

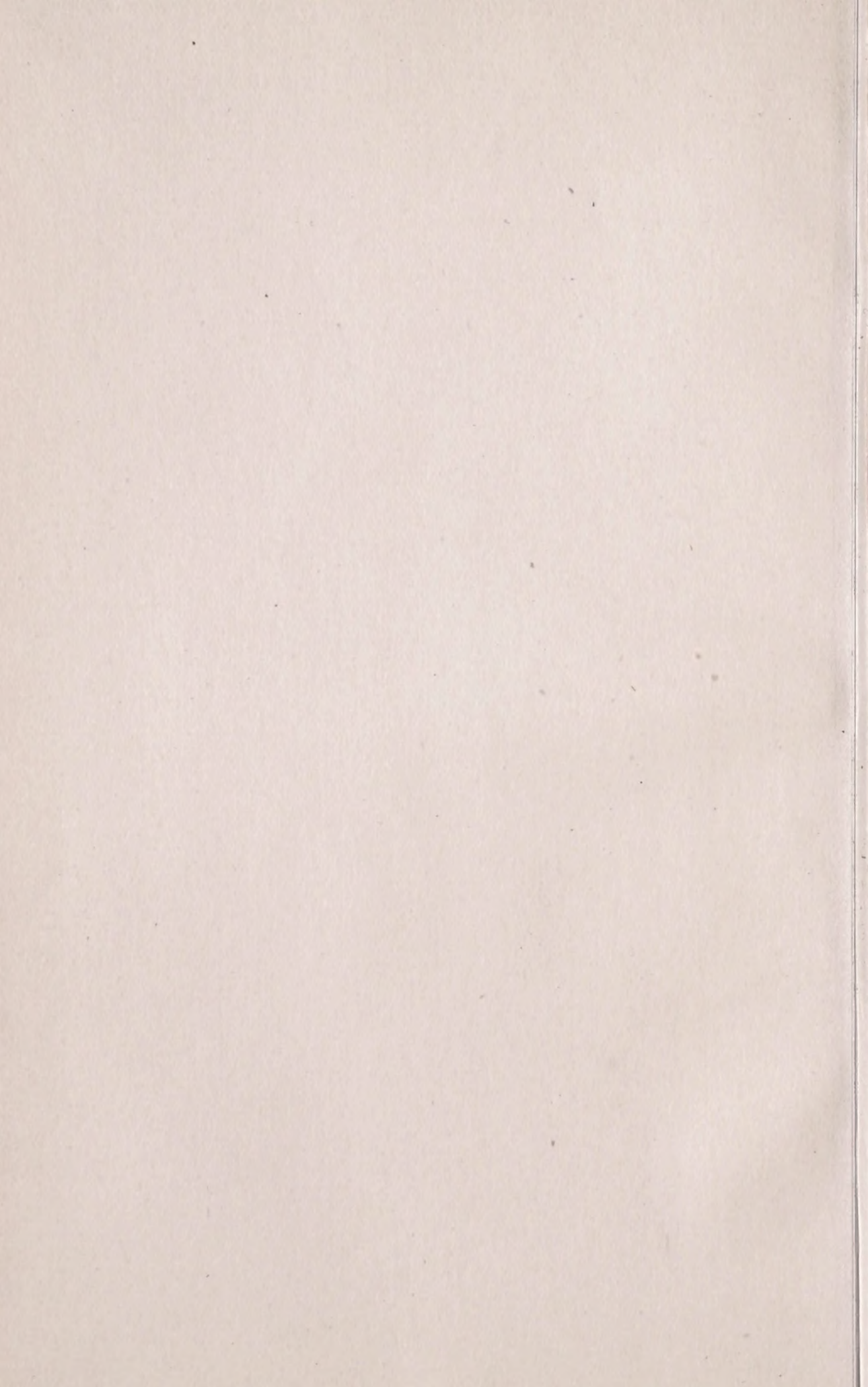


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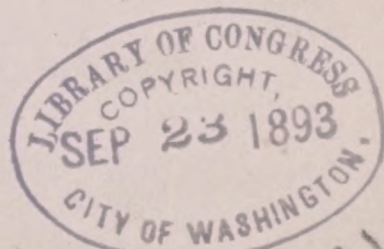
SOUL OF THE BISHOP

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER [pseud.]

AUTHOR OF "BOOTLES' BABY," ETC.

Stannard, Mrs. Hewuetta
Eliza Vaughan (Palmer)

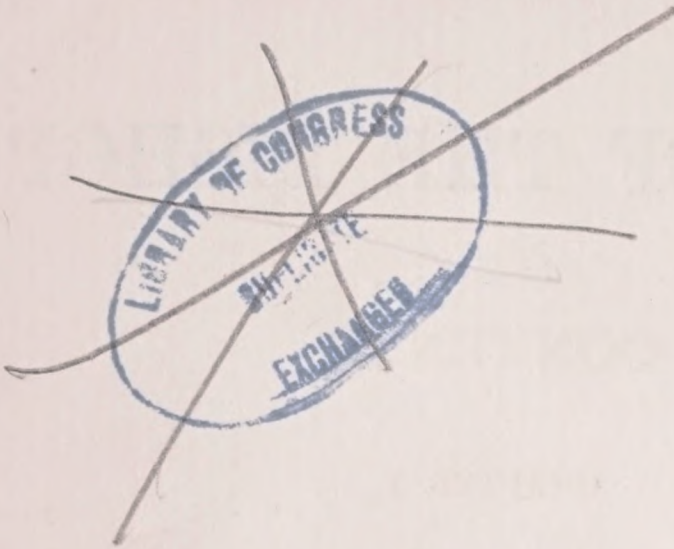


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PREFACE.

IN presenting "The Soul of the Bishop" to the world, I feel that it is necessary for me to make some explanation to my readers as to the reason which has made me choose this unlikely theme as the motive of this story. I use the word "unlikely" advisedly, because I am aware that I have the reputation of being a writer of light stories, of pretty trifles, *pour passer le temps*, which is one of the disadvantages of beginning to write novels while very young, as it often creates a difficulty in more mature years when the author wishes to be taken seriously, feeling strongly that the work has grown in quality or in strength with the years that have gone by.

"The Soul of the Bishop" has been on my mind for more than two years, and I now offer it to the world with much diffidence, being not very sure whether I have made out a good case or not. But if my readers see what my aim has been, that it has been to present with unmistakable force an attitude of mind which is very prevalent to day, then I shall not feel that I have thrown my work away.

I have not attempted to elucidate the situation, nor have I tried to bring the story to the conventional ending usual in such tales—a practice which, to my mind, has utterly spoiled some of the best and most interesting novels bearing on religion, which have appeared of late years. What I have tried to show is the working of a mind so thoroughly endowed with practical common-sense as to be unable to reconcile an innate sense of justice and an intense desire to follow real Christianity—I mean the *original* religion which Christ Himself taught (regarding Him from any Christian stand-point, or even from that of the Agnostic)—with the so-called religion of Christ as laid down by some of the dogmas to which the Orthodox Church sets her seal to-day. I have tried to show how a really honest mind may, and, alas, too often does, suffer mental and moral shipwreck over those rocks which the Church allows to endanger the channel to a harbor never easy to navigate at any time.

I do not, of course, presume to expect that my story will do much to bring about the removal of those rocks and stumbling-blocks which the Church permits to stand in the way of those who wish to believe in a religion which shall be in true accord with that plain, unselfish, and eminently practical one which Christ Himself taught while on earth. Nor do I expect that any words of mine will cause the Church's Articles of Religion to be pruned of those which common-sense rejects, and so make the

Orthodox Church one more in accord with the advanced thought, cultivation, and enlightenment of modern times, instead of remaining as it is now, fast bound by the out-of-date and worse than useless dogmas of a constitution formed at a time when every energy was directed so as to offer as much opposition as possible toward the Church of Rome—an aim which was served to such an extent that the real and practical religion of Christ was almost lost sight of. I only desire to show that these rocks do exist, and that their effect upon thousands of men and women who are, by the very conditions under which we live, being taught day by day to think for themselves on spiritual matters, is terrible indeed.

It was not many years ago that a great Churchman, one in a position of much authority, refused in any way to countenance a meeting of the British Association, which was held in the town over which he held spiritual sway, on the ground that the tendency of such meetings was bad for “the people,” causing them to think for themselves and to discuss questions which had best remain untouched. Therefore, during that week while the meetings were taking place, he never once entered the town. To me the fact that a highly cultivated scholar could put forth views so deliberately blinding came as the surest proof that there must be something to find out, something to make ecclesiastics afraid of “the people” learning about the

religion which they professed; and this was the very first thing which set me thinking of these matters.

This was some years before I came to London and mingled among those who will insist on thinking for themselves, even about the abstruse points of their religion. Since those days the wave of independent thought has grown and thriven apace; and to-day men and women *will* judge for themselves, regardless of the continual exhortations which, from time to time, peal forth from almost every Orthodox pulpit in the land, to the effect that it is impossible for the laity to think rightly for themselves, and that their only safety lies in being content to believe what the clergy tell them they must believe—*in order to be saved!*

In the face of this growing tendency the question arises, Is it right or wise of the Church to stand by hard-and-fast rules, framed by men possessed only of the narrow, highly prejudiced views and opinions of the Middle Ages, or of times even more remote than those? I imagine that the majority of those who *think*—the Agnostics, who are increasing every day; the Freethinkers, who are many; and all the multitude of creedless Christians, who are legion—will be of one opinion and will join in saying—NO!

JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

THE SOUL OF THE BISHOP

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW BISHOP.

“Who is the honest man ?

He that doth still and strongly good pursue,
To God, his neighbor, and himself most true ;
Whom neither force nor fawning can
Unfix, or wrench from giving all their due.”

—HERBERT.

“His bishopric let another take ! ”

—*Acts.*

THE old city of Blankhampton was in mourning, for John, by Divine Providence Lord Bishop of the Diocese, was lying dead in his Palace a couple of miles away, and people were speaking more kindly of him than they had done for long enough. In truth the late Bishop had not been always a very popular man, but had been of an austere manner and somewhat haughty of demeanor; still the

townspeople had forgotten all that now, and only recalled his great learning, his magnificent powers of work, and his unimpeachable domestic qualities. They told each other that it would be well for the county and for the town, if all the clergy had proved themselves to be as perfectly devoted husbands and fathers as the late Prelate had undoubtedly set them the example of being. They reminded each other that if the dead man had had some unlovable qualities, he had had others that were eminently lovable. If his high-stepping horses had seemed, to his poorer brethren, to be sure signs of their Bishop's arrogance and haughtiness of mind, yet those same horses had never been turned out on to the hard world, to work out their declining years in underfed neglect, for no horses had ever been sold out of the episcopal stables during the whole of the dead man's reign.

Well, the reign had come to an end now, and the shutters kept up in the windows of the principal shops in sign of mourning did honor to him who was but just departed from among them. There was much hurrying to and fro at the Palace, there was a great deal of extra business for the florists, and there was a great gathering of clergy and laity on the cold wintry morning when John, by Divine Providence Lord Bishop of the Diocese, was laid to sleep, not with his fathers, but with his predecessors ;

and then that chapter in the history of Blankhampton was closed forever.

The next question which troubled the good people of Blankhampton and indeed of Blankshire, was, who would be appointed to the Bishopric? The Conservatives were in power, so that probably the new Bishop would be a man of good family; it was equally probable that he would be a man of somewhat evangelical principles, to which Blankshire people greatly objected, although the late Bishop had been distinctly of a low church turn. Still, they were not so anxious on that score as they were that their new spiritual lord should be a man of good family. They knew what they wanted, and they were not slow to express the same, although, it is true, they only expressed it to one another, which was not likely to make much difference to the eventual disposal of the See. They also knew what they did not want; and one of their desires was, that they should not have a school-master for their Bishop, although the predecessor of the dead Prelate had been a school-master in his time and had been universally beloved and revered by all classes of the community within his See.

Still, since those days, society had very much changed. Blankhampton itself had grown from a dull aristocratic Cathedral city, with one cavalry regiment quartered in its barracks and the little

gathering of good class men who took up their quarters there during the winter months for the hunting, to a big, bustling, rather frivolous place, whose Cathedral set had been utterly swamped by the gayer, livelier and more worldly society which had gathered itself about the now very large military garrison. This part of Blankhampton wanted what it called "a real swagger Bishop," and a promoted head-master from one of the public schools did not exactly fulfil their ideas of this somewhat anomalous being.

However, in due course of time, the doubts and fears of all sections of the town were put finally at rest, for it became known that the Prime Minister had offered the Bishopric of Blankhampton to a London clergyman, by whom it had been accepted. The news was for several days the one topic of conversation in the old city. Who was he? What was he like? How old was he? Was he high church or low? Was he married or single? Had he been popular in his London parish? What had he done that he should be made Bishop of Blankhampton? These and many other such questions fluttered to and fro upon the perturbed and expectant air.

Well, the natural curiosity was very soon satisfied. Within a week the Bishop-elect came down to look at the Palace, and although the spectacle of a

clergyman walking quietly down the street by himself, is not one of a very unusual character, some instinct or other seemed to tell every person whom he met that this was no other than the new Bishop. He was not, as yet, wearing Bishop's clothing—for the very good reason that his tailor had not yet sent home the garments for which he had been measured some days previously — but every man woman and child in Blankhampton who had chanced to set eyes upon him, knew that this was their new spiritual head.

In person, the Reverend Archibald Netherby was a complete surprise to the entire population. The majority of them had expected that he would be a grave, somewhat austere, middle-aged man, grizzly and unkempt as to his hair, portly in person, and wearing either pince-nez or spectacles. He was, however, totally different to this. Imagine a man of forty, big, strong, athletic and alert, with a quick, clean gait and a keen, interested, everyday sort of manner. He was fair of complexion, was clean shaven—and his thick, light-brown hair was cut as closely as any soldier's up at the barracks. His eyes were very blue and looked at you in a straight and frank manner. For the rest, his nose was straight, his mouth pleasant enough, and his chin firm and square, with a cleft in the middle of it.

The new Bishop had come on the previous evening to the Station Hotel, and had put up there in a simple and unostentatious manner. Having breakfasted in the Coffee Room and leisurely looked over the London papers, he got up, flicked the crumbs off his coat, smoothed his tall hat round with his sleeve, like any other man, and quietly sallied forth into the fresh and pleasant morning. Of course, to a man accustomed to the bustle of a busy London parish, Blankhampton seemed almost oppressively quiet and old-fashioned, but he sauntered up St. Thomas's Street, taking notes of houses and shops and people, and before ever he reached the Cathedral, had made up his mind that it was the very place for him.

Now the shops in Blankhampton are remarkably good, infinitely better than you will find in most provincial towns, taking exception always to the two delightful watering-places, Brighton and Scarborough. There is one big bookseller's shop in St. Thomas's Street at Blankhampton, which seems almost always to arrest the attention of the passer-by, and the Bishop-elect proved no exception to the general rule. He pulled up short at the sight of a battle picture of Lady Butler's and stood looking at it for some minutes, a marked and noticeable figure on the wide pavement, and at least a dozen people passing by said to one another, "That must be the

new Bishop," although perhaps one would not expect to see a bishop looking into a shop window like any ordinary person.

"Oh, no," said one girl to another, "that's not the new Bishop—he's too young."

"I'm sure it is," answered the one who had spoken first, "I feel certain of it. Let us stop and look into this window."

Now the window adjoining the bookseller's shop happened to be a gunsmith's, so was scarcely as appropriate for two smart young girls to stop at as the bookseller's window was for the Bishop. However, that is neither here nor there. They stood looking in at six-shooters and the latest thing in breech-loaders, while the stranger passed from the window in which Lady Butler's "Quatre Bras" was flanked by beautifully bound editions of the poets, to the other one where the photographs of the late Prelate were displayed, side by side with the last Society beauty, and the last notoriety in the way of skirt-dancing.

"I say," said one of the girls to the other, "but isn't he splendid? Fancy his stopping to look at those photographs, too; *that* doesn't look as if he was over and above goody-goody, does it?"

"Oh, he is not looking at them, he is looking at the poor old Bishop!" said the other girl.

"Yes, he is," persisted the first speaker, "I no-

ticed that all the skirt-dancers were up at this end; see, he's looking at them now."

"I wonder whether he is married?" said the second girl.

"Married? Yes," answered the other, "and got half a dozen children at home. Of course he's married—sure to be."

"Well, I don't know—he doesn't look married to me," said her companion.

Well, the new Bishop, having had a good look at the photographs, passed on his way up the street toward the Cathedral. It certainly had, at that moment, crossed his mind that it was an odd thing for two pretty young girls to be taking such interest in a gunsmith's window, but imagining that in his ordinary parson's clothes nobody would spot him—yes, I know that "spot" is slang, but the Bishop *did* say "spot" in his own mind, and, as a humble but faithful chronicler, I wish to present this man to my readers as he really was, and not, in any sense, as the pompous ass a typical bishop is supposed to be—it never occurred to him that the gunsmith's window was but an excuse for them to get a good look at himself. So he sauntered happily on, followed at a little distance by the two girls.

His way led him to the Cathedral, a glorious fane of nearly pure Norman architecture, always affectionately held up by Blankhampton folk as the most

perfect Temple of God in the wide world and always familiarly called by them—"the Parish." The bells were just ringing for morning service and, when he passed under the great organ screen into the choir, he was seen and taken possession of by a soft-voiced, flat-footed verger, who never suspected for a moment that this was the new Bishop. Probably he was the only person in Blankhampton, who did not suspect his real condition; but, as a rule, cathedral vergers do not take much account of clergymen, unless they happen to be wearing gaiters. His cloth, however, secured him a seat in the stalls, not very far from the Dean's seat, and when the Dean himself came in, he guessed, in a moment, who the tall fair-faced stranger was, and at the conclusion of the short service, sent his own verger to make sure whether his suspicion was correct or not and, if it was, to beg the stranger to join him in the vestry.

From that moment, the new Bishop's *incognito* came to an end; he was the lion of the hour; he was carried off to the Deanery to lunch, and he was driven over in the Dean's carriage to see the Palace; in short, he was completely taken in hand and so many of his future flock were presented to him that he was almost bewildered.

After this, the good people of Blankhampton very soon learned all that there was to learn about their new spiritual head. They learned first of all that

the Netherbys were one of the oldest families that have ever flourished in the good old North Country, and that the Reverend Archibald of that name was the head of the family, being the eldest son of the oldest branch of the house; that he had been educated at Eton and Oxford, where he had done fairly well but not brilliantly; that he was nearly forty-one years of age, and had an unsurpassable record for dogged hard work, and that he was possessed of the quality of shrewd common-sense to a degree which almost amounted to brilliance. They learned that as vicar of one of the busiest and most important parishes in London, he had filled his church Sunday after Sunday, with a crowd of people, all eager and anxious to learn, although it was generally acknowledged that his sermons read infinitely better than they preached; indeed, to tell the truth, it was generally admitted that the new Bishop of Blankhampton "could not preach a bit." They learned also, that in administrative power he was unequalled, that his network of parish organization had been the most complete and the most useful that had ever been known in that parish before, that he had a perfect genius for administration, an indomitable will, a simple unostentatious manner, an exceedingly kind heart, and, on occasion, the gay spirits of a boy. The good people of Blankhampton learned also that the inhabitants of

his old parish were heart-broken at his promotion, although they owned that it was no more than his due that he should wear the lawn sleeves of a bishop and fill one of the highest dignities of the Church ; still that they were parting with him with infinite regret and tears of sorrow, and looked forward to the future with apprehension and almost with despair. They learned that his servants were coming with him in a body, and that the Palace was to be done up and made fit for occupation by a local firm. And they also discovered that Archibald Netherby, Bishop-elect of Blankhampton, was not married.

CHAPTER II.

DAWN.

“ O, that a man might know
The end of this day's business ere it come !
But it sufficeth that the day will end,
And then the end is known.”

—JULIUS CÆSAR.

“ Rachel was beautiful and well favored.”

—*Genesis.*

IN due course of time, the new Bishop was consecrated in Blankhampton Cathedral and duly took up his abode at Blankhampton Palace. The firm, who had received the commission to do up and refurnish that charming old mansion, were so inordinately proud of the order that, when their task was accomplished, they took the liberty of giving a sort of private view of the grand old house; and very many of the townspeople, most of those indeed who happened to be customers of the firm, took the opportunity of inspecting the work.

All sorts and conditions of men and women drove or walked out to the rambling but stately mansion,

and went into raptures over the size of the rooms, the beauty of the gardens, the excellent accommodation in the stables, and the good taste of the new fittings and decorations.

“It is most extraordinary,” said one lady to another, “that a bachelor should make himself a home like this.”

“Perhaps he won’t be a bachelor long,” returned the other, trying to calculate mentally how a certain cosey-corner of white and pale blue would suit her own drawing-room, “perhaps he won’t be a bachelor long. I say, Maria, don’t you like that cosey-corner?”

“I like it *all*,” said Maria, with a gush of feeling.

Maria was a sweet young thing “about” forty, and had a gentle vision in her mind, at that moment, of herself as mistress of that beautiful old palace, of herself moving to and fro in the spacious rooms, of herself walking through life beside the new Bishop. It was a mere vision, it was quite innocent, it was almost as impossible as it was unlikely of fulfilment; but Maria was young in mind and ambitious in thought, and her little dream hurt nobody, not even herself. She had not often an opportunity of seeing the interior of a palace, and she was ready to take every stick and stone of it to her metaphorical bosom. Maria’s friend, however, was more practical.

“I want something new in my drawing-room,” she said, reflectively, “and Robert has promised I shall have *carte blanche*. I’ve waited ten years to have it done up, you know, and the other day he told me I could have it done when I liked, and I need not stint myself as to the cost of it. I’ve a good mind to have a corner like that one—it would be out of the common, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes,” sighed Maria, “it would be out of the common, that’s true. Everything here is out of the common.”

“Well, to my mind,” said Maria’s friend, “it all looks a little new. Of course, there’s the wonderful old oak furniture in the dining-room, and the large settees in this room and the pictures and the chapel-furnishings and the great chests in the hall, they were all here before and are heirlooms, so to speak; but to me, it all looks as if it wanted living in.”

“It wants a wife,” said Maria, with a sigh.

That was exactly what all Blankhampton said, nay more, it was what all Blankshire said, that the Bishop’s Palace had need most of anything of a mistress.

The Bishop himself, however, when he came to take possession, seemed very well satisfied to do without that luxury. He brought with him a few favorite pieces of furniture and a large quantity of pictures and *bric-à-brac* of all kinds, and, in an in-

credibly short time, he had settled down and made himself thoroughly at home in the big Palace.

But it must not be imagined that such a man had lived for nearly forty-one years in the world, without having the idea of marriage suggested to him many times. He was, unlike most bishops, a very rich man independently of his office, and, on many occasions, he had had hints thrown out to him that it was a thousand pities he did not marry.

“I look upon you, my dear Archie Netherby,” said an old friend, a very great lady, to him one day, when dining at his house in London, “I look upon you as a good husband wasted. Why, my dear boy, with a house like this, with an income like yours, with your position and—I don’t want to flatter you, Archie—but, with your looks, why you should enjoy it all by yourself, I cannot imagine. *Why* don’t you marry?”

It is true that the big parson turned a little red and showed some signs of confusion.

“My dear friend,” he said, with an effort to speak lightly, “I have not time to think of these things. Perhaps some day I shall find myself with more leisure.”

“Leisure,” echoed the lady; “oh, nonsense, you want very little leisure to get married. It is the will you want, Archie, not the leisure.”

However, be that as it may, Archibald Netherby

went down to Blankshire without having changed his state, and he took up his abode in the big palace and flung himself heart and soul into the many and arduous duties of his office, and had apparently, no intention whatever of giving that same palace a mistress.

Blankhampton, not to say Blankshire, took it into its general head that the new Bishop wanted encouragement. That was the favorite formula of the ladies in that part of the world, when a man did not easily surrender himself to the toils of the match-maker; and of a surety, the encouragement that the new Bishop received was enough to have tempted any man at least to consider the question. But the Bishop did not seem even to see the little snares that were spread out for his delectation; he went serenely on his way, making pilgrimage after pilgrimage into the uttermost corners of the earth—or if not into the uttermost corners of the earth, certainly into the uttermost corners of his diocese; he started just such a wonderful net-work of organization from one end of it to the other, as he had found of such good effect in his London parish; he infected all the young ladies with a desire to do parish work, and he infected all the young men with an enthusiasm for helping their less fortunate brethren; he made himself personally acquainted with every clergyman in his See; he preached at

every church in Blankshire ; in short, he began like the proverbial new broom, and he showed not the smallest sign of turning into an old one. But he did not get married.

The winter passed away and bright summer came in its stead. The new Bishop proved himself as good at tennis and at cricket as he had proved himself to be full of energy in his work ; but even tennis did not help matters on toward providing the Palace with a mistress. He was very popular, he was greatly admired, and he was a pattern to all his clergy ; but he remained a bachelor. He received quite ten times as many invitations as he could possibly accept ; everybody in the county said that he was the best fellow, the finest all-round worker, and the kindest soul that they had ever met. And they agreed, one and all, that, although the matter of his sermons was exceeding good, yet his manner of delivering them was the one blot and blemish upon his otherwise beautiful presence.

For a wonder the new Bishop was on excellent terms with the Dean. It does not always follow. In Blankhampton, at least, the Deanery and the Palace had never been on really good terms, excepting during a very short period after the present Dean had succeeded to the Deanery. It is the case with many Deaneries and Bishoprics. In Blankhampton, for instance, up to the time of Archibald

Netherby's appointment, the relations between the two spiritual heads of the Church had been more than usually strained. But at the end of six months the Dean and the Bishop were still great friends and on the best of terms with each other, nor did there seem to be any likelihood of any disagreement arising between them.

One of their most pleasant arrangements was that the Bishop should preach as often as could be arranged in his Cathedral Church. On Sunday mornings, of course, the Prebends took their turn at preaching; but there were several of those who were too old to take the journey on fixed days or to make the effort to preach in so large an edifice. There were also a few off days, when no one was specially appointed to fill the pulpit. And there were some half-dozen days in the year, when the late Bishop had been set down as preacher, occasions of which he had frequently not taken advantage, so that Blankhampton people heard him but seldom. There were also a good many days when the Dean was the preacher, and a very good preacher too, so that by taking a fair share of these, and an equally fair share of the evening services, when the choice of the preacher was solely at the discretion of the Dean, the new Bishop was enabled to hold forth at the Parish, quite as often as his duties in other directions would admit of.

In one thing Dr. Netherby made a great change from the ways of his predecessor ; for, whereas that dignitary had on all days when he was not preaching at some church in his See, been in the habit of attending divine service in the quiet country church adjoining his palace, the new Bishop, at all such times, attended the services in the beautiful old Cathedral.

He happened to be preaching there one Sunday morning, on a lovely day in July, when the sun was streaming through the glorious old windows, casting colored rays of light upon the richly carved oak below ; and when the choir was full to overflowing, so that the gay dresses of the women and the rich uniforms of the officers present, made the sombre old building seem like a garden in summer bloom. The Bishop, looking as imposing as any in his satin robes, lawn sleeves, and Doctor's hood, joined in the service, without so much as turning his eyes to right or to left ; but, when he stood up to preach and grew interested in his subject, he began unconsciously and instinctively to pick out of the sea of faces, the one or two which were most in accord with his own feelings.

I think that there are but few preachers, especially those who are very much in earnest, who do not feel this power of attraction more or less. If a man can single out but one face that is earnest or

interested, whose soul is unmistakably in touch with his own by the medium of ears and eyes and mouth, that man has a better chance of preaching a sermon that will touch all who hear it, than if he preaches to nothing more impressionable than a bit of carving or a distant aisle. On that particular occasion, when there was everything to arouse a feeling of fervor in the hearts of both preacher and people—glorious sunshine, rich and stately surroundings, entrancing music, and almost perfect singing—the Bishop of Blankhampton found his attention gradually rivetting itself upon one of the faces just across the choir, framed as in a shrine of dark oak.

It was a woman's face, of course—well, a woman scarcely past early girlhood. He had remarkably good eyesight, but he scarcely noticed or indeed thought about the actual details of the face. He could not have told precisely what the lady was like, excepting that she was young, and that she was listening to him with strained and eager attention, the eagerness of a soul seeking for something. Yet, although he could hardly have said whether her hair was dark or light, whether her eyes were brown or blue, whether her features were regular or not, yet her face had impressed itself upon his mind and he knew that he would know her again, anywhere and at any time. After the service was over, he went, as was his almost invariable custom, to lunch at the

Deanery, but he had no opportunity of even inquiring who this lady might be.

July slipped over, as brilliant summer days have a way of doing, but, although the Bishop was twice present at the Parish during the month, he did not see that face again. The autumn came on, during which he took a brief holiday, going abroad for a change. Not a long holiday, because bishops, especially when they have not been very long in their dioceses, cannot afford to lift their hand from the machinery which they have set in motion and but barely established. Still, the three weeks in which he indulged himself served to give him complete change from his busy life, and he came back like a giant refreshed with sleep and once more took up the many threads of his calling.

It happened toward the middle of November, that the Bishop went to dine at one of the largest houses in the neighborhood of Blankhampton, that of Sir Thomas Vivian. The party was a very large one, a gathering of important people, in addition to a large house-party. The Bishop took his hostess in to dinner and sat with her at the top of a long table. Now, in some respects, Lady Vivian was an old-fashioned woman—a very great lady, mind you, a woman strong enough in her position to disregard many fashions, which *mondaines* look upon as essential. At that time, table decorations were all

the flattest of the flat, there were even some ardent reformers, who thought it so dreadful not to be able to see your opposite neighbors, that instead of decking their dinner-tables with vases and epergnes they merely strewed the table-cloth with rose-leaves, violets, daffodils or any such simple flowers, so that the whole effect should be flat and yet be rich in coloring. Lady Vivian, however, would have none of these modern caprices for the dinner-table at Ingleby. The great gold centre-piece which had been presented to herself and her husband at the time of their marriage, was an everlasting joy to her soul and, on all great occasions, it graced the centre of the long table, and was graced in turn by the most exquisite exotics and many fronds of delicate fern.

Lady Vivian had never been able to see the force of putting her beautiful centre-piece away into obscurity and placing her flowers and ferns upon the table-cloth itself. Moreover, at the time of their silver wedding, their tenantry and employés had supplemented the original gift by the addition of two beautiful five-branched candelabra to match it. She had also other beautiful gold plate, with which Sir Thomas had enriched their collection from time to time; and truly, when the Ingleby dinner-table was set out for a banquet, there was no mistaking the display for ordinary pot-luck.

On this occasion, having as guests the Bishop and

a great many other important people, Lady Vivian had arranged her table even more elaborately than usual and, in consequence, those who sat round it were not able to see every other person present, an arrangement which, to my mind, is usually a very advantageous one.

The fourth course was being handed round, when something happened, something very unusual for the Bishop, so that his heart seemed suddenly to stand still within him; a punier man would hardly have felt the shock so great, but his heart fairly jumped and then seemed to stand still for an almost sickening length of time, for he suddenly became aware that, at the other end of the table, sat the lady whom he had seen that bright July morning in the choir of the Parish. It was only a fleeting glimpse that he caught of her, for unconscious of the interest that she was exciting, the young lady turned her head again to speak to her neighbor and a tall arrangement of flowers shut her out of his sight.

He turned presently, that is to say when he felt he had once more got command of his voice and lips, to his hostess, saying, "Who is the young lady in the white dress, at the other end of the table?" Lady Vivian looked up. "No, not that side," said the Bishop, "on the other side. I think she is third from the end."

“That—oh, that is Miss Constable,” Lady Vivian answered, “Sir Edward Constable’s only child, you know.”

“Oh, really,” said the Bishop, in as indifferent a tone as he could put on.

“We think her exceedingly handsome,” said Lady Vivian, scenting a possible match, which would help to keep up the reputation of Ingleby as a garden of happiness wherein many lonely wandering souls might chance to light upon their own particular affinities.

“Very handsome,” said the Bishop, but without any sign of enthusiasm.

“She sings very well,” Lady Vivian went on artlessly.

“Really! How very charming,” was his comment.

“Lady Constable died about six years ago. Sir Edward was really quite young—you see, he is nearly opposite to his daughter, next to the lady in black velvet—we quite thought he would have married again, but I suppose Cecil makes him too happy even to think of it. Of course, she was very young when her mother died—not eighteen, if I remember rightly.”

The Bishop made a rapid mental calculation—eighteen and six make twenty-four—and he was already turned forty-one. His heart sank again.

Yes, it was a difference, a great difference, and probably one that would form an insurmountable barrier from her point of view. "But there," his thoughts ran, "how foolish to even think of such a thing—why, this young lady might be engaged, for anything he knew to the contrary. She might be—oh, it was ridiculous, it was perfectly useless even to think about it."

Still, although it was no use thinking of a contingency which might be as impossible as improbable, it must be confessed that his blue eyes wandered pretty often to that opening in the mass of flowers, through which he had already caught a glimpse of the face which had been haunting him more or less, ever since one bright Sunday morning during the previous July.

But Lady Vivian—her mind thus started off in the direction of match-making—which was her favorite pursuit and which she followed always in such an exceedingly delicate and nice-minded manner, that she was almost able to persuade even herself that she had never done anything to bring about a single marriage in her life—began, in a very roundabout way, to question the Bishop about his daily life.

"Tell me, my dear Bishop," she said, after they had discussed their autumn holidays and various other unimportant topics, "tell me how

do you like Blankshire now you are really settled here ? ”

“ I like it immensely,” he replied, “ I have never been so happy or felt so thoroughly satisfied with my work in my life. But it is not *easy* to be a bishop, Lady Vivian—I can’t think how old men do it.”

“ Ah, well,” she said indulgently, “ they have never got their dioceses into such good order, that things will work without much trouble, or else they don’t reform everything as you are doing. Of course, in a few years’ time, you won’t need to work as you do now.”

“ I don’t know,” he murmured doubtfully, “ I don’t know.”

“ But, tell me,” she went on, bringing him back to her original point again, “ do you still like the Palace ? ”

“ Immensely,” he answered, “ it is a delightful house to live in ; there’s plenty of room in it.”

“ Yes, plenty of room—that goes without saying,” she assented blandly. “ But, tell me, Bishop, don’t you feel sometimes a little lonely in that great place, all by yourself ? ”

“ Dear lady,” he answered, “ I never have time to feel lonely ; I always have too much to do.”

“ I have no doubt. But do you, for instance, breakfast alone in that big dining-hall ? ”

“Oh, no,” he answered, “I—I always have my meals when I am alone in the little ante-room, which is quite big enough for one person. Oh, no, I never think of taking a meal by myself in the big dining-room. Why,” with a laugh, “I should think the draughts would blow me out of it.”

“I am sure it must be lonely for you any way,” Lady Vivian returned. “Do you know I have often thought of you and wondered, when Sir Thomas and I have been alone and we have felt almost lost in this big room, what you were feeling like in that huge dining-hall at the Palace. Somehow, I am glad you don’t sit there alone,” she added.

“Lady Vivian,” he said with a laugh, “I take very good care of myself. Don’t you think,” laughing again, “that I look as if I did?”

“Well, yes. But still, I think you must find it very lonely, there’s such a sense of space at the Palace—of course, you cannot always have a party, or even one or two house-guests, can you? I rather wonder you don’t, as you are not married, have some of your own people to live with you.”

“No, thank you,” said the Bishop with decision, “no, thank you. I had my sister living with me seven years ago—my last unmarried sister—and, mercifully, she got married. I would not for the world have stopped a happy marriage for selfish

reasons." Just then he caught another glimpse of Miss Constable, who was talking to her neighbor on the hand nearest to them. "My sister married very happily, Lady Vivian," he went on, when the flowers had hidden the vision again, "and she is much better off with a husband than she was with me. She did not exactly take interest in what interested me. I never could get her to see that it was my pleasure, as well as my duty, to make myself something more than a mere teacher to my parishioners. She didn't like my having young men in the evening; she said that they were out of her line. I dare say they were; for the most part, they were out of mine, but I was very anxious to make the two lines meet if I could."

"I can quite understand your sister," said Lady Vivian quietly.

"Yes, yes, I know. I was sorry for her in some ways, because, you see, I could not do with junketings going on when I was giving all my mind to a sermon, and when she had her 'At Home' days, I generally had a Mothers' Meeting or a parish-tea or an engagement of some kind and I was seldom or never able to show at them. So that really, although it is a little lonely at the Palace, I don't mind it much; when you are lonely, necessarily you don't annoy anybody else, do you? I am afraid that my relations would be very unhappy if they

were doomed to live with me always—and I am sure I should,” he added, in an undertone.

Well, although this was not perhaps a very promising beginning, Lady Vivian took possession of him as soon as he entered the drawing-room and promptly made him known to her young friend and neighbor, Miss Cecil Constable.

“I want you, my dear,” she said to her, in her kindest tones, “I want you to know our new Bishop, whom I think you have not yet met, and to amuse him for a little while.” Then, as the Bishop bowed, she quietly sailed away and considerably turned her back upon the pair, so that they might have a fair chance of doing what she considered their obvious duty toward one another and toward her, their hostess.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT WILL THE STORY OF THESE TWO BE ?

“The Road of Love is that which has no beginning nor end ; take heed to thyself, man, ere thou place foot on it.”

“To everything there is a season . . . a time to love.”
—*Ecclesiastes.*

THE Bishop sat down on the wide lounge beside Miss Constable.

“I am very charmed to meet you,” he said, in his most pleasant tones, “but I rather wonder that we have not met before, because I have been a long time in Blankshire now and fancied that I had met everybody.”

She looked up smilingly.

“You would have met us,” she answered, “but we have been away, my father and I, for a long time. We spent last winter abroad and although we were here for a little time in the summer, just when I believe you were away we went away again and have only just returned.”

“I hope you did not go on the score of health,” he said.

“No, not exactly,” she answered. “My father got it into his head that he wanted a long change and that he was getting too old to hunt—so we went to Italy. He did not care much for Italy and he missed his hunting dreadfully; indeed he declared that his rheumatism was very little better; so this year we tried the experiment of going to Aix and then to the Engadine, by way of building him up to get through a winter in the ordinary English way. He declares,” smiling again, “that the plan is much the better one and that his rheumatism is not half so troublesome as it used to be. But, of course, we are only at the beginning of the winter yet and I do not know what he will feel like in three or four months’ time.”

