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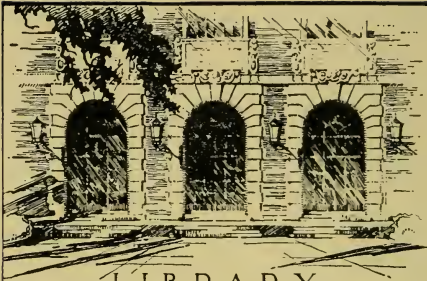
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CLEVE HALL.

VOL. II.



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BY THE AUTHOR OF

“AMY HERBERT,” “THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE,”
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“Tho' justice be thy plea, consider this,
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation.” — *The Merchant of Venice*.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS.
1855.

M. B. G. from H. P. G.

7 June 1855

CLEVE HALL.

CHAP. XXX.

THE evening at the Rectory had been more pleasant than at the Lodge. The hour for tea was earlier, at least, nominally, though Mr. Lester's engagements did not always admit of his being punctual. This evening he happened to be very fairly at leisure, and had given Rachel more of his time than he was often able to do. They were very precious hours for Rachel, which were thus snatched from other duties. They tended more to enlarge and form her mind than any which were devoted to regular study. Mr. Lester's character was peculiarly simple, notwithstanding the depth of his intellect. He never dogmatised, or patronised, even when talking to a child. There was no effort to obtain influence or produce an effect, and so conversation, with him, even when touching upon the most abstruse subjects, flowed easily, because no one could feel shy, or be afraid of betraying ignorance, before one who never seemed to lose the consciousness that he himself was but a learner.

It was this characteristic which had so tended to develop Rachel's intellect. It had been nurtured in

a genial atmosphere, free from the blight of coldness, or the stunting influence of condescension, or the weakness caused by the cultivation of any faculty merely for the purpose of display. She was not quick in acquiring mere knowledge, and had therefore never been considered clever; and this, perhaps, was rather an advantage, since it served to make her like her father, simple-minded and free from self-consciousness. But she had great powers of comprehension, and could grasp a vast idea almost as it seemed by intuition, even when she was unable to follow out the detailed evidence by which it was supported. If Mr. Lester's mind had been controversial, this alone would not have satisfied him; if he had found pleasure in reasoning for the sake of controversy, or delighted in argument from the love of victory, he would have required a companion who could at times throw down the gauntlet against him, and give interest to his researches by opposition. But truth alone was his object; and if all the world could see and recognise truth, he was only so much the better pleased. And it was very pleasant to find a willing listener always ready at his fireside, and to listen to Rachel's remark, and set her difficulties at rest. Intelligent ignorance is most valuable when we are endeavouring to reason correctly. It makes us view our theories from many different points; and those, peculiarly, which our own preconceived ideas would have been likely to hide from us; and Mr. Lester often learnt more from Rachel's humble question, how can that be, Papa? than he would have done from hours of study.

The danger was lest this kind of abstract specula-

tion should be too absorbing for both. With a less amount of conscientiousness, it might have rendered them unreal. But Mr. Lester's own training had taught him, as a moral caution, the lesson which is sometimes learnt to our cost, in another sense, by the bitter experience of life. "Save me from my friends, I can save myself from my enemies," would have been translated by him, though only in a secondary sense, "Save me from my virtues, I can save myself from my vices." His warnings to Rachel were but the expression of those which he gave to himself; and fearful of the enticing nature of such intercourse, he continually checked and limited it, never allowing it to interfere with the slightest practical duty, even when a plausible reason for the indulgence could be brought forward, and always, if possible, deducing even from the most abstruse theories some definite conclusion which might operate upon the daily course of life.

A conversation of this kind had been carried on by the flickering, cheerful firelight; Mr. Lester leaning forward with his arm round Rachel's neck, and Rachel on her low stool, resting her head against his knees. He had been explaining to her the kind of argument used in Bishop Butler's Analogy,—trying to make her comprehend the true strength and goodness which are to be found in being contented with the faith of probability, rather than the certainty of demonstration; or rather not so much endeavouring to make her understand, as pouring forth his own ideas,—showing her how the argument had worked upon his own mind. And Rachel was drinking in his words, find-

ing in them, not indeed an answer to the difficulties which her working, thoughtful mind, often suggested ; but that calm, trusting, enduring principle, based upon the consciousness of our own infinite ignorance and God's Almighty Wisdom, which, if we think at all, can alone support us through the mysterious scenes of this mortal existence.

