperious tone. "This good mistress here and I have something to say to each other."

The door was closed immediately, and the two women were left alone. The servants waited long enough to grow uncomfortable. What could that strange gipsy woman be doing with the old missis?

"We had better go in and see that all's right," at length spoke Phemie. "She may have frighted her into a fit."

At that moment the parlour door opened, and the gipsy came out. Shutting the door behind her, she strode through the kitchen without a word to the frightened group standing there, and departed by the shrubbery, as she had come.

The servants gazed into each others' faces in silence. Then, as with one accord, they opened the parlour door, and peeped in.

Dorothy Stone had her head bent on the table beside the tea-tray, and was sobbing tears, dreadful to hear, of fright, distress, and pain.

(To be concluded.)

WILLIAM TYNDALE.

IT was on the borders of Wales, with the songs of the Cymri ringing close at hand, with the grand earnest heart of the English middle-classes of that day throbbing near his cradle, that William Tyndale was born. Such things, in truth, suited well his future story, for Tyndale was to be a great hero for God, and a noble thinker for man.

The child soon began to show something of what the man was to be. He quickly made his mark in his own narrow corner of the world. His favourite study was, at a very early age, the Bible, which his rapid acquisition of the Latin language soon opened to him. As he read the story of God's ancient people, or the precious promises of the New Testament, his bright, boyish wonder grew more and more keen that such a volume should be a sealed book to the nations.

In those days Oxford often served as a place of education for youths from the time when they left their mothers' sides with their balls and kites still in their hands, to the time when they stepped into early manhood, with a first love, or a first enthusiasm flashing from heart to brain. Tyndale's parents were able to give him a full course of liberal teaching, and so he was sent to the university while still a little lad, and did not leave it till years had ripened the fair blossom which was in him into fruit.

At Oxford, as he grew up, the union of his high scholarship with his blameless life began, gradually, to make his name known among both dons and undergraduates. There was something about young Tyndale, too, which drew hearts towards him, and he won as much love as he did honour. But the quiet, studious hours, and the hours of genial, social intercourse of his college days, could not go on for ever. His parents could not afford to keep him in a life of learned idleness when his education was completed. He must choose his path in the world, and must try to win a foremost place upon it. Accordingly he left Oxford, and determined to become a teacher of the young.

The best opening in those days for a young man who followed this profession was to get a tutorship in the family of some nobleman or country gentleman of position. Tyndale's reputation soon gained for him such a situation in the house of a Gloucestershire knight named Welch, and thither he went to reside, and to take his pupils in charge. There, between his duties as tutor, he had much leisure for carrying on his own favourite studies; studies which were very deep and very earnest in their character; studies which led him to look down into the religious teaching of the Roman Catholic

Church, and to feel how much it was wanting in breadth and light.

The spirit of the reformers was already afoot in Europe, and a strong breeze, which came from it, blew full upon William Tyndale in his retired English dwelling-place. Very soon he began so to glow and burn with the light which was in him, that he could not keep it entirely to himself; in after-dinner discussions, or in chance meetings at neighbours' houses, he showed the Gloucestershire clergy something of his mind, and quickly woke up their opposition. The strong brain and keen tongue of Tyndale made him generally the victor in these word conflicts; this embittered the feelings of the priests against him, and before long their hatred blazed out towards him on every side.

It was at this period that Tyndale spoke those celebrated words which form, as it were, the text to the labours of his whole life. He was arguing with some great Roman Catholic divine about the rights of the Pope to rule the whole Church of God. The priest cried in the heat of his zeal: "We could do better without the laws of God, than without the laws of the Pope."

The expression stirred up in a moment the spirit of Tyndale, and he exclaimed: "Say what you will about the laws of the Pope, but I tell you that, in a few years, every boy that follows the plough in England, shall know more about the law of God than you do."

From that day forward the plan of making a complete version of the Bible in English began to shape itself in William Tyndale's mind.

Tyndale received little support and encouragement in his bold assertion of liberal, reformed opinions from the family with whom he lived. Welch and his wife rise up before us as very distinct figures as we look back at them; and they are figures that seem to have scant sympathy with the young champion of spiritual religion. The knight was a jolly country gentleman, who had but few and scattered ideas beyond his stable and his cellar. He had the haziest notion possible as to what his young tutor was making such a tumult in the neighbourhood about; but he had a sort of idea that the matter in hand concerned some innovation, and anything new was always contrary to the worthy gentleman's nature. Besides, the knight could not in the least understand how a young man, who sat at a good table every day, who had money enough in his pocket to buy two new doublets every year, could be so utterly wanting in common-sense as to go about the country getting himself into trouble by prating about all sorts of new-fangled trash. No; he had decidedly no patience with his house-tutor.

As for the lady, we can see her as plainly as if she had just stepped out of an old worm-eaten picture, come rustling in flowered brocade down the oak-panelled passages, with eye and-ear alert to catch shortcomings on the part of her serving-men and maids; with

mind intent on calculating how much less spice can be put into this week's venison pasty, without her lord, who has a decided taste for good cookery, finding it out; with her drowsy soul only peeping, at intervals, out of her placid, meaningless glance. Such was the woman in whose family Tyndale was unlucky enough to have found a home. Little can we wonder that, if it had not been for his high, bright hopes, and his well-loved studies, and the triumphs which from time to time he gained in theological disputes, he would have found life itself no easy task.

At length the uncongeniality of the people with whom he lived, and the fierce enmity of the neighbouring clergy, made Tyndale resolve to leave Gloucestershire. He wanted, also, to see a little more of the world, and to make some further use of his talents, than he could do buried in a retired country district. He therefore went to London.

His first act on reaching the capital is very characteristic of the age. One morning, there stood at the door of Sir Henry Gilford, who held a high office under the King, a shy-looking young man, who had never been a visitor at the grand house before. The gold-laced lacqueys, standing in the entrance-hall gossiping about the affairs of the lords and ladies they waited on last night at supper, hardly knew whether to laugh at his awkward manner, and the country cut of his coat, or to be angry at the trouble he gave them in announcing his presence to their master. Who could suppose that Sir Henry would receive, at this early hour, a fellow from Gloucester, by the unknown name of Tyndale? Sir Henry did, however, actually say that he was to be shown into the library to await his coming, and thither one of the lacqueys, having put on as dignifiedly patronising an air as he could, conducted him.

It was certainly no comfortable half-hour which poor Tyndale spent waiting the great man's coming; he could do nothing but pull out of his pocket the translation of some Greek author, the MS. of which he had brought with him as a sort of credential, and stare at it, until his own handwriting became the most wearisome and distasteful thing to him in the world.

At length Sir Henry appeared in his velvet morning-gown, and was more gracious than might have been expected. He had heard of Tyndale, through a friend, as a young man of promise. He glanced at the MS.; that was all, notwithstanding all the pains that had been taken to make it fair and primly neat: yet still he did glance at it, and vouchsafed to say it was a pretty bit of scholarship. Then he promised Tyndale he would try to get him a place in the household of Tonstall, Bishop of London, and dismissed him with a nod.

This promise of preferment came, however, at last to nothing; the Bishop said that his palace was too full already of dependents, and advised the young man to seek an entrance into life elsewhere; he could not do anything for him.

Tyndale lingered for a year or more in London, hoping, but hoping in vain, that his friends in power would do something for him. During this period he had ample opportunity to notice the corruptions that had crept into the Church among her higher dignitaries, and he was more resolved than ever to do his utmost to let the light of purer truth shine in upon England.

A great desire now seized him to go abroad and hold communion with those men who had first set up the standard of the Reformation; surely they would help him in the work he longed to take in hand—the work of translating the Scriptures. He had a rich and enlightened friend in Humphrey Munmouth; to him he went, and told him all that was in his heart, and Munmouth generously offered to supply him with funds for his foreign journey. Other gentlemen of the reformed persuasion also gave him substantial help towards the carrying out of his undertaking, and Tyndale left the shores of England with no lack of gold in his pocket.

In the earnest, yet active, religious life of the German Reformers Tyndale found, for the first time in his experience, an atmosphere entirely congenial to him. We can catch something more than a glimpse of this fair chapter in his story, and we may pause, for a moment, to glance at the picture.

The western sky is glowing as if an angel has just passed that way, the city lies wrapped in soft golden mist, and the air is full of sweetness of sabbath chimes. In the garden, where the noise of the town comes, through distance, as a gentle hum, and where the little breezes creep about bearing perfumed messages from field and forest, a small group are sitting. How eagerly those two men are talking together: they seem spell-bound by the very power of their own words. "What a rugged, harsh face," we say, as we gaze at the elder of them. But let us look a little longer, and then what are our words? "How his eyes burn and flash," we cry out; "it seems as if the lamp of the soul within him were all on fire." By-and-by we find ourselves adding, "What a gracious, kindly mouth; surely what it speaks must be as full of loving tenderness as it is of wisdom."

Yes, we are right; Martin Luther has quite as much heart as he has mind. And with what depth of reverent affection in his eyes does his companion turn to Luther—the short, slight man, whose face counts so many lines for his young years. Yes, William Tyndale's features have written on them all the days and nights of hard study he has gone through: yet that smile, which is now gleaming on it, has something in it of almost boyish brightness.

But what is that soft, dropping sound close at hand? We turn, and see a lady, who is employed in diligently shelling peas into a dish; the occupation certainly seems to have nothing in common with the talk going on hard by, and yet her figure, somehow, exactly fits into her surroundings, and we feel that the picture would be incomplete without her. At first sight, there is something in the

prim outline of the folds of the dark dress, and in the delicate neatness of the frills of the white cap, which make us feel sure she is on the safe road to being an old maid. But one look into her face shows us that there is nothing but motherhood in the eyes with which she is watching the fairy gambols of the child playing at her feet; the little creature who has so much of a fresh, sweet bud about her, that it seems quite natural she should make playfellows of the flowers.

The lady has scarcely spoken since the little party settled themselves in the garden, but still, for all the attention that she is giving the peas and the child, we are sure, from the quick, changeful play of her shrewd, strongly-marked features, that she is following, silently, the whole conversation of her companions. And so time glides on, and the grand, sweet talk of those two is talked out, and all the peas are shelled, and Luther calls to his Kate, as the twilight falls, to go and prepare supper, and bids his little Madalena come and sit on his knee to say her evening hymn.

When Tyndale left Germany he went into the Netherlands, where he lived for some time at Antwerp. There he wrote, and sent over to England for publication, his two best known books: "Obedience in Man" and "The Wicked Mammon," both of which did good service for the Reformed cause in that day; and there he set to work upon his long premeditated translation of the Bible. He began with the New Testament, and then went on to the five books of the Pentateuch, to each of which he wrote an introduction full of learning and deep religious earnestness.

From Antwerp, Tyndale started to go by sea to Hamburg, there to meet a highly-gifted Englishman called Coverdale, a man who held the Reformed doctrines, and was deeply versed in the study of the Scriptures. Tyndale wanted to read over with him his translations, before he published them. On his way the ship in which he sailed was wrecked, and he and all on board were in danger of losing their lives. It was not, however, his own personal peril which appeared most to disturb Tyndale; his companions in misfortune were filled with no small astonishment when they saw the young Englishman rushing wildly into the raging surf to save, what seemed to them, nothing but a bundle of worthless waste paper. That bundle was his precious Bible translation; the poor scholar strove in vain to rescue it; and the labour of many a weary day, and many a sleepless night, was all lost in a moment before his very eyes.

Even this disaster could not daunt the brave spirit of Tyndale. His resolute will upheld him, and when at length he reached Hamburg in safety, he at once set to work again at his translation. He found Coverdale waiting for him there, and the coadjutorship of this true friend, and solidly-endowed man of learning, was no slight support and comfort to Tyndale in his twice-undertaken task.

At Hamburg the two Englishmen lodged in the house of a certain Mistress Margaret van Emmerson. We do not know whether this lady

was young or old, fair or ill-favoured, of low or gentle birth. But we may be quite sure that she was a brave woman, who was strongly attached to the cause of the Reformers, or she would not have received Tyndale and Coverdale as guests. We can fancy with what pride, and lively interest, she must have stolen into the room where, beneath her roof, the two great servants of God were poring over their writing, to ask how the glorious work was getting on. We can fancy, too, how the good lady vexed the souls of pages and waiting-maids by strict injunctions to speak softly and tread lightly as they passed the door of that important chamber.

When Tyndale and Coverdale had completed their task, Tyndale left Hamburg, and went back again to Antwerp, from whence he sent his translation over, as he had done his other books, to be published in England. The effect produced by its appearance among Englishmen of all ranks was great. It was like a blaze of light being let in upon the nation. The Roman Catholic clergy were at once enraged and alarmed, and quickly made up their minds that Tyndale was too dangerous a man to be allowed to live unmolested even in a foreign land.

Accordingly they sent a secret agent over to the Netherlands: a smooth-tongued, snake-like fellow, called Philips, who managed to lodge in the very same house with Tyndale at Antwerp. Tyndale's simple, trustful nature made it easy for Philips to creep into his confidence; he received him with pleasure as a countryman, and made close friends with him as such. His landlord suspected the man's intention, and warned Tyndale against him; but all in vain; he would not heed him. The result was fatal for Tyndale; Philips had him arrested and confined in the castle of Filford.

Then the end drew on fast. Tyndale went through a mock trial, and behaved with the calm courage of a Christian hero. He was of course condemned, and, in spite of the efforts made by his friends to save him, he went with the crown of martyrdom from his work on earth to his rest above.

ALICE KING.

MARGARET THORN.

"THERE'S nothing half so sweet in life, As Love's young dream," sang George Arcastle, as he stood outside the low cottage gate in the autumn twilight. "Do you believe that, Daisy?"

The girl, who stood just inside it, her clasped hands resting lightly on his arm as he bent over her, laughed a low, contented, childish laugh, which told a tale of quiet happiness.

"I don't know whether I believe it, or not," she answered. "But," —timidly—"I believe in you."

Was it her fancy, or did a cloud pass over the handsome face above her? She thought so at first, but the smile which came close upon it made her doubt.

"What a dear little girl it is," he exclaimed, touching her pink cheek softly. "What a dear little innocent heart!"

She looked at him shyly, a sidewise, bird-like look, which made her pet name seem most aptly given, for he often called her Birdie.

"Don't laugh at me," she pleaded. "Ought I not to believe in you?"

He bent to kiss her. "Yes, yes, believe in me, little one. I would not make a jest of you for the world. I must not keep you longer: the dew is falling, and your dress is damp already. Good-night."

"So soon!" If the lips did not express the words, the sweet face showed her disappointment. "Shall I see you to-morrow, George?" she asked.

"Probably. I'll not promise, so don't be disappointed if I fail."

"But why should you fail?" she asked, wondering how he could like to tantalize her.

"Would you know, my dear one? It is because I shall have to be away to-morrow—to see some people staying at the great fashionable seaside place two miles off us. Good-night again."

Daisy stood for a few moments, looking at the sea in front of her, still to-night; and then went into the cottage with a happy heart.

"So Mr. Arcastle has gone," said her father, laying his paper aside with a little sigh of satisfaction; "we can have a quiet evening together, you and I. By the way, Daisy, this sea air is doing wonders for you, you are actually growing rosy. I am glad we came; and it was lucky, our getting these cheap, pretty little lodgings, wasn't it?"

"Yes," answered Daisy. "Everything has come about very happily for us, papa, very happily indeed."

"One thing troubles me, Daisy," he said, a little anxiously; "after the pure air of the country, you will not like London."

"Never fear for me, papa; I am not going to dislike anything.

And, besides, we have two weeks yet to enjoy of these lovely seaside breezes, so we need not think of any worry that is to come. Papa, I will play for you if you like—music sounds best in the twilight—and you shall lie and listen and go to sleep if you will."

There was an old piano in the room by the window; it was not much now, but it had a sweet tone. And Daisy, sitting to it in the darkness, translated the language of her happy heart into music.

"Two weeks more," she had said. Two weeks of love and happiness. But those two weeks passed all too quickly, and at last, before she fairly realized it, the last night of her stay in Fairsea came.

Nearly every day of that two weeks had brought George Arcastle to the little white cottage that stood nearly a mile from the village; sometimes but for a few short minutes—oftener for a longer stay.

Mr. George Arcastle, gentleman and man of the world, was fighting a battle with himself—and it was a very rare thing for Mr. Arcastle to do.

Cosmo Thorn, Daisy's father, was always glad to see the handsome, cheerful young fellow; and Daisy was shy and quiet always, and the welcome that shone in her eyes was not seen by the elder man.

On this the last afternoon, the clear brown eyes had a shadow in them; but the red lips smiled the while, and Daisy seemed very bright and cheerful. So much so that her father, stroking her soft hair, said, with a pleased look on his worn face, "My little girl is glad to go back again, after all. The prospect of living amidst bricks and mortar is not so gloomy as I thought." But the younger man, seeing the shadow, understood.

Just eight weeks before, in a solitary ramble he was taking along the shore, George Arcastle descried, far off on a high rock, cut off from land by the advancing tide, a slender, girlish figure, standing erect, and gazing straight out to sea.

"It is almost up to my waist already, and I can hardly hold on," she had answered in response to his call, and then she turned her face seaward again, and said no more.

Half an hour later Mr. Thorn, sitting in the shady porch of the little cottage, with his newspapers, was horrified, nay, almost paralyzed, by the sudden appearance of an excited and very wet young man, hatless and coatless, bearing in his arms a half-drowned figure, which proved to be his daughter, Daisy—a veritable Undine in appearance, but, for the time, unconscious of it all.

"The people directed me here, sir. They said the young lady lived here."

"Heaven bless me, yes!" cried the agitated father. "It is my child, and you have saved her!"

That was the way the acquaintance commenced, but it did not end. Daisy, when attired in dry raiment, proved to be so charming a girl, that George Arcastle could not resist the temptation of calling again and again to inquire whether the adventure had been pro-

ductive of harmful consequences, and after that of calling without any excuse whatever. For eight weeks this had gone on, and now the end of the summer had come, all too soon for Daisy.

"It must be good-night and good-bye this time," said George Arcastle, as they stood by the gate in the twilight, for she had strolled down the garden with him. "It has been a pleasant season here, has it not, Daisy?"

"Oh, so pleasant!" The sigh arrested, told how much the words meant. "Shall we ever see you again?" she asked timidly.

He paused before he spoke: knowing quite well that he wished to see her again, but that he ought not.

"I shall be in London during the winter, and will look you up," he said presently. "I have the address: Chelsea, or some such out-of-the-way"—Mr. Arcastle coughed to drown the words—"some such rural suburb of the great metropolis, is it not? Yes, I will certainly call upon you if you will allow me."

"I—papa will be very glad. Good-bye."

His own good-bye was whispered as he stooped to kiss her. And then she stood alone, her heart aching: for a separation, though it may be a short one, is hard to bear from one we love—and Margaret Thorn had learnt to love him with her whole soul.

Cosmo Thorn was an artist. He had owned a small rural patrimony in Northumberland, which brought him in next to nothing, save that there was a house to live in upon it; and he painted pictures for the rest. The patrimony had had to be sold piecemeal, the house the last; and then he and his daughter, who did not seem strong, went for a few weeks to Fairsea, before settling in London. In that great metropolitan town he hoped to obtain patronage. But his health had failed him strangely of late, and the future presented but an uncertain vista. He hoped to live; to live and work yet for Daisy's sake: two years ago he had buried her mother.

Their Chelsea lodgings were in Amity Place. For a few weeks they were busy in settling themselves in them; and the excitement, together with the gratification of looking at the picture galleries, did Mr. Thorn good. The landlady, Mrs. Wilson, a good-hearted, motherly woman, always busy, took genially to the pale, gentle artist, and to the no less gentle daughter, who had such pleasant, honest, sweet brown eyes and rather sad face.

But ere Mr. Thorn had well begun to work his health failed him again. The experienced landlady thought she saw symptoms of heart disease, and urged him to see a doctor. He would, he answered, if he did not soon get better—he supposed the thick, London air and the November fogs were affecting his breath.

"Daisy," he said one day, "I wonder we don't see anything of Mr. Arcastle. He told me he should call."

"Did he, papa?" she said, her cheeks flushing.

After the first week or two a little shadow had come into Daisy

eyes and rested there. It puzzled her father, and troubled him more than he would have confessed. She had of late taken a fancy to sit near the window, that she might see both sides of the road—the house stood back from it in a small garden: she started nervously at any unusual sound, and there was a look in her face as though she were watching for some one. If so, nobody ever came.

At last, one day, Mr. Thorn, coming up the stairs slowly and with the frequent pauses which of late were necessary to him, heard a man's voice in the room above, and on reaching the door George Arcastle rose to greet him. It needed only one glance at Daisy's face to tell the story of the past waiting and watching. And her father, settling down into his great chair with a little sigh, said to himself sadly, "Children grow so fast—so very fast."

After that the handsome face and figure might be seen often at Amity Place; George Arcastle came frequently, and Mr. Thorn, watching the two from his corner, noted his manner curiously.

He seemed very fond of Daisy always; but now and then there would arise a constraint in his manner, which was greatly at variance with the lover-like tenderness of other times.

"I must have a talk with him some day," thought Mr. Thorn; "though it is very disagreeable to have to speak upon such a subject. But I cannot let this go on if he does not mean anything—and if he does mean it, I must—must make some enquiries. He has told me he is a gentleman, and he appears to be rich; but beyond that I know nothing. He has always been silent about himself; never yet as much as hinted in what part of the world he lives."

Disagreeable tasks often get procrastinated, and just about this time Mr. Arcastle mentioned that he was going out of town to spend the Christmas: should probably be away a month. Daisy's face fell, but her father's brightened. "I'll not speak to him till he comes back," he said to himself; "and perhaps there may be no necessity to do it at all. He may never renew his acquaintanceship with us; and it may be all the better for Daisy in the end if he does not. There is a secretiveness about him that I don't like."

So Mr. Arcastle departed on his visit, and the father and daughter remained on in their solitary loneliness.

More than a month passed before he again appeared at Amity Place. Daisy met him with a white, sad face, and she wore a deep black dress that told its own story.

"He was buried yesterday," she gasped. "Only yesterday."

Mr. Arcastle had not an unfeeling heart. He was deeply shocked; and when Daisy grew a little calmer he got her to tell him some of the particulars. She sat back in her father's arm-chair as she did so, her thin hands clasped together.

"It was the very day after you were last here. Papa had been making ready to walk out; he was going to a picture dealer to see if he could get an order; I wished him good-bye, and went to my room

to fetch some work. When I came back he was sitting on the carpet here, his head on a chair; he had turned faint and fallen, he told me. Mrs. Wilson got a doctor in; he said papa must go to bed, or at least rest and be still, if he wanted to get better. From that day he never went out; never; instead of getting better he grew worse, and last Thursday—to-morrow will be a week—he died."

She seemed to recite this mechanically, a little sob catching her throat now and then. Mr. Arcastle drew a deep breath.

"I am deeply sorry. I wish I had been here to visit him!"

"Yes, if you had been! We had no one, you know."

"No one. And—what are you going to do now, Daisy?"

"Oh, that's all settled," she said, calmly. "I am painting water-colour drawings; little things on cardboard. They bring me in enough to live and to pay Mrs. Wilson. She lets me stay here for the present."

"A precarious living!" he exclaimed, with almost contemptuous disparagement. "And one that may fail you at any time."

"I think not," she answered. "While papa lay ill, I told him I should like to dispose of some of the water-colour drawings I had done when in Northumberland, and he bade me take two or three to a shop near the Strand, where they deal in such, and to say that I was his daughter. They liked the drawings, and bought two of them; they have taken more since then, and they say I cannot do better than go on painting them. Oh, I have no fear of getting on."

"And I suppose you sell these things for an old song?"

"They don't fetch much, it's true. But I am very industrious. See! here are two, ready to go in."

Opening a portfolio that lay on the table, she showed him two small water-colours. Mr. Arcastle was no judge of art; but he saw how pretty they were.

"Why that—that's a view at Fairsea!" he exclaimed, gazing at one of them.

"Yes," she sighed, "I did it from memory. Here is the cottage gate we used to stand at, and these are the rocks, and that's the sea in the distance."

"Perhaps these things are as well as anything else you could do for yourself at present," he acknowledged, as he laid the drawing down. And by-and-by he took his leave.

The days went on, and poor grieving Daisy began to see some sunshine in them. What with the constant occupation of her work, which she loved, and the occasional companionship of George Arcastle, life seemed to be growing bright again.

Sometimes, in the pleasant spring evenings, he would come and tempt her out for a walk: taking her into the quieter parts of the parks, or through some of the more solitary streets—never into frequented places. Daisy would lean on his arm, and glance up at his face in her happiness. Never a word did he give utterance to

in any degree to alarm her—how could he, to one so unsuspiciously innocent?—and Daisy thought that the world was Eden.

And he—he seemed happy, too, but in a fitful way that troubled Daisy a little sometimes; seasons of gaiety alternating with seasons of gloom. She could not understand them: and they began to torment her unreasonably; just like a shadow.

"I wish you would tell me what it is that troubles you," she said one evening, as he stood tapping idly on the window, after they got home from a walk. Generally speaking he left her at the door; this evening he came up-stairs. "I do not like to see you unhappy."

"Unhappy! My dear, do not get fanciful," he added, with a laugh—but, to Daisy's ears, it seemed forced.

She turned to light her wax candle—for the twilight was deepening into darkness—put it on the table, and took her bonnet off. George Arcastle turned sharply from the window, shook her hand, and wished her good-night.

Vaulting down the stairs, he was confronted by the landlady. Good Mrs. Wilson, full of bustling care though she was, had her ideas of right and wrong, and she intended to protect the friendless girl above, as far as it lay in her power.

"Right! perfectly so, Mrs. Wilson," he cried, in response to her few whispered words. "What else can you be thinking of?"

"Well, sir, I'd not like to doubt you. You were a friend, as I often remind myself, of the poor gentleman, her father. But you are not her brother, sir, and you are not, so far as I know, engaged to be her husband; and for any other, save one of those two relationships, I can't help saying that you are here over-much."

The front door was standing open, and the rays of the gas-lamp fell full on the honest face of the landlady. Mr. Arcastle, looking also full at her, paused.

"And what if I tell you, Mrs. Wilson, that I am engaged to be her husband? At any rate, that I intend very shortly to be so?"

"Then, sir, if it is so, I am only too glad to hear it. Do you really mean it, sir? Honour bright?"

"I do mean it," he answered, laughingly, as he turned away; "good-night."

"And that's pleasant news for a rainy day," thought the good landlady, as she gazed admiringly after him. "Somehow I didn't think it—and I had to take care of the child. He is so fine and fashionable—seems as if the world were made for him."

The next evening Mr. Arcastle came again to take Daisy for a walk. During its progress he asked her to become his wife. What answer could she make but "Yes."

It was a pleasant evening, just cold enough to make one's pulses tingle. George Arcastle was in the gayest of spirits, laughing and talking merrily as they sauntered along, he looking down upon her

in her quiet happiness. Her hand was within his arm, and he laid for a moment his own hand upon it.

"I wonder how many people in this town are as happy as we?" he said, laughing at the sweet face which glanced up at him. "Not many, are there, Birdie?" and "Birdie" clung a little closer to his arm by way of answer.

Turning the corner of the unfrequented street at this moment, his hand still resting upon hers, two fashionable-looking men met them unexpectedly. Mr. Arcastle snatched away his hand at once, and made as if he would have put Daisy off his arm; really it seemed so. The strangers nodded to him and walked on. It all passed in an instant, leaving Daisy struck with discomfort.

They had stared at her rudely. The look they both gave her was one of undisguised admiration, but it was a look which made the hot tears rush to her eyes. Without knowing that she had done anything wrong, she yet felt guilty and ashamed.

"George," she said, suppressing a little sob, "I do not care to walk any further; let us go back."

"Did those fellows startle you?" he cried, fiercely, a dark cloud settling on his face. "Hang them for their rudeness! But you were not afraid, Daisy—with me?"

His fierceness frightened her more than all: what could it mean? —but she answered earnestly, "No, not afraid—never afraid with you. Still, I would rather go back."

When they got in, George again went up with her. He sat down, made Daisy sit opposite to him, and asked her to marry him the following week.

She was too startled at first to reply. The following week!—when her father had not been dead—"Oh, George!" she gasped.

"Well, what is there to prevent it?"

"Not so soon, George, not so soon. I could not. Six months at least must elapse."

"Nonsense, Daisy. Recollect you have no one to take care of you here."

"I take care of myself."

"I tell you you are talking nonsense," he cried, angrily.

But for once Daisy had the courage to be firm. This was April; she would be married in June if he wished, but not before, she gently told him. Mr. Arcastle could not help himself; he went away in a temper, and Daisy sat down and indulged in a good cry.

Two days after he came again, and made his peace. Daisy, who had been rendered thoroughly miserable by the estrangement, conceded so far as to abate a week or two of the prolonged term, and promised to be his on the first of June. And when he said good-bye that night, he told her she would not see him again for a week or two; he was going to a place he had in Wales.

"Is it in Wales that we shall live?" she asked, timidly.

"I can't tell. I mean to take you travelling with me at first."

"Where?"

"Oh, half over the world. Good-bye, my darling," he concluded —and left his last kiss upon her lips.

Three or four days after this, Daisy was busy over her work, the little table drawn to the window, when Mrs. Wilson appeared, showing up a large, middle-aged woman, very handsomely dressed. Daisy rose; and the first thing this lady did was to put her hands on the girl's shoulders, the better to gaze upon her face.

"I should have known you, my dear, from your likeness to your father. Do you remember me, Margaret?"

"N—o."

"What, not remember your poor mother's cousin, Mrs. Grantley? I stayed some weeks with you the year before she died."

"But you have grown so stout," rose to Daisy's lips. She did not say so; the recollections of past years came over her, and she burst into tears. Mrs. Grantley gathered her to her bosom, and let her sob there.

"I have been a bird of passage since then," she said, "roaming about from place to place on the Continent. Coming over here a week or two ago, I went into Northumberland, and found your father had sold the old place, and was gone away; and I have been until now tracking you out. Margaret, why did he not write to me when he became embarrassed? *I* have plenty, and to spare."

"I think he did not know where you were, Aunt Grantley. And, if he had known—you remember how sensitive he was."

"Yes, I remember all that," returned Aunt Grantley—by which name Daisy had been taught to call her. "And I am afraid it may be true that he did not know where to write to me. Ah well, that's over and done with; from henceforth, Margaret, you must be to me as a daughter."

So this young girl's fortunes were changed. All in a moment. She felt herself something like Cinderella. She who had had to work for her bread, was suddenly converted into a young lady of consideration and an heiress; for Mrs. Grantley made no secret of where her money was already settled.

She carried Daisy off to the hotel she was staying at; in a week they would leave for Paris, in which fascinating city Mrs. Grantley meant to set up her chief home. Daisy, as yet, had not called up courage to tell her of Mr. Arcastle—but she must do so in a day or two—and she wished he would come back for it.

"You are going to the opera to-night, Daisy," said Mrs. Grantley, coming in one afternoon.

"Oh, aunt, how kind of you!"

"It is no kindness of mine, my dear. I met Lady Bell just now—you know, I think, what old friends we are, and we were together all

last summer in the Tyrol—and she invited me to her opera-box to-night. I spoke of you, and she said bring you by all means. We dine with her first. Have you ever been to the opera?"

"No, never."

"Ah, you will enjoy it then. It is 'Lucia.'"

Evening came. Daisy was entering the house in the wake of Lady Bell and Mrs. Grantley, when, putting down her hand in one of the corridors to catch up the train of her new black lace dress, her jet bracelet fell off her wrist, and she stooped to pick it up. Not at the first moment did she find it; her friends were then out of sight, and two gentlemen, passing, had turned to look at her, and seemed to be waiting.

"She is confoundedly pretty," cried the one to the other, not attempting to lower his voice. "Arcastle has taste; that's certain."

Involuntarily Daisy raised her eyes, and she met the same bold gaze which had frightened her so a few days before. The insolence of the stare made her turn crimson. "What have I ever done to them?" she asked herself; and she felt sick and faint, for they seemed to bar her passage forward.

"My dear, where are you?—What are you lingering for?" called out a voice at this juncture, and to her intense relief she saw the ladies coming back in search of her.

"I dropped my bracelet, Lady Bell," she answered, hastening forward: and the gentleman who had not spoken, spoke now to the other.

"You must be mistaken, Tom: what a fool you are! I thought it was not quite the same face."

"Ah, how do you do, Sir Thomas?" cried Lady Bell; and to Daisy's surprise, both the ladies and both the gentlemen were the next minute shaking hands together.

"I did not know you were in England, Mrs. Grantley," cried the one who had stared at Daisy.

"I am only here for a short time. Next week I go to Paris with my niece. Margaret, my dear, this is Sir Thomas Shelton." And the gentleman bowed to her with a deprecating grace that had never yet been offered to Daisy.

The curtain was rising as they took their places in the box. Daisy sat in a maze of enchantment. What with the magic scene before her, and the singing, and the glittering company crowding the house, she felt as one in a delightful dream. Only one thing did it want to make it perfect—the presence of George Arcastle.

A stir in the opposite box, empty until now, aroused her. A lady, tall and elegant, was entering it; and, evidently displeased at something, was complaining in rather too loud a tone to the box attendant. A certain haughtiness in her carriage, and a frown, which seemed to have become part of her dark beauty, attracted Daisy. The next moment, following her in, came another lady, and then

George Arcastle. A rush of red dyed Daisy's face, and she hastily spread her black fan out before it.

"There's George Arbuckle!" exclaimed old Lady Bell. "He is looking over here; he sees us."

She bowed, as did Mrs. Grantley. Daisy took a stealthy peep, and saw that the bows were given to her lover.

"Who did you say that gentleman is?" she asked of Lady Bell.

"That? That's Mr. Arbuckle."

"I—thought—his name was Arcastle," Daisy ventured to say, in her perplexity.

"It was Arcastle; and of course it is, so to say, Arcastle still. When he married, he had to take his wife's name, and drop his own. The names are ridiculously alike."

"His wife's name!" mechanically repeated Daisy, believing they must be speaking of two people. "Mr. Arcastle is not married."

"Indeed he is," replied Lady Bell. "That is his wife yonder, by whom he is sitting: and that other lady is her sister. They were co-heiresses, the Miss Arbuckles, very rich, and young Arcastle married the elder. He was not badly off himself, but her riches are immense. Where did you know him?"

"He—he was at the seaside last autumn when I was staying there with papa," gasped Daisy, feeling ready to faint with this dreadful revelation. "I do not think he was married then: he did not seem to be; he was by himself—and he called himself Arcastle."

Lady Bell smiled significantly. "He has been married these three years, my dear. As to being out alone, that is no uncommon thing; and it is said he is addicted to calling himself Arcastle still, and wishes he had never changed it for the other name. He and his wife do not agree very well, and he seeks his own amusements."

"Why does he not like her?" breathed Daisy.

"Ah—why? It is said he never did care for her, but her vast wealth dazzled him. And she has a harsh temper—and so, they quarrel. There, he is off! I knew he'd not sit long by her side."

"He cannot be a good man," mused Daisy, unconscious, perhaps, that she spoke aloud.

"As good as most other young men of the day, who are votaries of folly and fashion," spake old Lady Bell. "At least, I know nothing to the contrary."

"But she does not know what I could tell," groaned Daisy in her stricken heart. "What had I ever done to him that he should have sought to deceive me? I can understand the behaviour of those two friends of his now. Oh, what an escape it is! Heaven must have been watching over me."

"My dear, are you ill?" cried Lady Bell, chancing to look at Daisy when the opera was drawing towards its close. "You are as white as death—and nearly as still."

Daisy called up a wan smile, and shook her head. "I am not

ill, thank you. I never saw an opera before, or a play of any kind; and—and I am a little tired."

Before Daisy went to bed that night, she wrote a little note, and sealed it. In the morning, as soon as breakfast was over, she carried the note to the old lodgings at Chelsea and left it with Mrs. Wilson.

That same evening Mr. Arcastle called there. The house door happened to be open, and he went straight up to Daisy's old sitting-room. It was empty. It seemed to have been put into stiff order, as though it were not occupied just now. The light of the setting sun came in, and illumined his pale and handsome face.

"Where's she gone to, I wonder?" he fretfully cried. "About some of that drawing work of hers, I suppose! Holloa! oh, it is you, Mrs. Wilson. Miss Thorn is out, I perceive."

"Miss Thorn has left, sir; left for good."

"Left!" he exclaimed, his face flushing.

"Her grand relations have found her out, sir—for she and her father were of good family, as perhaps you know. And her aunt came down here in a beautiful carriage, and took Miss Daisy home to her."

"Do you know her name—the aunt's?" he asked, after a pause.

"It's Mrs. Grantley, sir. Miss Daisy came here this morning to say good-bye to me, for they are going to travel. She is very gay now; she was at the opera last night, she told me, with her aunt's old friend, Lady Bell, after having dined with her ——"

"At the opera!" interrupted Mr. Arcastle, recalling the bows he had given to Mrs. Grantley and Lady Bell across the house—and the young lady sitting with them, whose face he did not see. A deep flush rose to his own.

"And she thanked me so prettily and gratefully for all I had done for her while she lived here—which goodness knows was not much," continued Mrs. Wilson. "And she slid a ten-pound note into my hand, to buy something to remember her by, she prettily said, or to spend in any other way I liked. And she left this note with me, sir, and said would I give it to Mr. Arcastle if he chanced to call."

Leaving the note in his hand, the landlady left the room. It was addressed to George Arcastle. He broke the seal, and read a few words written therein, in a pitiful, trembling hand, so unlike Daisy's.

"I pray God to bless and keep you always. The truth is known to me; and I can never see you again. What had I done—what had papa done, that you should seek to serve us so? The matter is safe with me; I will never betray you. Good-bye, George Arbuckle; good-bye for ever.—M. T."

"God forgive me! and keep her from future evil!" he breathed; and went away, crushing the note in his hand.

ABOUT NORWAY.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland."

In the Hardanger.

OUR time in Norway was drawing to a close. We wished to be back in England by a certain day. Had a boat left Bergen at a convenient season, we might have contented ourselves with making a few of the many excursions that lie in the neighbourhood of the picturesque old town, and in due time have embarked from its shores. The Bergen steamer, however, for us, went by "the rules of contrary." It often happens so in life: and we have to preserve a calm exterior and an unruffled temper, by laying ourselves open, as it were, for small disappointments, and philosophically balancing the bitters against the sweets of existence. So when we found the Bergen boat would land us in England either a week sooner or a week later than was convenient, we looked afield for fresh plans.

And we found that by going to Christiania we should catch a steamer exactly suited to our purpose. This decided us. We would work our way round to the capital. If this entailed travelling in part over old ground, we should be glad to renew the impressions of our first days in Norway: days when the North Cape had yet to be done, the midnight sun to be seen, and all the small incidents of that pleasant voyage lay still in the mysterious future.

Now all our North Cape experience was over: our faces were set in an opposite direction. But as far as the interior of Norway was concerned our grandest scenes had yet to be encountered. There were several ways of getting back to Christiania, and as usual we had various opinions upon the point. Not in a single case did there seem any certainty as to the time of arriving at our destination. One advised the plain-sailing course of continuing our journey round the coast. Another strongly advised our going over the mountains by Thelemarken, but confessed we might be detained on the road; might have to walk many miles through a rough pass; at most would certainly get nothing better than a shambling horse. This doubtful prospect was at once abandoned. Then we heard that that very night a large steamer would go up the Hardanger-fjord, with a limited number of passengers: an excursion conducted, as Mrs. Malaprop would have said, in the most *researched* manner. The ordinary cheap steamer would start just before the larger one: and as the fares in the latter would be in accordance with the magnitude of the enterprise, there was no fear of overcrowding. She was said to be magnificently fitted up, and was moreover the largest vessel that had ever navigated the fjord. This sounded interesting and adventurous; and, as the schoolboys say in writing their home-letters, we availed ourselves of the favourable opportunity.

We had reached Bergen on the Friday night, and no sooner had landed, than, at the door of the hotel, we met two pedestrian acquaintances who had crossed over with us from London, and with whom we had parted at Christiania: they to take a walking tour into the interior: we to come round to Bergen on our way to the North Cape. Our lines had widely diverged, and now, singularly enough, had met again. They amused us that night with many of their experiences in remoter parts: small huts in desolate regions where they were entertained—supped, slept, and breakfasted for the sum of sixpence: other regions, again, where creeping bedfellows compelled them to turn out and roll themselves up in blankets upon the hard floor: a number of adventures more or less interesting that cannot be recorded here. At ten o'clock on Saturday morning they left Bergen, by the ordinary steamer that goes up the Hardanger. Their destination was Eide. At that early period of the day our plans were as yet unformed: we had not the remotest idea that before many hours were over we should follow in their footsteps: our destination also Eide. Half an hour after they left, we had settled our course. As it turned out, we could not have chosen more wisely.

We made the most of that day in Bergen, assured that we should see the picturesque old town no more. The heat was so intense that to look back upon the cold of the North Cape was like looking back upon an impression received in some far-off dream. The very stones of the streets smoked and cried aloud for water. The perambulating beer-carts drove a thriving trade as thirsty householders appeared

at their doorways and bartered for a double supply of the inoffensive beverage. For Norwegian beer, though refreshing, is mild.

In course of time we found ourselves at Herr T.'s, who, having never been himself to the North Cape, welcomed us as lions—in a small way. True, we had not discovered the North-East Passage, or penetrated to the North Pole; but there must be degrees of comparison in the world as long as it continues to roll. Greatness, after all, is often only a matter of opportunity.

Herr T. asked us many questions about the North Cape, and the various incidents of the voyage. These duly chronicled, we bade him farewell, and exchanged the grateful shade and coolness of his house for the outside heat and glare of the town. Next came the important event of dinner at Holdt's Hotel: a well-appointed table d'hôte, well attended. Soon after, it was time to start. At the last moment of course there was a great rush: there always is in last moments.

To make matters worse, the man who had charge of our luggage put it on to the wrong steamer: a boat going to remote regions, so crammed with passengers in every part that it was quite impossible to move about on deck. Then ensued an intelligent pantomime: we could not speak Norwegian; the man spoke nothing else. After much trouble, just as the gangway was being withdrawn, the luggage was discovered. A dame of wonderful dimensions, in a bright yellow gown and an excruciating head-dress of red ribbons and feathers that would have driven an Indian squaw mad with delight, had seized upon it and converted it into a seat. No doubt she was tired of standing: tired of being knocked and buffeted about on the crowded deck, with the thermometer at about 100 in the shade. Evidently, too, she thought possession nine points of the law, for it was only by main force that the porter succeeded in rescuing our property. Upon which the lady, with the calmness of despair, sank a step lower in the world and sat upon the deck. It was only by throwing the portmanteau on shore, and jumping for it ourselves, that we succeeded in landing.

Our own steamer was on the opposite side the harbour. This we now expected to lose. She was a large vessel, gay and lively with a number of flags, that hung limp and listless in the breezeless atmosphere. The owners of this new boat, by way of inauguration trip, had organised this excursion up the Hardanger. We jumped into a small boat, and made all haste towards her. But her third bell had rung, and long before we were half-way over, she was on the move. We were giving up hope and preparing to return, when one of the officers spied us out; the steps were hastily let down; in a few moments we were on board. It had been a race with time, and time for once had lost.

The beauty of the vessel had not been exaggerated. She was fitted up with every regard to taste and comfort. In the large horseshoe saloon, resplendent with fresh gilding and luxurious velvet

cushions, the tables were spread for tea; and, as usual, at least a hundred different cheeses, looking like huge cakes of brown soap, gladdened the eyes and quickened the pulses of the Norwegians. If they were to sit down to a meal without cheese, breakfast not excepted, they would expect after that the Deluge. At the farther end was a piano, which would no doubt be in demand later on in the evening. There were enough passengers on board to make the decks lively, but three times the number would not have over-crowded them.

Bergen looked hot and languid in the broad sunshine, as we steamed away; sorry to bid it farewell, glad to leave its baking streets for the cool breezes of the water; breezes begotten of our own rapid movement, for the air was still. Very soon the changing scene demanded all our attention, and with the fickleness of human nature we forgot for the moment all the pleasures and beauties of the past in those of the present.

Losing sight of Bergen, we entered the Hardanger-fjord. Passing upwards, the broad channel gradually narrowed, until we found ourselves in waters just wide enough to admit the steamer. The banks were lined with the most luxuriant vegetation. Crags and hillsides covered with verdure took almost the form of castellated ruins. We had seen nothing so romantic and beautiful in all Norway. Everywhere leaves glinted and rustled, and murmured their secrets to the fairy folk that certainly dwelt here. The sun, now somewhat low in the heavens, gilded everything with rich warmth and colouring. Then, passing through these narrow waters of enchantment, we wound in and around the mountains, amidst such sharp turnings that every moment it seemed as if we should strand upon the very mountains themselves, until the fjord opened out again into more space.

Evidently our steamer was causing great excitement. At every small settlement out rushed its handful of inhabitants, gazing at us with wonder and delirious joy, until we were out of sight. Occasionally we stopped at a station, landed a passenger or two, and went on our way again.

The hills and valleys opened up in greatest beauty. Not the ruggedness of so many parts of Norway; not the grand severity of the Sognefjord, some of whose mountains rise bare, rugged and frowning to their very summits: but a soft, southern luxuriance: the fertility of a warmer clime and lower latitudes. Villages, at distant intervals, nestled in the slopes; waterfalls dashed downwards into the fjord, with their everlasting monotone, sometimes dividing in their course, sometimes disappearing from sight before their course was ended. The more important falls of the Hardanger can only be seen by landing and walking some distance.

Nothing could be more strange and unfamiliar, nothing more interesting and romantic, than going up into the land, hour after

hour, in this large steamer, whose proper place, as it seemed, should rather have been the broad waters of mid-ocean. But this only made it the more unreal and delightful, as if we were going through a living experience of one of Hans Andersen's fairy-tales. Anything less like real life could not be imagined. We were in a dream, but a waking dream, in full possession of all our senses, able to revel in and grasp all the happiness of the fleeting present.

Not one of the least of the charms of this excursion was the fact that we could never see very far a-head of us. Entering narrow passages, one trembled for the safety of the vessel; marvelled how

VOSSEVANGEN.

she would pass through the ordeal; and then breathed freely again as, cunningly piloted, she turned a hidden corner and launched forth into wider waters. The windings of the fjord were so numerous and abrupt, we seemed for ever turning these corners, leaving one grand panorama only to enter upon another. At some of the stations, they treated us to a salute, in honour of our size; the vessel returned the compliment, and the echo of the guns went rolling up into the hills and lost itself in the far, very far distance.

Gradually, to our sorrow, twilight gave place to darkness. Nothing was left us of the beauties of the land but the outlines of the mountains, with here and there a white cataract finding its way to the dark waters below. The outlines were gigantic in the darkness of night; full of suggestions of mystery; full of strength and power;

full of a deep solemnity that seemed out of tune with the gaiety on board. For the passengers having come to amuse themselves were naturally of a lively and frolicsome turn of mind. Yet it was all quiet enough; liveliness without noise; laughter without riot; as befitted respectable citizens of Bergen: as characterised, moreover, an assemblage of Norwegians.