“But he will have had his hunting,” said the Bishop.

“Yes, that is what he says. I suppose, if he gets it very badly, we shall have to go away again, but he doesn’t care about Continental life, nor do I, so that until he is obliged to move I am very happy where I am.”

“You hunt too?” the Bishop asked.

“Not very much—I do sometimes, but I am not an enthusiast.”

They sat talking there for a long time, the Bishop gradually drawing out of her much information concerning her daily life, her tastes, her pursuits, and

her ambitions ; but he saw no trace of the eagerness, which he had noticed the first time that he had seen her in the Choir of the Cathedral. He had, of course, a very good opportunity of seeing her well, of noting every detail of face and figure ; she was barely of the middle height and was excessively handsome ; she was also a complete contrast to the Bishop himself. Her hair was dark and abundant and of that peculiar shining quality which knows not the sear of the curling irons ; it was neither dragged away from her forehead nor did it hang over her eyes in a bush, but it lay in soft rings on her brow, as you sometimes see the hair of a little child do but seldom that of a grown person. Her eyes were dark, or rather they were gray eyes, put in with a "dirty finger," the lashes being as black as night. The eyebrows were fine and widely set, the features straight, though the nose had a characteristic turn at the end, which relieved its otherwise severe lines, the mouth was neither too large nor too small, the lips such as form themselves into the most charming curves, and the teeth were white as pearls. For the rest, her figure was good, her throat just long enough, her complexion one of milk and roses. In manner she was dignified and very self-possessed, without having the slightest sign of self-consciousness. She had a sweet voice, an absolutely clear enunciation, and a delightful smile, and

I may just as well own up frankly from the beginning, the Bishop was already madly in love with her.

A few days later, Sir Edward Constable called upon him, and within a week he was invited to dine at Raburn. Being a dinner-party given in his honor, he naturally took in the young hostess, who interested him more and more with every word that she uttered, with every glance that she gave him.

It is doubtful whether he would, in the ordinary course of events, have become so intimate as he subsequently did with Sir Edward Constable. On Sir Edward's side, it was not wonderful that he should conceive a warmth of friendship, which might almost be described as devotion, for this mental, moral, and physical, Anak of a Churchman, the man who had during his whole life possessed the power of drawing all sorts and conditions of men under the sway of his personal strength and influence. Sir Edward, on the other hand, was a man of a distinctly commonplace order. An aristocrat, for the Constables had been Constables of Raburn since the time of Henry VI., indeed from that time until the present, in an unbroken line from father to son. It had been at the time of Cecil's birth and in her childhood, when there seemed to be no chance of an heir following her, somewhat of a trouble to Sir Edward that his daughter had been a daughter, but to that he had

long ago grown accustomed and would not now have changed his girl for a dozen sons. With him, the lords of the soil were not only the salt of the earth but they were also the backbone of the kingdom. He was very good to his people, in a free and easy, yet lordly fashion, but, with him, Constable of Raburn was omnipotent in all worldly affairs, within a certain radius of Raburn itself.

The plan of his life was to hunt six days a week, if it were possible, and to go to Church on Sunday, be it rain or shine. At his parish church, he always read the responses out very loud, a word or so in front of the congregation—he quite believed it to be his duty to do so, in order to set his people a good example and to let those more lowly and ignorant than himself see that he really did take a personal interest in the worship of Almighty God. Invariably also, he went to sleep during the sermon, although if taxed with doing so, he would have stoutly denied the imputation. With the hundred and one schemes, which such men as Blankhampton's new Bishop draw out with such loving care, for the benefit of humanity, Sir Edward Constable had absolutely no sympathy whatever. Religion with him was a decent and respectable thing to encourage. He held that all landowners, great and small, should, to a certain extent, provide for the

welfare of those, who were, in a manner, dependent upon them. He subscribed largely to the county hospital, and to the county asylum. He gave great doles of beef, and coals, and flannels at Christmas-time and none of his laborers were turned off during the winter; but there his duty to humanity, as he conceived it, stopped. With evening classes, night schools, working men's clubs, institutes, polytechnics and the like, he was utterly at variance. He saw no sense in attempts to elevate the masses, for with him, gentry were gentry and working-people were working-people, and he believed, with a faith as childlike as it was implicit, in the wisdom of the common phrasing of that old exhortation, "to do my duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me"—and for him it read "unto which it *has* pleased God to call me."

"I like him," he said, speaking of the Bishop one day to a brother squire, "he's the sort of man one would like to have for one's vicar. He's tolerant and—well, there's no cant about him. He isn't one of your long-faced, psalm-singing devils, who would rope you as soon as look at you; he's *a man*, and I like a man—I always did. Yes—yes, he's a good fellow all round."

To his daughter, however, Sir Edward expressed himself somewhat differently.

"My dear," he said to her, the morning after the

Bishop had dined there for the third time, "I hope you like him."

"Like whom, Father?" she asked.

"Why the Bishop, of course."

"Yes, I think he is very nice," she replied, in a guarded tone.

"Nice! I don't call nice the word for a man like that. He's a man, my dear, a man after my own heart, a credit to his cloth, in fact, rather more than that, he is an ornament to it. He is a credit to his country, and, still better, he is a credit to his order. Now, last night, he said to me, before we came into the drawing-room, in speaking of an egregious blunder that has been made by some parson over Warrington way, 'Well, that is where I think a man of good position makes such a mistake, he uses those of a less good social standing than himself to do work that requires the hand and mind of a gentleman to carry it through properly. It's the greatest mistake in the world. I always take care to get my work done for me by men as good as myself.' Now," said Sir Edward, standing up in front of the fire with his hands thrust deep down in his pockets, "now, that's what I call a sensible thing for a man to say. Most men who have to do with the Church go snivelling along on the equality business, cramming down one's throat that we are all alike in the sight of God, and that one man is as

good as another, and that Jack will sit as high or higher than his master in the Kingdom of Heaven. Well, I daresay he will, but we haven't got to the Kingdom of Heaven yet—and when we do get there, I fancy there will be a considerable change in most of us. Why," he went on scornfully, "what would be the result if the Government were to pick out John Simpson to be Ambassador to St. Petersburg? John Simpson is the best head-groom I have ever had in my employment, he's A1 at his own work; but, I ask you, what good would John Simpson be as a diplomat? Why, about as bad as he very well could be. Every man to his trade, that's what I say. I feel a very great admiration and a very great liking for the Bishop, and I hope, Cecil, my dear, that you will bear it in mind and show him all the honor you can, when he comes here. He is a man whose friendship I feel very proud of having."

"Well, dear," said Cecil, "I really don't think you have any cause to complain on that score, for he has dined here three times and has always sat next to me at dinner; I dare say he was bored to death, though he was very polite over it. I am sure I think I have been tremendously civil to him."

"Oh! dear, yes. Bless my soul, child, I wasn't finding fault with you—when do I ever find fault with you? Only you know my wishes—you won't do him too much honor to please me."

“Very well, dear,” said Cecil quietly.

Both times that he had dined at Raburn before, the Bishop had called on the following day but, on both occasions, Miss Constable had not been at home. This time, however, he did not call until the second day, when the servant replied in the affirmative, in answer to his inquiry for the young mistress of the house, and conducted him to a cosy little room on the south side of the building, of whose existence he had not previously been made aware.

Here he found Miss Constable sitting, in the soft lights cast by a fire and a rose-shaded lamp, singing softly to herself, from memory. He caught a few words of her song, ere the servant made her aware of his presence; just the end of the refrain—

“What will the story of these two be?”

When she realized that he was in the room, she jumped up, all in a hurry, and came to meet him.

“Oh, is that you, Bishop? How glad I am not to have missed you again. I did not hear you come in, I was just singing to myself. Matthew, bring some tea, please,” and she came forward out of the corner, where the little piano stood endways against the wall, into the soft yet brighter circle of light cast by the rose-shaded lamp. “I am afraid my

father is not at home yet, he has gone to a rather distant meet—in fact, he had to box to get there. Why, how cold you are!” she said, as she laid her hand in his.

“Am I?” looking down at his big hand, “I never felt it. I am not much troubled with little variations of temperature—I suppose it is rather cold to-day?”

“Oh, it is dreadfully cold,” she answered; “dreadfully cold. I went out this morning—I drove myself into Blankhampton—and I think I got chilled. I was shuddering all the way home and, really, I did not get warm until I had made this room like an oven. Do you find it too hot? I hope not.”

“Oh, no, I think it is charming,” he replied. He looked at her when he might have looked at the room.

Miss Constable’s color deepened a little, as she perceived the evident admiration in his blue eyes.

“You have not seen my little den before, have you?” she asked.

“No—though I should not have called it a ‘den,’ ” he answered.

Then he looked at the room, than which surely nothing is a better guide to a woman’s character. Her sanctum told him, accustomed to judge by trifles, more of her than he had already learned

during the half dozen times that he had been in her company.

It was not one of those rooms specially designed for a lady's boudoir, by an enterprising and highly correct firm of upholsterers—not at all. Its walls were of a subdued rose color—what they call “old rose”—its paint-work was a few shades deeper, and the prevailing tint of the draperies was of a dull, almost faded blue. Add to this a little piano set modestly in a corner, a large and roomy couch covered with a rich material, of the same soft blue tint as the draperies, three or four deep-seated, luxurious-looking chairs, a great white bear-skin spread before the fire, a great many pictures and a good deal of china, and there you have the portrait of a room which was, in the Bishop's eyes the prettiest and the most comfortable in which he had ever found himself.

He was very happy, for Cecil was kind and gracious to him, not at all overawed by his presence, as most of the young ladies with whom he came in contact were, but treating him quite as an equal, ministering to him in the daintiest way, when Matthew brought in a little tea-table and tray; and finally sending, for his benefit, for the two greatest pets which she possessed, one a magnificent Angora cat brindled like a bull-dog, the other a small satin-coated, squash-faced apricot-colored pug.

“Don’t say, Bishop, that you don’t like cats,” she cried, “for Ruffie and I are tremendous friends; are we not, Ruffie, my dear? I can hardly imagine a friend more faithful than this beautiful person,” holding the cat in her arm, exactly as she would hold a long-clothes baby, “excepting, perhaps, this little fellow here,” laying her disengaged hand on the pug’s satin-smoothed head.

“Miss Constable,” he said, in a perfectly grave voice, “I am afraid that I must plead guilty to possessing a cat myself. I have had her for eight years and she is almost always the first person to greet me, when I return home, and very often the last to take leave of me on the doorstep. But she is not such a beauty as yours; in fact, she is only an ordinary kind of cat, a mere come-by-chance, that probably nobody else would have looked at.”

Then, when they had made still greater friends over the cat question, he asked her if she would do something for him.

“Why, surely,” she said, in reply.

“Then will you,” he said, with all his soul in his blue eyes, “will you sing me the song that you were singing when I came in?”

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMFORTABLE FATIMA.

“ O, how can Love’s eye be true,
That is so vexed with watching and with tears ?
No marvel then, if I mistake my view ;
The Sun itself sees not till heaven clears.
O cunning Love ! with tears thou keep’st me blind
Lest eyes well-seeing thy foul faults should find.”

—SHAKESPEARE.

“ Put on thy beautiful garments.”

—*Isaiah.*

MISS CONSTABLE went across to the piano, saying, “ Now, sit still, because I don’t often use music and I don’t like anyone standing beside me when I’m singing.”

So the Bishop sat down on the roomy couch again and settled himself comfortably to hear the song which his entrance had interrupted.

She had a beautiful voice, soft and rich and sympathetic. She sang as clearly as she spoke and the notes which stole out from under her firm little white hands were kept strictly in subordination to the music of her voice. The song was called “ The

Story ;” the music was passionately dreamy, and the words despairingly tender.

Two wee babes together came
Into a world of grief and shame ;
What will their fate be—praise or blame ?

Born in a stately castle he ;
And in a lowly cottage she ;
What will the story of these two be ?

Two young hearts together met ;
Love-filled eyes with glad tears wet ;
Passionate vows ; but the end not yet.

Tender and trusting and true, ah ! me ;
High as the stars and deep as the sea ;
What will the story of these two be ?

Two sad souls in anguish drear,
Parted and sorrowful, year after year ;
She was so true—and he so dear !

Two hearts broken—one life free :
Two souls apart that one should be :
This is the story—ah me !—ah me !

The Bishop did not miss a single line of it and when the last sweet cadence came to an end, Miss Constable got up and came back into the circle of light again.

“There ! Do you like it ?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he answered ; “I think it is a song to haunt you. I like the way you sing it—

how could I help it?" And then he rose to his feet and, almost abruptly, said, "I have stayed an unconscionable time, I must say good-by now."

I can hardly express to you quite what Cecil Constable felt, when the door had closed behind the Bishop and, a moment later, she heard the wheels of his carriage passing away down the avenue. A certain chill sense of disappointment had fallen over her, an indefinable feeling that she had made a mistake, that she had done something if not exactly to offend him, at least to hurt him. Still he had asked for that song and she had sung it—well, certainly not any less well than usual. And yet, he had gone away so abruptly, so—it was strange, it was odd; she could not make it out.

"Oh, I am getting fanciful," she exclaimed aloud. "Ruffie, my dear, your missis is not used to Bishops, who take things into their heads and think things. Ruffie, my child, your missis thinks Bishops are not good for her."

She little thought that the Bishop himself had gone away in a state of mind much more perturbed than her own. That he was then driving through the dark wintry evening in his smart Victoria, with the refrain of her song still ringing in his ears, ringing like a warning—

"This is the story—ah me!—ah me!"

She little thought that the despairing words had wreathed themselves into a sort of cloud, which hung over him like a pall; that if she was feeling a vague sense of imagined vexation, he was feeling as if some iron hand had gripped hard hold of his heart.

“Ruffie, my dear,” she cried, “let us go back and play a little; Bishops are not good for one.”

She carried the cat to the little piano and set him up upon the blue silken draperies which shrouded it. The cat was an uncommon creature, for he loved music and would sit for hours on the silken cushion, which some of Miss Constable’s visitors sometimes remarked made an odd finish to these same draperies. As soon as she touched the keys, the cat settled himself down in an attitude which was neither one of sleep nor of attention, but something midway between the two.

After a few hours, the strange feeling of uneasiness which the Bishop’s manner had aroused in her, wore away, and Cecil Constable thought no more about the effect of her song upon him.

They did not meet again for more than a week, not indeed until she and Sir Edward went to a large dinner party at the Palace. It was the first time that she had entered the great house since the Bishop had taken possession of it. She had known it well enough in former days, of course,

but everything was so much changed from the period of the last Bishop's reign, that she could scarcely believe it was indeed the same.

Since the sentimental Maria and her friend had gone over the Palace, the general aspect of the entire place was very much changed. You see, the Bishop had set the stamp of his own strong personality upon everything. At that time the walls of the drawing-rooms had presented great undecked surfaces of white and yellow; they were now literally covered with pictures and china. The great settees, which went with the house, had all been re-covered to match the window draperies, so that the whole tone of the rooms had then been somewhat of a dead level; and it had been the tone of the upholsterer, not of the occupant. Now, all the corner cupboards and cabinets were filled with beautiful china; many photographs littered the tables, and cushions and embroideries were freely disposed about the settees and lounges. They were not quite like the rooms of a woman and yet they were unmistakably the rooms of a pre-eminently lovable man, sufficiently artistic to love beautiful things and sufficiently rich to gratify his tastes. The cat, of which the Bishop had spoken to Miss Constable, was in possession of the great tiger-skin, which lay before the huge fireplace in the principal drawing-room.

“Is that the cat?” she asked, when he took her hand and welcomed her to his house.

He looked back.

“Yes. My little friend is nearly always about, but of course she is a very commonplace person indeed, compared with your beauty.”

Then somebody else was announced and Miss Constable sat down on the nearest chair and began to make overtures toward the come-by-chance, which had followed the fortunes of the Bishop during the last eight years.

“Pussy,” she said, “Pussy, come here and talk to me—I’m very fond of cats.”

But Pussy did not move.

It was a small cat of the tiger-like tabby order, with a white breast; it lay coiled up in a circle, apparently quite oblivious to anything that was going on.

When the Bishop had greeted the new arrivals, he came back again to the fireplace.

“Fatima,” he said, “Fatima, get up and make yourself agreeable at once.”

But Fatima did no more than open one yellow eye and peer for a moment at her master.

“Come,” he said, stooping down and lifting the cat on to its feet, “when a lady takes notice of you, you must make yourself agreeable. Fatima, I’m afraid your manners have been neglected.”

“Give her to me,” said Miss Constable. “Yes,” as he hesitated, “put her right on my knee—I love a cat dearly. Fatima, you are a beautiful little person. I think, Fatima, that you and I might become very friendly, if we had the opportunity.”

She looked up as she spoke and caught the full gaze of the Bishop’s eyes. A sudden realization of the opening she had given him, made her turn first red and then white; she dropped her eyes again immediately and then went on caressing and making much of the none too friendly Fatima.

For a moment the Bishop was almost speechless, a wild desire to burst the bonds of conventionality and pour out to her everything that was in his mind took possession of him. He altogether forgot that there were five-and-twenty people gathered in the room, he indeed forgot everything, excepting that this girl, whose favor had come to be all the world to him, had given him the chance of speaking plainly, as plainly as even he could desire.

At that moment a voice sounded above the general hum of conversation.

“Sir Thomas and Lady Vivian,” it said.

The words brought the Bishop back to himself. He turned on his heel and went forward to receive his latest guests. Miss Constable bent her head low down over the cat, which had deliberately settled

itself into the most comfortable attitude possible in her lap.

“Oh, Fatima,” her thoughts ran, “but I put my foot into it that time.”

Almost immediately the dinner was announced and her cavalier came to offer her his arm. He happened to be one of the officers of the cavalry regiment then quartered in the town. Her neighbor on the other hand was Lord Lucifer. The Bishop himself sat between Lady Lucifer and Lady Vivian, and was the most personable man at that long table.

For one thing a Bishop who has a fine physique has a better chance of looking well in the evening than any man not possessing a uniform. His smart-cut coat, corded across the breast, his knee-breeches, silk stockings, and big silver buckles, all single him out from the ordinary swallow-tail and expansive shirt-front of regulation evening dress.

More than once Cecil Constable's eyes strayed toward the giver of the feast, and each time that they did so he seemed to be moved by some sympathetic instinct to look in her direction also. She averted her eyes instantly, vexed with herself for having let them wander that way, and still more vexed to feel the tell-tale blood creeping up into her cheeks.

She scarcely knew why this man interested her

so much, why he attracted and even fascinated her so intensely. She was not the very least little bit in love with him, she had never admitted to herself that it was possible for him to ask her to become the mistress of the Palace; scarcely indeed did she think of his being attracted by her. Miss Constable had not been brought up to think it an even possible contingency that she might eventually marry a clergyman; on the contrary, she had learned to look upon the clergy as a class of men entirely set apart from her own life. Until this friendship with the Bishop, Sir Edward had never in his life taken the smallest interest in any clergyman. They had visited at the Palace, at the Deanery, and at the Residence, but in anything but an intimate manner. Their own Vicar was an old man, a scholar, a book-worm, and a bachelor. He came to dine at Raburn three or four times a year, and her father was in the habit of sending him game whenever he gave a shooting-party. The last Bishop she had known in a distant and formal kind of manner, going sometimes to a garden-party, and, at long intervals, exchanging dinners; but, in all her life, she had never known a clergyman intimately, and would as soon have thought of the likelihood of her marrying an archangel as of her marrying a Bishop. So it was with mixed feelings that she felt herself irresistibly attracted by this Anak of a churchman.

It is true that he was unlike any other churchman whom she had ever met, that he more nearly approached to the ideal soldier of Christ than those who follow religion as a profession generally do ; a soldier whose religion was strictly of an every-day kind, a churchman with whom religion came before the Church, a Christian whose Christianity was the Christianity of Christ himself, that plain, common-sense, every-day, practical teaching, of which we see so deplorably little in these latter days. In truth, the Bishop of Blankhampton was a very giant among men ; a man whose regular habit was to do right, because it *was* right and not because it *looked* right, a distinction which is too often absent in the calculations of the priestly character.

When the ladies passed out of the dining-room it was the Bishop who opened the door for their exit. Miss Constable scrupulously avoided raising her eyes any higher than his chin as she passed, although she smiled a little and gave him a courteous inclination of her head. Yet she was conscious that her heart was beating much more rapidly than was comfortable, and she was conscious, too, that the Bishop had wished her to lift her eyes to his.

He did not afterward in any sense single her out by any special attention. It was natural, as she was sitting near to Lady Vivian, that he should

draw near to that gracious lady and speak to her once or twice during the evening. Perhaps it was natural, too, that he should carry across to their part of the room, an album filled with unmounted photographs.

“I thought you would like to look at these, Lady Vivian,” he said, yet looking at Cecil. “They are photographs of my own home at Netherby and of other places that I have lived in.”

He drew the little table nearer to Lady Vivian and put the book down upon it before her. He did not wait to see how the two ladies liked the views, but moved here and there among his other guests, speaking to all though lingering with none.

“This is most interesting, dear,” said Lady Vivian, in her most urbane and bland manner. “Oh, you see, here is Netherby—oh, what a sweet place! I knew, of course, that he was very well off, but I had no idea that he had such a place as this—why, it is lovely!”

There were at least a dozen views of Netherby, which took the first place in the book.

“I wonder how he came to be a clergyman—to go in for the Church,” said Lady Vivian, in a musing tone. “Not as so many young men do, because there was a fat living in the family, for he told me he had never had a chance of that, as his father’s cousin has been there for some thirty years and is

likely to hold it for a good many years to come. And it could not have been for that reason either, with a place like this. I'm sure," Lady Vivian went on, "it is really almost incredible nowadays to believe that a young man with every worldly advantage has gone into the Church for no other reason than from mere conviction—and yet, it is a beautiful reason, Cecil, and it seems to me that the Bishop has not altered his convictions either."

"Oh, no," said Cecil, diligently looking at the views, "oh, no, he is quite a genuine sort of clergyman, don't you think?"

"Perfectly so," said Lady Vivian, decidedly.

It was a very interesting record that the album formed, for apparently it contained pictures of every house in which he had lived for any length of time. As I said, it began with many views of Netherby, then went on to one, a large roomy house, the inscription underneath which was, "My first school." Then came views of Eton, then views of Magdalen, and also the interior of his sitting-room there. Then the house and church of his first curacy, a quiet, idyllic country place; then those of his second charge in the East-end of London. After these came many views of his London parish, and some beautiful new photographs of the Palace in which they were all assembled at that moment.

Presently he came back and joined them again.

“You see,” he said, in his frank and straightforward tones, “that I have gathered all my dwelling-places together in one book. Don’t you think it’s a good idea? I feel, though, as if the space at the end of the book is almost superfluous, because I shall never be made an Archbishop—at least, I don’t think so—and I shall stay in Blankhampton for a few years, till I feel that I can conscientiously give it up, and then I shall go and spend the end of my life in my own home.”

“But not alone, my dear Bishop,” said Lady Vivian in her smooth tones.

“Ah, well,” he answered, “that, you see, will not altogether depend upon me.”

CHAPTER V.

NOT GOOD ENOUGH !

“ O, know, sweet love, I always write of you,
And you and love are still my argument ;
So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent ;
For as the sun is daily new and old,
So is my love still telling what is told.”

—SHAKESPEARE.

“ Make haste, my beloved ! ”

—*Song of Solomon.*

THE Bishop had been more than a year at Blankhampton and the good people of the neighborhood very often said to one another, that it was wonderful how he contrived to get about and make himself familiar and friendly with so many and such widely different classes of Society. He seemed to be here, there, and everywhere. In former times, when any clergyman had wanted the Bishop to preach in his church, he had had to make some special occasion as the excuse for obtaining the favor. Either he must contrive to restore his church, or to get a new

organ, or to arrange that it should be chosen for a confirmation or some such ceremonial. But with the new holder of the office, such substantial excuse was not necessary. He seemed to be available for everything, for all sorts and conditions of clerical functions, given in the interests of all sorts and conditions of men and women. In the hospital and workhouse he was almost as well known as the chaplains of those institutions. He penetrated into the prison, into the asylums, and almshouses, made himself at home in the Church Institutes, and the various associations for the recreation and improvement of the young people of both sexes. And yet, he contrived, in addition to all these labors, to go about a good deal in his own rank of life.

To Cecil Constable it seemed as if she met him everywhere ; as if she could not enter any house or go to any gathering of men and women without seeing the fair smooth head towering above all others, without meeting the gaze of the frank blue eyes and hearing the pleasant, well-modulated tones of his voice.

But extraordinarily popular as he had made himself, I must confess that the first time the Bishop of Blankhampton appeared in a ball-room, a little quiver of excitement went from one end of the diocese to the other. The new departure, however, did the Bishop no harm in the eyes of his people.

On the contrary, his presence in a great measure sanctified and hallowed an amusement, which he declared was, in his estimation, both innocent and healthful.

“No, I don’t dance,” he said to Lady Vivian, when speaking to her on the subject, “because I am very big and I never was very good at it. But I would rather dance, although, perhaps, it would be a little venturesome of a man in my position to do so, than I would sit for hours playing cards for money. I don’t think that much harm—no, to be quite candid, I don’t think that any harm has ever come of dancing. It is pretty, it is intensely enjoyable for those who dance well enough, and I see no more reason why young people should not dance, than why lambs should not skip about the meadows. I cannot see why we clergymen should shun a ball-room, any more than we should shun a dinner-table, and I believe that my half-guinea will do as much or more good toward the funds of the hospital, as any other half-guinea which is paid here to-night. If it is wrong for us to dance, it is wrong for everybody, and, as I said before, I believe that there is no harm in it.”

“Well, neither do I,” said Lady Vivian briskly, and still keeping her pet project in mind, “and I am quite sure, my dear Bishop, that a great deal of happiness is brought about by such assemblies as

this. If we were to debar our young people from all such meetings and confine our entertainments entirely to dinner parties and a little music, what chance would they have of meeting and growing better acquainted with one another? Why, just none at all. And what would the world be like if there were no marriages? Of course, Bishop, I know we are taught that in another world there will be no marrying or giving in marriage, but, at the same time, marriage is the obvious duty of all people in this world. I truthfully look upon all unmarried people as having but half an existence—oh, yes, and even yourself also, you unmarried people are all tarred with the same brush in my mind.”

The Bishop laughed out loud.

“My dear Lady Vivian,” he said, “you must not be too hard upon us poor bachelors. Some of us have not had time to settle ourselves matrimonially, and others have not been so fortunate as to meet with the right complement to themselves, and a few, I dare say, have met and missed their affinity. You must surely pity these.”

“I don’t think,” said Lady Vivian, looking at him with a pleasant smile, “that you can claim to be one of those, Bishop.”

The Bishop laughed, but he reddened a little, and, almost instinctively, his blue eyes wandered

round the room in search of the shining dark eyes and proudly carried head of the heiress of Raburn.

“Let me take you to have some coffee,” he said, by way of changing the conversation.

He was engaged to Miss Constable—not to dance, for, as I have said, he did not dance, but for a little chat during the next quadrille. Lady Vivian accepted his invitation with alacrity and many eyes were turned toward the two noticeable figures, as he led her down the room toward the refreshment table.

“Now that,” said Sir Edward Constable to Lord Lucifer, as they passed by them, “that is what I call *a man*. No snivelling, no whining, no yowling, but a genuine, honest, Christian gentleman. My dear Lucifer, if there were a few more men like him in the Church, its power would be simply unlimited.”

“Then, perhaps,” said Lord Lucifer dryly, “it is a good thing that there are not.”

“Tush, my dear fellow, tush, weak organization is never a good thing. Strong organization is always good. I’ve believed in strength all my life, and I shall believe in strength to the end of the chapter. I don’t believe in parsons on the whole; in fact, though I like my own old chap at Raburn as well as I ever liked a parson in my life, I’ve never been on terms of intimacy with a parson of any sort

till this man came among us. But I do something more than like him, I admire him almost more than any man I have ever known."

In due course the Bishop escorted Lady Vivian back to her seat and presently left her to go in search of Miss Constable. Her partner was just leaving her when the Bishop offered her his arm, asking her if she would not like to take a turn in the corridor.

It happened that evening that Cecil was in an unusually gay mood.

"I never thought," she said, as they passed out of the long ball-room into the corridor, all decked with great palms and lighted with shaded lamps, "I never thought that I should walk out of Blankhampton Assembly Rooms, in this highly frivolous manner, on the arm of a bishop. Really, you have worked marvels among us. People seem to think that it is quite a natural thing for you to be here to-night."

"It *is* a natural thing for me to be here to-night," he maintained stoutly.

"Yes, I know it is natural for *you*, but if the last Bishop had come to a ball, Blankshire and Blankhampton would alike have gone into fits over it. Until your time, I really believe that all the dear folk around here believed it was wicked for a bishop even to laugh. But you know you ought to dance,

you really ought to dance; it is the first sign I have seen in you of doing things by halves."

"I would dance," said the Bishop, "if I could; but I never was good at it, and I don't believe in giving myself away by doing things badly."

"I am sure you don't," said Miss Constable, laughing.

"I know perfectly well," the Bishop went on, in a tone of much amusement, "that, as you consented to waste a dance over me, we ought to have sat upon two chairs on the dais, talking very gravely and formally of my own particular work—in fact, talking shop—but, all the same, it's very much pleasanter in this corridor, isn't it?"

Miss Constable laughed aloud. "Well, yes, I am afraid it is."

"Oh, don't say afraid," said the Bishop. "I'm sure you're not one of those people who think that a man, because he happens to be a Bishop, ought no longer to take any interest in every-day life. You know, there is no earthly reason why a man because he makes religion his profession as well as his life, should always look down his nose to try and find out where the corners of his mouth are gone to. By the bye," he went on, in a different tone, "here's a charming resting-place; do let us sit here a while."

They were actually in the cosey little retreat before

Miss Constable had time to draw back, without seeming to make a display of doing so. Not that she really minded sitting there a while with him for her companion, for since that evening on which she and her father had dined at the Palace, when she had so awkwardly, so completely, and so unintentionally given him a perhaps not wished-for opening, he had never by word or look reminded her of the incident, and, some months having gone by, she had since thought that he had no more feeling of interest in her than he had in any other young lady of his flock. True, he had been several times to see her, and she had more than once had long arguments with him on the subject of women's rights and other delectable topics of the day. Still, these are not embarrassing topics, nor at all personal ones, so it was with a very light heart that she settled herself on the comfortable lounge and went on talking as gayly as if he were only some young squire or officer of the garrison, rather than the spiritual head of the Church and the keeper of her soul.

"Tell me," she said, waving her great feather fan to and fro, "how is the sleek and comfortable Fatima?"

A gleam of light came into the Bishop's blue eyes, but he did not answer her.

"Miss Constable," he said, "Lady Vivian is very much concerned about me."

Cecil's eyes opened to their widest extent. "What has Lady Vivian to do with Fatima?" she asked rather blankly.

The Bishop reddened a little.

"Well, your mention of Fatima reminded me of something, that was all, and——"

"And what?"

"Well, I suppose I spoke of what was uppermost in my mind. I know, of course, that you are quite unconscious of what you said when you dined at the Palace and were making much of my humble little friend, Fatima."

"Oh, did I say anything?" said Cecil, a little awkwardly—she remembered perfectly well what she had said, but she felt such a desire to put off what was so inevitably coming, that she said just the one thing which would invite the Bishop to go on. "Did I say anything?" she faltered.

"You said," he answered, "that you thought you might become very good friends with Fatima—if you had the opportunity."

"Oh, well," she said vexedly, "of course, I haven't the opportunity—it goes without saying. It is not possible that I should have—how could I?"

She flushed a vivid painful scarlet in her anxiety to put off the evil moment, and every word that she said but served to draw the Bishop's explanation on.

One never quite knows how to describe these

affairs; in truth, I can hardly tell you how it all happened; whether it was from the flush on her face, or the look of distress in her gray eyes, or from some feeling in the Bishop's heart that he must not lose such an opportunity as this. Be that as it may, in less time than it takes me to write the words, the big fan had fallen to the ground and Miss Constable's slender hands were fast imprisoned in the great strong clasp of the man who loved her.

"There is only one way," he said, in a trembling voice, "in which you could have that opportunity—that is to become the mistress of everything that the Palace contains, myself included. Miss Constable—Cecil—I may call you Cecil, may I not—I am sure you must have known how utterly I have been at your feet ever since the first time we met—oh, and before that."

"Before that!" she echoed. "Why, where did you see me before we met at the Vivians'?"

He drew her little, white-gloved hands up against his breast.

"I saw you," he said, devouring her with his frank handsome eyes, "I saw you one morning in the Parish. I did not know one soul from another, until I began my sermon, and, surely, you must have known that I was preaching to you and for you the whole time."

The girl positively shuddered.

“Oh, no, don’t say that,” she cried.

“But, my dear, I must say it—it is true,” he answered. “I did not know what you were like—I could not have told what you were like to save my life—and yet, the moment I saw you that night at Ingleby, I knew you again for the soul that seemed to be laid bare before me on that bright July morning. I don’t remember what the sermon was about even—I remember nothing, except that you were there and that my heart seemed to be telling itself to yours.”

If he had been less passionately in earnest, he must have noticed how ghastly pale the girl had grown.

“Oh, Bishop,” she cried, “don’t—don’t say any more—don’t say it—it is no use—I am not fit for you—I am not good enough for you—you know so little of me—don’t say any more about it—it is impossible—what you ask is out of the question—you only distress me. Did I seem to be drawing you on, to be leading you on, to be drawing you on to tell me this? Oh, if I did, forgive me—I had no notion of it when we came in here. I would have stayed away from every ball from now until the end of my life, rather than let you say what you have said. Don’t think of me in that light again—it is out of the question—it is impossible.”

But the Bishop was too utterly in love himself

and too little used to any form of philandering to be easily put off without a complete and convincing answer. He still held her hands fast in his great grasp. She could feel the strong beating of his heart, she could see, by the blaze in his eyes, how he was hanging on her words—as a man would hang upon the issues of life and death. His voice was very eager and trembling, but he was in no wise abashed or disconcerted.

“You say it is impossible,” he said, looking down into her lovely unwilling eyes, “that you are not good enough for me—that you are not fit for me; that it is so impossible that you would have made all sorts of unnecessary sacrifices rather than have let me speak out what was in my mind. But that is ridiculous. To say that you are not good enough for me is nonsense, to say that you are not fit for me is absurd, and the one thing which would make it impossible for you to give yourself to me, you have not said.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” she cried, shrinking away yet a little more.

But it was no use shrinking, he was so big, so confident, so gentle and yet so manly, so masterful and yet so tender; it was practically of no use for her to attempt to shirk what was inevitable.

“There is only one thing that you can say which would make me believe that it is really impossible,”

he went on, "and that would be to tell me—what you have not told me—that you do not love me."

She tried hard not to look at him, to reply without letting her eyes meet his, but the personal power and fascination of the man were so strong, that this was beyond her strength. Slowly, unwillingly, yet irresistibly, she raised her eyes, feeling with every moment that her powers of resistance were fast leaving her. But she said nothing.

"There is nobody else?" he asked. But he spoke in a tone of complete confidence, as if her answer was a foregone conclusion.

"No, there is nobody else," she admitted.

"I don't know," he went on, "but I think that there has never been anybody else on your side. I don't generally go through life with my eyes shut, it is my business to keep them open, it is my business to judge of men and women by what might to some seem mere trifles, and, although I know that a woman of your beauty and with all your advantages of position, and influence, and wealth, cannot have lived in the world for some six or seven years, as I am told you have done, without having excited a great deal of admiration, I feel almost as sure as I have ever been of anything in my life, that your heart has been untouched until now."

She did not answer him, except by a look, but the look told him that he was perfectly right.

“Then,” he said, “I am waiting for the one word which will send me away now and for always. I feel,” speaking in a very triumphant tone, “that you do love me—I *know* that I love you. I need not add any protestations that my love for you is such that I have never felt for any woman, for you will believe me when I tell you that in my whole life, until now, I have never asked any woman to share it, I never even thought of doing so. Come,” holding her hands yet closer, “I am waiting for that one word.”

I think at that moment that Cecil Constable would have given worlds had she been able to say it.

“But I can’t say it—I do like you, and you know it,” she said brokenly. “I have never cared for anybody—you are quite right in that—but, all the same, you must not ask me to marry you—you must not ever think that I can come to the Palace, except as my father’s daughter. Indeed, I am not good enough for you—I am not fit for you—I should be doing wrong if I said yes. Oh, no, don’t ask me why—I know myself so much better than you know me, and you must believe me when I tell you that I am not fit to be your wife.”

But to him the assertion was merely the husk of an argument whose kernel was wholly wanting.

He was no laggard in love, this Bishop, no gallant

dragoon then quartered in the garrison could have been more eager and more masterful than he.

“My dearest,” he said, “you are talking nonsense; there is only one thing which could prevent you and I being fit for each other. If there were no love, I should not have another word to say, but I know there is—I can see it in every look you give me—I can hear it in your voice—feel it in your hands—see it in every line of your face.”

She did not deny it, but, at the same time, neither did she admit it.

“You must not ask it,” she said, under her breath at last.

“Then I won’t,” he replied, setting one of her hands free, “I won’t ask it, I’ll take it.”

He put his arm round her and drew her, still feebly resisting, close to him; he was just bending to kiss her, when a man’s form darkened the entrance to the retreat in which they sat. As soon as he perceived the kind of *tête-à-tête* upon which he was intruding, the new-comer turned abruptly on his heel and went away, not, however, before Cecil Constable had caught a glimpse of his retreating figure.

“Oh,” she cried, pushing the Bishop away from her, “somebody saw us—oh, what shall I do, what can I say? There is no mistaking you. Why did you do it, when I asked you not to? Oh, why have

you put me in this awful position? I shall never get over it, never."

"The way is very easy," said the Bishop, not in the least disturbed. "People are bound to know sooner or later, there need be no more than the usual surprise over an engagement, which many people must have anticipated. I will come and see your father to-morrow; there can be no need to distress yourself."

"Oh, but I haven't said yes," she cried, "I have told you that it is impossible. I must have time—I must think—there is a great deal to be thought about. It is not as if you were a nobody, an ordinary man, a soldier, or a squire, or somebody of no importance, you are different to everybody else in the county—don't you see that? Don't you see that being a Bishop makes it so very different?"