It was not quite agreeable to be recalled from these favourite subjects, and the enjoyment of the hour so rarely free from interruption, yet Mr. Lester did not even look annoyed when Bertha's knock was heard at the door, and Rachel only said, "It is over now, Papa, thank you so very much," and kissed him, and moved away before the door opened, that Miss Campbell — for she guessed it could be no one else — might not think she had disturbed them.

Bertha entered the room slowly, and, after saying that she was afraid she had interrupted them, sat down by the fire. Rachel begged her to take off her bonnet and shawl, but she declined, still in the same unmoved voice which gave no indication as to why she had come, or how long she intended to stay. Mr. Lester was used to her however, and went at once to the point. "Do you wish to see me for any thing particular?"

"Thank you, I should like to say a few words to you, alone."

"Then, Rachel, run and see if the fire is burning in my study ; perhaps, we had better go in there."

"I won't keep you long," said Bertha.

"The study is the best place for business, whether it be long or short," said Mr. Lester ; and to the study they went.

Rachel asked for the lamp, and began her evening work for the poor; her thoughts occupied with all her father had been saying, whilst her fingers moved nimbly.

“Clement has been with Goff again to-night,” began Bertha at once. She was abrupt upon principle, when business was concerned, from an idea that abruptness was a species of honesty.

“Has he? when, and how long?” Mr. Lester always treated her in her own way, and never offered consolation or sympathy till every thing relating to the matter before them had been said.

“My mother sent him to the Hall on a message. I did not think it desirable, but she was determined. Clement met Goff coming home, and stayed with him nearly three quarters of an hour beyond his time. At least—no—I can’t be sure that he stayed with him all the time, but he was certainly three quarters of an hour behind time.”

“And what excuse does he make for himself?”

“None; I did not give him the opportunity. Another thing I wanted to say. Your servant took the letters to the post to-day, and met Goff, and allowed him to carry them for her. I don’t think that is safe.”

Mr. Lester’s countenance changed. “Took them, do you say? Did she let him have them?”

“Yes, so the children told me.”

Mr. Lester rang the bell. It was answered by the delinquent Anne.

Bertha turned round upon her sharply; but Mr. Lester spoke very gently, much more gently than

when he was addressing Bertha: "Anne, you took the letters to the post to-day?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Did you put them in yourself?"

A blush, and a hesitation. "I gave them, Sir, that is, I took care that they should be put in."

"That is not the point. Did you put them in yourself?"

"No, Sir; but——" Anne looked round for help, but there was none to be obtained from Bertha.

"Don't be frightened, there is no good in excuses. Who did put them in?"

"Anne's voice trembled, and her tears began to flow, as if sentence against her had been already passed. "I met Goff, Sir, and he was very civil; and I was so busy; and I didn't know you would mind."

"And you gave them to him? Did you ever do so before?"

"Yes, Sir; I think so."

"Recollect, you must be quite sure. You have given them to him before?"

"I can't tell, I don't remember. Please, Sir, don't send me away, I will never do so again."

"Foolish girl! You will be certain of being sent away if you deceive me. Let me know at once how long you have been in the habit of allowing this man to take the letters for you."

Mr. Lester doubtless intended to be gentle still, but his uneasiness and anxiety gave a sternness to his voice, and an impatience to his manner, which effectually frightened poor Anne, and without any further attempt at excuse she poured forth a confession which, though comparatively slight in its evil as

regarded herself, was the cause of the most painful misgivings as to the affairs in which Mr. Lester was interested.

It seemed that Goff had for a long period been endeavouring to make friends with Anne, always putting himself in her way, talking to her, and from her obtaining a good deal of information as to the proceedings at the Parsonage and the Lodge. Anne had given her information in the simplicity of her heart, not in the least intending to do harm, not knowing that what she was saying could be of the slightest consequence, but only at first yielding to the love of gossip, and perhaps a little intimidated by the questions of her interrogator, which were generally put in such a way as to give her little choice as to her answers. By degrees, however, he had drawn her into a confidence which she herself saw to be wrong and dangerous, but it was then out of her power, or at least so she thought it, to recede. Whenever she went out, Goff met her, persecuting her with questions, and threatening her mysteriously if she refused to answer them. However she might try to avoid him he was sure to cross her path; most especially he put himself in her way, as had happened on the present occasion, when she was entrusted with the letters for the post, sometimes making her show him the directions, and more than once inducing her to give them up to him. Anne's excuse was that she could see no harm; it did not seem to her that it signified much whether one person or another took them; and it saved her a walk which she was very glad of, as she had so much to do. Yet she was forced

to acknowledge that she never came back without a fear of being scolded, if she was found out, and for that reason had carefully avoided letting her fellow-servant know what she had done.