With darkness, music took up the tale: and a lady played some of the most entrancing music it had ever been my lot to hear. I do not know who she was: I know not whether she was aware of her power: but every line that lady played was full of genius. After going through some grand passages of Wagner and Beethoven, and the sweeter strains of Mendelssohn, she suddenly struck into an extempore performance, so wonderful that at least one of her audience was thrown into a dream that came to an end all too soon. In that performance, all our experience since leaving Bergen seemed to be put into music: in those notes, now calm and gliding, now wild and impassioned, one saw again all the beauties of the fjord. She ceased as suddenly as she began, plunging many into despair; for, with the perversity of genius, nothing would induce her to strike another note.

Going up on deck, we were just in time to witness an exhibition of fireworks. For some time, golden showers, rockets and blue lights enlivened the darkness, lighted up the mountains, and brought out the whole form of the vessel with weird and telling effect: intensifying the darkness as each display died out. The passengers grew enthusiastic, clapped and cheered, and were altogether charmed with their surprise—for the fireworks had been kept a close secret.

About one o'clock, when the darkness of the night was past, when there was the faintest suspicion of dawn in the East—it was hardly a suspicion—we entered the narrow waters leading up to Eide, and gradually, quietly, and gently came up to the landing-stage. Here the first person to greet us was one of our Bergen friends, who by some prophetic instinct had taken up the idea that we should arrive by this vessel. It was a happy thought, for before anyone could land he went off and secured us beds for the night. Others, less fortunate, had to go without, and put up with chairs, whilst one youth walked about throughout the night. We met him the next morning looking wild and haggard, pale as a washed-out ghost.

So that night at Eide we bid the steamer farewell, and she went on her way up the fjord. Our route towards Christiania would take us through Vossevangen, Gudvangen and the Sognefjord. And to every one who finds himself in this neighbourhood I would say: Go and do likewise. There will be neither regret nor disappointment: except the inevitable regret one feels when all good things, all delicious experiences come to an end.

When we awoke the next morning, our previous day's experience seemed more than ever a dream of beauty and enchantment rather

than a reality. And to a dream of beauty we awoke: for Eide in its situation and surroundings is little less.

Our quaint inn stood upon the border of the waters, nothing but the narrow road between. Upon the opposite shore were stretches of green fields backed by hills full of beauty and luxuriance. Great mountains rose to the left, leading towards Vossevangen, and into the unknown mysteries of the road we were soon to plunge. There was something about Eide strangely full of calmness and repose: a subtle soothing influence especially grateful to the spirit. The place was romantic, out of the common order, slender in houses and population; so remote from the world—even the world of Norway—that one longed to spend here a month; revelling in retirement, in all the beauties of nature, that seem, in this deserted spot, to address themselves to each one individually. Here you may pass your days in quiet contemplation; or, if it please you, in whipping the stream hard by, so well stocked with trout that cry aloud to be taken.

We watched them from the rustic bridge lying idly amongst the stones, every now and then a more lively fellow rising to the surface as an unwary fly darted down to its fate. A vivid recollection of that Sunday morning, gorgeous with heat and sunshine, remains; its quiet calm, its isolated position, its utter, soothing silence. Whilst we lay idly upon the banks, and like children threw stones into the waters for the pleasure of disturbing their bright unruffled surface, which reflected so vividly mountains and trees and sky: the bluest sky imaginable, that cast quite a celestial tinge upon the distant mountains.

The repose of Sunday seemed to lie upon everything, animate and inanimate. At twelve o'clock our two pedestrians started off on their way to Vossevangen, undeterred by heat or any other consideration. At two we were to follow them, in carrioles. The Sunday in Norway is over by two o'clock, as far as religious purposes are concerned. If you travel from early morn till dewy eve it will neither offend nor surprise the prejudices of the people: but in the afternoon everyone travels who has need to do so. Again, as I have already said elsewhere, it frequently happens that you must travel on the Sunday whether you will or not, unless you are prepared to run the risk of throwing out of joint the whole plan of your journey.

We were not so prepared, and punctually at two o'clock our carrioles were in readiness. We bid a reluctant farewell to Eide, devoutly hoping it might be our good fortune one day to see it again. Our road for a considerable distance skirted the borders of a lake: the mountains on one side, the calm water reflecting all surrounding objects on the other. It was a new, well-made road, smooth and level at first; and our fresh little horses bowled along in earnest style, as if they too found happiness in this glorious day, these beauties of Nature, this hot, yet exhilarating air: a

combination that went through and through one's very being; making this drive through the everlasting hills almost as much an act of worship as that of the congregation in the little church in the distance, of which the spire cut sharply against a background of towering hills.

Presently we came up to the church and the village; a few houses nestled on the slope of the hill, where the road turns away from the borders of the lake. The church door was closed, all service over for another week. Small groups and couples were scattered along the road in picturesque Norwegian costumes: the "Sunday's best," that saw daylight only on high days and in the meantime was wrapped up in lavender: probably stowed away in some of those quaint, gaudy pieces of furniture all paint and flowers of unimaginable colours that seem to be heirlooms in these little households, and are handed down with care and reverence from one generation to another.

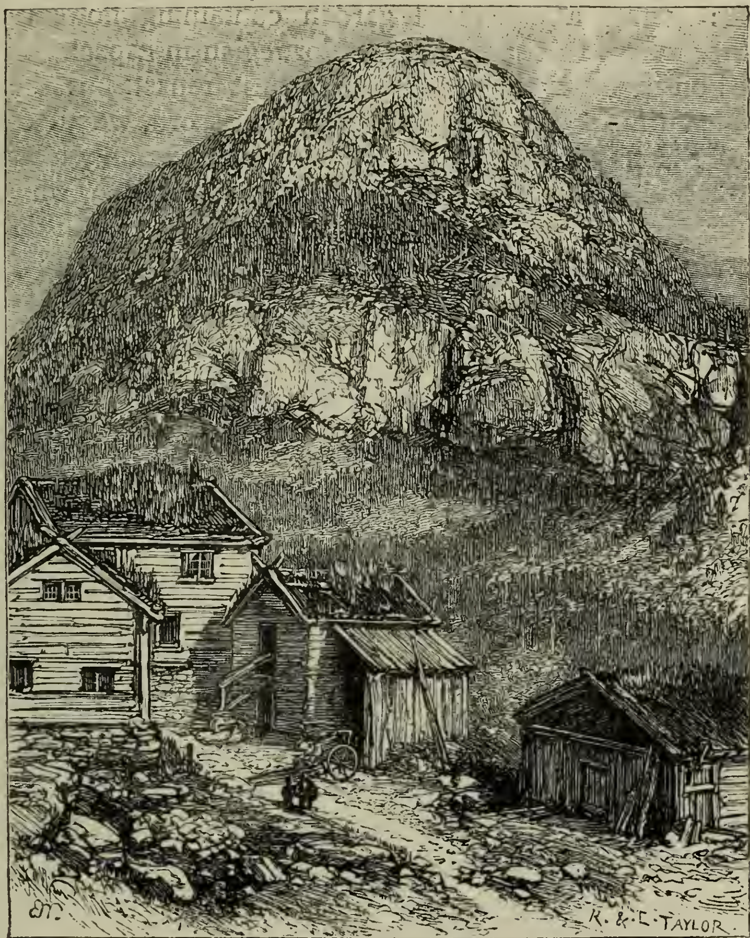
These groups and costumes on the road enlivened the journey; harmonized with the surrounding scenes; gave to the hills something of life and animation. Many were the couples spending their Sunday afternoon in long strolls—many, that is, for Norway: perhaps there were not twenty in all. No doubt some of them, with arms intertwined, were making love to each other, vowing eternal fidelity, and forming plans for the future. Humble plans, without ambition, or care, or desire to rise beyond that state of life to which they were called: but to them as full of meaning, of import, of prospective happiness, as the future of one into whose calculations it enters to destroy empires or build up thrones.

Presently commenced a sharp, very steep and winding ascent, which the horses had to take leisurely and with frequent pauses. We felt almost like flies going up a wall, as we gradually and with labour crept up this semi-perpendicular zigzag. To our left hand rose a flat, towering, gigantic wall of straight mountain rock, frowning, gloomy, and almost black. At length we reached the summit and commanded the magnificent view and the pass itself. With a little ammunition we might have kept a whole regiment of soldiers at bay. At our feet were the windings we had just ascended, like long-drawn steps cut out of the mountain side; a zigzag of rugged paths. Far below lay the lake, its calm blue waters stretching towards Eide, that we yet regretted. The little church and village reposed in the shelter of the mountain, safe from the storms of heaven, the tempests of earth.

We lingered long, resting the willing horses, satisfying our souls with beauty, and then turned our faces onwards. A descent more gradual than the late climb, took us once more into the valley, and our road now lay through a vast pine forest. The sun cast lights and shadows through the trees, grateful to the eye, tired with the glare of this unusually hot day: and grateful was the shade occasionally

thrown upon the road itself. Large pools of water lay here and there, so clear and placid one longed to plunge into their cool depths.

Nearing Vossevangen, the plain opened out into one of the most extensive views we had seen in Norway. Grand mountains and valleys lay in various directions: passes leading up into unknown regions—unknown as far as we were concerned. At our feet was the rich plain; and, as yet in the distance, reposed the village, lake, and



The Station at Stalheim.

church of Vossevangen. We were high above it all, but gradually, and with a long, sweeping road, descended from our bird's-eye view: the air growing hotter, the mountains seeming to rise and expand as we neared the dead level of the plain.

Our two friends had made good way. It was only within about five minutes of our destination that we overtook them. Passing through the village, which seemed quite a remnant of the world in comparison with Eide, we found it lively with the inhabitants, who had all turned out of doors this fine evening, and stood chatting in groups or idly lounging against the walls. Our arrival was a little

diversion for them, and created quite an excitement in a small way. The people stared after us, and a buzz arose, something like the noise of bees swarming. We left it all behind us, and soon found ourselves at Fleischer's Hotel on the outskirts of the village.

It is a very picturesque spot by the side of a large lake, in which there is said to be good trout fishing. The plain is extensive, rich and fertile, and the mountains rise in all directions, near and distant. The inn itself is on the slope of a hill: a hill clad with rich trailing verdure: whilst a cultivated garden containing flowers and fruit altogether makes this spot very un-Norwegian in aspect.

Later on in the evening, when a modest repast, but the best the inn could furnish, had become a fact on record, we all four sallied forth to reconnoitre the neighbourhood. It was only a repetition of what we had seen. First we inspected the church, which, though large for Norway and very ancient, contained very little that was interesting or worthy of note: unless it was a band of rude, irreverent girls rushing about the aisle and gallery and playing at Hide-and-Seek. Opposite the church we noticed a long range of buildings; stables, in which the congregation—those who come from a distance, as many of them do—put up their horses during service time on Sunday mornings. The quiet dead rested in the churchyard, many of the graves no doubt almost as old as the building itself: but the spot seemed held in small respect by the people.

Indeed the good folk of Vossevangen appeared rather of an exceptional type altogether: bolder and more daring, staring more rudely, and openly making their remarks: possessing evidently all the independence of the Scandinavians without the innate good breeding that characterizes so many of them. But we took into consideration that it was Sunday: they were in their best clothes, and out of their natural element. It was a day of idleness with them, and "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do." Had it been Monday instead of Sunday, we might have found them ordinary Norwegian folk: busy, and quietly civil.

Climbing upwards on to the high road, we came to an anchor on a pile of logs by the wayside, on the slope of the hill, and watched the sun descend and twilight creep over all. The mountains and the vales were all about us. The setting sun gilded the trees, and flushed the sky, which passed through all its phases of rich colours, until it faded to the colder tones of nightfall. A number of carrioles dashed past, one after another; finally followed by a lumbering barouche holding four black-coated, dust-begrimed travellers, who looked hot and ill-tempered, and gazed suspiciously at us, as if they wondered whether we had taken up all the room and devoured all the food Vossevangen was capable of supplying. But Herr Fleischer was a man of resources, had a very keen eye to his own interests, and was equal to an emergency. We returned presently to find our quarters, so quiet when we had left, in possession of a

noisy band who were disposing of beer with as much earnestness as if they had just terminated a six weeks' fast.

We left Vossevangen the next morning, somehow with far less regret than we had quitted Eide. The landlord had given us horses for the whole distance, so that we should not have the trouble of changing. Our two walking friends were an hour ahead of us. It would take us, at least, seven or eight hours to accomplish our journey of twenty-eight English miles.

Between Vossevangen and Gudvangen the stations are some of the worst in Norway, where it would be impossible to pass the night except from necessity. The road is, for the most part, diversified and picturesque; but at the last station before reaching Gudvangen, Stalheim, a scene of grandeur and sublimity bursts upon the traveller perhaps not to be surpassed in the whole country.

We reached Stalheim about four in the afternoon, and waited here some time. One of the horses had cast a shoe: and the postboys, having to change the one horse, for some reason of their own thought they would change the other also. This was, perhaps, the roughest, rudest, and most unpleasant station we had seen in all Norway. Three or four men and women—the former looking like ruffians one would scarcely like to meet on a dark night: the latter only a degree better—were seated at a long deal table, taking their evening meal. An earthenware basin stood in the middle of the table, holding a hot, brown, greasy liquid that looked far from tempting. In this they dipped, sometimes one after the other, sometimes all together, a thick slice of sour black bread, which they held in their fingers; and occasionally fingers and all were immersed in the steaming liquid. Their faces became gradually smeared over with the same; and they eat more like animals than like human beings. If the reader is repelled by the description, what were we by the reality? In a very short time we found it advisable to back out of the room, and take up our standing on the doorstep in the broiling sun. Nearly an hour was wasted here, and then we continued our journey.

Passing upwards to the right, we suddenly came upon such a view as we had not yet seen in Norway. We found ourselves on the brow of a high, steep hill, gazing into a great depth, the Valley of Gudvangen. On either side, the mountains towered in gigantic masses, rising precipitously and in various forms. One pile behind and beyond another stretched far away. The valley itself was narrow, and in some places seemed only to give room for the road and the stream that ran beside it. The descent from our present position was steep and abrupt; managed by a series of zigzag paths cut out of the side of the precipice and called the Stalheimscleft: a triumph of engineering skill in its way. So steep and abrupt it seemed, that involuntarily one's first instinct was to get out of the carriole for safety. This we had to do very soon, to ease the horses, who every now and then had to slip down a steep bit on all fours. On either

side the Stalheimscleft was a magnificent and most picturesque waterfall, tumbling about 1,000 feet of white foam into the stream below. The close proximity of these falls, at right angles with each other, and therefore fed from distinct sources, added much to the beauty of the scene.

We gradually descended this wonderful Jacob's ladder to the level of the valley. For more than an hour the road was a series of grand and overwhelming impressions. On either side, as the road wound round, the mountains continually seemed to close in and bar further progress. At length the valley expanded into a small plain; a few farms were passed; and then we came upon a cluster of houses which proved to be Gudvangen and our journey's end.

Gudvangen is situated at the head of the Naerofjord, the grandest and most picturesque branch of the Sogne. The village is shut in by towering mountains. Immediately in front of the inn, some 4,000 to 5,000 feet high, were three distinct falls, of which the body of water was at present small. It was now Monday evening, and we found that the steamer would not call until Wednesday. But we were not sorry of a day's rest in a spot so full of beauty, and with edifying resignation we abandoned ourselves to the inevitable.

Our friends, the walkers (by nature, not by name), were only about an hour after us, having posted from Stalheim. Thus it would seem that in the matter of time, the tortoise, in Norway, might almost beat the hare. In other words, what with the walking pace of the horse: which now and then degenerates to crawling, seldom reaches more than four miles an hour, and sometimes does not get beyond two; what with the frequent stoppages of half an hour or an hour, occasionally expanding to three or four hours at a station: it is a matter of doubt whether pedestrians after all have not the best of it in Norway. At least they have full freedom and liberty: they can halt when and where they please, regulate their own pace: and at the end of the journey find themselves plus so much money not expended in posting: plus invigorated health and therefore happiness: minus—I know not what, unless shoe-leather fails them. But this applies only to strong men and good walkers. There are others to whom a walking expedition would only be a slow way of committing suicide: and these others not so few in number as the world may imagine.

That Tuesday was a very quiet, very pleasant day at Gudvangen. We spent the morning in voluptuous idleness, lying upon the grass under the fruit trees, looking up at the mountains, watching the water-falls, tracing forms in the white fleecy clouds that here and there floated across the sky, luxuriating in the heat and the sunshine above—so delicious to those who were in the shade and cool of the valley below.

We were in primitive but comfortable quarters at Schultz's hotel. The people were so obliging and civil, so anxious to do all in their power to please, that far less than we received would have satisfied

us. The landlord was away for the time being. His representative had been in America; learned English there; was suddenly taken with a desire for his mountain home (perhaps, too, he had not been particularly successful, but we did not like to be too inquisitive) and so returned. He was an amusing and original character: a little too free and easy for one's English ideas: but we made allowance for his training. He was really an honest, straightforward man, and had gained nothing of the sharpness which the Americans, whether they deserve it or not, have the credit of possessing.

So when the Wednesday morning came, and with it the steamer

GUDVANGEN.

that was to bear us away, we left Gudvangen with reluctance: its pleasant quarters, its magnificent surroundings, its studies of human nature. But time, "like an ever-rolling stream" runs on: and we had an allotted task to perform in a given period. Therefore, accompanied by a small crowd of friends we had made during our short stay—village natives who insisted upon seeing the last of us (a compliment capable of two interpretations) we all went on board the steamer.

Down the Naerofjord we steamed; through its dark gloomy waters; between its glorious mountains, sombre and frowning, yet often pine-clad to their very summit, casting their shadows into the depths of the impenetrable waters. Then, leaving all this behind us, we launched forth into the broad, open waters of the Sognefjord.

LADY CONWAY AND VALENTINE GREATRAKE, THE STROKER.

By C. J. Langston.

IF the ancient house of Blakesmoor with its cheerful store-room, "in whose hot window-seat I used to sit and read Cowley," was dear to the gentle Elia, no less dear unto me was the lone and deserted mansion belonging to the Hertford family; about which I know perhaps somewhat more than most people.

It was in truth a vast and stately building into which, in a manner, I entered into possession some twenty-five years ago. Its spacious rooms and sounding corridors had scarcely given back the tread of the noble owners since the days when the Prince Regent had complimented our great-grandmothers during a rubber at whist in the library, and (oh, tell not the tradition in Gath!) looked very much like royal winking at the Marchioness in the family pew at Alcester, when the old rector was petitioning for the health of his dear papa.

Once since, in 1834, when the cholera was raging in London, even shaking its grimy fist in the haughty face of Belgravia, did the Marquis of Steyne remember his Warwickshire seat. "Death was busy (he said a much neater thing in French), the country was Bœotian; but he must be amused."

The lodge gates rolled back in trepidation like the little old lady who opened them. In the heavy barouche sate Monsieur le Marquis with his famous mastiff Pluto, by his side; and opposite was my Lady S———n, with her handsome daughter, to be dowered so well, and married so ill. I am told that, ten minutes afterwards, a gaunt, decrepit man, with red hair, and a settled scowl, slowly ascended the broad steps leading to the Hall. Leaning on the shoulder of the immaculate Suisse, he smiled serenely, and swore at every step. "By that," said Master Edkins, "I know'd as how his lardship had come at last to enjoy hisself."

Later on was the silence of the many rooms broken by the temporary sojourn of Tommy Raikes, who, like another small Tommy, "dearly loved a lord," and was as well versed as the late Mr. Hill in the talk of the town. A very small party, in a very large house, (for their only visitors were the Damers) must have been depressing; and when they left in 1845 the Hall ceased to be a dwelling-place, for another quarter of a century.

During that interval the large, lonely house was to me a casket of golden memories; or, as a pensive poem wrought in stone. Often have I wandered stealthily, almost fearing to disturb the stately silence within the two great courts; now peering through the bleared windows of the offices—scanning the tenantless stalls in the stables,

and those noble division-doors which must have been so placed when the house was altered many years ago. And then, with what interest I looked at the carved prow of the large pleasure-boat—long disused; and, in so looking, I saw in a moment the honest face of the first Marquis, and the dark ringlets of my lady's hair, as the Prince handed her to a seat, with her beautiful sisters and the Talbots: followed by Yarmouth and *his* friends Croker, Jekyll, Malden and Glengall, with a host of attendants behind. And the silvery laugh and the gentle splash of the oars came back to me from the near-hand lake, and from that Plutonian shore wrapt in eternal mist.

But especially did I love to linger within the lofty portico and trace the proud magnificence of the unrivalled entrance-hall. The slamming of a distant door thundered in the vaulted roof, making the delicate sprays of Grinling Gibbons tremble; this, and the hoarse calling of the circling rooks, were the only sounds of life and motion. Yet stay—at times there wandered over the spacious building, mocked by its feeble echo, the subdued sound of the stable clock, passed into the childish treble of old age; giving the hour lazily as if it thought: "What is the use of recording time; now that dressing and dinner and gaiety are over, and there is no mortal to heed it?"

Yet, not of the Ragley Hall merely of yesterday do I wish to speak; but of certain remarkable people and incidents connected with the older mansion, parts of which are built up in the present structure.

In the middle of the 17th century, the Conways having married into the families of Burdett and Greville, became possessed of Arrow and the adjacent manors. Edward, Earl of Conway, and Viscount Kilultagh—a man well able to breast the troublous times of the Commonwealth, chose for his wife the sister of Heneage Finch, afterwards Earl of Nottingham, and Lord Keeper under Charles II.; and with her the narrative is twined.

Lady Conway was noted for her attainments even among the learned ladies of that age. She had mastered the chief Greek and Latin authors, and had a strong leaning towards the mysticism of the early Fathers—especially that of the liberal Origen. As it often happens, with a powerful mind and strong will, the body was diminutive and the health weak; in fact, there was too much mind for the body, and in consequence the fragile form was laid aside for weeks together. Thus she sometimes lived "out of the body," by becoming habituated to certain influences which produced startling effects.

Lady Conway was no less remarkable in her associates. At a time when the Universities were troubled by the fierce contention of opposite parties; the quaint manor-house originating with John Rous de Raggeley, was the secure retreat from the turmoil of Cambridge of those brilliant light-bearers to a generation yet in darkness—Ben-

jamin Whichcote, John Smith, Ralph Cudworth and Henry More. With the affectionate Conway for a host, and his gentle wife—no mean disputant against scholarship so ripe—we may well imagine that the sun shone serenely over the dense woods of Ragley, and the sky was fair; albeit the air was charged with the sullen thunder of a nation divided against itself: and Baxter was shouting to the sleepy town at their feet, "The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

Very often indeed did these gifted friends take sweet counsel together in the quiet rooms overlooking the extensive park; but he who was the most frequent guest, and whose influence over the mind of the Countess was greatest, was Henry More. It is pleasant to think of him—occupying by favour the pulpit still standing in Arrow Church, and from thence showing unto the people "a more excellent way" than the stony path of a narrow theology. Perhaps he went too far in placing everything in subjection to the purely spiritual; for under such persuasive guidance, the contemplative mind of Lady Conway began to show distaste for ceremonial worship; and, much to the sorrow of Henry More, she left the Church of England, and entered the sect of the Quakers.

This was a bold step to take; far bolder than that of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, one hundred years later: but Lady Conway was the daughter of Sir Heneage Finch, and a Finch knows not fear. A few years before, and humble folk leaving the Established Church might leave some part of their ears and noses behind them. Even then, there was the loss of caste. What was that? The strong love of a husband, whose patent was the smallest part of his nobility; the ardent affection of tried friends and true, all powerful in the Monarchy of Thought—these things were treasures, the rest shadows. Yet no small stir was created in the adjoining town of Alcester when it was known that the Lady at the Hall had turned Quakeress. "What would she now do?" chimed the gossips. "Might she eat and drink? It is certain there will be no more robe-making, or garnishing of the rooms at Christmas!"

But the Countess rode into the town as usual, and afterwards, when not well, came in a coach, a new thing of its kind. There was one alteration. One or two strangers settled in the town; and shortly, a few sedate people, in a garb scarcely different from others, met once a week at Dame Pumphrey's, a goodly house near the Market Hall, still standing; when there was silence for a space. Their number slowly increased until another generation (the rein of harsh laws being loosed) ventured to build a Meeting-house, hidden from the main street; and when these homely friends left, or passed away one by one, until the very name of their noble leader was forgotten—then the Quakers' Meeting-house, scarcely more quiet than it was before, was dismantled and disused; an empty shell left by the tide of religious thought.

Meanwhile, the sensitive and receptive mind of Lady Conway was exercised by a series of extraordinary visions. *Visions* they were not to her, but as tangible and real as any other objects in the wakeful world. Surrounded as she had been at Ragley by master minds deeply imbued with spiritualism; she passed with a bound beyond the margin of surmise, into the belief that this thin partition of flesh dulls, but does not divide, sweet communion with the disembodied spirit. The belief in ghosts was common enough when witchcraft was punishable by burning, and the evil eye was still in active operation in rural districts; but the higher thought that sympathetic souls should have mystic union without union of place, or of form, threw into bold relief the dark superstition of the day.

It was the conclusion of the gentle lady that "there is neither speech nor language but their voices are heard among them." Not only the departed, but certain others dear unto her dwelling at a distance, and trembling for their inheritance in those troublous times, did the spirit of Lady Conway seem to touch as in a moment. Lying on the couch in the withdrawing-room, she murmured to her dear lord: "Prithee, hast thou not had tidings of George Rawdon this day?" To which he answered, "No, dame, he hath no behest." She continued: "Thou wilt shortly hear, for his wife is stricken with the falling sickness, and hath twice besought him to send hither without let." And on the morrow there came a letter with "Haste, post haste" outside, written by Sir George on account of his wife's sudden illness.

On another occasion, my lady mentioned that the Earl of Norwich, commander of Royalist forces, had been thrown from his horse, and she saw his leg being braced by a barber at Maidstone. "He hath asked me," she said, "for the receipt for liniment left by your aunt Elinore, and I have answered him, Yea." All this without leaving her room; and, presently, a messenger reached the house with a letter from the said Earl, describing the like accident, and praying for a particular dressing for fractures which Lady Conway had by her, and which, saith he, "I feel curiously persuaded in my own mind she hath now given to me."

These instances are recorded by Van Helmont, a man who inherited much of the shrewdness and eccentricity of his more famous father; and who lived for some years at Ragley Hall as medical attendant to the Conway family.

At that time the science of medicine was in its infancy. Even later, when Charles II. was dying, the prescription signed by fourteen doctors comprised "a volatile liquid distilled from human skulls, and the application of red-hot iron to the head." Therefore it is no disparagement to Van Helmont to observe that certain phases of the moon, and conjunction of the planets, together with the dried remnants of creeping things entered largely into his pharmacopœia. But Lady Conway chiefly regarded him, because he could well administer to the mind, and its latent development.

Van Helmont had studied much abroad, had dabbled in alchymy, and, if he did not believe in an elixir-vitæ, he held the theory that bodies of different kinds could be so tempered and attuned that one should act on the other: that, for instance, an incision having been made in the trunk of a vigorous tree, a man in fierce pain might press his throbbing face against it, and the pain would pass from him to the sensitive fibre and tendons of the tree. Perhaps this was a crude anticipation of the power of electricity. Moreover, he was one of the earliest to hold that disease is an accident of nature, to be avoided or mastered greatly by the force of the will; and that inviting euthanasia should be the sequence of life.

Such views were not a little in accordance with the mind of Lady Conway, ever enquiring and ever perplexed by the enigma of a suffering world. But no prescription of Van Helmont could remedy the increasing ailments which at last prostrated the benevolent Countess; and Lord Conway, much distressed, anxiously considered what other physician should be brought to Ragley. The name of one, scarcely known in England, but whose singular fame had been the subject of eager interest at Portmore, near Lisburn, Lord Conway's other beautiful seat, occurred to him. My lord wrote to his friend George Rust, afterwards Bishop of Dromore, in January, 1665, and entreated him in furtherance of his friendship to see Master Valentine Greatrake, and urge him forthwith to take ship to England, and "journey to Ragley in Warwickshire, where my lady is now grievously troubled with pains in the head."

Mr. Greatrake consented to come, forewarning the Earl that his singular success was not dependent upon his desire; and that "there are divers hereabout whom I would wish to heal, without being able so to do."

He hastened to embark at Youghal, but the voyage proved neither safe nor speedy. For several days they were tempest-tossed in the Channel, and when off Lizard Point, being driven from their course, it was feared that the crazy old vessel would go to the bottom. Then did the Christian courage of Mr. Greatrake shine forth as St. Paul's in Adria: bidding the sailors be of good cheer in their extremity. He noticed one man—a poor Papist, "whose ignorance" he says, "I pitied; but whose zealous trust in the protection of the Virgin and St. Nicholas, I failed not to admire; forasmuch as when all other were clamouring for wives and parents, this sailor quietly prayed and shewed no concern."

The fame of Valentine Greatrake was spread by the crew, and after landing on the Somersetshire coast, he was soon surrounded by people anxious to witness some token of his remarkable powers.

And here it may be well to observe that Valentine Greatrake was no mere adventurer or illiterate charlatan. An Irishman of gentle birth and fair fortune, he had the higher advantage of considerable talents, developed by a liberal education. As a gentleman he would

have made his mark in society; but the mysterious gift which he possessed—a gift which has ever excited my deepest interest—caused him to be received into the highest circles; and even royalty delighted to do him honour. He was also favourably noticed by the clergy. Bishops and deans entertained him, and derived benefit from his skill. None could help liking the man; he was so humble and courteous to all, making no pretence to miracle, but rather ascribing his striking success in the art of healing to some sympathetic power (yet in the germ), of mind over matter; some supreme effort of consentient wills, which, carried to its intended length, may yet say "unto this mountain—Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and it shall be done." Thus, a deep religious feeling pervaded the outward acts of the physician. As he hurriedly passed northwards, at several places he wrought cures, some of them in a moment, and "so the wonder grew" until he arrived at Ragley Hall, on January 27th, 1665.

It was a dull day threatening snow, and a sharp north wind had fringed the river Arrow with ice; but a knot of people, chiefly tenants on the estate, lingered at the park boundary, and when Mr. Greatrake appeared with Squire Throckmorton, Van Helmont, Dr. Taylor, and my lord, these walked on either side of the horsemen. Passing the Kingslea, and skirting those noble woods described by Henry More, and where his gentle spirit loved to meditate, the party reached the Hall; then a quaint, roomy mansion of Jacobean type. It was dusk, and a ruddy light—cast from the lower windows far down the park, and kindled by logs round which had gambolled the famous white roe of Thomas Burdett—showed the warm welcome waiting within. And surely, notwithstanding the illness of the mistress of the house, they were merry, for the "King had got his own again," and the gratitude of the nobility was great, if the definition of gratitude be the expectation of favours to come.

On the morrow, Valentine Greatrake saw Lady Conway in her chamber for a considerable time. Being assured that there was no bodily decay, he hoped to effect a cure. The sun shone. He was glad to see that; "for," said he, "the sun, madam, is a great healer and composer." Passing his right hand somewhat quickly down the spine, he enquired whether the patient felt a sensation as of smarting. She said, "No!" Presently he pressed one hand on the temples, and stroked the back of the head with the other: afterwards gently clasping the wrists. At first my lady experienced some relief; caused perhaps by momentary excitement and expectation, for the pains returned forcibly. Nor did Mr. Greatrake give further hope of being able to subdue them, although he laboured frequently for the space of three weeks, and his tender care increased the esteem with which the Earl and all others in the house regarded him.

The next case with which Valentine Greatrake had to deal, was alike remarkable in its origin and its cure. About one mile from

Ragley, bordering the old Roman ridgeway, were the remains of the humble priory of Cookhill; the dormitory and offices of the nuns being formed into a plain farm-house, to raise and roof which the adjoining chapel had been despoiled. Here lived a worthy couple, old John Slade and Alice his sister. Alice had long been ailing, yet no one could tell why. During the day she was cheerful; but as night came on she fell into a grievous sweat, and could scarcely contain herself for fear, and sate by the blazing hearth with her eyes fixed, starting at every sound.

For lack of rest and food she one day fell into a deep swoon; and was put to bed; whereupon, she waked and seeing that she was in her usual chamber adjoining the chapel, she struggled to escape, crying that no mortal should keep her there. Her brother, fearing that she was possessed, had her tied to the bed, and acquainted Parson More, then at Ragley, who had much repute with humble folk in allaying disorders.

Dr. More was brought by Lady Conway, and after much persuasion and shrinking, Alice Slade described to them how, on three several occasions, in that room she had seen, at the stroke of twelve, a waving figure in a black habit, with the face bound up as if for burial, and that the said figure had afterwards beckoned to her as she was binding fagots on the chapel flags; and, "mithered as I was," added Alice, "I could but follow, till she sank under the stones at the window end: and on that spot I hear her sighing and sighing every day."

Lady Conway and Dr. More soothed the sufferer; and the eager interest of the visitors in any manifestation of spiritualism, afterwards caused Henry More to examine very carefully under Alice's guidance, the place where the apparition disappeared. It was a plain slab about two feet square; and, bending with his ear to the ground, there certainly came at intervals a sound, like a sigh or a murmur. For a moment that pale, thoughtful face flushed; then it was turned to Lady Conway.

"Our senses are readily deceived," he said, "this may be but a counterfeit of nature—John Slade, bear a pickaxe this way, if ye have one."

The slab was upheaved, and proved to be the entrance to a passage or vault extending east and south. Procuring a ladder, and holding a roll of lighted flax set in oil, Henry More descended. He saw some human remains beneath the tomb of Lady Isabel de Beauchamp, and elsewhere; and, at the entrance, in a fair state of preservation, was a plain elm coffin, having burnt in the lid "Margaret Dyson, 1573, R. I. P." The mysterious noise was easily explained: for the ground was covered by several inches of water, oozing from a point near the surface: where a fragment of stone jutting out, intercepted the rill; and from this projection, the water dropping at intervals caused a gurgling, sighing sound to reverberate.

Alice Slade became easier in mind, but without manifest disease, her body grew weaker; and when Valentine Greatrake was called to

her bedside, so feeble was the action of the heart that the attendant thought she was gone. This wonderful doctor began by murmuring a few sentences in a plaintive tone, taking her left hand meanwhile. Whereupon the sufferer opened her eyes and smiled: and after a while he repeated those strokes and passes for which he was famous. He then enquired whether she would show him the Malvern Hills; when, to the wonderment of those present, Alice being dressed, presently walked quickly out of the house, and did as he desired. Nor was there any return of her ailments; for Job Heritage, who was then bailiff at the home-farm, saw her as a very old woman years afterwards, and gave these particulars to Mr. Popham Seymour.

But the most startling cure was effected at Alcester. Mr. Greatrake had accompanied the invalid Countess to that town, it being the Lord's day, leaving her among the Friends, whilst he as a true Protestant attended the Parish Church. That was a long, low building dedicated to St. Nicholas, with the Chauntry of St. Faith attached; having a fine embattled tower—the only part now remaining of this once interesting pile.

Divine service over, the quality and townsfolk, having passed uncovered through the west door, Mr. Greatrake was interested in observing several aged persons wait at the gates of the chancel: whereupon the minister, peering through the trellis, demanded:—"How be ye all, good people?" to which they answered according to their infirmity. Thereupon he opened the dole cupboard, and gave to each a certain coin. As they were leaving, Mr. Greatrake called to one of them, James Squyor, who was led by his daughter; being drawn together by fits, and shaking withal; and asked him "Should you like to be cured?"

"Yes! good master," saith he, seeing by his dress that he was a physician, "but no 'pothecary can mend me; for I ha' bin so this nineteen year."

Then Mr. Greatrake bade James straighten himself, holding by the spikes round the tomb of Sir Fulke Greville: and gave him his own staff to bear at arm's length; merely touching him gently at times. Whereupon, James Squyor, from being of dwarfish stature, and halting in his gait, did raise himself to a proper man of nearly six feet, and walked and felt as well as he did when he was a boy.

This was noted by several men of good repute; and amongst them by the observant and ingenious physician, Henry Stubbe of Stratford-on-Avon, from whom the above account is taken.

Amongst other remarkable cases of healing were those of Widow Ledbiter and Ralph Symonds of Alcester; Benjamin Hancocks of Bidford, Sarah Griffin of Wixford, and Ruth Quiney of Alne; which, being well attested, were long remembered; but it would be tedious further to detail the wonderful cures wrought by Doctor Greatrake, during a few weeks' sojourn at Ragley Hall. *How* those cures were wrought, it is difficult to imagine. Several theories were advanced;

perhaps one of the most reasonable of them is embodied in the following extract from a letter dated February 9th, 1665, written by Lord Conway to his brother-in-law, and cited by Sir Bernard Burke :—

"DEAR BROTHER,

". . . Mr. Greatrak's hath been here a fortnight to-morrow, and my wife is not the better for him ; very few others have failed under his hands, of many hundred he hath touched in these parts. . . . .

"So I wonder that he had not a greater esteem in Ireland ; but after all this I am far from thinking them miracles, or that his cures are at all miraculous ; but I believe it is by a *sanative virtue* and a *natural efficiency*, which extend not to all diseases, but is much more proper and effectual to some than to others, as he also doth despatch some with a great deal of ease, and others not without a great deal of pains." . . . .

The success of Valentine Greatrake, the Stroker, may not have appeared so impressive to that generation when we call to mind that the efficacy of the royal touch was still undoubted. A contemporary monarch, the treacherous, subtle despot Louis XIV., three days after his consecration, touched more than 2,500 persons in the great church at Rheims. His apt pupil and lieutenant, Charles II., was equally active. King William, with a sly touch of humour, gravely wished the recipient better health and more wisdom. Queen Anne, in 1712, followed suit to the tune of 200 in one day ; the baby lexicographer being of the happy number. The practice was revived in Edinburgh in 1745, and belief in it retained in the Shetland Isles so late as 1838. Shakespeare, who enshrines so many English customs, thus alludes to it in "Macbeth" :—

> "Ay, sir ; these are a crew of wretched souls
> That stay his cure ; their malady convinces
> The great assay of art ! but, at his touch,
> Such sanctity hath Heaven given in his hand,
> They presently amend."

It is certain that the curative power possessed by Greatrake excited the deepest astonishment among the best informed and most sensible men of that day ; and, as Dr. Tulloch reminds us, these powers were the subject of formal investigation by the then recently-incorporated Royal Society ; and no such man has appeared since. Leaving Ragley by way of Evesham, he was earnestly invited by the Mayor and Corporation to Worcester ; and in their new Guild Hall, before a concourse of the citizens, he exercised his marvellous skill, to the lasting benefit of some, and to the astonishment of all. Staying at various houses of the nobility on his way, he at length reached London, was interviewed by Baillon and Douglas, and duly presented at court, near unto which he settled and practised as a physician.

A few words more about Lady Conway.

One of the most beautiful seats in Ireland, in the 17th century, belonged to her lord. It was that of Portmore, near Lisburn, and close upon the romantic borders of Lough Neagh. Here, in a spacious house designed by Inigo Jones, Lord and Lady Conway passed much of their early married life; and it was a trial to the latter when failing health prevented her from accompanying her husband thither.

Early in 1678, Lord Conway was detained in Ireland by the disturbed state of that country. He had left his dear wife apparently no worse than usual; Van Helmont was in close attendance upon her, and sent a despatch to the Earl twice a-week. On the morning of the 23rd of February she was seated at her embroidery, feeling, as she said, a strange lightness and strength, the while Mary Walsingham was reading "A Discourse on Eternitie." Lady Conway suddenly complained of cold, and, when her couch was being moved towards the hearth, her gentle spirit passed away.

So often had she swooned that the attendants believed not that she was dead. Even Van Helmont, from conclusions known only to himself, watched the body at intervals during a whole week, being doubtless deceived by a certain flexibility of the limbs and a tinge of colour on the cheeks. Deeply grieved was her husband; but urgent business detained him in Ireland, and he did not reach Ragley for some time. Therefore Van Helmont very carefully embalmed the fragile body; inserting a piece of glass in the coffin, which was kept above ground, so that when the Earl at length returned, he might look once again upon the calm face of his beloved, which turned to a likeness of her knightly father: and Collins assures us that the burial in the vault beneath the chancel at Arrow Church did not take place until the 17th of April, 1679.

THOSE DREADFUL JAPS.

IT was a fearfully hot season, and let me tell you that heat is heat in the States. I was coming from Canada to sail the next day for home. I took the train at Niagara Falls, and had a long sixteen hours' ride before me. The nasty white dust sifted through the window-blinds and sashes; the sun glared in fiercely, spite of the shades provided by the company; the car was crowded, and every moment the atmosphere grew more and more oppressive, until breathing became absolutely painful. As things reached this crisis a brilliant thought struck me, emanating from sheer desperation. Why not get off at Albany and take the night boat down the river to New York? I should arrive in plenty of time for the sailing of the *Russia*, and escape the further misery of six hours in the train. Surely, on the beautiful Hudson, a comparatively cool breeze could be found.

We were already nearing Albany; so, hastily thrusting my scattered belongings into my portmanteau, I stood ready and waiting as the train entered the large railway depôt. Two hours later, behold me tranquil and triumphant, after a very good dinner, and with an excellent cigar, pacing the deck of the finest river steamer in the world.

It was a beautiful night, the moon at its full, the stars all out in their lesser glory. As I roamed up and down I passed the door of the ladies' saloon, and my attention was caught by a figure sitting silent and alone, in the moonbeams. When I passed again, I caught a glimpse of a bended brown head, and two ungloved hands loosely clasped together; a pretty, quiet figure, with feminine grace in its attitude. She did not look up as I stood between her and the moonlight, but moved a little impatiently as if only half conscious of the obstruction. When I came by a third time, she had vanished.

Shortly after, as I was still wandering lazily to-and-fro, I heard the sound of the piano in the saloon. For a moment I felt annoyed; the night was too perfect in itself to be marred by any of the popular war songs of the time, and what else could be expected from a performer on board a river steamer? My displeasure however soon gave way to astonishment and delight, as I listened to the strains of the "Moonlight Sonata." My love for music amounted to a mania, and when this delicious melody, rendered with all the passion of its composer's mind, floated away over the moon-washed waters, I stopped in amazement. Instinctively the thought, formed by desire, took shape within my mind: "She who thus plays must be the girl that sat half hidden in the shadows."

Throwing away what remained of my cigar, I stepped within the gilded apartment from whence the sweet sounds issued. The room was comparatively empty, for most of the passengers were on deck. As I had suspected, at the farther end, seated before the grand piano, her back towards me, I saw my Incognita. Her head was a little drooped, and the fine curves of her figure well defined against the crimson gorgeousness of walls and furniture. She was absorbed in the music. I approached quietly and stood by her side looking down upon her. Her face thus seen was very charming, softly tinted and delicately cut; a drooping mouth, half melancholy, half determined; and braids of nut-brown hair rolled high upon a shapely head.

As she finished I made some appreciative remark, to which she responded gravely, but with a certain dignified pleasantness that marked her as one used to the world.

With two true lovers of music, conversation soon springs into life; so in a few moments we were in full swing over our favourites, she arguing, differing, and illustrating with sudden touches on the keys in a manner dangerously charming, while her eyes met mine fearlessly. Handsome eyes they were, grey, with black lashes, and finely-pencilled brows.

In the midst of a lengthy argument over Chopin, in which she was displaying considerable fire and spirit, a shrill, piping voice cried out, "Mamma, Mamma," followed by a long and voluble explosion of Hindostanee, or any one of the languages of the ten lost tribes, as far as intelligibility was concerned. My companion replied in the same incomprehensible form of speech; the result being the appearance, from one of the adjacent state-rooms, of two of the most astonishing figures I had ever beheld.

They were the most ultra-ugly children imaginable, sallow-faced, with dark almond-shaped eyes whose heavy lids unclosed with difficulty, black brows and lashes, and hair growing loose upon their foreheads, brushed back and braided into long tails upon their shoulders. On one these heavy locks were ebon black, on the other of a common light brown, that added greater plainness to the yellow skin and thin, sharp features.

These two strange little folk ran towards my pretty incognita and laid hold of her with their skinny little paws, gabbling all the time in their unreasonable jargon. She answered them in soothing tones, and taking the little girl upon her lap, drew the boy to her side as she continued her consolatory remarks. Feeling decidedly an outsider in this domestic scene, I made a movement to leave them. She raised her eyes, over which a shadow had come and dimmed their charms, and said:

"You must forgive my little ones; they are Japanese and understand but a few words of English." I took this as my dismissal, and left her; but, as I looked back from the doorway, I saw her still

bending over those fearful imps, caressing their horrid little faces with her soft white hand. I resumed my promenade.

"Good Heavens," I thought. "Her little ones! She an Englishwoman, and they—Japanese! Then—horrible, unbearable thought! —her husband—the father of the children—what was he but a Japanese also!"

Indeed, was there not a curious blending of the two nationalities in the little faces, the brown hair of the girl, the grey eyes of the boy—like her, yet rendered unlike by the unmistakable stamp of their race! But how could such an alliance have come about? Were such things ever done? Was there no law to prevent such marriages?

An hour later, as I approached the door of the saloon, I came face to face with the mysterious subject of my thoughts. She was coming out for a breath of the evening air, she said, before consigning herself to her comfortable quarters for the night. I fancied she met my glance less calmly as she broke into a rapid flow of words, fearing perhaps I should ask some leading question.

Leaning over the railing, glancing now at the gliding water, now at my companion's face, about whose finely-cut features the moon's rays lingered tenderly, we grew more friendly. But all my efforts, put with my greatest finesse and delicacy, failed to draw from her any confidence regarding her name, her station, her past, present or future.

She was dressed in mourning I noticed, and she wore on the third finger of her left hand, a heavy gipsy ring with a single stone—a diamond of great beauty; otherwise her attire was plain in the extreme. As it grew later, she turned from gazing at the quiet river below us, and, fixing her fearless eyes on mine, held out her hand and said:

"Good-bye, and thank you for a pleasant evening."

"Good-bye!" I echoed. "But I shall see you in the morning; I have promised myself the pleasure of waiting upon you in New York. Seeing you to an hotel, or—or your home."

"You are most kind," she returned quickly; "but I am quite provided for, and I shall require no assistance." Then bowing, she withdrew, and I was left lamenting.

I did not see her again, though I lingered about the next morning, walked through the saloon many times, touched the notes of the piano invitingly. All to no purpose: she would not appear. To be sure, the elder of the Japanese horrors, the girl, came out and played upon the floor with a Japanese doll so fearfully like its owner that I fairly shuddered. Overcoming my repugnance, I approached this small specimen and asked insinuatingly for "Mamma."

The child squinted her sharp black eyes at me, and began in her high, shrill voice a voluble harangue in her native tongue, gesticulating with her elfin hands as she concluded; but, though she grinned and chattered, and winked her eyes, so like those of the doll she

held, I could make nothing of what she said. Finally, I left the brat with no more accurate knowledge of my mystery, than I possessed when I first saw her sitting amidst the moon's shadows.

My voyage home was a dull one. The ship had few on board, and among the few no sensible man to make a pleasant hand at cards, no pretty girl to keep one up in scientific flirting. Consequently my thoughts often dwelt tenderly upon La Mystère, as I called her in my heart, and her strange, weird, ugly children.