"No, I don't," he said, promptly. "I don't see what my being a Bishop has to do with my marriage. If you are good enough to be Sir Edward Constable's daughter, you are more than good enough to be the wife of the Bishop of Blankhampton. And I don't marry you as a Bishop, I marry you as Archibald Netherby."

"Oh, if you only could," she burst out, "but, you see, you *are* something more than Archibald Netherby; you are the Bishop of Blankhampton. It makes the whole situation different—it makes

our relations to each other different—it makes mine to you so different. But I must go back, I must go back and try to look as if nothing had happened. Oh, it will be dreadful—that man will have spread it everywhere. There is no mistaking you, you are so big, your dress itself is different to everyone else's, there is no mistaking you and I am sure he saw me too. Oh, I think if you will fetch my father I will go straight home without going into the room again."

"My dear child," said the Bishop, in a perfectly composed voice, "you will do nothing of the kind. You will sit down again and you will talk to me for a little while, and then I will take you back and put you down beside our good friend Lady Vivian, and then you will have to dance with one or two of the men you were engaged to. I never regretted before," he added, drawing her down upon the lounge again, "that I am such a duffer at dancing."

She sat down again—oh, yes, she was like wax in his hands—still, it was like the kind of wax, of which you have to be very careful lest it break in your hands instead of bending.

The Bishop was very judicious. He picked up her fan and, opening it, put it into her left hand.

"There, hold that so," he said, "nobody will see you—nobody will know who it is, your dress is like a dozen other dresses here to-night, and I will put

my buckles out of sight, so that nobody will know me even if they come in, which is quite unlikely. Now, I won't worry you any more and we won't argue any more to-night about your being fit for me, or not good enough for me, or not even about your not loving me, so you can get quite composed and like yourself again, and then I will take you back. I may hold your hand, mayn't I?"

He had already taken hold of her hand and she had not the heart to withdraw it from him. "Yes, they are a contrast," he said, looking down with amused eyes upon her little slender hand, in its well-fitting glove, lying in his huge brown one, "but then men's hands and women's hands should be different and a contrast to each other. I am not fond of masculine women, but I cannot endure an effeminate man."

He did not say another word of what was uppermost in his mind. He kept her there for half an hour longer, until she was as much herself again as she was likely to be after such a trying conversation.

"Now come," he said, in answer to her wish that they should return to the crowd again, "you must have a glass of champagne after this; but before we part, tell me would you like me to go away at once?"

"Oh, no," she answered.

“It would look as if you had refused me. Yes, it would rather, and I don’t want people to think that, unless it’s absolutely inevitable. Then I may come to Rayburn to-morrow?”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“And you will answer definitely, one way or the other?”

“Yes, I will try.”

“I don’t think you will find it very difficult,” he said confidently. “I don’t feel as if you would turn me adrift after all; you couldn’t do it—I know you couldn’t. But I am content to wait for your pleasure, although I think you might just as well say it now as to-morrow afternoon—because you will have to say it; you cannot be false to yourself, putting me out of the question. But supposing,” suddenly turning graver, “that we should chance not to meet again, for one never knows what may happen in a single night—will you do me a favor now?”

“Yes, if I can,” she answered.

He did not put the question into words, he stooped and kissed her.

“Now, I will take you back,” he said simply.

When they got back to the ball-room they found it comparatively deserted, for supper was in full swing in the great room adjoining.

“Let me give you some supper,” he said, in a matter-of-fact, yet masterful tone, “you must need

it, and it will keep people quiet if they see us having supper together. Don't look anxious, don't worry yourself about what people may be thinking. People in these little provincial towns are always thinking something or other—they've got nothing else to do, at least a good half of them haven't; take our friend Lady Vivian, for instance, a good soul, brimming over with affection for her fellow-creatures—how she has worried herself over my affairs—how anxious she has been to impress your charms upon me—how delicately and deftly she has weaved little scraps of praise of you into her every-day, ordinary conversation! I have been very much amused during these past months."

"I don't like Lady Vivian trying to make people like me," said Cecil, vexedly.

"It is one of the penalties of knowing a thoroughly good-natured woman," said the Bishop, carelessly. "In this case, however, her efforts were altogether and entirely superfluous. It was an interesting little game at cross-purposes that we played, she and I, because she was giving an admirable study of careless interpolation of your name into her conversation, and I was giving an equally admirable exhibition of absolute indifference to you, feeling all the time that it amused her and certainly did not hurt me. Now, shall I get you some mayonnaise?"

They found a seat at one of the side tables and he ministered to her quietly and without any fuss, indeed, as only a certain class of men can do, and, as a result, the color stole back into her cheeks and the scared look died out of her soft eyes, so that when she once more found herself near to Lady Vivian on the daïs—an admirable arrangement never seen in any ball-room except at Blankhampton, saving always the presence of royalty—Cecil was looking bright and like herself again.

At last the music began again and a partner came very diffidently to claim her for a dance. Miss Constable jumped up with more alacrity than she had ever displayed in her whole life.

“I was not sure,” he began rather hesitatingly, “whether you would wish to dance this with me or not.”

“Why not?” she asked.

“Well, you were engaged to me for a waltz before, Miss Constable, and when I went to look for you I—I could not find you. People tell me that I am to congratulate you to-night.”

“Not at all,” she said sharply. “I was wondering where my partners were. I think I have been very badly treated to-night.”

The young man’s manner changed instantly and a thought flashed through his mind that she had refused the Bishop. He had indeed been the one

to intrude upon their *tête-à-tête*, and the one to spread the news through the room that she and the Bishop were going to make a match of it. Poor Cecil!

Ten minutes later Lady Vivian "happened" to saunter past her.

"My dear child," she said very kindly, "a thousand happinesses to you."

"You are very kind," said Cecil, "you are always kind, dear Lady Vivian, but why to-night of all others?"

"Oh, a little bird told me what has happened."

"Nothing has happened," she said quickly.

"Oh, well, well, I am a little too soon, am I? But I wish you joy all the same, dear Cecil."

"You are very kind," said Cecil, softening a little, "but there is really nothing to wish me joy about—at least, not yet."

"I see, I see. Well, dear, you will not keep me in the dark when there is anything to tell, will you?"

"Not at all," said Cecil, "when there is anything to know, everybody shall know it. But I am going to say good-night now, Lady Vivian, I am very tired and I am going home."

She made her way to her father and told him that she was tired, that her head ached, and that she wanted to go home at once. He, good-natured

man, was nothing loath; he was accustomed to sit out balls to the bitter end, as all fathers with good daughters ought to do, but since Cecil herself wished to go home, he was more than pleased to fall in with her desires.

“By the bye,” he said suddenly, when they had almost reached home, “what was Lady Vivian so full of to-night?”

“I did not know that she was full of anything,” said Cecil, mildly prevaricating.

“Oh, wasn’t she, though? She nodded, and smirked, and threw out vague hints, and went on exactly as if your engagement had just been announced. You haven’t got engaged to anybody, have you?”

“Certainly not,” said Cecil, “as if I should get engaged without telling you. Really, Father, you are as foolish as Lady Vivian herself, and she lives for nothing else but to try and worry people into marrying each other. I wonder she doesn’t try to get you settled.”

“Perhaps she will when you are,” he returned, with a laugh.

“Ah, that’s very likely,” said Miss Constable, with more annoyance than the occasion seemed to warrant.

“However, she is a good sort,” Sir Edward remarked, as the carriage drew up at the great entrance.

Miss Constable did not linger downstairs.

“I will go straight up to bed, dear Father,” she said, lifting her cheek up to be kissed, “my head aches and I am very tired. No, dear, I won’t have anything; Louise will get me a cup of tea if I want it.”

However, when she reached her bedroom she did not ask Louise to get her tea or anything else. She submitted to be undressed and to have her shining hair brushed out and braided loosely in a long plait.

“No, nothing else, Louise,” she said, “nothing.”

Surely, for a girl who had just received a most brilliant offer, she was most quiet and subdued. She drew a chair up to the fire and sat there for a time, staring into the glowing embers and thinking—thinking—thinking. And then she put out her light and got into bed, but not to sleep. The embers sank slowly down into the grate and gradually darkness closed in over the still wide-open eyes and, at last, under that friendly shelter, the tears began to flow; she hid her face in the pillow and wept bitterly.

The Bishop, meantime, had gone home; that is to say, as soon as he perceived that Miss Constable and her father were leaving, he quietly and unostentatiously took himself away, without bidding farewell to anyone. He had a sort of idea that Lady

Vivian was bearing down upon him like a ship in full sail, but he cleverly escaped her and got out of the room before their paths could meet, so that the only person who, in any way, was able to approach the great topic of the evening to him, was a hard-riding old Squire, a hardened bachelor, who was standing in the portico, waiting for his brougham, while the Bishop was there for a like purpose.

“Well, Bishop,” he said, “I expect you’ve enjoyed yourself to-night.”

“Yes, I have,” answered the Bishop pleasantly.

“Your predecessor never went to dances.”

“No, so I’m told,” the Bishop replied.

“And he was married, eh?”

“Yes, yes, he was married.”

It was an assured fact, there was no gainsaying it, indeed the Bishop did not attempt to gainsay it.

“Ah, I dare say you’ll be married after a bit.”

“I can’t say,” said the Bishop coolly. “I may be, of course. But I don’t think that that would make any difference to my going to a dance now and then. I think I should like to see my fellow-creatures as much, if I were married, as I do now that I am single.”

“Well, there’s logic in that,” said the old Squire deliberately. “But, of course, you know what people are saying to-night?”

“No, I never hear any scandal,” said the Bishop.

“Of course I know that it’s there—I can see it, I can see it any time, but I never hear it, even the most inveterate scandalmongers draw the line at talking scandal to me.”

“I didn’t say it was scandal,” said the other, laughing.

“Oh, not scandal? Well, I didn’t hear any particular news.”

“No,” said the other, “you wouldn’t. You’d be the last, of course. Still, I wish you joy, my dear Bishop, I wish you joy, and if I’m the first to congratulate you, that’s the greater pleasure for me.”

“I’m sure you’re very kind,” said the Bishop, laughing also. “I have no special cause for congratulations that I know of, rather the contrary if the truth were told; but I’m obliged to you, Mr. Vandeleur, I’m always glad to have good wishes, even if the *raison d’être* is a little doubtful. Well,” as his brougham drew up, “I’ll wish you good-night and many thanks and—congratulations when your time comes.”

“Congratulations when my time comes,” Squire Vandeleur’s thoughts ran, as he got into his own carriage. “H’m, that sounds as if my young lady had said no, doesn’t it?”

The Bishop, meantime, was driving home through the darkness, his thoughts more or less in a tumult, his brain in more or less of a whirl, his heart full to

overflowing, and with just enough of uncertainty overshadowing all to make his position one of extreme anxiety.

And yet, he knew that she loved him, he was certain of it; why, he could hardly say; he could not have explained it, but he felt that she loved him. She had not denied it, indeed she had gone further than that, she had told him that there had never been another in her heart.

He was differently placed to her. A sleepy footman opened the door and told him in a machine-like, yet deferential tone, that there was a good fire in the study; he also inquired whether his lordship would like a fire in his bedroom. It was almost an habitual custom in the house that the Bishop should have that question put to him, and it was quite as usual for him to reply no.

“You need not sit up, I have some work to do, I shall be late. Let nobody sit up,” said the Bishop, as he gave his coat into the man’s charge.

“Very good, my lord,” he replied.

The comfortable Fatima met him half way across the great entrance hall. She received him with many demonstrations of delight, purring and arching her back and going through the whole feline category of making herself agreeable. She followed him into the study and mewed plaintively, because he did not take any notice of her, then

sprang on to the table and rubbed her head against his hand.

“Ah, is that you, Fatima,” he said, gently; “I had forgotten you, little friend, I had forgotten you.”

He had apparently forgotten the work which had been his excuse to the servant for not going to bed. At all events, he did no work that night, beyond walking up and down the study and smoking as hard as if he were a navvy instead of a bishop.

It was far into the small hours ere he, at length, sought his sleeping-room, but, unlike Cecil, he went to sleep at once, like a child, and when morning came, got up strong and handsome as ever, surely as gallant a wooer as ever went to claim the hand of his lady fair—doubtful, yet confident, assured and yet a little diffident, proud yet humble, anxious and yet very happy.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE WORD.

“No good and lovely thing exists in this world without its corresponding darkness ; and the universe presents itself continually to mankind under the stern aspect of warning, or of choice, the good and evil set on the right hand or the left.”

—RUSKIN.

“I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.”

—*Song of Solomon.*

WHEN Cecil opened her eyes the following morning, for she had fallen asleep at last, her maid had just brought a cup of tea to her bedside.

“Oh, Louise, is Sir Edward hunting to-day?” she asked, sleepily.

Usually Miss Constable had no need to ask particulars of her father's movements, being almost always the first person to be cognizant of them. But on this morning her head was a blank, she could remember nothing.

“Yes, Mademoiselle,” Louise replied, “Sir Edward is going out. The meet is at Burts' Hollow. Breakfast is ordered for nine o'clock.”

“ Ah, yes, I remember.”

Then she had no time to lose, she must get up, for it was part of her household creed that when her father was hunting, she should always be there to minister to his comfort and see him safely off the premises.

“ Why, Cecil,” he cried, when she went down into the dining-room, just as the gong was sounding, “ you look all eyes, you are as pale as a ghost. My dear, you make a vast mistake in not hunting. Why did you not put on your habit and come out with me, if it was only to the meet ? ”

“ Why, dear,” she replied, “ I didn’t feel like it—I have a headache, I was tired last night.”

“ I saw uncommonly little of you last night,” said Sir Edward, opening his letters.

“ I kept myself very quiet,” said Cecil.

She was thankful that he was engrossed in his correspondence, for she could feel the hot blood stealing up into her face and telling its own tale to anyone who cared to read.

“ You don’t go out enough,” he declared, “ that’s where the mischief is. You get mewing yourself up indoors ; it’s a very bad thing. What are you going to do to-day ? ”

“ I am going to do nothing,” said Cecil, quietly.

“ Well, it’s a very bad thing, doing nothing. Can’t you ride—can’t you drive ? ”

“Oh, I’ll take care of myself, don’t worry about me. How would you like it,” she went on, as she carried his cup of coffee and put it down beside him, “how would you like me to worry you every time you’ve got a twinge of the gout and tell you you ought to do this and you ought to do the other? I’ve got a headache, dear, that’s all; there’s nothing particularly dangerous or mischievous about a headache.”

“Oh, no, no, perhaps not; but I’m always anxious about you if you look a bit peaky—you know that.”

“Yes, dear, I know,” said she, soothingly.

She felt unusually relieved when she saw his square scarlet-clad shoulders disappearing down the long avenue. With a sigh and a flickering little smile, she turned from the great porch and went back into the house again. There was much for her to do, and Cecil was a methodical sort of girl, who never shirked any of her duties, even when she had a headache. On that particular occasion, she wished that she had a few more duties to do, because they would have helped to put the time on. However, such as they were, she conscientiously and diligently got through them.

First an interview with the cook, then an interview with the head-housemaid, then the round of the stables to see her ponies, and every other four-legged thing that they contained. Then a little tour

round the big conservatory and some dozen or so of notes, which must be written that day. Yet even when all these were done, she had time to put on her hat and furs, and to go down to the head-keeper's cottage to see his wife, who was ailing. And in spite of all these varied occupations, she had time to think, and think, and think, about what she should say to the Bishop when he came for his answer.

She had eaten next to no breakfast and she ate next to no lunch. Her thoughts were vague, and confused, and chaotic. Try as she would, she could not get them into anything like a proper sequence, she could only go over the scene of the previous evening, think of the mellow tones of his voice, of the blaze in his blue eyes, of the many difficulties of the situation, and then shudderingly and despairingly of that one thing which had made her tell him that a marriage between them was impossible.

She had come no nearer to a decision when the Bishop arrived. She had been sitting for an hour with her head held hard in her hands, at the table in her father's study, when Matthew came to tell her that the Bishop was in the boudoir.

"Is he driving?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Constable, his Lordship is driving."

"Well, you had better tell the coachman to put up, and I am not at home to anybody else."

“Very well, ma’am,” Matthew replied.

“And Matthew”—hesitatingly—at which Matthew turned back and waited in an attitude of respectful attention—“don’t bring tea or anything until I ring. If I want tea, I will ring twice; if I only ring once, you will understand it is for the door.”

“Very good, ma’am,” the man replied.

She did not move from her place for a moment or so. “I must go,” she said aloud, “I can’t keep him waiting, and yet what am I to say—what shall I say—what *can* I say?” She got up and went to the hearth looking at herself in the glass over the mantelshelf. “Oh, you white-faced thing!” she cried, shaking her head at her own reflection, “why need you look like that, you tell-tale?” and she pressed the palms of her hands hard against her cheeks. But it was of little use; she brought a momentary patch of color, which had the effect of making her look more ill than if she had left it alone; her eyes were mournful and set in dark rings.

“It’s no use looking at myself here; I’ll go in and get it over,” she exclaimed.

She honestly meant to go in and get it over, she had every intention, when she went across the great hall and down the little passage at the end of which was the boudoir, of going in very quietly and in a firm and dignified manner, telling the Bishop that

she was grieved and sorry to have nothing more agreeable to say to him, but that, for many reasons, it was impossible that she should become his wife and the mistress of the Palace. She quite meant to say that she hoped they would always be good friends, the best of friends, that there was no reason anyone should suspect he had spoken out to her, and that she would hope, with all her heart, that no shadow of difference should come between the friendship of her father and himself. Poor girl, she had been all day trying to think and now, at the last minute, she suddenly resolved that this was the only course open to her.

But how different it all was in reality. She went with dignity enough across the hall, but with less assurance down the little passage, which led to the boudoir. She opened the door with a trembling hand and went into the room, shutting it behind her. At the sight of the Bishop, who was standing on the great white hearth-rug looking more like a giant than ever, her dignity and her resolution alike began to melt away.

He came to meet her with his most deferential air, an air that yet was an odd mixture of confident tenderness and masterful possession.

“Dearest,” he said, “you are ill. Tell me, has anything happened? Something *must* have happened to make you look like this.”

“Only that I did not sleep,” she answered. “I did not know that I looked ill—at least, I did know,” she admitted, “for I looked in the glass just now and I thought what a fright I was.”

“A fright!” he repeated, holding both her hands and looking down on her with love-filled eyes, “I don’t think you look a fright—though you are looking dreadfully ill. Well, and have you made up your mind?”

“Yes, I had made up my mind,” she replied, “when I came in here.”

“And you were going to tell me——?”

“I was going to tell you,” she said, trying hard to speak quietly and calmly, “that what you asked is impossible.”

“But you have changed your mind?” he said, in no wise cast down by her reply.

“I did not say so,” said Cecil, quickly.

“No, but you looked it,” he rejoined promptly.

They were still standing as they had met and he was still holding her hands fast in his. He could feel that she was trembling violently and he could see that she was growing whiter with each moment.

“Don’t you think,” he said, very gently, “that you had better sit down? I don’t like to see you like this, it distresses me. If I were not sure that you loved me, Cecil, I should be a brute to stay here at all. But it is because I am so sure of it,

that I am not willing so take the answer which you have given me. I know—I feel sure—I feel confident that you love me with your whole heart. Don't think I am a braggart, I only tell you honestly my convictions, and until you can look me in the eyes and say that you positively do not love me, I shall not be content to take that other answer. I know that you will not do that," he added, in a more gentle tone.

"I am not fit to marry you," she said, in a dull voice, "I am not good enough to be a Bishop's wife. I would rather that you would go away and say no more about it. Yes, I mean it, really, Bishop, I would much, I would rather, far rather, that you would go away now and never mention the subject to me again."

"But you have not told me that one thing," he said masterfully. "My dear child, why, when that one word will send me away, why don't you say it, if you really want me to go?"

The tears came into her eyes and her lips began to quiver, she wrenched one of her hands free from his and began to grope blindly for the scrap of lace and cambric, which she called her handkerchief.

"No," he said, taking the hand prisoner again, "no, you are not going to hide yourself behind a handkerchief; if you will say that one word, I will go away now, I will never approach the subject

again, I will never remind you of it in any way. But I tell you honestly that I will not go away for anything else. Now, come, it is quite easy to say if you really want to say it. Just four words."

She made no resistance, she in no wise attempted to struggle for freedom, but the tears overflowed her eyes and she bent her head until it almost touched his breast.

"Come," he said, with infinite tenderness and patience, "when are you going to say it?"

"I can't say it—you know I can't," she cried passionately and with deep reproach; "I would if I could, because I believe it would be kinder to you. I believe, if I could only force myself to do it, that it would be less wicked to lie to you, than to tell you the truth. But I can't tell you a lie—I can't tell you I don't love you. I do love you—and—you—know—it."

It seemed to the Bishop that there was no need of any further argument; the woman he loved, loved him, and that was enough. It was no use to say anything more about it. What, indeed, was there to say?

As for Cecil, her confession seemed to have lifted a great load of difficulties off her heart. The storm of doubt and reluctance had passed, and she suffered herself to be soothed and made much of, as if she were a child that had suffered some hurt. After

the long hours of doubt and distress through which she had passed, it was eminently comfortable to her to be taken possession of as he, with a strong man's instinct of protecting the woman he loves, even from natural fatigue and anxiety, took possession of her.

He drew her on to the wide and roomy couch, and settled her comfortably among the silken cushions. And there they sat and talked, and talked, and talked—or, at least, I should more truly say there they sat and he talked, and talked, and talked—until the fire had burnt low in the grate and the dusk of the wintry afternoon had deepened into darkness.

“I want to know,” said the Bishop, presently, “what you have been doing all day. I have a sort of instinct that you have had nothing to eat.”

“I haven't,” she admitted.

“Ah, I thought as much. You are still very pale, although you are looking better than you did when I came. What there can be about me,” he added, drawing her near to him, “to have taken away your appetite and kept you awake all night, and otherwise made you thoroughly miserable and uncomfortable and ill, I cannot imagine. Now, if I may ring the bell, we will get the excellent Matthew to bring some tea, and to mend that fire, and generally to minister to us. May I ring it?”

“Yes, of course you may,” she answered. “Ring it twice; that will mean that he is to bring tea.”

“I suppose your father won’t be back for ever so long?” he said, as he rose and touched the bell twice.

“Oh, I think he may be very late to-night. It depends, of course, upon which way they run from Burts’ Hollow, and, of course, if he goes in the other direction, he may be ever so late.”

“I may stay and see him, of course?”

“Why, yes.”

“But tell me—when he gets in from hunting, is he tired usually—will he feel inclined to break my head for broaching the subject?”

“I don’t think so,” she said, smiling. “Father is very reasonable.”

“Which is more than his daughter is sometimes,” said the Bishop slyly.

“Oh, his daughter has many faults and many failings, you will find them all out, by and by,” she returned. “His daughter pities you with all her heart.”

“I am quite willing to take the chance of needing her pity,” said the Bishop promptly.

Then Matthew brought the tea and a couple of silver lamps, and, with a reproachful air, mended the fire and tidied up the hearth.

“Oh, Matthew,” said Miss Constable, “I think

you had better lay another cover for dinner to-night. You will wait to see my father, however late he is?" she added, turning to the Bishop.

"Yes, I would rather see him to-night, if possible."

"You are not dining out—I mean, if he is very late, you will stay and dine?"

"If you will excuse my dress," he replied.

"Oh, yes, I will excuse you. Then, Matthew, lay another cover, and take care of the coachman—you understand."

"Perfectly, ma'am."

His tone was indeed so comprehensive, that the Bishop laughed outright when the door closed behind him.

"I should think that fellow did understand," he said, standing up and looking very big and important over the little tea-table. "Now, my dearest, you take sugar and you like your cream put in first; how much of it?"

"You're not going to make the tea?" she exclaimed.

"Why not? I passed a very good night; I ate a very good breakfast, and I ate a very fair lunch, and I was pretty sure what would happen this afternoon. Now you, on the contrary, have worn yourself to fiddle-strings, and you look like a ghost more or less, and you've had nothing to eat, and no sleep,

and therefore you deserve to be waited on. To-night I am going to wait upon and attend to you. Sugar?"

"But you look so ridiculous," cried Cecil.

"Perhaps I do—I wish you would give me the information about the sugar——"

"No, I don't take sugar," said Cecil.

"Ah, well, I do—I do; and plenty of it. Cream—how much of it?"

"Oh, a fair amount. Well, now, that really is nice. Do you think you will always be so obliging as to pour out my tea and wait hand and foot upon me?"

"I think so," he answered. "I am big enough, and strong enough, and hard enough, to work like a galley slave—which, by the way, I don't do—and, in my opinion, men ought to wait upon their wives—it's the right sort of thing to do. In this country there's a great deal too much of 'the white slave who wears a wedding ring.'"

"But you may get tired sometimes," said Cecil.

"Oh yes, and when I am very tired, if it will please you, you shall wait upon me. But when it pleases you to look like a ghost, then it will be my pleasure to wait upon you."

He certainly waited upon her then most assiduously. And, presently, when the discreet Matthew had reappeared and had taken away the

tea-tray and the little tea-table, the roses began to bloom out again upon her milk-white cheeks, and the dark shadows under her eyes seemed to have been chased away by the sudden blaze of love's sunshine.

CHAPTER VII.

MY HOMAGE TO YOU.

“ After dark night cometh the joyful morrow ;
So follow joys upon the track of sorrow.”

—CHAUCER.

“ Ask, and it shall be given to you.”

—*Luke.*

It was close upon seven o'clock before Sir Edward Constable reached home. He was very muddy and very tired, and in that pleasant frame of mind which is generally brought about by a real good day's sport. As soon as he entered the house, he inquired of Matthew where Miss Constable was. As a matter of fact, she usually came to meet him and her not doing so made him somewhat fearful lest her morning's headache should have deepened into a serious illness.

“ Miss Constable is in the boudoir, Sir Edward,” the discreet Matthew replied, with an apologetic cough ; then added, like an after thought, “ and the Bishop is with her.”

“The Bishop. Oh—Oh—then I’ll just look in before I go upstairs.”

He tramped across the hall and down the passage to Cecil’s sanctum.

“I heard you were here, Bishop ; how d’ye do ?” he said, with his cheeriest welcome. “I thought I would come in on my way to get rid of this mud. Well, Cecil, my dear,” putting his arm round his daughter and looking at her affectionately, “how’s the headache ?”

“It’s all gone, thank you, dear Dad,” she answered. “Did you have a good run ?”

“Oh, splendid—never better—splendid.”

“The Bishop is going to stay to dinner,” Cecil announced, looking from one to the other.

“Is he ? Ah, that’s good news. You’ll never stay too often for me, you know, Bishop.”

“Well the fact is, Sir Edward, I wanted to have a talk to you, and as Miss Constable was good enough to ask me to stay——”

“And take pot-luck,” put in Cecil, with a laugh.

“Yes, and take pot-luck—I ventured to run the risk of your being too tired to be troubled with me.”

“I ? Oh, not at all. I am not one of those brutes who are unapproachable for the rest of the day whenever they are out of the saddle. If hunting had that effect upon me, I should give it up.

On the contrary, I'm never so amiable as when I've had a good day's run,—eh, Cecil?"

"Well," said Cecil, "I think you are generally amiable enough, whether you've had a good day's run or not."

"There now, you see the character my daughter gives me. Fine thing when your daughter gives you a good character—eh, Bishop?"

"A very fine thing," said the Bishop smiling.

"Well, I suppose we're dining at half-past seven as usual, my child?"

"Yes, dear, half-past seven as usual."

"Then you will be going to dress?"

"Yes, dear, I am going to dress now," she replied.

"Very good. Then, Bishop, you'll come up to my room, won't you?"

"With pleasure," replied the Bishop.

The two men went up the great staircase together. The Bishop had never been on the upper story before. He found that the arrangement there was very much the same as in most country houses. A wide staircase, branching off on either side, a broad gallery with a railing running round the entire hall and several corridors leading to the many bedrooms. Sir Edward led the way down one of these corridors and opened a door on the right.

"This way," he said.

The Bishop found himself in a large and handsome room with a large bed, covered with many-colored embroideries, a cheerful fire burning in the grate, and a couple of easy-chairs drawn near to it. Between the windows was a smart dressing-table, set out with every requisite for a man's toilet.

"Now, Bishop," said Sir Edward, "make yourself at home and I'll get these muddy clothes off and have my tub within ten minutes."

He really was not longer than ten minutes, but when the Bishop had washed his hands and had brushed his fair hair into a smooth sweep across his forehead, he had time to look round the room and take note of the pictures which adorned the cheerful walls. There was a large looking-glass with an overmantel over the mantel-shelf, whose principal adornment seemed to be many photographs of the only child of the house. There was one miniature in a gold frame, unmistakably a portrait of her mother; but all the rest were of Cecil. Cecil as a little chubby baby, with very little to show in the way of wardrobe; Cecil as a tot of about two, in a white lace pinafore; Cecil with a kitten; Cecil with a couple of dogs; Cecil in a donkey-cart; Cecil on a pony; Cecil in fancy dress; and Cecil in a court gown, with the usual misty finish of feathers and veil, which made the Bishop look at it with interest and picture her in his mind as a bride.

He was still standing looking at the photographs, when Sir Edward, looking very spruce, not to say parboiled, in his trousers and a clean white shirt, came in fastening his braces.

“Ah, you’re looking at my gallery, Bishop,” he said, in genial tones.

“Yes, you have a good many portraits of the same subject,” the Bishop replied.

“Well, you see, one’s only child is one’s only child, and my girl’s all I have got in the world—that I care about. By the bye, Bishop, will you have a cigarette before dinner?”

“I shouldn’t object to one,” the Bishop admitted.

“No, I thought not—you’re a sensible man,” handing him a silver cigarette-box. “You’ll find matches in that little pail affair on the mantel-shelf. You wanted to see me on business?” he remarked, as he held out his wrist for his servant to fasten his buttons.

“Well, I wanted to see you,” said the Bishop—“yes, I suppose it is on business, but I’m not in a hurry about that; by and by will do very well.”

“Oh, I see—all right. By the bye, Badger, you may as well go down now, I shall not want anything else.”

He buttoned his collar as he spoke, and began to arrange his tie into its usual neat bow. It was only

a black tie, such as he wore usually, but the Bishop had not worn collars for so long that he began to discuss the most serious matter of his life at that moment.

“Upon my soul,” said Sir Edward, after a moment’s intense silence, “I don’t wonder that men take to those things that hitch on behind; I think I shall come to it sooner or later.”

The Bishop laughed. “I don’t see why you shouldn’t,” he said. “A bow made by a professional and sewed up tight, must be just as good as a bow made by yourself and fastened with a pin that pricks your fingers.”

“Yes, there’s something in that”—then a pause and a sigh of relief—“There! It’s done at last. Now, I’ll have a cigarette.” He stood on the wide hearth-rug while he lighted it. “Would you rather your business would keep or is it short enough to tell me now?” he asked, after he had drawn a whiff or two from the little cigarette.

“Oh, it’s short enough,” said the Bishop, leaning back in his chair and surveying Sir Edward with steady eyes. “I want something, of course.”

“Oh, of course,” said Sir Edward, “naturally. Is it the West front?—no, that’s the Dean’s business. Is it hospitals or institutes?—I don’t think I take much interest in institutes. Perhaps it’s——”

“No, it isn’t any of those things,” said the

Bishop quietly. "As a matter of fact, I want Cecil."

"What!"

"I want Cecil."

Sir Edward stared at him.

"You want Cecil," incredulously, "my daughter—my girl?"

"Yes," said the Bishop. "There is nothing very wonderful about my wanting her, is there?"

"Well, no, I don't know that there is, but you surprised me, that's all."

"Perhaps you're astonished that Cecil wants me," said the Bishop, his eyes beginning to twinkle.

"Oh, no, I'm not surprised at all. But—then there was something in it last night?"

"There was a good deal in it," said the Bishop, looking at the ends of his fingers.

"Why, she told me this morning positively and apparently decidedly that there was no truth in the rumor."

"Well, you see, she hadn't said 'yes' this morning."

"And she has this afternoon?"

"Well," said the Bishop in a tone of quiet triumph, "yes, Sir Edward, she has said 'yes' this afternoon. I—of course, I am very anxious for your consent," getting up and standing with one elbow on the edge of the mantel-shelf. "I don't

think I need go into any details of my position or my means. I am a fairly rich man, you know, and——”

“Oh, that’s nothing,” said Sir Edward, “that’s nothing. Cecil would have plenty apart from that. Your feelings are the greatest consideration—the greatest consideration of all—excepting hers.”

“I think you may rest satisfied on both those points,” said the Bishop deliberately. “For myself I may as well tell you frankly that I have been in love with Cecil ever since the first time I set eyes upon her, and I don’t think that there was any doubt of Cecil’s feelings for me. Of course, I am older than she is—I am turned forty-two and she is only five and twenty.”

“But if she doesn’t mind that, I can’t raise any objection,” said Sir Edward sensibly enough. “Of course, you know, Bishop, it’s no use my pretending I like losing my daughter, because I don’t—but she’s young and she’s exceedingly good-looking, and she is as good as she looks. Never was a girl of a sweeter character than mine, though I say it who shouldn’t perhaps. And, of course, I’ve known all along that this would come sooner or later, though I confess I had not hoped it would be you. You see, she hasn’t been brought up much among parsons and I never thought of her marrying one, but if she’s happy, I am more than content. And I’m

glad it's you, Bishop, I respect you and I like you—I think you're a fine fellow, I'm proud to have you for my son-in-law and I shall be glad to have my girl so near me and—and I wish you joy, old fellow," suddenly putting out his hand and grasping the Bishop's heartily. "I wish you joy, I couldn't have given my consent with more pleasure. Hang it all, I know you'll make her a good husband and I know she'll make you a good wife—a good daughter makes a good wife—and I'm very pleased and I'm very proud and—I'm very hungry—let me get into my coat and let's go down to dinner, I'm starving—I'm ravenous."

But the Bishop held Sir Edward's hand hard for a moment.

"Thank you, Sir," he said. "I have no words in which to express my gratitude for your kindness."

And then Sir Edward hemmed and hawed a little and fussed into his coat and led the way downstairs.

They found Cecil already before them. She had changed her morning frock for a white one and was sitting comfortably on the padded rail of the fender which guarded the hall-fire, looking at the pictures of an illustrated paper.

"Well, Pussy-cat," said Sir Edward, putting his arm round her, "and what have you got to say for yourself?"

“Well, I don’t know that I have anything to say for myself,” she said smiling.

“No? Well, I have heard the wonderful news and, of course, I sent your Bishop packing.”

“Oh, did you?” lifting her radiant eyes to his. “I don’t think so, Daddy—I don’t think it looks like it.”

“Well, it doesn’t, my dear. In short, I reversed the usual order of things and gave him my blessing instead of his blessing me; and we’ll drink your health presently in a bottle of the best Clicquot that there is in the cellar.”

He bent down and kissed her and Cecil put her arm round his neck and whispered, “Dear Daddy,” with something like a sob in her throat. But it was not a sob of grief in any sense, and when, five minutes later, Matthew informed them that dinner was served, it was a very gay and happy trio that sat down to the table to partake of it.

“Matthew,” said Sir Edward when the fish had been handed, “bring up a bottle of that best Clicquot.”

“The 18—, Sir Edward?” said Matthew in an undertone.

“Yes, a bottle of that—we’ve got to drink a health to-night.”

The comprehensive Matthew went out and told

his particular chum the cook that "Something is up between our young Miss and the Bishop."

"Never—you don't say so," said the cook incredulously.

"Well the Governor's ordered a bottle of the 18—and we haven't got above five or six dozen of it left. I don't think he'd order it up for nothing, and I don't think they'd ask the Bishop to stop like this without any invite—and besides they look like it."

"Lor', you don't say so!" exclaimed the cook, with every sign of astonishment.

"Well, you'll see," said Matthew knowingly.

Sure enough the next time that Matthew came into the great kitchen he brought with him the assurance that his suspicions were true.

"It's as I said, Mrs. Pincher," he declared triumphantly, "it's a case. As soon as I'd filled the glasses, Sir Edward looked at Miss Constable and then at the Bishop and says 'e 'My best wishes for your 'appiness,' and the Bishop 'e said 'Thank you.' And then 'e lifted his glass and looked across at Miss Constable and 'e said, 'My homage to you.' And Miss Constable she just went red and then white and looked as if she was going to cry, and then she laughed and then she said 'Thank you, dear Daddy,' and then she looked across at 'im and she said nothing, but she looked—Oh my," said

Matthew, "I have never seen our young Miss look like that afore."

"You don't say so—well I never!" said the cook amid a chorus of like ejaculations from half a dozen maids standing by.

"And then Sir Edward 'e says, 'Matthew,' says 'e, 'let the servants have champagne for their supper to-night, and they'll oblige me by drinking Miss Constable's 'ealth and the Bishop's, and we're going to have a wedding, Matthew, and I shall be glad if they'll add their good wishes to mine.' And then I bowed and I says, 'Might I make so bold as to offer mine first?' And Miss Constable she puts out 'er 'and and she says, 'Thank you, Matthew, thank you.' And the Bishop 'e got on to his feet and 'e made me a bow, as if I'd been a lord, and 'e says, 'Matthew, I'm much obliged to you.' And damn him, 'e's a swell," said Matthew, suddenly getting enthusiastic, "no snivelling parson about him, he spoke to me just as if I'd been a dook."

"There now," said the cook with a suspicious little snuffle, raising her apron to her eyes, "that's the way with real gentlefolk. I'm sure, poor young things, I wish them all the joy in life."

"Well, I don't think you can exactly call the Bishop a 'young thing,'" said the head housemaid.

"Lor', they're all young things when they're just entering matrimony," said the cook wiping the

other eye, "I've been through it. I'm sure when my poor 'usband, what's been dead and gone these twenty years—but there, if I once get to talking about my poor 'usband my chocolate soufflé will be done to a bit of leather—I wishes 'em joy, Matthew, that's all I've got to say—I wishes 'em joy."