It was one of those many instances in which a fault has been committed much greater than has been intended or understood, but for which there is little excuse, since the warning of conscience ought to have been a sufficient safeguard. Anne was dismissed with a severe reprimand, and cried bitterly when she was told that her master had lost his confidence in her ; but Mr. Lester's thoughts were at the moment too painfully occupied to permit him to dwell long upon her share of the offence ; and as the door closed behind her, he sat down, and forgetting Bertha's presence, gave way to a train of perplexing considerations.

Bertha remained by him unmoved. She would have waited for an hour without interrupting him, but her patience was not quite so sorely tried. Mr. Lester looked up at length, and said, " We have been utterly outwitted by him."

" I hope not," was Bertha's quiet answer.

" What hope do you see?" inquired Mr. Lester, quickly.

" If he had discovered any thing, we should have known it before this. At the utmost, he can but suspect."

" I would not trust. He might know every thing, and still keep quiet till the last moment. This affair of the letters, you see, has been going on for some time."

“Yes.” Bertha looked more anxiously grave. “I will take them myself for the future.”

“Or I will; we can trust no one but ourselves. But I think less of that.” He paused; then added, suddenly, “What do you say to the time being arrived for the decisive step?”

The colour rushed to Bertha’s cheek in a quick glow, and faded away as suddenly. “Oh, Mr. Lester, do you at last say that?”

“I see no other alternative. The moment the fact of Vivian’s being in England is absolutely known, or even very probably suspected, we are exposed to schemes against which it is impossible for us to be on our guard. Goff may have opened our letters, or he may not; at any rate, it is clear he has found out that Mr. Bruce is not Mr. Bruce, or he would have had no curiosity in the matter.”

“And you would have Edward go openly to his father?” inquired Bertha.

“I see nothing else that is to be done.”

“But, dear Mr. Lester, you speak so despondingly.”

He hesitated for an instant; then he said, “I have seen General Vivian to-day.”

“And you have sounded him? Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“I sounded him as much as I dared, with regard to Clement; but he has entrenched himself within a wall of false principles, and there is no reaching him.”

“And you don’t think that Edward’s appearance in person will have any effect? A father! it must soften him.”

“And it may harden him; he may, I think he will, call it a fresh act of disobedience.”

Bertha looked discouraged. “There is no time to work upon him,” she said, “as we had hoped, through the children.”

“No; and if there were, I am afraid I should not be very sanguine as to the result.”

“General Vivian is too keen-sighted not to see Ella’s faults, even if they were less hidden than they are,” replied Bertha.

“Yes; and there is the old prejudice.”

“She is a Campbell,” said Bertha, bitterly. “Little enough the Campbells would have to do with the Vivians if they could help it.”

Mr. Lester laid his hand kindly upon hers; yet there was reproof in his tone, as he said, “I hoped that old feeling had been buried.”

Bertha coloured. “General Vivian takes pains to revive it,” she said.

“It must be buried, if there is to be any hope of success with us. We must trust almost every thing to you and Mildred, and you must therefore be friends.”

Bertha was silent.

“You will find her anxious to prove herself a friend,” continued Mr. Lester gravely.

“She has made no advances,” was the reply.

“Is that quite a fair judgment?” replied Mr. Lester, “considering how little she is her own mistress. And surely she has sent you kind messages.”

Bertha’s habitual candour conquered her momentary pique. “I dare say Miss Vivian has done all

that I ought to expect," she said; "but it is very difficult to forget that if it had not been for the old family feud, poor Flora must have been received by them, and all that happened afterwards would have been spared. There was no fault in her."

"Miss Vivian feels this as much as you do," replied Mr. Lester; "and you, on your part, must consider that, but for what, no doubt, there was cause to consider an unfortunate attachment to your sister, her only brother might never have been an exile from his home. I don't say this to pain you," he continued, observing Bertha's face of distress; "I only wish to make you view the question from both sides. It may be most essential that there should be no misunderstanding between you and Mildred. You have both something to forget and to forgive, as regards your family histories."