A season spent in London, however, threw her somewhat into the shades of memory, and when I did recall her, it was but with a momentary interest coupled with a slight feeling of disgust for the small Japs. The deeper sentiment she had excited in me I fancied dead, and though I often caught myself comparing other grey eyes with hers, I was in no way hard hit, and did not waste a thought on the possibility of our meeting again.

Life, however, is stranger than fiction; and so I found it.

I was again in the States, and again on my homeward journey; the *Russia* this time was full to overflowing, but as I had a jolly companion with me in the person of my old college chum, Arthur Harford, I felt above any chance acquaintance. We sailed late in the day, and after dinner Harford and I sat smoking, comfortably at our ease in our deck chairs. As the sun went down into the sea on one side and the moon rose from it on the other, I was reminded of that evening in the past, when, under just such a sky with just such a moon above, I had listened to Beethoven, as never before had it been my good fortune to hear him rendered.

I felt communicative, so told the story to Harford, adding as I finished:

"I would give a goodish bit to see La Mystère again. She was pretty and she could play—ah! how she *could* play Beethoven!"

"Bah!" said Harford, sententiously. "You have dined to your liking. You are always sentimentally inclined, Phil, after a good dinner; I have remarked it often. Go and talk to that slim girl over by the wheel-house; she may like your rhapsodies better than I do."

"You are a heathen, Arthur," I politely remarked. Nevertheless I did get up, and stole in the direction of the lone figure bending over the railing.

She was enveloped in a loose wrap of some kind, pulled well up about her throat and ears, and, as she bent upon her crossed arms, a view of her countenance was rather difficult to obtain. With invention born of necessity, I threw myself forward and tossed my lighted cigar into the gliding waves. It gleamed for an instant in the shadows of the keel ere it went out, but my object was accomplished; the sudden flash as it passed before her eyes caused her to start from her meditative posture, and throw back her head. The dark drapery dropped from about her, and, as she turned full upon me, I beheld

once more, under the moonlight, the finely-cut face and honest, earnest eyes of La Mystère!

A sudden thrill at my heart told me the meeting was anything but unpleasant to me. Was she equally pleased? A slight flush spread over her brow and lost itself in the waves of her brown hair: then she held out her hand in the same old fearless manner, lifting her handsome eyes to mine.

"History and life are for ever repeating themselves," she said. "Is it not so?"

I took her outstretched hand, I looked into her happy eyes, and in that moment fell hopelessly, helplessly, unwillingly but eternally in love with the mother of the two Japanese infants.

Of the ten days that followed I will give no minute description. Anyone will easily understand how dangerous ten days at sea passed in the presence of a pretty, fascinating, cultivated, incomprehensible woman may prove. The evenings worked the most mischief; never were such moonlights, never such summer weather! We three—for Arthur succumbed to the glamour—sat hour after hour in the full beauty of an almost tropical moon, while she would sing to us: for La Mystère possessed a voice of such power and sweetness, that even her incomparable playing faded into insignificance before it. So she would charm us both, until even prosy, steady old Arthur lost his head, and declared that, but for me, he would have placed his heart and fortune at the incognita's feet.

You will scarcely believe me, yet, during all this time, neither Harford nor I had learned if she were maid, wife or widow. There was the black dress, and the horrible little Japs, whom in my presence she had caressed and fondly addressed as her "little ones," for proofs of her widowhood; while on the other hand, her innocent fearlessness, her absolute belief in the good of this evil world, her almost childish trust, implied a maiden's heart and nature not yet tried or moulded. Her name was Sandwell; we always addressed her as one entitled to the prefix of Madame, and as she never corrected us, we had, consequently, to believe her a widow—anything less dignified was impossible.

As we neared our journey's end, I began to understand that I was deeply interested in her—so deeply and so truly, that my future seemed a wilderness of unrest without her figure in the foreground. But how present her to my stately lady mother, with all the proud blood of the Grantlys distilled into a double essence in her veins? How say, "This is my chosen wife! I know nothing about her family, or her past. I met her on a river steamer in America. She has two Japanese children—but—I love her!" A pretty statement of facts, and one synonymous with a cut-down of my present allowance, and the loss of Thorney Grange, in my mother's gift, in prospective.

So the days glided by; I loved her more and more desperately, and, as I told myself, more and more hopelessly.

Once only we spoke of the future. I had made some senseless remark as to the blankness of life after our parting, and the probable do-nothing state I should sink into. She lifted her arched brows a trifle scornfully, and her lip curled a little though she did not make me any answer.

"And you," I asked, "what will you do?"

She flashed her handsome eyes upon me as she replied, "Simply my duty. You forget—I am going home to my little ones."

Oh, those horrid Japs! They had not been mentioned between us, and I had piously hoped that a merciful Providence had removed them from this sphere, and that never more should I encounter their ugly faces.

The day we landed was a forlorn ending to our summer sailing; it rained copiously; rained as it only can in Liverpool. Through some mistake there was no one to meet her, so she allowed me to take her to the train, see her comfortably placed in a first-class carriage, booked for London, and did not refuse the miscellaneous collection of literature I thrust upon her.

I was very miserable at seeing her go from me, yet I had not the courage to try and win her, Japs and all. *I* could love *her* distractedly, but not her accessories.

The guard rang the bell: I put out my hand. "Good-bye," I said, and some of the mournfulness of my heart echoed in my voice. "Good-bye, I shall not easily forget you!"

She gave me her hand, the brave eyes meeting mine unflinchingly.

"Good-bye," she returned quite calmly. "Thank you very, very much for all your kindness."

She loosed her hand from mine, the last bell rang, the train moved, she smiled, and I turned away. Looking back for a farewell glance, I saw the bright, brown head sink on her clasped hands, and I felt the grey eyes were filling fast with wilful tears. She, too, then felt this parting! It was some slight compensation for my own wretchedness, and I gloated over it as I walked towards the hotel, until the miserable idea dawned upon me, that I had let her go without obtaining any information concerning her ultimate destination. Questions innumerable had often suggested themselves during our ocean life, but a certain dignified reserve on her part completely repelled any advances on personal subjects. So to the last she had preserved her incognita.

Over our late dinner I told Arthur of our good-bye. He growled at the tears in her eyes, and added savagely:

"No sign that she cares a button for you—no doubt she was laughing at you next moment. Tears indeed—thought you couldn't see her—very pretty little trick that—Bah! I tell you it's nonsense, all women do that sort of thing—I have seen them scores of times."

After this rather depressing statement I kept my own confidence, and ere long La Mystère died out of our conversations, though not

out of my heart. Indeed I found my thoughts constantly roving off to those brave grey eyes, and the proud mouth, as I had last seen her look from the window of the railway-carriage. All the confusion, hurry and bustle of a gay season could not clear from my memory that one face, grown so inexpressibly dear during the summer days when we sailed together over the blue Atlantic.

I never attended a dinner, ball, or drum that the thought was not present with me, Will she be there? As the weeks flew by and I never once met her, I waxed furious at my own stupidity in letting her go, without a clue by which to discover her. Various schemes formed in my busy brain; I would insert a discreet advertisement in all the dailies; I would look up all the Sandwells, in all the different counties, make raids upon their homes and unearth in some way my beautiful, tantalising mystery; but all to no purpose. What I strove for so eagerly, Fate alone could obtain for me.

I was at the opera one night when Patti, as Margarita, was charming everyone, though to me even her delicious voice brought no solace; the entrancing music fell flat upon my ears and heart for the lack of one woman's face. Yet even as I argued with myself against this useless passion, I felt her presence near me. I raised my eyes; the occupants of one of the large boxes on the grand tier were moving about in a subdued but excited manner; I heard a low cry; and then as the group parted, my glance met the beautiful grey eyes of La Mystère!

At that moment the curtain went down at the end of the fourth act, and a crowd of men singing out from the stalls, prevented my reaching the box before the occupants had left it. I caught a glimpse of a white gown in one of the passages and rushed blindly after it, though it seemed that all the men I had ever known in all my life, conspired at that particular moment to keep me from flying to the assistance of my unknown. When I did reach the corridor, she was standing half supporting a lady, so beautiful and yet so ethereal looking, it seemed as if even the breath of the summer night would blow her away.

The moment La Mystère's eyes caught sight of me they lost their anxious look, and the little troubled frown disappeared from her brow. She put out an eager hand, from which she had withdrawn the glove, saying impetuously, as though we had parted but yesterday:

"Oh Mr. Earnsford, we are in such trouble; the carriage has not come, and see, she *must* be taken home immediately."

To offer my brougham, which was luckily in waiting, to put myself, horses, servants, everything at her little feet was the work of a moment. She accepted the first calmly enough; but just as I was depicting to myself the bliss of escorting her home, a tall, distinguished, and rather cross-looking man joined them, apparently very much heated and disgusted.

"Not a cab to be found anywhere," he said irritably, but she interrupted him.

"Never mind, George, Mr. Earnsford has offered us his brougham, so we can get Cora home comfortably without delay."

George looked at me with the air of "And who the deuce is Mr. Earnsford?" but before he could put his look into more polite words, La Mystère seized him by the arm, whispered something in his ear, and pointed to the other lady, who was growing rapidly more and more pale. George turned to me.

"You are very kind," he said, "I accept your offer without hesitation: here is my card." He held out the bit of pasteboard which I thrust into my waistcoat pocket; then, almost lifting the elder lady in his arms, he passed down to the carriage, followed by La Mystère, whose only sign of thanks was a quick look towards me from her handsome eyes, and a slight flush on her fair face. Another moment and they were gone. With a feeling of triumph I went back to my stall and listened in calm serenity to the final act of the opera.

Had I not secured the right and the means of seeing her again? The man's card was in my pocket, he was evidently some relation, and from him I could find her address, go to her and tell her—what? That I loved her, but not the little Japs; that she must love me and forget the little Japs; in fact, that with me she could not need the little Japs.

I sauntered home to my chambers, happy in the thought of what the day would bring me, put my hand in my pocket for my talisman, but—*the card was gone.*

I searched every available portion of my clothing, pulled my pockets inside out, but with no good result; it was not to be found. Then I sat down and sulked over it; what a fool I was not to have read the name and address before putting it away! now there was no possible chance of seeing her. In short, I was in despair until it suddenly occurred to me that at least I could ask the coachman where he landed the party. If he had not caught their name, he would remember their address.

The next morning I summoned Peters earlier than usual. Did he remember the two ladies and the gentleman he took from the opera last evening? Oh yes, he remembered perfectly. Where did he put them down? Could he tell me that? Undoubtedly: the gentleman had given him half-a-sovereign: of course he remembered. It was No. — Eaton Square.

Peters retired, and I, once more triumphant, prepared my mind for the happiness in store for me. My inclinations advised me to seek the lady of my heart immediately, but my obstinacy, though I dubbed it propriety, urged me to wait until the approved hour for visits; over a cup of tea one grows so much more intimate and confidential.

At a little after four I strolled into Eaton Square, and rang the

bell of No. —. The door flew open. "Not at home," said the irreproachable butler.

"I called to enquire ——" I began, when he resumed in a most respectful tone," Was I Mr. Earnsford?" "Yes." "Then my lady had left directions that should Mr. Earnsford call, he was to be told they had all gone to the country, that my lady was better, and very much obliged for Mr. Earnsford's kindness."

"To what part of the country?" I asked, insinuatingly.

"To her ladyship's father's," replied the man-servant, implying by his manner, Of course you know where that is, or, if you do not, you know nothing, and are not worthy of enlightenment. As I stood hesitating what more to say, a door at the end of the hall was pushed back and, within the room thus revealed, I beheld the elder of the two Japs—the girl with the wild yellow hair and black eyes. She caught my unwilling gaze, and pointing her finger at me, commenced jabbering something in her mother tongue. I lingered no longer; another instant the door closed, and I stood outside the wide portico, in silent rage.

So near and yet so far!

A week went by. At the end of that time, I found one Saturday morning, with my other correspondence, a letter to this effect:

"St. Mary Cray, Kent, June, 186—.

"My Dear Sir,—The ladies of my family have reported to me your kindness and politeness to them the other night at the opera. Their hurried manner of leaving town prevented their thanking you in person when you called. Will you do me the honour to pass a few days at my house in this old-fashioned village? It will give me great pleasure to receive you, and to show my appreciation of the kind services you rendered one of my daughters some months ago, to which you have now added another to the list. I enclose the trains; pray take which best suits you,—Yours sincerely,

"Henry Kendall."

Needless to say, I accepted the invitation by return of post. Two days later, the four o'clock express saw me speeding on my way, this time with every assurance of meeting La Mystère face to face, and learning at last somewhat of her history, past and present, and maybe form for both of us some possible future.

At St. Mary Cray I alighted. A groom came forward: a moment more and we were bowling along over a fine country road, past the old grey church with its graveyard, nestled in the very heart of the poorer cottages; past the rapid river Cray, dear to followers of old Izaak, and down the pretty winding road towards a large group of trees at the extreme end of this quaint Kentish village. A drive of less than half an hour brought us to the lodge gates, then a moment more, and the Priory stood before us; a dear old-fashioned latticed-windowed house, with an overhanging roof, and triple chimneys of

the Tudor period. The door stood open; it always was open, that door, testifying mutely to the hospitality of all who dwelt within.

A fine, handsome old man came out to meet me, with snow-white hair crisp and youthful standing about his head.

"So," he cried in a ringing voice. "This is Mr. Earnsford! We have you at last, and are delighted to see you, sir." Then turning to someone within, he called: "Here Weasel, tell Cora and Dorothy, Mr. Earnsford has come."

Some things come to one by instinct: I knew that "Weasel" could be no other than one of the small Japs, and my instinct proved correct. Presently there appeared the delicate, fragile-looking lady I assisted at the opera, and at her side the Japanese boy, his sallow complexion, black hair and eyes, looking more dismal than ever beside her flower-like fairness.

"This is my daughter, Lady Dinsmore," said Mr. Kendall; "and this—is my grandson."

I thought the old man's happy face clouded somewhat as he acknowledged the last relationship; and I experienced a horrible sensation of the inevitable creep over me, as I found, here at the threshold of her own home, evidence of Dorothy's being the mother of these children. La Mystère must of necessity be Dorothy, for had I not heard them all address Lady Dinsmore as Cora, and then too, had she not just the face for a Dorothy, not beautiful, but bright, and fair, and proud?

The day waned and no Dorothy appeared: it was not until dinner time that I saw her. She came into the drawing-room last of all, wearing some kind of thin black gown that showed her white arms and neck, with a bunch of roses at her waistband. Mr. Kendall simply said,

"You and Dorothy are old companions; no need to introduce you. What makes you so late, Dolly?"

"Angel would not go to sleep," she answered in a low voice. "I had to sing to her until she did."

The same look of annoyance passed over his face that I had noticed when he spoke of Weasel. He said a little sharply:

"You take too much care of those children, Dorothy. Leave them more to the nurses."

"I cannot, papa. You know I promised *him*."

"Well, well, never mind my dear; we won't discuss it. Mr. Earnsford, will you give your arm to Lady Dinsmore—Dolly, you come with me. Sorry George wasn't able to come down to-night, but an M.P.'s always busy now-a-days."

A most agreeable dinner followed, and one I should have better enjoyed had I not been haunted by the all-pervading presence of the two absent Japs, and by the half sad expression upon Dorothy's face, that had settled there after her mention of *him*. Could it be possible that this sweet Englishwoman regretted her Japanese husband!

Only one circumstance gave me hope, her name: Sandwell had a truly English ring, and could not be orientalised. Shortly, however, that faint consolation was destroyed by my servant, who, a worse gossip than any femme-de-chambre, poured out to me the facts that she had taken the name of Sandwell from an old aunt whose property she had inherited, the name being part of the legacy. "They do say, sir," continued Jackson, "as her own name was a monstrous queer-sounding one. She's always called Mistress Dorothy through the house, and has only been home a short time—only since my lady's marriage; and when she did come, she brought them fearful blacks with her. It's shocking to hear them a-calling her Mamma, and it don't seem natural as they should be hers."

Alas! my fears and surmises were rapidly becoming certainties. I felt that, ere long, I must look the matter squarely in the face, and make up my mind that in loving Dorothy I must love the Japs as well. In choosing her for my wife, I must accept her past, and her little ones with it.

A week, two weeks, were gone, and still I lingered at the Priory. My passion for Dorothy had become the prominent part of my being. Day by day, hour by hour, it became more obvious to me that I should part from her either as her future husband, or a badly-wounded, unsuccessful suitor. Yet, during these two weeks, not one word had ever come to my ears regarding her past life. She was still young—too young for her to have been anything more than a slip of a girl when the heavy cares of life apparently became hers. She spoke seldom of herself, never of her life in the States. Yet she was open-hearted as the day, and talked well and earnestly on all subjects; was most affectionate to Mr. Kendall, and devoted to the little ones. The latter, by a lucky accident, were confined to the nurseries with some childish ailment. She was never addressed save as Mistress Dorothy, or Dolly; I adopted, naturally, the former; there was a fitness in it that pleased me: was she not my mistress, and I her humblest servitor?

Well, to cut it short, we were walking home one evening from a lawn party—tennis had not come into fashion in those days—given at one of the neighbouring houses; Lady Dinsmore, her husband, Mr. Kendall in front, Dolly and I loitering behind them. It was a lovely moonlight night; the little river rippled like a silver thread at our feet; the trees cast deep shadows before us; the air was sweet with a thousand flowers. The influence of the night was not to be resisted. Another moment and—she knew it all. Knew how I loved her, how I had fought off that love, and how it would not be conquered, but grew stronger and stronger until it held me captive, and made me sue for her love in self-defence.

No Lovelace could have pleaded more warmly, and no Clarissa listened more coyly. The beautiful colour stole over her face, her

slender hands held each other in sweet confusion, and the proud, handsome eyes were lowered beneath the ardour of mine.

At last she spoke.

"The children!"

"Ah, Dolly, Dolly!" I answered; "do you suppose I would separate them from you? I must love them, for your sweet sake. I confess," I added, impatiently, "I would rather they were not yours, and not Japanese. Of course I have no doubt your husband was no end of a good fellow, but that's neither here nor there; they *are* yours, and that's enough. I love you, I want you; and naturally must take the children with you. I am not such a savage as to ask a mother to part from her little ones!"

"Husband!—father!—me!—my own children!" faltered Dorothy, her grey eyes full of indignant surprise; then on a sudden breaking into a ringing peal of laughter. "Oh, my poor, misguided, credulous Philip! And did you think me the mother of Angel and Weasel? *I* married! *my* husband a Japanese! Oh, forgive me, but it is too delicious!"

Dolly, however, was merciful. She saw my confusion, and choking back her merriment as best she could—though it would crop forth every moment in little spasmodic bursts—she took my arm, and related the following incidents.

"Mr. Kendall is my stepfather. My mother, an English lady, was the widow of a Spanish Don, who, being on the unfortunate side of politics, at his death left my mother very poor, and with two little babies. My twin-brother, Guy, was always a wild, harum-scarum boy, and, as he grew older, never could agree with either my mother or her husband, though a kinder father could not be. Guy ran away at the age of sixteen. We heard nothing of him for four years. Then, two years ago, a letter reached us from the clergyman of a Japanese settlement in the Far West of the United States, saying Guy was very ill. His wife, a Japanese lady of royal birth, had died, leaving two little ones to his care. The clergyman stated that he had performed the marriage ceremony between them, she having previously become a Christian, and added, if we wished to see Guy alive we must lose no time.

"Of course, there was no end of a scene, and my poor mother, long a sufferer of heart trouble, died in consequence of the shock. Mr. Kendall was thus rendered totally unfit for travelling, even if my step-sister's health would have permitted his leaving her. I persuaded him to allow me to go to America—I was used to going about, and did not fear the journey. I reached San Francisco in time to see my poor brother before he died, and to promise him, as a last request, to take care of his little ones and be a mother to them. I was bringing them home when I first met you, and our second meeting came about by my being obliged, some months later, to go back to the States and take possession of their property as their guardian, my brother having left them with a handsome fortune."

"But why not have taken a maid with you?" I interrupted. "Why travel so far alone?"

"Because," returned Dorothy, "I have learned that maids, since I was the age of twelve, especially where a sea-voyage is concerned, are far more trouble than anything else. They are simply encumbrances. No. I had no fears at going alone. I am used to it. I went each season to my great-aunt Sandwell in France, and, as we travelled considerably, I soon learned to manage for the entire party. When my aunt died, she left me her property with her name, and this ring"—holding up her pretty hand, where blazed the diamond in its gipsy setting that Arthur and I had speculated over—'because,' she said, 'I was the only one of the family that would put up with her vagaries.' At Mr. Kendall's request, I added to my name the prefix due only to a married woman, as a safeguard in my travels, though the soubriquet of 'Mistress Dorothy' was given me long ago, after the famous Dorothy Fox of Chatsworth Hall."

She paused, then added a little breathlessly, but with a dignified movement of her proud head:

"I have never been married. I am simple Dorothy del Balbo."

"Oh, Dorothy!" I cried in an agony of shame—"Will you, can you forgive my stupid mistake? I was a fool, a blind, idiotic fool! But do forgive me, my darling! Show your Christianity by heaping coals of fire upon my unworthy head—say Yes to my pleading!"

"If you wish it," she replied tenderly, and lifted her proud eyes to mine, proud no longer, but full of truest love.

And there, in the shelter of the woods, only the bright moon to look down upon us, I took her in my arms and sealed the contract that made me then, and has made me ever since, the happiest man in the world.

And the little Japs, you ask? Guy, more familiarly known as Weasel, is a fine young fellow now at Cambridge, and carrying all before him. And Alice? Look at that tall, slight girl now entering the room, in white fleecy drapery that clings closely about a finely-moulded figure; masses of golden hair twine about her shapely head; black, pencilled brows and deep almond-shaped eyes complete the beautiful apparition. To-morrow is her wedding-day, and, looking at her as she stands there, you hardly wonder that she is making one of the best matches in Kent.

A. DE G. STEVENS.

M. ELLEN EDWARDS. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

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THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "BROUGHT TO LIGHT," "IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT," "UNDER LOCK AND KEY," ETC.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

IT was a lovely January morning, sunny but cold, as the ladies sat around the breakfast-table at Heron Dyke. Miss Winter scarcely spoke a word during the meal, and scarcely touched a mouthful; she seemed buried in thought.

"What is the matter with you, Ella?" asked Mrs. Carlyon, noticing this. "Surely *you* are not going to be ill!"

"I was never better in all my life, Aunt Gertrude, than I am this morning," answered Ella with her sweet, serious smile. "Only, I do not seem to be in the humour for talking."

"Nor for eating either, apparently," said Mrs. Carlyon with a shake of her cap-strings. "I don't like the symptoms; and if you have not recovered your appetite at luncheon I shall think it time to send for Dr. Spreckley." At which Ella laughed.

By-and-by, Ella put on her hat and shawl and went out, st olling across the garden towards the way in which she might expe : the approach of her lover. He was already in sight. Drawing her hand within his arm when they met, he and she paced about for the best part of an hour, talking eagerly. It was the day subsequent to the gipsy's visit to the kitchen, when she had told the fortunes of the maids and—perhaps—of Dorothy Stone, and this conversation ran on that event. The reader will very probably have divined that the gipsy's visit had been a ruse; a thing planned by Conroy, to get some information out of Dorothy.

Going indoors, Ella and Mr. Conroy proceeded to the old Squire's sitting-room, which had not been used since his death. A fire, ordered in it this morning, burnt brightly on the hearth. Ella paused for a moment on the threshold. There was her uncle's big leathern

high-backed chair, with the screen behind it, as in the days that were gone. There was the little old-fashioned table with the twisted legs that used to stand at his elbow. It needed but a slight sketch of imagination to fancy that presently the Squire's heavy footstep would be heard, that he would come in with his curt "good-morrow," and begin at once to poke the fire, which was a thing that he believed no one could do as well as himself. Ella's eyes filled with tears.

"Courage, my dear," whispered Conroy. "Think of the present just now, not of the past."

She brushed away her tears and nodded, as she rang the bell. It was answered by Phemie, who was desired to inform Aaron Stone that his mistress waited for him in the Squire's old room.

Aaron received the message with an incredulous stare. "You must be dreaming," he said wrathfully. "The missis in that cold room—and wanting me in it! Be off with your tales."

"Is it cold!" retorted Phemie. "There's a wood fire blazing in it up to the top of the chimney. And the mistress is there, sir, with Mr. Conroy, and she is waiting for you."

Aaron obeyed slowly, fuming a little. He did not like being sent for by Miss Winter and talked to before Mr. Conroy. With all his heart he wished Mr. Conroy well away from Heron Dyke: he was the only man whom Aaron feared. His look of cold, dark, grave scrutiny always disconcerted the old man. What he and Dorothy should do when Mr. Conroy married the mistress and became master of Heron Dyke, which would undoubtedly be the case before long, was a thought that had troubled him a good deal of late.

Aaron paused when he opened the door, and shivered as he looked in. What could he be wanted for in that room, of all others? What was up?

"Come in, Aaron," said Miss Winter. "Shut the door, and sit down."

She was leaning back in one of the smaller chairs. Mr. Conroy stood with his arm on the old-fashioned mantelpiece. The old man took a chair near the door with a sinking heart.

"Some considerable time ago, Aaron," began his mistress in a grave but not unkindly voice, "I put certain questions to you bearing reference to my uncle's illness and death. I had been led to suppose that some mystery attached to that time, and that, whatever it was, it had been kept, and was intended to be kept, from me. You denied it; you told me I was mistaken."

"No, no, Miss Ella, I kept nothing back from you; I didn't indeed," answered the old man, in a trembling, beseeching voice, his agitation pitiable to see.

"But I now know that you did, Aaron. I know that while my uncle was said to have died the middle of May, he really died weeks and weeks before that date! Will you tell me why you induced me to believe that it was *my* uncle whom John Tilney and the choristers

from Nullington saw on the evening of his birthday, and whom Mr. Plackett, the lawyer from London, saw a day or two later, and whom Mr. Daventry's partner saw—when you knew quite well that it was you yourself, dressed up so as to personate your master, whom each and all of them beheld?"

Aaron's teeth began to chatter.

"The truth is known to me at last," continued Ella. "Do not make any further attempts to deceive me; they will be useless."

"Quite useless," struck in Conroy, a sternness in his tone that Miss Winter's had lacked. "We know all."

What little tinge of colour had been in Aaron's rugged face fled from it; he looked like a man suddenly stricken with some mortal sickness. He turned his affrighted eyes from his mistress to Conroy, and from Conroy to her again.

"Better make a clean breast of it, old man," said Conroy quietly.

"I will," at length spoke Aaron in a husky whisper, probably seeing that no other course remained to him. "The Squire did die afore May; long afore his birthday too, the twenty-fourth of April."

"It was a dreadful fraud!" gasped Ella.

"Ay, 'twas a fraud," assented Aaron. "It was not me, though, that set it agate; I only helped to carry it out."

"Who did set it agate?" asked Conroy.

"Hubert: my grandson Hubert. Him and the Squire between them."

"The Squire!" cried Ella, reproachfully. "Aaron!"

"It's true, ma'am. He couldn't rest for fear of dying before his birthday; old Spreckley let him know that he'd not live to see it, except by a miracle, and it a'most killed him. Hubert thought of something. He had been reading just then in one of his French books of a gentleman in France who died and was kept alive for months afterwards—leastways was *said* to be kept alive to deceive the world. He told the Squire of this, and the Squire caught at it eagerly, and they spoke to Jago and he helped to carry it out."

"And you helped too," said Conroy.

"I did it for the best; for the best," sighed Aaron, the tears starting to his eyes as he slightly lifted his wrinkled hands. "Moreover, the Squire ordered me: and when did I ever disobey him? 'Twas in this very room, Miss Ella,"—looking across at her—"that he first spoke to me. I had come in to get him ready for bed, and he told me about it. At the first blush I felt frightened to death; I said to him, 'Master, it can't be done.' 'It can be done and shall be done; how dare you dissent?' he answered me angrily, and I didn't dare to say more."

What could Ella answer?

"'Twas all for you, Miss Ella; all for you," shivered the faithful old servant—for faithful he was, despite this wrong-doing. "How could you have inherited Heron Dyke had the master not lived over

his birthday? 'Twould have gone right away to the other people. A nice thing for that other Denison to have come in to the old place! Swindlers and spies, all the lot of 'em! If——"

"Be silent!" sternly struck in Conroy. "How dare you presume so to speak of your master's kinsman?"

Aaron looked up with a gasp.

"Mr. Denison of Nunham Priors is every whit as honourable as the late Mr. Denison of Heron Dyke. Take care how you speak of him in future. And remember that he is Mr. Denison of Heron Dyke now—and would have been so ever since last April but for your plotting."

Never had Conroy been so moved—so stern. Ella, though assenting in her heart to every word, looked at him in surprise. Aaron felt checked and mortified; he thought this was pretty assumption for a man who was but a newspaper reporter, and would have liked to say so.

"Mistress," he stammered in a husky voice, "how did you come to know about the Squire?"

"That I must decline to tell you," spoke Miss Winter. "It is enough that I do know it. Had you but told me the truth when I first questioned you, what annoyance it would have saved!"

But the aged retainer could only reiterate, "I did it for the best." Mr. Conroy spoke.

"I want you to tell me, Aaron, the real date of the Squire's death."

Aaron threw a quick, sour, suspicious look at his interlocutor. "Am I to answer that, Miss Ella?" he asked, in an aggrieved tone.

"Certainly."

"Well, if you must know, sir, he died the 19th of February."

"The 19th of February. What did you do then?"

"Why, we put the body into a coffin that had been ordered from London two months before by the Squire's own directions. Hubert ordered it, and it was sent down in a packing-case, and the servants were told that it was a new sort of invalid-chair for the master."

"Oh. And this coffin, nailed down, I suppose, was kept in the room?"

"In the lumber-room off the bed-room; nobody had ever thought o' going in there. We kept the room locked mostly after that."

"Just one moment," interposed Ella. "Was the account you gave me of my uncle's death—what happened the evening it took place—a true one?"

"Every word," answered the old man. "Save that it was in February 'stead o' May, ma'am."

"Whose idea was it that you should personate your master after his death?" resumed Conroy.

Aaron did not answer at once. His eyes had taken a dull, far-away expression, as though he were lost in the past.

"Such a lot o' things had to be done that wasn't at first thought of," he presently said. "Nobody can foresee what ins and outs a matter will take when it be first planned. Hubert saw that it might not be enough to say the Squire lived over his birthday; people might clamour to see him and convince theirselves of it; and Jago, he saw it also."

"Yes. Go on."

"They thought there was nothing for it but that I must be dressed up to personate him. I fought against it; I did indeed, Miss Ella," lifting his eyes to his mistress, "but 'twas o' no manner of use my holding out; for, as they pointed out to me, all might have been discovered unless I gave in."

"So they dressed you up!" cried Conroy.

"Hubert did it—the whole scheme was carried out by Hubert. Oh, but he was a clever lad; an amazing clever lad! Jago was deep and cunning, but he had not the talent of Hubert. Who but he got me a wig to imitate the Squire's long white hair, and a velvet skull-cap? I had to put them and the dressing-gown on every day and be drilled for an hour, till I used to half fancy I had been transmogrified into the Squire himself. It took in Daventry's partner, and them lawyer rascals from London finely!—and the band from Nullington and John Tilney and his wife! I had on the cat's-eye ring."

"Dr. Jago was in the secret from the first, you say."

"Of course he was, sir. He was just the man for a job of that sort, and it couldn't have been done without a doctor."

Mr. Conroy had been jotting down a few notes in his pocket-book. "I think that is all for the present," he said to Aaron. "If any other questions should occur to me, I can ask them later."

Aaron rose stiffly from his chair. To his ears there seemed an assumption of authority, of power in Conroy, excessively distasteful to him. But the cloud vanished from his countenance and his rugged features softened as his eyes rested on his mistress. No anger, no haughty condemnation sat on that fair young face; only a sort of sweet, patient sadness.

"Miss Ella, you know everything now," he whispered, moving a step or two nearer to her. "But what of that? The world's none the wiser and never need be. The secret's as safe as ever it was."

"Yes, Aaron, I know everything," answered Ella a little wearily. "I know that I am no longer the mistress of Heron Dyke. I know that the dear old home no longer belongs to me, but to another! But I also know that he will be a worthy inheritor."

Aaron gasped—as if demented. "But, Miss Ella, you have only to hold your tongue and nobody will ever be a bit the wiser. The Squire bound us all not to tell you, but now that you've found it out for yourself, there's no harm done. You surely would not tell—no, no! not that—not that!"

"I have no alternative, Aaron. I would do that which is right.

This home is not mine: it must be given up to him to whom it rightly belongs."

"Oh! ma'am!—Miss Ella! My master would turn in his grave if he could hear your words. Give up the old place? No—no! And not a soul knows the secret but ourselves and Jago—and the nurse: and their mouths are sealed!"

"If my uncle, out of that larger knowledge which I doubt not is now his, were permitted to counsel me, do you think he would not urge me to do that which is just and honourable?" said Ella, condescending to reason with him, in pity for his evident wretchedness. "Your master sees now with other eyes than those he saw with when on earth; he would not ask me to keep what is not, and never has been, mine; that which he would have me do, could he speak to me, is the thing I must do, and no other."

Aaron listened, but he was not convinced. "To think of the estate going to them that the master hated so! Sneaks and spies——"

"Not another word!" severely spoke Miss Winter. "You forget yourself, Aaron."

The old man bowed his head and let his arms fall by his side with a gesture of despair. Turning, he hobbled slowly from the room.

"Poor, faithful old soul!" cried Ella, as she gazed after him. "Wrongly though he has acted, it was done in loyalty to my uncle and me. And so, Edward," she added, bravely smiling through her tears, "you see that you will not have a well-dowered bride."

"So much the better, sweet one," answered Conroy, stealing his arm round her. "You will then owe something to me, instead of my owing so much to you. Nobody can now call me a fortune-hunter."

"They have not called you one."

"Have they not! Ask that old man, now gone out, what he thinks of me in his private thoughts. Ask your Aunt Gertrude; ask Mrs. Toynbee—ask the world."

"I am sure you have never been *that*."

"I don't think I have. But, Ella, it will be a sore parting—this of yours from Heron Dyke."

"When the day shall come I shall try to bear it."

"Who knows but that old gentleman at Nunham Priors will give it up to you to live in?" suggested Conroy. "Has he not said something of the kind to you?"

"And do you think I would impose upon his generosity by staying? No, no. This is the place of his ancestors, and it must be his; his entirely; and his son's after him. You forget he has a son, Edward."

"One Master Frank, I believe. A graceless young fellow, by all accounts."

"That may be; but he is a Denison, and the heir after his father. Besides—you have indeed been speaking without thought, Edward!—how could poor people, such as we shall be, live at a grand old place like this? It requires a grand income to keep it up."

"Dear me! So it does."

"You had better give me up, perhaps, Edward, now things have turned out for the worse," she suggested, her voice slightly trembling. "I shall only be a clog upon your ambition, and keep you down."

"Do you think so?" he rejoined gravely. "You will be afraid to venture on a man so poor as I? Well, there's little doubt you might marry a rich one. Many a man high in the world's favour might be glad to woo you. Young ladies with only a tithe of your good looks make rich marriages every season; why should not you? You have always been used to the luxuries and refinements of life; it would be a misery to me not to be able to afford you them still. Had we not better part?"

Ella was looking at him with a startled expression in her eyes, as if she were half afraid he might be in earnest, and was taking her at her word. Edward Conroy's pleasant laugh rang out. He drew her to him and kissed her tenderly. "Why, what a great goose you are to-day," he said. "As if you did not know that our love was altogether independent of either poverty or riches, and that neither one nor the other of them could affect it in any way! You are mine and I am yours, and no caprices of any worldly fortune can come between us. And now let us fling our cares to the wind for a little while and forget everything except that we do love each other, and that the sun is shining, and that Rover and Caprice are waiting to be saddled. Put on your riding-habit and let us go for a long gallop in the sweet January sunshine. If we are not to have many more rides together, it were wise to enjoy them while we may."

Aaron Stone felt utterly dazed and confounded. It was not merely the shock of finding that the elaborate house of cards which he and others had helped to build had tumbled to pieces so suddenly about his ears that dismayed him; it was the fact of Miss Winter's having unravelled the plot which nonplussed him. The secret of the Squire's death could be known to three people alone: to himself, to Dr. Jago, and to Mrs. Dexter: Hubert was no longer living. Both Jago and Mrs. Dexter had been well paid for their share in the affair, and neither of them would be likely to speak of what would render themselves liable to a criminal prosecution. From what unknown source, then, could Miss Winter have obtained her information? Aaron could not answer: and the oftener he asked himself the question the more puzzled and bewildered he became. As to that bumptious Conroy—one might think the whole place belonged to him to see him and hear his tones! "There's witchcraft in it altogether; that's what there is," concluded the dazed old man.

And witchcraft there was in it, but of a kind different from that imagined by Aaron Stone.

Convinced that Dorothy Stone knew more than she dared tell, that the clue to the secret might be got from her by stratagem, though perhaps never by a straightforward examination, Edward

Conroy set his wits to work. She was so full of superstitious fancies and beliefs, it seemed to him something might be effected by playing upon them. At first Miss Winter objected, but she grew to see that if the means used were not perfectly legitimate, the end to be obtained certainly was. In fact, there seemed to be no other way, and they could not go on living in this state of uncertainty.

During a recent visit of Conroy to London, he had witnessed a representation of the play of "Guy Mannering," and had been much struck by the powerful way in which the character of Meg Merrilies was portrayed. The actress who played the part was known to the public under the name of Miss Murcott. She was a lady of irreproachable character; and Mr. Conroy had been introduced to her, after the play was over, by one of his newspaper friends. In furtherance of the object he had now in view, he went up to London again, sought an interview with the actress, and enlisted her sympathy. The result was that Miss Murcott went down to Nullington, and took up her abode for a night at Mrs. Keen's, who had been prepared to receive her by Mr. Conroy. In the disguise of a gipsy and under pretence of telling the maids of Heron Dyke their fortunes, she obtained access to Dorothy Stone, Aaron's absence having been secured by his mistress. Using the information confidentially given her by Conroy, she whispered words into Dorothy's ear that so startled her as to render her pliable as a lamb.

"Give me your hand," said the sham gipsy then: and the dazed and trembling woman held it out without a dissenting word. Holding the withered palm in her own, the gipsy proceeded to scan it closely, tracing the different lines with her forefinger.

"This indicates a coffin," she said; and Dorothy groaned. "And this—dear me! what *is* this? It seems to point to a hale old man with long white hair, who wears something dark on his head, and is put into the coffin before ——"

"Oh, don't, don't!" shrieked Dorothy, trying in vain to withdraw her hand from the gipsy's firm grasp.

"What have we here?" continued the fortune-teller. "A darkened room where people walk with hushed footsteps; green doors that open and shut without noise; a little white-faced man with a black moustache and evil eyes!——And this dark line must be a secret—a secret with a crime in it that might drive you forth from your grave at midnight had you committed it ——"

"I didn't commit it," moaned Dorothy. "They never let me know of it."

"No, but you found it out; you hold the secret; this line shows me that. You must disclose it ere it be too late—too late!"

"What shall I do!" sobbed Dorothy. "What shall I do!"

"What I bid you," said the woman sternly. "Tell me all you know—or there will be no peace for you living or dead."

It needed no more to induce Dorothy to do as she was bidden.

With many sighs, and groans, and hesitations, her story came out little by little. It appeared that in those past days the housekeeper's curiosity was aroused, and to a certain extent her anger also, at being kept in ignorance of what was going on behind the green baize doors, and not being allowed to penetrate beyond them herself. "They treat me as if I was a common pantry-maid," she would say with bitterness. The position also that Mrs. Dexter took up in the household by no means tended to soothe these ruffled feelings. "I've helped to nurse the master for the last twenty years when he has been ill, and now I've got to make room for a strange woman!" she said to Aaron; and all the answer Dorothy got from him was an order to concern herself with her own business. "There's something going on behind those doors that they are afeared to be let known," concluded the shrewd old woman in her mind.

Dorothy determined to go beyond the doors, if she could get a chance of it, and tell her wrongs to the Squire himself; and she watched for an opportunity. It came at last. One afternoon when Aaron had gone to Nullington, he came home all the worse for the pints of strong ale he had taken. Not often did he transgress in this way; and, with the view of hiding it from the household, he went straight to bed, saying the sun had given him a headache, and fell asleep. Dorothy filched the key of the green baize doors from his pocket. Mrs. Dexter, who rarely left the house, had gone this afternoon to the railway station, to send off some private telegram that she would not trust to anybody else; and Hubert Stone was out riding. In a perfect twitter of excitement Dorothy took the key to the green baize doors; she ventured to open them both, and went on. Knocking at the door of the Squire's sitting-room, she waited for the answering "Come in." It did not reach her ears. She thought he might be dozing, and opened the door, all in a twitter of eagerness to ask and hear from her master why she was excluded. The room was empty. He is in bed, thought Dorothy, and went to the chamber. That also was empty. She stood bewildered; what could be the meaning of it? Perhaps the Squire had stepped into the lumber-room for something—she opened its door gently, and gave one glance around. That one brief look was quite enough. A low scream broke from her lips; then, hardly knowing what she was about, she closed the door, and fled back by the way she had come. What she saw in the third room was a closed coffin—the very coffin which she saw carried out of the Hall some two months later on the day of Mr. Denison's funeral.

The Squire must be dead; she saw that: but, why were they concealing it? Watching and prying about after this, Dorothy saw enough to convince her that, before the death was really announced to the world, it was no less than her own husband who personated the dead Squire. She stole into the garden the night the musicians were playing, and distinguished Aaron's features in his master's clothes.

The day Mr. Charles Plackett was expected from London, Dorothy watched and saw her husband turn back privately, and go stealing into the Squire's rooms, instead of proceeding on his pretended walk to Nullington. All this was confessed to the gipsy woman, who in her turn related it to Miss Winter and Mr. Conroy.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CONVERGING THREADS.

After Philip Cleeve's return home he had had a slight relapse. Old Mr. Marjoram, hearing of this in London, for Maria often wrote to him, sent a peremptory mandate for Philip to go back to his house to be nursed. But Philip was getting better now.

Matters were arranged with Mr. Tiplady: and that gentleman had already ordered a new brass plate for his office door—"Messrs. Tiplady and Cleeve, Architects and Surveyors." The necessary money had been paid by Maria: and the Vicar did not withhold his sanction. Philip would take a fair income for a year or two, then become full partner, and succeed to the whole whenever it should please Mr. Tiplady to retire. It was a very fair prospect, and the Reverend Mr. Kettle saw no cause to grumble at it.

One little clause, known only to Mr. Daventry, who drew it up, to Mr. Tiplady, and to Philip, was inserted in the deed of partnership. It was to the effect that Philip could not come upon the firm for any money whatever beyond his salary: if he contracted debts, Mr. Tiplady was secured from the fear of having to pay them.

"It is only a matter of precaution, Cleeve, inserted as much for your own sake as for mine," Mr. Tiplady said to him in private. "I have not much fear that you will be playing cards for high stakes again, or betting at billiards. *Or*," added the architect with a grim smile, "investing your spare cash in silver mines."

"Never again; never again," whispered Philip, tears of emotion filling his eyes, as he clasped the hand of his good friend.

The paying of the money had been a surprise to Mr. Tiplady, knowing Philip's penniless state. Without saying a word to her husband, Maria had gone to Mr. Tiplady and had made over to him the twelve hundred pounds which, long before, he had agreed with Lady Cleeve should be the premium paid him in consideration of taking Philip into partnership. How gratifying to Philip it was, to know that his mother was never to hear the truth of all his folly; that she was to be left in the belief that the money she had made him a loving present of on his birthday had all gone in the silver mine! In her fond eyes Philip always remained the most peerless of sons. What a weight was lifted off the young man's heart by this generous act of his wife! From that day forward his health improved rapidly; he grew again like the merry, light-hearted Philip Cleeve of old

times, his laugh a pleasure to hear. But the lesson taught him was not one to be readily forgotten. And there would be one sweet presence ever by his side to see that his footsteps did not falter, and to cheer him onward whenever the road before him seemed hard and difficult to travel. Philip Cleeve had learnt his life's lesson.

In truth he had been more lucky than he deserved; and he was to be more so yet. Apart from his past follies, the one item of remembrance that made him wince was the thought that his wife should have sacrificed a great portion of her little fortune to patch up his. Even this bitterness was to be taken from him.

Just at this time his brother, Sir Gunton Cleeve, was despatched to England on some mission by the embassy to which he was attached; and he snatched an opportunity to run down to Homedale for four-and-twenty hours. To him Philip made a clean breast of the past, confessing everything: the card-playing, the billiard-playing, the personal extravagance in the shape of pretty ornaments and the like; and the voracious silver mine that had quite finished him.

"Why, what a silly young fellow you must have been!" exclaimed the baronet.

"I know it, Gunton, to my cost. I shall know it all my days."

Sir Gunton had sown a few wild oats himself, though he had long ago steadied down, and he was not inclined to be too severe.

"What I don't like, Philip, is this: that your wife should have had to pay the premium to Tiplady. It looks mean—for us. What does the mother say?—and the Vicar?"

"The Vicar has said nothing to me: I don't think he intends to blow me up; he has been very good, I must confess. All he said to Maria was, that the money was her own and he could not interfere. As to the mother, Gunton, she knows nothing of my wicked folly; she thinks the twelve hundred pounds was all swallowed up by the mine. Maria went privately to Tiplady and paid over the money."

"Well, look here, Philip. I can't stand this: a Cleeve was never mean yet; at least in our day. I am not rich, as you know, but I can manage this much. *I* will pay the premium to Tiplady; that is, I will refund the money to Maria: and you had better let it be settled upon her. But I do it in the belief that you will never play at folly again: understand that, young fellow."

The tears had rushed to Philip's eyes. "Oh, Gunton, you may trust me! How generous you are!"

When Philip had done thanking him, they began to talk of Captain Lennox, and the suspicions attaching to him. "Where is he now?" asked Sir Gunton.

"He can't be found—by the police, or by anybody else. By the way, you knew him three or four years ago, Gunton."

"*I* knew him!" retorted Sir Gunton. "Knew Lennox!"

"Anyway, you have seen him. You met him at Cheltenham, at Major Piper's. Young Conroy, a fellow up at Heron Dyke, told me

that much. The Major had a card party, and you and Lennox were both at it, he said; and the next day the Major's jewels were missing. You spent a few days at Cheltenham about that time."

"Yes, I did; and I recollect the evening. Lennox?—Lennox? Ay, I do remember him now. A fair, slender man of very gentlemanly manners: wore a white rose in his button-hole."

"That's he. One can hardly believe him to be an accomplished swindler."

"If he played these pranks often, helping himself to jewels and purses, and the like, he must have been uncommonly lucky to go on so long without detection," observed Sir Gunton.

"The very remark Conroy made to me."

"Pray who is Conroy?"

"The luckiest man living," replied Philip with enthusiasm.

"That's saying a good deal," cried the baronet, lifting his eyebrows.

"Well, upon my word, I think he is, Gunton," returned Philip. "He is nothing but a man connected with newspapers; draws cartoons for them, or something of that. He and Miss Winter met somewhere and fell in love with one another, and she means to marry him and make him the master of Heron Dyke."

"Oh, indeed. What next?"

"I think that's pretty well. You can't say but he is lucky."