If the truth be told, the almost involuntary and wholly spontaneous courtesy of the Bishop to Matthew, who had been some fifty years man and boy at Raburn, proved almost too much for Cecil, and went very near to breaking her down altogether. It would be difficult to express the gush of wild love which flooded into her heart as she perceived the act of courtesy from the man to whom she had just given herself, toward one who though highly valued by her father and herself, was yet by many degrees their social inferior. She looked across the table with an indescribable expression of ineffable love and tenderness and she half stretched out her hand, as if she needed the sympathy of touch; then drew it back and smiled, with the tears very near to her eyes.

Nothing was lost upon the Bishop. He was a man who missed few opportunities, a man with eyes in his mind as well as in his head. He knew what the look meant and the little flutter of her hand, and he looked across at her with a smile, and bent

his head slightly in acknowledgment of her wordless wish.

Sir Edward, on the contrary, who was within reach of the Bishop, did not keep back his thoughts. As soon as Matthew had hurried out of the room he put out his left hand and said, "Thank you for that, Bishop, thank you."

So the joyous meal passed over, and presently Cecil left them and went off to the boudoir by herself.

A minute or two later Sir Edward looked up at the Bishop.

"You know you needn't stand on ceremony with me, Bishop," he said kindly. "I am pretty tired, and I shall have forty winks in the big chair there, before I move. If you want to go, don't mind me."

"Sir Edward," said the Bishop, getting up as eagerly as a schoolboy, "there's only one way in which I can thank you for all your goodness to me, and that is the way that I know you will like best, by trying to make Cecil happy."

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRAIGHT QUESTION.

“The child-like faith, that asks not sight,
Believes, because it loves, aright.”

—KEBLE.

“But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do engender strifes.”

—*Timothy.*

THE engagement did not create much stir in Blankhampton. For one thing rumors had been very freely circulated during the day following the Hospital Ball, to the effect that the Bishop had certainly proposed to Miss Constable, of Raburn, during the evening. One faction said that she had refused him, while another declared that she had accepted him, so that by the time the engagement was really announced, the pros and cons of it as a possibility had been very freely discussed and the alliance looked at from every possible standpoint.

But I think that nobody was sorry when it was actually made known as an accomplished fact. Everybody liked the Bishop, and everybody liked

the Constables, while those who did not know them felt that the standing of the newly betrothed pair was very suitable one to the other. It is true that the sentimental Maria, who had been among those who attended the private view of the newly furnished Palace, gave a little sigh for the memory of a dream that had been very pleasant, very harmless and very unreal. It was hard that every young woman of marriageable age had not been born a Miss Constable, of Raburn, for, although the sentimental Maria was beyond the actual meridian of life, at the same time she still regarded herself as a young person of marriageable age, and generally called herself a girl.

When Maria heard the news, she gave a little gasp and suffered a few pangs, as if the Bishop—to whom she had never spoken—had indeed actually belonged to her, and as if the rich Miss Constable, of Raburn, had actually done her a grievous wrong. Poor Maria, it did not last. Her harmless little day-dream faded away, and left her with a kind of feeling that she had a right to take more interest in the Bishop's engagement and approaching marriage than anyone else. There are many Marias in this world—unappropriated blessings who would make good and devoted wives, but who never have the opportunity of proving of what stuff they are made. Poor Maria!

A few days after that first evening the Bishop and Sir Edward had a long talk together of a strictly business kind. You see with a man so rich, and a bride so well dowered, there were naturally a good many arrangements to make, which do not enter into the calculations of the ordinary girl, who takes with her to her new home little more than her bridal trousseau and her wedding presents. It was then about the middle of February, and the Bishop was naturally not anxious to have a long engagement; the wedding, therefore, was fixed to take place during the week after Easter, which that year fell rather late. Had it not been for Lent intervening, I think that he would have begged hard for the shortest engagement possible for them to have. As it was, however, the season made it absolutely impossible for him to be married until Easter had come and gone.

Now the Bishop was not a very High Churchman, but he was by no means a Low one, so that when Cecil told him that her father wished to give a large dinner-party by way of announcing their engagement, he looked at her with concerned eyes.

“Dearest, I don’t see how I can come.”

“Why not?” she asked. “We will make our date to suit your arrangements.”

“But it is Lent,” he replied.

The girl’s face fell.

“I don’t quite see, Archie,” she said (she had long ago taken to calling him Archie), “I don’t quite see what Lent has to do with your going to a dinner-party.”

“But,” he answered, “I have never gone out to entertainments during Lent in my life.”

“But surely this is a separate occasion,” she urged.

“Well, that is so, but I really can’t—at least, I don’t see how I could—break my rule. If there is any good in keeping Lent at all, there must be more reason now than ever for not breaking my regular habit.”

“But you want to come, don’t you?” she asked.

“Yes, I would like to come, of course I would like to come; but that is the more reason why I should not do so.”

“But you are dining here to-night!” she cried.

“I know it, my dearest, I know it—but that is not like a dinner-party.”

“You enjoy yourself to-night as much as you would do if there were forty people here, do you not?”

“Quite as much.”

“Then where is the difference?”

“I do not know,” he said uneasily. “If you put it in that way, I shall have to give up coming altogether.”

“I don’t think,” she said thoughtfully, “that you

ought to have engaged yourself to me just before Lent if you meant Lent to interfere with proper attention to me, and it is a proper attention to me that you should meet my friends and my father's friends as my future husband. If it were not Lent it would be a perfectly natural thing for my father to give a dinner-party in order to formally announce our engagement, and I don't think it is at all right to slight me because of the season of the year."

"But, my darling," he exclaimed, "you keep Lent in some way yourself, surely?"

"Never," she answered, "never. I believe in being good all the year round. If it is wrong to eat your dinner in company in Lent it is wrong to eat your dinner any day. I think good people ought to carry a certain amount of Lent with them always. I may be wrong—I don't say that I am right—but I cannot see that you would do any harm by going to a dinner-party, because it happens to be Lent—no, I cannot. Why," she urged, "you would like to have been married earlier, if it had not been for Lent. Why, what difference does it—can it make?"

"It makes all the difference," he answered.

"If you were bidden to perform the ceremony at a royal wedding, you would do it whether it was in Lent or not?"

"I dare say I should."

“Of course you would. They have their weddings in Lent. If it is wrong to marry in Lent or to take any pleasure in Lent, why do you great dignitaries of the Church encourage princes to do the very things you regard as wicked for yourselves to do?”

“My dear child,” he said, drawing her near to him, “I don’t think that we need split upon that rock. After all, there is no essential virtue in the keeping of Lent—I believe it is a good thing for everybody to do, because the rush of life is so great and the pleasures of the world so entrancing—to all of us—that it must be, nay it is, a good thing to pull ourselves up short sometimes, and taking a rest from these worldly enjoyments, search ourselves and make sure whether we are going upward or downward. It is good to have such periods now and again during the year, and surely no season can be so fitting as that which immediately precedes Good Friday and Easter.”

“But,” said Cecil, looking at him with her lovely eyes, “you are not going to give up loving me because it is Lent?”

“Why, no,” he answered.

“You don’t mean that you are going to give up certain times, when you would naturally come to see me, by way of mortifying yourself?”

“Not at all,” he replied. “I have never told you

that I believe in self-mortification as a proper way of spending Lent."

"Then why give up a dinner-party?" she asked.

"Why? Because it is my custom—it is my habit. I would prefer not to take part in any social gayeties during this time, that is all. I don't think it would be wicked to do as you wish."

"Then don't you think that under the circumstance of our having only just become engaged, and the fact that we are going to be married so soon, would make it admissible for you to break your rule in this one instance?"

"Certainly, I think it would be quite admissible, and if you seriously ask me to do it, I will come; but I hope," looking gravely and earnestly at her, "I hope, with all my heart and soul, that you will not ask me to do it."

"No," she said, with a sudden change of tone, "I won't ask you. I will never ask you to do what you believe to be against your best interests. But," with a burst of contrition, "already, you see that it is as I told you—I am not fit to be your wife—I am not half good enough for you. But I will never ask you to go against what you believe to be right, I never will."

I think if the Bishop had become engaged to Miss Constable at any other time of the year, that the course of their true love would have run

smoothly to the final consummation, and I should probably have had no further story to relate to you. They would, it is more than likely, have been married after an engagement of only a month or six weeks, and every available moment of the Bishop's spare time would have been filled in with congratulatory parties, and such time as he had not to spare would have been filled in by the bride-elect, with all manner of shopping and such-like personal arrangements.

As it happened, however, to have been brought about just before Lent, there was no possible question — the bridegroom being a Bishop — of the marriage taking place until Easter was well turned, and therefore their engagement was an exceedingly trying time to both of them.

For one thing, although the Bishop was desperately in love with his betrothed, there were many duties attached to his office which could not be ignored, and which he had not the smallest wish to ignore. For instance, for months previous to his engagement, he had been booked for various sets of sermons and, as a matter of fact, had very few unoccupied evenings to put at her disposal. When he had an evening to call his own, he religiously dined at Raburn. He refused the many invitations which were sent to him by way of specially marking the great event, and as he generally went over to

Raburn on the days when he was not preaching at night, he passed a good part of the nights doing the work which, at an ordinary time, he would have done during the day.

It is astonishing how rumor spreads. When the first flush of excitement at the engagement had passed off, the people in the county said to each other that Miss Constable was marrying for position. And there was some ground for such a rumor, for the Bishop was radiant, and Cecil herself looked wretched and, as the dull heavy Lenten days passed over, the cloud seemed in no way to be lifted from her eyes.

Her life at that time was a strange dual kind of existence. When the Bishop was at Raburn, she was filled with the wildest spirits, which, when she was out of his presence, seemed to go down to zero, and, indeed, even lower than those frozen depths.

“Did you ever see a girl look so wretched as Cecil Constable?” said Lady Lucifer one day, at an afternoon party in Blankhampton, to Lady Vivian. “I am sure there is something wrong there.”

“She looks very ill,” said Lady Vivian, guardedly. Not for a moment would she admit that there could be anything wrong about the engagement itself. “But don’t you think that girls nearly always do look ill at these times? I am sure her position must be most trying, particularly with a man of the

Bishop's eminence—you see, poor girl, the eyes of the whole county are upon her.”

“Yes, that is so, but at the same time, what need Cecil mind if the eyes of the whole world are upon her? She has always been used to being a person of importance,” returned Lady Lucifer; “I am certain that is not the secret of her wan looks.”

Now, the Lady of Ingleby was not a brilliant woman, not by any means. She seldom, except on the subject of a possible marriage, thought out any fresh ideas for herself; but once implant an idea in her mind, be it ever so slight a suggestion, and she was ready to follow it up, like a beagle on the trail of a red-herring.

She took the first opportunity of mildly and delicately questioning Cecil on the subject of her approaching marriage; indeed, she made it her special business to drive over to Raburn, and was lucky enough to find Miss Constable at home.

“I don't think you're looking very well, Cecil,” she remarked, in her blandest manner, when she had inquired after Sir Edward's health—Sir Edward was hunting, as usual.

“Oh, don't you think so?” said Cecil, “I feel all right, thanks. You know it has been a damp winter; a little frost and snow would do me more good than anything else.”

“It has been a trying winter, that’s true,” said Lady Vivian, in reply, “and, of course, it is often very trying to be engaged.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” said Cecil, laughing, though she changed color a little.

Nevertheless, there was something a little forced about the laugh, and Lady Vivian, little observant as she was, noticed it.

“You are very happy in this marriage, Cecil?” she remarked.

“Oh, very,” the girl replied.

But the tone, somehow, did not satisfy Lady Vivian, and she pursued the subject still further.

“A most lovable man,” she remarked.

“Oh, Lady Vivian,” Cecil cried, “he is the best man I have ever known in my life.”

“Yes, dear, but I don’t know that even that is quite everything, is it? I mean—well, it is rather difficult to explain what I do mean—but, of course, when you’re thinking of marriage, you may be thoroughly impressed with a man’s goodness and all that, and yet feel that something else is wanting.”

“No,” said Cecil, “nothing else is wanting. The Bishop is as nearly perfect as a man can be. If I were not afraid that you would laugh at me, I would say that he is quite perfect.”

“I shall not laugh at you,” said Lady Vivian, with dignity.

“No, dear Lady Vivian, I know you won’t—I didn’t mean to imply that you would. I know exactly what is in your mind,” smiling at her and holding out a slender white hand toward her, “I know so well just what people are saying. I am not looking very well—I don’t know that I am very well—and the Bishop is preaching here, there, and everywhere—and he doesn’t go out to dinner in Lent—and people put two and two together, and they think that I am not happy in my engagement and in the prospect of my marriage, and they think perhaps that I am marrying him because he is the Bishop of Blankhampton. Oh, yes, I have seen it in people’s looks, I know so well what they are all saying—they think that I am not really and genuinely in love with him. Well, dear Lady Vivian, you’ve always been good to me, and you always have a tender place in your heart for people who love each other, haven’t you? Then you may tell everybody—everybody who is interested in knowing—that I am madly, wildly, passionately in love with my Bishop. If I look ill or I do not look happy, that has nothing to do with him. I am not very well, and I am not sleeping, and I am tremendously impressed with the responsibility that I have taken upon myself—but, so far as he is concerned, I have only one feeling, which is that I am not half good enough for him.”

“Oh, don’t say that, Cecil,” Lady Vivian exclaimed, “don’t say that, my dear. After all, he is the best judge of that. If he thinks that you are good enough for him, that, surely, is enough—don’t get having ideas of that kind—I am sure the Bishop is the least bigoted man that it would be possible to find anywhere.”

“You don’t quite understand,” said Cecil, putting out her hand again. “I did not say that he thought me not good enough—why, no—but that *I* sometimes feel so.”

“Then you ought not to feel so, my dear, you are good enough for anybody,” taking her hand and patting it. “Oh, and this is your ring,” she went on, in a different tone; “I haven’t seen it before, dear—how very charming.”

“Well, they are both his rings,” said Cecil, letting her hand lie passively in the other woman’s, “but one he gave me for himself—the diamonds—and the other he gave me to please a fancy of mine. I always thought,” she added, “that I should prefer an opal ring to any other; but the Bishop wished to give me diamonds, so he compromised matters by giving me opals afterward.”

“But, my dear, are you not afraid? They are very unlucky stones.”

“Oh, I don’t believe in that,” said Cecil, hastily.

“Well, but you were not born in October?”

“No, I was not.”

“Then you should not wear opals; nothing could be more unlucky. I would give that ring back to him if I were you, I would not wear it.”

“Oh, no,” said Cecil, “I don’t believe in that. You see, the diamond is my engagement-ring proper, the other was only an after-thought.”

Lady Vivian, however, had something else to say, and she did not mean to go away without saying it. She patted the girl’s hand and smoothed it gently once or twice, between her own plump, well-gloved fingers, and then delicately broached the subject of her intention.

“The Bishop is preaching a good deal just now,” she said casually, and in a tone of extreme indifference.

“Yes, he is,” Cecil replied. “You see, he had made all his engagements for Lent before our engagement came off.”

“I see—and of course, he could not break them. By the bye, you know that he has refused our dinner on the 21st?”

The shadow of a cloud came into Cecil’s eyes.

“Well, the fact is he doesn’t like going out to dinner in Lent,” she answered.

“But surely that is very bigoted,” said Lady Vivian, a little vexedly; for she had set her heart upon his being at this particular entertainment.

“No, I don’t think it is bigoted; only he has never gone out during Lent, and he doesn’t wish to begin it.”

“But that will be a great change for you, dear.”

“Well, yes, that is so. But of course,” putting her head up and speaking very bravely, “we none of us take up a quite different life and expect to have everything just our own way of thinking, and although I have not been used to keeping Lent in that way, at the same time it’s not much of a thing to do for one’s husband, is it?”

“True, true; you are sure, I suppose, that the Bishop has no strong leaning toward ritualism?”

Cecil laughed outright.

“Oh, dear, no, not the very least in the world. He doesn’t think it wicked to dine out in Lent, but he has never done it and he doesn’t care to begin it. He would do it if I asked him, but he doesn’t want to do it and, therefore, I don’t want to ask him.”

“Very right, dear, very right. I am sure you will make him a perfect wife.”

“I don’t know,” said Cecil, shortly.

She sat for a long time staring into the fire, after Lady Vivian had swept away with a few more pleasant words and a vague kindly expression of good-will for the future. She was not at all sure that she would make Archibald Netherby of Netherby a good wife—at least she was very sure

that she would make a very imperfect one for the Bishop of Blankhampton. She was still sitting there in a little chair on the great white bear-skin, when the door opened and the Bishop came in.

“Oh, is that you?” she cried, gladly. “I thought you were going to somewhere the other side of Barmington.”

“Not to-night,” he answered, “I have just come from there.”

“Oh, I thought you were going to-night. Then you’ll stay to dinner?”

“Yes, dearest, if I may.”

“If you may—what nonsense—of course, you may. Will you have anything now? Lady Vivian has been here, she has just gone.”

“I’ll have a cup of tea if it’s going,” said the Bishop, cheerily.

“Well, it is going, and has been going so long that it must be something like ink now—you shall have some fresh.”

She put her hand on the bell as she spoke, and the Bishop sat himself down in the big chair on the other side of the hearth to the roomy old sofa.

“Matthew, some tea,” said Miss Constable, “and the Bishop will stay to dinner to-night.”

She had lost all her wan looks since his entrance, and she sat down again on the little chair and put

her hand into his with a sigh of ineffable contentment.

“Lady Vivian has been here,” she said. “Somebody has dropped a pebble into the serene pool which she calls her mind. She was quite in trouble when she came in.”

“In trouble—about what?” he asked, holding her hand between his two.

“About me. She thinks I look ill, and unhappy, and she seems doubtful whether we are suited to each other, after all.”

“And you told her——?”

“Oh, never mind what I told her—or stay, I will tell you what I told her. I told her what I have so often told you, that I am not half good enough for you.”

“My dear, you should not—you ought not to tell people that sort of thing—it is wicked,” he said, holding her hands in his and looking down into her soft eyes. “You have no right to depreciate my property.”

“I am not your property yet,” she said quickly.

“No, no, but you are my prospective property, and it is more wicked to damage it now, than it would be to damage it when I am perfectly sure of you.”

Presently Matthew came back with fresh tea and hot toast, and Cecil insisted upon waiting upon the

Bishop, although he declared that he was not in the least tired.

“No, but I like to wait on you, and I want to wait on you, and I will wait on you,” she cried, “so sit still and try to imagine—well, that you’ve been married four or five years,” with a roguish laugh.

“You think I shall expect to be waited on, when I’ve been married four or five years?” he asked.

“I think it’s not at all improbable.”

She certainly waited upon him admirably, and then she sat down again on the little chair, and asked him one or two questions about the place to which he had been that afternoon.

“Was it a big service?” she inquired.

“Oh, yes, the church was crammed.”

“Pretty church?”

“Yes.”

“And you had lunch there?”

“I had.”

“Nice lunch?”

“Oh, pretty fair.”

“And how did your sermon go?”

“I think all right,” he said, in a matter of fact tone. “But you know, dearest, I never feel quite the same when you are not there. Somehow, when you are in church, I feel as if I was better able to get hold of my congregation. Still, it was a very interesting subject to-day, and I think the people

liked it. At all events, they paid very close attention to me."

"And what was your subject?" she asked.

"Well, you see, it was the restoration of a very old church, and I took the entire history of the church—of that particular church—and the events which had happened around it, during the last five hundred years."

"I wish I had gone," she said. "Yes, I wish I had gone—it would have interested me."

She was silent then, resting her elbow on her knee and her chin on her hand.

He watched her curiously for a little time, then said, "Dearest, what are you thinking of?"

"Thinking? Oh, I was thinking about the Thirty-nine Articles," she answered, without hesitation.

"About the Thirty-nine Articles?" he repeated, incredulously. "Why, were you thinking about them?"

"Well, I read them over last night," she said; "I never read them before. Tell me, Archie, and tell me truly—I mean, don't explainify matters till I can't understand what you mean—but tell me, yes or no, whether you actually believe in the Thirty-nine Articles or not?"

CHAPTER IX.

A PLAIN ANSWER!

“The sunniest things cast sternest shade,
And there is even a happiness
That makes the heart afraid.”

—HOOD.

“Which are a shadow of things to come.”

—*Colossians.*

FOR a moment the Bishop looked at his pretty sweetheart, as if he could not believe the evidence of his own ears.

“My dear child,” he said, “do you realize what you are saying?”

“I think so,” she said, gravely; “yes, I think so.”

“But, my dear, you might as well ask me if I believe in you, if I believe in my own personality, if I believe in the existence of what I see now before me.”

“Then you do believe in them?”

“Of course.”

“I don’t quite see the ‘of course,’” Miss Constable said boldly, and yet with a certain air of diffidence.

“But my whole position asserts my belief in them,” he said, very gravely. “What made you ask me such a question?”

“Well, as I told you, I never read them until last night. I asked my father this morning if he had ever read them? He said ‘No, never,’ that it was not his business to do so, that if I wanted any enlightenment on the subject I had better apply to you.”

“Your father is perfectly right,” said the Bishop, “it is much better for the laity not to dive too closely into the actual formalities and technicalities of religion, because those who have not made what I may call the technique of religion the study of their whole heart and of their best energies, are not as capable of taking a calm and just view of the whole as those who have devoted their entire lives to it. I have always thought,” the Bishop went on, “that one of the most wise rules of the Roman Catholic Church is, that her children should not consider themselves at liberty to interpret the Scriptures for themselves. There is nothing so fatally easy, for either the feeble doubter or the professed iconoclast, as to be able to take one single sentence and judge the whole scheme of religion

therefrom. I believe," he added, "that probably more poor souls have split upon the rock of that one sentence about King David than perhaps any other in the whole Bible. 'David was a man after God's own heart.' They say, looking at the character of David from the standpoint of this nineteenth century, with its refinements, its quick-working leaven of Christianity, its high education, its lofty aims and aspirations, its sense of honor and its appreciation of beauty—'If David was a man after God's own heart, I have no desire to be the same.' They don't consider for a moment the circumstances of David's life, the customs of the country in which he lived, the extraordinary changes which could transfer him from the position of a lowly shepherd-boy to be the king of a powerful country. Still less do they consider that the term 'a man after God's own heart' meant, not that God approved of everything that David did on earth, but that He had simply chosen him to be His instrument with which to do certain work. Even less do they remember that David was most emphatically a man with a conscience, and that for every ill deed he committed he suffered far more than most men. So," he went on, "may be argued in many other instances the folly of those who have not made the Bible their study, and who yet judge the entire scheme of religion from a single sen-

tence of it. It is infinitely wiser and more reasonable—and above all things religion should be reasonable—to accept with simple faith the broad teaching of those who have carefully thought out the entire subject. Take the Thirty-nine Articles—to you, reading them for the first time, I can quite understand that they are conflicting and contradictory; but a large number of the most earnest-minded, clear-headed, and deep-thinking men, who have lived in this country for hundreds of years, have decided that they cannot improve upon these Articles, that they embody every point which is necessary, either for salvation or for the simple leading of a religious life.”

“Yes, but,” said Cecil, “don’t you encourage every man and woman to think for themselves?”

“To a certain extent—yes. In all matters or questions of right and wrong, we must *all* of us think and judge for ourselves. But the fact that you, for instance, wish to think for yourself on a purely doctrinal matter, ought not to prevent you from letting another mind, which has made the subject (about which you have only just begun to think) its especial study, throw all possible light upon it. Of course, there are several Articles concerning certain mysteries which, so to speak, classify them, but which cannot in any sense attempt to explain them. I know that to one who suddenly tries

both to classify and to explain them, the task must be a very difficult one. But to all such inquirers after a definite standpoint, we Churchmen, we experts, can only ask you to have sufficient faith to accept these tenets as mysteries and without explanation."

"But your authority?" said Cecil.

"In what instance?" asked the Bishop.

It was characteristic of this man that he was in no wise annoyed or shocked at this new attitude in the mind of the woman he loved. I think that, so far, his enormous influence on all those with whom he had been brought in contact, had consisted mainly in the fact of his extreme earnestness, in his willingness to be practically religious, in his evident desire not to throw dust in the eyes of any seekers after truth, in his simple every-day, what one might almost call "up to date" language, applied to those old truths, or shall I more truly say those old statements of truth, which have been handed down to us from biblical times.

Now, so many of the clergy seem never prepared to discuss certain questions appertaining to the beliefs of the Church, in ordinary every-day language. If you ask them a question which is distinctly troubling your mind, and you ask it desiring to have a plain and straightforward answer, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred they will reply to you

by a quotation, a quotation which is perfectly familiar to you and which conveys no more to your mind, when coming from the mouth of one of the cloth, than it conveyed to you when you read it last with your own eyes. If you press them further, they will tell you to come and hear them on such a day, and they will then give you from twenty to forty or fifty minutes' discourse, more or less wrapped up in what is generally considered to be suitable language, but which conveys less than nothing to your groping mind. You seldom gain any light, real light, from a sermon. When there arises a man who, like Savonarola, preaches something which makes those who hear him think, or which gives some ray of light to a soul unwillingly enveloped in darkness, that preacher becomes at once overwhelmed with hearers. Yet the ordinary sermon or homily is in a measure useless, for it is unanswerable; I mean it is physically unanswerable. And it is so easy to tell a story from one side only, so easy and so pre-eminently unsatisfactory to the mind which stands on the other side, which knows only the other side, and has neither the ability nor the learning to amalgamate the two, which has no opportunity of threshing out the subject with an intelligent thinker, who will use language as simple as that in which we conduct the ordinary every-day business of life.

“But your authority?” said Miss Constable.

He looked up and put out his hand to her.

“The best of all authority,” he said, gently, “the Word of God.”

“Yes, naturally,” she replied, “but I would like to know what you think of this Article?”

She got up and fetched a prayer-book from a drawer in a bureau.

“Now, this one,” she said. “‘Works done before the grace of Christ and the Inspiration of His Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or (as the School-authors say) deserve grace of congruity; yea, rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but that they have the nature of sin.’ Now, do you mean to tell me that God does not love good for its own sake, and that good cannot exist without a certain belief in an accepted creed? If so, in that case, what would become of the millions of Chinamen, who have no opportunity of even knowing anything of Christianity?”

“My dearest,” he said, mildly, “it stands to common-sense that no man will be judged of God, without everything for and against him being taken into consideration.”

“But,” she persisted, “there are many in what

we call Christian England, who have not the opportunity of being believers, as some are believers. For instance, you might think that it is impossible that I, who am a well-educated and, to a certain extent, an accomplished woman, living in a good sphere of life, should not know very much about religion. It is quite true that I have gone to Church regularly, ever since I was old enough to go at all, that I have listened Sunday after Sunday to our old Rector's sermons, that I have joined in the services, and I have been baptized, and confirmed, and have taken the Sacrament; but, until lately, I have never *thought*, until quite lately I have never questioned anything, I simply accepted it, and, if you asked me off-hand what I believed in, I should not have been able to tell you. For the matter of that, I don't know now; indeed I feel much more like knowing what I don't believe in. But do you mean to tell me—I mean would any authority in the Church tell me—that I, who am by no means fixed in my beliefs, who am by no means assured of salvation, am not better and more acceptable in the sight of God, than a man or woman who may have committed every form of violent sin, but who, in his last hours, professes and perhaps really feels a genuine belief in Christ? Is not my white life more acceptable than the newly whitewashed one?"

“ ‘The first shall be last,’ ” murmured the Bishop.

“ No, no quotations,” she exclaimed, putting up her hand ; “ I can quote little bits of scripture for myself, I want every-day language. But I want to know this: do you believe that a man who has committed a dozen vile murders, who has, without even the excuse of physical necessity, robbed from the widow and the orphan, who has gone about the world doing evil, who has betrayed those who trusted him, who has stirred up strife between master and servant, who has broken all the laws of morality, but who in his last hours repents of his sins—do you believe that he is in as good a position in the eyes of God as one who has lived what we may fairly call a white life ? If so, what inducement is there for anyone to be good at all ? ”

“ So far as this world is concerned,” said the Bishop, “ those who live good and blameless lives from whatever cause, have always the reward and satisfaction of being nobler and better and happier than if they had followed evil courses.”

“ But,” said she, quickly, “ I am not talking about this world, I am talking about the next one.”

“ But don’t you think,” he said, gently, “ that it would be best and safest to leave that question to take care of itself ? ”

“ No,” she answered. “ If these Articles of Re-

ligion left that question to take care of itself, I would say these Articles of Religion were honest. But they do not leave it to take care of itself. The thirteenth Article lays down, clearly and authoritatively, that good works done before the grace of Christ are sinful. Are they, then, less valuable in God's eyes than the failings of those who have received salvation and the grace of God?"

"Certainly not," said the Bishop. "That Article is not intended to be read in the way in which you read it. Of course, the good works of a Chinaman or of a heathen are as acceptable to God as the good works of a professed Christian."

"But you don't say so."

"Because the Articles of Religion are not intended to be read by those who have not thoroughly studied the subject."

"Then why are they given to us?" she asked. "Why are they put into the Prayer-book? Why are they read when a man is inducted into a living? My father says that the only time he ever heard the Thirty-nine Articles read was when Mr. Seaforth read himself into the Rectory of Raburn. But there they are in every Prayer-book, and there could be no law to compel the possessors of Prayer-books not to read them. Why, then, are they not framed in language which even a child could understand? Why do you have these stumbling-blocks

set in the path of those who are only too anxious to believe what is right and just? I may be wrong," she went on, "but I cannot reconcile these two assertions with each other. The declaration that works done before the grace of Christ are not pleasing to God, because they do not spring from faith in Jesus and therefore have the nature of sin, in short that they are wicked; and the assertion in the Sixteenth Article that not every deadly sin willingly committed—willingly committed—after Baptism, is sin against the Holy Ghost and unpardonable. Why," she cried, "it amounts to this: 'If you do not believe in Christ, if you have not the grace of God, your goodness is wicked; and if you have the grace of God, your willing sin is pardonable.' It isn't reason—it is not common-sense. And it seems to me absolutely impossible that you, whom I know to be good, whom I know to be generous, forbearing, kind, and full of practical common-sense, can believe, truly and really believe, statements so conflicting as these."

"My dearest," said the Bishop, quietly and soothingly, "you seem to forget that those Articles were not framed for the use and guidance of a community of perfect men and women! On the contrary, those who drew them up, well knew the weakness and failings to which human hearts are liable, the temptations to which they are most

prone. Those Articles are framed so as to make the way as little difficult and discouraging to those who wish to live right and do well, as is possible. The religion of our Church has never been a hard and merciless one—but if you believe in Christ's redemption of us at all, you must believe that faith and belief in Him are absolutely *necessary* to salvation; necessary, that is, to all those who have had the opportunity of knowing the story of the Gospel. As for the Article on sins willingly committed after baptism—my dear child, you must know that human nature is terribly weak—for instance, to use a metaphor as simple as you could wish for, take the case of a drunkard who wishes to give up drink—he may believe, may know that it is social, mental, and moral ruin to him to indulge in drink—probably *nobody* in the world knows it quite so well as he does! Yet there may be times—and generally are—in a drunkard's life, even long after the sin, as a habit, has been put away and trodden under foot—when he may deliberately, in cold blood, *willingly* (as the Article puts it) indulge himself in a fit of steady, hard drinking. Yet would you say, therefore, that all hope of that man's future is gone, that when he comes back to his senses again, and with them comes a horrible realization of the fearful slide he has made backward, that he is a worse character than the man who is steadily and

deliberately drinking himself into his grave, with no idea even that he is on the wrong road? Why no, a thousand times, no. Give me any day the man who has still enough grace to be bitterly ashamed of his sin, before the man who glories in his wickedness, and would rather not walk ever so short a distance on the right path. The one may fail in keeping his path over and over again—he may be weak, he may be vacillating, uncertain, infirm of purpose—but in his heart he would prefer to be always sober and to live a decent, respectable life—he is to be pitied, but he is never, so long as he is alive, necessarily lost.”

CHAPTER X.

AN ACHING SOUL.

“ We live by hope
And by desire ; we see by the glad light,
And breathe the sweet air of futurity ;
And so we live or else we have no life.”

—WORDSWORTH.

“ My kindness shall not depart from thee.”

—*Isaiah.*

FOR a little time the doubts which had troubled Cecil Constable's mind seemed to sleep, and the Bishop believed that his conversation with her that cold wintry afternoon had dispelled them. It was not so, in reality, however. To tell the truth, the girl's mind was torn a thousand ways. People round about Blankhampton said that she looked ill, and many firmly believed that she was marrying not for love but for position, and that she was simply pining away in consequence thereof. But nobody guessed or even suspected the tumult of feeling which, during that quiet Lenten time, was literally

raging in the girl's heart. She was not happy, that is true; but, as every day went over, she became more and more in love, passionately and unreservedly in love, with the Bishop. It was not to be wondered at, for if he had endeared himself to all sorts and conditions of men, who regarded him with no small degree of awe, owing to the dignity of his position and the no less dignity of his manner, although he was very kindly withal, he naturally did not fail to please a woman of his own rank of life, with whom he was on terms of the most perfect equality.

But as her love grew, so did her doubts thrive apace. Up to the time of her engagement to the Bishop—or I should say up to the time of her realization of her true feeling for the Bishop—religion was not a question that had troubled her in a very great degree. She had had certain doubts, as most thinking people have, but they had been of a very fleeting character. She had gone to church regularly, but as a form that must be gone through, almost without question; she had followed and joined in the Church services (which are the least puzzling part of the Church's forms) as many other girls do, without asking what every individual sentence meant. From time to time, she had found herself brought face to face with some startling question, which came upon her with a kind of shock, with a certain sense of wickedness, a sense of im-

piety that her mind should question these things, which she had been brought up to regard as sacred and as infallible; and like any other thinking person, this habit had grown upon her rather than the reverse.

From her earliest childhood she had been accustomed to hear her father, Sunday after Sunday, confess himself to be a miserable sinner, but the words had produced no effect upon her whatever. She had never regarded her father in the light of a sinner; on the contrary, she had been taught to look upon him as the very salt of the earth. She had heard in church that, in the sight of God, all men are equal, and that the first shall be last and the last shall be first in the Kingdom of Heaven. But these words had conveyed no impression to her young mind. Had anyone declared to her that her father was no better than the humblest of mankind, Miss Constable would have laughed outright at the idea that her father, the Squire of Raburn, the head of one of the oldest families in England, whose lands had passed in an unbroken line from father to son since the time of Henry the Third, should only be the equal of, if not actually ranking after, Thomas Smithers, the old man who minded cows in the village—why, it was preposterous. But nobody ever did offer the Squire's daughter this piece of valuable information, least of all the spiritual guide to the

parish of Raburn, and so Cecil Constable had duly and truly called herself a miserable sinner and had accepted the doctrine of the equality of all men, without in the least asking herself what such words really meant.

So it was only from time to time that awkward, and to her seemingly unanswerable, questions came to her with appalling vividness. Why did God do this? Did God ever do that? Where is the authority for this statement? In what part of Christ's teaching shall we find the justification for that? And at such times she had been vaguely uneasy—vaguely anxious. But it was not until her whole heart and life came to be bound up with that of one of the highest dignitaries of the Church, that the terrible importance of certain questions was forced home to her inmost soul.

Her life at this time was a strange mixture of intense happiness and equally intense misery. Whenever the Bishop was with her, she was wildly, almost deliriously happy; when he went out of her presence, the black cloud of uncertainty and, alas, of doubts which were no longer doubts, doubts which had come to be more terrible than mere doubt, seemed to settle down upon her like a funeral pall, like the funeral pall of her dearest earthly hopes and desires.

“If I could only make sure—if I knew—if there were anybody that I could ask,” she kept saying to

herself, over and over again. Then came the answer with dreadful conviction, "You can never know, you can never be sure—there is nobody that you can ask—nobody that can speak with higher authority than he is able to do." But he, the man she loved, was no better able to satisfy her aching soul than any other and more indifferent counsellor.

No wonder that the girl got thin and looked so ill that she was the open comment of all her large acquaintance. She had the appearance of one breaking down from overwork, and little marvel that it was so. She had many duties, and she certainly neglected none of them. The Bishop spent a good deal of time with her, and during those hours that she was free, she read assiduously in a praiseworthy but fruitless attempt to gain some satisfaction for her soul. The library at Raburn was a very valuable one, containing some of the rarest theological works in existence. Cecil read them all, often sitting up half the night, poring over some one or other of the old Fathers, seeking for some ray of light which would lighten her darkness; for some finger-post, which would guide her into the fair haven of child-like and absolute belief which she was so desperately anxious to find; for some strand of hope which would take her out of this dreadful trackless plain of unbelief, which

would release her from this new and appallingly fascinating frame of mind which needed practical, common-sense assurance of the reality of things that were not, in the ordinary acceptance of the word, realities at all. And the result of all this anxious and very promiscuous reading was, that every day and every hour, with every book she opened, with every line she read, Cecil Constable drifted farther and farther away from the faith which her fathers had followed implicitly, because most of them had not taken the trouble to do anything else.

Her first definite step was to put off her marriage.

"I want," she said one day, when the Bishop had gone over to Raburn, "I want to ask you something."

"Yes?" he said, inquiringly.

"Well, I know," she said, hesitatingly, "that it is very old-fashioned to want a honeymoon. People go away for a week now and think that it is more than sufficient; and you proposed to take a fortnight when we were married."

"Well," he said, "I couldn't take more, because you see all the confirmations are fixtures, and I am rather stretching a point as it is."

"Archie," she said, a little doubtfully, "I don't want you to stretch a point for me in any direction,

I would rather wait to be married until the confirmations are over."

"But that won't be until the end of July," he exclaimed, blankly.

"I know. I would rather wait until the end of July," she blurted out.

"But Cecil—dearest—what does it mean—that you are not willing to be married—that you want time to think it out? Not—oh, it might mean a dozen things—you are not changing, you couldn't be changing; I wouldn't believe it of you."

"No, I'm not changing," she answered, "I'm not any less in love with you than I was a month ago; it is not that. But I don't feel fit to be married—at least I don't feel fit to marry you—and I would rather wait until the end of July and then go away for two months right off, than I would be married feeling as I do now. It is not in any way a question of my love for you, you know that you have my whole heart; but I should feel happier if I had more time to think, I should feel so much happier if I had a more assured belief than I have now."