"I will try not to be prejudiced," said Bertha; but the tone implied a mental reservation.

"And you will succeed," replied Mr. Lester, "if you don't attempt too much. These vague feelings of family dislike are scarcely to be combated like actual faults. We can only accept them, and deal with them as we do with individual characteristics, —negatively, that is, rather than positively."

"I don't quite understand," replied Bertha.

"What I mean to say is, that we can't actually make ourselves, all at once, forget them, or feel as if they did not exist, any more than we can suddenly become insensible to certain peculiarities of manner or expression which may offend us; but we can prevent ourselves from allowing them to weigh with us

unduly ; and it is always in our power to put them aside in action."

"I have never seen Miss Vivian yet," replied Bertha ; "so there have been few opportunities for action."

"She would like to see you as soon as you can make it convenient to go to her ; the sooner now, I think, the better. She is one with us, and has, I think, quite forgiven the concealment of Mr. Bruce's identity."

Bertha seemed undetermined ; and said she could not perceive what good was likely to accrue from the meeting.

"Essential good, if our hopes should fail," replied Mr. Lester. "In that case you will be the only person to keep up any satisfactory communication between Mildred and the children. Poor Vivian will be more cut off than ever."

"I am so unfortunate and awkward," said Bertha. "I feel that I mar every thing I come in contact with. I don't mean it, I am sure," she added as tears rose to her eyes.

Mr. Lester answered eagerly : "No, I am sure you don't. Perhaps, — don't think I am taking a liberty in saying so, — perhaps contact with another mind may throw more light upon your own. Only, I will just remind you, — you mustn't think it necessary to fall in love with Mildred."

Bertha smiled in spite of herself. "Not much fear of that," she said.

"I am not so sure. I really believe that conscientious people have great difficulty in accepting anti-

pathies, and so they make violent efforts to overcome them, which have just the contrary effect from that desired."

"The antipathies are wrong, of course," replied Bertha.

"Their indulgence is wrong, but the feeling may be the result of circumstances beyond our own control, and we are much more likely to be just to persons when we acknowledge to ourselves we have a prejudice against them, than when we try to conceal the fact and persuade ourselves that we are fond of them. But we must leave all that now. I am sure you will try to understand Miss Vivian, and I hope when I come back from London I shall hear that you have met."

"Are you going to London?" inquired Bertha quickly.

"I think I must see Vivian; but I shall only be absent two or three days."

"And he will come down at once then?"

"He will wish to do so, I suspect; any risk will seem better than the monotonous life he has been leading. But even without this fresh call, I think I must have gone to talk to him about what is to be done with Clement. The General offers to assist in placing him with a private tutor."

Bertha's countenance brightened. "Oh! then, he does acknowledge a duty."

"Partly; I don't mean to be perverse, but I honestly would rather he did not. Persons are so difficult to deal with who go half-way with a duty, and then say good-b'ye to it. He promised,—let

me see — I made a memorandum as to the conversation when I came away.”

Mr. Lester felt for his pocket-book, and in doing so took out his handkerchief, and with it the paper which he had, without knowing it, brought away from the Hall. It fell upon the table, and Bertha took it up. “Is this it?” she said.

“Thank you, no: I wrote it on a blank leaf.” Without looking at the paper, and supposing it to be a bill, Mr. Lester placed it in the pocket of his little book, and then proceeded to read to Bertha the heads of his morning conversation.

“You see,” he said, when he had ended, “there is little if any hope: the feeling is as strong—stronger perhaps than ever; and each day that goes by strengthens it, by enlisting pride in support of what seems justice. No, we have now only one alternative, to make a last appeal to the General’s feelings, and possibly in doing that we may find the clue to John Vivian’s rascality, and so at least place Vivian’s conduct in its true light, even if we can do nothing else.”

“And if all should fail, Edward must return to Jamaica,” said Bertha.

“I trust not that; he would never stand it: we must make a home for him somewhere; and with you and Mildred to feel with him we may hope that it may be fairly happy. But that is running on very far ahead, and we must not forget Goff and the present moment.”

“I don’t see what is to be done about him,” said Bertha.

“ Nothing just now but to watch. Oh! Clement, Clement! the despair it is not to be able to trust him.”

“ And he piques himself so upon being honourable, and having the feelings of a gentleman,” said Bertha.