"Is the man a sneak?"

"Just the opposite. A highly-educated, open-mannered, masterful kind of man, who can hold his own with his betters, and apparently, not recognise them to be so. To see him and hear him, you might think he had been born the master of Heron Dyke at least. Anyway, that's what Ella Winter intends him to become."

"She has the Denison blood in her veins I suppose, and we know the old distich," carelessly remarked Sir Gunton:

> "Whate'er a Denzon choose to do
> Need ne'er surprise nor me nor you."

The small dinner-party at Heron Dyke, of which Miss Winter spoke to her housekeeper, was held. Philip, getting strong then, was able to attend it with his mother and Maria. Lady Maria Skeffington, who had been taking a good deal of notice of Maria since her marriage, the Vicar, and Dr. Spreckley completed the party.

Dinner was over, and they were all back in the large drawing-room, when the evening post was brought in. It was some hours late; the postman said there had been a breakdown on the line. Three or four newspapers came in, and one letter which was addressed to Miss Winter. It bore the American post-mark; and Ella's curiosity arose; not so much because she knew no one in America, as that she thought the handwriting was Margaret Ducie's.

"Oh, I must open it!" she exclaimed, taking it into the next room.

The intervening doors were open, and they watched her read the letter. She came back with it in her hand, looking a little pale.

"It is from Mrs. Ducie," she said in a low tone to her guests: "it is dated from Rhode Island, America. I think you ought to hear it. Perhaps"—turning to Mr. Conroy—"you will read it aloud."

Conroy took the letter from her hand, glanced over it, and began:

"Mrs. Ducie, late of The Lilacs, near Nullington, takes the liberty of addressing a few lines to Miss Winter of Heron Dyke. She does it with reluctance, as Miss Winter will readily understand; but the charge is laid upon her, and she cannot evade it: the time being now come when certain facts connected with the past must be made known.

"Mrs. Ducie's brother, known to Miss Winter and to others as Captain Lennox, died two days ago. Enclosed is a declaration which he dictated, word for word, before his death; with a request that it might be forwarded to the proper quarter immediately after that event should have taken place.

"Mrs. Ducie can make no attempt to palliate anything that happened in the past. As it was, so it must remain. If all were known, which it never can be here on earth, it would sometimes be found that the greatest sinners were first driven into sin by no wish or will of their own. Many, who were destined to fill an honourable career, have been forced by circumstances which they could not control on a contrary path. The dead are sacred; and she, obliged to write these painful lines, can never forget that she has lost a brother, who, whatever his faults might be, was dearer to her heart than anyone now left to her."

Such was Mrs. Ducie's note. The enclosed paper was also in her handwriting. Mr. Conroy went on to read it:

"I, Ferdinand Lennox, or the man commonly known by that name, being about to quit this mortal world and set out on my travels to that unknown country from which there is no return, am desirous, while there is still sufficient strength and clearness of mind left me, to state the facts with regard to a certain event as they really occurred; which facts will probably be found to be somewhat different from what the world believes them to be. I allude to the death of Hubert Stone.

"The Fates had been unpropitious for some time; circumstances were against me; I had lost heavily on the turf and in other speculations, and was nearly at my wits' end for lack of ready money. It was at this time that my sister, quite innocently, told me of the strange discovery of a quantity of old family jewels at Heron Dyke.

"And, in justice to her, my good and faithful sister, I may here remark that since she came to live with me I have been more cautious, and have striven to keep my little peccadilloes from her knowledge. She may have thought sometimes that my luck at the card table was something out of the common way, but of the more shady passages of my life she knew absolutely nothing.

"It did not take me long to decide that I must make those jewels mine if it were by any means possible to do so. My circumstances just then were desperate and a *coup de main* had become absolutely necessary. Burglary was altogether out of my line, but in this case the enterprise seemed to me so peculiarly an easy one that I could not forego it. I knew the position of the room in which the jewels were lying. I knew that it was only a question of opening a window and forcing a shutter, after the family should be safe in bed. There were no dogs to fear, and the servants slept in another wing of the house. Nothing could be more easy. I felt that I could never forgive myself if I allowed such an opportunity to escape me.

"Up to a certain point, everything happened in accordance with my expectations. The Hall was in darkness; there was no sign of life anywhere. I found the window I was in search of, and a few minutes later I stood inside the room. I opened a slide of my dark lantern and took a survey. There stood the bureau in the corner where I had expected to find it. I had brought a small chisel and one or two other implements with me, and a very little time sufficed to force open the receptacle in which the jewels were stored. What a fine glow filled my heart as I feasted my sight for a few moments on their flashing beauty and recognised the fact that they were all my own! For some time to come my finances were assured.

"I was wearing an old shooting-jacket, with many pockets, so that I had no difficulty in stowing away my booty. I was putting away the last handful when a noise behind me made me start and look round. There was just enough starlight to enable me to discern the figure of a man standing at the open window and gazing into the room. Flashing a ray from my lantern across his face, I recognised Hubert Stone. He vaulted over the low window-sill into the room: 'Surrender, you villain,' he cried, 'or it will be worse for you!' I did not answer, but moved noiselessly in the darkness over the soft carpet to another corner of the room. He was evidently nonplussed, and after standing still for a moment or two I could just make out his figure as he advanced, but in a direction opposite to the spot where I was standing. Now was my opportunity. I made a rush for the window, reached it, and was leaping from it; when, as ill luck would have it, my foot caught against the slightly-raised framework, and I fell face downward on to the gravelled pathway. Hurt and bleeding, I regained my feet, but only to find myself enclosed by the stalwart arms of young Stone. 'Surrender!' he said again. Again I made no answer, hoping he had not recognised me, and a desperate struggle began between us: but he was the younger and the stronger, and presently we were rolling over each other on the ground. It must have been then I lost the sleeve-link; which loss has led to all the mischief as regards myself. Although I could by no means get away from Stone, he was unable altogether to overpower me. Suddenly, while holding me down with his right hand, with his left he

drew from some inner pocket a closed knife, which, with the help of his teeth, he presently contrived to open. 'If you will not surrender,' he said, 'I will mark you so that you can be traced wherever you go.' What he was about to do I know not, but I suddenly struck up his arm and the knife flew out of his hand. His object was now to regain possession of it, while mine was to keep him from doing so. We were still struggling on the ground, when my fingers felt the knife as it lay among the gravel. I drew it towards me, and Stone perceived that I had got it. He bent suddenly forward to regain possession of it, but as he did so the point slipped and penetrated deep into his chest. A short sharp cry broke from his lips, he sprang to his feet, threw up his hands, staggered a pace or two, groaned, and fell on his face—no doubt dead.

"Once for all, let me assert most solemnly, and at a time when to tell a lie in the matter could be of no possible benefit to me, that I am utterly guiltless of intentionally causing Hubert Stone's death. His fate was the result of an accident brought on by his own rashness in the struggle. Had he left the knife in his pocket he would have been alive at the present moment; although how the battle would have terminated in that case, and what might have happened to me, is another matter.

"After having confessed to so much, it may be some relief to the minds of certain people if I reveal one or two other secrets, which in comparison are trifles. Be it known, then, that it was I, Ferdinand Lennox, who appropriated Mrs. Carlyon's jewel case, and Mr. Bootle's watch and chain, and the old doctor's gold box, together with one or two other minor articles, that I happened to find close to my hands; hands that had acquired remarkable dexterity. And, really, if unthinking people will place such flagrant temptations in the way of poor erring humanity, they are decidedly to blame; for it serves to entice otherwise would-be innocent people into wrong-doing. Had no thoughtless person ever put temptations before me, even my dark plumage might have been far whiter than it is now.

"And now that my task is over—it has cost me some pain, if only from the sight of my poor sister's tears that drop on her writing as she sits by the bed—I subscribe my name for the last time in this world: FERDINAND LENNOX."

It was his own signature, scrawled in a shaky hand.

"Poor Mrs. Ducie!" exclaimed Ella. "I shall write her a nice letter."

"So shall I," added Maria.

"I shall write to her myself," cried the good-hearted Vicar. "If we were all to be abandoned for the sins committed by our friends and relatives, the world would be harder than it is."

"To have had such a brother!—so sweet a woman as that Margaret Ducie seemed to be, poor thing!" lamented Lady Maria Skeffington. "She quite won my heart."

Philip Cleeve's face flushed: Margaret Ducie had nearly won his. He recalled what his feelings towards her had been. But last summer's flowers were not more dead than those feelings were now. "Mrs. Ducie will never come back to England," he remarked aloud.

"Never," nodded Dr. Spreckley: "we may rest pretty well assured of that. It must have been Lennox to whom you were indebted for the loss of your purse," he added to Mr. Kettle.

"Ay," said the Vicar. "I remember quite well that he stood talking to me for some little time just before the party broke up. The fellow was so pleasant that no one on earth would have taken him for a pickpocket. Dear me! what curious experiences we pick up in life!"

The discovery made of the treacherous plot enacted at Heron Dyke was not to be proclaimed to the world: it reflected discredit on the old Squire as much as on his subordinates, and Miss Winter was anxious to spare his memory. But to one or two people it must necessarily be disclosed, Ella intending to bespeak their secrecy. Mr. Daventry was the first to hear it.

Ella, accompanied by her aunt, proceeded to London, Mr. Daventry travelling by the same train. Conroy had already left Nullington upon business of his own. The object of Ella's visit was to inform Mr. Charles Plackett that she was prepared to yield up the property to his client at Nunham Priors. But she meant to ask the favour, of Mr. Denison, of being allowed to remain at Heron Dyke herself for a short period longer; until, in fact, she quitted it with Conroy for good: which she felt sure the kind old man would accord.

Ella had told her aunt something, but not all. She gave her to understand that in consequence of some flaw in the title-deeds, Heron Dyke had become the property of the other branch of the family. There is no need to dwell on Mrs. Carlyon's perturbation of spirit when she found that her niece was determined to give up everything of her own free will. Of her own free will: that's how Mrs. Carlyon looked at it. When first the news was broken to her she cried, and implored Ella not to be so romantically foolish, so ridiculously Quixotic. "If there is any flaw in the title-deeds it is their place to find it out, and not yours to show it them," she reiterated. But Ella assured her that she could not help herself; *no other choice was left her;* that, in fact, the estate had been Mr. Denison's ever since her uncle's death. It a little appeased Mrs. Carlyon; she kissed Ella and remarked that "what must be, must be."

And, in the gratification of once more getting to her own home, Mrs. Carlyon recovered her spirits. Ella was her guest that night; and the following morning proceeded to keep the appointment already made with Mr. Charles Plackett, Mr. Daventry meeting her there. In a very few words, Miss Winter stated her business. Recalling to Mr. Plackett's mind their interview at Heron Dyke and what passed

thereat, she went on to state that certain fresh circumstances had come to her knowledge, in consequence of which she had decided to give up the property to Mr. Denison. What the circumstances in question were she declined to say, and begged that she might not be pressed to explain. All she wished was that Mr. Denison would quietly accept that which she had of her own free will come to offer him, without enquiring too curiously into the past. In short, Mr. Charles Plackett understood that she wished to have no persecuting of this person or indicting of that one: there must be a complete condonation of what might have happened in the time gone by. During this, Mr. Daventry sat by and said nothing: he was but there to give, as it were, legality to this avowed resolution of Miss Winter's; in fact, to show the other side that it was not made lightly, or in jest.

"I perceive," nodded Mr. Charles Plackett, gazing at his brother lawyer: "you have obtained information that you consider to be conclusive as to my client's rightful claims, but the particulars of which you do not wish to be enquired into?"

"That is so," replied Miss Winter.

"Is my esteemed friend here, if I may put the question to him, cognisant of these particulars?"

"Yes, I am," spoke up Mr. Daventry. "And I am prepared to testify that Mr. Denison need entertain no scruple whatever as to assuming possession of the estate. Miss Winter resigns it to him from to-day."

Mr. Charles Plackett looked at her earnestly. "It will be a great sacrifice on your part, my dear young lady."

"Yes, it will; I do not deny that," acknowledged Ella, involuntary tears starting to her eyes. "But I have no choice in the matter; none. All I would ask of Mr. Denison is, that he will allow me to remain in the house for a short while longer: a very few weeks at the most."

Mr. Charles Plackett smiled amiably. "That small request will be granted as a matter of course, my dear Miss Winter. *I* remember some words spoken by my client in this very room; not long ago, either. Though it were proved that Heron Dyke did belong to him, he said, he would like that charming young lady to retain it."

Ella smiled faintly, and shook her head. "That cannot be," she answered. "But I do not feel the less indebted to Mr. Denison for the kindness that prompted the thought."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MORE SURPRISES THAN ONE.

Miss Winter remained in London with her aunt three or four days. She had some purchases to make preparatory to her nuptials and consultations to hold with her dressmaker. Neither did Mrs Carlyon care to quit her house again without giving a few days to it,

On the morning preceding that on which they were to travel down to Heron Dyke, they were surprised, not knowing he was in London, to see Conroy. He had been somewhere in the country.

"And my visit was a failure," he said to Ella: "the friend whom I went to see was absent from home. I waited a day or two; but as he did not return, I came up here.—Have you been house-hunting?" he carelessly asked.

"House-hunting!" she repeated. "No."

"Seeing that Heron Dyke is to be given up, it will be necessary to fix upon some nest or other, will it not?" he continued.

Ella's eyelashes grew wet in a moment, and she turned away her head. A little while, and the old home that she had known and loved all her life would be hers no longer: how bitter the parting would be, no one but herself could tell.

"And there will be the furniture to select," continued Conroy in the same light tone; "chairs, and tables, and carpets, and fire-irons, and a thousand other things that we can't do without: but all that I shall leave to you."

"I hope you won't do anything of the kind," said Ella in some alarm. "I should be a great ignoramus at selecting furniture."

"And I should not be one whit better," lamented Conroy. "Mrs. Carlyon, we shall have to fall back upon you. You must purchase for us."

"Time enough for that," returned Mrs. Carlyon rather crossly. Any reminder of the giving up of Heron Dyke made her cross at once. "You intend to travel, you both tell me, for two or three months after your marriage: you can come to me when you return and look out for a house then."

"So be it," said Conroy.

Mrs. Carlyon and Ella returned to Heron Dyke together, Conroy travelling to Nullington with them. Just to make sure that they got down in safety, he observed, in a laughing, saucy manner: on the next day, or the next day but one, he should have to go back again.

It was with a heavy heart that Ella entered her many-years' home. Not much longer would she be able to call it her own: indeed, the feeling of its having been hers had already left her. In her heart she began to say farewell to all the sweet familiar places that seemed now almost as if they were a part of herself. No whisper had yet gone abroad of any impending changes at the Hall. Neither had the servants been spoken to. It was best to keep the matter in until the last moment drew nearer. Miss Winter did not care to become an object of commiseration or condolence; after she was gone people might talk as they pleased.

Her thoughts had other things to dwell upon, beside the sweet sorrows of farewell. Before her stretched a strange, new, unknown life—a sea whose depths and whose shallows she had not yet fathomed—and sometimes the prospect half affrighted her. But

when she thought of Conroy and how her heart was safely anchored in his love, a trusting courage came back to her. He was the pilot of her life-bark : whatever storms might come, whatever winds might blow, so long as he was at the helm she would not be afraid.

On the morning but one after Miss Winter's return to Heron Dyke, Aaron Stone was crossing the lawn in front of the Hall when he saw an elderly gentleman within its gates. Pacing to and fro and turning himself about, he seemed to be examining the house from different points of view in a manner that Aaron deemed to be the height of impudence. Aaron had hated strangers all his life, and he made no ado about walking up to this one and demanding by whose authority he was in the private grounds of Heron Dyke.

The old gentleman turned to face him. "Ah, you are Aaron Stone, I expect: I have heard of you before to-day," said the stranger, as he peered at Aaron through his eyeglass. "Well, I am Mr. Denison of Nunham Priors. Here is my card. Take it to Miss Winter and ask her whether she can oblige me with an interview."

Aaron gave a great start at mention of the name and shrank back a step or two. This little pleasant-faced, inoffensive elderly gentleman the man he had all his life been taught to hate, and whom he had always pictured to himself as more of a demon than a man! He could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes, and stood staring at a respectful distance.

"Take the card, man alive! What are you afraid of?" cried out Mr. Denison.

And there was so much in the impatient, commanding tone, ay and in the words themselves, that put Aaron in mind of the other Mr. Denison, his late master, now dead and gone, that he took the card at once and hobbled off with it. Mr. Denison watched him with an amused smile. Ella was in her morning-room alone when the old servitor came in with a face white as milk.

"Oh ma'am! Miss Ella! he has come at last! But don't you see him, ma'am; don't you speak to him! The old Squire will turn in his coffin if you do."

"Who is here?" exclaimed Ella. "Who is it that I am not to see?"

"He is outside on the lawn there, taking his views of the house, and he has come in the guise of a harmless, smiling little gentleman. But if he is not Old Nick himself ——"

But by this time Ella had the card in her fingers. Flinging down her sewing, she ran out to the lawn with a glowing face of welcome. Aaron's mouth fell. To him the end of the world seemed at hand.

"I am so glad you are come! I am so glad to see you!" cried Ella, with outstretched hands.

Mr. Denison drew the blushing girl toward him and kissed her tenderly. "You don't know how pleased I am to see *you* again," he said. "What would I not give if I had a daughter like you!"

"How did you get here? Where did you come from?"

"I came down from London last night, my dear; and was driven to a country inn a mile or two away—I like your old-fashioned country inns, they are sure to be comfortable—and I walked here this morning. I am good for a few miles' walk yet."

"You will come in," said Ella, as she linked her arm in his. "It is your own house now, you know."

"That is a fact with which I shall not be able to familiarise myself for some time to come," replied Mr. Denison. "I have not set foot inside Heron Dyke since I was a lad of nineteen. Dear! dear! what changes in the world, and in me too, since that time."

They sat down in Ella's pleasant little room overlooking the flower garden and the park. "And is this strange news that Charles Plackett has told me really true?" asked Mr. Denison.

"Quite true, dear Mr. Denison," said Ella, hiding her quivering lip.

"I was told not to ask any questions, and I won't, although I may have have some opinions of my own in the matter, which may or may not be near the truth. However, we will let that pass. I have been anxious to see you ever since I heard the news from Plackett; wishful, too, to see the old roof-tree once again—for I am as much a Denison as my cousin was. But there were two or three interesting sales coming off in London, and I waited for them. And you are glad to see me, are you!"

"I am indeed. Can you doubt it?"

"Well no, I can't, for your tone and your face tell it me as well as your words. And now, my dear, what I am come to say to-day is this: Heron Dyke must continue to be your home in time to come as it has been in time gone by. However much I may esteem the old place, I should not care to live here: I am too old to change my roof-tree. As regards the revenues, we can come to some arrangement about them after a time. You have behaved so nobly in this matter that I will see you do not suffer, and you may safely leave your interests in my hands. All I wish is that things should go on here as they have gone on hitherto. You shall continue to be mistress of Heron Dyke."

Ella shook her head. "It cannot be, dear Mr. Denison," she answered through her tears.

"And why can it not be, I should like to know, if I say that it shall be?"

The peremptory tone was her uncle's over again, but with a quaint geniality in it which his had lacked. Ella did not answer at first. Her face was rosy red.

"I am going to be married," she said in a low tone. "So it is not that I should continue to be the mistress here: my husband would be the master. And I fear he would not care that his wife should be dependent on anyone's bounty—not even on yours, dear Mr. Denison."

A pained look came into Mr. Denison's face. "Well, well; I might have had the sense to know that some young fellow would not fail to secure such a treasure. I was foolish enough to dream that you and my boy might perhaps in time meet and learn to like each other, and then—But all that is at an end now. Well, well."

Ella was gazing sadly out of the window. There was silence for a little while.

"I hope the husband you have chosen will take you to as good a home as this, my dear. Is he rich?"

"No. He has four hundred a-year certain, and—"

"Four hundred a-year!" interrupted Mr. Denison in a tone ot contempt. "Why I allow my scapegrace son as much as that. Tut, tut! you can't marry a man who has but four hundred a-year."

"And I have as much, or nearly as much," continued Ella. "Dear Mr. Denison, we shall do very well."

"Very well! After Heron Dyke!" Mr. Denison gave an emphatic sniff. "My dear, I have taken a great liking to you, as much as if you were my daughter, and I don't care to hear of this. I don't approve of it. Four hundred a-year!"

"Is your son come home from abroad?" enquired Ella to change the conversation, after a pause of silence.

"Oh yes, he is come home, the graceless dog. Came down to eat his Christmas dinner with me at Nunham Priors. Stayed but a day or two, though."

"Is he so very graceless?"

"That's as may be. He thinks himself a model of a son for duty. Reminded me once, when I was blowing him up, that he had never given me a moment's care in his life. Oh, Master Frank's one that won't be sat upon—even by me."

"And has he never given you care?"

"Care, yes; plenty of it: does he not go roving off by the year together pretty near, leaving me to my china and my things? Is that dutiful? I don't say Frank has vexed me in other ways. He has good parts and principles; he does not play up old Gooseberry, as some young men do. Ah, my dear, if he and you could but have made it out together! You would not have scrupled to stay at Heron Dyke then."

"No, not with him," smiled Ella. "It would have been his own—so to say. We must not think of that."

"No use to think of it. My young gentleman gave me to understand in an obscure hint or two that he had been setting up a sweetheart on his own account; hoped to marry her sometime. When I asked who it was, he drew in and said no more: save that I should know all in good time."

"Then he would not have had me," laughed Ella. "Was it at Christmas he told you this?"

"No, the next time. It was another flying visit, he chose to pay

me since then. 'Why don't you see if you can't make up to that young kinswoman of ours at Heron Dyke?' I said to him, and he had the impertinence to laugh in my face. 'Very well, young sir,' said I, 'understand this much: that if you take up with any black foreign woman, let her be a princess if you like, I'll not countenance your marriage.' It was not a black princess, he assured me; so I make no doubt it is some silly native doll."

Ella laughed heartily at the old gentleman's genuine tone of grievance. The next moment she blushed crimson at the sound of a well-known step, and Conroy entered the room.

He stood transfixed with surprise, the door-handle in his hand, as he gazed at the stranger. Mr. Denison rose and gazed back again.

"Sir!" exclaimed Conroy. "What brings you here?"

"I think I may ask what brings *you* here?" retorted the old gentleman, while Ella looked on in wonder. "Have you no welcome for me?"

Conroy advanced and put his hands into Mr. Denison's, his face lighting up with smiles. Ella turned to her lover.

"Do you know this gentleman, Edward?"

"Well, he ought to: he is my own son," interposed Mr. Denison, before the other could speak. "A graceless, ne'er-do-well young fellow! always giving me surprises."

Ella Winter stood bewildered. She thought a farce was being played for her benefit. "This is the—the gentleman I told you of, sir," she said to Mr. Denison. "His name is Conroy."

"Indeed, my dear, it is not. His name is Denison."

"Dear father, it is Conroy; you forget," said the young man with a laugh. "Ella," turning to her, "my name is Francis Edward Conroy Denison, as the church register of my baptism will testify."

"Just you tell me the meaning of this, Master Frank. It seems that you do know your young kinswoman, here."

"Yes, father, and it is to her that I am engaged; she has promised to be my wife."

"Bless my heart!" was all that Mr. Denison could ejaculate. "Conroy? Well, yes, I ought to have remembered that was the name you went by when you chose to go gallivanting about the world as a newspaper correspondent.—My dear, you are looking bewildered—and no wonder."

"I am bewildered," returned Ella.

Conroy turned to address her. "My father brought me up to no profession," he began. "He thought that as he was a rich man there was no necessity for me to learn to work. With all deference to him, I chose to think otherwise. Idleness was distasteful to me. Like Ulysses, I could not bear 'to rest unburnished, not to shine in use.' I wanted to taste the sweet pride of earning my bread by the labour of my own hands. I dropped my family name and went out into the world: with what result you know."

"You made no such mighty splash after all," grunted Mr. Denison.

"I contrived to be of some use, sir, which was the end I had in view. And I have seen the world, and gained experience. I shall be none the worse for it in the long run, father."

"And not much the better, I daresay," retorted Mr. Denison. "My dear, can it be true that you have promised to marry this scapegrace."

"Yes," smiled Ella with a blush.

"Very good. We'll hold a jubilee. But how was it, pray Mr. Frank, that you kept the secret from me? Is that your idea of duty?"

"Father, I will explain to you: and to you also," he added to Ella. "The first time I ever saw this young lady—it was at Mrs. Carlyon's—I fell in love with her. I resolved that she should be my wife, good Providence permitting. Had I been what I then appeared only to be, a correspondent for the newspapers, I might have hesitated to cherish any such hope; knowing myself to be the probable heir of Heron Dyke, certainly of Nunham Priors, I felt the hope was justifiable. In a short while I followed her down here, and got admittance to the Hall and to Mr. Denison under the plea of wishing to take sketches of points on the estate; my incipient love for Miss Winter grew into an ardent passion, and I felt assured as to the future. Moreover, I saw, or thought I saw, that Heron Dyke would never come to her, but to you; there was that in the Squire's aspect which convinced me he would not live to see his birthday. But now, I must ask you, father, to acknowledge what your course would have been had I told you this. Should you not have hastened to open negotiations for the alliance with your cousin the Squire?"

"Daresay I might."

"I am sure of it: and that would have ruined all. The Squire would have laid his embargo on the marriage, for I was one of the hated Denisons; and he would have extorted a promise from Miss Winter never to see more of me during his life or after it. So I maintained my incognito to her, and said nothing to you. I might have spoken after the Squire's death: that's true enough; but I wanted her to care for myself alone, not for my prospective fortune. I very nearly told you at Christmas, father; but I thought I would wait just a little longer. Last week I went down to Nunham Priors for the purpose, but found you absent. To-morrow I intended to start for Nunham Priors again, expecting you would by that time be at home."

"He should take out a licence for special pleading, he should!" interjected Mr. Denison to Ella. "To hear the neat way he twists and turns things! Where you got your gift o' the gab from, Frank, *I* don't know. Not from me."

Frank smiled. "It is true pleading, father. And you need no longer be under the fear that I shall bring home a black wife."

"There's some sense in the 'Dougal creature' yet," muttered the

old gentleman with a flourish of his pocket handkerchief. "Ah! my dear, what can I say to him, in what terms can I scold him, when he proffers you to me as his excuse? I can only forgive him; yes, were it a thousand times over!" He drew her to him and kissed her very tenderly. "You shall be as my daughter, as my own child to me, in every way. Heaven has been kinder to me than my deserts—and I am quite sure it has to Frank! And now there will no longer be any question of your quitting the old homestead here."

"But it is yours, sir," answered Ella, through her tears.

"My dear, it is Frank's from this day. I shall never quit my own home of many years. Good gracious! how would all the bric-à-brac be packed and moved? I'll come and see you both here as often as it suits me, and you must come in turn to me."

"And you will stay with me a few days now, to begin with, won't you," pleaded the grateful girl. "Aunt Gertrude is here, you know."

"Don't say but I will, my dear. I should like to see a bit more of the old family place."

Mrs. Carlyon's surprise when she came into the room and saw the group, and her amazement when she learnt that Edward Conroy the despised was Frank Denison the heir, may well be left to the reader's imagination. Aaron Stone at first refused to believe it: "it was but a trick o' them other Denisons," he muttered, and it did not soften his ill-feeling towards Conroy.

Other troubles were not done with yet. That evening, after dinner—and never had a happier party met under the old roof than was then assembled—when the ladies went into the drawing-room, Ella was called out of it, by Adèle, to be told that the household was in a commotion. Two of the maids, despatched on some errand to Miss Winter's sitting-room in the north wing, had come rushing down again in a terrible fright, asserting that the ghost of Katherine Keen had appeared to them. As a consequence, the whole of the servants were thoroughly scared. Ella whispered the news into Frank Denison's ear that night before he left for his quarters at the Rose and Crown. Frank made light of it to Ella, but he resolved to resume his patient watchings; which had been interrupted of late. And his patience was not put to much further trial.

The following evening, Frank—as we must now call him—instead of following his father to the drawing-room, quietly made his way to the north wing. He saw nothing. The next night he saw nothing, heard nothing. On the third night, as he was on the same seat in the darkest corner of the gallery that he was sitting on once before, when he heard those mysterious words spoken, the origin of which he had not yet been able to fathom, he was startled by hearing a low sigh, or by fancying he heard it, no great distance away.

He scarcely dared to breathe. The night was bright with stars and a young moon, and Frank's eyes, accustomed to the semi-twilight, fixed themselves in the direction from which the sound

seemed to have come. Next moment he saw a dim figure emerge from the blackness of the corridor beyond and advance slowly into the starlit gallery. As it came nearer, stepping without a sound, he could see that it was robed in black from head to foot, he could see its white face and one white hand that clasped the robe closely round its throat. Frank Denison was no coward; but the figure, gliding noiselessly towards him, looked so eerie and unsubstantial by that dim light, that if his heart sank a little it was hardly to be wondered at. If he, strong and fearless man that he was, felt thus, what must be the effect of such an apparition on the nerves of timid and ignorant girls?

Nearer, came the figure, and nearer. It would have passed him without noticing that he was there; but Frank nerved himself, sprang suddenly forward, and flinging out his arms seized the figure firmly round the waist. It felt tangible enough, a form of flesh and blood without doubt: he had half expected that his arms would grasp nothing but thin air. Simultaneously with this, the silence of the north wing was shattered by a piercing scream; and the figure fell into Frank's arms.

That scream did not fail to make itself heard below; two minutes later half-a-dozen scared faces with as many lights were crowding into the gallery. One of the first on the spot was Miss Winter. She stooped and gently turned the face that was resting on Frank's arm to the light. "Why this is poor Susan!" she exclaimed. "Susan Keen!"

"Susan Keen!" repeated the wondering maids, pressing round.

Mrs. Carlyon was up now. "It can't be Susan Keen: what should Susan Keen do here?" she cried, full of incredulity.

"It is Susan; no mistake about that," said Frank. "The first thing to be done is to try and restore her to consciousness."

The girl was carried to Miss Winter's dressing-room, and placed on the sofa near the fire: the sofa that Maria Kettle had lain on when she got her fright. Susan soon revived, and they gave her some warm wine. Shutting everybody out except Mrs. Carlyon, Ella soothed and comforted the girl with pleasant words. Gradually the eyes lost their frightened look, and the poor fluttering heart began to beat more equably. Then she was gently questioned: and, little by little, without much pressing, Susan's story was told by her own lips.

Possessed by the belief that her sister, either alive or dead, was hidden somewhere inside the Hall, poor Susan, as we already know, whenever she could escape her mother's vigilance, took to wandering about the grounds in the dusk of evening, gazing up at the windows of the old house, more especially at her sister's bedroom window, often fancying that she heard Katherine's voice calling her, and trying everywhere to find some traces of the missing girl. After a time the thought seemed to have entered her head that if she

could only get inside the Hall and search there, it would be better still. It would appear that on two occasions during Katherine's service there, when Susan had gone up to the Hall hoping to see her sister, Aaron Stone had locked up for the night. Susan had then thrown some pieces of gravel at her sister's window in order to attract attention; upon which Katherine had come out to her, kissed her, and bidden her to return home. Susan, curious to know by what means her sister had been able to leave the house after it was made safe for the night, had persuaded Katherine to tell her.

Among other rooms on the ground floor at the back of the Hall, or, rather at its side, and the side not frequented, was one that was called the wood-room, in which logs were kept to dry for winter burning. The unglazed window of this room was protected by horizontal iron bars; and one day, by a mere accident, Katherine saw that the lowest bar was loose in its socket; it could be displaced and replaced at will, and there was not the smallest difficulty in stepping through the low aperture to the ground outside. Katherine had thought it no harm to make use of this discovered means of egress on the one or two occasions she had seen her poor simple sister waiting; rather than let the girl remain there, as she might have done, for half the night. When the loss came, poor Susan never spoke of this, lest it might bring blame on Katherine's memory.

But she did not forget it. And when, impelled by uncontrollable longing to discover a clue to her sister's fate and to venture inside the house, she sought for the window, she readily found it. She had but to displace the bar, step in, and be within the Hall. Near the door of the wood-room was a narrow, back staircase, hardly ever used, which led up to the north wing, and so to the bedroom which Katherine had occupied.

Susan Keen might be half-witted, but she was cunning in this search. As she had found a way of getting into the Hall, so she found a way of getting out of her mother's house. After she was supposed to be safe in bed, she would creep down stairs, open one of the lower windows, go out of it, and return in the same way, Mrs. Keen being none the wiser. She made for herself a pair of list shoes which she slipped on over her ordinary walking shoes whenever she ventured, which was but rarely, inside the Hall. Between the two sisters there was a strong family likeness; both had the same long, pale, serious face, the same large grey eyes, and hair of the same tint —a dark brown with a gleam of gold in it. In the dusk of evening, or by the dim light of a candle in a big room, it was quite possible that one sister should be mistaken for the other, even by those to whom both of them were well known. Susan it was whom the two maids, Ann and Martha, had seen looking down upon them from the gallery; she it was who had frightened Mrs. Carlyon and deceived Maria Kettle; it was her voice that Conroy had heard calling for her sister as she wandered through the dark passages of the north wing;

it was she who had tried Betsy Tucker's door the night of the storm: and it was no other than she who had re-arranged the furniture in Katherine's abandoned chamber, about which there had been so much speculation. The supposed ghost, haunting the north wing, had not been a ghost after all; instead of being Katherine dead, it was Susan living.

"But she will not come to me, though I seek for her everywhere," wailed poor Susan as she came to the end of her narrative and looked piteously into the compassionate face of Miss Winter. "Oh, ma'am, where can she be? Living or dead, she *must* be inside these walls. I hear her voice calling to me but I can never find her. Where can she be; where can she be?"

It was a question that Miss Winter could not answer.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LAST MYSTERY SOLVED.

"It's not a bit of use your making any objection, my dear. I've set my mind on it and I mean to do it. Why should you wait till I'm dead? I may live for a dozen years to come; and the income will be of far more use to you now when you are setting up housekeeping than it would be later."

The speaker was Lady Maria Skeffington, and the person to whom she was laying down the law in this peremptory fashion was her god-daughter, Maria Kettle—or rather Mrs. Cleeve. Maria and Philip had moved into a pretty little house near Homedale; they were furnishing it and beginning life on their own account. Maria had a large apron on and her gown-sleeves turned up at the wrists; she was making herself as busy as a bee this morning, with her two maid-servants, when interrupted by her godmother.

Lady Maria sat down on the sofa, causing Maria to sit by her side, and began to talk. After a little gossip touching the sayings and doings of the neighbourhood, she went on to tell Maria that she had always intended to bequeath to her two thousand pounds at her death: but that, as Maria was now married, and help would be useful to her and her husband, she had decided to make over that sum to her without delay. It was well and safely invested, and would bring in one hundred pounds yearly, secured to Maria herself.

Overpowered by the unexpected kindness, Maria remonstrated. It was too much, she said: and why should Lady Maria deprive herself of this much yearly income before her death?

"Not another word, child, if you love me. Don't I tell you I have already decided? After that, argument is waste of breath."

Maria knew of old that when once her godmother had made up her mind to any particular course nothing could move her from it. In such a case submission was the only policy.

She turned and kissed her. "You are far kinder to me than I deserve, dear Lady Maria! Philip will scarcely know how to thank you sufficiently."

"Philip is not so high-flown as you," rejoined her ladyship drily. "He knows the value of money; he would never think of refusing such a gift."

Maria said nothing; but she smiled to herself to hear Philip spoken of as one who knew so well the value of money. Though, indeed, his late experiences had perhaps taught it him.

"And now, my dear, I want you to put on your bonnet and accompany me to the Hall," continued Lady Maria. "My barouche is at the door, and I am going to call there. The drive will do you good this bright, brisk morning."

The young wife would rather have been left to the arrangement of her household gods; but she could not refuse her godmother, especially at the moment when she had been so generous to her. So she made herself ready, and they were soon bowling along the road to Heron Dyke. Lady Maria was still full of the marvellous revelation that Edward Conroy was Edward Denison, though some two or three weeks had elapsed since the fact became known abroad.

"I was talking to Dr. Downes about it yesterday, my dear. He agreed with me that it was like one of those romances clever people write of. What a good thing it is that the young man is so charming: and indeed I think we might all have seen something in him above an ordinary newspaper reporter."

"It is a romance," agreed Maria, "and a very delightful one. Have you seen Mr. Denison?"

"I saw him when I was at the Hall the other day. A charmingly quaint old man, who put me so much in mind of the late Squire!—And, my dear," added Lady Maria, lowering her voice, lest the servants on the box in front of her should hear, "what do you think Dr. Downes told me—that the ghost which has been supposed to be haunting the north wing, has turned out to be crazy Susan Keen."

"It is so," answered Maria.

"The poor half-witted girl has been in the habit of creeping into the Hall at night, to look for her sister, the Doctor tells me. The appearances that were set down to the dead girl, the mysterious noises, and all the rest of it, have been traced to her."

"Susan confessed it voluntarily," remarked Maria. "It is a sad thing—though well that it should have been discovered."

"Well, Maria, what I should do with the girl is this—put her into an asylum. Dr. Downes agreed with me that many a one has been confined for less cause: though he thinks there will be no further trouble of this sort with her in future."

"Never again in future," said Maria, shaking her head. "Her mother will take right good care of her. She has had a little bed put up for her beside her own, and does not trust her out of her sight."

"Here we are!" cried Lady Maria, as the coachman drove in to Heron Dyke. "What a commotion the place is in! What can be going on, I wonder?"

Mr. Denison found himself so comfortable under the old family roof-tree that he let Nunham Priors take care of itself for a while, and stayed on. Before a week had gone over his head, he was projecting no end of improvements: this must be done and the other must be done: some for embellishment, some for use; and all of course for the convenience and benefit of his son and daughter-in-law, who would inhabit the place. Energetic as ever was the old Squire when once he took a thing into his head, Mr. Denison was not content with projecting: he set about doing. Calling Mr. Tiplady to his counsels, and after him a clever builder of reputation, the alterations were begun forthwith. Heron Dyke was of course his own, and he could do what he would.

The new conservatory, recently built by Miss Winter, was all very well, but not large enough; it was to be considerably lengthened and widened. "I don't like walking down a greenhouse, my dear, where the space allowed for the paths is so narrow one's coat-tails must brush the plants on either side," he remarked to Ella. The kitchens and some other portions of the domestic offices must be rendered more commodious in accordance with modern requirements. A new road was to be driven through the shrubbery, and the old, narrow, inconvenient road, rarely used, on the side of the house, blocked-up and planted over.

On the morning that was to witness the call at the Hall of Lady Maria Skeffington and Philip's wife, the workmen were busy with this last-mentioned work, when Frank Denison came hastily into the room where his father sat, talking to Ella, Mrs. Carlyon, and Mrs. Toynbee. Frank's countenance wore a startled expression, and he looked grave and pale. Ella's thoughts flew to the men: she feared some accident had happened.

"What is it?" she cried, rising from her seat. "Are any of the men hurt?"

"No, no, the men are all right," he answered. Then, after a pause, he held something out to Ella. "Do you chance to know this?" he asked. "Can you tell to whom it belonged?"

It was a small gold locket, dented in on one side and much discoloured, as if it had lain for some time in a damp place. Ella recognised it with staring eyes, and began to tremble with a fear she did not wait to define.

"This was Katherine Keen's; it was my present to her on her birthday, and she had it on the night she was lost. Oh, Edward, where did you find it?"

"I fear," he replied, "that we have found *her*."

"Found her! Katherine?"

Mrs. Carlyon put Ella back with her hand. "Sit down, my love,"

she said. "Frank"—turning to him—"do you say you have found Katherine Keen?"

"I believe so. It can be no other."

"Dead?"

"Oh yes, poor girl."

"But where?"

"In that old well just beyond the wood-room. The men have been uncovering the well this morning, and—and—they have found someone lying in it. She had this locket round her neck."

Ella sat down, white and silent, and hid her face amid the sofa cushions. Mr. Denison caught up his stick, and hurried out. The news had already got wind. People were rúnning to the spot: and it was just then that Lady Maria's carriage drove in. They had indeed found poor Katherine Keen.

We must trace back to the time of Katherine's disappearance. This old well, situated not far from the door of the wood-room, had supplied the Hall with water for more than a hundred years But at length, for some unknown cause, the spring had begun to fail, the water in the well gradually becoming lower until what was left lay so deep down that it was not worth the labour of drawing up. After that, the old well was left to itself for several years, the woodwork above it decaying and rotting slowly in summer sun and winter rain. It lay, as has been said, on the unfrequented side of the house. "I'll have this altered," said the Squire one day as he chanced to pass that way, and stood to look at it; and he at once gave orders that the woodwork should be removed and the well filled up.

His wishes were not long in being carried out. The old woodwork disappeared, a quantity of earth and rubbish was collected to be shot into the well, and a large flagstone, big enough to cover the whole of the orifice, was brought to the spot. The work was in progress one February afternoon when the snow began to come down thick and fast, which caused the men to cease working until the morning, only a portion of the filling-up rubbish being then shot in.

Except the actual fact of the catastrophe itself, what else happened on that fatal night could only be matter of conjecture. The inference was that Katherine, on reaching her bedroom and beginning to undress, lifted up a corner of the blind and, peering out, saw her sister standing below gazing up at the window, a dark figure outlined against a snowy background. The snow by this time had ceased to fall, and a bright moon was struggling through the broken clouds. Katherine must then have hurried down stairs with the intention of seeing her sister and sending her back home. Although the house was being locked up she would get out easily, and unseen, by the wood-room window, replacing the loose bar as a matter of precaution. This done, she no doubt ran round by the unfrequented way where the well was, and fell headlong into it, the two screams heard, one loud, the other fainter, escaping her in the act of falling. Whether

she cried out afterwards, and there was no one to hear, or whether she fell senseless, or whether she was killed at once, must remain matter of supposition. After that, so far as was known, all was silence.

Early next morning came the workmen. More snow had fallen in the night, erasing all footprints of the previous evening, covering the bottom of the well with a white surface. The men made sharp haste to finish their task, knowing and suspecting nothing; and Katherine's fate had remained undiscovered until now.

Aaron's habitual crustiness had something to do with the non-discovery. Chancing to meet the men as they quitted the work before time that evening, he sourly demanded whether the work was accomplished and the well filled up. Afraid of him, not caring to incur his stinging reprimands, both the men answered that it was quite finished. Therefore Aaron never gave a thought to the well in regard to Katherine's disappearance; and as for the Squire himself, and the rest of the household, they did not so much as know that the work was just then about. While the fact of its being impossible, or assumed to be, that Katherine could by any manner of means have got out of the house, served yet more to divert thoughts from the truth. And the two workmen, deceived by the white surface inside, on which they had both looked down in the morning, never, then or later, supposed the well could have anything to do with the girl's disappearance.

Thus the last and longest mystery was solved. Such had been poor Katherine's unhappy fate. Susan would never more wander in the park after nightfall or within the Hall to look for her; she would never hear her sister's voice calling to her again, never fancy that the moonlight playing upon the window of Katherine's room was her apparition standing there.

The wedding was a very quiet one. Without show or parade Ella Winter became the wife of that erratic gentleman, Francis Edward Conroy Denison, the indisputable heir of Heron Dyke. Old Mr. Denison insisted upon giving the bride away; and a hamper of his choicest china arrived from Nunham Priors to deck the breakfast table. Lady Maria's nephew, the young Earl of Skeffington, had asked leave to be the best man.

Aaron stood behind his mistress's chair at breakfast; to deny him this privilege would have broken his heart; but it was the last service he would render at the Hall. He and his wife were about to retire to a pretty little cottage near the Leaning Gate: Mr. Denison, at Ella's wish, had given it to them for life, and she had furnished it.

Frank and his bride, now Mrs. Denison, as her uncle had always wished her name to be, started on their way to the Continent. During their absence, which might extend to two or three months, the alterations at Heron Dyke would be completed, and their establishment put upon a proper footing.

What more is there to tell? All are left happy. The years go round, and as yet no sorrow falls. The young Squire, as Frank Denison is now called, is in Parliament, so that he and his wife are much in London during the earlier portion of the year. Mr. Denison travels often from Nunham Priors to stay at Heron Dyke, where his pleasantest days are passed. When Ella's baby came, he was a little grumpy, in his comical way, at its being a girl, instead of the boy he had expected: though he acknowledges that it is not impossible the boy may put in an appearance later.

Much unity, friendship, intimacy exist between Ella and her husband and the Cleeves. Philip is so steady as to justify his mother's never-changed fond opinion of him; his talents for business, and his application to it, surprise even Mr. Tiplady: while his laugh is as genial and his manners are sunny and pleasant as ever. Little Freddy Bootle often runs down to see them, and is ever a welcome guest at the Hall. Mrs. Carlyon comes sometimes, and the baby bears her name, Gertrude.

Even old Aaron is tolerably happy—for he can grumble to his heart's content. He could not cease from doing that. Partly at Dorothy, though she does not mind it, partly at his friends in general. He is a great man of an evening in the sanded parlour of the Leaning Gate, or the Fisherman's Arms. A special chair is placed for him, and he, between the intervals of growling at the world, tells anecdotes of forty years ago to the deferential company smoking around.

Mrs. Keen, active as of yore, is assisted in her duties by Susan. Time has laid its healing hand upon their sorrows. Poor Susan will never be quite bright, and that half-dazed look is sometimes to be seen on her face still; but no sweeter-tempered or more gentle girl is to be met anywhere, and now that the mystery of her sister's fate no longer weighs upon her brain there is a sort of peacefulness and soft serenity about her which are very attractive. Her greatest treat is to go up to the Hall and see the baby, little Gertrude, and the nurses avow that that youthful tyrant is never so much on her good behaviour, as when allowed to rest for a few minutes in Susan's loving arms. But as soon as ever daylight begins to die in the woods round Heron Dyke, when the long corridors of the old house grow dim, and the wide staircases become the homes of shadow and mystery, then does Susan resolutely set her face homeward. She who used to haunt the Hall after nightfall, when trying to find the ill-fated Katherine, will not go near it except in broadest daylight.

THE END.

HOW MAX KEPT HIS WORD.