"My dear," he said, earnestly, "why will you not have sufficient belief in me to leave the care of that to the future? If I am willing to marry a wife, whom I believe to be an absolutely good woman, taking no heed to doubts which come into the minds of most men and women at some time or other,

surely you need not have any scruple on the subject. Believe me, dearest, that as you become more settled in your life, there is every probability that these doubts will disappear one by one, and they are more likely to disappear under the influence of one whose faith is implicit, than while you allow yourself to worry about them in your present position. If I am willing to take that risk, I don't think that you need hesitate in the least."

"But," she said, "supposing that we are married when we first intended, and supposing that instead of my doubts fading away and being set at rest, they became confirmed and that I found it impossible, as I am afraid I should do, to accept what is the leading motive of your whole life—where shall we be then?"

"Exactly where we are now," answered the Bishop.

"Yes, but now you have every hope that I shall not feel as I do now, and if I definitely make up my mind that I cannot accept what I cannot believe, would you remain the same to me then? No, you could not. And how could I, if I do not believe in your creed, in the creed which has, after a fashion, been my own up to now, how could I attend a single service of the church? How could I, as your wife, avoid doing so? People would say, and they would say rightly, 'This man is a man of

great influence, but he cannot influence his own wife sufficiently to make her come to church; how then can he expect to influence others for good? It would be your ruin and I should be your ruin; I should know that I was your ruin. How could you imagine that your love for me would last in such a case?"

"I could not imagine my love for you not lasting," he answered, steadily.

"What, if I went all against the aim and effort of your life?"

"But I don't think you would go against the aim and effort of my life," he replied. "If you had doubts—or I should more truly say, if you had definite beliefs in another direction—it would not be absolutely necessary for you to give outward expression to them."

"Then I should be dishonest," she said, quickly.

"I don't think so. Though, mind, I don't believe for a moment that you would have those doubts really and truly confirmed. You would try not to have them—you would naturally and instinctively try to believe what I believe, you would naturally try to accept what I accept. And you are certainly more likely, remaining as you are, to have your doubts confirmed, than if we were married as soon as possible."

"I think perhaps," said Cecil, "that if I could

spend a couple of months with you abroad, quite away from old associations, I should be more likely to come back and take up my life here as your wife—than if I went with but a few days' interval, from one home to the other. The change would be so sudden, so much would be expected of me, I should never be able to live up to it. No, believe me, Archie, unless you can get two months' leave-of-absence—I don't know what you call it in the Church—from Easter, it will be far better to wait until you can have it."

"I don't see," he said, in a tone of deep disappointment, "how I could make so long an absence from my people, when I have definitely promised to hold the majority of the confirmations myself; it would be breaking faith with my whole diocese, and even for you, dearest, I do not feel willing to do that."

"Then," she said, almost eagerly, "will you agree with me to put off our marriage until the end of July? Then, unless I feel very much more convinced than I am now of my—doubts, I will raise no obstacle to that which I desire beyond everything on this earth."

"You are quite sure," he said, holding her close against his breast and looking eagerly down into her troubled eyes, "you are quite sure that you have no feeling in your heart of doubt of me, that you have

no feeling of doubt of your affection for me, of your love for me? You are quite sure that it is a doctrinal doubt which is troubling you, and nothing nearer to me than that?"

"How could anything be nearer to you than doctrinal doubt?" she asked.

"Many, many things," he replied, without hesitation. "I am not one of those men who believe that their own little following are secure of Heaven, and that all those who differ from them in the details of Christianity shall be damned for everlasting. I put nobody outside the pale of Heaven. How could anybody, who believed in the infinite love of God and the endless mercy of the Saviour, who died for us, truly in his heart make any real distinction between one kind of Christianity and another? My dear, we are all trying to win the same end, we are all pressing on the same road, the differences of doctrine are mere forms for the guidance of those who are not strong enough to depend merely upon the broad lines of Christ's own teaching. We may be Jews or Gentiles, we may go to church or we may go to chapel; no, I will go farther afield than that, and say we may be followers of Moslem or we may be worshippers of Buddha, but it does not really matter which, so long as we honestly try to do the right thing by the religion which we profess, and which we believe in. There

may be some who belong to the extreme High or to the ultra-Low Church, who would lead you to believe differently, but if you pin such men down to a definite statement of faith, I don't think that you would find any who would say in cold blood that they honestly and truly believed that anyone of a different religion to himself is totally cut off from the God who made him."

He had naturally meant his words to be a comfort to this precious soul, so eagerly and so earnestly seeking after truth. But for once the Bishop had made a mistake, his very charity and his liberality toward all sorts and professions of religion but served to intensify the despair in Cecil's mind.

She almost wailed as his words fell upon her ears.

"Oh," she cried, "oh, I wish you had not said it—oh, you have made me wretched—you have made me miserable. I have been trying to school myself all these weeks into thinking, into believing that you absolutely accept as a solemn truth, all that you declare and affirm when you testify to these terrible Articles of Religion. Now you have undone all that I have been trying to do. You make a distinct profession, you have put your seal to all these terrible declarations, and yet your own heart is wider, broader, more liberal, more charitable, than the religion that you profess openly, the re-

ligion that you teach to others, to those who have not the same power of discrimination as what you call an expert in religion must have. You tell me that I must believe those Thirty-nine Articles; then I must believe that a dear little innocent babe of a week old shall, if by some accident or other it has not been baptized, merit God's wrath forever."

"I never told you so," he put in.

"No, but these Articles tell me so. There is no doubt about it—there is no getting over it; why, you will not even read the burial service for the comfort of the living, over a child that according, to the Church's theory, has, by no fault of its own, been let to slip into eternal damnation. Oh, you couldn't believe it—nobody could believe it—why then do you teach it? Why do you tell me that I must believe it? Why do you tell me that I must believe these Articles of Religion in their entirety?"

"But I don't tell you so," he exclaimed.

"You tell me so in church. Do you tell me one thing in church and do you tell me another thing in private life? Is that all your religion is worth? Oh, Archie, if you knew how wretched I am—if you knew how anxious I am to believe everything as you would have me believe it, you would pity me. Now I understand what a poor woman, whose child died last year in the next village, felt like when she cried out that they had buried her baby like a dog. And

yet you ask me to believe, to definitely accept a religion which could wound a bleeding heart like that. You ask me to pin my faith for eternity upon a religion which can deliberately place the issues, not of life or death, but of eternal salvation or damnation, in the hands of ignorant peasant people who have not got sense enough to vote for the man they wish to support at an election. It is all very well to leave the arranging of Parliament in the hands of these people, but the Church goes further—it gives to the hopelessly ignorant or wicked the power of deciding whether their unconscious and wholly innocent babes shall inherit Heaven or Hell. Oh, everything you say, everything I read, everything I think, only confirms in my mind the wickedness and the dishonesty of the terrible things that the Church sends broad-cast upon the world, in the guise of God's holy truth. I never *believed* these things, for I never thought about them, and now that I do think I could not insult my God by believing that He, who is so good, so holy, so generous, and so pitiful, could treat that little babe as His ministers here did. Surely that child was as much God's child in the hour of its innocent birth as it was in the hour of its equally innocent death. And yet you tell me that every human soul born into the world is born wicked. Oh, I could not believe in such a religion, I won't believe it, nothing could

make me believe it. Surely, the Burial Service is for the living, not for the dead? Surely, the trouble of the mother who loses her little child, is just as great if the child dies without baptism, as if it has been baptized? Surely she has the same hope of resurrection and after-life for that child? And surely, if she believes in a Redeemer at all, she believes that He will redeem her baby as willingly and as efficaciously as if its white soul had lived long enough to be stained with conscious sin? Surely, a baby which has never known, which never can have known, a single conscious thought, must be as much our sister, our brother, as the murderer who perishes on the scaffold? And yet you, who are so good, so generous, so pitiful for the wickedness of those less strong than yourself, yet you teach this diabolical doctrine, and you ask me to marry you and profess those very things which fill my whole nature with the utmost loathing."

The Bishop got up and walked restlessly about the room for some minutes.

"Dearest," he said, coming back to her, "in your present frame of mind, it is perfectly useless for me to say anything. I shall do both myself and my cause less harm if I do not argue with you just now, than if I attempt to refute everything that you have said. From your standpoint, you are perfectly right in wishing to put off our marriage. You must

know," he went on, "the intense disappointment that it is to me—I feel as if my whole life had been torn up by the roots. However, we will put it off until the end of July, and it need not be necessary for anybody to know the exact reason for our doing so."

CHAPTER XI.

AND WHAT ELSE ?

“There is always a hope, in the storm or the calm ;
There is always a hope, and a comforting balm.”

—SHIRLEY HIBBERD.

“How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words ?”

—*Job.*

THE Bishop and Cecil Constable had, however, reckoned altogether without their host. As soon as she broke the news that the wedding was to be put off until the end of July, a perfect storm of inquisitive questions broke upon her devoted head. She first had to deal with her father, who, when she hinted at the new order of things, stared at her in undisguised amazement, as if he could not have heard her aright.

“You have put your wedding off ?” he said, incredulously.

“For a little time, dear,” said Cecil, trying to speak calmly.

“But why—why ?”

“Well, dear, I wished to put it off.”

“Yes, but you must have had a reason?”

“Well, dear, you see, Archie can only take a fortnight at the very outside now, and I felt that I would like to have a longer honeymoon than that, and if we wait until the end of July, he can get a couple of months.”

“That’s all nonsense,” said Sir Edward, with decision; “no girl ever put her wedding off for such a reason as that; there’s something else behind it.”

“Well, I tell you frankly, Father, that it does weigh on my mind coming back so soon to be the wife of the Bishop. It is all so sudden to me, and so much will be expected of me, and I am sure I should get more used to being married to Archie if we had a couple of months abroad.”

“And what else is there?” said Sir Edward, looking straight at her.

Cecil’s color faded a little.

“I don’t think, dear,” she said, with gentle reproach, “that it’s nice of you or generous of you to insist that there is something else. It sounds almost as if you were anxious to be rid of me.”

“Not at all—not in the least—I never want to be rid of you, and you know it, you young minx, as well as I do,” he exclaimed, with affectionate scolding. “Only your words made me a little suspicious. I don’t want to have you hold yourself to an engage-

ment, from a scruple of conscience, if you would rather not fulfil it. I have always thought," Sir Edward went on, "that the most foolish thing any man or woman could do in this whole world, is to ratify an engagement as a question of honor; the law of breach-of-promise ought to be revised—there should be no such thing. If any man or woman has made a mistake, it is better to find it out before marriage than afterward. I feel very strongly on the subject," he said decidedly.

He was standing in front of the fire, his hands in his pockets, and he looked very determined and almost fierce.

"My dearest old Daddy," said Cecil, looking at him with shining eyes, "you mistake the situation altogether. I haven't got that particular scruple troubling my conscience, and I don't want to get out of my marriage with the Bishop. I think I almost worship him, and I am sure I never thought it possible that I could love any man so much, and it is perhaps because I love him so dearly, that I am not eager to rush on our marriage. You may think it is very queer, dear, but don't you get it into your head that I am not absolutely happy in my relations with him."

She rose from the table, where she had eaten very little in the way of breakfast, and went and stood close beside him.

“Dear Daddy,” she said, putting her slender hands upon his shoulders, “how could I be anything else than over head and ears in love with such a man?”

“Well, it doesn’t seem to me natural that you are not enough in love to want to marry him at once. I can tell you I should have looked very much askance at your mother, if she had proposed putting off our marriage for three months.”

“Well, so he did,” said Cecil, trying to smile.

“I dare say he did,” returned Sir Edward, in a tone of conviction, “for there is no doubt about his feelings, my dear.”

“Oh, no, nor of mine,” she rejoined quickly.

“Well, as to yours, I tell you frankly, child, that I have had my doubts about yours for some weeks past. You don’t look to me like a girl engaged to the man of her heart, you look anxious and worried and ill. I’ve watched you, when you thought I was otherwise occupied, and I know perfectly well—at least, I am as sure as I can be of anything that I can only guess at—that you have not told me everything. There *is* something in the background that you are keeping from me. However, I have never tried to force your confidence, and I never mean to do so. Of course, you know, Cecil, that I never, until this splendid Bishop came among us, contemplated the possibility of a child of mine marrying a clergyman.

Personally, all I want is that you shall have your highest happiness, but remember this: if ever you feel that the bond is one likely to be irksome to you or not in every sense according to your liking, don't let any false scruple of honor bind you. I am perfectly certain that the Bishop would rather die a thousand deaths than marry a woman who did not give him her whole heart."

"I have given him that for all time," said Cecil, solemnly.

All the same she went about her usual avocations with the feeling that she had not in reality hidden the truth from her father. He had perceived that something was amiss between her and Archibald Netherby; he had not only perceived it, but he had put it into plain language, and she had not been altogether able to deny it, or rather she had not attempted to do so; she had only reiterated the assurance of the intensity of her feelings toward him.

Her father pressed her no further. He had supreme confidence in his daughter's judgment, and as she was evidently not willing to discuss the question in its entirety, he was willing, if not quite content, to await her explanations. On the other hand, no one else who knew her well enough to mention the subject at all, was as easily put off as he who had surely the most right to question and speak,

and the most right to her confidence. Lady Vivian heard the news about a week later, at a dinner-party.

“But Miss Constable is not going to be married until July,” said a lady, hearing her speak of something relative to the wedding, as if it were to take place soon after Easter.

Lady Vivian looked up with her grandest air. She had a very dignified manner, bland and urbane but with the decided accents of one accustomed to command, and likely to have the best and latest information on any subject on which she chose to speak with authority.

“The Bishop and Miss Constable are to be married soon after Easter,” she said.

“No, July—the end of July,” said the other.

Lady Vivian smiled.

“The week after Easter,” she repeated.

“But it is put off,” said the other lady, “it has been put off—it is to take place at the end of July.”

“I have not heard of it,” said Lady Vivian, still unconvinced.

“I assure you that it is so.”

“I think I should have heard of it,” in a more unbelieving tone still.

“Well, I have very good authority,” said the younger woman.

“My dear Mrs. Wrothesley, I think I have as good authority on that subject as anybody in this neighborhood, and the last time I saw Miss Constable, which was about a fortnight ago, she spoke of the marriage as being fixed to take place during the week after Easter. I don’t think one can have better authority as to the date of a marriage than the bride herself.”

“No, no, in a general way, of course not,” said Mrs. Wrothesley, in an unmoved tone, “but my authority is somewhat better, as I happened to see Sir Edward Constable yesterday, and he told me that it was put off until the end of July.”

“Indeed—is that so? Then I must beg your pardon, I had not heard of it—you surprise me very much. Did Sir Edward give you any reason?”

“No, he did not—at least he said it had been put off in deference to his daughter’s wishes, and that for his own part he was very glad of the respite, as he did not want to get rid of her a day sooner than need be.”

“I can quite believe that,” said Lady Vivian.

She went home with a vague sense of uneasiness.

“I don’t like this wedding being put off,” she said to Sir Thomas, as they were nearing home; “I don’t like put-off weddings—they’re not lucky. There is something wrong about it. Why should

Cecil want to put her wedding off? They have nothing to wait for. I—I shall go over to-morrow and see her.”

“I shouldn’t,” said Sir Thomas, who was sleepy, and thought that young ladies ought to manage their own matrimonial affairs without the help of outsiders; “I shouldn’t, she won’t thank you.”

“It is not quite a question of her thanking me, Tom, I—I want to know the reason why.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it? Well, my dear, don’t worry about it; you will get to know the reason why, all in good time, and if you don’t, why, time will show—time will show.”

Lady Vivian, however, was not to be put off like this. She ordered the carriage, the following afternoon, for three o’clock, and she went over to Rarburn, determined to get at the bottom of the mystery. But, of course, it is one thing to determine to do a certain thing and it is quite another thing to do it. Lady Vivian had to return no wiser than she went. Miss Constable was not at home.

“Is Miss Constable not receiving or is she out?” Lady Vivian asked.

“Miss Constable is out, my lady,” Matthew replied. “She has gone to Wendelby with the Bishop.”

“Oh—oh—Well, tell her that I came, say that I wanted to see her very much. I shall be at home

to-morrow afternoon, if she is anywhere in my neighborhood. I want to see her very much."

"I'll tell Miss Constable, my lady," said Matthew; "but I believe she is going somewhere to-morrow afternoon with his Lordship. I heard," he went on, with the respectful familiarity of an old retainer, "I heard Miss Constable making arrangements for to-morrow. His Lordship dined here last night—not a party, my lady, no other visitors."

"Oh, I see. Well, give my love to Miss Constable, and tell her that I hope she will come and see me as soon as she can. I have not seen her for a long time."

"I will, my lady," said Matthew, deferentially.

He repeated the message to Cecil, when she and the Bishop returned from their drive.

"Oh! oh, yes, thank you, Matthew. And now let us have some tea," she said, pleasantly.

As the door closed behind the old servant, she turned and looked at the Bishop.

"Oh—oh, Archie," she cried, "it is so easy to see what that means."

"Why—what does it mean?"

"She has heard," said Cecil, slipping down on to the fur rug dejectedly. "She's a dear, an angel, the kindest woman in Blankshire, but she always wants to be at the bottom of everything, she wants

to know now why we are not going to be married until July."

"She can't put such a question plainly to you," said the Bishop, who stood in no awe of Lady Vivian.

"Oh, can't she?" said Cecil, dryly. "That only shows how much you know about our dear friend. Can't she? Why, she not only would not mind putting such a question to me, but she wouldn't hesitate to put it to you. Now, she has only known you since you came to Blankhampton, but she has known me all my life. If she cannot get the information she wants out of me, or if I keep out of her way, she will certainly manage to get it out of you."

"I don't think so," said the Bishop, "I don't think so. You give our dear friend the credit of a great deal more acumen than she possesses. She will be a very clever woman if she discusses that question with me."

"Why, if she puts the question plump and plain to you, what would you say? What could you say?"

"I would tell her politely, and with my most episcopal air, to mind her own business," said the Bishop, promptly; "I would put on my robes, so to speak, and my ruffles, and my hood; I would even, if necessary, put on my mitre; and I would defy

Lady Vivian or anybody else to ask me any personal questions, if I had donned my mitre."

"My dear—Bishop," said Miss Constable, smiling, "pray don't take it into your episcopal head that your episcopal manner, or your episcopal robes, no, nor even your episcopal mitre itself, will save you from the cross-examination that you are bound to undergo at our dear Lady Vivian's hands. My dear boy, she is the kindest soul in the world, it would be impossible to overrate her extreme kindness, her tenderness of heart, her overwhelming love toward all humanity, especially the humanity of her own set; but when, dear woman, she has started her mind on a certain course, nothing, not even Bishops, would stop her. Don't flatter yourself, for a moment, that this particular Bishop will do so. You see," she added, "*I*—know Lady Vivian."

CHAPTER XII.

CROSS-QUESTIONS AND CROOKED ANSWERS.

“ He that will have a cake out of the wheat
Must tarry the grinding.”

—SHAKESPEARE.

“ The words of a tale-bearer are as wounds.”

—*Proverbs.*

A FEW days later Miss Constable dutifully went over to Ingleby, and called upon her good friend and neighbor who was the chatelaine of that charming mansion. Not a little to her joy, Lady Vivian was out, had indeed gone into Blankhampton to do some shopping and to pay some calls.

“ Oh, I am sorry,” said Cecil—which was a distinct perversion of the truth, because she was indeed very glad—“ do tell Lady Vivian that I am so sorry to have missed her, and to have missed her the other day when she called upon me.”

“ I believe her ladyship will be at home tomorrow,” said the servant, fully believing in Miss Constable’s professions of regret.

“Ah, but I cannot come to-morrow—I am rather occupied just now—but pray tell Lady Vivian how very sorry I am to have missed her.”

It seemed really as if Lady Vivian was fated not to get at the truth about the changes in the date of the Bishop's marriage. On all hands she heard the news, and as many times as she heard it, just so many times did she hear a fresh reason for its having been put off.

“I always said that Cecil Constable didn't care a button about the Bishop,” she heard Lady Alice Wynnard say one day; “how was it likely that she could, a girl like Cecil, who had done nothing but hunt and dance and play tennis and generally enjoy herself? Was it likely she would ever *really* take to a Bishop, however well-born and however good-looking he happened to be?”

“Oh, she's devoted to him,” exclaimed Monica Beaumont, a cousin of Lady Alice's. “I'm sure the very way she looks at him is enough to tell that.”

“She's put off her marriage, all the same,” rejoined Lady Alice, dryly.

“But she gives a very good reason,” said Monica Beaumont, quickly. “She has scarcely had time to get her things ready——”

“Nonsense.”

“And she wants to go on a long tour, rather than going straight back to the Palace. Honestly, I

think she is quite wise; after all, being engaged must be the best part of it all."

"You have heard that Cecil Constable's engagement is put off?" said Lady Lucifer, half an hour later.

"Oh, yes," poor Lady Vivian answered. "Do you know why?"

"Not I. I have not the least notion. I heard it in—oh, well, I heard it the other day in Roxby, and I saw Cecil two days after and of course I asked her why, and as she rather shut me up, I didn't pursue the subject any further; but I saw them driving together yesterday, and certainly she looked radiant. The last time I saw her to speak to I thought she was looking excessively ill, but she was certainly looking radiant when I saw her driving with the Bishop."

"I dare say it had something to do with his engagements," said Lady Vivian, who never encouraged the gratification of curiosity in other people.

Quite a fortnight elapsed after this before Lady Vivian drove over to Raburn and was so fortunate as to find Miss Constable at home and alone.

"How glad I am not to have missed you again," she said, in her most motherly tones.

"Dear Lady Vivian," said Cecil, going to meet her. She knew, of course, pretty well what was coming.

Lady Vivian complained a little of the east wind, and complimented Cecil on the pleasant warmth of her room, said she should be glad of a cup of tea, and when Cecil had poured it out and had generally ministered to her, she let fly the original bombshell which was the exact cause of her visit.

“I hear you have put off your marriage, Cecil,” she remarked, in a casual tone, much as she would have spoken of the putting off of the date of a journey for a few days.

“Yes,” Cecil answered.

“I have heard it everywhere,” Lady Vivian went on, stirring her tea reflectively. “At first I could not believe it, because I had seen you so short a time before, and you had given me no hint that you were even thinking of such a thing.”

“I don’t know that I had thought of it then,” Cecil answered.

“But, my dear, why—why do you do it?” her ladyship asked, bluntly.

“We put it off,” Cecil answered, “because it was more convenient to us to do so.”

“More convenient? What, on account of the Bishop’s engagements? Ah, that was what Violet Lucifer said. I wonder you did not think of that before.”

“The fact is,” said Cecil, “that before the Bishop asked me to marry him at all, he had fixed all his

engagements down to the 8th of July, and he could only take ten days or a fortnight if we were married at Easter, and I much prefer to go away for a longer time than that. If I were going to a strange neighborhood, I don't know that I should have minded a short honeymoon; but coming back to live in Blankshire, so short a distance from home, and under such different circumstances, I much preferred to be away for a longer time and, therefore, we are going to be married at the end of July and shall be away for two months."

"You are quite sure, Cecil," said Lady Vivian, determined to get to the bottom of what to her seemed to be a mystery, "that you are making no mistake in this marriage?"

"Mistake?" said Cecil. She turned a little red, as well she might, knowing all that lay between herself and the Bishop. "Why, what do you mean?"

"Well, you are quite sure you are as much attached to the Bishop as you thought?"

"A great deal more so," said Cecil, unhesitatingly.

"Of course, he must be more so too."

"I have not seen any signs of his wanting to get out of it," said Cecil, trying to turn the whole conversation into a joke.

"No, dear, I don't suppose he would try to get out of it, even if——"

“Even if he did not care a button about me,” said Cecil.

“Well, dear, I was not going to put it in that way — but, of course, the Bishop is a man of honor.”

“I don’t think it is a question of honor with him,” said she.

“You are quite sure you have no doubt yourself, dear?” Lady Vivian went on, pursuing the subject with relentless persistency.

Cecil started as if she had been shot.

“Doubts—what made you say that?”

“I meant that you really do care for him?”

“Oh, dear, yes, of course. I shouldn’t marry him if I didn’t care for him—I would not marry any man if I didn’t care for him. What should I marry him for?”

“Well—position, for one thing.”

“Oh, his position is no better than mine—neither his position of birth nor his official position. I should have thought,” she added, a little disdainfully, “that even in Blankhampton I should be free from such a suspicion as that. But there, one never knows what people may think nor how foolish they may be. But I do wish,” she went on, a little vexedly, “that people would leave me and the Bishop to manage our own affairs and to mind our own business. What can it matter to anybody,

when one marries or for what reason? If a woman likes to marry for position, that is her business; if she likes to marry for love, that is her business too; it can make no difference to anybody else."

"I think, my dear child," said Lady Vivian, kindly, and not in the least taking a word of Cecil's vexed comment to herself, "I think that everybody who is really nice, takes an interest in the marriages of those whom they know; it is only kindly and pleasant for people to do so, not by any means interfering or anything of that kind. For instance, now, *I* take the greatest possible interest in you and the dear Bishop; in you because you are you, and in the Bishop, because he is the Bishop and we respect him and like him; and because we wish him to be married happily and suitably, both for his sake and for yours."

"Oh, yes, yes—don't think me ungracious," cried Cecil, with some contrition, "but you really don't know how I have been badgered these last few days. People seem to think because we have decided to put our marriage off for a few weeks, that there is something dreadfully wrong between us. If it were so, it would be bad enough without being worried about it by everyone else. And it is not always easy to discuss your most private affairs and your most sacred feelings, even with your most intimate friends. I am sure it is better to let people worry

through their affairs, and even their troubles, without bothering them one way or another."

"It's not the kindest way," said Lady Vivian.

"Well, I don't know; neglect *is* sometimes the kindest," Cecil answered.

There were many times during the next few weeks, when Miss Constable wished with all her heart that she could have married the Bishop, leaving doctrinal questions to take care of themselves.

"If only you had not been a Bishop," she exclaimed vexedly to him on the evening of Lady Vivian's visit, "if only you had not been a Bishop, we could have got married and it would not have mattered—I mean, it would have not mattered so much, whether I accepted or denied certain things; we could have agreed to differ on those points. And then people would not have been able to talk as they do now; they have actually got some tale afloat that I am marrying you for your position."

"Not really?"

"Yes, really. Of course, I know it is a fine thing to be a Bishop, but, after all, Archie, in spite of your episcopal robes and your episcopal manner, we stand on an equality, you and I."

"Perfectly so. But, my dearest," he said, soothingly, "why do you worry about these dear people? People will talk, they have talked ever since the world began, and they will talk as long as the world

lasts. It is human nature to talk. If you and I were not so wrapped up in our own affairs, we should probably talk more or less about other people's. As for me, I am always interfering in other people's business. Before I came to Blankhampton, I was the recipient of all the troubles, and joys, and woes, and pleasures, and anxieties of a good half of the people in my parish ; in fact, I got so used to dealing with other people's affairs, rather than with my own, that, at last, I got to feel that it was absolutely wrong to spend a little time managing my own business. In our case now, I only wish that you would consent to let the future take care of itself. It would be so much the wiser course, because I am afraid, dearest, that even these three months will not serve to satisfy your mind, and your very anxiety to bring your thoughts to a certain issue will only tend to prevent any settlement in your mind. As it is now, you must feel that your inclinations press you one way and your doubts direct you another, therefore you cannot honestly fix upon one side or another ; whereas, if the irrevocable step were taken, you could then do exactly as your reason best dictated."

"Yes, that is true," she answered. "But I don't think that you—even you—can understand my feverish anxiety to believe what my reason tells me is perfectly impossible."

CHAPTER XIII.

A NINE DAYS' WONDER.

“Life is almost a meeting and a parting!

A glimpse into the world of ‘might have been.’”

—GERALD MASSEY.

“The heart knoweth its own bitterness.”

—*Proverbs.*

SEVERAL weeks went by. The little buzz of wonder and gossip about the postponement of the Bishop's marriage to Miss Constable died out, as such nine days' wonders do. Blankhampton people held very much to their original opinions, and it must be confessed that very few of them indeed believed in the story of the bride-elect's desire to have a longer honeymoon than she could have had, had the wedding taken place at Easter. Their common-sense told them that no bride would ever put a wedding off for such a reason.

So Easter came and went, and still Blankhampton people were hugely puzzled. That there was nothing wrong between the Bishop and his fiancée

they were at times quite sure, at such times, indeed, as they happened to see them together, when Miss Constable always looked radiance and happiness personified. At other times, when they saw her alone, they told each other, not only that she was not happy in her approaching marriage, but that she was, from some cause or other, breaking her heart.

“I wonder,” said one Blankhampton woman to another, “that the Bishop himself doesn’t see it. She looks ghastly. It is a very bad compliment to such a match as he is.”

“Oh, but have you seen them together? They are perfectly wrapped up in each other.”

“I know they seem so. Look at her now,” said the first speaker, turning her eyes toward Cecil, who was on the other side of the room.

“Yes, I know—I know. But, all the same, she does not look like that when she is with him; indeed, you would hardly know her for the same girl.”

“She looks miserable enough now,” said the other, in a tone of conviction.

“Poor thing, yes. I wonder what it is. Perhaps she is overwhelmed with the responsibility of the situation.”

“Oh, I don’t see why she should be. Mrs. Cottenham was never overwhelmed with the responsibilities of her situation as a bishop’s wife.”

“No ; but she had been married a long time before he was made a bishop. She didn't marry him as a bishop, which does make a difference, you know.”

“Yes, perhaps it does.”

The sentimental Maria perhaps entered into Miss Constable's real feelings more truly than any of those who knew her personally. It happened that the languishing lady was in the principal jeweller's shop in St. Thomas's Street, having gone for the purpose of buying herself a new watch, for which she had been saving up for a long time. And while she was standing by the counter with all the watches spread out before her on their velvet-covered trays, Miss Constable's little cart stopped at the door of the shop. She came in a moment later and approached the counter at which the sentimental Maria was standing.

“Oh, Mr. Ward,” she said, in her pleasant, well-modulated tones, “I fancy one of these opals is a little loose. I would like you to look at it.”

She drew her glove off her left hand and, slipping off the opal ring which the Bishop had given her, handed it to the jeweller.

“It should not be loose, Miss Constable,” he said, as he took it from her. “It is one of our own setting, and I particularly tested it before it was sent home to you. But opals are rather tricky stones to

manage. However, it can be put right in a few minutes."

He screwed a glass into his eye and turned to the light that he might the better examine the ring.

The sentimental Maria's keen eyes marked its beauty, and she wondered whether Miss Constable had been an October child or not. From the ring her eyes wandered to its owner's face. She was standing with her arms resting on the rather high glass-covered counter, carelessly looking down upon the contents of the cases below. Maria noted what a pretty hand she had. A slender hand and white, without being at all sickly looking. She noted, too, the lustrous half-hoop of diamonds upon the third finger and realized, in a moment, that the opals had not been her engagement ring.

"One of the stones is a little loose, Madam," said Mr. Ward, coming back to the counter again; "but it is a mere trifle, I'll have it put right in a few minutes. Are you remaining in the town for any time?"

"No," she answered, "I am going straight home—I am on my way home now. It does not matter, Mr. Ward, I'll wait till it is done. I will look at these pretty things here."

She made a little movement of her hand as if to excuse him from attending her, and he turned back to wait upon the sentimental Maria.

“I have another watch which I should particularly like you to see,” he said to her. “If you will excuse me for a moment, I will fetch it.”

And Maria excused him, saying that she was in no hurry, which was true; moreover, she was very well entertained in taking notes of Miss Constable. Not because she was Miss Constable, but because of the proprietary interest which she still permitted herself to feel in the Bishop to whom Miss Constable was engaged to be married.

Miss Constable was wearing a light tan-colored driving-coat, made with several capes and very big buttons; and she wore a little red velvet hat upon her soft dark hair. To Maria she looked the essence of refinement and good breeding, but she noticed that her face was set in sad, almost stern lines, and that the shadows under her eyes were very dark and deep.

“How ill she looks,” the sentimental Maria thought. “Poor girl, she is overwhelmed with the responsibilities of her new life.”

Instinctively Maria knew very much what Miss Constable was feeling, by her knowledge of what she herself would have felt had she been placed in her present situation; indeed, it gave her something like a throb at the heart, even to think of another's marriage with the man who was her secret hero and the object of her most ardent admiration.

Presently the jeweller returned.

“The watch will be ready in a moment, Madam,” he said, in an undertone. “The fact is, in showing it the other day, I broke one of the hands and it is being put on; if you don’t mind waiting a minute or so, it will show to better advantage than without it.”

“Oh, I don’t mind at all,” said Maria, with a little gush of feeling that if Miss Constable did not mind waiting neither need she.

There was a moment’s silence, during which the jeweller divided wordless attentions between his two customers. It was Miss Constable who broke the silence.

“That’s a pretty thing, Mr. Ward,” she said, pointing to something in the case on the counter.

“That cameo with the pearls, Madam?” he asked.

“Yes, I should like to see it.”

He opened the back of the case and took out the tray upon which the cameo was lying, among a quantity of other trinkets.

“It is not new,” she remarked.

“Oh, no, Madam, quite an antique. I took it in exchange some years ago.”

“Really? Is it expensive?”

“No, Madam, not for what it is. I never make

very much upon these trinkets. It is five pounds, ten."

"Oh! I think I will have it. I have not seen anything so pretty for a long time. I will take it with me. But I have no money—at least, I have only a few shillings in my pocket."

Mr. Ward, however, expressed himself absolutely indifferent upon the question of money; indeed, one might have imagined from his deprecating airs and looks, that he would rather not be paid for anything that he parted with in the ordinary way of business; but that is the way of a good many tradespeople, until *you* have done the deed.

"What is that?" she asked, taking, in her un-gloved hand, a little coral charm.

"I don't know that it is anything particular, Madam," he answered. "I came by that in the same way. Indeed, most of the articles in this tray are what I have taken in exchange for more modern things. The lady from whom I took that told me that she had brought it from Naples, and that she had picked it up there in a little shop in a back street. I wondered that she was willing to part with it. It is very interesting—but though a good many ladies have looked at it, nobody has cared to buy it. You see, Miss Constable, charms have gone out of fashion lately."

"Yes, I suppose they have," said Cecil. "But it

is very pretty. Such things ought never to go out."

The charm was a tiny *Agnus Dei* in coral, with a band of gold about its girth, so that it could hang by a little ring in the middle of its back.

"How much is it?" she asked.

"Oh, quite reasonable, Madam; thirty-five shillings."

"I will have that too," she said. "And now, put the tray away, or else I shall be wanting something else."

"Would you like these in separate boxes?" said Mr. Ward, as he shut the back of the case with a click.

"Yes—no—yes, you may as well put them in boxes. I think that antique ought to have a case—you ought to give me a case for that."

"I will, Madam, with pleasure," he answered; "and here is your ring. I don't think the stones will come loose again."

At that moment the Bishop walked into the shop. Miss Constable looked up, her color rising and a sudden flood of radiance lighting up her face.

"Oh, is that you!" she exclaimed. "I did not expect to see you this afternoon."

"No, nor I. But I was on my way from the station and I saw your cart at the door."

"I have been buying you a present," she said,

holding up the little charm. "I also bought one for myself, but, of course, that does not count."

"Then I think that I ought to buy one for you," said the Bishop, looking at her with all his soul in his eyes. "This is very charming, Mr. Ward, I didn't know you had anything so precious in your stock."

"Well, you see, my lord," said Mr. Ward, smirking, "you don't take very much interest in these vanities—at least, not for yourself."

"Well, I don't know so much about that," answered the Bishop, "I like pretty things as well as anybody. If you are going to give me that now, I will have it put on my watch-chain at once. I am delighted with it."

It was as good as a play to the sentimental Maria, but from that moment she regarded the Bishop in a totally new light. She had thought of him as being always in the episcopal robes and with his episcopal manner; she had never dreamed of him as an ordinary person, as a man who could look delighted and wax quite enthusiastic over a coral charm.

"Why, what has happened to your ring?" he asked, seeing her slip it on her finger again.

"Oh, nothing much. One of the stones was a little loose, that was all," she replied. "I thought I had better get it put right."

“I believe that that ring is thoroughly unlucky,” said the Bishop, resting his arms on the glass-topped counter, and looking at Miss Constable with a proud and well-satisfied look. The sentimental Maria gasped. The idea of a Bishop talking of anything being lucky or unlucky was a revelation to her. Miss Constable, however, only laughed.

“You had better exchange it for something else,” he went on. “Now, you were a December child, so you ought to wear turquoises; they would bring you good luck. And besides that, they are much prettier than opals, which always give me an uncanny sort of feeling. They’re so like eyes that have got cataract upon them.”

The sentimental Maria nearly had a fit. For the first time, she thoroughly blamed the Bishop’s bride-elect in her heart, for instead of submitting instantly to have her opals changed for turquoises, she remarked obstinately that she would prefer to keep them, and that if he wanted to give her a turquoise ring, he could do so.

“I suppose you have turquoise rings, Mr. Ward?” said the Bishop.

Mr. Ward replied that he had.

But Cecil interposed, with a courteous gesture toward the sentimental Maria.

“No, Mr. Ward, this lady came before me; I

cannot keep her waiting while I choose anything else. Please, do attend to her first."

The sentimental Maria almost wept as she declared that time was of no consequence to her whatever, and that she would have had to wait just as long had there been nobody else in the shop. The Bishop, however, took off his hat and gravely insisted that they could not be served before her, and Mr. Ward called one of his assistants to hand out all the turquoise rings of which he was possessed, and himself attended to the flushed and excited lady, who was so intensely interested by the little romantic comedy which had so unexpectedly laid itself before her.

However, Maria did not lose any of the play. Before she had fully made up her mind as to the choice of a watch, Miss Constable had chosen a beautiful ring, a half-hoop of turquoises. She put it on her finger there and then, as she laughingly said, for luck between the diamonds and the opals. Then the Bishop took off his watch and chain that the charm, just presented to him by his fiancée, might be attached thereto. Mr. Ward's assistant suggested that the charm certainly would be the better for a rub up; and, receiving the Bishop's assent, disappeared with it into the back premises. The Bishop and Miss Constable remained at the counter talking together, but although the senti-

mental Maria's attention was supposed to be occupied by the jeweller and the watches, yet like the weazel, which sleeps with one eye open, she managed to keep an ear unoccupied for the receipt of their conversation.

“ You are coming out to Raburn to-night ? ” she heard Miss Constable say in familiar undertone.

“ Yes, I intended to do so. ”

“ What a pity you can't come back with me, ” she went on.

“ So I will if you like—that is, if you think your cart will bear me. ”

“ Oh, I think it will carry you ; it carries William occasionally, and William weighs seventeen stones. ”

“ Who is William ? ” asked the Bishop.

“ Oh, William is the stately person who presides over our stables. He comes one in precedence of Matthew, and poor dear Father cannot call his soul his own when William's word has gone forth. Indeed, I am the only person of whom William stands in any awe ; and I think that William's awe of me consists mainly in the fact that I had the unparalleled audacity to be born a girl, when I ought to have been born a boy. He considers if I had nerve enough to do that, I should have nerve enough to snap his head off, if I felt like it. Once or twice he has borrowed my cart when something has hap-

pened to his own ; but I always lend it on condition that if it is broken, it is repaired out of the ordinary stable expenses and not as a smash of mine. But tell me, if you come back with me how will you get home ? ”

“ Well, unless I send a note up to the Palace to tell them to send for me, I couldn't get home,” the Bishop answered.

“ I tell you what we will do,” said Miss Constable, “ I will send my boy up to the Palace with a message from you, and he can come back with your carriage. Then I think my cart will just manage to hold you,” laughing again.

“ Very well ; then that is what we will do. You won't mind my not being dressed, will you ? ”

“ Oh no, that is one of the advantages of being a Bishop,” she said, smiling, “ you always look presentable. Now here is your watch and chain back again.”

The Bishop put the chain on and admired himself a little, and finally they went out of the shop with kindly farewells, attended by the jeweller to the edge of the curb.

The sentimental Maria went home, and pondered in the loneliness of her virtuous domicile upon the inner life of a man of such standing as the Bishop of Blankhampton. I will not pretend that the incident had not been somewhat of a shock to her.

To hear such a man told that he always looked presentable. To hear such a man chaffed a little about the likelihood of the cart's breaking down under his weight. To hear him told, in that joking way, of the advantages of being a Bishop—as if there could be any *disadvantages* to that illustrious position !

“ She is very fond of him,” said Maria to herself, more than once ; “ how different she looked when he came in, to what she looked before. And yet, there is something. No girl who was perfectly happy could look so sad as she did. She is happy and she isn't happy ; she looks to me as if she was breaking her heart.”

CHAPTER XIV.

CALM DISCUSSION.

“ Strong son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace.
Believing when we cannot prove ! ”

—TENNYSON.

“ Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart.”

—*Kings.*

Now, during all this time the Bishop was exceedingly considerate and good to his fiancée, whose storm-tossed mind seemed in no way to be drawing nearer to a haven of possible belief. Had he reverted much to the cause by which their marriage had been put off, I think she would have broken down altogether; but, as it was, he never so much as hinted at the disturbed state in which he knew her mind to be.

As soon as Easter had gone by, the whole neighborhood seemed to rouse itself into a perfect epidemic of dinner giving, and on all these solemnly

festive occasions, the Bishop and Miss Constable were made to feel themselves the principal guests. Cecil had always been a person of considerable importance in Blankshire, but now, for the time being at least, she found herself in the position of being the most important woman in the entire county. With every day it seemed as if the Bishop's personal popularity increased, and although with every day her love for him grew stronger, yet so did her want of faith in those tenets which to him were essential, both in this world and the next, grow more and more confirmed. She was very unhappy.

May went over and June came in. Whenever the Bishop preached within reasonable distance of Blankhampton, Cecil Constable was to be seen among the congregation, but I do not think that his sermons helped her in the smallest. They were sermons that would have helped most people anxious for help in the ordinary every-day current of life, but, like most advanced thinkers, the Bishop was not great on doctrinal points.

He was not in any sense an argumentative preacher. With him, if the truth be told, the beautiful life was infinitely of more importance than the cut and dried faith. Had he been either an extreme High church- or an extreme Low church-man, he would have been better able to argue her out of the position in which she found herself. But, you see, the

Bishop was neither High nor Low ; he was of that moderate advanced section, which shelters itself, its inconsistencies, behind its works, so much at variance with its attested faith, its many improvements on the original scheme of episcopal Christianity, which calls itself Broad. In ordinary every-day life, your Broad churchman is wonderfully clever at letting the question of doctrine alone ; in modern language, he lets it slide : and it is only when you bring him up face to face with a plain question, requiring a plain yes, or no, for answer, that you can ever induce him to explain what his faith really is. So far as my experience goes, your Broad churchman swallows the Thirty-nine Articles in a lump, as one tries to swallow a pill without tasting it. He takes them very much as ordinary people take a pill. We know there are all sorts of horrible things in it, but some of them seem to do us good, and so we don't inquire too closely into the internal composition of the little sugar-coated globe, which we pop down our throats, leaving the rest to Providence. It is true that the majority of churchmen of all shades of color between Ritualists and Evangelical, believe that the general scheme of the Church's constitution is good, that although many of these doctrinal points have become more or less old-fashioned and obsolete (in deed if not in word), yet, taken as a whole, it could not well be improved upon. Most of them believe that any

tampering with a constitution which has stood firm during so many years, would do more harm to the general cause of Christianity, as accomplished through the established Church, than a new and possibly more rational order of things would be likely to do good.

It would be worse than foolish of me to pretend that a man so enlightened, so advanced in Christianity, so pure of purpose, and of so blameless a life as the Bishop of Blankhampton, could believe for one moment that an innocent and unconscious baby dying unbaptized, should suffer the torture of the damned to the end of time. For my own part, I have never yet found a clergyman of the Church of England who would definitely declare that he believed, in its literal sense, a doctrine so unnecessarily diabolical as this. To an ordinary mind, troubled upon such a point, the Bishop of Blankhampton would have said:

“You must not forget that these Articles were framed in a very hard time, that there was still very much of the eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth theory about the Church Fathers of that day. It was still believed in a literal sense that the sins, even the spiritual sins, of the fathers should be visited on the children, not only until the third and fourth generation, but unto the end of time—of time which has no end.”

I can scarcely tell you how he longed at this time to say to her, on this very point :

“Dearest, why trouble your dear little ignorant head on such points as these? Leave it all to me. Let me tell you what to believe. Let me explain to you what interpretation you ought to put on certain portions both of Scripture and of the Church’s Articles.”

But he did not say it, because Cecil was too desperately in earnest. She was too eager and anxious —“If you could only make things clear to me,” she burst out one day, when they had been talking of their future life.”

“My dear child, you ought to be sensible enough to understand, you ought to be sufficiently enlightened to be able to read between the lines as it were, you ought to be able to realize that the holy men of those days who framed those Articles, compiled them to the very best of their belief; but that they were men of limited understanding is, to a certain extent, indisputable. At that time of day, the religious life tended toward narrowness; the old Fathers of the Church had to work by fear rather than by common sense, upon the minds of a people who were guided, as it used to be the fashion to guide children, not through their hearts — but through their senses, their senses of touch, feeling, hearing, and sight. In those days, to put the mat-

ter into the simplest possible every-day language, those who were devoted to a religious life, had no idea of doing what Christ Himself did, of making the ordinary every-day life and the religious life one. No, their greatest idea of religion was to mortify and punish the flesh, to out-Herod Herod, as it were, in the way of—oh, forgive me, my dearest, but you ask me for the most every-day language—of piling up the agony. The people were lawless and, for the most part, very ignorant, and minor crimes were frequently punished with death. If a man stole a sheep he was hanged; if a man set a rick on fire, even by accident, he was hanged; if he stole a turnip out of a field, it was ten chances to one that he was hanged for it. The whole tone of the age was severe, and it was also unbridled. So severity in religion was as unbridled as was severity in the putting down of law-breaking. Therefore, it is not to be wondered at that the Articles of Religion are exceedingly severe in their tone. But to alter these things now would be to lay ourselves open to the scorn of every sect which has dissented from us. You will not find any religion that works with absolute harmony in every particular; when that religion is found the great work of evangelization will be over, the world will be evangelized. But that will only be at the millennium. You have never heard me say that any church or, for the

matter of that, our church, is a perfectly constituted body. There is no such thing as perfection in this world, at least not of corporate perfection. The very best, and purest, and most holy of men and women, may absolutely disagree with the ideas and most carefully cherished plans of others, and the natural friction of disagreement may widen into a bridgeless gulf, without the very slightest fault upon either side. But although I do not hold up the constitution of our church as being perfect, I do say that it is the best that has ever been built up, that it will last the longest of all the creeds, and that it will do more good work than any other form of religion in this country."

"But," cried Cecil, "you preach one thing and you believe another."

"No," he said, "I do not preach it, I accept it. I accept certain points, as being the least of several evils. You know St. Paul said—I know your objection to texts, but this is a simple text which should be at the tips of all tongues—'All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient.'"

"I don't see," said Cecil, "what that has to do with the subject in question."

The Bishop smiled.

"My dear," he said, "it has everything to do with it. It would be *lawful* for the leading men of the Church to-day, to form themselves into a body

and give voice to the general feeling that the point about infant baptism being necessary to salvation, should be eliminated from our Articles of Faith; but it would not be expedient. You know," he went on, "there are some churches that do not accept that doctrine, there are churches which have made other radical changes from our creed, not because they were anxious to break away from the Mother Church, but solely because their minds refused to accept certain things which the Church does not see her way to alter. But time has shown that, although those changes have been made, these churches do not work more smoothly, do not give more solid satisfaction to their members, do not accomplish more labor in the human vineyard, than the Mother Church has done and is doing. It is an ascertained fact, it is proved beyond all question of doubt, that you cannot pull any constitution to pieces without doing a vast amount of harm. You can never build it up again to what it was before you began to tamper with the main supports. And so most men and women to-day are contented to treat these Articles to a certain extent as a matter of form, not to be taken literally, word for word, any more than you would take the whole Bible, literally word for word, from one end to the other. You could not, knowing me, believe that I could, in its *literal* sense, put forward the doctrine that baptism

is necessary, literally necessary, to prevent an innocent baby of a few hours' old being burned forever to the end of time. Yet it is necessary that children should be baptized."

"I don't see it," said Cecil.

"No, perhaps you do not. That is because you are troubled in your mind, and you have only just begun to think about a subject which needs a lifetime to understand, and you look at it, now that you have begun to think about it, from an uneducated, and unskilful, and wholly prejudiced point of view."

"But," said Cecil, "there is the fact that the poor baby was buried without any religious service whatever—as the mother put it, buried like a dog; and the vicar of the parish expressed himself deeply grieved to have to deny the mother the consolation of the usual service. And yet, his grief wouldn't allow him to bury the child!"

"Well, in a technical sense," said the Bishop, deprecatingly.

"Technical? But there ought to be no technicality in religion," she said.

"Well, neither ought there to be, and when we find ourselves gathered together in that heaven, to which most of us are looking, we may be quite sure that there we shall have no technicalities to contend with; but here we do have them and we must put up with

them. For my part," said the Bishop, "when I was in the way of taking funerals, I never asked any questions; I took it for granted that the child had been baptized."

"That was what our Rector told me," she cried. "He went further than that; he said, 'When I know that a baby has not been baptized, I always send and ask some other parson to take the service for me; I get out of it that way.'"

"A very sensible man," said the Bishop. "But you will never find a whole body of men, of such numbers as the clergy of the Church of England, all endowed with common-sense to such a degree as the Rector of Raburn seems to be. As a matter of fact, that is one of the Church's greatest weaknesses; Bishops are not half particular enough whom they ordain. The standard now is a standard of learning and personal character, but that is not really enough. If I had my way I would to a great extent study personal appearance and manner; and I would make every candidate for ordination pass through a *vivâ voce* examination in every-day common-sense. However, I suppose it wouldn't work," he added, regretfully, "and I am perfectly sure that a certain set would simply howl when the suggestion was put forward. So far as I can see, dearest," he went on, taking her hands in his and looking at her with great affection, "your situation practically is

this: Being very holy-minded yourself, you do not require to have your plan of life laid out for you, as it has been found necessary to lay out the plan of life or religion, which should be the same thing, for those less ready than you are to take the good road first. If the whole world were like you, a Creed would scarcely be necessary, because in that case everybody would follow the broad teaching of Christ himself, which is so simple, so admirably clear, and so utterly unhampered by technicalities and subject for doubt. It is because the Fathers of the Church went beyond these simple truths, that such minds as yours are troubled by the apparent inconsistencies, or if you will have it so, the evident inconsistencies in the Church Creed. You know it has always been my belief that it is infinitely better to say too little than too much; I have found that in every relation of life. The Fathers of the Church, those who framed the Thirty-nine Articles, erred in explaining a little too far, which is all very well for us, who understand how to make allowances for the differences which four hundred years have made between their ideas and ours, who understand how to lay stress on the broad truths which no sensible or right-minded person can deny or wish to deny, and those explanatory details, which must have been perfectly clear to those who put them forward four hundred years ago. I think," he went on, "that if

we could frame a new constitution for the Church now, we should frame it more nearly on the actual teaching of Christ than any constitution which has yet been compiled. For instance, if you look at the Baptismal Service, you will find that parents are exhorted to teach their children the Creed—the Creed, meaning of course the Apostles' Creed—the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments in the vulgar Tongue. Taken broadly, these comprise everything that is necessary for the Christian life. Any man or woman who keeps the Ten Commandments, must of necessity be leading an absolutely good life. Any one who believes in the Apostles' Creed must of equal necessity be believing everything that is essential for the Christian Church; while the Lord's Prayer, which we have straight from the highest Christian authority of all, Christ Himself, is simply the broadest, the simplest, and yet the most perfect expression of a religious faith that it is possible for any human being to make. Speaking to you, not as your future husband, not as the man who loves you with his whole heart, but as a clergyman, as a Bishop, I would have you believe that these three, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed, are absolutely sufficient for you to use as landmarks of faith. All the rest, you may safely put aside and honestly believe that they are as nothing to you."

For some little time Cecil Constable did not speak.

“We won’t talk about it any more just now,” she said, at last; “I would like to think over everything that you have said without any further argument. You have given me more comfort to-day than I have had ever since those terrible doubts first came into my mind. I would like to think before I say another word.”

CHAPTER XV.

COULEUR DE ROSE.

“To the tears I have shed and regret not
What matters a few more tears ;
Or a few days waiting longer,
To one that has waited for years ?”

—OWEN MEREDITH.

“Truly the light is sweet.”

—*Ecclesiastes.*

THE Bishop went away from Raburn that afternoon feeling that, practically speaking, the way was now smooth and clear between his fiancée and himself. Without doubt, he loved her the more for the very attitude of mind which had cost her such acute and keen distress during the past few months. His thoughts went back to that brilliant summer morning, when he had first set eyes upon her in the choir of the Parish. How well he remembered the scene. The stately edifice with its richness of carving, its priceless old oak, its rare old windows and inlaid reredos; the exquisite music and imposing ritual, all culminating to him in that one eager soul,

vainly seeking for satisfaction, as it looked at him through Cecil Constable's beautiful eyes.

He smiled tenderly to himself, as he thought of all that had come about since that day. Of how it had been fated that they should have met soul to soul, as well as face to face. To him, it was as if the past had been ordained, for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.

We are all of us in this world, however, prone to believe what we want to believe, and good and wise as the Bishop of Blankhampton was, he was no exception to the general rule. He *wanted* to believe that Cecil Constable would find her chaotic and troubled thoughts turned into the smooth path of conventional belief, and it was but natural that he should see only rose-lit smooth waters ahead.

Miss Constable herself was in no such happy frame of mind. She sat where he had left her for a long time without moving, thinking over what he had said to her. She knew that, from his point of view, he had been absolutely right in everything that had fallen from his lips. But the point of view was the stumbling-block. She felt he was right in what he had said about those terrible Thirty-nine Articles, that they must be taken in the spirit and not in any sense by the letter. She felt that he was perfectly right in saying that the

Church's constitution, though not perfect by any means, had yet never been improved upon, and that it would never do to tamper with it in these later days. She knew that he had justified himself against her charge of accepting one doctrine and preaching another. And great peace stole into her soul as she realized, for the first time, that as Archibald Netherby's wife she would have, in the years to come, not more but less temptation to inquire too closely into the whys and wherefores of the faith in which he believed so implicitly.

She never moved until the first bell rang for dinner. The Bishop had been gone quite two hours, for he was giving a dinner at the Palace that night to certain important ones among his clergy, many of whom were staying with him. She rose from the wide sofa and seated herself at the inlaid writing-table; then she opened her blotting-book and wrote a short note.

“DEAREST,” it said,

“I know that you will be busy when you get this, but I must tell you that you have set my mind at rest—I hope forever.

“YOUR CECIL.”

She addressed it to the Bishop and rang the bell.

“Oh, Matthew,” she said, when that functionary

appeared, "I want you to send Thomas over to the Palace at once with this. He can take my cart, or as William may direct."

Sir Edward was in town for a few days, whither Cecil had steadfastly refused to accompany him, so that she dined alone. But she was not dull; she was not even lonely. She chatted a little with Matthew, hearing quite a little budget of village news and information, and then she went back to her own sanctum and gave Ruffy a concert all to himself. In truth Cecil Constable had not felt so full of peace and happiness for many months.

Her note was put into the Bishop's hand as soon as it arrived at the Palace, for the servant who received it naturally thought that it might be important. The dinner itself was actually over, but the gentlemen were still lingering over their dessert.

"The groom does not know if any answer is required, my lord," said the footman.

The Bishop looked up.

"Do you permit me?" he said to his guests, who all conveyed by gestures their desire that he should make the contents of the letter his own.

The effect of the short note acted like magic upon the Bishop, for, as he realized what Cecil had written and the depth of the affection which could not bear to keep him a moment longer in suspense than was absolutely necessary, such a flood of joy

rushed into his heart, that he almost broke down under it.

“Tell the groom to wait; I will write an answer in a few minutes,” he said, with what calmness he could command; then folded the note and put it away in his breast pocket.

“Pleasant news, I hope, Bishop,” said the Dean of Blankhampton, who sat at his right hand.

“My dear Dean,” said the Bishop, “the best news of any that could have come to me. I was not exactly unhappy when I sat down to this table, but truly, I don’t think that the whole world holds a man more supremely contented with his lot than I am at this moment.”

“That is good,” said the Dean, heartily. “But don’t mind us, if you want to go and write an answer.”

“Thank you very much, I will go and do it, since you allow me. I shall not be five minutes.”

On his way to the study, he had to pass the door of the chapel, which, as usual, was dimly lighted. It was a beautiful little shrine, carved and gilded, and wrought with mosaic and precious stones, with many-colored marbles, and rare old windows, rivaling those of the Parish in beauty. In front of the altar a lamp always hung, and it was the Bishop’s wish that it should never be extinguished. He passed in and went straight up to the Altar-rail,

when he knelt down ; but what his prayer was or what his pæan of praise and thanksgiving, is not for me to tell or for you to hear. It was not long, but there are some moments of our lives in which short measure makes over-weight.

Then he went on to the study and wrote literally three lines to his sweetheart.

“Your letter came to me,” he said. “God be thanked, my darling, is the prayer of your always devoted

“ARCHIE.”

After this the preparations for the wedding went blithely on. Cecil Constable wrote to her father that night and said, “If it will please you, I will come up to town the day after to-morrow, and will stay a few days. I shall not come till the three o’clock train, if you will come or send Badger to meet me. I shall bring Louise. I think you had better send me a wire as soon as you receive this.”

For the first time for many months she went to sleep the moment she got into bed, with the satisfied weariness of a child, a child who has to think about nothing, a child who is not even afraid of bogies. And in the morning, when she came down, she looked, as the discreet Matthew expressed it to

his friend, the cook, as if a load had been taken off her shoulders.

“I don’t know what’s come to our young Miss,” he remarked, “she seems so gay and so happy, and you’d think when Sir Edward’s away and the Bishop had a dinner-party last night, that she would have been dull. But not a bit of it, she’s as blithe as a bird.”

“I don’t see why she shouldn’t be happy,” said the cook, sensibly. “Miss Constable isn’t a young lady as has nothing to occupy herself with—she’s a sensible woman; she isn’t a doll, she never was a doll.”

“She hasn’t looked happy lately, Mrs. Pincher,” said Matthew, with conviction.

“Well, a great many young ladies don’t look very happy when they’re just going to be married,” said Mrs. Pincher, dogmatically. “It’s a very serious business, I’ve always said so, and I’ve always ’eld to the same thing; and I always tell the girls in the ’ouse they can’t think too much about marriage beforehand, for it’s no use thinking about it after. Miss Constable isn’t the kind of young lady that it would be right to be going and giving of ’erself away as if she was a bundle of rags not worth twopence ha’penny. It’s a very serious thing is marriage, particular when it’s between people of their station.”

“I thought you said it was serious for everybody.”

“So it is,” the cook retorted. “It *is* serious for everybody, to themselves if not to others; but it’s more than serious for these two, it’s serious to everybody concerned. Don’t you get worrying yourself about Miss Constable’s looks, Matthew, it’s likely enough that she’ll look a deal worse before the wedding day is over.”

“She can’t do that,” said Matthew, “she’s looked as if ’er ’eart was breaking times out of number.”

“Well, I dare say she ’as; but she never looks as if ’er ’eart was breaking when his lordship’s about.”

“Why, how do you know, Mrs. Pincher?”

“My kitchen winders,” returned Mrs. Pincher, “don’t look over the front drive for nothing. I know when people come ’ere and see ’em, they say—‘What’s them winders?’ ‘Oh,’ they say, ‘the kitchens, and they looks down the front drive. Well, that’s queer!’ I dare say it *is* queer,” she continued, “most people shoves kitchens away in the back and gives ’em nothing but a court-yard to look on to; but them as built Raburn didn’t do that, and, as I say, my kitchen winders don’t look over the front drive for nothing. There’s no ’eart-break about Miss Constable when she’s driving the Bishop up the avenue in that little cart of hers; her ’eart breaks always when the Bishop is not to the

front, and, I take it, that's the greatest compliment a young lady can pay to the gentleman she's going to be married to."

"Well, I sincerely 'ope it is," said Matthew, "and this morning she's as bloomin' as a rose."

"I'm 'eartily glad to 'ear it," said Mrs. Pincher; "not that I ever believed, Matthew, that she was anything else."

Before twelve o'clock the Bishop made his appearance, and oh, how radiant he was!

"I've seen the last of my guests off," he said to Cecil, "and I have nothing to do all day. What shall we do with ourselves?"

"Well, first of all——" began Cecil.

"First of all," interrupted the Bishop, "I must thank you with all my heart and soul, dearest, for sending me that little note last night; it has made a new man of me. And now," he said, holding her close to him and looking fondly down on her, "we have got a whole long precious summer day before us. What shall we do with it?"

"We will spend part of it," said Cecil, "in here; and we will spend another part of it in the gardens; and we will spend another part of it down by the river; and we will dine together quietly and soberly, as though we had been married for ten years. By the bye," she added, "I am going up to London to-morrow."

“To London—why?”

“Oh, well, you see Father is there, and was very anxious that I should go with him in the first instance. And I think I had better go up for a few days.”

“Oh, yes, of course, if you think so. For anything special?”

“Well, you see, June is getting on and I have not ordered any of my things yet; and of course I cannot possibly be married without clothes and things of that kind.”

“No, no, of course not. Why, my dearest, I have scarcely begun to realize yet that our marriage is really within measurable distance. You have kept me so long on tenter-hooks, that I didn't know, I could not be *quite* sure whether you might not fail me, after all.”

“Oh,” she cried, with deep reproach, “you knew, you must have known that I should not *fail* you. I might have failed myself, but that would have been a very different thing.”

“I don't know so much about that,” said the Bishop. “I don't believe that the cause would have made any difference to the end. However, these dark days are all over now, and I can afford to forget the days of waiting.”

CHAPTER XVI.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE TRUTH.

“ All worldly joys do quickly fade,
Nor give to any full content ;
The wisest is who trusts them least,
Who trust them most shall most repent.”

—CHAUCER.

“ A fire devoureth before them ; and behind them a plain burneth.”

—*Joel.*

THE following day, Miss Constable went off to town with her maid, Louise. Her father met her at the terminus and, after putting Louise and the luggage into a cab, carried his daughter off in a hansom to his hotel.

“ And what made you take this freak into your head, Madam ? ” he asked, teasingly.

“ I thought I had better come up, dear,” she replied.

“ Well, that was what I told you, only you didn't seem to see the wisdom of my remarks. How is his lordship ? ”

“Oh, his lordship is blooming,” answered Cecil, blushing a fine rosy red. “I believe that he too is coming up to-morrow.”

“Really? Well, I haven’t any objection. But what made you change your mind?”

“You see,” answered Cecil, “I suddenly woke up to the fact that I had not ordered any things, and, of course, I can’t be married without clothes and so on.”

“No, I should imagine not, but you have really seemed so indifferent on the subject, that I began to think you might put your wedding off again.”

“Not any more,” said Cecil, with a happy little smile.

Sir Edward turned and looked at her.

“You look much better than you did, child,” he said, as if he had only just discovered how gay and blooming she seemed.

“Oh, yes, dear, much better than I was. In fact I am all right and as happy as possible.”

“And the Bishop is coming up to-morrow?”

“Yes, I think so—for a few days.”

And surely enough, on the following afternoon, the Bishop of Blankhampton made his appearance at the Burlington, where Sir Edward and his daughter were staying. And during the next four or five days, Cecil enjoyed life in truly royal fashion. Every day they took a turn in the Park,

sometimes twice; and everybody asked of their neighbors, who was the handsome Bishop and the pretty, radiant-looking girl. And then quite a crop of little paragraphs began to appear in the society papers, somewhat after this style—"And among others, we saw the splendid-looking Bishop of Blankhampton—the handsomest Bishop on the bench—with his charming fiancée, Miss Constable, the great Blankshire heiress."

They were obliged to show themselves, too, at a good many large social functions; and one morning he took her down to see his old parish and church.

Then, of stern necessity, the Bishop bade farewell to his sweetheart and the metropolis, and went back to his engagements in Blankhampton, while Cecil spent another week, going from shop to shop, from dressmaker to tailor, from tailor to milliner, from milliner to bootmaker, and so on, right through the whole gamut of tradespeople necessary to the composition of a harmonious trousseau.

As soon as they returned to Raburn, the invitations to the wedding were sent out, giving a full month's notice. The wedding day was fixed for the 30th of July; and following right on the heels of the answers to the cards of invitation, wedding presents began to pour in upon the bride-elect. They made a goodly show, for all sorts and conditions of things came from all sorts and conditions

of people. A complete set of turquoises and diamonds from the Bishop, together with a triple string of pearls of great beauty and value ; a huge silver bowl from the Netherby tenantry ; a complete toilette service of silver from the Raburn people ; a pair of silver candelabra from the clergy, and a diamond bracelet from the ladies of the diocese. From private persons they literally poured in by hundreds, and Cecil was kept very hard at work indeed, acknowledging them with proper and suitable expressions of gratitude and thanks.

It was a dreadfully busy time, and in the midst of it Miss Constable had to go up to town again for three days, when she stood for hours in dress-makers' fitting-rooms, while her various garments were tried on.

At this time, the Bishop was not preaching quite so much as he had been doing. He had a good many fixtures, of course—what Bishop in full work has not ? A new organ here, a restoration there, a sermon for this charity, or an address for that institution ; and whenever it was possible, Cecil accompanied him or, at least, was present when he was likely either to speak or preach. When one is very much occupied, a fortnight is soon gone. Two weeks of Cecil Constable's last month of maidenhood had slipped by, and everything seemed to be going as well and as merrily with her as the

proverbial marriage bell. It happened, however, when the third week of the month was just beginning, that she drove some five miles one evening, to hear the Bishop preach at the church of the oldest clergyman in the diocese.

Now, the Bishop was blessed with unusually keen eyesight, and from his place within the altar-rails, he could plainly see Cecil, whenever he lifted his eyes. She was, indeed, a very noticeable figure in the church, which was not a very large one, for she was wearing a light-grey tweed dress, with a cotton shirt, and a neat sailor hat bound with a white ribbon. Not a detail of her dress or face escaped the Bishop. He could see the white fire of the diamonds on her left hand, and equally well the azure of the turquoises beside them; he could hear every note of her charming voice, and felt indeed almost as if she were sitting beside him. Then when the time for the sermon came, he went, a grand and dignified figure, in his majestic robes, up into the pulpit. There was only one thing about Cecil that evening, which he did not realize, and that was the throb of pride with which she saw him in the old carved pulpit, with the soft light of a many-branched candelabra falling down upon his smooth fair head and clean-cut earnest face—probably a handsomer and more personable man than had ever filled it before.

He took for his text, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" As a sermon it was discreet, calm, temperate, practical, and eminently eloquent, directed mostly at the class which forces up prices in hard times, for the benefit of trade. A sermon to be distinctly understood of the people, for the Bishop gave one instance after another of trade facts, which had come under his own personal knowledge while the vicar of a busy London parish. Instances of great fish-dealers who deliberately turned whole cargoes of fish into the Thames, because prices had run down, rather than let the starving poor benefit by the glut in the market, which had caused the fall in prices. Instances of an iniquitous thing called a "corner," which he explained to wondering bucolic ears, with the lucidity which was one of his greatest charms. He ended his sermon by saying, "There is no one of us here present to-night, who has not at some time or other in his life, had something offered to him distinctly in exchange for his soul. The outside world may not know it, our own special world may never know whether we take it or leave it; our fellow men and women may never know that which we well know ourselves, or which we ought to know and would know, were not our souls steeped in desire or indolence; they may never sus-

pect we have acquired certain things at the cost of our own souls. As for ourselves, if we do know, we take a certain course at our own risk and the blame is wholly and solely our own. If we are so blinded by our desires or by the world, as not to be aware that this dire calamity has fallen upon us, we are to be pitied, but we shall not be excused ; for we shall surely awake sooner or later to the awful knowledge that, though we may indeed have gained the whole world, yet we have gained it in exchange for our own soul ; and what shall it profit man or woman to have acquired myriads of worlds at such a cost ? ”

I can scarcely describe by what instinct the Bishop at this point looked at Cecil, but he saw to his horror that the look which he had first noticed upon her face in the Parish Choir had come back again. His voice died away to silence and the people rose to their feet, as he spoke the concluding sentence giving glory to God. The offertory took some little time, and the Bishop noticed that Cecil did not join in the hymn which was sung meanwhile. Then after he had pronounced the Blessing, the whole church was hushed in silence for a moment, before the organist struck up the notes of a recessional hymn, and the choir and clergy slowly filed down the church and out of sight. The Bishop painfully aware, as he passed Cecil Con-

stable's seat, that she was still kneeling with her face hidden on her arms.

She had promised to drive back with him, having sent her own cart home, without putting up. There are always certain small courtesies to be got through, before a Bishop can leave a church at which he has been preaching, when the service is over, and when the Bishop of Blankhampton reached the church-yard gate, accompanied by the Vicar, his victoria with its fidgety chestnut horses was waiting, but there was no sign of Cecil.

"Has Miss Constable come out of the church?" he asked of the footman.

"Not yet, my lord," the man replied.

"Oh, but you saw everybody come out?"

"I did, my lord."

He turned to the Vicar.

"I think she must be looking at the church. Excuse me a moment, I will go back and fetch her."

He went back into the church and went softly up the aisle. Cecil had not moved, but was still kneeling with her head bent upon her arms, exactly as she had been when the Bishop had passed her. He laid his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Come," he said, "it is time to go home."

She raised her head with a start. He saw that she was very pale and that her eyes had a strange far-away look in them.

"I am ready," she replied, then gathered together her gloves and books and a warm coat which she had brought to wear for the drive home.

"You will put this on?" said the Bishop.

"Yes."

He took it from her and held it so that she could easily slip her arms into it.

"I believe you are very tired," he said, trying to speak in his usual voice.

"A little," she admitted.

"I am afraid you are not very well," said the Rector, when the Bishop and Cecil reached the gate.

"I am a little tired, that is all," she replied. "Oh, no, not anything, thanks, not anything; we shall be home in little more than half an hour."

She got into the carriage with a decision which quite prevented any acceptance on the Bishop's part of the good Rector's hospitality; so he had little or no choice to do other than to bid his host good-night, and seat himself beside her. Then, with a mutual uplifting of hats, a bow and something meant to be a smile from Cecil, the Bishop gave the signal to the coachman and they started for home. And Cecil never said a word. Twice the Bishop looked at her, but she was looking blankly at nothing, her thoughts evidently very far away. At last he turned himself a little in his seat, and under cover of the light rug, took hold of her hand.

“Dearest,” he said, gently, “what is it?”

She turned and looked at him, a look of such dire anguish that his very soul seemed to turn sick within him.

“What is it?” he repeated. “You are not well—you feel faint?”

“No,” she answered, “I feel stunned.”

“But why, my dearest, what has happened? You were quite like yourself this afternoon; what can have happened between then and now to make you look like this?”

“Everything has happened,” she answered, under her breath, “everything. Oh, why did you preach that sermon? It seemed, all in a moment, to lay my very soul bare, I never really knew myself until to-night. And yet, you were right to preach it—you were right, it was your duty. No, it was something more than that, it was Providence that stepped in to save you.”

“To save me!” he echoed. “Why, what nonsense are you saying? To save me from what?”

“What shall it profit a man to gain one thing,” she answered, “in exchange for his soul?”

“My dear, you are talking wildly,” he managed to say, with an assumption of calmness which he was very far from feeling. It was, however, only the calmness of coming despair. His strong face blanched, and an involuntary shudder ran through

his broad frame. "Cecil—dearest—you cannot mean that anything—any words of mine to-night, could make you fail me now, at the last moment? It is impossible."

"Do you think it is impossible?" she said, breathlessly. "I do not know—I feel as if nothing can be impossible. Why did you preach that sermon—'In exchange for his soul.' Am I to give myself in exchange for *your* soul?"

"But you are not doing so; you are talking something very like nonsense. There is no question of your taking my soul. I give you myself, my life, my heart, my name—but my soul—why, there can be no question of my giving you that."

"No, not of your giving it to me, but of your giving it for me."

"No more than any other man does who marries the woman he loves," he answered, soothingly. "My dear, you are tired, you are over-wrought. These ceremonials are too much for your sensitive nature, by and bye you will have got used to them. The excitement of all at once giving deep thought—anxious thought, terribly anxious thought, to a subject about which you had not before troubled yourself, has been too much for you. Be advised by me, try to live during the next fortnight without thinking—without thinking at all!"

"You seriously advise me to do that?"

“I do seriously; I do earnestly; I do cold-bloodedly, if you will forgive the expression. I would so advise you, if you were nothing to me, and I were nothing to the man you were going to marry.”

“I will think about it,” she said. “Just now, I feel as if my very heart had been torn out of my body. Up to now, I have thought only of myself and my own feelings; of my own life in the future; but to-night you have made me think of yours.”

It is only fair to admit that the Bishop was but human. At that moment he could cheerfully have bitten his tongue out, for having preached a sermon which would arouse any such feelings in her mind.

“Do be guided by me in this, dearest,” he said, gently, and holding her hand very tightly. “You are naturally nervous, and over-wrought, and unstrung. You are not fit, at present, to take the decision of these great questions upon yourself. Afterward, afterward, after the thirtieth, when there is not so much happiness hanging upon your convictions—I mean earthly happiness, of course—you will be able to look upon these questions in an unbiassed light. As it is now, you are biassed to the last extent—it is *impossible* for you to take a fair view of the matter.”

“But you are biassed, too,” she said, quickly.

“Not at all,” he answered. “My belief remains

precisely what it always has been. I see a little more need of patience, of charity, of making allowances for the doubts, cares, and weaknesses of others, than perhaps I did before ; but my belief is not altered one hair's breadth—*nothing* could alter it. I believe what I have always believed, what I believe to be right ; what I believe to be the best finger-post that we can find in this world to guide us into and make us fit for a better one. After all, what is religion, what is faith ? Only the working out of a perfectly reasonable, a perfectly simple, and a perfectly easy code of life. Our religion was not given to us to be a sort of bogie, following us round and making us miserable at every turn. On the contrary, it was intended to make us happier here in this world, it was intended to make the world and poor human nature better and brighter and happier ; not to fill our lives with sorrow and sadness, and mortification.”

“ Yes, I know. I will think about it—I will try to do as you tell me.”

“ You want to do as I tell you, I hope ? ” he said, tenderly.

“ Oh, yes, you must know that. I want to do what is right, and I thought my way was quite clear ; but to-night the clouds have all come back again, and I feel that there is a lion in the way. I am very wretched, Archie.”

“My dearest, I know you are. But here we are, at Raburn. Don’t look like that; people will think we have been quarrelling, you and I, and, although I care as little as most men for outward appearances, I should not like your father’s people to imagine for one moment that I had been quarrelling with and ill-using you.”

“They will never think that you have done anything that was unkind to me,” she said, gravely. “Nobody could ever believe but that you were the best and kindest and dearest of men.”

“And yet you don’t trust me,” he put in.

“Oh, yes, I do; but you are too generous—it is your worst fault. But I trust you implicitly.”

“Not to the extent of letting me decide an important question for you.”

“Because,” she answered, “I am afraid that you might decide it more in favor of me than of yourself. You are strong, but the strongest men are weak sometimes, and if it is given to me to be stronger than you, I must do what I believe to be the right. That is reason, is it not?”

“I don’t know,” said the Bishop. “No, I can’t see that it is. It is a one-sided piece of reasoning altogether. At all events, Cecil, there is one thing which, right or wrong, conviction or no conviction, you cannot do.”

“And that?” she asked, startled a little by his tone.

“You cannot break our engagement with honor,” he answered, not looking at her but straight away through the gathering dusk.

In another moment they were sweeping along the avenue at Raburn, and then the horses drew up, with much prancing and fuss, at the great entrance door.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PIECES DON'T FIT!

“Not in the clamor of the crowded street,
Not in the shouted plaudits of the crowd,
But in ourselves, are triumph and defeat.”

—LONGFELLOW.

“In the valley of decision.”

—*Joel.*

WHEN the Bishop parted with Cecil Constable that evening, it was on the understanding that he should go out to Raburn the following afternoon, not later than five o'clock. He forebore from continuing the conversation which had passed between them during their drive home, and on parting had only begged her to trust implicitly in the future—to trust him. Needless to say, the girl passed a wretched night, and when the Bishop entered her little sitting-room the following afternoon he realized, in a moment, that things had gone hardly with her.