In a pleasant German city we were keeping Christmas Eve,
But our hearts were sore foreboding as the sacred time drew on :
Each from each we hid our sadness, smiled, and would not seem to grieve
For our dearest, and our bravest, and our gayest who was gone.
Dark a cloud hung o'er our country : we had felt War's heavy hand ;
Months ago our boy had left us, when the summer's sun was bright :
Gay and gladly he had started, proud to fight for fatherland,
"When we've beat the French," he promised, "I will come on Christmas
night."
"Tho' I am not there to help you, you must deck the Christmas-tree ;
You shall have such Christmas presents brought from Paris when I come ;
Bertha, Fanni, you'll remember each to make a gift for me ;
For by Christmas Eve I promise, mother, surely to be home !"
But the war was fierce and bitter, lasting longer than we thought,
And the summer crept to autumn ; autumn changed to winter black ;
Day by day their grievous tidings mourning friends and neighbours brought,
Of the troops who marched to Paris and would nevermore come back.
Still our Max wrote cheerful letters—every week the siege must yield :
He might keep his German Christmas at the closing of the war.
There was now no longer any fighting in the open field,
And when Paris should surrender all the struggle would be o'er.
So in spite of hearts' foreboding, Christmas Eve broke cold and clear,
And we dressed our tree with ribbons, set its tapers, hung its flowers,
And the children clung about us, asking, "Will not Max be here ?"
"For he promised !"— and he always kept his word, this Max of ours.
In the centre of the branches we had set his Christmas-box—
Clothes, and cake, and homely trifles, such as he would use and love ;
Fanni's water-colour paintings, Bertha's pairs of knitted socks,
And a twisted wreath of laurel hanging from the bough above.
Then at close of winter daylight, hand in hand, we stood assembled
Round our glittering tree of presents, and our eyes were strangely dim,
While the father's voice uprising, for a moment stopped and trembled,
As, amid our girlish trebles, he began the Christmas hymn.
Was it echo ? was it fancy ?—loud and bold and clear among us
Rose the notes of truest tenor, 'mid our childish voices weak.
We could none mistake its accents, for how often he had sung us
All the songs that German people learn before they learn to speak.
Bold and true and clear among us rang the holy Christmas greeting,
Tho' no step had crossed the threshold, tho' no mortal voice we heard,
Tho' we knew that for our future was no hope of earthly meeting—
Max had promised to be with us, and had come to keep his word !

Yes ! a random shell had struck him, and he died on Christmas Eve ;
Someone wrote the news from Paris—sent a curly lock of hair ;
Falling in his country's service, we would never seem to grieve ;
And, besides, we knew that at our Christmas meeting he was there !

THE GHOST OF ALDRUM HALL.

"THIS will never do," I exclaimed, awaking rather suddenly to a consciousness of the fact that I was writing utter nonsense, and the fourth chapter of my second volume bid fair to become a mere mass of verbiage. With something of a groan I flung the pen down, and betook myself to the sofa, prudently determined to get rid of a tormenting headache before I attempted to write another word.

It was a blazing, brilliant July evening, and my chambers, with their shabby, dusty furniture and litter of books, looked somewhat dreary. I glanced round with a weary longing for the wooded slopes and shady lanes and meadows of my old Warwickshire home. For the past six months I had been working hard, often far into the night, at my writing-table; I needed rest, but it was useless to think of rest until my book was finished. Moreover, going into the country meant spending money, and of that I had little enough to spare. All I could do was to give up work for some twenty-four hours, and think of nothing till I sat down again to that unfinished chapter.

With this end in view, I ran over two or three places in my own mind where it might be pleasant and profitable to spend my enforced holiday—Hampton Court, Twickenham, Burnham Beeches. I had half decided in favour of the latter, when a step on the stair and a thundering knock at the door startled me. Before I could answer, the door opened, and the fair head and broad shoulders of my old school chum, Phil Wentworth, appeared, followed by a big dog.

"I suppose I'd better not let Shot in, had I, Charlie?" said he, trying to keep the dog back. "He'll be trampling on your best love scenes and lying down on the proof sheets. I know your room of old."

"Hang the love scenes!" I exclaimed. "Come in, old fellow, and bring the dog too. You don't know how glad I am to see you."

I pushed open the door, and Shot bounced in, and overturned the waste-paper basket with a sweep of his tail. Phil Wentworth followed, only a shade less actively, flung himself into a chair, and mopped his face gravely with a wonderfully-scented handkerchief.

"I've half a mind not to come to see you again, 'pon my word, you live so near the sky; it's enough to kill a delicate fellow like me to get up all these stairs. Hallo, Shot! lie down, and stop wagging your tail! I told you how it would be, Charlie—he's overturned that basket of yours."

"Never mind the basket," I returned. "I wish I knew as little about the contents of it as he does. I certainly didn't expect you to-night. I thought you were at the Isle of Wight."

"Yes; I've been yachting," answered Phil; "but I came up from Cowes yesterday. You look seedy, Charlie."

Phil put up his eye-glass (a vanity about which I chaffed him unmercifully), and stared at me with a solemn face.

"Very likely I do, through those spectacles of yours," I retorted; "but I have a headache."

"Ah! I don't wonder at that, stewing up here all day writing! I tell you what, Charlie, you shall go down to Aldrum for a week or two. You can make hay, and pull all the fish out of the river, if you like. I know it would set you up again, and I hate to see you looking so confoundedly thin and white."

"Aldrum?" I returned. "I thought the place was all tumbling to pieces, and inhabited only by bats and owls."

"So it was," said Phil; "but I have had the house done up a bit. My old bailiff and his wife live there now, and I always have a room or two kept ready for my use if I should feel inclined to run down for a night. It will be the very place for you—jolly old ruined chapel, moat, fish-pond, and weird towers: everything ready for the first chapter of a new novel."

"My dear fellow," I replied, gratefully, "you are very kind, but I can't spare the time. I promised to have my book ready for the publishers by the end of September."

"Hang the publishers!" cried Phil. "You can finish it when you come home again, and if it isn't done it won't matter. I'll go and punch the publishers' heads if they say anything."

"Thank you, Phil, but it's impossible. I —— "

"It's no use saying any more, Charlie," interrupted Phil, putting his hands on my shoulders. "I've made up my mind for you to go, and go you shall. I only wish I could too, but the mother wants me to stay with her till we start for the moors. There's your brother Jack. Why not write and ask him if he can get a fortnight's leave? I know he likes fishing and flirting."

It was a species of enjoyment that of late had not fallen to my lot—a fortnight of my twin-brother's society; and I felt very strongly tempted to accept Phil's offer.

"I shall write to old Brown to-night," continued Phil, seeing me waver, "and tell them to get ready for you. Better go on Saturday, both of you. You'll find plenty of fishing-tackle there, and a couple of horses. Besides, there's another reason why you should go down," he added, whilst a more serious look came into his face.

"What's that?" I asked, wondering.

"Well, the truth is, Charlie, I haven't felt quite the thing lately, so I consulted old Eastwood. The heart's not strong, he says; nothing wrong—nothing I need fear. I am careful, you know. I have always gone in for muscular Christianity, and that kind of thing, and I suppose I have rather overdone it in the long run. Eastwood says big men seldom have strong hearts."

"Bosh!" I interrupted. "I don't believe a word of it, Phil. I

never saw a man who looked more the picture of health and strength than you do."

"Oh, I daresay I shall live out my three-score and ten," laughed Phil; "but it's best to be on the safe side. So what do you think I've done?"

"Made your will," I suggested in joke.

"Exactly," he answered to my surprise. Phil was coming out in a new character. I should have supposed him the last man in the world to think of these things. "You know," he added, "I am the last of my race. If I die unmarried and childless, I have no heir; so, Charlie—you know that you and Jack are my best and dearest friends—I have just been and gone and left Aldrum between you."

In the first moment of astonishment I could not speak; then I jumped up and endeavoured to protest. "Not a word," cried Phil, "if you love me. You don't know what a weight it has taken off my mind, and what a happy man it has made me—*in case* it should be needed."

"Phil," I cried, grasping his hand and almost throwing my arms round his neck, "if ever I come into Aldrum, it will be the most miserable day of my life. If I lost you, old fellow, I should never be quite happy again."

"Well, well," retorted Phil, laughing it off, "no one wishes you to come into Aldrum less than I do, Charlie. And now we will dismiss this melancholy matter. But you will go down to the old place, won't you?"

I saw he had set his heart upon it—and, indeed, I could no longer resist: so I flung all other considerations to the winds, and gave way. We arranged that I should write to my brother and ask him to join me, if his Colonel would give him leave, lock up my papers, pack my portmanteau on Saturday morning, and start.

After a little more conversation, Phil took his departure, to keep an appointment, refusing to hear a word of thanks. Ever since the first day I fagged for him at Rugby, he had been the kindest and best friend a fellow could have; and though within the last few years our circumstances had changed—he was rich, and I had to work for my daily bread—it had never made the slightest difference to him. There was something about his generosity at once so frank and delicate, that, proud and sensitive as I very well knew I was, I could never feel hurt or offended, scarcely under any obligation.

I wrote to Jack that night, and he answered my letter by appearing as I was at dinner next evening, his handsome face aglow with pleasure, and flinging his hat up to the ceiling like a schoolboy. He had a week's leave of absence.

"The Colonel's a brick, Charlie," he said. "But what's the matter with you, old fellow?" and Jack sat down with a very concerned face, and insisted on feeling my pulse, making believe he

knew a great deal about it. I succeeded in persuading him that a week's rest would set me up again; adding that I was afraid he would be bored to death down in the country with only myself to speak to, and nothing to do but fish.

"Bored," he returned; "well, there isn't such a complete dearth of society there as all that. There are the Jermyns and the Davenports, and a few others. I've been to Aldrum before, with Wentworth. Let's have some of the MS. to read while you finish your dinner."

We had no secrets from each other, my brother and I; but I confess I should have been a little surprised at his evident delight, had I not happened to know that he was on pretty intimate terms with the Davenports. I guessed that his appreciation of Squire Davenport's merits was not entirely due to the fact that he was a keen sportsman. Devoted as Jack was to horses, dogs, and guns, I felt pretty sure that he admired the Squire in a great measure because he was Janie Davenport's father.

More than two years before the time of which I'm speaking, my father had died rather suddenly while abroad. His property was to be divided equally between Jack and myself, but we soon discovered there was very little property to divide. I was reading for the bar; Jack had been at Sandhurst, and was already Ensign Kenyon. Several of his friends advised him to sell out and emigrate, but he wouldn't hear of it, and declared his intention of living on his pay and working hard. He did work, nobly and well, and kept out of debt too, with such efforts as only a brave heart and resolute will could have made; but he had his reward. I had been called to the bar in due time, and was getting my living by writing, waiting pretty patiently for the briefs that never came.

To return. We went down by the 4.30 train from Paddington, on Saturday. A three hours' journey by rail, and we found ourselves at W—— station. The dog-cart was there to meet us, in charge of an ancient groom, and, after rattling over five miles of country roads, we arrived at our destination. It was too dark to see much of Aldrum or the neighbourhood, to which I was a stranger. The house itself stood in a hollow, and was shut in on all sides by the great, stately Warwickshire elms: I only received a general impression that it was a large, rambling old place, covered with ivy up to the very chimneys.

We were not unexpected guests. The library and breakfast-room adjoining had been made ready for our reception; we had a jolly little supper, and smoked our pipe of peace in the window-seat by the light of a glorious yellow moon. At last Jack yawned terribly and declared his intention of going to bed: so we rang for candles.

The library door opened at the foot of the broad, polished oak staircase. The spacious corridor in which we found ourselves was lighted at the farther end by an oriel window, round and across which long sprays of ivy waved and swayed in the breeze. The cold

moonlight streamed in and lay in ghostly lines of light on wall and floor.

The spaces between the doors were hung with pictures, and beneath each be-ruffed and be-wigged ancestor of the Wentworths stood a huge china beaupot, round which there seemed to linger still a faint scent of roses, though the fair hands that plucked them must have been mouldering in the Aldrum vaults for many a long year. There was not a vestige of curtain or carpet, and the gloomy shadows and dark corners made the place altogether one you would not choose to linger in.

Almost directly opposite the head of the staircase, a small archway led to a long, narrow passage, the end of which was swallowed up in darkness, and which I did not care to explore. Just inside the archway was my room door. There I wished Jack good-night. He went off to his own apartment in some remote region on the north side. Candle in hand, I proceeded to make a survey of my quarters. Oak panelling, an oil-painting or two on the walls, two four-posters—large enough to have accommodated four people at least, and sombre enough for a funeral—three long, narrow windows, and a general air of antiquity and disrepair. There was, nevertheless, a sort of dignity in the faded aspect of this solemn chamber—the dignity of past glories and mouldering beauty.

I had just completed these observations when Jack came back, growling.

"My room is a good quarter of a mile off yours," said he. "Can't imagine what the dickens they put me there for. It's rather too bad! Suppose I were to have an attack of apoplexy in the night, and die—I shouldn't be able to make you hear."

"I don't suppose you would," I answered, laughing.

"Or I might see a ghost," continued Jack.

"You might."

"Well, I shan't stand it!" And Jack flung himself into the armchair and took out his cigar-case again.

"Stay here then, and we'll sleep together, as we used to do at home," I suggested.

Jack signified his approval of the proposition, and went off for his belongings. But then, instead of going to bed, we sat down opposite each other on either side the empty fireplace, and chatted on till midnight, discussing plans for the future, and memories of the past; the hopes that are so strong, the regrets so transient, with youth and strength, and the world before one. Jack threw away the end of his cigar at last, and began pulling off his boots lazily.

Just then we heard a step in the passage outside, apparently at the other end; not the deliberate heavy tread of the old bailiff, or the short trotting step of his buxom wife, but a regular, measured "tap-tap" of high-heeled shoes on the polished floor, faint but distinct, and growing nearer and nearer.

We looked at each other in surprise. There was not a soul in the house but ourselves and the Browns—so we had been told, at least. Who could this be?

"Sounds as if one of the stately dames from the pictures in the gallery was coming to pay us a domiciliary visit. Scandalous, I call it!" remarked Jack, laughing, and pulling his boot on again.

Nearer and nearer they came, those cautious, unhesitating footsteps, and we listened till they seemed to pass the door and reach the little archway. Then, suddenly, the most awful wailing shriek rang out in the dead silence, and Jack and I rose to our feet simultaneously, with a startled exclamation. There was a sound as of a slight struggle, as Jack sprang to the door with the light, pulled it open and dashed out. I followed him through the archway into the corridor. There was nothing there; nothing but the cold splendours of the moon, and those calm, immovable faces high up on the wall.

"What on earth was it?" said Jack, with a puzzled air.

"I can't imagine," I replied. "Let us look down this passage."

I fetched my candle, and together we explored it. Nothing at the extreme end but a locked door, and a tiny narrow window looking out on to some leads. We returned to the other landing, and tried the doors of all the rooms. All were locked, and Jack examined every nook and cranny with soldierlike precision. In vain: there was nothing to be seen; not a sound to be heard but the faint sighing of the wind.

We returned to my room more puzzled than perhaps we cared to acknowledge to each other.

"It must have been a bat flying against the window," I suggested at last, anxious in some way to account for sounds that seemed so utterly unaccountable.

"Bats don't walk in high-heeled shoes," returned Jack. "And what was the cry we heard?" he demanded sharply.

"It might have been an owl," I said.

"I never heard an owl hoot like that, Charlie. Ugh! it seemed to make one's blood run cold. Anything so awfully despairing and full of terror I couldn't have imagined. I'm certain I heard a scuffle as well. I can't make it out."

"I'm equally puzzled," I answered. "Perhaps we may find some clue to the mystery in the morning. It might have been a ghost—though I have never heard Phil say the house was haunted."

Jack interrupted me with a scornful laugh; the very notion of such a thing roused his loftiest contempt. He was a firm disbeliever in ghosts.

"If I thought you were speaking seriously, I'd pound those ideas out of your too lively imagination," he added, severely. "However, we're not likely to be disturbed again; so let us to bed."

And down he knelt to his prayers—unlike most young fellows

now-a-days, he didn't think himself too old for that. I followed his example, and we were both very soon soundly asleep.

Gloomy passages and oak-panelled rooms flooded with brilliant July sunshine wore a totally different aspect next morning; and Jack and I felt a little inclined to chaff each other about our midnight alarm, as we sat down to an eight o'clock breakfast. Jack was given to early rising, and, although it was Sunday morning, insisted on my turning out when he did. Mrs. Brown was evidently not a little dismayed at our untimely appearance, so we left the good lady to broom and duster, and went off to explore the garden and grounds.

It was like a Paradise to me, after six months of my musty chambers, and the noise and glare of the London streets; and Jack's enjoyment of the change seemed scarcely less than my own. How we laughed and joked, sang snatches of songs, and quoted poetry as we sauntered up and down the grass-grown terraces, whistling to the surly old pointer on the doorstep, as he lay basking in the sun! How we shied pebbles into the weedy fishpond like a couple of mischievous schoolboys, frightening a pair or two of ancient sheldrakes out of their remaining wits! The memory of that summer morning comes back to me often with wonderful freshness, though years have since rolled over our heads.

Mrs. Brown came in to wait upon us at breakfast. At Jack's suggestion, I told her of the disturbance of the previous night, and cross-questioned her a little as to its cause. It did not appear to puzzle her very greatly. "We had been dreamin' most likely. When folks sat up so late o' nights they were bound to have bad dreams; it was one of the ways o' Providence a-showin' them as they were wrong." Evidently Mrs. Brown had a bad opinion of us, as a couple of dissipated men about town. We assured her that we had not been asleep, and that it was no dream.

"Then it was howls."

("It certainly was a howl," Jack muttered between his mouthfuls of toast.)

"There was numbers of howls in the old tower, and their screechin' was that unearthly, Brown had often said it was like somebody bein' murdered. No, she had never heard of no ghostes; didn't believe in 'em."

It was apparent that Mrs. Brown was sceptical in regard to ghosts. We dismissed her and the subject accordingly, and Jack lighted a cigarette, and dragged me out into the stable, to have a look at the beauties in the loose boxes. He couldn't be satisfied without an early inspection.

"Wentworth sent those horses down from Catheron for us," Jack observed, as we started towards the park. "What a good fellow he is! This place seems to be a kind of Chelsea Hospital: old men, old horses and old dogs, sent here to end their days in clover."

We strolled back to the house, and then started for church, Jack

with a white rosebud in his buttonhole. We arrived at the church door about the middle of the psalms, and were, I fear, the occasion of no little commotion among the less devout, by our untimely appearance. Of course they put us in the Hall pew, and I caught many furtive glances of Jack's dark eyes at the dainty muslins and laces behind the red curtains of the Davenport seat.

After service he lingered in the churchyard to exchange greetings, and introduce me. Davenport père made rather a fuss of him, talked of calling on us next day, and hoped we should spend a night at the Grange. Jack seemed to like the idea, and promised to do so, and the fact of his having parted with the white rosebud did not escape my fraternal vigilance when we reached home.

All the afternoon we lounged about the library, and smoked, varying the proceedings with an occasional skirmish over the bookshelves. Finding the library unbearably hot, after dinner we went out into the garden, and Jack grew confidential as we sauntered up and down the moonlit walk, and treated me to a lengthy account of the rise and progress of his affection for Janie Davenport. He was hopeful, as indeed he well might be. There were few girls, I should imagine, who would have refused him, and I had a conviction that Janie Davenport was not one of those few. Nevertheless, I felt it my duty to suggest that her father might have some remarks to make upon the subject, and Jack looked serious. His income was confined almost wholly to his pay, and the prospect of matrimony upon that very modest sum was not a lively one.

"Never mind," he said at last, with hopeful audacity: "perhaps old Davenport will give her a fortune, and then it will be all right. If he doesn't, I can work for her. Hallo! who's this?"

We had turned into the laurel walk, and were going away from the house and towards the gate into the park. Looking down the long dark vista of overgrown, untrained shrubs, lighted here and there by a stray moonbeam, I saw a figure coming towards us from the direction of the park gate. As it drew nearer, I could perceive that it was that of a girl apparently quite young, scarcely more than a child. She had on a white dress and a long dark cloak over it, but no hat or bonnet, and her fair curly hair fell in a mass of bright disorder down her shoulders. I noticed that the cloak was of a quaint, old-fashioned shape and make, but there was nothing peculiar about the dress: and a white dress was not unusual in the summer, even among the village girls.

"Who on earth can she be?" said Jack, in a puzzled tone. "Out alone at this time of night, too."

"Someone going to see Madam Brown, likely enough," I said.

"Nonsense, Charlie, Mrs. Brown wouldn't have a very cordial welcome for so late a visitor. I fancy it's the old story, and she is on her way to the trysting tree. Depend upon it, the expectant lover is not far off. I rather envy him, she's confoundedly good-looking."

Jack lowered his voice, for we were quite close by this time and the moonlight was shining full on the girl's face. A fair, lovely face it was, though perfectly white and colourless, and there was a half-frightened, half-resolute look in the blue eyes, and certain lines of pain about the little mouth, that would seem to indicate all was not smooth sailing for the fair truant. She passed us without turning her head, and hardly appearing to be aware of our presence, though the walk was narrow. With the slightest movement of my hand I could have touched her dress. Jack, impudent fellow, stared full at her from over my shoulder.

"We shall be in the position of eavesdroppers soon, if we don't look out," he observed in a low tone. "But it's an awful pity she should be out at this time of night with no one to look after her. Right about face, Charlie—let us follow her."

"Hardly fair, is it?" I answered, turning round nevertheless. But we were too late: the girl had reached the upper end of the walk, and disappeared in the dark shadows of one of the three winding paths that led to the lawn and terrace.

We walked back to the house slowly, keeping a sharp look-out for the white dress among the trees: there was nothing to be seen or heard. On going into the library and ringing for lights, Mrs. Brown appeared in something suspiciously like a night-cap: a delicate intimation, I suppose, that she was on the point of going to bed, and would consider our speedy retirement desirable. It was evident she had no visitor. We were not so rash as to disregard the good lady's hint, and went upstairs forthwith. Jack flung himself down on the sofa, and was fast asleep in ten minutes.

The opportunity was too good a one to be lost, and I sat down to the window with a novel and a freshly-filled pipe, but somehow I failed to get up any interest in my book. After skimming over half a dozen pages, I let it fall, moved the candle away, and leaning out of the open window into the bewitching beauty of that summer night, I began the building of my castle in Spain, as I had built it, ah, many times before.

The room we were in fronted to the west, and looked out upon the broad terrace and narrow strip of lawn sloping rather sharply down to the fish-pond. A gravel path ran half-way round the pool, and on the farther bank a belt of larch and fir trees threw a dense black shadow across the water. The moon was at the full, and shedding a cold, white, lustrous light over the silent world. There was not a breath of air, not a leaf stirring, not a sound to be heard. The cattle in the park stood dumb and motionless in the moonlight. The great black bats, wheeling and skimming in their noiseless flight in and out of the trees, were the only sign of life and movement. The distant sound of the church clock striking midnight, fell with startling distinctness on the absolute silence and stillness that reigned.

I turned to look at Jack. He was sleeping as calmly as a child, a half-smile on his handsome face. With a curious sense of expectation, a waiting for something—I knew not what—I sat still and watched the scarcely perceptible movement of his broad chest as he drew the long, soft breaths of a deep, dreamless sleep; the perfect and intense repose in every line of his magnificent limbs, and the almost faultless outline of his clear, bronzed face: a perfect type of manly beauty.

I do not know how long I sat thus, but it could not have been many minutes before I heard a footstep in the passage outside—the same light, hurried "tap-tap" of high-heeled shoes we had heard the night before. I remember now that I listened to the sound with a strange fascination, and that it was with an effort I rose and stretched out my hand for the candle.

Jack slept on quietly; I would not wake him, I thought to myself. And then, a second later, that awful, wailing shriek rose on the midnight silence, and he had sprung to his feet with a white, startled face and a smothered exclamation.

"The owls again, old fellow," I said, as he turned to me.

"I dreamt they were murdering Janie," he answered, rather hoarsely. "Why did you let me sleep like that? Let us go and have another search in the corridor; the thing is most mysterious."

We each took a candle and looked high and low, as we had done the previous night: there was nothing but absolute silence and darkness. At last we returned, perforce, to our room, and retired to bed, neither volunteering any further conjectures respecting the disturbance.

The same silence on the subject was maintained between us at the breakfast-table next morning, by tacit consent it would seem. For my own part, I felt a little uncomfortable about it, I confess; not so much in the impossibility of assigning any cause for the mysterious sounds, as in the strange sense of awe and expectation with which I had waited for them, while Jack was sleeping; the curious feeling of helplessness and oppression with which I had listened to the tapping of those high-heeled shoes as the—what?—drew nearer and nearer. I wasn't a believer in ghosts, but—well, the whole thing was so very unaccountable.

Will Davenport and his father drove over in the course of the morning, and insisted on our going back with them to luncheon. We went, and played tennis all the afternoon, spite of the heat; Jack and Janie Davenport monopolising one court, Will, his two younger sisters, and myself having to put up with the other, which was not so good. But I am under the impression that our play was of a more energetic, if less absorbing, character than that of the young couple on our right. Old Davenport sat under the trees smoking, and watching us with a half-smile lingering at the corners of his moustache. I could not help regarding this as rather a hopeful sign on

Jack's account. They persuaded us to stay to dinner, and we didn't get home till late.

There was a portmanteau in the hall, and Phil Wentworth met us at the library door.

"I have been learning the experimental truth of a certain proverb," he exclaimed oracularly. "You didn't expect me, I suppose, you fellows. I'm glad I came, though; I know now in what an immoral manner you conduct yourselves under favourable circumstances. Charlie, my lad, you look better already."

We gave him an explanation of our absence over brandy-and-soda and cigars, for which Phil rang ere we were seated.

"Well, you know," he said, setting to work on the third bottle of soda with a practised hand, "I didn't think I should be able to run down and take a look at you, but as Providence would have it, my aunt from Yorkshire—you know her, Charlie—a lady who has ideas about 'woman's rights,' and one of those misguided individuals who *will* wear green silk dresses—came in last night quite 'unexpected and promiscuous,' maid and parrot to follow. Shot hates the parrot, so he and I bolted, and here we are."

Phil rattled on gaily until Jack grew silent and preoccupied, passed a resolution to retire, took up his candle to go, and then turned round abruptly to Wentworth and demanded to know if the house were haunted. Phil stared.

"Haunted by rats, owls and bats, yes; ghosts, no. Never heard of any, at least."

Jack sat down again, and proceeded to relate our nocturnal experiences in a brief matter-of-fact fashion, appealing to me occasionally for confirmation of his statements.

It struck me as rather odd that he should say anything about the girl we had met in the shrubbery; but he detailed that encounter no less carefully than his account of the mysterious sounds in the corridor.

Phil listened with wide-open eyes, and leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. I rather expected he would ridicule the whole affair as the product of a too vivid imagination, and a too liberal supply of St. Julien at dinner. On the contrary, he seemed interested and impressed with the quiet, laconic description.

"Most extraordinary!" he exclaimed at last, as Jack paused. "Have you said anything to Mrs. Brown about it?"

"She treated the subject with such lofty scorn, we felt constrained to abandon it," I laughed.

"Well, I have never slept in the house myself. You know I have not so very long come into the property," resumed Phil. "In fact, it has been empty for the last forty years, I believe, with the exception of a succession of superannuated couples from Catheron and Yorkshire, and I've never heard a word as to its being haunted. I shouldn't have taken any notice if I had, for I don't believe in

that sort of thing. But 'pon my word, this is really very extraordinary !"

Wentworth pulled the ends of his yellow moustache and put up his eye-glass in much perplexity.

"It is nearly midnight now; let us go upstairs, and wait for this unearthly visitant," I suggested.

"The very thing to be done," answered Phil, seizing on a candle and his cigar-case. "Bring that bottle of soda, Charlie, and come on. We'll overhaul this mystery before we're much older."

Upstairs we dashed with noise enough to have affrighted a score of ghosts. Phil proposed we should search the corridor and passage at once, but Jack would not agree to it.

"If we did so, we should probably not hear anything to-night," he said. "Let us sit down and wait."

We lit a fresh cigar apiece and sat down, Jack and I on either side of the fireplace, Phil in the window-seat. He was, I believe, the only one of the trio who thoroughly enjoyed the prospect of a visit from some deceased ancestor or ancestress.

We were silent till the church clock struck twelve; we compared watches, and I was about to make some irrelevant remark, when Jack turned his head towards the door quickly, and at the same moment I distinctly heard the light footfall outside, and the soft sweep of a dress on the floor; Phil heard it too, and was on his feet as soon as I was.

"Hush," said Jack under his breath. "Put the candle out of the draught, and we'll go into the passage." He opened the door noiselessly and stood there for a second in the doorway; then he went outside, and Phil and I followed. There was nothing to be seen save one ray of moonlight—one soft, brilliant ray falling through the little window at the end of the passage—and a length of shadowy space between us and that weird, cold light; but still the quick, cautious footsteps came on and on.

I cannot describe the feeling of horror and dismay with which I listened to the gentle tap-tap of those high-heeled shoes, coming from out of the darkness, or the strange desire that I had to laugh when Phil put up his eye-glass and stared blankly at that window opposite and its little slit of light; conscious all the time that to save my life I couldn't have spoken a word. I scarcely know what I expected to see emerge from those black shadows to pass through the square of faint yellow light that streamed from out our open door.

The footsteps came on, but nothing else. I heard one little heel set down on the very same polished oak board on which my own foot was planted; I could have sworn I felt a slight vibration, and I heard the soft rustle of a dress, but I saw nothing.

"Hallo!" called out Jack. "Who's that!"

His voice sounded hoarse with suppressed excitement, and, ere the sound had died away, an awful, despairing shriek rang out, it seemed

at our very feet. Phil started and half muttered an exclamation. Jack turned to him.

"You see," he said hurriedly, "it is as I told you."

Phil did not hear him. He had sprung out through the archway and into the corridor beyond, and in another moment Jack and I followed with the light. We searched as we had done the two previous evenings, high and low; we tried doors and windows, peered behind brackets and vases; we went downstairs and explored the hall and library, but with the same result. Silence and darkness reigned, save where the cold moonlight fell through the uncurtained windows, on panelled walls and polished floor. At last, even Phil was satisfied as to the fruitlessness of further search, and we returned to my room to hold a council of war. "In the multitude of the counsellors there is wisdom." Nevertheless, we failed in getting at the bottom of the mystery, and Wentworth got up at last and took up his candle. "Well," he said, meditatively, "it couldn't have been an optical delusion, because there was nothing to see; it must have been a—what d'ye call it?—an acoustic illusion. I'll go and sleep it off."

He departed; and Jack and I went to bed, rather bewildered if the truth be known.

We were not very early next morning. In came Mrs. Brown with the coffee and cutlets, and a punctuality-is-a-virtue expression of countenance, the moment she heard us in the breakfast-room. Phil followed her in, in his slippers, caressing his moustache sleepily.

"Mrs. Brown," he began, over her shoulder. "This house is haunted."

Mrs. Brown set the dish down on the table with a bang, and turned round to look at her master with respectful but unmeasured contempt.

"It's not houses that is haunted, sir, it's folks themselves, with their own wicked thoughts," she said, severely giving me at the same time a stern glance round the corner of her cap border—a fortification in white muslin that would have done honour to Vauban. I was a maker of books, and therefore a wicked and abandoned member of society in the good lady's eyes; and Jack, as one of "those wicked hofficers," was only a shade less guilty.

"Oh yes, I know all that," rejoined Phil in a conciliatory tone, and sitting down at the head of the table. "But thoughts don't walk about the passages at night, and shriek loud enough to wake the dead. Mr. Kenyon and his brother have heard this row for three nights, and I heard it myself last night. Don't you know what it is?"

"No, Master Phil, I do not know what it is. I've lived here for six months now, and I've heard nothing o' nights but the howls and rats, and I never expect to hear nothing as long as I live a sober and a godly life." Jack was the victim of a withering

glance from out of the cap border, which I fancy rather spoiled his appetite for breakfast.

"Brown—I suppose he has heard nothing?"

"That I will answer for, he hasn't, sir; he's as deaf as a post since he came here; it ain't any use my readin' prayers to him even; he says Amen at the wrong place and puts me out continual."

"It's very strange," said Phil dreamily, helping himself to more sugar.

"What you heard, sir, was howls and nothing else, if you'd only believe it; but folks is so fond of making tales and mysteries now-a-days, it's no wonder, I'm sure, the Almighty lets 'em be caught in their own net."

With a little contemptuous sniff, Mrs. Brown took up her tray and marched out, in the comfortable consciousness of having no net of wickedness spread wherein her own well-shod feet might be caught by special permission of Providence. We all laughed, and, after another "very extraordinary" from Phil, the subject was dropped, and we fell to discussing plans for the redemption of time during our brief holiday.

The Davenports had asked us for a day's fishing, and Wentworth expressing himself as ready and willing to accompany us, we had the dog-cart out after breakfast and drove off; carried away the post going through the lodge gates; ascended a heap of stones by the road-side about a hundred yards farther on, were whirled round and taken in every direction but the right one, four times in as many consecutive minutes; till finally the mare planted her fore-feet in the hedge, and gazed tranquilly into the field on the other side. "I've had enough of this, old lady," observed Phil calmly at this juncture. "Besides, I want to get on: we'll have the whip brought into action."

I gave myself up for lost, and began to think seriously of the unfinished second volume. Phil's style of punishment was the reverse of soothing, and once we were clear of the hedge, the rest of the journey was performed in shorter time than I should like to tell. I fancy Jack enjoyed that day's fishing: he caught nothing—a fact which was not surprising, since he found it necessary to resign his rod to Miss Janie at a very early hour; and, after luncheon, old Davenport got hold of him, and treated him to a disquisition on the gentle craft, angling past and present, and the speaker's achievements in almost every known trout-stream in the United Kingdom. Very soon afterwards I felt a hand on my shoulder, and turned to see Jack standing beside me with a radiant face.

"I've done it, Charlie," he said in a low tone.

"Well?"

"It's all right, she has promised to wait for me. I hardly dared to hope she would."

"I'm awfully glad, Jack," I said, as he returned my brotherly

squeeze of his hand. "But, 'pon my word, I don't know whether you ought to have done it yet."

"Oh, I've been to head-quarters—Janie insisted upon that. Old Davenport was inclined to be a little bit snappish at first; talked about my engaging his daughter's affections without her parents' consent, and all that sort of thing; he has given his consent though, and he's going to set us up in trade. I mean, Janie will have a fortune, so money matters are not to stand in the way. A perfect old brick he is," concluded Jack, with affectionate disrespect.

Twelve o'clock that same night we were all three pacing up and down the shrubbery by the light of our cigars and the moon; Jack in a beatific silence that disdained to answer or even listen to the running fire of chaff kept up on either side of him.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Phil at last, as we wheeled round for another turn down the walk. "Here she is."

True enough, there was the white dress and golden head gleaming in the moonlight, not thirty yards in front of us.

We went forward slowly, and in another moment the girl was close to us, looking straight before her as if she saw nothing but the long, dark vista of the walk, and the moonlit lawn at the end. Her face was perfectly white and colourless, and there seemed to me a certain indistinctness, a something shadowy about it—and indeed her whole figure—that I had not noticed on the former occasion of our meeting her. Wentworth stepped in front of her and raised his hat: "I beg your pardon," he began, and then stopped—he was speaking to nothing! My eyes had been fixed on him and on the girl, intently; I had not taken them off for one second—no, nor one tenth part of a second—but, as the words had left his lips, I could see him only; the little white figure had disappeared, the place where it had stood was empty; and, hat in hand, Phil paused, staring in mute amazement. "Are we all mad?" he exclaimed fiercely, wheeling round on us.

"I suppose we must be," I answered. "And, in that case, we had perhaps better go to bed, and leave further investigations till to-morrow."

"I'll investigate and get at the bottom of this confounded mystery before I'm much older," Phil rejoined in a passionate tone. "I see no fun in being made a fool of night after night."

"Well, come in and wait in the gallery; there is sure to be a row of some kind to-night." Jack knocked the ashes from his cigar as he spoke, thrust his hands deep down into his pockets, and marched on. We made the best of our way back through the shrubbery into the house, with watchful eyes bent on every turn of the walk, and opening in the trees; Wentworth questioning us both as to what we had seen, and as to the precise moment when the apparition, whatever it might be, had disappeared from our view; Jack's account agreed in every particular with mine. Phil himself had seen nothing more than we had, or failed to see as much. The plot thickened.

Arrived upstairs, he took up his station in the archway, a light on the bracket at his elbow, and Shot at his feet. Jack and I stood on either side of the open doorway of our room, partly in the shadow. The house was perfectly silent—Mrs. Brown and her spouse having retired to rest some two hours before—and no sound broke the intense stillness but that of our own quick breathing, an occasional low whine from Shot, and an answering growl from his master.

For my own part, I must confess to a very fervent hope that this, our fourth vigil, would be an undisturbed one, and did not like Wentworth's nervous irritability and excitement over the mystery; and, though I was anxious enough to get at the bottom of it, I hardly knew whether to treat the matter in jest or in earnest: whether to advise Phil to leave it alone, or to take further steps to discover the cause of these midnight disturbances. I was not converted to the ghost theory, but I began to think there was something uncanny about the house.

We waited there perhaps a quarter of an hour; Phil changed his position impatiently; Jack looked at his watch and held it out to me with a significant glance; I nodded assent, and then started. A light footstep fell on the polished floor not ten yards from us, and came nearer, advancing slowly and cautiously it seemed. Shot crouched down lower at his master's feet, and showed his gleaming white teeth in a long, furious growl. Phil turned round full face to the end of the passage, completely filling up the doorway with his tall, heavily-built figure. I looked straight out into the darkness, as Jack was doing, with a fixed, fascinated gaze. Ere we had time to think, the soft footfall seemed to pass us. I could not move a finger, could not stretch out my hand to feel what was to us so strangely invisible, and yet must have some shape or form. I heard a brief, stern word from Wentworth; and then that awful cry, more fearful, more despairing, if possible, than before. The spell seemed gone, and I turned my head just in time to see a look of awful horror and dismay in Phil's face that almost froze my blood.

"Take it away; for mercy's sake, take the cursed thing away!" he muttered hoarsely, putting his hand over his eyes; and then he staggered a little and fell heavily, before I could step forward to save him.

We were both kneeling beside him in a moment, and Jack turned the ashy grey face to the light, and laid his fingers on the wrist hurriedly. There was no sign of life or movement, and the head fell back again. He looked at me.

"Charlie," he groaned, "he's dead!"

"Dead! No—no!" I shouted desperately. Tearing open the shirt, I placed my hand upon the heart, that had already ceased to beat.

Alas! it was too true; poor Phil Wentworth was dead. The kindest, truest friend man ever had! We raised his head again,

fetched water and brandy, and then carried him to the bed in my room. It was all in vain.

I need not enter into all the details of that terrible night. The alarm, the hastening for the doctor, the desperate remedies, the lingering hope, resigned at last, and then the awful silence of death, and the darkened room upstairs; or of the days that followed, full—it seemed to me—of hurrying to-and-fro, of strange, painful scenes, and faces of mingled curiosity and sorrow. Heart disease and undue excitement, the doctors in their wisdom pronounced it, and I suppose they were right: doctors always are; but I know what Jack thought and what I thought myself—that there was something else besides undue excitement. Poor Phil undoubtedly saw something that night: what it was I do not know—I scarcely dare to think.

It was not until months after that I could bear to have the subject mentioned, or hear the strange wild legend of that haunted gallery—a legend that had almost died out with the decay of the old house: of a fair ancestress of the Wentworths, with a sweet, childlike face, and a heart as hard and cruel as her face was fair, condemned for her many crimes, and a wickedness conspicuous even in the dark and wicked age in which she lived, to wander for ever up and down the gloomy passages and galleries of her earthly home, in the most hideous form that the mind of man can conceive, and shrieking out the never-ending torture and despair of a lost soul—a fearful vision, appearing only to the heir of the house in every third generation.

I do not know whether to believe the story or not: it is no great matter. I only know that I lost my dearest friend that night, and though I shall go to him, he will never come back to me. As for the strange apparition in the garden, it will, I suppose, for ever remain a mystery. I had no heart to make further investigations and inquiries. But the sweet, childish face I saw that summer night in the shrubbery rises before me even now when I think of my poor friend. Was it—could it have been—one with the hideous vision that filled his brave heart with such sudden horror and dismay? I will think of it no more.

It all came to an end at last, and we went back to town the joint possessors of Aldrum and the Aldrum estate, by a codicil in poor Wentworth's will dated only a few days before he joined us for that fatal holiday. From that day to this we have never, either of us, set foot on our property. The house is kept in some sort of repair, and the estate fairly well managed, I believe, but I cannot make up my mind to go and see. I'll leave my responsibility to that bright, fair-haired lad who comes rushing in at the window for a ball of string and some advice about his kite, and wonders audibly why his father is looking so dull over those bothering papers.

"Your advice is sound and good, Charlie, my boy. The papers shall be shoved into the drawer, and we will go and fly kites."

ABOUT NORWAY.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland."

Nearing Christiania.

NOT until long familiar scenes and circumstances have passed away for ever can we know how happy we were in them, and what a blank has arisen in our lives. Rarely until the loved has become the lost, as far as earth is concerned, do we appreciate at its true value the quiet, unobtrusive beauty of a life that is nevermore to make our sunshine. The light of other days has faded, and the same light can never again brighten those that are to come.

So, not until our short stay at Gudvangen was over, did we realise what a pleasant interregnum it had been to our life in Norway. A brief calm in the storm of constant motion through which for many weeks we had been passing. Everything favoured us. That uncertain element, the weather, had been propitious. The situation of Gudvangen was retired as it was glorious; the small handful of houses enlivened, but took not from the repose of nature. By the time our stay came to an end, we were looked upon as old inhabitants of the place, and felt on friendly terms with everyone. This happy state of feeling was apparently shared by the natives themselves: from the postmaster, with his calm, refined face, that appeared to have a past history in it of some shock, trouble or suffering, down to his two pale-faced intelligent boys, who seemed above the rest of the village lads, and somewhat out of place amongst them.

They, amongst others, accompanied us to the steamer, one of them chattering in English, which he had managed to pick up by some process of his own, unknown to the rest of the little world. "Will you come with us to England?" I said, pleased with his endeavours to conquer the difficulties of an unknown tongue:

anticipating that the fear of a stranger, the vague mystery enshrouding a far-off land, the love of home, would be enough to bring forth a decided NO. But I reckoned without my host—or rather, in this instance, without my guest. The little fellow of thirteen summers was quite ready to depart. With the most serious air he started off to obtain his father's consent and pack his trunk. There and then, with the happy confidence of youth, he would have placed his hand in mine, and gone with me to the ends of the earth. After that, it was not the easiest task in the world to persuade him that his best place was by his father's side.

So we departed: steaming down the Naerofjord into the broader waters of the Sogne, calling at many stations on our way to Laerdal. One spot in particular drew forth many an adjective of praise from the passengers, where sloping hills, green and placid, swept round in an immense semicircle, their shadows reflected on the calm waters. Here sheep grazed and goats skipped about in happy security. It was the only bit of smiling scenery we had seen on the broad arm of the Sognefjord, where, for the most part, everything is of the severe and frowning type. Barren mountains raising their gigantic and rocky heads in magnificent disdain of all that is soft and beautiful in nature: deep fissures and crevices where repose eternal snows: heights given up to the blue ice of the glaciers whose existence is not marked by decades and generations, but sets centuries at defiance.

Towards evening, we passed between the high mountains that contract and tower in the neighbourhood of Laerdal, rounded a point, and in the distance sighted the little town (that was no better than a village) reposing in the plain.

It was a return to old familiar quarters. But there was still the same want of cordiality in the landlord to his guests: and still the waiting-woman was repelling as ever: as silent and mysterious in her movements; looking at you with a fixed, unamiable stare when you made a request, that, in fear of her, became a petition and almost an apology. And still she would listen and depart, making no sign, but presently doing your bidding.

And now for the first time in Norway, we were prisoners from stress of weather. Thursday morning announced itself with a downpour of rain that rendered travelling impossible, where it was not imperative. We had a few days to spare, and determined to wait in hope of better times. Our pedestrians did likewise. It was as unpleasant to walk as to carriole in the rain.

Of all places, Laerdal is perhaps the worst to be detained in. Sheltered from the winds, it soon grows hot, relaxing and dismal. The mountains, so close to the inn, overpower you, until at last you feel oppressed as by a nightmare. The everlasting murmur of the cataracts becomes infinitely wearisome, and drives one to the verge of madness. The body of water was two or three times as great as at our first visit, and the noise was loud in proportion. We went

to bed with our windows open, and could not sleep for the roar: we closed them and were suffocated. It was all very picturesque, but one may pay too great a price even for the beautiful.

So we hoped that Friday would mend matters; but Friday, still more obstinately wet, only marred them further. Some of the travellers, however, had had enough of it, and took up the thread of their journey soon after breakfast, departing in carrioles. They had their trouble for their pains; and a drenching through and through into the bargain. In about three hours' time they returned with the alarming intelligence that the heavy rains had caused a landslip. A portion of the road overhanging a precipice had given way: it was impossible to pass over. Men were already hard at work, and it was hoped the road would be open, at least to pedestrians, on the morrow. Next week the King would come that way, in his royal progress through the country, and not an hour was to be lost.

This intelligence was not exhilarating to those whose time was limited, but we hoped for the best. On Saturday morning came the good news that the chasm was bridged over by planks. The rain had ceased, and with it our endurance of Laerdal. We hired carrioles to take us right through to Christiania, and bade the comfortable inn and its eccentric folk a last, not very reluctant, farewell. Our friends had shouldered their knapsacks, and were an hour or two ahead of us.

The road now lay through familiar scenes, and we renewed with delight the impressions of our first carriole journey in Norway. Passing up the valley, which narrowed as we ascended into the mountains, we presently came to the site of the disaster. Just before doing so we met two ladies travelling to Laerdal. They looked indignant, and were boiling over with rage at the unceremonious, almost dishonest conduct of the navvies. The chasm was so slightly bridged by the planks, that vehicles had to be taken to pieces—the wheels dismounted from the body—and carried across. The overseer was away, and the men refused to do anything under a bribe. For two hours they detained these indignant ladies, finally assisting them only when their extortionate demands had been satisfied.

We listened to the woes of these ladies, gave them every satisfaction that sympathy could afford, and proceeded to the scene of action. It was a formidable landslip; a few loose, tottering planks requiring a steady head, and something more than Dutch courage alone enabled one to pass over the yawning chasm. The sides were rocky and precipitous, and at the bottom the noisy torrent of the Laera ran over its stony bed. For some time we endeavoured to impress upon the men—a rough, evil-looking set—that, our moments being precious, we should think it amiable on their part to assist us. They stared insolently, but paid no further attention to the requests. Suddenly, without warning, after keeping us waiting more than an hour, they

turned to, dismounted the carrioles and carried them over in a twinkling. Horses were unable to pass. At this crisis the overseer appeared, and the mystery was solved. Like Miss Pecksniff, they had seen him coming round the corner.

But we were over, and we were thankful. At about six o'clock that Saturday evening we reached Husum, where we had arranged with our friends to put up for the night. And not for that night only as it turned out, but for all Sunday also. On Sunday morning the downpour of rain was greater and more determined than ever. It was a pleasant, quiet Sunday, for we had the place to ourselves. In the afternoon when the rain ceased, the youths and maidens of the surrounding buildings dressed up in their costumes, and went their various ways. One little fellow shouldered his rod, and in about an hour's time returned with a dozen fine trout, some of which found their way to our supper-table.

Monday rose in splendour and tremendous heat: a reward for our patient waiting. A long day's journey lay before us, but a longer one was in store for the morrow. These enforced stoppages had stretched our time to its utmost limits. At Haeg we overtook our two walking friends, and there finally parted from them. We had now to push on, and the most indefatigable pedestrian could not keep up with the rate at which we must travel. Not that the speed was startling, but the hours were long.

Again we passed through old, familiar scenes: again were struck with the meek, subdued look of the pale, apparently henpecked landlord at Skogstad, though on this occasion we neither saw nor heard the shrew. Perhaps she had been tamed; perhaps she had departed this life. But no: there were no signs of any suddenly-acquired happiness in the man's expression: no insane joy irradiated his countenance. Shrews, as a rule, live to be a hundred. Like cats, they have many lives; but unfortunately they cannot be so easily disposed of. What would kill ordinary women is a mere jest to them. It is always our "dear gazelles" that go first. And this brings us face to face with another of life's many mysteries—why man, constantly putting out a blind hand for the substance, grasps only the shadow.

We left the subdued martyr, so pale and shadowy himself, and pushed on to Tune, found the illustrious Member of Parliament at home, and full of care for his guests: as little like an M.P. as he could be—so modest, so ready to act, so little given to talking. It was then that he begged us to return later on in the year with a party of friends, to shoot bears: declaring that he would guarantee excellent sport, and make us as comfortable as his out-of-the-way inn permitted. And he would have been as good as his word. Nevertheless, we spared the bears. It was a formidable undertaking, and the cold of a Norwegian autumn or winter, setting other considerations aside, was not to be lightly encountered.

We started at six o'clock the next morning upon our longest day's journey. It did not come to an end for twenty-one hours, although at Reien it nearly came to an end altogether. Here they gave us terrible horses: animals in a condition only to be speedily put out of life and misery. We afterwards learned that the station was noted for its inhuman proceedings. In this instance our postboy was a woman, and she sat herself, as they generally do, upon the luggage strapped on behind. So A.'s carriole had the double load. My horse, the better of the two, soon outdistanced the other. The road wound round at the foot of the mountains, beside the running stream, which now and again broke in grand, majestic waterfalls. Nearing Fagernaes, I stopped and waited for A. to put in an appearance. At length, after what seemed an interminable time, he rounded the corner, walking—carriole, horse, luggage and woman were not. The animal had utterly broken down, and could scarcely crawl at the rate of a yard a-minute.

There was nothing left for it but to push on to the inn, and despatch a horse for the absent vehicle. But we had not been many minutes at Fagernaes before the woman came tearing in, like another Jehu, carriole and luggage in possession. What did it mean? Simply that she had met an empty stolkjaer on the road, and in spite of all protestations on the part of the postboy, almost ending in a pitched battle, seized upon his good horse and left him the bad one. We were lucky in having a woman for our charioteer: boy or man would never have had sense thus to get out of a difficulty. But we wondered how the youth felt and fared, who, no doubt, was still patiently waiting on the high road the resuscitation of his steed.

All differences adjusted, we pushed on to Frydenlund, branched into a new road, and from this point into new scenery. That to the right led to Sörum and the Spirillen: the road we had followed in coming from Christiania. We now turned up a gradual and lengthened ascent, ending in a view at once magnificent and extended: the immense valley and plain of Valders, intersected by its villages and lakes; the snow-capped Jotunheim mountain range in the far distance. The evening shadows were lengthening, the glow of the day was past. We were many hundred feet above the valley, which had a distant, dreamy look about it. Full of beauty and repose was the scene, which yet we had little time to contemplate. The end of our day's journey was far off; and the declining sun warned us that much would have to be done in darkness.

Our postboy, a well-grown lad of fifteen, spoke very fair English, which he had learned at school. He informed us that it was now his holidays, and he had only come with us to oblige the people of the inn. We felt duly honoured. He went circumstantially into the history of his family, to the third and fourth generation. His father

was a small farmer, and he pointed out his home—a little house nestling in a plantation of stunted birch trees, surrounded by culti-

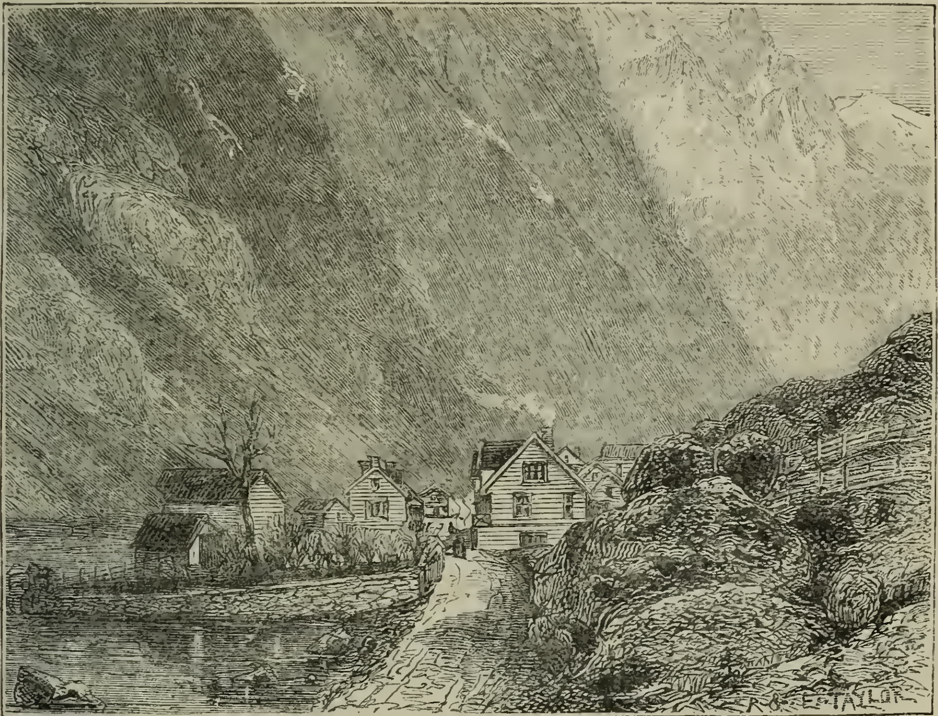
Valley of Gudvangen.

vated fields—with quite a proud, affectionate look. But he was very happy at school, preferred books to farm work, and would be sorry when the time came for the exchange.

So we reached Sveen, whence an almost continuous descent led

through a dense pine district. Gloomy firs surrounded us, extending in long wave-like undulations far into the distance, rising out of deep ravines wild and desolate: all shrouded, ere the next station was gained, in impenetrable night.

At Tomlevolden the landlord said—in a short, decided manner, crushing to weak nerves—that it was impossible to proceed further until the next morning. As it was impossible to remain, it was clear that one impossibility must be overcome. The landlord, beside himself at finding that he must give way—according to the law they are compelled to find horses for you at any hour of the day or night



GUDVANGEN.

—kept us waiting until long past midnight, and then despatched us with two men, and an ill-tempered command not to take us beyond the next station: we were to be left there, high and dry, to go through another battle for horses.

We had spent the time very cheerfully in awakening echoes out of a piano that stood in a corner of the enormous room they had shown us into: sounds that were almost weird and out of place in this far-off, desolate region, wrapped in a silence and solitariness almost tangible. Yet it was in keeping with the gloomy depths of Beethoven's melancholy strains; and, for want of Moonlight, he might very well have been inspired, had he been there, to write a "Midnight" Sonata, full of the ghosts of black forests and the murmur of rushing torrents. In place of Beethoven, there came in presently two

very pretty girls, dressed in dark, well-fitting gowns, and looking quite like young ladies, who brought us the consolation of steaming coffee in delicate cups, and biscuits handed us with their own fair fingers: compassionating, no doubt, our hard usage, and evidently holding cause with us against their wicked tyrant of a father. This delicious sympathy (the coffee always remembered) was quite worth the price paid for it.

The darkness, as we started afresh, could be felt as well as seen. Stars glittered and flashed in the heavens. One star in particular, rising above the pine-clad hills, looked large and brilliant almost as a small moon. Nothing could be seen around but the dim outlines of the hills, fringed with trees, or clear cut, after their kind. Now the road was black and dense with overhanging boughs; here and there, huge gaps in the earth suggesting gloomy thoughts of graves and midnight adventures; and now the road opened out upon a large tract of water, into which the running stream emptied itself with determined fury.

The men, unable to speak English, were mysteriously, persistently silent; only when passing these yawning roadside pits, exchanging hurried sentences that sounded portentous to our excited imaginations. Why, by the way, does darkness always excite the imagination? Perhaps they were making up a nice little plot to rob, murder, and bury us out of sight. No one would ever be the wiser; and, if they would not be much the richer, how were they to know that? One had heard of such things: of course, all the fearful tales of midnight assassins and mysterious disappearances that had ever come to our knowledge recurred with startling vividness.

But they were better than they seemed, these men; innocent and even kindly; for when we reached the next station, they offered to take us on to Odnaes, our final destination. We wondered whether those two pretty maidens had stood our friends in need; and, under cover of the night, whispered their instructions into the ears of the men as they were setting out. Whatever the cause, we gladly closed with the proposal. The people at that last station were evidently all fast, very fast asleep. As for ourselves, we had now only one ambition, one desire in life: to get to our journey's end and sink into unconsciousness.

The dawn of a new day was creeping out of the East. Every moment it grew a little less black and shadowy, and Odnaes was reached in the chill grey light of early morning. It was three o'clock; we had been twenty-one hours on the road. We paid the men, gave them an extra "drikke penge" for their civility in bringing us to the end of our journey—it had been a great accommodation to us, and a piece of benevolence on their part—and they, rejoicing, went their way to an adjoining barn, no doubt to divide the money amiably and also sink into oblivion.

We knocked at the door of the inn for admittance. It was a

building much larger and more pretentious than anything we had seen since leaving Bergen : in fact quite an hotel, and not a small one. To alight upon such a structure at apparently the ends of the earth was a matter of surprise. At length, in answer to our repeated summons, an unsophisticated lady—stout, not comely, with flowing locks, and a scanty white robe—appeared in the corridor. Her face was pale, and she evidently thought it was fire. We surveyed her through the glass doors with wonder, as a being of another sphere. But no sooner did she catch sight of our amazed gaze, than, with a shriek that sufficiently proved her humanity, she disappeared like a flash of lightning. We were left in solitude. Act the First.

Act the Second commenced with the re-opening of the door through which the celestial vision had vanished, and the issuing therefrom of a folding-screen, propelled as it were, by invisible hands, struggling across the corridor. We supposed the celestial being was behind it : we could not be certain. The vision disappeared through the opening whence it had first appeared, a door was violently slammed, and once more silence and solitude.

We were beginning to wax impatient, when Act the Third opened with the arrival of a sleepy, dishevelled maiden, half-dressed, and very human indeed, who unbarred, unbolted the doors, admitted, and forthwith ushered us to sleeping-rooms. We were grateful, but our hours of unconsciousness, if any, would be short. It was now nearly four o'clock : at six we must be up again for the steamer.

In less than three hours we had packed our selves, carrioles, and baggage on board the boat. Before leaving the hotel we came across the landlady, and recognised our previous night's apparition. She gave us a shake of the head, half laughing, half indignant, and in a "Good voyage !" sealed our pardon.

The journey up the Randsfjord was pleasant; the lake a little disappointing. It is almost the largest in Norway. At first setting out it was very picturesque, with rich fertile banks, villages and churches giving life to the landscape, and clusters of weeping birches bending over the clear waters as if enamoured of their own reflection. The early morning sunshine sparkled over all. But making way, and calling at various stations, the hills became uninteresting, the points of the scenery less striking. Finally it grew monotonous, and we were not sorry when it was over. On the whole we had been more pleased with the Spirillen, a lake of much smaller extent. Some allowance, perhaps, must be made for the twenty-one hours' journey of the previous day, and a comparatively sleepless night, which would knock out of most people, for the time being, a little of their enthusiasm for the Beautiful.

We landed at the Randsfjord station, where most people took train for Christiania. We preferred our carrioles, and the road, taking the splendid district of the Ringeriget, and were more than

repaid for our extra trouble—if that can be called trouble which affords at once the highest pleasure and delight.

From Randsfjord to Hönefos, the drive lay in part through a great wood. The trees overhead plunged us into delicious shade. The rough, often steep, road, sometimes threatened to turn us over altogether. Wild flowers and fruit grew in abundance. Again the oak fern, so common in the forests of Norway, charmed the eye, with its fresh, pure green; bilberries, larger and more luscious than

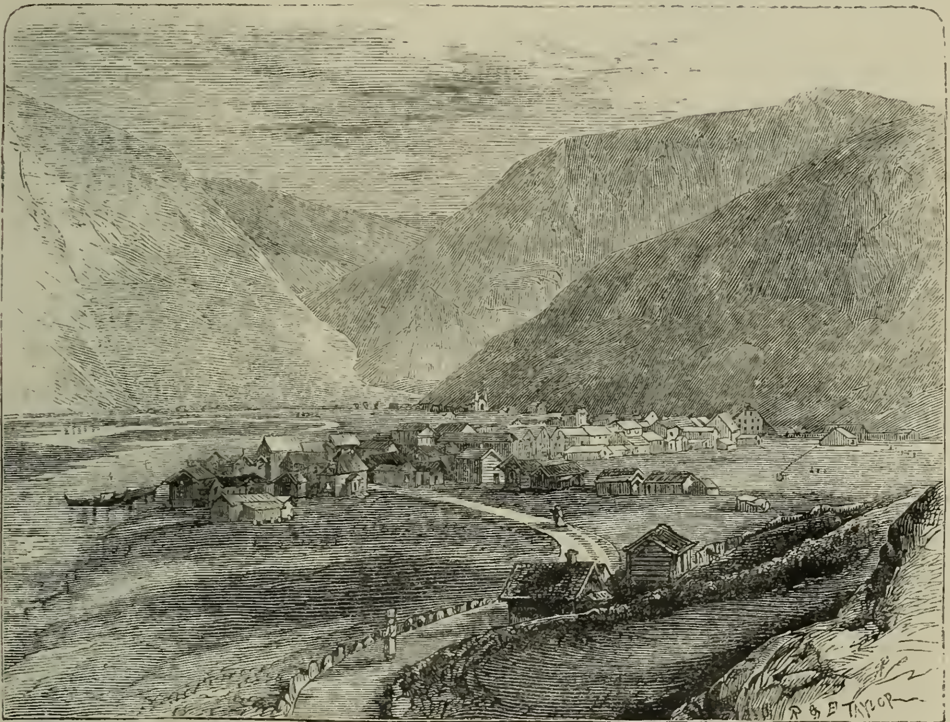
ON THE SOGNEFJORD.

any ever seen in England, waited to be gathered in reckless profusion. Flaming scarlet leaves of some unknown plant, enlivened the forest-carpet, and the sun chequered our path with long lights and shadows. It was fairyland; and had the little people suddenly made themselves visible, reclining upon the oak fern, or feasting upon the bilberries, we might have wondered more, perhaps, but not have been more enchanted.

The forest passed away, and we launched out upon quite an English scene. Narrow, picturesque lanes; broad plains, animated by genuine farm-houses with their rich stores; fields of grain, where men and women were reaping. Through the fertile plain a silvery river ran its

course to the sea, probably having already gone through the torrent fever phases before reaching the calm tenour of its present life. All this passed away, and we found ourselves at Hönefos: so rich in its marvellous rushing torrents and waterfalls: such a sheet of wide, falling, tumbling foam as can hardly be matched in Norway, perhaps not in Europe. The falls are not high, but they are long and wide-spread: the body of water is overwhelming, its force tremendous: a succession of rapids. The neighbouring saw-mills make it more picturesque, and the surrounding country is of the loveliest description.

Altogether Hönefos is worth a sojourn, and the hotel, with its



LAERDALSOREN.

pleasant garden, is comfortable and almost luxurious—at least, to anyone coming from the less civilised regions of the north. But we had decided to push on to Sundvolden, for the purpose of ascending the famous "King's View" on the following morning.

Our road lay in part through a wide tract of country, and presently we came to the quaint church of Nordenhovs, with its white body, black tapering spire, and little parsonage. The place is historically interesting. Here, in 1716, the wife of the pastor succeeded in betraying six hundred Swedes by her own wit into the hands of the Norwegians. The scene rose vividly before one, that quiet evening, throwing a romantic glow over the spot that the gathering twilight could not obliterate. One saw the brave woman setting fire to the huge pile of wood, ostensibly to warm the enemy, in reality to give

notice to the Norsemen. Then she freely distributed spirits amongst them (there must have been an abundant supply in the cellars of the good pastor to satisfy six hundred men, but history must not be questioned), and when her countrymen arrived the enemy fell an easy prey into their hands. Let us hope they received mercy.

Beyond this, skirting a lake and bowling rapidly over a hard, well-made road, we reached at length the inn of Sundvolden, at the foot of and overshadowed by the mountains one has to climb for a sight of the "King's View." It was kept by the most decent and honest, most civil and obliging landlord it had been our good fortune to meet in all Norway.

The house itself was somewhat dark and gloomy. Large rooms furnished in an old-fashioned manner. Ponderous four-post bedsteads hung with thick curtains, where at mid-day you might wrap yourself in the darkness of night. Long passages cold, cheerless, and mysterious. But there were rooms at the top, smaller, more modern than these ghost-haunted chambers, far more cheerful; out of whose windows you could look upon the great mountains, the opposite lake, and the distant hills. The landlord's courtesy, however, robbed the ghosts of their terrors, and one felt at home and at rest within his portals.

To-night the ghosts were slightly noisy in the shape of a party of Norwegians who were merry in their cups—but a very innocent merriment after all: and slightly romantic in the form of four pairs of lovers; mutual friends, who did nothing but fall out with each other and fall in again, and thus passed the time in a manner more agreeable to themselves than amusing to those around. Finally they went off in two conveyances, half gigs, half barouches, and their mirth might be heard far down the road, startling rude echoes in the quiet mountains and affrighting the silence of the lake. By this time the merry-makers above had sought their respective couches; and when we retired to ours—the new rooms in the roof—if the house was haunted, it was only by the ghosts of departed laughter. This is often quite sufficiently appalling, without troubling the visitants from the world of spirits.

Next morning we ascended the mountain to the "King's View," A. walking, I once more on horseback. But now there was neither appearance nor reality of danger, as there had been in the Vettifos excursion. No deep precipices with rushing torrents far down the height; no turning impossible corners over yawning gulfs where—to allude once more to Bailie Nicol Jarvie, and to greet his words—my horse's head hung down on the one side, and his tail on the other, like the yarn scales in the weigh-house. A safe but rough road led half way up the mountain, and beyond that a narrower, steeper path, worn into steps and hollows by a multitude of pilgrims, gave access to the summit.

Once there, we had our reward. Turning a sharp angle, there

suddenly burst upon us an immense stretch of fair fertile plain intersected by villages, lakes, islands, flowing streams, and long white roads backed by an amphitheatre of mountains, range upon range, many of them ice and snow-crowned. These stretched far away, and melted into dream pictures. The view is best seen in the afternoon or early evening, when the declining sun gilds everything with a richer, softer tone, throwing up lights and shadows that add so much to the beauties of nature.

On the lake before us, a dark speck upon the water looked in the far distance like a small bird; but a glass quickly magnified it into a gay cavalier rowing a fair dame to the opposite shore. An elopement, perhaps. Surely in such scenes something unusual and romantic must always be taking place? But in Norway elopements are not popular. The cold, calm blood of the Norseman is little given to impulse: that kind of impulse which acts first, calculates and repents afterwards. The country, too, is unfavourable to these tender episodes. Long journeys through a hard, rough country, with a prevalent east wind, giving time for reflection, and also for recapture, require a second consideration before they are lightly encountered. Now second thoughts are fatal to impulse, and consequently to elopement.

Before us was the whole range of the Ringerike; and, stretching away to the left were the calm waters of the Tyrifjord. The view was much of it too far off, too extensive to be taken in in detail; to be even appreciated at a first visit; but as we turned away we felt as if we had been gazing upon a small kingdom, one of the fair kingdoms of the earth. A party of ladies were struggling upwards, and would soon occupy the seats we had just quitted; the small opening cleared in the mountain height, with the pine trees all about; a spot full of isolation and repose, but a little too much above the world to be quite comfortable.

At noon we started on our last day's journey. In a few hours we should reach Christiania, bid farewell to carriole travelling, the changes and vicissitudes of the road, the wild freedom of this pleasant life. In point of beauty, this day equalled anything we had seen since leaving Laerdal. We skirted the borders of the beautiful Tyrifjord, on the one hand: on the other, the mountain sides were covered with tangle and gorgeous flowers, wild strawberries and raspberries, luscious and abundant. The temptation was too great: we stopped, scrambled up the hillsides, gathered juicy handfuls of the fruit, and were children once more. Now we passed through vast pine forests; now came out upon views almost as grand as that we had lately seen from the mountain height of Sundvolden; now rumbled over rude bridges spanning streams that dashed over their stony beds, and kissed the tangles that dipped their heated branches in the cooling waters.

Approaching the capital, more life and animation were apparent.

Houses sprang up in greater number; factories and mills sent forth their wonted sounds of labour; people hurried to-and-fro as if they had real business to attend to, and hard work was the stern order of the day. Sandvigen, last on the outskirts of Christiania; so near the great town one could almost hear its rush and roar, feel the suffocation of its streets. For the last time we changed horses. At the station, in a room below us, unmistakable signs of rioting and drunkenness were going on. It was the first time we had seen or heard anything of the kind in Norway. As the men one after another came reeling into the open air, A., pointing to them, said it was evident we were once more approaching civilisation.

Away we went again, and were soon in the fair suburbs of the capital. Strings of villas embowered in luxuriant gardens, where flowers grew in reckless profusion. On these our eyes, long withheld, feasted with keen pleasure. The flowers seen since leaving Christiania had been few and far between, save here and there the wild flowers of the woods growing amidst the ferns: lovely of their kind, but of another order. Many of these villas, after our late experiences, looked almost palatial, a dignified calmness and repose a noli-me-tangere air was over them all. We were returning to the pomps and vanities of the wicked world.

As to ourselves, launching at length into the busy streets of the town, we felt that for us all calmness and repose was over. With something like a groan, we realised how blissful had been the past days, now ended. The hot streets of Christiania were scorching as a furnace after the weeks of magnificent air we had been breathing. The houses seemed to fall upon and suffocate us. A glaring, mocking pair of eyes appeared to be gazing curiously from every window as we clattered along and awoke the echoes of the quieter side streets: and in a procession of two felt ourselves remarkable and conspicuous as if we had been a procession of twenty. After our late life; where nothing had been more delightfully evident than the absence of men and civilisation, the presence of absolute liberty and freedom from all manner of restraint; this returning to forests of bricks and mortar in place of the glorious pine forests with their eternal solitude and grandeur, was simply the unendurable of that which nevertheless had to be endured.

Such being the case, as we turned into the broad thoroughfare of the Hotel Scandinavia, we shook ourselves morally into the condition of stoics, bid a long lingering farewell to the past, and with Spartan fortitude braced ourselves up to the present and the inevitable.

I am ashamed to say that it had its compensations. As we entered the hospitable portals of the hotel, and presently sat down to a well-appointed table, and well-dressed dinner: not least amongst its luxuries the pure white bread to which we had long been strangers; we felt that after all every medal has its reverse side, every cloud its

silver lining. A humiliating confession, but truth, like murder, will out soon or syne.

In the visitors' book we saw recorded the name of Herr von X., our pleasant travelling companion to the North Cape. So he had safely braved the dangers of mountain climbing, crossed the Justedal Glacier, and was now probably refreshing himself with military manœuvres in Germany.

The next day we devoted to matters small and trifling—but then trifles make up the sum of human life. Strolls about the town. Wondering whether it would ever again be possible to endure these miles and miles of streets and crowds and crowds of people. Falling amongst friends (where will you go and *not* fall amongst them ?) who, proceeding northwards in their yacht, were about to go through many of our late experiences, under more favourable conditions. We, alas, had no yacht, and in default, embarked at five o'clock on board the steamer for Hull.

A small crowd of passengers were on board ; a great crowd lined the quay, of all nations and kindreds and tongues. As the gangway was withdrawn, and the ship left the sides, a subdued shout arose ; hats and handkerchiefs were waved ; men and women clung to each other sobbing and sorrowing, having just parted from sons and daughters emigrating to a strange land. Young birds, headstrong and ill-advised, will leave the old nests—and, as aliens, sometimes count the bitter cost. One young fellow on board, unable to bear the sight, and perhaps repenting at the twelfth hour, was with difficulty prevented from throwing himself overboard, and swimming back to land : the dear land, the dear, broken hearts he was leaving behind, his happiness, his all—but never before realised. I, for one, would have held no staying hand.

Gradually the crowd faded, the houses, the towers and steeples of Christiania grew less and less, until all went out of sight and hearing.

We steamed down the romantic fjord. Twilight fell and gave place to darkness. Mentally, in the blackness of the hour, we wished a long "Good-night" to picturesque, health-giving Norway ; its lonely pine forests, its rushing waterfalls, its fields of ice, and marvellous iron-bound coast ; its regions of midnight sun and midnight glory ; its stern, eternal hills and gentler valleys. And to its hospitable, earnest people, an "Au revoir, sans adieu."

THE END

A PERILOUS ADVENTURE.

By F. E. M. Notley, Author of "Olive Varcoe."

SITTING by my fireside this Christmas time, with my young wife by me, she prays me to detail in writing the history of that perilous adventure which befell me at this period just a year since.

I was not married then. I was Florian's lover, though not more her lover than I am now. I was living as I am at present at my paternal mansion of Penkivel, only I was a forlorn man living alone, my heart brooding over a jealous affection, and my mind filled with a blank melancholy.

My mother had died but lately, and there was a great gap in our household—a gap hard to fill, for she was a notable woman, and a loving mother to me. A trifle fond of power perhaps, a trifle jealous and exacting; but I have a little too much of her blood in me for that matter, so I will not complain that her affection required of me, in return, an exclusive attention and a single heart. I gave both. Knowing all she had done for me, I thought it but a small thing that I should remain single for her sake.

Nevertheless this bachelorhood had somewhat soured me, and at thirty-five I was conscious that I could no longer play my part among younger men, or catch the eye of a maiden, as I had done some eight or ten years ago. And this grieved me; for, down in the West, there lived a lady whom for three years I had loved secretly and too well. It was for my mother's sake that I spoke not of my love. Looking sorrowfully on her aged face, I could not find it in my heart to embitter her last days by placing another mistress in the old house, where she had reigned queen for more than forty years. So I held my peace, and bore to see my love surrounded by handsomer and younger suitors than myself—men before whom my claims would seem weak as cobwebs in the eyes of a young maiden. And yet sometimes the remembrance of a glance, a blush, a tone, made my heart beat wildly with hope, as in my loneliness I counted these shadows over in my memory.

And now my mother was dead. She died blessing me; seeming at last to understand that, if she had done much for me, I too had borne somewhat for her.

"Give yourself a comforter, dear Ralph," she said eagerly. "Waste no time in grief; your household needs a mistress: marry, my son, and may God bless your choice!"

Thus I had her blessing on it; and if I could only persuade myself that my suit would prosper, I might speak now; but my hopes were so low that I dared not. I was no longer young, my face was worn, my hair was sprinkled with silver threads. And this

change had come to me through her—for her sake. Oh, that I could make her understand this!

Three years is a long time for a man to stifle love and endure jealousy, doubt, despair. And yet when I looked down on the face of my mother, so beautiful in death, I felt glad that I had borne these things silently and in patience. If Florian might only comprehend that I had suffered, and love me for it! but no, I was too old now to win a woman so young and fair.

Thus ran my thoughts, therefore it was no marvel I was exceeding sad after my mother's funeral, when I sat in my house alone.

It was Christmas Eve, and, because of my grief, there was silence among my servants, and there were no guests in the house, no voice of merriment or of song. It was very chill, very lonely, and I sat alone.

Suddenly the door was opened by a rough hand, and there broke offensively upon my solitude a gay roysterer,—a merry blade men called him—*her* cousin. The man was handsome and young, and had a careless, easy grace, a winning way with him that maddened me. For I knew his soul was not so fair as his face, and it was hard to see him gaining sweet smiles and gracious glances from those who had no means of judging him, save by his outward looks.

"Why, man," he cried, wringing my hand with false friendship, "thou'rt grim and glum, and silent as a drowned cat this Christmas tide! Come, cheer up! order in the punch-bowl and the claret: grief is dry; and at thy years there is no time for sorrow. Let us laugh and be merry. I vow there are wrinkles on thy brow since last I saw thee, and thy pate grows grey as a bald magpie's."

I answered his rude greeting with few words, but they were cautious for *her* sake, and I rang, and ordered Christmas cheer for him.

We talked and drank till late into the night. In his cups his talk flowed freely, and his words were bitter to me. He loved his cousin, he said, and he believed her heart was his; he was going to ride next day—Christmas Day—to her father's house; he should be in time for dinner; he should stay with them a week—the feasting, merry Christmas week. Had I any message? He would take it with pleasure; or a letter if I chose.

"I had no letter, no message," I answered coldly.

Ah, well, I was a dismal man, and he was sorry for me. I had grown lately to look quite an old bachelor too. Why did I not brush up that grizzled hair of mine, and make love to some staid lady of my own age? There was Miss Penelope Penguin, she was but thirty-four, and not ill-looking; what did I think of her?

I hated her. And I considered his remarks offensive.

Oh, well, he begged pardon; he meant no offence. At all events, let us drink to our future brides. He filled his cup to the brim, and, reeling as he stood, drank to the health of the woman I

loved. "Here's to the health of Florian the fair!" he cried, "and may she be my bride before Lammas-tide! Well, sir," he added with tipsy fierceness, "will you not give a health likewise?"

"I cannot give a better toast, or a fairer lady," I answered. "I drink to Florian also. And may I see her in her shroud rather than wife to such a man as you!" I thundered forth with fury.

Staring at me with stupid amazement in his bleared eyes, he flung the silver flagon across the table wildly, and then fell helpless and drunken on the floor. I rang the bell.

"Put this *gentleman* to bed," I said quietly. With that I left the room; I could not endure the sight of his handsome, foolish face, now that he had talked of Florian as his wife.

In the morning, I saw by my servant's looks that he was gone. I sat at my breakfast lonely, counting in my heart the miles still stretching between him and her. At dinner-hour he would be there—he would see her face—touch her hand—whisper the words in her ears that I had not dared to say. I thought of the dance, the song, the jest, the fair rooms bright with evergreens and music; and with heavy, jealous eyes I looked round upon my sombre dwelling, where the pale shadow of my dead still rested.

And this was Christmas Day! Truly a melancholy time for a solitary man, who knows himself uncared for, and whose "way of life has fallen into the sere and yellow leaf."

The next day, and the next went by; and on the third there came a letter from him. "Had we drunk too much on Christmas Eve?" he asked. "He had a confused memory of a fight, in which he certainly came off victorious, being unbruised. However, he hoped I would forget and forgive. For his part, he bore no malice, and was sorry for my loneliness and my loss. He had talked of me to his cousin, and she was sorry also, very sorry. And her father had said, "Would I finish my Christmas with them?" It was doubly hard to be lonely at such a time, and *she* thought that grief was not so ill to bear when shared; so would I come? I should have a Cornish welcome, and good cheer."

He ended in his rough, wild way thus:—

"Hang it, man, brighten thy long visage, and bestride thine horse, and let the good beast bring thee hither with all speed. Here shalt thou find winter and fair weather, and a fairer lady, who deems not her cousin, forsooth, good company enough for Christmas."

It was hard to take an invitation from his hand. My pride rebelled against his interference; I would not go. I held to this resolve all that day, and the next till noon; then I read his letter again, and fancied I saw a vexed tone in it—fancied I saw that he had written it perforce against his will. At this my stubborn mood melted.

I hesitated, pondered, then yielded. My weak heart yearned to see her face, and to have that joy, I would bear to behold it beaming smiles on *him*.

Half ashamed of my weakness, I lingered till next day—the 30th; and even then it was past noon when I started.

But my horse was good, and if I rode hard, I might be at Trevesy by nightfall. There was a sprinkle of snow on the ground, and a feathery shower fell lightly around me, of which I thought nothing till sunset. The short, dark day was over at five; and at that hour a sharp wind sprang up, and the snow began falling thickly. I felt somewhat blinded and bewildered by the big flakes, ever flying downwards and onwards, and around me, like a cold, patient army, whose onslaught could never be stayed or driven back.

Still I pushed on, though the poor beast I rode shook and trembled, and strove, in his dumb way, to reason against my headstrong will. And now, with some dismay, I suddenly perceived, by the sinking of my horse, even to his flanks, in heaped snow, that, bewildered by the whiteness, he and I had lost the road. It was but a rough one at the best, for I was in a wild country, where mines were many, and men and dwellings few. Extricating my poor steed from the drifted snow wherein he floundered, I rested him a moment, and shouted aloud for help. Again and again my cry came back to me, following on the wings of the cold wind, but no other sound broke the deathly stillness of the night.

Oh, for a saving light in some charitable window! But there was none—only snow and darkness, darkness and snow all around. I thought it terrible; and yet in a little span of time from this I would have deemed it Paradise to be lying lonely on the heaped snow upon this drear moor.

"Give me thine hand, wife. Methinks I have need of the touch of thy dear lips to give me courage, ere, even in memory, I can dare recall the horror—the hideous horror—of that night. So let me hold thee thus, while my shrinking pen draws the details of my peril."

I put my horse to a sharp canter, and he went about a furlong blindly, then stood still, snorting with terror. I strove to urge him on, but he refused to obey either whip or spur. Seeing no reason for my horse's fright and stubbornness, I spurred him sharply, and urged him with angry voice to obedience. His wonderful obstinacy compelled me at length to dismount, and, with my drawn sword in my hand, prepared for highwayman or footpad, I dragged him onwards by the bridle. Upon this he made one hasty plunge forward, then stopped, and at the same instant the earth went from beneath my feet, and I fell—fell I knew not whither, down, down, into deep darkness unfathomable, terrible as the great pit. I can scarcely say whether I thought as I fell, yet I knew I was going to death—knew I was descending one of those unused shafts that lie out on many a Cornish moor—knew that my bones would lie unthought of in its depths for ever.

Surely there are moments in time that count as years, for, as I fell, I *saw* my whole life pass before me, and old buried actions long forgotten surged up fiery. I saw my mother's face and Florian's. As hers came I closed my eyes. "Let me die now," I said; and, with a great cry to God for mercy, I gave myself up to Death.

But even at that instant my flight was arrested, and I hung in mid-air, clinging by my hands, to what I knew not. It was my sword, which I had forgotten that I held. By a miracle it had thrust itself, as I fell, between the earth and the rocks in the side of the shaft; and there, jammed fast, it held me up.

I cannot explain how this occurred—I only know that it was so. As that cry for mercy escaped my lips, the mercy came. My sword caught in the interstices of the rock, and I was held up, my feet dangling over the abyss, my hands clinging to the hilt of my good blade. It was firm as a wedge—I could feel that, in spite of my trembling; yet still my position was horrible. To remain thus, to hold on, was torture unutterable; but to yield even for a moment was death. There was no hope of release for hours—there was no possibility of relief of posture; there was nothing but strong endurance and courage to carry me through. I waited—I suffered—I prayed.

Ah! darling wife, you lean your fair face on mine, and your tears fall. Looking into your loving eyes, and paying back kiss for kiss, I thank God that I endured and hoped. It was a night to me of fire. The winds blew and the snow fell, but the cold touched me not; I had fallen too deeply into the shaft for that, even if my tortured blood could have felt it.

Morning broke at last, and hope grew with it. At intervals I had called aloud through all the night; but now, with scarcely any intermission, I raised my voice in cries for help. I did this till weariness stopped me; then I rested in agonised hope of a voice in reply. There was none. No sound reached me. I was in my grave, alone. I called again, again, again! I husbanded my voice. I drew in my breath, and shouted with the strength of despair. There was no answer.

The sun travelled upwards, and I knew it was high noon, though to me the stars were visible likewise; yet the mid-day rays shone somewhat into the shaft, and showed me how I hung. The pit here was not quite perpendicular; it sloped slightly from my feet outwards, and I had found rest for one foot on a ledge of rock. Oh, the ease to my anguish from this merciful rest! Tears sprang to my eyes as I thanked God for it.

The sun had shown me that to climb out of the pit unaided was impossible, so I called for help again, and called till voice failed me. I ceased to cry, and night fell down again.

As the hours crept on, a kind of madness seized me: phantoms sprang up from the pit, and tempted me to plunge below; horrible eyes glared down on me; voices mocked me. But worst of all was the

sound of water—a purling rill flowing gently in my very ears, trickling drop by drop in sweetest music, horribly distinct. Water ! To reach water I would willingly die ; but I *knew* it was a madness, so I resisted the fiery thirst that would have made me release my hold and perish. Water ! Yes, there was water at the bottom of the shaft, fathoms deep below my feet, but I could only reach that to die ; and there was water on the fair earth, fathoms above me—water I should never see again.

I grew dizzy—sick—blind. I should have fainted—have fallen—died ; but as I leant my head against the rock, I felt as though a cold, refreshing hand were laid upon it suddenly.

It was water ! It was no madness—it *was* water ! A tiny stream trickling through the bare wall of rock, like dew from heaven. I held forth my parched tongue and caught the drops as they fell ; and as I drank my strength was renewed, and hope and the desire for life grew warm within me again. And yet on this, the second night of my horrible imprisonment, I cared not so passionately, I looked not so eagerly, for succour. My limbs were numbed, my brain deadened ; life was ebbing towards death ; a shadow at times fell over my eyes ; and if I held still to the hilt of my sword, if my feet sought still the ledge that rested them, they did it mechanically, from habit, and not from hope.

I think sometimes I was not in my right mind. I was among green fields and woods, I was gathering flowers, I was climbing mountains ; and from these visions I awoke always to darkness—darkness above, around ; darkness below, hiding the abyss that hungered greedily for my life. And no friendly face, no voice, no footfall near. Not a step, through all these slow, slow hours. If passing peasant, through the day, had heard the lonely cry rising from the depths, he had set it down to ghost or pixy, and had passed on his frightened way regardless.

And now the night was wearing on, and no rescue. I could not live till morning—I knew that. "Well, I would die with a prayer for mercy on my lips, and the thought of Florian hidden in my heart. She would marry soon, and if she had ever guessed my long, long love, she would smile on it then as an old tale, and forget it. He was a hare-brained fellow—witless, wild, not wicked. No, now I was dying, I would not let jealousy blind me. I would do him justice."

My mind wandered again. My mother waited for me, I must hurry home ; but I was bound by a chain, in outer darkness, and I was going to die. There was no Christian in all the land to succour me—I was forgotten and forsaken, left in the pit—and I would unclasp my hands, and fall and die.

No, I would call again once more. "Help ! help ! Mercy ! help !"

As my fainting voice died in the dark depth, and quivered up to

the glimmering sky, I felt hope die with it, and I gave up all thought of life. I turned my eyes towards my grave below, and murmured with parched lips—

"Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord!"

The little rill that had saved my life hitherto trickled on, and its silvery murmur, as it dropped on the rock below, was the sole sound that broke the deathly silence around me.

My prayer was over, and I had not relinquished my hold. I was stronger than I had deemed myself: I would cry out again, "Help! help! help!"

I stopped. I listened. A sound was floating on the wind. Coming, going, joining the drip, drip, drip of the rill—then dying, then returning. Listening with my whole being, I recognised the sound.

Bells—church bells—chimes ringing in the New Year. "Oh God, have mercy on me! have mercy on me!"

Bells ringing in the New Year—bells chiming in the ears of friends, telling of gladness and of hope—bells clashing in at merry intervals, between music and laughter, loving greetings, kisses and joy.

Will no one in my Father's house take pity on me? Am I missed nowhere? The bells chime for feasting and gladness; and I am here hanging between life and death. The jaws of the grave are beneath me, my joints are broken—and the bells chime on. Would it not be a good deed on this New Year's Day to save me? O feasters and revellers, hear me!

"Help! help! It is Christmas-time! Help, for Christ's sake, good people!" The bells float nearer, and drown the drip of the trickling water; and I cry "Help! help!" saying, "Now will I call till I die." A film grows over my eyes, but my voice is strong and desperate, as I shout, "Christmas-tide! For Christ's sake, help, good Christians!"

A great light—a flash as of fire! For a moment I deem it death; then, gazing upwards, I see, amid a glare of torches, faces—oh, they were angels to me!—eager faces peering downwards. And close by me swings a torch, let down into the depths; its light falls on my haggard face—a great shout rends the night sky.

"He is here!—he is safe!—he lives!"

I cannot speak, though my lips move, and my heart stands still as I see one, two, three daring men swing themselves over the abyss—miners, used to danger—and in a moment stout arms are around me, and I am borne upwards, carried gently like a child, placed an instant on my feet, and then laid down tenderly on the heath. I am so weary, and faint, and worn, that I lie with closed eyes, never striving to say a word of thanks.

"Go not so near the brink, madam, I entreat!" I hear a voice cry sharply. Then I open my aching lids, and between me and the shaft there kneels a white figure; between me and the sky there

bends a white face, and tears fall down upon my brow fast and warm. It was Florian. But even when she stole her little hand into mine—mine so cramped and numbed that it gave no response to her tenderness—and even when she stooped and pressed her lips upon my cheek, I could not breathe a word to thank her.

Yet Florian, dear wife, let me tell thee now, that from the depths of my happy heart there rose a hymn of joy, and I understood from that moment that thou wert mine, and I owed my life to thy love.

Then thy sweet lips breathed words that fell upon my soul like manna—words of tenderness and pity that made the torture of those slow hours in the pit fade away, so mighty did this reward seem for my sufferings.

I was carried to Trevesy, and as the men bore me along, you walking by my side, I heard them tell the tale of my servants' fright when my horse returned home alone, and how they came to your father for tidings of me. Then they whispered of the painful search through the day and night—the tracking of my horse's hoofs upon the snow, and the story of the scared peasant, who all night long had heard the cry of tortured ghosts issuing from the earth. And this story seized upon my Florian's heart with deadly fear, and turning back upon the black moor, she tracked the hoof-marks, till they stopped upon the brink of the old, forgotten shaft, the shaft of the worked-out mine, well named the Great Wheal Mercy.

There was I found and saved by her I had loved so long. And, dearest, as I slowly came back to life on that New Year's morning, and faintly whispered to you of my long love, my patient silence, my pent-up sorrow, you, in your great pity, thinking of my sufferings in the shaft, poured out all your maiden heart. And your loving words, my Florian, were sweeter to me than even the trickling spring had been in Great Wheal Mercy.

Because of my silence, my patient waiting, my tender thought for my mother, you loved me better, you said. So in a month you were my wife, and this Christmas-tide I sit by a happy hearth; and looking down on the bright faces of wife and child, I thank God for that crowning mercy, thy love, dear one, which saved me on New Year's Day from a dreadful death in the shaft of Great Wheal Mercy.

Hark, dearest! the bells ring out for another year as I write; they chime their welcome from every steeple in the land, awakening us to fresh hopes and labours. Sweetest wife, the year is done and another round of time is born to "crown the earth with mercies."

NOTE.—The account of this gentleman's perilous adventure and deliverance from the shaft into which he fell, is to be found in Borlase's "History of Cornwall." His life was saved, as related, through his sword being caught in a crevice of the rocky sides of the shaft. The occurrence took place in the parish of Constantine.

THE BETTER LAND.

I sat one night in a lighted hall,
  In the lonely midst of a silent crowd,
And I heard a beautiful ballad fall,
  Like the lark's sweet song from a sunlit cloud.
Close at my side sat one whose hand
  Has a greater power than a king of old;
And the singer sang of the better land,
  And the streets of gold.

She said that the flowers ne'er ceased to bloom,
  That could not grow in this world of ours;
That songs too sweet for the days of gloom
  Filled all the length of those brighter hours;
That pleasures no mortal heart had known,
  In infinite numbers gathered there;
That sorrow forgot to make her moan,
  And Hope her prayer.

And I drank, with a soul athirst, each word,
  And the words as they fell were filled with rest;
'Twas only a song I had often heard,
  Yet it grew like a psalm within my breast.
For I saw the sweet face quivering near,
  I heard the tender, pitiful sigh,
And I said in my heart, "That land is here,
  And very nigh."

What made that beautiful realm so fair,
  And lit the gleam of its golden hours?
'Twas the glory of love outshining there,
  And kissing the lips of buds and flowers.
Love was the wonderful power for good,
  That banished the gloom of grief and care;—
And love was the form that woke, and stood
  Between us there.

So I knew that the better land begins
  Here, in the saddening cares of earth;
That even from out our tears and sins
  The endless City of Rest has birth.
And a fuller light to my soul was given,
  An angel touched me from above,
For I learnt that night that Love is Heaven,
  And Heaven is Love.

J. T. BURTON WOLLASTON.

OLD VANDERHAVEN'S WILL.

By Mary E. Penn.

A GOLDEN summer evening some fifteen years ago. The shadow of the Belfry Tower lay aslant the sunny market-place of the ancient city of Bruges, and the musical chimes fell sweetly on the warm, still, evening air, as they played the Shadow Song from Dinorah.

The old houses which surrounded the place, with their quaint "step" gables, carved timbers, and deep-set casements, seemed to have fallen asleep in the sunshine, dreaming perhaps of the days when Bruges was one of the centres of the world's commerce; when her haughty burghers lived like princes, and the ministers of twenty nations resided within her walls.

One of the largest and most picturesque of the ancient tenements —formerly the Guild-house of a wealthy Corporation—was occupied by M. Nicolas Vanderhaven, who, after a busy and prosperous life as a merchant at Antwerp, had retired to spend the evening of his days in his native city.

On the first floor, looking out on the Market-place, was a spacious apartment which had been the Banquet chamber of the Guild, and was now used as a studio by M. Vanderhaven's grandson. No artist could have desired more harmonious surroundings. The room, though unfurnished, was a picture in itself; with its painted ceiling, walls panelled in dark polished oak, superb Renaissance chimney-piece, and the sixteenth-century tapestry that hung before the door. Portraits of the members of the Guild still occupied their old places on the walls, but on a panel to the right of the chimney-piece hung a more modern picture, representing an ancestor of the present proprietor, in whose family the house had been for many generations.

The only occupant of the room this summer evening was Bernhardt Vanderhaven, a handsome, dark-eyed young fellow, with moustache and short pointed beard, dressed, with a certain affectation of carelessness, in a quaintly-cut velvet blouse and open collar.

He had drawn his easel close to the window to catch the failing light, and was painting industriously, puffing at his cigarette meantime, and only pausing now and then to cast a half-reproachful glance at the darkening sky.

At length he drew back, looking at his work with a critical frown. Gradually his brow relaxed, and a smile stole to his lips.

"Yes, it is like her," he muttered; "very like! Just that wistful

look in the eyes, and the tender, trustful smile I know so well. My sweet Annette!"

The painting was a half-length portrait of a young girl in the richly picturesque costume of a noble Flemish lady of the seventeenth century; a girl with a delicate, oval face, only faintly tinted with rose-colour; sweet, smiling lips, and softest hazel eyes, which had a dreamy, "out-looking" gaze that gave a touch of spirituality to her beauty. The young man studied every line of the sweet face as if he had never seen it before. So absorbed was he that he did not hear the opening of the door, and started when a familiar voice behind him said, drily: "I fear I am interrupting you, Bernhardt. Shall I come again when you are less occupied?"

"You caught me dawdling for once, grandfather," the young man answered, turning towards the intruder with a pleasant smile; "but I have been working furiously all day, and my picture is nearly finished."

"I am glad to hear it," was the reply, as, without even glancing at the canvas, the intruder took his seat on the only chair the room contained, unceremoniously sweeping on to the floor a heap of drapery which encumbered it.