“My dearest,” he cried, “you are killing yourself—you are very ill.”

“Yes, I do feel desperately ill,” she answered, “sick in body and sick in mind. Oh, Archie, I am so miserable, I am so wretched!”

He drew her on to the sofa and held her hands fast in his.

“Tell me all about it,” he said, in soothing tones. “You look as if you had been awake all night.”

“I have not been to bed at all,” she said, wearily.

“Oh, my dear,” he cried, with the deepest reproach, “why won’t you trust me in this matter—why won’t you believe that I know what is best for you? I thought we had put away all these doubts of yours, and that when you sent me that dear little letter your mind was at rest.”

“On those points, yes,” she admitted. “On all the points that you and I talked over I realized that I had perhaps thought more of the letter than of the spirit.”

“Then what is troubling your mind now?” he asked, gently.

“Everything, Archie, everything. If it were only such questions as you and I talked over before, I would admit—cheerfully admit—that you were perfectly right in everything you have said. Then I thought that those were the important things, but now I know that there is only one thing for me to do”—speaking painfully, as if she were

dragging the words up from her unwilling heart—
“with honor——”

“And that?” asked the Bishop.

“Is to tell you that I cannot marry you. No”—
putting up her hand to stop him from speaking.
“It is no use your trying to persuade me—I have
made up my mind. It will break my heart, and I
am afraid it will break yours—and everybody will
talk—oh, how they will talk—and I shall have to
send all the horrid wedding presents back, and ex-
plain to people that it is going to be no wedding—
and—and—I think it will kill me.”

“You are not going to break faith with me?”
said the Bishop, in a very cold voice.

“Yes—I must. You said last night, that I could
not do so with honor. Under ordinary circum-
stances, of course I could not. Oh, Archie, believe
me, I would sooner put my hand into a living fire
than have to tell you, under ordinary circum-
stances, what—I—I have got to tell you to-day. It
is not of my own will—you know that it is not—
I don't want to break with you. Oh, you know—
you cannot have any doubt that I love you with my
whole heart—that I am distracted—heartbroken—
forlorn and wretched at the very idea of parting
from you; but I have a duty to you and to your
position. I cannot marry you. It would be like
selling your soul. For my own, it would not

matter—I don't believe that I have a soul to sell, *but you do*. And if you are right, and all that you believe in, and I knew and you knew that I had bargained it away, I should never know peace again and there could be no real love between us. When you realized what you had done, when you came to your senses, you would no longer love me. If you were too good to hate me, you would look upon me as the Christ, that you believe in, looked upon the Devil when he tempted him."

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"Mean—oh, isn't it clear enough? Haven't I made it plain enough? Will you force me to say literally—in English—what you must know—what you must have realized already? Archie, I love you—you know it—you cannot need any more words of mine to convince you of that; but I have been forced, during the last few hours, to admit to myself that I am utterly without a religious belief of any kind. I believe in nothing—I accept *nothing* of what is *your life*. I have been up all night and I have read the whole of the four Gospels over several times; but I can't reconcile them to my reason. The pieces don't fit, Archie. I hate to say it, because I know that it hurts you to hear it—but I don't believe a word of it. So how could I, giving little or no credence to the past, regarding it all as a mere fable, having no reverence for the

religion of the present, and without any belief or hope in a world to come, marry a man in your position? Still more to the point, how could you, in your position, marry a woman of my way of thinking?"

"But this is new," exclaimed the Bishop; "you never gave me a hint of this before."

"I scarcely admitted it even to myself. It was not until last night, when you put that awful thought into my mind, that you were gaining me in exchange for your soul, that I realized what a terrible thing was about to happen. Don't try to persuade me otherwise. You said that last night about honor, but I feel that no woman of honor could have done other than I have done. Don't try to persuade me to go straight on and trust to time to put everything right. I should only," she continued, not giving him time to speak, "I should only despise you, if you were weak enough to run such a risk."

"I am not going to ask you to run it," said the Bishop, in a dull, hard voice.

She looked at him piteously, but for the first time, there was no answer in his eyes.

He got up and walked to the window, where he stood looking out over the lovely summer landscape, with eyes so full of pain that they saw nothing, with a brain all in a whirl of misery, and a heart like a

lump of lead. The girl did not dare to speak. She sat still, just as he had released her from his strong and tender grasp—a girl did I say, no, no longer a girl, but a sorrowful, heart-stricken woman, with a white, drawn face, and eyes of living anguish, in which there was no sign of tears. She longed to go to him, not as an equal, not to put her arms about his neck as she had been used to do; but to creep to his feet, as an outcast, a leper, who would fain kiss even the ground upon which they trod. But she dared not. She felt that she had by her own act, if not by her own will, put herself completely away from him forever. For the first time in her life, she was afraid of him, the more afraid because he had said so little, because he had not reproached her, because he had not in any way attempted to refute her words or to overcome her scruples. No, that was the hardest blow of all—he had accepted her fiat, and she felt that she had put her hand to a plough, from which there could be no drawing back during all the rest of her life.

It seemed to her that he stood for hours looking out over the gardens and wide-spread lands of Raburn, but, in reality, it was only for some ten minutes that the silence lasted between them. She did not know—how could she know—that while he stood there he was only struggling for mastery over himself, struggling to command himself, so that he

should not break down in her presence. At last, however, he turned toward her again, going back to the great bear-skin before the hearth, and rested his elbow on the wide mantel-shelf, so that he could partly shade his eyes with his hand.

“You will forgive me,” he said, in a very unsteady voice, “if I go away. It is useless, in the face of what you have told me, to prolong the agony of this discussion. It is useless for me to protest to you the depth of the blow which has fallen upon me to-day. I have only one thing to ask—that you will make what explanation you like to your father, and that you will not pain me by sending back to me anything that I have given you. Perhaps, after a time, when I have got over this, you will let me see you again. For the rest, I will write to you. I must go now.”

He did not attempt to take formal leave of her, but went out of the room without daring to look at her again.

She had not moved during the time that he stood at the window or while he was speaking; but when she realized that he was going, going forever, she stretched her despairing arms toward him and opened her mouth as if to beg him to stay. Then a realization of what she had done, of what had happened, of the irrevocable barrier that had risen up between them, came upon her like a flash of light-

ning; the imploring words died upon her lips, her trembling hands fell back upon her knees, the door closed, and he was gone.

The coachman had, in accordance with his usual custom, put up his horses, and great was the estimable Matthew's surprise, when, on answering the hall-bell, he found the Bishop standing there alone.

"Will you order my carriage, please," he said.

It was the first time since his engagement to Miss Constable, that the Bishop had ever spoken to the valued old servant of the house, without the pleasant and friendly use of his name. In a moment, Matthew realized that something dreadful had happened. He answered, "Certainly, my lord," and bustled away to apprise the Bishop's coachman that his master wanted the carriage round at once.

"Why—what's up?" asked the episcopal Jehu.

"I don't know what's up," replied Matthew, "but whatever it is, it's something serious. His lordship is as white as a ghost, and he spoke like a man in a dream."

But a very few minutes passed before the carriage came round. The discreet Matthew returned to the hall at the same moment and ushered the Bishop out, as if he were a total stranger and this his first call on the lady of the house.

"Home, my lord?" asked the footman.

"The Palace—yes," answered the Bishop.

He never looked up, he was too stunned to give Matthew his usual kindly smile and gesture of farewell, he simply sat in the carriage like a man of stone, keeping himself under control till he could get into some friendly shelter, from the same instinct that the wounded deer speeds until it reaches covert.

Just as he turned into the high road, he met Lady Vivian evidently driving up to the house, and to that lady's no small surprise and dismay, he passed her without recognition.

"That was the Bishop," she said to her companion, a lady, who was staying at Ingleby.

"Really—well he doesn't look to me like a man who is going to be married next week," said her friend. "Is he short-sighted?"

"Oh, no, not at all. But did you notice that he never looked at me?"

"He looked more like a man going to be hanged, than one going to be married," declared the other.

"I thought so too," said Lady Vivian, with conviction; "however, we shall see what Cecil says."

But Matthew blandly informed them that Miss Constable was not at home.

"Is she in the town?"

"I believe not, my lady," said Matthew, urbanely. "Miss Constable did not tell me whether she was going into Blankhampton or not."

“Oh, I hope she is well?”

“Yes, my lady, Miss Constable is quite well,” Matthew replied.

“I met the Bishop at the end of the avenue,” said Lady Vivian.

“His lordship has just been here, my lady,” Matthew replied.

“I see. Well, give my love to Miss Constable.”

“Certainly, my lady.”

Now, as a matter of fact, Matthew had intuitively grasped the fact that something terrible had happened, and bearing possible visitors in view, he made bold enough to seek his young mistress out and ascertain her views thereupon. The usual afternoon tea being ready, he carried it into the boudoir and arranged it before her.

“Are you at home to visitors, ma’am?” he asked.

Cecil looked up.

“No—no, Matthew, not to anybody.”

“Very good, ma’am.”

“Mrs. Pincher,” said Matthew, a few minutes later, “I don’t believe there’ll be any wedding on the 30th inst.”

“*What!*” she cried.

“Mark my words, Mrs. Pincher, there’ll be no wedding. H’m — there’s visitors already,” and Matthew hurried out that he might, as he afterward put it, get rid of Lady Vivian.

Meantime, the Bishop's horses carried him swiftly along the smooth country roads, through the town and back to the great echoing Palace. He looked neither to right nor to left, indeed he never raised his eyes from his own feet. He was quite unconscious that between Raburn and the town he met Sir Edward Constable driving himself in a high dogcart, or that, in the streets of Blankhampton, he passed many other people who knew him. He saw nobody. As soon as he reached the Palace, he gave orders to the butler, "I am at home to no one," and went into his study, shutting the door after him and turning the key in the lock. And there he stayed for hours, stricken down as only the strong can be, battling hard with the terrible anguish which had that day eaten into his very soul. When it was nearly eight o'clock, he rang the bell.

"Don't prepare dinner for me to-night," he said, "I am too busy to eat it. Tell cook to send me up a cup of strong tea at once."

The man bowed and retired. The Bishop's study always looked busy, the tables were always littered with papers, so that the excuse should have seemed a good one. But the servant was not to be deceived.

"Something 'orrid 'as 'appened to my lord," he remarked to the dignified butler, who watched over the Bishop's daily comfort. "'E ain't going to 'ave

any dinner. That's bad. 'E's too busy to eat it. I've never known 'im too busy to eat 'is dinner before. I wonder what's up?"

"Oh, what should be up?" replied his superior, with infinite scorn; "you always were given to fancying things, Wilson. It's very foolish of you: as if his lordship's a man to go without his dinner for a mere fad."

Meanwhile, Cecil Constable had with feverish thirst drank a cup of tea, but had not touched the contents of the pretty three-cornered basket which Matthew had brought with it. And then she slipped back among the cushions again, as if all the vitality and strength had been taken out of her during the past hour. It was not very long before Sir Edward, cheery and a little fussy, bustled into the room.

"I met the Bishop," he told her, "and the man was so wrapped up in a brown study that he never even saw me. Why—what's the matter—what has happened?"

Cecil tried to speak but the words choked her.

"He has been here," she managed to say, at last.

"Been here? Well, there's nothing wonderful in that; of course he has been here, I met him—where else should he have been? But—" in a different tone, "has anything happened?"

"Yes," she replied, scarcely above a whisper.

“What is it? Don't beat about the bush—tell me what is the matter.”

“I don't know how to tell you.”

“Anything between you and the Bishop?”

“Everything,” she answered.

“But what do you mean by everything?”

“It's all over,” said Cecil with difficulty.

“Your marriage?”

“Yes.”

“Do you mean to say that your engagement is broken off—that you are not going to be married on the 30th?”

“Yes, that is what I mean.”

“But why?”

“I cannot tell you.”

“Nonsense—you must tell me.”

“I cannot tell you,” she repeated. “Oh,” in a wailing voice, “don't ask me why. It is all over—there is going to be no wedding at all—he will never come here again. That's enough, isn't it? What do the details matter?”

“But they do matter,” Sir Edward persisted. “I have a right to know—I must know.”

“I cannot tell you. Oh, Father, cannot you see that it is killing me to talk about it? Don't, for pity's sake, ask me any more questions. Help me to get through the next horrid week, to tell people that I am not going to be married, that they needn't

send me any more wedding presents, that they can take back those they have sent, and give them to somebody else ; that there won't be any wedding on the 30th—more likely a funeral.”

Sir Edward fairly fumed.

“This is all very mysterious, Cecil,” he said abruptly. “And if you were an ordinary young lady, this sort of thing might pass muster ; but you are not an ordinary young lady, you are a very important person indeed, and Miss Constable of Rarburn cannot be taken up and put down in this way. If you won't give me an explanation, I must demand one from the Bishop himself.”

“I would rather not give you any explanation,” she replied. “It is impossible for our marriage to take place and that ought to be enough, even for you.”

“What am I to say to people who ask about it ?”

“Nothing,” said Cecil. “You need not say anything—it is enough for them that there will be no marriage. You might at least do this much for me.”

“I must seek my explanation from the Bishop himself,” he said vexedly, “an explanation I must have ; and if you won't give it me, I must get it from him.”

“I cannot give it to you. Look at me. Cannot you see that I am heart-broken ? Cannot you see

that I am too crushed and wretched to talk it over and describe my agony? I don't think you are kind—I did not expect you to make me suffer like this, in the most cruel sorrow that I have ever known. I did not expect it from you.”

“But it's so inexplicable,” he explained, his sympathy for her all blotted out by his annoyance and his surprise. “Here are you, on the very eve of your marriage, with the invitations all sent out more than a fortnight ago, presents come in from the tenantry and from half of our friends, with your settlements arranged and drawn up and your clothes got ready. I come home, all unsuspecting and unwittingly, and you simply cast a bombshell at me, that you are not going to be married at all. I don't understand it. I don't know what to say to people.”

“It cannot be necessary to say anything to people,” Cecil repeated. “You have the invitation list and you will send out an intimation to everybody who has been asked that there will be no wedding. Nobody could be so cruel as to come harassing me or you to know the reason why? It is quite enough for the world that it is so.”

“But I am not the world,” Sir Edward persisted.

“I know that you are not the world—but I know too that you are the *one* who might have some consideration for me.”

“It is consideration for you that makes me desirous of knowing everything,” said Sir Edward testily. “For anything I know to the contrary, the Bishop may have jilted you.”

Cecil broke into a dreary laugh. Sir Edward fumed on.

“And if he has done so, I warn you, and I warn him, that not even his cloth shall protect him.”

She looked up, shaking her head.

“He needs no cloth to protect him from any imputation that is disgraceful to him. Forgive me, if I go away and do not come down again to-night. I cannot, I simply cannot bear this discussion any longer, but I hope I may trust you to see the proper announcements given to the world. It is a thing that I cannot do for myself.”

She went out of the room unsteadily, like one just recovering from severe illness, and when she had shut the door, Sir Edward realized that she did not mean to tell him anything of what had caused her broken engagement.

“I see nothing for it,” he muttered, “but going over to the Palace and trying to get some information out of him—though he won’t tell me anything either.”

There is, you know, a wide difference between an affair of that kind, a broken engagement and an abandoned marriage, when it is closely concerning

yourself and when it only closely concerns somebody belonging to you. Sir Edward Constable was bewildered, puzzled, and intensely annoyed, but he did nothing out of the common course. He dressed for dinner and he sat down by himself to eat it; and being a loquacious person and bound to relieve his mind by talking to somebody, he partially unburdened himself to the inestimable Matthew, who, be it remembered, had been over fifty years, man and boy, at Raburn.

“Miss Constable is not coming down to dinner, Matthew,” he said, when he entered the dining-room. “You might tell Louise to take her up some tea and something of that kind presently. Don’t bother her with any dinner. By the by, send James out of the room, will you?”

The discreet Matthew lifted his eyes and jerked his thumb at the door, as an indication to his subordinate that he might depart.

“I’m afraid, Sir Edward, something has happened this afternoon.”

“I can’t make it out, Matthew, I can’t make it out. There’s going to be no wedding.”

“I said so, Sir Edward,” said Matthew, “I said so.”

“But why? What happened this afternoon?” Sir Edward asked, holding his spoon poised above his soup-plate while he stared at Matthew. “What

took place? I cannot get anything out of Miss Constable, excepting that she's not going to be married on the 30th."

"Well," said Matthew, resting his arm on the back of his master's chair and standing in the attitude that twenty years ago was considered the most correct one for the photographer's art. "Well, Sir Edward, it was like this. The Bishop, he called here close on 'alf past four o'clock and I showed him into the boudore, and Simpson, he put his horses up—as usual. And just on the point of five, when I was going up, to carry the tea, the 'all-bell rang, and I went to see what was wanted, and his lordship was standing in the hall and he says to me, 'Will you order my carriage, please?' Now, generally, Sir Edward, his lordship says, like he did when he come in this afternoon, 'Ah, Matthew, how are you?' or, 'Will you order my carriage, Matthew?' or something pleasant and recognizing-like. But this afternoon, he never looked at me, but he just says, 'Will you order my carriage, please?' as if I'd been a hired waiter at somebody's house that he'd never been to before, and didn't mean to go to again. And of course, I said, 'Certainly, my lord,' and I went and hurried Simpson up and the carriage came round and he got in. He never looked at me, but his face was like chalk and his hands were shaking, and I knew that there'd not be any wedding on the 30th

—I said so. And his footman said, ‘Home, my lord?’ and he said, ‘The Palace—yes,’ and then he drove away, without turning his eyes and just as if he was made of stone. Well, then, Sir Edward, I went in and I carried the tea in to Miss Constable, and she was like death too. And I asked her if she would receive any other visitors and she said ‘No, not anyone,’ and so, when Lady Vivian came, I told her Miss Constable was not at home.”

“How did the Bishop look when he came?”

“As usual, Sir Edward, as usual. ‘Ah, Matthew,’ said he, ‘Miss Constable at home?’ just as pleasant and affable as usual.”

“I can’t make it out,” said Sir Edward, with what was almost a groan, “I can’t make it out, anyhow. And Miss Constable won’t say anything, not a word. However, look here, tell William to get me out a dogcart, and one of the grooms can go with me.”

“Very good, Sir Edward.”

“As I said, Mrs. Pincher,” the estimable Matthew remarked five minutes later, “there’s going to be no wedding on the 30th instant.”

“You don’t say so!” said Mrs. Pincher.

“Miss Constable isn’t dining; Sir Edward, he can’t make anything out, and he’s ordered a dogcart to go over to the Palace to-night.”

“To-night, Matthew?”

“To-night, Mrs. Pincher. I knew it,” he added triumphantly, “there are some things in this life that you can’t make any mistake about. And that kind of flare-up is one of ’em.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

SORE STRICKEN.

“ True be it said, what man it sayd,
That love with gall and honey doth abound,
But if the one be with the other way'd,
For every dram of honey therein found
A pound of gall doth over it redound.”

—SPENSER.

“ A talebearer revealeth secrets : but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.”

—*Proverbs.*

HAVING finished dinner, Sir Edward lighted a cigarette and started for the Palace as soon as the dogcart had come around.

“ Don't forget to look after Miss Constable,” he said to Matthew, as they reached the door-step.

“ I will, Sir Edward, I will,” said Matthew sympathetically.

It was then very little after nine o'clock. He reached the Palace in about half an hour and asked to see the Bishop.

“ His Lordship is very much occupied, Sir

Edward," said the solemn butler confidentially, "but if you will come this way, Sir, I have no doubt he will see you."

He led the way into the dimly lighted drawing-room, turning up a couple of the many gas jets before he sought the Bishop. After a minute or two, he returned, saying that his lordship would see Sir Edward, if he would kindly step this way.

The man led him to the Bishop's study and ushered him into the room, closing the door behind him. The Bishop was standing by the large writing-desk, which stood in the centre of the room.

"I expected you, Sir Edward," he said, holding out his hand.

"Then I won't apologize for coming," said Sir Edward, in a guarded tone. "It is of course natural that I should want an explanation of what has taken place between my daughter and you to-day."

"And I am sorry that I cannot give you one," said the Bishop steadily. He pointed to a huge easy chair set cornerwise to the desk, and sat down himself in his usual place, that is in the writing chair, where he had been sitting before.

"I think it is my due to have an explanation," Sir Edward blurted out.

"To a certain extent, yes," the Bishop said. "Miss—Constable—Cecil—has definitely broken off our engagement and done away with all idea of our

marriage, and I take it that there is nothing more to be said."

"Then it *is* Cecil's doing," Sir Edward exclaimed.

The Bishop looked up with a sudden light in his eyes.

"My dear Sir Edward, has it been in your mind, even for a moment, that *I* could have failed Cecil?"

"Well, so to speak, no; but in the face of such a catastrophe, such an upheaval of everything, as was suddenly flung at me on my return home to-day, one thinks a thousand things that are both likely and unlikely. I met you this afternoon, just outside Blankhampton. I was on my way home—you never saw me. I thought *that* queer enough, and then when I got home Cecil told me the bare fact that the marriage would not take place. Now, it is almost the last moment, the invitations have been out a fortnight, the house is littered with wedding presents, my daughter has made every preparation, the settlements are all drawn up; and then all at once everything is knocked on the head. And I am not even told the reason why."

"The reason is," said the Bishop, in a not very steady voice, "that Cecil has definitely decided not to marry me."

"But why? That is what I want to know."

"And that is what I cannot tell you," said the

Bishop. "If Cecil likes to tell you, she is, of course, quite at liberty to do so. But the reason is hers, and I cannot give her away even to you—unless she chooses to do so herself. That it is not *my* wish," he went on with a great effort to keep calm, "I think needs no words of mine to make you believe. I don't think I can possibly look like a man who has either broken his engagement to the woman of his choice, or like one that is glad that she has broken hers."

"No," said Sir Edward, "I saw that when I came in here, and, for the matter of that, Matthew told me that you looked——"

"Oh, for God's sake spare me!" cried the Bishop passionately. "I know what I looked like, I know what I felt like, I know what I feel like now. But the marriage is out of the question, Sir Edward; it is no use trying to patch this thing up, it is no use my howling about my feelings, it is no use your being annoyed about what people will say; they'll talk—they'll talk; let 'em talk—the main fact remains the same; there will be no marriage between your daughter and me on the thirtieth of this month."

"I can't make it out, I think I ought to be told everything. It is only my due and my right that I should be told what it all means. It must be something serious; you are not the kind of man to take

this pronounced view for a mere fad. You are sitting here in this Palace breaking your heart, and my girl is sitting at home in her bedroom breaking hers. Damn it, sir, I want to know the reason why. There, I beg your pardon, I forgot for a minute that you were a Bishop. Still, you will admit that I have some cause to feel badly used over this. It is not a light thing to have one's daughter's marriage broken off in a moment in this way. It wouldn't be a light thing, if it were that we had found a man to be unworthy of her, if it were that a man had got tired of her, or that she had got tired of him, or that there was anything in her past, like there is in the past of plenty of women. It would be different then. But you two haven't got tired of each other——”

“My God,” muttered the Bishop under his breath, “how long is this man going on?”

“A man and a woman,” went on Sir Edward, who was too much excited to hear the Bishop's invocation, “don't go on loving each other as you two did, right up to a certain point and then snap—like a bit of glass. I want to know what it is!”

“Well, Sir Edward, I won't tell you,” said the Bishop, “and that's plain. Cecil has a reason; it's enough for her and it's got to be enough for me. That she loves me,” he went on with a suspicious quaver in his tones, “is my only consolation, my

only bit of comfort. That I am absolutely hers, now and for all time to come, while I have any consciousness of my individuality, is equally certain. Please God that it may be some small consolation to her. Beyond that I simply refuse to say another word."

"I must ask you one more question," Sir Edward said, after a moment's pause. "Is there any chance of things working out smooth again?"

"I don't know," the Bishop replied, "that depends upon Cecil entirely. So far as I am concerned, Sir Edward, I assure you I have had no part in this unexpected and terrible rupture. I am acquiescing solely of necessity. If Cecil ever says 'Come,' I shall be ready; if she never says that one word, I shall still be waiting for her. Beyond that, I can say nothing—indeed, there is nothing more for me to say."

"Then it is no use our prolonging this interview. You are knocked all of a heap enough as it is," said Sir Edward, rising. "And I must say, Bishop, before I go, that I am something more than sorry, something more than grieved that this unpleasant business has happened. I was proud at the prospect of having you for my son-in-law, I admire you and look up to you more than to any man of your cloth that I have ever known; and although I suppose of necessity ordinary intercourse must, for a

time at least, cease between my house and yours, you'll remember, won't you, that you have one good friend at Raburn, who will always be glad to do you a service, and who will always be glad to come to you, whenever you ask him? I can't say more. I can do nothing it seems. Well, good-by, Bishop," he said, holding out his hand and gripping the Bishop's hard. "I am more unhinged and cut up about this than words can say. Don't come out with me, don't stand on ceremony with me. God bless you. Good-by."

It was many a long year since Sir Edward Constable had felt anything like the sensation of tears in his eyes, but he stumbled out of the Bishop's study like a man walking in his sleep and, as he went down the long corridor, he had to wink his eyes very, very hard, to force the treacherous drops back to their starting place.

"It's a mystery," his thoughts ran, as he drove homeward along the quiet country roads, "and I shall probably never get to the bottom of it. But my girl has done a bad thing for herself to-day, she has missed the greatest chance of happiness that any woman ever had."

CHAPTER XIX.

FOOD FOR THE BUSY-BODIES.

“Life’s more than breath and the quick round of blood :
It is a great spirit and a busy heart.”

—BAILEY.

“And I will cause you to pass under the rod.”

—*Ezekiel.*

WITH the following day the astounding news burst like a bombshell over all classes of society. In Blankhampton and Blankshire, the news ran like wildfire. Soon after nine o’clock in the morning, Sir Edward’s confidential servant, Badger, set the ball rolling in the town itself, for he left a written intimation at each of the newspaper offices, asking them to be good enough to insert a paragraph in their next issue, to the effect that the marriage between the Lord Bishop of Blankhampton and Miss Constable of Raburn, fixed for the 30th instant, would not take place. Then he went into the principal bookseller’s shop and ordered five hundred cards to be printed, with

the announcement containing the same information.

“But it isn’t true?” said the head of the business, staring at Badger with open-mouthed surprise.

“Yes, Mr. Thompkinson, it’s quite true,” said Badger in positive tones.

“Is it him, or is it her?” the bookseller asked.

“Well, we don’t really know anything. However, from what I can gather, Miss Constable and his lordship won’t say anything, but, of course, I know pretty well what Sir Edward thinks. It all happened yesterday afternoon, and Sir Edward went down to see the Bishop last night, and he thinks Miss Constable simply broke it off. Some of our people saw the Bishop come yesterday, just as smiling and happy as usual, and Matthew—you know Matthew, the butler—he saw him off, when he left half an hour later and he said he looked like death. As to Miss Constable, she’s like nothing but a ghost this morning.”

“Oh, then you’ve seen her?”

“Yes, she came down to breakfast, she didn’t dine last night—but she came down to breakfast this morning. She looks like a ghost; I couldn’t describe her looks as anything else.”

You may imagine, in a busy town on a brilliant July morning, when most people in the habit of

going to London during the season had flown back to their country seats for a couple of weeks, before going off to their foreign spas or other health-giving resorts; when the next set of people were waiting for their children's holidays to begin, before they packed themselves and their belongings off to the seaside; when everybody was out and about, and a great many were actually delaying their departure in order to be present at the Bishop's wedding—you may imagine how the wonderful news spread from mouth to mouth. Everybody was incredulous, but there was no getting over the intimation written on the Raburn note paper, which Mr. Thompkinson, the bookseller, kept in his shop all that day and showed to every customer that came in. Her ladyship of Ingleby was among those to whom the news came with the suddenness of a clap of summer thunder.

“You have heard the news, of course,” said Lady Alice Wynyard to her cousin, Monica Beaumont, whom she met in St. Thomas's Street.

“News, no—what news?”

“Cecil Constable's engagement is broken off.”

“I don't believe it.”

“Well, go into Thompkinson's and ask about it—they'll tell you. I must be off now, for I am due at Mrs. Powell's to get a couple of dresses fitted on. See you afterwards, perhaps.”

She whisked into her pony-trap, and was off before her astonished cousin could say a word. Miss Beaumont turned on her heel and walked straight into the bookseller's shop."

"What is this wonderful news, Mr. Thompkinson?"

"News, Miss Beaumont? About—Miss Constable's engagement?"

"Yes."

"It is—it is broken off—the marriage will not take place. You would like to see the note I had about it this morning? Of course, I don't consider this a breach of confidence—the sooner it is circulated, the better pleased the family will be. Yes, here it is," laying a sheet of note-paper on the counter before her.

"Sir Edward Constable," it read, "wishes to inform his friends that the marriage of his daughter to the Bishop of Blankhampton will not take place on the 30th instant."

"I never was so surprised in my life," said Miss Beaumont, breathlessly.

"Nor I, indeed, Madam," said Mr. Thompkinson, "nor I. His lordship was here yesterday morning, and he seemed as bright and affable as usual, and the previous evening I saw them together at my own church—I live a few miles out, at Sparksworth. We had a special sermon from the Bishop on the

occasion of a new organ being put into the church. Miss Constable sat just in front of me, and I don't think there was anything wrong then—in fact, I saw her drive home in the Bishop's carriage with him."

"It is most extraordinary," said Miss Beaumont, "most extraordinary. I can't make it out. Well, I came into town this morning to buy my wedding present, but I suppose I needn't trouble about it now."

"I think a good many wedding presents will be thrown back on their givers' hands," said Mr. Thompkinson; "we have had a good many bought here, very handsome ones too, and my neighbor, Mr. Ward, the silversmith, was telling me just now that he had had quite a large quantity bought of him—in fact, they had to get quite a fresh assortment of goods down for the purpose."

"I cannot make it out," said Miss Beaumont.

She did not linger any longer, but after the manner of people who have got a choice bit of news, a little before the rest of the world, she bustled out in search of those, to whom she might impart the astonishing information. She had already told three people when she saw the Ingleby carriage, with its light drab liveries faced with pale blue, coming down the street. A glance showed her that Lady Vivian was alone, so she unceremoni-

ously put up her hand as a signal to the coachman to stop.

“Oh, Lady Vivian,” she exclaimed, “have you heard the news?”

“News, my dear—what news?”

“Cecil Constable’s engagement is off—the marriage is not going to take place.”

“Nonsense.”

“True. I have just seen the form of intimation which is being printed at Thompkinson’s. It is in Sir Edward’s own writing—oh, there is no mistake about it. And they say Cecil is heart-broken.”

“And the Bishop?” asked Lady Vivian, in blank astonishment.

“Oh, well, nobody has seen him. They do say, but I can’t say that it’s true, but they do say that he came to the conclusion that Cecil was too frivolous for him.”

“I don’t believe that,” said Lady Vivian, promptly.

“No, well, that was what I said. But, of course, people will talk, and people will say what they think; and, of course, in the face of such a sudden break off as this, people will think.”

“I shall go out to Raburn and see—I must get to the bottom of this,” said Lady Vivian.

In truth she was as good as her word, for she bade the coachman turn his horses and drive straight

to Raburn. The dear lady might have saved herself the trouble, for Matthew told her, with many apologetic gestures, that Miss Constable could not see anybody.

“Well, I’d rather that you would take my name in. I think she will see me,” said Lady Vivian, who simply never admitted that she could be looked upon as an outsider in the matter of love affairs.

“I will do that, my lady, of course. Will you come in?”

“No, I will stay here, thank you.”

So Matthew went in and intimated to Louise that her ladyship from Ingleby was waiting at the door and that she intended to see Miss Constable.

“Well, I will tell Mademoiselle that miladi is here, but I am sure she will not see her,” said Louise volubly.

And, sure enough, after a couple of minutes, she came back and down into the hall again.

“Mademoiselle sends her love to miladi, and she is very sorry that she cannot see her. She is exceedingly indisposed, suffering very much from a headache.”

“Is Sir Edward at home?” asked Lady Vivian, after a minute’s pause.

“I believe Sir Edward is at home, my lady,” replied Matthew, who really and honestly thought

that it would be good for his master to have somebody to talk to for a little while.

“Well, ask Sir Edward if he will see me—I should like to see him.”

When Matthew returned he said, with a beaming countenance, carefully assorted with one of extreme misery, that Sir Edward was at home and would see Lady Vivian with pleasure.

Lady Vivian, therefore, alighted from her carriage with much satisfaction; but, if the dear lady thought she was about to get exclusive and detailed information out of her old friend, Sir Edward Constable, she had for once in her life made a mistake. Nobody can give information of which they are not actually in possession, and Sir Edward was not able to give Lady Vivian information which he had not been able to obtain for himself.

“I don’t think Cecil will see anybody,” he said, looking at her, with a becomingly mournful countenance. “You see she’s knocked over with this business.”

“But what is the reason, Sir Edward? Has anything happened?”

“I don’t know. That’s what I want to know myself. I came home yesterday afternoon, and the whole thing was off. That is all I know about it. And he is sitting in his great big Palace breaking his heart, and my girl is upstairs in her bedroom,

breaking hers. I can't tell you the reason, Lady Vivian, because I don't know it myself. You know now just as much as I do about the whole affair."

"Did Cecil break it off?"

"Yes, Cecil broke it off."

"Do you think she found out that she was not fond of him—that she did not care enough about him?"

"No, I think not," he answered promptly—"I don't think she would be so knocked over if that was it. No, I don't understand it—I don't know what it means—it's a mystery. I can get nothing out of either of them, except that both say the marriage cannot take place. But I don't think, Lady Vivian—you know, you and I are old friends, and we can afford to speak plainly to each other—I don't think you'd better speak of it to the Bishop; he is pretty hard hit, and I came out of his room, last night, with a lump in my throat and something in my eyes that hadn't been there for years."

Lady Vivian drew herself up with quite a shocked air.

"My dear Sir Edward," she said reproachfully, "I am the last person in the world who would be likely to say a single word to hurt the feelings of either of them. I felt, somehow, as I had the pleasure of introducing them to each other, that I was in a manner responsible for this engagement, and I

am quite sure, from what I know of dear Cecil, that she would never have acted like this without some very good and sufficient reason ; and I really came on this morning, as soon as I heard the news, that I might offer her my help. Possibly, after all, it is only something that may be put right yet."

"It was very good of you," said Sir Edward moodily, "and like your kind self to suggest that things may come right yet ; but I am afraid that is impossible. From what I can gather—they are both very reticent—but from what I can gather, Cecil broke off the engagement, and the Bishop acquiesces without a murmur. They're in love with each other yet, my lady, and, as I said before, my girl's breaking her heart upstairs and he's breaking his heart over in his Palace yonder."

As a matter of fact, however, the Bishop was doing nothing of the kind. So far from sitting down to think over the inevitable, the unavoidable, he had gone down into Blankhampton, to hold his usual informal reception at his office ; for he was always accessible to the clergy on a certain morning in the week, and had arranged for a room at his lawyer's office, in order that those coming from a distance might be spared the long walk or the expense of taking a cab to the Palace, which was about a mile and a half out of the town. It was an exceedingly painful duty ; but he did not shirk it.

And the worst of it was that they all knew. Those who had made a special point of coming, in prospect of his two months' absence, were in turn warned by his secretary not to mention the subject.

"His Lordship is going away," he said, to one after another, "and will be away two months, but the marriage is put off."

"Definitely?" they all asked.

"That is more than I can tell you," was the guarded reply.

So as each clerical gentleman was shown into his presence, did the Bishop of Blankhampton realize that they had heard the latest Blankhampton news. No one, of course, uttered a single word even distantly bearing on the subject, no one so much as hinted at it in the most remote way, but the manner of each was unmistakable, and the Bishop, suffering as he was from the first sharp edge of the wound, was keenly alive to every glance, every tone, and even every thought that seemed to be passing through their several minds.

That over, which was about four o'clock, the Bishop took leave of his secretary and walked home. Not a single person ventured to stop and exchange greetings with him, though it seemed to him as if he met everybody in the town, everybody in the neighborhood; and every single one who passed him by felt a great throb of pity for him,

and an equally strong feeling of indignation against the young lady who had set that look of anxious pain upon the face of the most popular man in the whole county. The sentimental Maria, who was walking with a friend down St. Thomas's Street, had just heard the news, and the sight of the Bishop coming towering along with his blanched, haggard face—and he was a man whom pallor and haggardness did not improve by any means—nearly fainted as she passed him by.

“Oh, I say, doesn't he look bad?” said Maria's friend. “Fancy his liking to go out!”

“I do not suppose he *liked* to come out,” said Maria, in a stifled voice, “but he is not the sort of man that would shrink from a duty, however hard it was.”

“I wonder why she broke it off?” her friend continued, not noticing Maria's agitation. “She must have had a reason. I wonder if she found out she wasn't fond enough of him, or what it was?”

“Oh, she was fond enough of him!” said Maria.

“Do you think she was?”

“I am sure of it,” said Maria with conviction.

“Well, I don't know,” said the other, “you never know with ladies of her position what they mean and what they don't. Everybody says she was only marrying him for his position, and I should

think, if the truth be told, she has got a better catch on."

"That's as may be," said Maria sententiously.

"At all events, *she* isn't walking about," said Maria's friend. "I have been out twice to-day and I haven't seen her."

"She scarcely would be in any case," said Maria with dignity.

Poor Cecil! At that very moment she was sitting on the bank of the river which divided her father's estate from that of his nearest neighbor, not weeping, no, her grief was too deep for that, but just sitting with her elbows on her knees, staring at the deep eddying river which at that point was swift and dangerous. The Bend, as they called that particular corner of the park, was considered one of the prettiest views in the neighborhood. The sun was blazing overhead like a great diamond in a bed of turquoise, flowers dotted the bank as far as the eye could see, the birds were singing merrily, diminutive frogs were hopping restlessly about, and sly-looking water-voles whisked in and out of their earthy homes. To Cecil it was all blank. Her faithful pug sat upon the tail of her gown, snorting as pugs do, and every now and again casting large-eyed glances toward her, as if he realized that she was in trouble. But Cecil was blind and deaf and dumb, filled only with a huge sense of utter misery,

and feeling that the sword of Damocles had fallen, and that her life had come to an end, feeling that she had done with happiness in this world, and had not even the hope of either happiness or misery in a world to come.