Monsieur Nicolas Vanderhaven was a handsome, vigorous man of seventy, with few signs of age about him, save his silvered hair and the thick, white brows, beneath which his keen eyes glittered "like fire under snow." His chin was square and firm, and his closely-shut mouth would have been terribly grim but for some lines about the corners, which showed a gleam of humour and kindliness. His face was a pretty fair index to his character; shrewd, hard, but not unkindly, and capable on occasion of generous impulses.

"I am glad to hear it," he repeated. "There has been enough, and rather too much, of dreaming and daubing: it is time you began life in earnest."

Bernhardt raised his brows.

"I thought I had begun it in very serious earnest," he returned, with a half smile, standing with one foot on the rail of his painting-stool, and his elbow on his knee. "I have worked hard enough lately to satisfy even you, Monsieur."

"Worked? humph, well—if you call that work. But who is the better for it? What comes of it all?"

"Nothing yet perhaps, but fame and fortune will come of it some day—at least, I hope so," added Bernhardt; "and that hope is my guiding star."

"A will-o'-the-wisp that will lead you into a swamp," was the encouraging comment.

The young man laughed, and tossed back his long hair.

"Come, grandfather, how can you tell what my chances are?" he said good-humouredly; "you never even glance at my pictures. I should be glad if you would, for you are an excellent judge of painting, though you have such a contempt for artists."

"Artists who are worthy the name have my admiration and respect," answered Mr. Vanderhaven deliberately. "I only despise those shallow pretenders who make art an excuse for idleness and affectation; for wearing abnormal coats and beards" (his listener winced slightly); "leading abnormal lives, and being altogether chartered as Bohemians. However, enough of that," he continued. "I want to have a little serious talk with you."

The young artist gave a resigned sort of shrug, and perching himself on his painting-stool, prepared to listen.

"You will be twenty-one on the first of next month," his grandfather began. "You have not forgotten our agreement?"

"No, sir; I have not forgotten. You were to leave me free to follow my own devices till I was of age, then I was to choose between art and commerce; to decide whether I would go on with my painting, or join my cousin in the house at Antwerp, of which you are still the nominal head."

"Exactly. Well?"

"Well—I have chosen art, or rather art has chosen me. She has called, and I must follow, whether she rewards me or not. I am sorry to disappoint you, grandfather, knowing you had set your heart on my entering the firm, but—it is impossible. I should never be a man of business. I am a painter or nothing."

Ominously grim grew his companion's face as he listened, and the lines about his mouth had nothing humorous now, but he replied quietly enough.

"Very good. You are prepared to take the consequences of your decision, I presume?"

"The consequences? I am prepared to work hard and bide my time, if that is what you mean."

"Not quite. Are you prepared to earn your own living? Will your brush find you food to eat, clothes to wear, and a roof to cover you?"

"Well—not yet, perhaps; I haven't tried to sell my pictures; but after a time ——"

"After a time, when fame and fortune have found you—just so. Meanwhile, you see, like many another 'genius' before you, you stand a chance of starving in a garret."

Bernhardt stared at him in astonishment and dismay.

"I don't understand," he began; "you do not mean ——"

"I do not mean to keep you here in luxury and idleness, when you have set my wishes at defiance, upset my plans, and frustrated the ambition of my life."

"What was that?" his grandson interrupted.

"To leave the old firm as I found it, flourishing under the old name, that has been transmitted stainless from father to son for four generations—since the time of our founder, Simon Vanderhaven." And he glanced at the old portrait by the chimney-piece, which seemed to look back at him with sympathy and approval.

"But my cousin Cornelius—" Bernhardt began.

"Your cousin is an excellent manager, and a keen man of business—somewhat too keen, perhaps—but he is not a Vanderhaven. I had hoped that your father would have been my successor, but he is gone before me. You will soon be the last of the old stock."

Bernhardt was silent a moment, looking at his grandfather with compunction and regret.

"Grandfather," he faltered, "I did not understand—I did not know you felt it so deeply. Believe me, I am grieved to disappoint you, but——"

"Grieve for yourself, rather, if you disobey me," was the sternly-spoken rejoinder. "But I do not accept your decision as final," added M. Vanderhaven as he rose; "I give you to the end of the month to reconsider it."

Bernhardt followed him to the door, and held back the tapestry, looking wistfully into his face.

"It would be easy to decide if I had only myself to think of," he muttered; "but there is Annette—I mean there is some one else who has a right to be considered."

The old gentleman stopped short on the threshold. "A-ah?" he said, interrogatively. "And who is 'Annette,' if you please?"

"She is—her name is van Elven," he stammered.

"The daughter of that van Elven who died bankrupt a few years ago?"

Bernhardt coloured. "He was an honourable man, though unfortunate. He left a name as stainless as our own."

"Have I said to the contrary? But he died bankrupt, and left his wife and daughter to live on charity—or starve."

"They do neither, Monsieur. Annette maintains herself and her mother by lace-making."

The other made a sort of grimace. "And you propose to make this little lace girl your wife?"

"With your permission, Monsieur."

"Or without it," was the dry addition. "You will ask her advice in the matter we have been discussing, I suppose?"

"I—yes, I shall certainly consult her."

"And let her decide for you," the old merchant recommended, glancing shrewdly at him under his heavy brows. "I will wager she takes my view of the subject when she knows what is at stake. Women are wonderfully clear-sighted and reasonable where their own interests are concerned. I leave my cause with perfect confidence in Mademoiselle Annette's hands." And with an ironical bow and smile, he passed over the threshold, and closed the door.

Left to himself, the young man paced the room with a face of troubled thought. Yes, Annette would take his grandfather's view of the case, he supposed, though not, as the latter had cynically suggested, from interested motives. It was not poverty she would

fear, but the separation which was inevitable if he were cast at once on his own resources. It might be years before he could ask her to share his lot, and he had no right to expect that she should waste her youth in waiting for him.

And yet, to give up the one purpose and ambition of his life : to turn his back on the luminous heights that rose before him, and descend to the grey and level plain ! It was hard indeed.

He glanced round the room, and thought of the happy hours he had spent there, in eager pursuit of the ideal ; of the fair visions that had kept him company, the hopes that had lured him on. Would love itself compensate him for all he would lose in losing art ?

The sound of the chimes roused him from his troubled reflections. He glanced at his watch.

"A quarter to seven ! I did not know it was so late. I promised to meet Annette on the Pont du Béguinage at sunset."

He put aside his brushes and palette, and exchanging his blouse for a coat, left the house and took his way to one of the innumerable bridges which give the old city its Flemish name. He was first at the trysting-place.

He folded his arms on the parapet railing, and looked thoughtfully at the familiar scene before him. In the background rose the tall spire of Notre Dame, bathed in the golden glow of sunset, while the group of roofs and gables at its base were lost in purple shade. The picturesque, irregular old houses which bordered the canal were built for the most part sheer to the water, with little terraces or balconies overhanging it, but some had a strip of garden between, with a boat moored under a willow. Every detail of the scene was reflected in the still water as in a mirror, except where, here and there, the picture was broken by a floating network of water-lily leaves. Beyond the bridge was the archway leading to the Béguinage ; the chapel bell was summoning the sisters to "Benediction." Presently the church clock struck seven ; then once more the belfry chimes rang out, softened by distance.

The golden summer evening, the gently flowing water, the softly chiming bells all blended together in a charm that soothed and cheered him.

He took out his pocket sketch-book, and was dotting down the outlines of the scene, when the sound of a light footstep made him turn.

It was Annette. She did not see him at first, and he watched her as she advanced, glancing about her with her soft, short-sighted eyes. How sweet she looked, he thought, with her pretty, pensive mouth and dreamy eyes ; those eyes which had always a shade of tender melancholy, even when her lips smiled, as they did most brightly when he came forward to meet her.

Yes, she was worth any sacrifice, he decided. His mind was made up now as to the course he should take.

"Have I kept you waiting?" she asked, giving him a dainty little hand that a duchess might have envied. "I have been very busy finishing some work. Daylight grows precious after midsummer."

"You try your eyes too much, dear," he said, looking at her tenderly. "You know they are not strong, and if you overwork them they may fail you altogether some day."

"Do not suggest anything so terrible," she said, with a little shiver, passing her hand over them. "Have you been drawing?" she continued, looking at his sketch-book.

"It is only an outline," he returned, showing it to her.

"The view from here would make a beautiful picture," she remarked; "you must paint it some day, for me."

"I shall paint no more, Annette."

She looked up, startled. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," he returned with a forced laugh, "that in future I am to be a slave of the quill instead of the brush. You remember I told you my grandfather wished me to enter the business when I was of age?"

"And you have consented?"

"Not yet, but I must. He tells me if I refuse he will turn me adrift; then you and I must part. That is not to be thought of, is it, darling?"

"So it is for my sake you are giving up your art?" she said regretfully.

"No, for my own, because I can live without art, but I can't live without you," was his reply, as he drew her hand through his arm.

"And you are quite sure it does not grieve you to relinquish all your dreams of fame?" she questioned, with a wistful smile. "Perhaps after all it would not have made you happier, if you had won it. 'Laurels have a bitter taste,' the old poet says."

"Yes, but a true artist does not work for 'laurels' only. The service of art is its own reward. I should hardly care for fame if I felt that I had produced good work, which would live when I was forgotten—as I once hoped to do. Ah well," he added, with a quick sigh, "I must forget my old dreams, and outlive my old self, if I can. Perhaps I shall develop an unsuspected genius for commerce—who knows?"

He laughed rather drearily, and looked straight before him, as if he were gazing down the long grey vista of the new life on which he was to enter. That look and tone were a revelation to his companion. She realized for the first time what the sacrifice cost him.

"Bernhardt, you will not be happy," she exclaimed with sudden conviction. "You can never adapt yourself to a life so unsuited for you, in which all your talents and capabilities will be wasted. Your nature must be crushed to fit it. Your grandfather does not understand this, but I do, and I dare not accept such a sacrifice. Tell

ROBERT BARNES R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"HAVE I KEPT YOU WAITING?" SHE ASKED.

me, dear," she went on, laying her hand on his arm, "what would you do if you were free—if it were not for me, I mean?"

"I should borrow a few hundred francs of my cousin and go to Rome," he answered.

"Yes; you could live cheaply there, and you would have congenial companions, and learn all that the great masters could teach you. Why should you not go?"

"And leave you, Annette?"

"Not for long, I hope. Dearest," she added earnestly, "I would rather part from you for ever than live to feel that I had been the means of spoiling your life. You shall go to Rome."

"No, no! do not tempt me," he interposed, turning his head aside.

"Yes; for my sake," she persisted. "That you may win a name I shall be proud to bear some day."

"That day may never come, Annette."

"Everything comes to those who can wait," she quoted, smiling, though her eyes were full of tears; "and you would not have to wait long for success; I am sure of it."

His face flushed and paled; he looked troubled and wavering.

"Well," he said at length, "I need not decide now. I have a whole month to consider. Let us talk of something else."

She said no more, but she foresaw what his decision would be, and, bravely as she had spoken, her heart sank when she thought of the coming separation. She had a reason which Bernhardt did not guess for fearing the future. She had never acknowledged to him the dread which had haunted her lately, growing heavier every day. If he had suspected that hidden trouble, nothing would have induced him to leave her.

II.

On the morning of the first of July, Monsieur Vanderhaven sat at breakfast in his dining-room, a pleasant old room, the prevailing tint of which was a sober brown, relieved with brighter touches of colour here and there, in a repoussé salver, or Grès-de-Flandres vase, and in the rich bindings of the books which lined one of the walls.

When he had finished his cup of café-au-lait, he touched the bell at his elbow. The summons was answered by his housekeeper, a stately, high-nosed old dame, wearing the cap and fichu of her native province of Liège.

"Tell Monsieur Bernhardt that I wish to speak to him."

Instead of leaving the room she closed the door, and approached him mysteriously.

"He is not in the house, Monsieur," she said. "His bed has not been slept in, and—and I have just found this letter, addressed to you, on his table."

She lingered, watching him curiously, as he opened it. He dis-

missed her with one sharp word, then read it through, his face growing darker with every line.

"So—he is gone to study in Rome," he repeated, with a sour smile, when he had finished. "Very well; he may starve in Rome. I have done with him."

He took a vesta-match from the inkstand, twisted the letter, deliberately burnt it, and then mounted the stairs to the Banquet-room. The painting materials were gone, but the unfinished portrait remained on the easel.

He frowned as his eyes fell upon it. He guessed whom it represented, and his heart was bitter against this girl, who, it seemed from Bernhardt's letter, had encouraged him in his disobedience.

A palette-knife lay on the ledge of the easel; in a sudden impulse of resentment he took it up, and was about to cut the canvas from the frame, but as he raised his hand, the sweet eyes seemed to meet his with a wistful appeal, as if in deprecation of his anger. His hand fell, his brow relaxed; he gazed at the fair face with a sort of fascination.

Then, as he noted the execution of the picture, a new expression dawned in his eyes; a mingling of astonishment and half-reluctant admiration. If the lad could paint in this way at twenty, what might he not achieve when his powers were matured? An uncomfortable feeling took possession of the old merchant. Had he been mistaken after all? Had Bernhardt done wisely in disobeying him?

With an impatient movement of the head, he dismissed the unwelcome doubt, and taking the picture from the easel, turned it with its face to the wall, then left the room, locking the door and putting the key in his pocket.

"If anyone enquires after my grandson, you may say that he is travelling," he told old Ursula, briefly; and from that day Bernhardt's name was spoken no more in his old home.

The months went by. Summer waned into autumn, and autumn into winter—a winter of the "good old-fashioned" type; invigorating to the young and healthy, but terrible to the weak, the aged and the poor.

One bitter December afternoon, Annette van Elven and her mother were alone in the little room which now served them as bed and sitting-room both, on the first floor of a house in a dull grass-grown side-street not far from the Cathedral.

Madame van Elven, a fair, fragile-looking woman, who had been beautiful in her youth, and was still attractive, though worn by suffering, sat in a cushioned arm-chair near the stove, while Annette crouched on the hearth, her head drooping, her hands idly folded on her lap, in an attitude of listless dejection. The snow outside was hardly whiter than her cheeks, and her eyes had a veiled look that made them more pathetic than ever.

"How quiet you are, dear!" her companion said, breaking a long silence; "are you asleep?"

"No, I was thinking," she answered, with an effort. "I was wondering what sort of Christmas Bernhardt would have in Rome."

"A pleasant one, no doubt. Pleasanter than ours will be. Poverty weighs lightly on him: it is all part of the romance of his artist life. But with us it is bitter reality," she added, with a sigh.

Annette did not reply, but her face grew if possible sadder than before.

"Did M. Lebrun pay you for the piece of lace you took to him this morning, dear?" asked Madame van Elven after a pause.

"No; he—I shall have to go again," Annette answered, hesitatingly.

She dared not tell her mother the truth—namely, that the tradesman had declined her work, as too imperfect for sale. What she had long dreaded had come to pass: her sight would no longer serve for her employment.

"You are tired; I can tell by your voice," her companion said tenderly, and putting out her hand, she drew the girl to her side.

Annette let her head sink on her mother's knee, and closed her eyes, with a deep, long-drawn sigh. Yes, she was tired; so tired that she almost felt as if it would be happiness to sleep and never wake again; to give up altogether the weary struggle that grew harder every day.

They were sitting in the same position when, ten minutes later, an unfamiliar footstep sounded on the stairs, and there was a tap at the door. Annette rose, smoothing her disordered hair, and opened it. A stranger stood there; a comely old woman, in the picturesque costume of a Liègeoise.

"Mademoiselle Annette van Elven?" she said, interrogatively, and when the latter assented, handed her a letter, adding: "I have had some trouble to find you, Mam'selle. My master said I was to wait for an answer."

"Is your master M. Lebrun?" Annette enquired.

"No; M. Vanderhaven," the old servant replied, glancing shrewdly at her face.

The girl started, turning from white to red. Recovering from her surprise, however, she placed a chair for her visitor, lighted the lamp, and then, returning to her mother's side, read the note aloud.

"MADEMOISELLE,—I wish to see you, but am prevented by illness from calling upon you. Will you do me the favour to return with my servant? I shall not detain you long.—Yours,

"NICOLAS VANDERHAVEN."

"I suppose he is anxious to have news of Bernhardt," was her mother's whispered comment. "You will go, dear?"

"Yes," Annette assented. "Has M. Vanderhaven been long ill?" she asked Ursula, as she put on her hat and jacket.

"All the winter, on and off; it began with a bad cold. But he has never been quite the same since M. Bernhardt went away."

Annette said no more, and they presently left the house together.

"Please to come upstairs," her companion said, when they were admitted to the old Guild-house; and she led the way up the broad, oak staircase to the Banquet-room. It was furnished now; a great wood fire burned on the wide hearth, and a Japanese screen shut out the draught.

Monsieur Vanderhaven was seated near the fire, with his back towards them; a tall, gaunt figure in a grey dressing-gown and velvet cap. When his visitor entered he gave her a scrutinizing glance under his heavy brows, and bowed, but did not rise, as he motioned her to a seat.

"Mademoiselle van Elven," he began when they were alone, "I believe you are in correspondence with my grandson?"

"Yes, Monsieur," she answered, quietly, though her heart was fluttering. "I have heard from him frequently since he left home."

"Since you sent him away," he corrected; "it was by your advice, I believe, that he went?"

"I advised him, as I thought, for the best, and I have reason to believe that I was right. He tells me that he is making rapid progress, and that his pictures have already attracted attention. I believe there is a brilliant future before him."

"Humph! we shall see," was the remark. "Be kind enough to give me his address. It may be necessary for me to write to him," and he pushed the inkstand towards her.

She took up the pen, but there seemed to be a mist before the paper. After one attempt she shook her head, and held it out to him.

"My eyes will not serve me at all to-night," she said, with a deprecating smile; "the address is ——"

"What is the matter with your eyes?" he interrupted.

"I have over-tried them at lace-making. They have been failing me some time."

"You ought to have advice about them," said M. Vanderhaven, more gently than he had yet spoken. He had felt bitterly towards her when she entered, but somehow his resentment seemed to be melting away before the gentle composure of her manner, and the patient sweetness of her smile.

"I have, Monsieur. The doctor tells me there is no organic disease; if I could give them complete rest for a time they would serve me for my whole life to come."

"And are you resting them?"

"I must now—against my will," she answered, with an involuntary sigh. "I can work at my lace-pillow no longer."

"And how do you intend to employ yourself?"

She shook her head and made no reply.

He looked at her steadily a moment, slowly rubbing his chin, then dipped the pen in ink.

"You said the address was ——"

"Number 12, Via Margutta, Rome," she answered, and rose, thinking the interview was at an end.

"Wait a moment," he interposed as he wrote. "I have something to say to you."

He seemed in no hurry to say it, however. Having written the address, he methodically folded the paper and placed it in his pocket-book, took off his spectacles, and put them in their case; then looked up.

"I have a proposal to make to you," he began abruptly. "It has occurred to me that I may be able to assist you and serve myself at the same time. I am in failing health, I need a companion and attendant—someone who would not set my nerves on edge as professional nurses do. Should you be inclined to accept the post?"

She looked at him as if doubting whether she had heard correctly.

"Do you mean—to live here, Monsieur?"

"Yes. Of course you could see your mother every day, and I should enable you to give her the comfort and attendance she needs."

"You are very kind," she faltered, "but ——"

"Am I so formidable that you dare not trust yourself with me?" he asked, with a grave smile which softened his features wonderfully, giving them a vague resemblance to Bernhardt's.

Her face caught the reflection of his, and brightened suddenly.

"No indeed," she said, with an answering smile; "if I hesitated, it was because I feared I might not be competent ——"

"Then you will come?" he interrupted.

"Yes, Monsieur, and I will do my best to please you. It will make me happy to be of service to ——"

"Bernhardt's grandfather?" he finished; "just so. Then that is settled. Shake hands on it."

When she gave him her hand he detained it, looking up at her so intently that she blushed, she hardly knew why.

"When are you going to write to this distinguished artist?" he demanded.

"Very shortly. To-morrow perhaps. Have you any message for him?" she asked wistfully.

He paused, apparently forgetting that he still held her hand, and looked thoughtfully at the fire. She watched his face anxiously, reading there the signs of a struggle between pride and affection.

"Tell him I am glad to learn that he is making good progress in the profession he has chosen ——"

"Yes?" she prompted, as he paused. He glanced at her wistful face and smiled.

"And you may say that if he is not too busy to allow himself a holiday, he may spend Christmas with me—with us, that is."

The girl's heart leaped; a thrill of exquisite happiness brought the tears to her eyes.

With a sudden impulse she stooped and kissed the wrinkled hand that held her own.

The old merchant patted her cheek. "Tut, tut, silly child; save your kisses for someone who has a right to them," he said.

Two days later Annette began her new duties, and was soon as much at home in the old Guild-house as if she had lived there for years. She was happy in her new life, and her young presence so brightened the house that M. Vanderhaven found himself wondering how he could have endured its gloom and solitude before she came.

The time passed pleasantly to both of them, and every day brought nearer the meeting which, in his heart, the old merchant longed for as much as she did, though he seldom mentioned his grandson's name.

"Only five days till Christmas," Annette remarked one evening, looking up from the knitting which kept her fingers busy while her eyes and thoughts were free.

They were in the Banquet-room; Monsieur Vanderhaven reclining in a capacious leather fauteuil near the fire, while Annette sat opposite to him in a low, straight-backed tapestry chair. The old room, with its panelled walls and antique furniture, formed a picturesque background to her girlish figure.

Her companion was staring thoughtfully at the fire, with the newspaper on his knee. Her words roused him from his abstraction.

"So soon? I had forgotten how time went."

"Bernhardt will be with us on Christmas Eve," she added.

"Ah! and that reminds me; there is something I intended to do before he returned." He turned his chair to the table. "Give me pen and ink, my dear."

She placed writing materials before him, and then paused, struck by the haggard pallor of his face.

"Are you feeling worse to-night, Monsieur?"

"Worse? No, child; I am better, if anything," he answered, cheerfully. "I was thinking, only a moment ago, that I might yet live to see my great-grandchildren round me in the old house."

He glanced at his companion, who "suddenly, sweetly, strangely blushed," and became absorbed in her work again.

His pen travelled rapidly over the paper, only pausing now and then to make an alteration or addition. When he had covered four pages with his clear, firm handwriting, he glanced over what he had written, seemed satisfied with it, and made a fair copy on a fresh sheet. Then he looked up.

"Will you tell Ursula and Jacob that I want them for a few moments?"

She left the room, and gave his message to the two old servants, remaining downstairs till they returned, which they did very shortly, looking mysterious and important.

As she re-entered the room, she fancied she heard the click of a drawer or door hastily shut; but the screen being so arranged as to enclose the hearth, she could see nothing until she had passed round it. Then she found Monsieur Vanderhaven standing with his arm on the massive chimney-piece, watching the burning of a piece of paper, which he had just thrown upon the logs.

He did not speak till she had been seated some moments.

"I have been making my will," he said, abruptly, at length: "I made one six months ago, in a moment of anger, but that shall be destroyed before Bernhardt returns. By this new one I have left him everything except the business, and that he will not grudge to his cousin. I shall give it into Maître Janssen's keeping to-morrow. Meantime," he added, with a curious smile, "I have put it in a safe place, where it would be difficult to ——"

He stopped abruptly, putting his hand to his head. The blood suffused his face to the temples, then retreated, leaving him lividly pale. He staggered, and would have fallen if Annette had not supported him. She bent over him in alarm as he sank into a chair.

"It is nothing," he gasped; "a passing faintness ——"

He drew one or two heavy breaths, and seemed to recover somewhat, though his face was still white and haggard.

"Good girl, good girl," he said, touching her cheek as she bent over him; "you deserve to be happy, and you shall be. You will live here, you and Bernhardt; he will have this for his painting-room again. He will make a name—yes, the lad was right; he is an artist. Never let the old house go into strange hands—I love it. It has sheltered my people for more than a century; ever since the time of old Simon Vanderhaven, yonder," and he nodded towards the portrait with a smile of friendly recognition, then sat silent, looking into the bright hollows of the fire.

"I am drowsy," he said at last; "I think I could sleep."

Annette stood near him till his eyes closed, then returned to her seat. But she could not work. She felt uneasy and depressed. Her eyes dwelt with a sort of fascination on the motionless figure opposite, only glancing away now and then at the flickering fire, or out through the uncurtained window at the bare moon-lit Place, where the shadows of the quaint old houses lay black on the snow-whitened pavement.

About a quarter of an hour had passed thus, when she heard the muffled roll of carriage-wheels approaching the house. They paused at the door, and there was a knock which sounded unnaturally loud in the silence. She started to her feet. Could it be Bernhardt, who had arrived before his time? was the first thought that flashed across her.

Assuring herself that M. Vanderhaven was still sleeping, she went out into the landing, and leaned over the heavy carved balustrade, looking down into the lamp-lit hall. Yes—it was Bernhardt who stood there, laughing at old Ursula's shrill questions and exclamations, as he dismissed the carriage and closed the door.

Annette's glad little cry caught his ear at once. He looked up, flung his travelling-wraps on to the floor, and bounded upstairs.

"My darling, my darling!" was all he could say at first, between a shower of kisses. "How I have longed for you all these weary months!"

"And I for you," she whispered shyly, as she looked up into his face, bronzed and older-looking, but handsomer than ever, she thought, with a thrill of pride.

"And to find you here to welcome me; it seems like a fairy tale! You must have bewitched my grandfather. And your eyes, darling?" he went on tenderly, bending to look into them. "If you had told me that trouble before, I should never have left you. Are they better?"

"So much better that I warn you I shall be able to detect all the faults in your pictures," was her laughing reply. "But you haven't explained yet why you are here four days before your time? We did not expect you till Christmas Eve."

"I feared if I delayed I should be snow-bound. There have been several falls, and some of the lines are blocked."

"I am glad you came to-day," she said, more gravely. "I have been so anxious."

"Is my grandfather worse?" he asked quickly.

"I fear so, though he will not admit it. He was speaking of you just now. I know he longs to see you. Come."

Hand in hand they passed into the room, bright with fire-light and lamp-light. The old merchant had not moved. His head rested against the back of the chair; his hands were folded in an attitude of peaceful repose.

"He is asleep," she whispered; "he —— Oh, Bernhardt, what is it?"

For the young man, after one glance at the placid face, uttered an inarticulate cry, and sank on his knees before the chair. Monsieur Vanderhaven was sleeping "the sleep that knows no waking."

III.

It was Christmas Eve. The grave had closed over Nicolas Vanderhaven. All the dismal bustle of the funeral was over, and those interested in the old merchant's will were assembled in the dining-room to hear it read by the notary.

The party was not a large one, consisting only of Bernhardt, his cousin, Cornelius Dewint, from Antwerp, a stout, florid, prosperous-looking personage of middle age, with a loud voice and a self-

assertive manner; Ursula, and Jacob the butler, and lastly, Annette, who was present at Bernhardt's desire.

The notary, a little, spare, high-dried man, in a dusty brown wig, and gold eye-glass, glanced round at the party as he unfolded a sheet of crackling parchment.

"This will was deposited with me by my late client some six months ago," he began. "It ——"

"Excuse me, Maître Janssen," Bernhardt interrupted: "I am informed that there is a later one, which my grandfather made only a few hours before his death."

"Yes, he wrote it in my presence," Annette put in.

"And we witnessed it, Jacob and I," spoke old Ursula. "The master sent for us on purpose."

Monsieur Dewint wheeled round in his chair, and stared from one speaker to another, while the lawyer looked under his eye-glass at Annette. "Indeed? I was not aware of it," he said.

"Monsieur Vanderhaven intended to have placed it with you the next morning," she continued. "He said the first will was made in a moment of irritation, and he wished it to be destroyed before Bernhardt returned."

"As Mademoiselle was so far in my uncle's confidence, perhaps she can tell us the contents of this second will?" suggested Cornelius, with a veiled sneer which brought the colour to Bernhardt's cheek.

"Yes," Annette answered quietly. "M. Vanderhaven told me that his grandson would inherit everything except the business at Antwerp, which was left to yourself, Monsieur."

He gave a sort of grunt, and pulled his beard discontentedly.

"Well, where is it? Why is it not produced?" was his demand.

"We have not looked for it yet," Bernhardt replied, "but it must be somewhere in the Banquet-room, as my grandfather never left that apartment alive after he made it."

"Then we must find it at once," Maître Janssen said, rising. "If it exists this is so much waste paper," and he threw the parchment on to the table.

"All the same, perhaps you will oblige me by reading that," Cornelius Dewint suggested. The notary glanced at Bernhardt.

"By all means, if my cousin wishes it," replied the latter. "I think I can guess the contents."

The document was short and to the point. The business at Antwerp, and all the real and personal estate—chargeable with annuities for the old servants—were left to Cornelius Dewint, on condition that he neither let, sold, or demolished the old Guildhouse, while Bernhardt came in for an ironical bequest of five hundred francs—"to buy paint and canvas."

Annette looked distressed, and the young man flushed hotly.

"I don't wonder my grandfather was anxious to revoke a will so unjust," he commented.

"It remains to be proved whether he did revoke it," was his cousin's remark. "I have a sort of presentiment that this second document will not be forthcoming."

Bernhardt answered only by a slight shrug, as he rose and led the way to the Banquet-room.

Nothing had been disturbed since the old merchant's death. His chair still stood in its place with the screen behind it; the ashes remained on the cold hearth. Annette's knitting lay where she had thrown it down. Inexpressibly forlorn it all looked in the waning light of the winter afternoon, and in their various ways every member of the party felt the depressing influence of the scene.

"If the paper is within these four walls we shall soon find it," the notary observed, unconsciously lowering his voice.

And indeed, with the exception of an old press, where Bernhardt had been in the habit of keeping his painting materials, there seemed no place where it could be stowed away.

The will was not in the press, however, nor was it to be found elsewhere. They searched systematically; examining every nook and corner of the old room, sounding the panelling and the flooring, looking behind and under the furniture, and not desisting in their quest till everyone, except Annette, was convinced that it was in vain.

"But it must be here," the girl exclaimed excitedly; "it cannot have been spirited away. M. Vanderhaven told me that he had put it in a safe place ——"

"The fire, probably," was Cornelius Dewint's suggestion. "My belief is—with all deference to Mademoiselle—that my uncle changed his mind at the last moment, and destroyed it."

"I am positive he did not," she asserted. "He was scarcely alone with it a moment, for directly the servants left him, I returned, and it was then that he told me the contents. He was standing there, by the chimney-piece."

Bernhardt, who stood near the window, looking out into the dusk, turned and beckoned to her. "Did you not tell me that he had been burning a paper?" he asked in an undertone.

"Yes, but it— I thought it was the rough draft of the will."

"Might he not, by inadvertence, have destroyed the will itself?"

She did not answer, but her heart sank. It seemed only too likely that such was the case. There was a pause. It was nearly dark now, and the faces of the little group were lit by a lamp on the chimney-piece. The young man stood with his back to the rest, looking down at the Market-place, where the snow was falling heavily.

At length the silence was broken by Monsieur Dewint, who left the notary's side and approached his cousin.

"Well, Bernhardt, you see I was right," he began, in a loud, cheer-

ful voice, rattling the loose cash in his pockets. "This mysterious document is non est inventus. Of course I feel for your disappointment; still, you can hardly expect me to give up the property off-hand to please you. Such generosity is rare—off the stage. You are not going to dispute the will, I presume?"

"No. I think it an unjust one, and I believe my grandfather had intended to revoke it, but no other being producible, it is perfectly valid. You are in your own house, cousin," and he bowed to the new master with formal politeness.

The latter glanced about him disparagingly. "H'm—it is no great acquisition. If I had my way I should pull down the old baraque, and build a good house in its place. Well," he continued, "suppose we go downstairs; this room is as cold as a vault."

He passed out, followed by Maître Janssen, but the other two lingered.

"Annette, my sweet, do not look so sorrowful," Bernhardt said, encircling her with his arm; "why, the loss of this fortune seems to trouble you more than it does me."

"For your sake," she faltered; "for myself, I am not afraid of poverty. It is so strange, so inexplicable, that the will should have disappeared in this way," she continued. "I am convinced that it is in the room at this moment, if we only knew where to look for it."

She moved from his side, and cast her eyes thoughtfully round. He shook his head.

"It is not here, or we should have found it," he said. "Try to think no more of it, dear; we cannot ——"

The words died on his lips as he looked at his companion.

She was standing in the middle of the room, her hands hanging at her sides, her eyes fixed and dilated, gazing into space. Every trace of colour had faded from her face. He sprang to her side.

"Good heavens, Annette—what is it? Are you ill?"

She drew a long breath, and looked at him like one waking from a dream. "No, I am not ill," she whispered, "but I have the strangest feeling. As if—as if there were someone else in the room with us ——"

She shivered and glanced nervously round the long, shadowy apartment, which was only half-lighted by the lamp on the chimney-piece. Bernhardt involuntarily did the same, but they were the only occupants.

"You see that we are alone," he said. "You are tired and over-excited, darling: you need rest. It is snowing so heavily that you cannot leave the house at present. Go and lie down, and I will send Ursula to you."

She acquiesced mechanically, and allowed him to lead her to the door. Her hand was deadly cold, and her eyes looked dreamy and absent. He kissed her cheek, and detained her a moment, looking into her face with anxious tenderness; but she turned from him

without another word, and mounted the stairs to the little room she had called her own. Five minutes later old Ursula entered with a tray, and found her lying on the bed in the dark.

"I've brought you a cup of coffee, Mam'selle Annette," the old servant said. "Monsieur Bernhardt hopes you are better; and the 'new master'" (she jerked her chin aggressively) "graciously allows you to spend the night here, as it is snowing so heavily. Eh!" she broke off, "it makes me angry to see the airs he gives himself, and to think how different things would have been, but for the loss of a sheet of paper! Well, 'tis to be hoped old master doesn't know—rest his soul!" she added, piously.

Annette drank her coffee in silence, and gave back the empty cup.

"Can I do anything else for you?" her companion asked. "You look as white as a Lent lily."

"I am tired; I shall try to sleep," she answered, sinking back among her pillows. Ursula threw a coverlet over her and retired, leaving the candle on the mantelshelf.

Night closed in. A solemn, tranquil winter night; the earth wrapped in a mantle of new-fallen snow, the sky glittering with innumerable stars. An almost preternatural stillness brooded over the old city, lying asleep in the snow and starlight. It seemed like an enchanted place, hushed by some drowsy spell. No footprints marked the white pavements, no sound broke the silence of the earth and air, save when at intervals the chimes rang out with a "strange unearthly music," telling how the hours crept on towards Christmas Morn.

When the moon's silver disc rose behind the Belfry Tower, one broad ray of cold ethereal light streamed on to the bed where Annette lay, still dressed, and sleeping profoundly. For several hours her rest was tranquil and oblivious, but towards midnight she was visited by a strange dream.

She seemed to be still lying on the bed, in the half-conscious state between sleeping and waking. Her eyes were open, but she was only vaguely aware of surrounding objects, of the moonlight streaming on the bed, and the glimpse of white house roofs seen through the window opposite.

Suddenly she was roused, she thought, from this dreamy lethargy, by a voice in the room, close to her, calling her name. She started and sat up, thrilling in every nerve, but not with fear. Drawing aside the curtains, she looked towards the spot from which the voice proceeded.

The room, save where the moon-beams lighted it, was lost in shadow, yet she fancied she could discern the outlines of a figure, standing near the hearth. As she looked, it moved forward into the ray of light by the bedside, and then, with a sudden shock of startled recognition, she saw that it was Monsieur Vanderhaven, who stood looking at her with eyes full of urgent purpose.

"Annette!" the low but imperious voice repeated, "the will

must be found. Come!" and he beckoned her towards the door.

After the first moment she seemed, with the curious insensibility of the dreamer, to feel neither surprise nor fear. She rose without hesitation and followed him down the stairs to the Banquet-room. The door was partly open, and the room within was lighted by a lamp, as when she had seen it last.

Her conductor crossed over to the hearth, and extended his hand to the portrait of his ancestor, which hung on a panel to the left of the chimney-piece.

"Master Simon can keep a secret," he said, with the grave smile so familiar to her; "you would never have thought of searching here. Look!"

She pressed forward eagerly as he touched the picture, but at the same moment a hand was laid on her shoulder, and another voice exclaimed, "Annette!"

Then with a start and cry she woke—woke in earnest this time—to find herself standing in the Banquet-room, with Bernhardt's astonished face bending over her. She looked round bewilderedly, trembling with a vague terror. Then, as remembrance returned, an expression of blank disappointment crossed her face.

"Oh, was it only a dream?"

"Were you asleep!" he exclaimed. "If I had known that, I should not have ventured to wake you. I was sorting and destroying some old sketches in these folios; it took me longer than I had expected, but I had just finished, and was about to leave the room, when you entered. You walked straight to the fireplace, and looked intently at the portrait. You were stretching out your hand towards it when I touched you. Did you dream about it, dear?"

"Yes. Oh, Bernhardt, such a strange dream."

"What was it? tell me," he said, making her sit down.

In low, awe-struck tones she related it, glancing now and then over her shoulder at the shadowy room behind them. "It was so real, so vivid," she concluded, "that I can hardly believe it was merely a dream."

He had listened with breathless interest and growing excitement. When she had finished he started to his feet.

"Dream or not," he exclaimed, "I believe it has given us a clue to the hiding-place of the will. It never occurred to us that there might be a cupboard behind that portrait."

Annette clasped her hands. "Oh—let us look at once!"

"Hold the lamp, I will take the picture down," he said; but he found this was impossible, as it was fastened with cramps to the panelled wall.

"There must be a spring somewhere," he muttered, passing his hand down by the side of the frame, "or else—stay, what is this?"

His fingers had encountered a slight obstruction in the polished

woodwork; a small metal knob or button, which was effectually concealed by the shadow of the heavy frame.

He pressed it, and immediately the panel with the portrait upon it started open, disclosing a deep square cupboard. The lovers looked at each other, too excited to speak.

"Hold the lamp higher," he whispered, putting his hand into the cupboard.

The first thing brought to light was a bundle of old letters, tied with faded ribbon, and still retaining the ghost of their first perfume; then came a miniature in a case of Bernhardt's father, when a boy, and finally—a folded sheet of letter paper, inscribed, in Monsieur Vanderhaven's clear, commercial hand, "This is my last Will."

Annette placed the lamp on the table, and looked over his shoulder as he unfolded the paper. One glance showed him that the contents were as she had stated. The business was left to his cousin, and all the rest, without reserve or condition, was his own. Their eyes met in an eloquent look.

"But for your dream we should never have found it," he said. "How strange—how mysterious it seems!"

"Was it only a dream?" she questioned, under her breath.

They were silent; a feeling of awe and reverence overpowered them. "If he knows, he is happy now, as we are," the young man said at last. They clasped hands, and looked into each other's eyes, reading there the brightness of the future, from which all shadows and perplexities had passed away.

And as they stood thus, hand in hand, in the silence of the sleeping house, suddenly there rang out from the Belfry Tower the midnight carillon, ushering in the blessed Christmas morn. Sweet, strange, solemn chimes, falling on the silence in a silvery stream of music, like the voices of wandering angels, singing, "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men!"

"A happy Christmas, and a good new year!" Bernhardt exclaimed, as he bent to kiss the sweet face uplifted to his.

OUR BROTHER-IN-LAW ON PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

THERE was no help for it. We were in for an infliction. When once Frank began, there was no telling when he'd leave off. The only consolation was that it was a pouring wet afternoon, and that there was nothing particular to do. The circumstances were these: we were thinking of having some really good theatricals, and began planning it out. I, Lavinia, could do Lady Macbeth splendidly, Polly has just the archness and vivacity for Portia, and Jane has general talent; we should only ask men who could really act well to help us, and—here our last new brother-in-law, Frank, broke in with such vehemence that there was no course left but to await his pleasure.

"My dear girls," he began, "I have listened hitherto in silence. I can bear it no longer. I am sure you are all born actresses. No one could beat Lavinia as Lady Macbeth, Polly is exactly made for Portia, while Jane, as you remark, has no end of talent. But you have as yet never appeared in anything but an elementary character. I claim to be heard. I am only fitted, I daresay, for the part of a clown (a clown, by the way, is no easy acting); still I have at sundry times acted Sir Anthony Absolute, Mrs. Malaprop, Young Marlowe, and (in the days of my youth) Juliet. Very amateurly you may say. That is just it; I admit the impeachment without a blush. Mark me, if you want a really good failure, get up a really good play in style. Try a "Robertsonian" revival; try "Society," with your best acting friends on a grand stage specially hired for the occasion, with appropriate scenery and an audience of all your nearest and *most distant* friends. I have never done it myself, but I have seen it done, and as a man of feeling have shed bitter tears over it. Nearly everything was beautiful, but the best was—what? a copy: and then the original at the Prince of Wales's is so much better. On——"

"But, Frank——"

"A moment, please. On the other hand, I have laughed as much over my small brothers in impromptu charades as at Toole in a 'Fool and his Money.' I remember a scene adapted from Ben Jonson's 'Bartholomew Fair.' I roared because my brother, who did the Elder, snuffled so much that we could not hear a word he said; because the brother who acted the bear-keeper would religiously say every word of his part in the wrong place, to the discomfiture of his fellow-actors; and because (owing to exigencies of the wardrobe) the bear was a lizard with a tail composed of a green and black foot-ball stocking."

"Oh, Frank!"

"True, I assure you: but don't interrupt. I am not one of those who disapprove of amateur acting; have I not acted Young Marlowe and Sir Anthony Absolute? I only say that it has its own place. I do not even disapprove of amateurs trying high-class plays. Better the sparkling dialogue of Sheridan in the mouth of a raw actor, than the twaddle of plays written expressly for the drawing-room. Only don't act Sheridan before a set of critical strangers, who have seen all the best actors interpret them. A sympathetic audience in the long Christmas evenings is the basis of amateur acting—a family party, aunts, uncles and cousins, who come to be pleased, and will not be over-critical over the many necessary short-comings. With such an audience you may play anything. Go in then for good plays, take scenes out of them, alter them, do anything you like with them, and act them to the very best of your ability. If you have a real love of acting within you, you will soon find yourselves amongst the best authors, and find also that you are able to adapt them to your requirements. Charades——"

"Why, Frank, this is just what we thought."

"Don't interrupt me, I say, Polly. Charades, however, are not at all bad things if properly understood. You have perhaps three or four good actors and a host of children who wish to be dressed up. You choose, say, a word of two syllables. In the first scene you have Mrs. Jarley's waxworks, bringing in all your company; or an episode from some fairy story, the few words required being furnished by your manager. For the second, someone gives a comic lecture to allow time for change of dresses, &c. For the third and last, your best actors appear in a scene from some play, or in a short farce. A very pleasant evening's entertainment; everyone that wanted to act has acted, and the sympathetic audience has been much amused."

"That's very nice of course, Frank, and——"

"You can say what you have to say when I've finished, Lavinia. Always try to arrange for a curtain and footlights, but *do not* hire a 'portable' theatre. You may fit up your theatre very well yourselves. Put up curtains across your folding-doors; or, failing them, let your carpenter make a frame for the curtains. Here is a receipt. Imagine two A-shaped wooden supports as high as the room, with a groove in the top of each to receive a bar of wood, which will stretch across the room. Pad both ends of the bar to prevent damage to the walls. Hang fringe in front of the bar, and your curtains—old schoolroom things will do—on iron rods at the back of it, and the thing is done. For footlights, tin sheets rolled round the ordinary pickle bottle, and cut at the bottom so as to stand in an apparatus that looks like a window flower-box bereft of one side, do very excellently——"

"Well, I never!"

"*Am* I to go on, or not, Polly? Place candles on nails in front of the tinned pickle bottles, and hire lamp glasses, if you can, from your china shop. Decorate the part of the footlight box which faces the audience, and stand a few shrubs in pots on either side, and you will then have the limits of your stage duly defined. Do not—"

"All this seems quite easy, Frank: in theory, at any rate. And—"

"Now, Jane, *you* are beginning. Do not hire dresses. Wigs as a rule you must hire; that is when you want really well-fitting ones, though a great deal can be done with tow and 'Judson's Simple Dyes for the People.'—Polly, how am I to speak if you scream?—Make your own costumes. Merino, glazed calico, chintz, cretonnes, and such like stuffs, make a grand appearance by gas-light, and are cheap. Home-made costumes are fresher, and at any rate look as if they were made for the actor. Real imitation gold lace, fringe, buttons, spangles, &c., can be procured at shops in Wellington Street, Strand, at wondrously low rates. I remember a splendid uniform for Sergeant Trouncer contrived out of a green volunteer tunic. The skirts of this were turned back and lined with crimson merino, large cuffs and lappets, gold laced, were added of the same material; the white knee breeches were old flannel cricket trousers cut down; the cross-belts made out of calico stiffened with cardboard; black stockings and buckled shoes, with a hired wig, completed the costume which, if not exactly like the original Sergeant Trouncer's, was very effective and only cost three shillings and sixpence all told. With regard—"

"Frank, one would think you had served an apprenticeship to—"

"*Will* you allow me to speak, Polly? With regard to scenery—for I know Lavinia is burning to paint some—that is not nearly so easy a matter as dress. Dress I believe comes naturally to all girls. It is dirty work and tiring from the mere fact of the space that has to be covered; and it requires the help of a carpentering brother to make the supports for it to rest on, and frames to stretch the canvas on, and to arrange rollers for drop scenes. The painting may be executed either in oils or distempers—"

"Distempers! What are distempers, Frank?"

"Hold your tongue, Polly. Of the former, oils, I say nothing, because if you don't know how to do it now, Lavinia, it is no use beginning on scenery. Distemper comes handy to those who are used to water-colour painting. I have never been able to get a proper receipt for it. I can only give a rough-and-ready description derived from experience. Your canvas is probably unbleached calico; this must be primed, which means that you must cover it with melted size and water; you may add a little whitening if you like. You draw your outline with charcoal. The distemper in which you paint is simply whitening, water, and melted size mixed,

and the colouring matter added. Size is one penny per pound, whitening, about twopence; colours, one penny to twopence per pound; they can be obtained from any oil and colourman. You must buy a tin saucepan—"

"Frank, you'll kill us with laughing."

"I wish I could stop your tongues! You must buy a tin saucepan for boiling the size in, and I hope you will enjoy the smell of it when boiling. I can give no rule for the proportion of the mixture; only this guide—that the use of size is to make the colour adhere to the canvas. You must be prepared for the distemper always drying lighter than when first put on. But ——"

"Do let us begin to-morrow!"

"I tell you, girls, what it is—you want all the talking to yourselves. If you can't listen to just a few words from anybody else it's time you went back to school to learn manners. This, the painting of scenery, is an extra luxury that may be avoided, I was about to say, by choosing plays with only 'interior' scenes. Interiors, however, give a plentiful scope to those who have an eye for effect. So much may be done in the arrangement of lights, flowers, rugs, carpets, curtains, mirrors, screens, furniture and all that, to make a pretty picture, and indicate change of scene. And ——"

"Oh, yes! And, Frank ——"

"An instant yet, Jane, *if* you can. I never saw such girls in my life. Why, you must all have been born talking! And now, as I was about to say, I have done, and I hope you are edified. What I have said has been in perfect good faith, I assure you. One remark of yours I must anticipate. You long to tell me that I am a man with no ideal. You are quite wrong, girls. It is only that a have a different one for Professional and Amateur acting. If ever I am your stage manager, you will find that I have an ideal, and a pretty high one too."

"Thank you, Frank, you're a good fellow; we'll try and not talk so much another time. And see! the rain has ceased, and there's the sun peeping out in the wintry sky: could we not get a brief walk?"

It is only fair to remark that we postponed our grand theatricals for a season. We knew that Frank's advice was thoroughly practical, and the result of personal experience. We had instead some "tableaux vivants," followed by the "Happy Pair," in which Polly and our new brother-in-law appeared before a *strictly family* audience. The result was a success.

LAVINIA.

THE PARSON'S OATH.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

I.

THE day was drawing towards its close, and the young charity-children, assembled in the newly-repaired schoolroom of the small village of Littleford, glanced impatiently through the windows at the shadows cast by the declining sun; for none knew better, by those shadows, than they, that five o'clock was near.

"First class, come up and spell," called out the governess, from behind her table by the window.

"There ain't no time, miss," replied one of the girls, with the easy familiarity apt to subsist between scholar and teacher in rustic schools. "It's a'most sleek on the stroke o' five."

The governess, a fair, pleasant-looking young woman, dressed in mourning, and far too ladylike in appearance for the paid mistress of a charity-school, glanced round at the hour-glass, and saw that it wanted full ten minutes to the hour.

"There is time for a short lesson, children," she said. "Put aside your work, and come up."

The first class laid their sewing on the bench, and were ranging themselves round the governess's table, when a young lady, in a hat and riding-habit, followed by a groom, galloped past the windows, and reined in.

"Governess!" exclaimed a dozen voices, "here's Miss Rickhurst."

"Go on with your work, children: what do you mean by pressing to the window? Did you never see Miss Rickhurst before? Jane Hewgill, open the door."

"How d'ye do, Miss Winter?" said the young lady they had called Miss Rickhurst, carelessly nodding to the governess, as she entered. "How are you getting on? What class have you up now?"

"Spelling," replied Miss Winter. "Jane Hewgill, why don't you shut the door?"

"'Cause here's Mr. Lewis and his aunt a-coming up," answered the child. "I'm a-keeping it open for them."

Miss Rickhurst hastily rose from the governess's seat, which she had uncremoniously taken, and went to the door to meet the new comers.

Mr. Lewis, the clergyman of the parish was a meek, quiet man of thirty years. It is certain he was not ambitious, for he felt within him an everlasting debt of gratitude to the noble patron who had stepped forward and presented him with this village living and its stipend of £150 per annum. He had never looked for more than

a curacy, and half the sum. His father, dead now, had been a curate before him, and he, the son, had gone to Oxford as a servitor, had taken holy orders, and struggled on. And when the Earl of Littleford, who had silently been an eye-witness of the merits and unassuming piety of the poor young curate, presented him, unexpectedly, with the little village church on his estate, John Lewis raised his heart in thankfulness to the Earl, who had thus, under God, put WANT away from him for his span of life.

Once inducted into the living, the Reverend John Lewis worked indefatigably. Amongst other good works, he re-established the girls' charity-school; an anciently-endowed foundation, which had fallen nearly into abeyance—as many other ancient charities have, in the present day. The mistress of it, Dame Fox, was old; so Lord Littleford and the clergyman superannuated her, and looked out for another: and whilst they were looking, Miss Winter, the daughter of Farmer Winter, who was just dead, went up to Littleford Hall and asked for the situation.

The whole village liked Regina Winter: although she had received an education, and, for five years of her life, enjoyed a home (with her dead mother's London relatives) far above what Littleford thought suitable for a working farmer's daughter. They likewise took numerous liberties with her name. Regina! it was one they could not become familiar with, so some called her Gina, many Ginny, and a few brought out a short "Gin." After her father's death, she found that scarcely any provision was left for her; and, as she one day sat musing upon what should be her course, the servant Nomy, a buxom woman of forty, who had taken care of the house since its mistress died, now ten years ago, suddenly suggested that she should apply for the new place.

"What place?" asked Regina.

"The schoolmissis's," replied Nomy. "The Earl and the Parson are a-wanting to find one, and they do say, in the village, it will be a matter of thirty pound a-year. Surely you'd do, Miss Gina, with the grand edication you've had."

"Too much education for a village schoolmistress," thought Regina. "But it would keep me well, with what little I have besides."

"Go up to Littleford Hall; go right up yourself, Miss Gina, with your own two good legs," advised Nomy. "Nothing like applying to the fountain-head oneself, if business is to be done," added the shrewd woman.

"Apply to Lord Littleford myself!" ejaculated Regina.

"Why not? Ain't he as pleasant-mannered a man as one would wish to come across? One day lately, not three weeks afore poor master died, the Earl was a-crossing our land on horseback, and he axed me to open the gate o' the turnip-field: and he kept on a-cutting his jokes with me all the time I was a-doing of it."

The servant's advice was good; and it proved so. Miss Winter made her own application to the Earl of Littleford, and she was successful; though the Earl demurred at her request at first, for her own sake, telling her she was above the situation, and that the remuneration was very small.

As the clergyman came into the school this afternoon, he shook hands with the Squire's daughter: he then advanced and held out his hand to Miss Winter. Miss Rickhurst followed him with her eyes, and curled her lip: what business had the Vicar, *their* associate, to be shaking hands with a charity-school governess?

"I was going to hear the class, Mr. Lewis," said the young lady, after some minutes had been spent in talking. "Jane Hewgill, tell my groom he may go on with the horses: I shall walk home. Pray, Miss Winter, where did you say they were spelling? Three syllables! how very ridiculous! C a t cat, c o w cow, that's quite as far as they need go."

"Do you think so?" returned Regina, in a cold tone, for she did *not* like these repeated interferences of Miss Rickhurst's.

"Highly ridiculous," snapped Mrs. Budd. "What can such girls want with spelling? If it were not for reading the Bible, I should say never teach 'em to read at all?"

A very domineering widow was this aunt of the clergyman's. Upon his appointment to the Vicarage, down she came and established herself in it, assuring him the house would never get on without somebody to manage it. Mr. Lewis had a dim perception that he and his house would get on better without her; but he never said so, and she remained.

Miss Winter went to the mantelpiece, and turned her hour-glass. It was five o'clock, and the children flocked out of school. The Vicar, Mrs. Budd, and Miss Rickhurst followed.

"Mr. Lewis," began the young lady, in a confidential tone, "don't you think your schoolmistress is getting above her business?"

"In what way?" he asked, looking surprised.

"There is such a tone of superiority about the young woman—I mean implied superiority," added Miss Rickhurst, correcting herself.

"I have always thought there is much of real superiority about her," replied the Vicar. "But I have never known anyone who, in manners and conversation, gave one less the idea of *implying* it. And she gets the children on astonishingly: one might think, by their progress, she had taught them two years, instead of barely one."

"It is of no use to argue with John about Miss Winter," interposed Mrs. Budd. "He thinks her an angel, and nothing less."

"No, I do not," laughed the Reverend John. "I only think

her very superior to young women in general." And Miss Rickhurst once more curled her haughty lip.

Meanwhile, Miss Winter left the schoolroom, with her assistant; a sickly-looking girl of fifteen or sixteen, named Mary Brown. Regina lodged at a farm-house near, occupying a parlour and bedroom, and was partially waited on by the people of the house. As soon as they got in, Mary Brown, whose weak health caused her to feel a constant thirst, began to set out the teacups and make the tea.

"Mary," observed Miss Winter, when the meal was over, "you had better go up to your brother's for the calico, and to-morrow set about making his shirts: you know he was scolding you yesterday at their not being begun. Start at once, or you will have it dusk. I will wash up the tea-things."

Mary Brown put on her things, and departed. But not long had she been gone, when the parlour door opened, and a tall, fine young man, about six-and-twenty, walked in. He was dressed in a green velveteen shooting-jacket, leather breeches and gaiters, and a green kerchief was twisted loosely round his neck. Altogether, there was a careless, untidy look about him, and it might have puzzled a stranger to tell whether he was a gentleman or a man of a lower order. The face would have been handsome (and, indeed, was) but for the wilful, devil-may-care expression that pervaded it. His complexion was fair, his eyes were blue, and his light hair curled in his neck. This gentleman was Mr. George Brown, universally known in the village by the cognomen of "Brassy." He had acquired the appellation when a boy; partly because he was gifted with a double share of that endowment familiarly called "brass;" and partly because in his boyhood he displayed a curious propensity for collecting together odd bits of brazen metal. Once, when a young child, he had stolen a small brass kettle, exposed outside a shop for sale, lugged it home, and put it in his bed. His mother, on going to her own bed at night, looked at Georgie; and there he was, sleeping, with the brass kettle hugged to him. He had been "Brassy Brown" since, and would be to the end of his life.

Mr. Brassy Brown did not enjoy a first-rate reputation. He had inherited a little land from his father, on which was a small house, where he lived, called "The Rill;" and, though he certainly could not subsist upon its proceeds alone—he had no other visible means of support—he lived well, and never seemed to lack money. He was upon friendly terms with the whole neighbourhood, from Squire Rickhurst down to the worst poacher in it: indeed, so intimate was he with the latter suspicious fraternity, that some people said he must be a poacher himself. Until recently his sister had lived with him in his cottage, no one else; but when Miss Winter found she wanted some assistance in the school, she thought of Mary, compassionating the girl's lonely life, want of proper society

and weak health, and she took Mary to live with her. It may be questioned, however, if Miss Winter would have made the proposal to the girl, had she foreseen that they should be inundated with visits from her brother.

When he came in, Miss Winter put down the book she was reading, poured out some hot water into a basin, and began to wash up the tea-things.

"Where's Poll?" began Mr. Brassy.

"She is gone to the Rill for the calico," answered Regina. "What a pity that she will have her walk for nothing!"

"It will stretch her legs for her," returned Mr. Brown, sitting down in the chair from which Regina had risen, and extending his own long legs across the hearth. "Now, Regina," he continued, "I want an answer to that question of mine."

"What question?" she enquired, a crimson hue flushing her face.

"Don't pretend ignorance, Gina, for it won't go down with me to-night," was Mr. Brassy Brown's rejoinder. "You know what I have been asking you this year past: we are by ourselves now, and I'll have it out. Will you come up to the Rill and make your home there, and be my wife?"

"Why do you persist in persecuting me thus?" exclaimed Regina, in a tone of vexation. "I have told you already that I could not be your wife. You behave like a child."

"Why don't you say like a fool?" he rejoined. "'Twould be as polite as the other. What fault have you to find with the Rill—or with me? Perhaps you think I can't keep you there like a lady?—but I can. Never you mind how: *I can.* You shall have a good servant to wait upon you, and everything as comfortable and plentiful about you as you had in your father's home. I swear it."

Regina shook her head. "I would not go to live at the Rill—I could not be your wife, Brassy, if you offered me a daily shower of gold. And if you continue to pursue this unpleasant subject, I shall send Mary home, and forbid your entrance here."

"So ho, my fine madam! it's defiance between us, is it?" uttered Brassy, rising and grasping Regina's arm in anger. "Then may the devil take the weakest! I have *sworn* to marry you, and I'll keep my oath; I'll keep it by fair means or foul."

At this moment, after a gentle knock, the door was pushed open, disclosing the person of the Vicar. He saw the angry look of Brassy Brown, and his hold upon Regina's arm.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed. "What game are you after now, Mr. Brown?"

"None of yours, parson," returned Brassy, flinging aside Regina's arm. "She affronted me, and I had as good a mind to treat her to a shaking as ever I had to treat anybody to one in all my life."

"He will kill me, some of these days, with his shakings," inter-

posed Miss Winter, laughing, and trying to pass the matter off as a joke; for she was vexed and annoyed that the clergyman should have been a witness to it. "If he does, sir, I shall look to you to give me Christian burial. Will you promise to do so?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lewis, falling into her mood—for he quite understood it.

"You had better swear to it, parson," added Brassy, with a sneer, for he felt savage at the interruption. "It may be more satisfactory to her."

"I swear it," returned John Lewis, giving no heed to his words in the moment's heat. But a flush rose to his brow when their purport came to him. He, a minister, to swear at this man's bidding!

"Mind you keep your oath, parson; as I'll keep mine," said Brassy Brown, swinging out of the room. "Do *you* hear, Miss Winter?" But neither of them answered him.

"Regina," said the Vicar, looking after the man, "he is not a desirable visitor for you."

"No," she answered, "and I wish he would not come. Not that I think there is any real harm in him, but I dislike his conversation."

"The plain fact is," resumed the clergyman, speaking with agitation, as a hectic spot appeared on his cheek, "your home here is too unprotected. Regina, will you suffer me to provide you with another?"

Oh, deeper than the flush Brassy Brown's words had called up, was the rosy blush that now dyed her face. Neither she nor he for some little time past had been unacquainted with the heart of the other.

John Lewis took her hand. "Regina, you cannot be ignorant that I have loved you. Will you take pity upon a lonely man, one who has had but few ties hitherto to care for him, and be his wife?"

"But—I—" she stammered, her trembling hand lying passively in his—"it will be said I am not your equal—that my birth does not qualify me for a clergyman's wife."

"Not my equal!" repeated the astonished Vicar, who was surely one of the most unworldly wise. "You are so far my superior, Regina, that I have hesitated to ask you. And it was but the thought of your unprotected state here that gave me courage to speak now."

"I was but the daughter of a small working farmer," she persisted, the tears filling her eyes with the extent of her emotion: "I am but the paid teacher of a charity-school."

"*I* was but the son of a working curate," he whispered. "We were four children and my father and mother, all to subsist upon seventy pounds per year. I am indebted to charity, which helped to educate me, for being in the position I now am. A working farmer was immeasurably above *us*, Regina. We are both alone in

the world: we have no ties or kindred to consult: from this time forth let us be all in all to each other."

The news travelled forth to the village, throwing up a fine hubbub in its wake: the Reverend John Lewis was about to marry Regina Winter. Mrs. Budd was pleased to be satirical over it, Miss Rickhurst was indignant, and Brassy Brown furious.

"What on earth possessed you to do it, John?" exclaimed Mrs. Budd to her nephew, when he came into the Vicarage at dinner-time, the day she first heard the tidings.

"Do what?" cried the Reverend John, with a conscious look, and that suspicious hectic rising to his cheek.

"You have been offering yourself and your name to the charity school-mistress, they say," retorted the aunt, who feared the introduction of a wife might lead to her losing her snug home at the Vicarage. "You must be out of your senses, John?"

"We shall be able to find another governess for the school," answered John, evasively. "It is past one, aunt. Is not dinner ready?"

"Dinner! You'll get bread and cheese to-day for dinner, if you get anything," retorted Mrs. Budd. "I and Betty have been too much upset this morning to think of cooking. Oh, John, you are a great fool! you might have had Miss Rickhurst."

"Miss Rickhurst!" exclaimed the Vicar, opening his eyes at the assertion.

"Miss Rickhurst, yes," mimicked the lady, "if you had not been more blind, more simple, than anybody ever was yet."

"I don't want Miss Rickhurst," answered the young clergyman. "Let her marry in her own sphere of life: she would have domineered me out of house and home."

These events happened in March. The Vicar proposed being married in May, until which time Regina had to retain her place in the school. One day in April, as she was walking home from its duties, she suddenly came upon Brassy Brown, who was looking over the hedge.

"I have been watching for you, Gina," he said, very quietly. "I want to hear from your own lips, whether it's true that you have promised to marry that cursed parson?"

"Yes, it is true," she timidly answered, not seeing how she could deny to him what was public news.

"How came you to conceal it from me all the time you were fooling me on?"

"*I* fooling you on!" uttered Regina, in surprise.

"Well—let that pass. Why did you not tell me you loved the black-coat?"

"I—could not tell you what I—did not know," stammered Regina, a blush dyeing her cheeks.

"Bosh! don't make excuses to me. I'd stake my Skye terrier again his holding-forth sermon-book, that there has been love between

you two this many a month past. What is it you have got in that paper parcel?"

"It is only some work," said Regina. "Good morning, Brassy. Mary is gone home already. She will wonder where I am."

"Let her wonder. I say, Regina, you remember what I told you—that I'd taken an oath. I'll keep it yet, and have you, sooner or later."

The words might have imparted to Miss Winter a sort of dread, but that Brassy Brown was smiling as he spoke them—and a pleasant smile was Mr. Brassy's, with all his imperfections. Her spirits rose at seeing that smile, and she arrived at the conviction that he was forgetting his preference for her. It pleased her much. Setting these persecutions aside, and a few slips of language he was wont to indulge in, she did not dislike Brassy, and had never thought so ill of him as some in the parish were disposed to do.

"Won't you shake hands before you go?" asked Mr. Brassy.

She held out her hand over the gap in the hedge. He shook it warmly; and away she went, silently thankful that all animosity between herself and Brassy Brown was over.

Nomy, Farmer Winter's old servant, had lately married the under-keeper of Squire Rickhurst, a widower with some grown-up sons. They lived in a cottage about half a mile beyond the Rill, following the high road. That same afternoon, on coming in from school, Regina told Mary she thought, as it was so fine, she should go and see Nomy. "Do you feel well enough to accompany me?" she asked.

"No," replied the girl, "my breathing is very much oppressed to-day. I feel I could not get so far. Do you mind calling in at the Rill, Regina?"

"What for?"

"To get my cotton shawl. This is such a weight, now the spring weather's coming, I can hardly drag to school in it. If the door should be open, and Brassy not just in the way, you can get it yourself: it's lying on the middle shelf of the press in the keeping-room."

Regina started on her walk, and had nearly gained the Rill, when who should come swinging down the road in front of her, but Brassy Brown.

"Hallo, Regina! where are you off to?"

"I am going to see Nomy. The afternoon is so fine, I quite longed for a walk. And I want something for Mary from your house, Brassy. Can you come back and give it me?"

"Oh, bother," was Mr. Brassy Brown's rejoinder, "I have not got a minute to lose. Ted Timms is waiting for me down yonder in the gap; he is a shuffler; and he'll make it an excuse to slink off if I'm behind time. What is it you want?"

"Mary's cotton shawl. Her woollen one is too warm for this

weather. Do you know, Brassy, that Mary seems to me to get weaker."

"It's no fault of mine if she does. Have the doctor to her. I'll pay."

"Can you bring the shawl down to-morrow?"

"I don't know that I can. If I get what I want from Ted Timms, I am going off for a few days. You can call in for it as you come back from Nomy's. I shall be at home then."

"Very well," rejoined Regina.

Mr. Brassy Brown went on his way, and Regina on hers. She found Nomy up to her eyes in work, brewing. She was delighted to see her young lady, and hastened to set out the best china for tea, in the little keeping-room, darting away every five minutes to her wort in the brewhouse. Nomy had heard of Regina's new prospects; and, in talking of them, the time slipped away unheeded, Regina forgetting the hour, and Nomy her brewing. The former at length started up.

"I dare not leave the wort, Miss Gina," exclaimed the woman, as she attended Regina to the door. "To think that you should have come this very evening, of all others, when I can't see you back to the village."

"Oh, I shall soon be there," rejoined Regina, speaking valiantly. "The moon is shining; and I have to call up at the Rill for Mary's shawl; that will break the way. Good night, Nomy."

"The Lord be with ye, dear Miss Gina!"

The evening grew late, and Mary Brown sat on, in Regina's lodgings, shivering and trembling. She was a nervous, timid girl, and feared to be alone at night, her imagination always running on some absurd ghost or vision story. Mary thought that the nervous dread she experienced, when left so much alone at the Rill, had been the first cause of her failing health. Where could Regina be? Mary had expected her home by eight o'clock, and now it was nearly ten. The people of the house, who had been in bed long ago, slept in a remote part of it, and their presence there gave no courage or consolation to the timid girl. Mixed up with her own imaginary terrors, came fears for Regina's safety. What if a stray shot from some poacher should have struck her as she came by the copse? Suppose anything had happened to prevent Nomy walking home with her (and the reader has seen that it had), she might be lying in the road wounded. The girl half resolved to go out and look for her: she *dared* not stay much longer alone where she was: yes, she would, she would go out and meet Regina.

Throwing on her bonnet and shawl, Mary tore along the passage as if a spectre were at her heels, and out at the house-door, taking the precaution to lock it after her. Once out, her superstitious fears were over: and robbers, poachers—any tangible cause of dread, brought no fear to the mind of Mary. Reared in the country, amidst the solitudes of its woods and dales, she thought not there of

fear, and could have walked about, in the open air, from night till morning. It was only in the silence of a midnight chamber that her ghost-terrors occurred to her.

She continued her way beyond the village, but could see no trace of Regina. She did not meet a soul. The early moon, drawing towards its setting, was often obscured by clouds, but the night was light. At length she came to her brother's house, and sprang forward to open the gate, hoping Brassy was at home.

What a curious thing! the gate was fastened! Never had Mary known that gate to be locked before. The key of it had hung up, untouched, on a nail in the kitchen, as long as she could remember. Brassy must be out.

But, as Mary leaned forward on the little gate, for she was tired with her walk, she detected a light glimmering through a chink in the shutter of the keeping-room. And, at the same moment she heard, or thought she heard, a movement in the garden, on the right side of the house. She shook the gate and called out.

Was it her fancy? Mary thought she saw a low, dark form creep from the middle of the garden towards the back-door: but the house cast its shade just there. "They are getting ready for a poaching expedition," she mentally concluded. "Perhaps Smith, or Timms, or some of them chaps are up here." She shook the gate again.

"Who the devil's that?" cried Mr. Brassy Brown, poking his head, enveloped in a cotton nightcap, out at an upper window, that of his bedroom. "It's not you, is it, Timms?"

"Brassy, it's me," responded Mary. "The gate's locked."

"*You!*" echoed Brassy, in a tone of the most unqualified astonishment. "What brings you here, knocking people up at this time of night?"

"I am looking for Regina," answered Mary. "She went after school to see Nomy, and she has never come back. I got frightened, stopping there all alone, and frightened for her, so I came out to meet her."

"Why, what a confounded little stupid you must be," ejaculated Brassy, "to come out upon such a wildgoose-chase as this! While you have been blundering up here, she's no doubt gone home by the other road."

"She never takes that road," rejoined Mary, "it is such a round, and very lonely. I was afraid that some stray shot might have struck her, coming by Poachers' Copse. You remember the horse that was shot down, going by there?"

"There are no poachers out to-night, you simpleton—it's too light. Miss Regina has walked home with her black-coat: gone round the longest way to enjoy his company. I'm up to her. I see, by the moon, it's hardly half after ten: just the hour for sweet-hearting. What a frightened child you are, Polly!"

"Do you really believe she has gone that way with him?" returned Mary, wonderfully relieved.

"I am not going to stop prating with you any longer, that's what I believe," retorted Brassy. "Just take yourself off. And never you come waking me out of my first sleep again, or you'll catch what you won't like."

"Brassy, there's a candle burning in the keeping-room."

"Who says so?"

"I can see through the chink. Did you forget to put it out?"

"There was a log on the fire, half burnt, when I came to bed. I suppose it's flickering up again. So much the better: hope it will stop in till I get up in the morning. Come, be off."

"You could not come down and give me my cotton shawl?" asked the girl. "The walk tires me so much, I don't know when I can get here again. It was the excitement that helped me on so quickly to-night."

"Cotton shawl be burnt, and you with it!" roared Mr. Brassy, wrathfully. "Do you think I am coming down out of my bed, for a cotton shawl?"

"Regina said she would call for it," answered the girl, in a deprecating tone. "Did she?"

"No, she didn't," replied Brassy. "I've not seen the colour of her, since I met her this afternoon. She couldn't call here, not she, if she went round with the parson, the other way."

"Good night, Brassy."

Mr. Brassy Brown vouchsafed no reply, but banged-to his casement. Mary had got some paces from the gate, when she turned back, shook it, and called out. Once more the window was thrown open, with an impatient anathema, and the white cotton nightcap extended itself out, as before.

"Brassy," she said, lowering her voice, "I forgot to tell you I saw something in the garden. It seemed to be making its way to the back-door."

"Saw what?"

"I don't know. It looked like a great black dog, or else a man on all-fours."

"Don't you think it was a cat?" rejoined the gentleman, sarcastically.

"No," said the girl, shaking her head, "it was too big for a cat—if it was anything. I'm not sure about it, Brassy. It might only have been the shadows, or my fancy."

"It would be a good riddance if you and your fancies were buried with the shadows," answered the irascible Brassy. "You want to be shut up in an asylum for lunatics! Get along home with ye."

Mary turned finally away, and walked home as fast as her troubled breathing would let her, fully expecting to find Regina and the Reverend Mr. Lewis waiting at the door. What excuse could she

make for her folly? She never could tell of her superstitious fears to the parson.

No one, however, was there. And the girl, all her fears renewed, sat down on the door-step. She did not dare to enter, and take solitary possession of their chamber. A thousand surmises crowded to her mind. Could Nomy be ill, and Regina have stayed to nurse her? She had had a desperate illness the previous autumn. But, then, the keeper, or one of his stalwart sons, would certainly have brought her word, when they got home from work. Could Regina have gone home with the parson, and be staying to sup with Mrs. Budd? That was not likely, and, if she had, she would not stay so late as this. Or could she have sat down, on her homeward walk, to rest (poor Mary had a great idea of people being fatigued), and so dropped asleep? It will scarcely be believed that the poor girl sat on that door-step till morning. She did: it was a fact well known afterwards to the village. Sometimes dozing, wandering in spirit, always shivering, the long night passed away.

With the morning light and the awaking village, Mary's courage returned to her. She thought Regina had stayed somewhere to sleep, and would soon be in, and explain. The first thing she did, upon entering, was to make a fire and put on the tea-kettle. By seven o'clock breakfast was ready, and after drinking one cup of tea, for she wanted it badly, she sat down and waited for Regina.

Regina never came. Before long, the whole village was aroused with the news of her disappearance, and nearly the whole village did something towards searching for her. Houses, forests, glens, lanes, —for three days every spot was looked into, every exertion made to find her; but in vain. No person had seen her, as far as could be learnt, after she left the under-keeper's cottage that night. Nomy deposed that she watched her as far as the turning in the road (about forty yards only), walking at a brisk pace: and Mr. Brassy-Brown asserted that she never reached his house, or, at any rate, that she never entered it. He was sitting in his keeping-room, smoking, a good part of the evening, expecting Timms to drop in, and he neither saw nor heard her pass. Regina had told him in the afternoon that she should call for his sister's shawl, and he looked for it, and laid it out ready, but she did not come. When asked if her non-appearance struck him as singular: "Not a bit of it," he answered; "what was it to him? If he thought of it at all, it was that she had gone home the longest way, to take a walk with the parson."

Amongst the universal perplexity, none were so much affected by this mysterious disappearance as Mr. Lewis: for none had regarded Regina with feelings akin to his. He left not a stone unturned to find her. He turned about in his mind every probability and improbability that could bear upon the case: at rest or in action, in his daily duties and his midnight chamber, he was ever dwelling on it. A vague suspicion, he scarcely knew why, rose, like a cloud in

his mind—a suspicion of Brassy Brown. But what suspicion? The clergyman could not define it to himself. Mr. Lewis had heard of such things as young girls being stolen away and married against their will: and it was known that Brassy Brown had long wanted to marry Regina. But Brassy could not have ventured upon a feat of that sort, because Mary found him in his own house soon after what must have been the hour of her disappearance, quietly sleeping in his own bed. The joking words of Regina occurred to him: "He will kill me, some of these days, with his shakings. If he does, sir, I shall look to you to give me Christian burial," and he remembered his rash promise, and shuddered.

The fourth day after Regina's disappearance, Mr. Lewis went again up to Brassy's. The latter was in his garden, planting cabbages. He came forward when he saw his visitor, invited him into the house, and set a chair.

"Mr. Brown," began the clergyman, "I have come up once more to talk with you about this mysterious affair. Will you swear to me, before Heaven, that you have no idea what has become of Miss Winter?"

"Won't do anything of the sort," said Brassy, coolly. "I have had an idea from the first."

"How? what idea?" cried the clergyman, eagerly.

"I suspect you took her off for a moonlight walk that night yourself, parson; and that, maybe, you have kept her in hiding, against taking her for some more."

"This levity ill becomes you, Mr. Brassy Brown."

"Levity!" uttered Brassy. "I don't mean it as levity. Who else is likely to have got hold of her, but you?—you had the best right to her."

"Did *you* get hold of her?" asked the clergyman, looking at him keenly.

"If I did get hold of her, I shouldn't have been able to keep her," retorted the imperturbable Brassy. "Not likely. Here was Nomy here, the next day, sobbing her eyes out, and looking all over my rooms and into my cupboards. When she had done, I asked her if she thought I had locked her up in one of 'em. My opinion is, parson, that you and Nomy and Mary are all going cracked together over this matter. What do I know of Regina Winter—or want with her? Not so much as you."

"Where *can* she be?" bewailed the clergyman, in his perplexity. "On what mysterious spot of this fair earth can she be hidden? Is she dead or alive?"

"She's not in my pocket," returned Brassy, "and I'm sure you are welcome to search everything else that's mine. Because I may have got the character for having taken a hare, or so, you must go, slap off-hand, and suspect I'd take a woman! The two are not the same articles, parson."

Nothing more satisfactory could be got out of Brassy Brown, and the affair remained as unfathomable as at its first onset. A new mistress was procured for the school. Mary Brown, whose health was growing rapidly worse, returned home to the Rill to die. Brassy continued to pursue his free-and-easy sort of life; and the village, in time, ceased to think and speak of Regina. But there were two hearts in which she was never forgotten—those of poor, faithful Nomy, and of the Reverend John Lewis.

II.

THE Reverend John Lewis lay on his bed, in Littleford Vicarage, tossing and turning from side to side. The cheek's hectic, of which observant friends had predicted mischief in the earlier part of his clerical career, had at length shone out in its true nature, and John Lewis was dying of decline. Seven years had elapsed since the now nearly-forgotten disappearance of Regina Winter, and he had been an ailing, fading man ever since.

The years had brought several changes to the village. Mrs. Budd was dead, and Nomy, whose husband had been killed in an affray with poachers, was now the housekeeper and general servant at the Vicarage. It had been a desperate conflict, this affray: two gamekeepers were shot dead, and others badly wounded. Several lawless characters were committed for trial, on suspicion of being concerned in it, one of whom was Mr. Brassy Brown. But when the trial came on at the assizes, the suspicions could not be converted into proofs, and the men were discharged. Brassy Brown felt, or affected, great indignation. They had treated him like a low, common poacher, he raved, instead of a gentleman, as he was, by descent, and he declared he would not stop amongst them. He was as good as his word: advertised his small estate for sale, pocketed the money, and took ship at Liverpool. Some people thought he went to America, some to Australia (not then flocked after as it is now), and some to the coast of Africa; but Brassy himself never said where, and after his departure he was never more heard of.

The Reverend John Lewis lay on his bed, tossing and turning. His restlessness that night was not wholly the result of his feverish, sick state. He had just awakened from a disagreeable dream. He thought that Regina Winter came to him dressed in white, with a pale, sorrowful face, and gently reproached him with neglecting his oath, and suffering her to lie in unconsecrated ground. He thought he asked the question, Where are you lying? and she glided on before, telling him to come and see. He seemed, after they had gone some way, to lose sight of her, and to have halted, himself, on a spot of ground familiar to him. But just then he awoke, and, try as he would, was unable to recal the features of the place, which he had seemed, in his sleep, to know so well.

With this dream, all the old trouble came back again, the painful feelings, the yearning after Regina, which he had, in a degree, outgrown. He had long been very ill; for many months had daily looked for death; his hours were passed in great pain and weariness; yet death came not: and the somewhat visionary idea now rushed over his mind, was it that he *could not* die—that he was not permitted to die until he had fulfilled his oath to Regina, found, and buried her? No wonder, with these thoughts haunting him, that the Vicar slept no more that night.

He retired to rest the next evening, thinking of his dream, wondering whether it would visit him again. Not precisely that, but one bearing upon it did. Could it have been but the sequence to his waking thoughts? He thought he stood upon a plot of ground, a green plot of ground, about two yards square, and all around was cultivated land. He appeared to know, beyond all doubt, that Regina was lying buried in this spot, and again all the features of the place seemed perfectly familiar to him, but when he awoke, they had, as on the previous night, faded from his recollection.

None can tell how the Vicar longed, all throughout the ensuing day, for night to come. A conviction lay strong upon his mind that the real spot of Regina's resting-place would be revealed to him. He had not, during these two days, spoken to anyone of these singular dreams; not even to Nomy, or to the young clergyman who had come to do his duty for him, and who was to him like a brother. The reader may be disposed to doubt that such dreams ever had place, but that they had, and that the body was found in consequence, is an authenticated fact.

The third night came and passed, and, with the first faint glimmering of morning light, Mr. Lewis summoned his housekeeper, who dressed herself, and hastened to his room.

"Nomy!" he exclaimed, "I have a strange trouble upon my mind. I cannot rest."

"Dear master," she said, "what is it? I am sure trouble's bad for you."

"These last three nights I have been dreaming of Regina. I thought she came and pointed out to me where she was lying, and though I saw it, and stood upon it, though all around the spot was familiar in my dreams, I cannot recal it when I awake. This last night it seemed the plainest, and the place where I stood I now know was a garden, for I saw the vegetables; not a ploughed or pasture field, as I had thought yesterday. And I don't know why, but Mary Brown seemed in some way to be mixed up with this last dream."

"You had better call to mind all the places where you have ever seen Mary Brown, master, or where she ever was, to your knowledge, with Miss Regina," whispered the woman, after serious thought. "It might afford some clue, maybe."

The Vicar lay back on his bed, remaining silent, his hand shading his eyes, as if he would shut out outward things. The woman stood watching him.

"Where is there a privet-hedge, Nomy?" he said, after a while, without removing his hand—"a privet-hedge, and potatoes planted under it, with a path running across to it?"

"A privet-hedge and potatoes growing by it," uttered Nomy; "there's many such in this neighbourhood, master."

"The kidney-beans lie in this way," he added, making a movement with the unoccupied hand, "and the peas—they are just coming up—are lower down. The cabbages are close under foot—Oh, Nomy!" he cried out, with a positive shriek, "I recollect—I see it all!"

The servant drew nearer to the bed, and grasped hold of the counterpane. A nameless terror was stealing over her.

"It is Brassy Brown's garden," gasped the invalid; "I see every part of it, as I used to see it when I went to read to Mary, in her illness. The green spot—but the green was only in my dream—is on the right of the narrow path leading to the back-door, along the side of the house. Cabbages were growing on it the spring I used to go to Mary. I saw Brassy transplanting them there, the very day I went to ask news of Regina. I believe solemnly," uttered the clergyman, with emphasis, "as truly as that we must all one day come to the same earth, that Regina lies there. Call Mr. Hampton."

The young curate was summoned out of his sleep, and came. Mr. Lewis related his extraordinary dreams to him, and his sacred conviction that, in this particular spot, the remains would be found. Before mid-day, not less than twenty inhabitants of Littleford had listened to these dreams, from the Vicar's own lips.

He could not go himself, he was too weak to get there and to risk the agitation it would entail, but he took a piece of paper, and drew a plan of Brassy Brown's garden, minutely marking the precise spot where he believed the body would be found. A company—such a company!—armed with spades, pickaxes, and shovels, and headed by Squire Rickhurst and the Reverend Mr. Hampton, flocked to the Rill in the afternoon: the new owner of the place willingly granting them leave to turn up his garden.

It was in spring, just about the time of year she had disappeared, and the spot was now planted with broccoli. They rooted them up, and dug and dug; and, a few feet below the surface, they came upon the mouldering remains of Regina Winter. Dressed as she had been dressed that evening: a black dress, a black-and-white plaid shawl, a white lace collar, and a straw bonnet trimmed with black. The bonnet and shawl were torn and tumbled, as if in a struggle, and lay upon her.

A coroner's inquest was held, and the cause of death proved at it. She had been shot in the left breast, in, or close to, the heart. The

verdict was "Wilful Murder against George Brown;" though some of the jury were for bringing it in "Manslaughter," believing it might have been the result of an accident. Brassy always kept loaded guns about his house.

Then came a contention: between the Vicar and Nomy, between the Vicar and his curate, between the Vicar and the Squire: he insisting upon officiating at her burial, and they saying he was not fit to do it. But on the afternoon appointed for the service, the Vicar struggled up out of his bed, and dressed himself. "I took a rash oath, during her life, that I would give her Christian burial," he answered to their remonstrances, "and I must fulfil it."

There was scarcely moving room in the churchyard: all Littleford, and its neighbourhood for some miles round, flocked thither to witness that singular interment. The remains of the once happy girl, about whose ill fate there could be no doubt, whatever may have been its mysterious details, brought, after the lapse of seven years, to their home in consecrated ground; and the weakened frame, the wan, attenuated face of him who stood there, in his white surplice, reading the service over her! Many who witnessed that funeral are dead, but, of those who remain, not one has forgotten the scene, or ever will forget it.

With the last word of the burial service, the Reverend John Lewis's strength, so artificially buoyed up with excitement, deserted him, and it was feared he could not walk back to the Vicarage, short as the distance was. Leaning on Squire Rickhurst, on one side, and on Mr. Hampton, on the other, he at length gained it. Before he had well reposed an instant on the sofa, preparatory to being taken back to his bed, Ted Timms, the man who had been the intimate associate of Brassy Brown, put his head into the room, and asked to speak with the Vicar alone.

"Be quick in what you have to say, Timms," panted the Vicar, "for I am very ill."

"I thought it my duty to come in and make a clean breast of it, sir," began the man. "I have been away from Littleford, till to-day, since the body were found, or I should have been here afore. I think I hold the clue to this murder."

"Speak up," breathed the Vicar. "My hearing is growing dull."

"The night afore Brassy Brown went away for good, the very night afore it, we was a-drinking together at my place, and Brassy got a drop too much, which is what he didn't often do. We got talking about a many things; a-bragging what feats, for good or for bad, we had done in our career; boasting, as it were, one again the t'other. Brassy at last hiccuped out that he had, one night, had a desperate quarrel with a girl in his house, at the Rill; and at last got so mad that he shot her, though he never meant to kill her. I didn't pay much attention to him then, setting it down to the boastings of a man in his cups; but, sir, I now think it were

nothing but the truth, and that he spoke of Miss Gina. The shot must have killed her, and he might have buried her in the garden that same night. If you remember, sir, Mary Brown told folks she was frightened by fancying she saw something black a-creeping from that spot into the house, while she was a-shaking at the gate. It must have been Brassy a-digging the grave then."

"Make ready with the sacrament," murmured John Lewis to Mr. Hampton, as he feebly resisted their wishes to carry him upstairs, after the departure of Timms; "I feel my time here is growing short."

Sure enough, that night he died. It indeed would seem as if he had only been permitted to linger on earth for the purpose of burying Regina Winter.

VALE!

O the swift years!
Pleasure, dismayed, beholds them hurry on;
And love, strong love, looks back through passionate tears
Like the bright meteor that scarce appears,
Soon are they gone.

O the fleet hours!
Why, what is man?—their puppet and their slave;
At first his fetters wreathing with fair flowers,
Then galled and worn and robbed of all his powers,
Gaining a grave.

Vale! we cry,
Watching in youth the sweet June roses fall;
They bloom again—small matter if they die.
Ah! yes, they bloom; but canker worms will lie,
Doubt not, in all.

Vale! The word
Later has smitten us with mortal pain;
Rung out the death-knell of dear hope, or stirred
The lips whose earthly voices may be heard
Never again.

Then does it wake
Sad recollections: haunting thoughts that grieve;
We know the cruel wound some farewells make,
We learn to dread the nothingness, the break
Parting may leave.

So the years run!
Vale! we soon must bid this brief estate;
But for that heritage which shall be won
When the freed soul with time itself has done,
Trusting, we wait.

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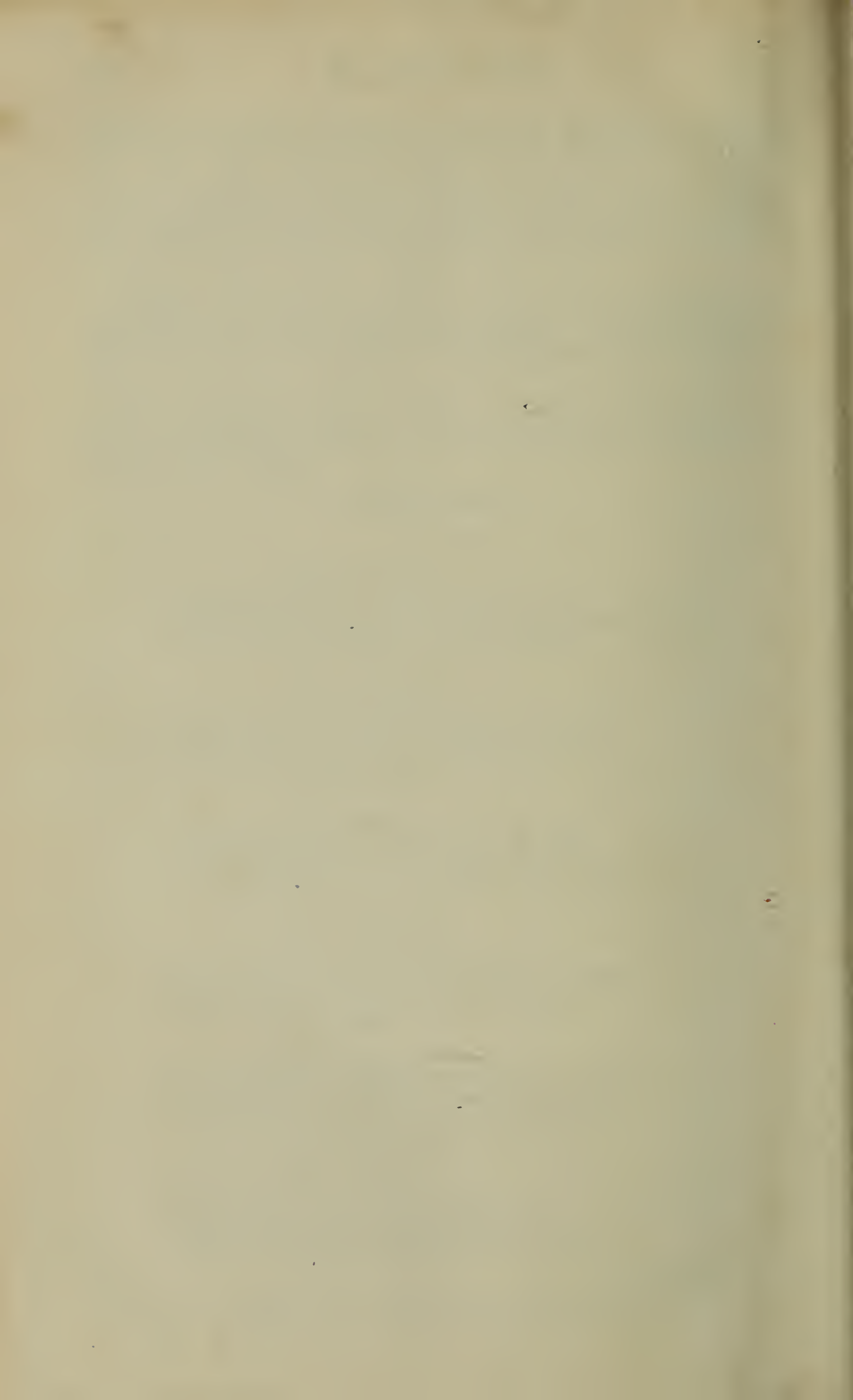

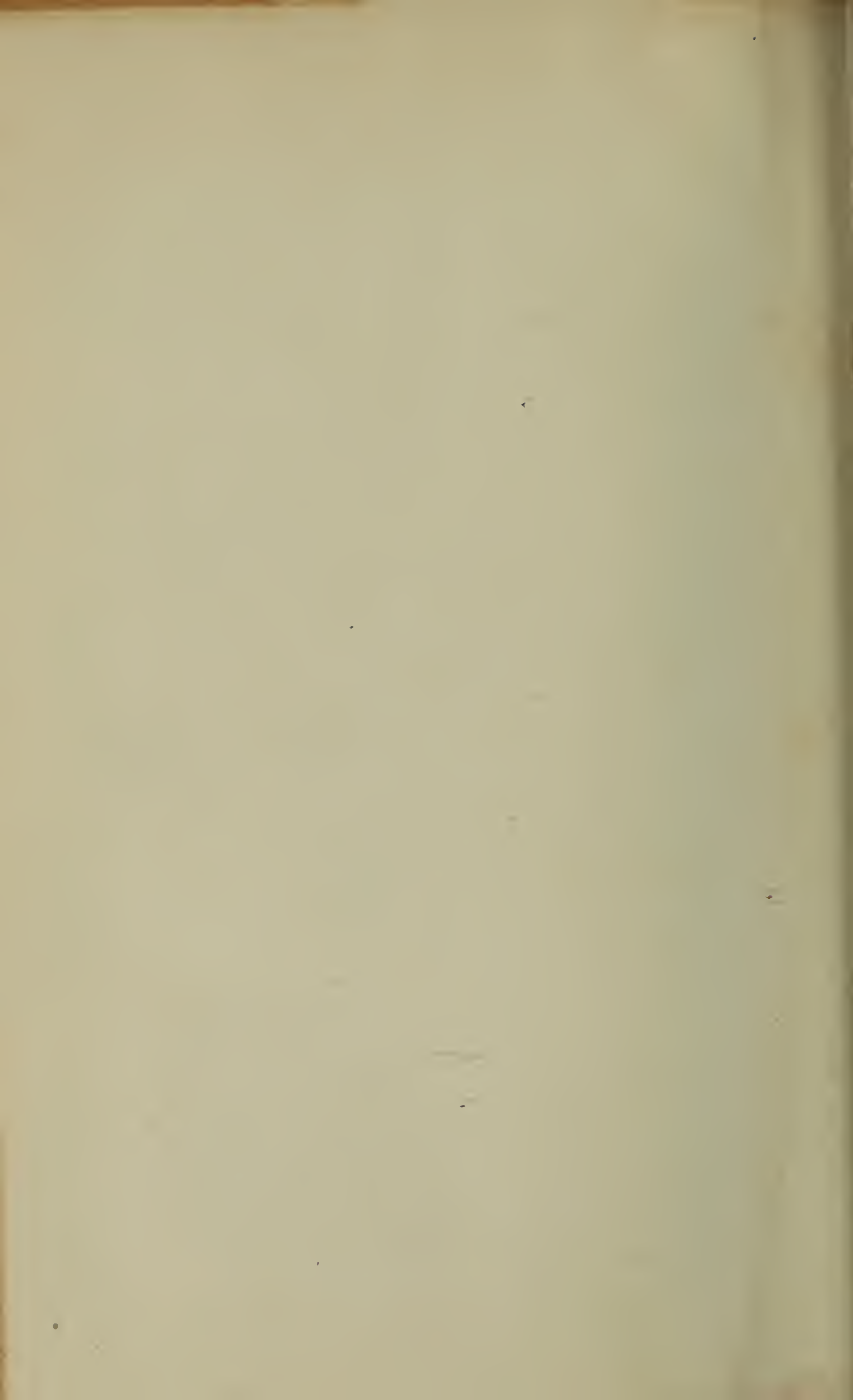

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