CHAPTER XX.

ALONE IN THE WORLD.

“ Life may change, but it may fly not ;
Hope may vanish, but can die not ;
Truth be veiled, but still it burneth ;
Love repulsed—but still returneth.”

—SHELLEY.

“ There is no hope ; no ;— ”

—*Jeremiah.*

THE nine days' wonder died out as nine days' wonders generally do. After that time the good people of Blankhampton and Blankshire accepted the new order of things as best they could. In due course of time all the guests invited to the wedding received Sir Edward's intimation that it would not take place. Gradually the presents were returned, but an awkwardness arose about those which had been presented by the different tenants and households of the respective families which would have been united by the marriage. The Raburn tenantry, indeed, created a precedent and settled the matter definitely, for a deputation waited upon Sir

Edward and told him that there was a general feeling among the givers of the toilet-service; they would be deeply gratified if Miss Constable would honor them by accepting their gift, the broken-off engagement notwithstanding.

“You see, Sir Edward,” said the principal speaker, “we all feel very strongly that this present was given to Miss Constable, as Miss Constable of Raburn, rather than to the future wife of the Bishop; and we feel equally sure that she had a good reason for breaking off her marriage, so that we should all like her to feel that we sympathize with her in what must be an exceedingly unpleasant situation. And, therefore, we hope that she will accept it and use it.”

“Mr. Soames,” said Sir Edward, “I will tell my daughter what you say. I am sure that she will be greatly pleased and honored by this expression of your regard for her. It is a great sorrow to me that the marriage will not take place. My daughter is not well and therefore cannot see you and thank you for herself, but I will write to you to-night and tell you what she has to say in reply to your kindness.”

“Very good, Sir Edward,” replied Mr. Soames.

Of course in the face of such consideration as this, Cecil had no choice but to accept the beautiful service of silver which was to have adorned her

toilet-table as the mistress of the Palace. She wrote a letter of thanks to Mr. Soames, and directed Louise to pack the exquisite things up and carry them down to Matthew that he might put them away in the strong room. She never thought of using the service, and if her father's good tenantry believed that she was several times a day reminded of their sympathy for her, why, they were mistaken, though they were none the worse for the kindly thought.

The example of the Raburn people was followed by the Netherby tenantry, and by all who had combined to give one thing from many. So these matters were disposed of, and Blankhampton people got used to the idea that their Bishop was still, and was likely to remain, a bachelor.

During the fortnight which elapsed between the social convulsion, which shook all classes of society, and the original date fixed for the marriage, the Bishop went about his business exactly as he had done aforetime. It is true that the want of sleep and the presence of a crushing sorrow had set their unmistakable mark upon him. He looked haggard and ill. He admitted to more than one that he was badly in need of rest and change, and on the evening of the 29th, he went away for an eight weeks' holiday, and Blankhampton people forgot to talk about him any more.

As for Cecil Constable, nobody saw her. Twice did Lady Vivian find her way to Raburn, but Cecil would not, or at least did not, see her. Then she wrote a friendly little note to her :

“ MY DEAR CHILD :

“ Why will you not see me ? Nothing is so bad for those in trouble as brooding over their sorrows. I am sure that you must be in trouble at this time, and it would unburden your mind if you talked it all over with me. For your sweet mother’s sake, my child, let me come and see you. I think of you so often, so much, and my heart *aches* for you, although I do not know the whys and wherefores of the new state of things.

“ Always your affectionate friend,

“ MARY VIVIAN.”

But Cecil was obdurate. Her answer went back by return of post :

“ DEAR LADY VIVIAN,” she said,

“ God bless you. I cannot see anyone. The wound is too deep.

“ Your grateful and affectionate

“ CECIL.”

“ Are you never going to see anyone again ? ” Sir Edward asked, when he realized that Cecil had denied herself to Lady Vivian for the second time.

“I do not know,” she answered. “Not if I can help it.”

“But you cannot shut yourself up as if you were a nun in a cloister.”

“No, I know that, but it’s early days yet, Dad; give me a little time to pull myself together in. It will have to come, I know; and then she will ask me, in that kind, purring, pussy-cat way of hers, fifty questions that I cannot and will not answer. I shall have to go through it, I know, but every day that I can put it off will make me feel it less.”

“Don’t you think that we had better go away?” he asked.

“No—at least, not yet, dear; we might go toward the end of September, don’t you think? And stay away—oh, till your hunting begins.”

“Oh, never mind my hunting; that needn’t count. You would like to go away toward the end of September. Well, where shall we go?”

“I don’t care—somewhere tolerably warm. If we go for a couple of months, that will put the time on.”

“Well, well, we can see about that when we get away,” he answered.

Eventually this was what they did. When the time drew near for the Bishop to return to Blankhampton, Sir Edward and Cecil went away, with a

good deal of luggage, and attended by Badger and Louise. They went to Carlsbad first, and then moved about, staying a few days here or a week there, and returning home by way of North Italy. And by the middle of November they found themselves once more at Raburn. This was by Cecil's wish. Sir Edward, the least selfish of men, had pressed her very hard not to consider him or his hunting in any way.

"I can't ride as I used to do," he explained, "and I am not so gone on it as I used to be; and in any case, you need not think about me, one way or the other. I am very happy where I am—I can make myself happy anywhere."

"I would rather go back," said Cecil; "oh, yes, dear, I would really much rather go back. I am getting to want to be at home again. You know we found it so before. It is much nicer to be among our own people again, especially during the cold weather. At all events, we will go home for a little time—I would much rather."

Somehow Sir Edward got it into his head that she wanted to go home because she had a hankering after the Bishop, and as, above all things, he still desired that the marriage should come about, he cheerfully acquiesced in what he believed to be her desire. Now, as a matter of fact, Cecil's only motive in suggesting that they should return home,

was from a conscientious scruple that it was selfish of her to keep her father away from his beloved hunting, and from among his own people. For herself, she dreaded the return more than words can express.

However, as often happens with things to which we have looked forward with great dread, the reality was less painful than she had feared. Everyone seemed very delighted to see her and, by tacit consent, nobody in any way approached the subject of her engagement to the Bishop; and, as her father was inexpressibly happy among his own people and occupied by his own pursuits, she was happy and thankful in the fact that she had forced herself to be strong enough to take what she had felt to be the right course.

They had been at home about three weeks, when she nerved herself to go and call upon Lady Vivian. I will not deny for a moment that it was an ordeal for the girl to face, for Lady Vivian was the one woman in Blankshire who could not be frozen or snubbed into silence on the subject of her broken engagement. However, Cecil felt she must put a good face on it and break the ice, so she drove over one afternoon, finding, to her dismay, that Lady Vivian was at home. She followed the servant into the house with a sinking heart.

“This way, ma’am, if you please,” he said.

She knew the way much better than he did, for he happened to be a new footman who did not know her. The butler had gone to town on business for Sir Thomas, but had that solemn and important functionary himself been at home, it is probable that what happened next would not have happened, for, knowing who was with his mistress, he certainly would not have flung open the door of the boudoir to announce in stentorian tones—"Miss Constable."

I think to her dying day Cecil Constable never forgot the supreme agony of that moment. There were five or six people in the room and close to Lady Vivian sat the Bishop of Blankhampton. It is no exaggeration to say that Lady Vivian nearly died, indeed she was so scared at this unexpected turn, that, although she rose and greeted Cecil with mechanical effusion, kissing her first on one cheek and then on the other, she had not the smallest idea of what she was really doing. There were two ladies in the room, wives of officers just come to the garrison, who did not know Cecil or the story of her affair with the Bishop. They therefore simply sat still and looked on. Cecil had advanced into the room too far to draw back, and in that moment she realized that however great the agony might be, she must still behave as if it were quite an ordinary occasion. She therefore spoke to the two other

ladies, both of whom she knew, and then turned to the Bishop and held out her hand to him.

It was the first time that they had seen each other since the dreadful day, following the evening, when the Bishop had preached that memorable sermon in Sparksworth Church. To the five pairs of eyes eagerly watching the unhappy pair, who had hoped to be husband and wife by that time, they met with wonderful calmness and self-possession. It is true that Cecil Constable's voice died away in her throat, as she tried to utter some words of greeting to the man she loved with all her soul. And it is true that the Bishop's blue eyes were filled with indescribable agony. Still, they met as ordinary acquaintances, touched hands and even, in their confusion, sat down side by side upon the same couch. It happened that the Bishop had been the last to arrive of Lady Vivian's callers, so that he had no excuse, short of openly slighting Cecil, to cut the visit short.

"I did not know that you were back, Cecil," said Lady Vivian very kindly, yet with a suspicious nervousness in her tones. "Have you been home long?"

"Some little time," said Cecil, conscious that everyone was hanging on her words. "We came back for Father's hunting."

"And you have had a pleasant time away?"

“Oh, yes, we went to a good many places,” she answered.

“You have not met Mrs. St. Maur,” said Lady Vivian, indicating one of the two ladies whom Cecil did not know.

“No,” said Cecil, “I think we have not met.”

“Mrs. St. Maur and Mrs. Hattersley are both belonging to the new regiment,” Lady Vivian explained.

Whereupon, Cecil bowed and the two ladies bowed, and Cecil murmured something indefinite about calling, and then the two ladies, all unknowing of the tragedy which was being enacted under their very eyes, bade adieu to Lady Vivian, and betook themselves away.

Lady Vivian was more on tenter-hooks than ever.

During the time that the two ladies were making their farewells, she perceived that Cecil and the Bishop were talking to each other. As a matter of fact, he had turned abruptly toward her and was scanning her sad, lovely face with his own blue eyes, more full of love than ever.

“Tell me,” he said, in an undertone, “how are you?”

“I am alive, yes,” she answered.

“You have been away a long time.”

“Yes,” she replied, “a long time; but I could not keep poor dear Father out of his hunting any

longer. He did not want to come home, but I felt that I should be happier if I knew that he was not kept away. He hates being abroad so—you know he does.”

“I don’t blame him. You know,” he added abruptly, “you are looking very ill.”

“I am not ill,” she answered, “I eat and drink and do things pretty much as usual—I am not really ill. But you—how are you?”

“I? Oh, I am—like you, I am alive; and that is about all I can say for myself.”

In the meantime, Lady Vivian had made a point of talking to her two other visitors, both of whom knew to the full the awkwardness of the situation, and pitied both the Bishop and Cecil with all their hearts. Therefore, when Lady Vivian began an elaborate conversation, which was utterly at variance with everything that they had in their minds and hearts, or with what they had been talking of before, they took their cue from her and met her more than half way in her endeavors to smooth over the extreme awkwardness of the situation.

“You were asking me the other day,” she said to one of them, “about my new chrysanthemums. I have only a few, but they are in perfection just now; would you like to see them?”

“Oh, I should very much,” the lady replied, understanding that Lady Vivian knew perfectly well

that she cared no more about chrysanthemums than she did about cauliflowers, and that this was but an excuse to leave the two over there on the wide lounge together.

“Then come this way and I will show them to you. Oh, you didn’t know that I had a conservatory through the winter-garden? Oh, yes, and it is in great beauty just now. We are going into the conservatory — I’ve got some new chrysanthemums,” she said in louder tone to Cecil. “You know the way.”

“Oh, yes; I will come too,” said Cecil, rising at once.

But Lady Vivian did not wait for her. She had whisked her other two visitors through the door leading into the winter-garden, and, finding that they were gone, the Bishop drew Cecil back on to her seat again.

“Don’t go,” he said reproachfully, “she doesn’t mean us to go; she doesn’t care anything about chrysanthemums and she knows that we don’t. Tell me—I have not seen you for ages—how is it with you?”

“Ill,” Cecil replied.

“Are things going no better — have you not changed your mind yet?”

“No,” she said, shaking her head, “things are no better with me than they were then. I would

have liked never to come back to Blankshire at all, but I could not keep poor Father away from his own people and from his beloved hunting any longer. He did not want to come, but I felt it was so selfish, for my own sake, to keep him abroad any longer."

"There is no reason," said the Bishop, "why you should be exiled from your own people."

"I think the pain is less," said Cecil simply. "But it doesn't matter how I feel—I am indifferent about myself now. But you—tell me—how do you get on?"

"I am alive," repeated the Bishop—"I do my work and I eat and I go to bed and I get up in the morning."

"You went away," she said, in a shaking voice.

"Yes, I went away—I went to Switzerland—and I buried myself in a little Swiss village, quite off the beaten track. I thought about you a good deal."

"Yes—?" Her tone was very eager and invited him to go on.

"Why," he said, "you expected me to think about you, didn't you?"

A faint flush crept over her blanched cheeks.

"I don't know—I didn't know what you might be feeling about me. I did not know what you might be feeling against me."

“Against you!” he echoed. He caught her hands with what was almost a cry. “Oh, my dear!” he exclaimed, “have you been thinking all these long weeks, that I left you that day in anger? Dearest, I was never angry with you in my life. Could I be angry? Could any man be angry, when a calamity so dire, so unlooked for, and so stupendous, had fallen upon the woman he loved? Did you think I was such a fair-weather friend as that? Why, no. I gave you my love, not on a lease, but freehold for all time; that fate has come in to part us makes no difference to my love for you. I shall love you, beyond all else in this world, to the very end of time. But I thought that you understood that the blow had been as much as I could bear—I thought that you realized that.”

“No,” she said. “If I had not been the one to strike the blow, I might have realized it; as it was, I was afraid to think so. I should almost have been sorry to think so. I think that I would almost rather that you were angry with me. I believe it would make life easier to me to think so. And yet, I don’t know,” she added, “I don’t know.”

“I may come and see you?” he asked, after a moment.

“I think not,” she said hesitatingly. “If I found that I had mistaken my mind, I would tell you at once; but, as it is, I can only tell you that it

hurts less when I don't see you. I have always the chance of meeting you when I am out in the world—in this part of the world, at all events—and it is such agony to know that every eye is watching us, every ear is open to catch each word that we let fall, that everyone is thinking about us and wondering and conjecturing—oh, it is dreadful! I would so like to go away where nobody knows me.”

“But you don't think,” he said anxiously, “that it would help you?”

“Not a bit,” she said, “not a bit. Nothing will help me. I have taken my fate into my own hands and I have been honest with you; that is the only crumb of satisfaction that I have. For the rest, my whole life is a blackened waste, and the sooner it is over and I am no longer able to think, the happier for me. No, don't come to see me—not yet, at all events. By and by, perhaps, time will have blunted our feelings a little.”

“Do you think it ever will?” he asked, in deepest reproach, and yet speaking very tenderly.

“No,” she cried, in a tone of sharp pain, “I don't think so—I am sure that it never will. I will go home now—I wish I had not come—and yet I am glad that I did.”

“And you will promise me, that you will send for me, if at any time you feel the very smallest gleam of hope?” he said, taking her hands in his again.

“Oh, yes; need you ask me for such a promise? Don't you *know* that I would?”

“And you will promise me, won't you,” he continued, “that you will not shut yourself up in your blank unbelief, without trying to let the light in. If I may not come to see you, at least you will let me send such books as I think will help you—you will come to hear me preach sometimes—you will go to hear others—you will not sit down with folded hands and say, ‘I will not even try to believe?’”

“No,” she said, “I will not do that, I will read anything that you send me. I don't think I can bear to come and hear you preach; I will try to do so, but the pain of it would be dreadful. You must not expect that of me—at least, not for a time. And now, I would really like to go home. I know what Lady Vivian is thinking—she is talking it over with those two women, and they are still admiring those wretched chrysanthemums; and they will go in the other way and have tea in the hall at five. It is just five now—they always have tea in the hall at five. Couldn't you ring for the carriage?”

“Of course I could; of course I will. You have only to express a wish. Besides, Lady Vivian is very kind, she would not wish to wound you.”

“Oh, no—I know. She is very kind; she is trying to help us, but she little thinks how impossible

a task she has set herself. But you won't leave before me—ring for the carriage, and then we will go and say good-by, and you can see me into it. That will prevent her asking any questions. You can order yours at the same time, if you want to avoid being cross-examined.”

“Lady Vivian will not cross-examine me,” said the Bishop.

“Oh, I don't know. Kind people who take an interest in their friends' business are capable of anything. Yes, thank you,” she said, as he rang the bell.

In a couple of minutes the footman made his appearance again.

“Will you see if my carriage is round?” Cecil asked.

“And mine also,” added the Bishop.

“Certainly, ma'am; yes, my lord. Tea is served in the hall, ma'am,” he replied, and disappeared.

“We will go out this way,” said the Bishop, pointing toward the conservatory. “We, too, had better look at the chrysanthemums.”

So they strolled through the winter-garden and the conservatories. I am afraid that neither of them looked at the beautiful white natural fringes of which Lady Vivian was so proud, but they strolled with admirable unconcern into the hall, where the three ladies and a couple of men staying in the house

were assembled. They found afternoon tea was in full swing.

“A cup of tea?” said, Cecil. “Oh, thank you; yes, Lady Vivian, I will have one.”

Lady Vivian poured it out and the Bishop took it to her, followed by one of the young men carrying a plate of muffins.

“Yes, I am very fond of muffins,” said Cecil, trying to speak lightly; “but I must take my glove off. I cannot bear eating in a glove.”

She was excited and flushed, and as for the Bishop, he could not help all his love shining out of his honest eyes, so that Lady Vivian had quite an idea that her cleverness in making the way clear for them had smoothed the troubles of the affair quite away.

“You are not going, my dear?” she said presently, when Cecil rose to her feet and bade her good-by. “Oh, but I have hardly seen you.”

“I am afraid I must go,” said Cecil. “I always like to be back when my father comes in; and besides, he has two men staying with him, so that I would rather get back. He will be uneasy about me. And our special tyrant William likes me to be in before the hunters come home.”

“Well, of course, if you put it in that way, I must not attempt to keep you,” said the lady of Ingleby kindly. “Perhaps the Bishop will see you into your carriage.”

“I will, with pleasure,” said the Bishop, in his most courtly manner; “and if you will excuse my running away, I will say good-by also.”

“Oh, I must not attempt to encroach upon *your* time. I think it is very good of you to come and see me at all—such a busy man as you must be. Then, good-by, Bishop; good-by, dear Cecil. Come and see me again soon, dear.”

“I will,” said Cecil, “I will.”

You may imagine how Lady Vivian and her visitors talked the situation over, when the two principal actors thereof had actually gone.

“What a lucky chance that they met here!” Lady Vivian exclaimed. “I don’t believe they have met once since the engagement was broken off. Nobody ever knew why it was, and I know Cecil was heart-broken. Fancy their going away together like that! Did he go away in her carriage, I wonder?”

“No, he did not,” said one of the men, “I went out on purpose to see. He stood for ever so long at the carriage door, but he did not go back with her.”

“Ah, well, of course, his home lies one way and her’s another; and people cannot break existing arrangements all in a moment. Very possibly he is dining out somewhere, and we know that Cecil had a reason for wishing to get home. At all events, I am thoroughly well pleased that they happened to meet again, and that they met here.”

CHAPTER XXI.

“ AMEN ! ”

“ A sacred burden in this life ye bear ;
Look on it, lift it, bear it solemnly ;
Stand up, and walk beneath it, steadfastly.”

—KEBLE.

“ And her gates shall lament and mourn: and she, being desolate, shall sit upon the ground.”

—*Isaiah.*

BUT although the old city of Blankhampton and the surrounding neighborhood rang for a week or more with rumors that the marriage between the Bishop and Miss Constable would come off after all, the interested spectators of the drama received no confirmation of the truth of such a report ; and, like many other such whispers, it died out without anything definite coming of it.

So time went on. Once more spring flowers bloomed and faded, golden summer shed her radiance and her fragrance on the earth ; tender autumn came in, and more than a year had gone by since the Bishop and Cecil had parted hands. They

had only met once again since that day when they had met in Lady Vivian's drawing-room, and then they had not foregathered. Indeed, it had been an occasion on which it would not have been easy for them to do so. But although to the Bishop this chance meeting had been as balm in Gilead, it is no use disguising the fact that to Cecil Constable it gave only untold agony. Naturally they had never met at dinner anywhere, as nobody had thought of asking them on the same evening.

She had kept her promise to him in one way, inasmuch as she had read many times over every line that he had sent her. She had also listened to many sermons, but she had never yet been present when the Bishop himself was the preacher.

In September the Bishop went away for his annual holiday, but this year he did not go to Switzerland for that change and rest which were doubly indispensable to him in his disappointed and saddened life. Instead he went to Southampton and there embarked on a friend's yacht and, together with three other men, went off for a long cruise, including Norway, Iceland, and the Faroe Isles; and when he returned home to Blankhampton Palace, he learnt that Sir Edward Constable and his daughter had gone abroad.

November came and went. Hunting was in full swing, but Sir Edward Constable did not return to

take any part in it. The Bishop heard from Lady Vivian that they were spending the winter at San Remo, and also that the doctors had absolutely forbidden Sir Edward to run the risk of spending any portion of the winter in England, and that Cecil wrote in much depression about him, and seemed terribly anxious and ill at ease. Indeed, she showed him the letter which she had received that morning from Cecil.

“Dear father is very much more unwell than he thinks or will admit for a moment. He has suddenly turned quite white and looks to me very shrunken and thin. He is continually having attacks of bronchitis, indeed they always seem to follow the smallest over-exertion, and I cannot get him to take any care of himself. If it were not for Badger and Louise, I really don’t know what I should do. The worst of it is that he hates this place and abominates the cooking, finding fault with everything, and contrasting it with the comforts of Raburn. I wanted to move to Nice, which I thought would be more cheerful, but Sir Henry Mallam, who has been here to visit the Archduchess Marie, saw him and absolutely forbade our even thinking of it, so here I suppose we shall remain until the winter is over. And it is now only the middle of December. You don’t know how I dread the next three or four

months, but as soon as ever the east winds are gone, we shall go home at once."

"I am afraid," said Lady Vivian, in her kindly tones, "that things are going very hardly with our old friends. I am very sorry for Cecil. You see, Bishop, she is alone in the world. They have practically no relations, she is really the last of the Constables; and what would happen to her if Sir Edward were to die, I cannot think. And I had so hoped," she went on, not looking at him, but assiduously contemplating the silken sock that was quickly growing under her deft fingers, "I had so hoped that things would be so very different for her."

However, if Lady Vivian had any idea that she was about to draw any confidence out of the Bishop, she was mistaken. He got up at once.

"I am very sorry. I have a very great regard for Sir Edward. Your news has grieved me very much," he said, letting the question of the might have been pass unnoticed. "But we can only hope for the best, these matters are in Higher hands than ours. I can only hope that, if the worst comes, Miss Constable will be sustained in such a grievous affliction."

He put out his hand and bade her good-by, without giving her any chance of, so to speak, probing

his wound again, and almost before she realized he was taking leave of her, he had gone.

“I believe,” said Lady Vivian to herself, letting the silken sock fall upon her knee, “I believe that it was *he* who broke off the engagement. Poor Cecil!”

That night the Bishop wrote to Miss Constable, telling her how grieved he was at what he had heard, and asking her if there was anything he could do to help her at this time? The letter was such an one as any Bishop might write to any important person in his diocese; but Cecil received it, read it, kissed it, and wept over it, realizing in every word what, to an ordinary person, would have conveyed nothing. Her answer came back in a few days and was brief enough.

“Your letter has been a great comfort to me,” she began without prefix, “it is no use pretending to you that I do not know what is coming upon me. My father is dying. He gets up, he even goes out, but although the doctors will say nothing definite, I know that the end will not be far off. I am very unhappy and I am utterly alone. Pray for me, for I cannot pray for myself.

“YOUR CECIL.”

And so the weeks crept by. At the end of February, the news came to Raburn that Sir Edward

Constable was dead. The good people of Blankshire very soon learned all that there was to know of the popular baronet's last hours. The local papers stated that the death had been comparatively sudden, that although Sir Edward had been in failing health for some months, yet till within a week of his death he had been able to drive out every day, and usually to take walking exercise also. Some slight imprudence, in staying out half an hour longer than usual, had brought on a severe attack of bronchitis, under which he had rapidly succumbed. The notices also stated that Mr. Alderton, Sir Edward's agent, and Mr. Scott, the family lawyer, had, immediately on receipt of the news, started for San Remo. Also that Sir Edward would be brought home and be laid beside his wife in Raburn churchyard.

It was a terrible week for Cecil Constable. She travelled home with Louise and Badger, leaving the agent and the lawyer to escort the precious remains of her dead father. It was a terrible home-coming. To feel that she was alone in that great, echoing, silent house; to feel that so long as she lived, she would always be alone in it; to feel that she was now absolutely alone in the world, mistress of that great estate, and with only such comfort as could be found in the thought of a broken past, a sorrowful present, and a perfectly hopeless future.

And all day long, people streamed up and down

the avenue at Raburn, leaving cards and messages of condolence, and many beautiful flowers in affectionate remembrance of him who was gone from among them. Indeed, by the time the coffin arrived, the great library, which had been made into a *chappelle ardente*, was all alight with those lovely tokens, and the air was heavy and sick with their perfume. Among other callers came the Bishop, who had never passed under the great elms since that bright July day when he and Cecil had parted, now a year and a half ago. The estimable Matthew, who was himself in dire distress at the death of his adored master, could not help noticing how changed and aged he was.

“Miss Constable has taken it to heart very much, my lord,” he said. “You see, Sir Edward and she thought a deal of each other, and it’s only natural she should feel it now he has gone.”

“Very natural,” said the Bishop, “quite natural. And you will give her this note, Matthew, won’t you?”

“I will, my lord,” said Matthew, taking the note as if it were something that would melt in his grasp.

“I assure you, Mrs. Pincher,” he said to the cook, a few minutes later, “that his lordship looks a good ten years older than he did the last time he came to Raburn.”

“I never understood that break-off,” said Mrs. Pincher. “And neither did poor Sir Edward, I’m quite sure of that, from what he said to me.”

“What did he say to you?” Matthew demanded.

“Well, I never told,” said Mrs. Pincher, “it’s not my habit to go babbling round over every bit of information that comes to me. But, as a matter of fact—it doesn’t matter now, though I don’t expect this to be repeated, Matthew—but, as a matter of fact, I was taking a look round at the currant bushes one day, for Timmins informed me that there wasn’t enough red currants for me to start on my jelly, so I took a look round to satisfy myself on that point. I made a fifty pounds of jelly that week,” she added, “but that’s neither here nor there, Matthew. Well, while I was strolling round the garden who should I meet but Sir Edward. ‘Ah, Mrs. Pincher,’ he said, ‘are you looking after your currants?’ ‘I am, Sir Edward,’ said I, ‘and I must say, I think there’s a fair tidy show.’ And then, you know how free and easy he was, in his own ’igh and ’aughty way, Sir Edward he got talking first about one thing and then about another; and then, he says, ‘Ah, Mrs. Pincher,’ says he, ‘I had hoped things would be different.’ ‘Well, Sir Edward,’ says I, ‘they would have been different, if my lord and my young lady ’adn’t changed their minds.’ ‘As far as I can make out, Mrs. Pincher,’

says he, ‘they’ve neither of them changed their minds at all; and that,’ says he, ‘is the infernal mystery of it.’ And now, I ask you, Matthew,” Mrs. Pincher continued, “if neither of them had changed their minds, why didn’t the wedding come off?”

“That’s more than I can tell, Mrs. Pincher,” said Matthew, “but it don’t look to me as if it was coming off now. It don’t look to me as if there’d ever be any wedding at Raburn, and what our young Miss will do in this great house all by herself, I can’t think—I don’t like to think.”

“She isn’t ‘our young Miss’ now,” said Mrs. Pincher, with a prodigious sigh. “But I’m sure, poor young lady, my ’heart bleeds for her.”

Then there came the dreadful day of the funeral, when the Bishop and the old Rector took the service between them, when people came from far and wide to do honor to the last of the Constables, not counting, of course, Cecil herself.

After this Cecil remained alone at Raburn for more than three months. It was very bad for her, but she obstinately refused to take any advice on the subject.

“I have lived at Raburn all my life,” she said, in answer to an expostulation of Lady Lucifer, “and it’s not a bit more dull to me than any other place would be. It’s awfully kind of you, Violet, to ask

me to come and stay with you, but yours is a gay house, and I'm not fit for gayety just now. I would rather be alone with my sorrow. By and bye I shall have got used to it, and then, I suppose, I shall have to go out into the world again. But for the present there is no place to me like my home."

"But, my dear child," Lady Lucifer cried, "how can you bear to live in this great rambling house all by yourself?"

"I have always lived in it," said Cecil.

"I know you have always lived in it—but you've not lived in it alone."

"I have got to live here alone now," the girl cried, in trembling tones.

"Well, my dear, I've not come here to upset you. Heaven knows I think of you continually, and I'm sure, Cecil, nobody was so sorry as I was when your engagement to the Bishop was broken off. Don't think, dear, I'm saying this to upset you or to touch upon any wound, but, of course, nobody understood why it was."

"I know that," Cecil murmured.

"I never like to speak about it, and I never liked to even hint at it before, but I thought it was just possible that the Bishop might have——"

"Jilted me," suggested Cecil.

"Well, I wasn't going to put it in that way, but he might have felt he had made a mistake or

something of that kind. Still, the day your poor father was buried, I was standing behind you, Cecil, and I saw him look at you, as he was turning away from the grave-side, and I knew in a moment that it had not been his doing.”

“Oh, don’t,” Cecil cried, “*don’t*. Try not to think about it—it doesn’t matter whether he or I broke it off—it must be all the same to the world. There was not any case of jilting about it, one side or the other. We decided that we would not marry, and that is as much as the world need know or ought to know. But don’t talk about it, and don’t press me to come and stay with you, Violet—I can’t. You must not expect it—you must not ask it. And don’t worry about my being here alone. I’m not more unhappy or sad or miserable here than I should be anywhere else; and I should be miserable if you put me down in the midst of a crowd.”

So Lady Lucifer was obliged to leave the matter, and so everybody who ventured to touch upon it, was also constrained to do. And the cold and cheerless spring passed over, and every day Cecil grew more pale and wan; and every day the Bishop seemed to look older and graver, until it was patent to all interested beholders, that these two were breaking their hearts for each other, although there was apparently no reasonable bar to their marriage.

During all this time, Cecil had never heard the Bishop preach, since that fateful sermon in Sparks-worth Church. She had duly and truly sought for light but, with every day, her unbelief had been confirmed, rather than helped and dispelled. The more she read, and the more she heard, the less did she seem able to accept those old teachings, which have lasted for so many centuries. The more she read and the more she heard, the more convinced was she that the pieces did not fit, that the whole thing was a fallacy, and that there was no foundation of truth in it whatever.

The events of the two past years had changed the Bishop, quite as much as they had changed Cecil. When first he became Bishop of Blankhampton, there had been only one thing in any sense against him, which was that people had told each other that although the matter of his sermons was good, the manner of them left much to be desired. But in that he was greatly changed. From the time of his broken engagement, although he had never seen Cecil in any of the many churches at which he had preached, he was in imagination, always trying to reclaim that lost soul, so infinitely and so unspeakably precious to him. From being a plain, practical preacher of the Broad-church type, he had gradually become more argumentative, more doctrinal, very persuasive and, at times, highly impassioned.

“It seems,” said one of his hearers one day, after a most fervent discourse on the difficulties and the beauties of faith, “it seems as if the Bishop’s disappointment has made him throw himself more heart and soul into his work, even than he was to begin with. Upon my word, he preached to-night as if someone he loved was on the brink of stepping into hell, and only his eloquence could save him.”

“*Her*, more likely,” returned the other dryly.

“I suppose Miss Constable is all right in that respect?” said the first speaker.

“Oh, yes. The Constables have always been particularly pious people, and she is far more so than ever Sir Edward was. She is very devout—I see her about continually at different churches. Oh, it’s not that.”

“I wonder what it was.”

“My dear chap, that’s what we shall never know—never. It is one of the mysteries of what we call life. But, upon my word, it has pulled both of them completely to pieces; they have never looked the same since, either of them.”

“And he buried Sir Edward — that was so queer.”

“Well, Sir Edward thought a lot of him, you know. Sir Edward was awfully disappointed when the marriage did not come off. By the bye, you

know that Canon Verulam is going to preach on Sunday at the Parish?"

"Yes—yes, I heard it."

"Shall you go?"

"Yes, I think so."

"He is going to stay at the Palace."

"Oh, is he? Yes, I think I shall go and hear him; I've never heard him."

Well, naturally enough, the following Sunday drew a vast crowd to the morning service in the choir of the Parish, a crowd of people eager and anxious to hear a man, who was called by many, "the modern Savonarola"—the most impassioned preacher of modern times. Among them was Cecil Constable, who was in her accustomed place in the second row of the stalls, close to the pulpit and immediately opposite to the Bishop's throne. In due time, the organ began to play, and the choir and clergy to pass slowly into the church. And the last of that long white-robed procession was the Bishop of the diocese, whose dignified head towered above all others. Cecil's heart gave a great throb, as he passed before her on his way to the episcopal throne, and prevented her from perceiving that there was no unusual figure in the procession. She never gave a thought to the preacher, until the time came for the sermon. She had scrupulously avoided looking up during the service,

until she heard the well-known tones speaking from the throne opposite.

“I stand here to-day,” he said, “in the place of the most eloquent preacher to whom it has ever been my lot to listen, feeling myself a poor substitute for him, but trusting that you will bear with me, when I tell you that he, who should have spoken this morning, received an urgent message, summoning him, to what, I fear, is the dying bed of a near and dear relative. In this affliction, I would ask for your prayers for him.” Then he gave out his text:

“Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”

Surely, if eloquence and impassioned utterance were the qualities for which the preacher, who should have enchained the attention of that congregation, was renowned, the people lacked nothing because of their Bishop being substituted for him. Never was a sermon so passionately pathetic, poured out on human ears before. The congregation was electrified, and Cecil Constable sat with her great eyes fixed upon him, her face strained with eager attention, her lips a little apart, but with that same terrible *seeking* look upon her face, which had first attracted him toward her.

“Cast aside your faith, break down the beliefs of your childhood, and what have you left? Nothing—nothing—nothing. Oh, it is so easy, so fatally easy, to find fault—even with God Almighty, who made you. It is so fascinating to take up an attitude which asks for proof. ‘Give me proof and I will believe,’ cries the soul, which has belief in nothing! It is so fascinating to be wiser than our fathers, to regard old faiths as fables, old beliefs as mere nurses’ tales, food for babies, but not for strong men! It is so easy to pull down, so hard to build up! One weak soul may undo in a single day what has taken centuries of faith to put together. There is *no work* so easy as the work of the iconoclast, no work so pitifully easy as that of finding fault, of picking holes, of pointing out the joints in the harness, the flaws in the jewels of God. But—I would ask of you to pause and reflect for a moment! There are those of little or no faith, who take away one standpoint after another, who refute this, who cannot accept that. And when such an one has taken *all*—what have you left? Nothing—nothing—nothing! Then, with no faith, with no belief in that divine personality which has carried men and women through the baptism of fire or, by the long divorce of steel, to the Heaven of the Saints, what is left to the unbeliever to make this poor life of ours worth living? I say to you—

nothing, nothing! A few short years of struggle and strife, of disappointment, and care and sorrow, of growing infirmities or of sharper bodily pains, and then—what? Nothing—nothing! No hope, no recompense, only the blank silence of the grave! And yet, O, ye of little faith—you can boldly ask for proof before you will accept the divine story of Christ’s love. I say to you that if you could prove, beyond all shadow of doubt, that there is as little truth in the story of the gospel as you now believe, that you would do a cruel act in putting that proof about. If we Christians, the humble believers and followers of Christ, are all wrong, if the whole story is a fable and a fallacy, we are yet happier and richer and more blessed in our faith than those who have no faith, those who must have proof, cold, material proof, before they can accept what is their best, truest, deepest interest to accept. I say, if the believing Christian is wrong in his belief, the belief which will carry him over a lifetime of trouble and adversity, if there is, as the Agnostic or the Atheist say, an end of all things human, when death has laid his finger upon our weary eyes, I still say the Christian has the best of it. He has at least pressed forward to a high ideal, he has had before him the model of a life, which even Atheists admit to be perfect, he has hoped for—striven after and struggled for a higher and a nobler life

than any other on this earth, and even if there is nothing beyond the grave, he is more blest in his blind belief, his blind faith, than the unbeliever in what to him is an assured span, an assured blank."

During the early part of the service, the May sunshine had been streaming through the windows, but, during the sermon, a storm broke over the great edifice. Those in the choir never forgot the scene. The pitiless rain beating hard upon the roof, beating hard against the great windows, and otherwise a dead silence, only broken by the voice of the Bishop, pouring forth one impassioned, pleading sentence after another, and ending with outstretched arms — "Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.

"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye say Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Across the crowd of men and women, two souls stood face to face, two hearts lay bare, one before the other — the palpitating, bleeding, passionate, eager heart of the one, and the crushed, aching, hopeless, despairing, lonely heart of the other.

And between them lay the unbridgeable, impassable, bottomless gulf of Fate—the cruel fate which had made the one mind see in religion all that was living, loving and beautiful, all that was satisfying, sustaining and comforting; the fate which had given to the other only the hunger which no spiritual food could feed, a mind which could take nothing, nothing on trust, a mind in which practical reasoning was unhappily carried to such excess, that the pieces never seemed to fit; a mind which could accept nothing, believe nothing, hope for nothing; a soul torn by a thousand passions, wholly unable to believe in the one thing which would have made the way clear for earthly happiness, and the hope of happiness in the world to come.

So they stood, this man and this woman, who loved each other beyond all the world, who loved each other for time and for eternity and who yet were utterly and irrevocably apart forever. . . . So they stood, the Bishop with eyes and head and heart on fire, wrestling with God and Satan both for the light to be let in on this one precious soul, striving for some way to be opened out before her doubting eyes, the eyes which could not see even a single foot of the road. And she . . . hope all dead, life all blasted, love-starved, and heart desolate though so full, gave up from that moment even the one little thread of joy in loving him

which had seemed to keep her woman's heart alive.

Then the Bishop uttered the words which gave the glory of his heart's agony to God above; and the choir chanted *Amen!*

THE END.

THE
SOUL OF THE BISHOP

BY
JOHN STRANGE WINTER
AUTHOR OF "BOOTLES' BABY," ETC.

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