“ Yes, not at all perceiving that the very essence of honour is never to abuse confidence.”

“ Don’t you think it might be as well to see him, and inquire what he has been doing with himself this evening ? ” asked Bertha.

Mr. Lester considered a little. “ I hate being suspicious, and the very fact of inquiring so minutely very often suggests deceit. Yet perhaps it may be as well : I will walk with you across the garden, and then I will bring him back.”

“ There is no occasion for that,” answered Bertha in reply. “ The moon is just up, and it is quite light. Besides, I must stop for one moment at Duff’s cottage, to ask for his child. I will send Clement to you ; that will be the best way.”

Mr. Lester demurred, but Bertha was positive, and just in that way which made him feel that he should annoy her if he insisted upon carrying his point. So they said good-b’ye ; and Bertha walked across the little garden, and Mr. Lester returned to his study to wait for Clement.

One thing could not but strike him, as he recurred to what had passed : the very matter-of-fact way in which all had been said and arranged, not in the least as if great interests were at stake, or there were grounds for unusual uneasiness. Throughout the whole of the conversation, Bertha’s rather monotonous voice

had scarcely been raised above its usual low pitch; she had seldom laid any peculiar emphasis on her words, or, in fact, in any way betrayed that the topics discussed were of importance to her.

Accustomed though he was to her, Mr. Lester marvelled. Perhaps in his heart he felt pained. It was very difficult to work with such a person, to give or receive the sympathy necessary for support in doubt and difficulty. And then with Mr. Vivian and the children! What was to be the end? Could they possibly live together? Would Bertha ever really obtain a right influence in her own family? — Yet the uncomfortable misgiving partially vanished when he remembered how she had given him her hand at parting, and said very timidly: “I don’t know how to say, thank you, as I ought.” There was something so humble, simple, child-like, and true in her; such a consciousness of her own deficiencies!

That unfortunate, early education, — nipping, blighting, as it had been; what a noble nature it had marred!

CHAP. XXXI.

“MR. LESTER wants to see you, Clement.” The words broke most uncomfortably upon Clement’s slumber, as, having finished his writing, he established himself in an arm-chair, opposite to his grandmother.

“Wants to see me, does he?” and he rubbed his eyes. “It’s awfully late and cold.”

“It won’t take you two minutes to run across the garden, and you must not keep him.”

Clement delayed, and Bertha was obliged to repeat the message.

“Mr. Lester will be very much annoyed, Clement, if you don’t make haste.”

“Going, Aunt Bertha, going.” He went out into the passage, but came back again. “Where on earth can that girl have put my great coat?”

“Your great coat, Clement? nonsense. It is not a hundred yards to the Rectory.”

“Enough to feel the cold, Aunt Bertha; I must have my coat.” He rang the bell; Bertha left the room, called out to the servant not to answer the bell, and went herself to the closet where she knew that the missing coat was to be found.

Clement looked ashamed. With all his faults, he had the feeling of a gentleman. “I beg your pardon, Aunt

Bertha ; I really didn't mean to give you the trouble, but that girl is so intolerably careless."

"And a boy ought to be ashamed to be dependent upon her. She has enough to do without waiting upon you, Clement."

"Then I wish she wouldn't meddle with my things at all," muttered Clement, determined to have the last word. He drew on his coat very slowly. Bertha looked at him with that evident self-control, which shows that impatience is on the point of bursting forth. Clement, however, did not see this. He buttoned his coat up to the chin, preparing, as it might have seemed, for a walk of ten miles ; and set forth as leisurely as if he had felt quite at his ease.

He was shown at first into the room where Rachel was sitting at work. A poor man had just come up from the village, having business with Mr. Lester ; and a message was therefore sent, begging him to wait.

Clement's heart sank. "What are you doing there, Rachel?" he said, drawing near to Rachel's chair, and watching her busy fingers. He said it merely to distract his thoughts. Any thing was better than that wretched standing by the fire, waiting for the door to open again.

"Making a warm coat for Barney Wood," replied Rachel. "Won't it be comfortable?" and she held it up for him to see.

Clement looked at it carelessly, and Rachel, a little disappointed at receiving no admiration of her performance, returned to her work in silence.

Clement still finding his own meditations uncom-

fortable, spoke again : — “ I thought Barney Wood was worse.”

“ Yes, so he is, a great deal ; that is the reason he wants something specially to keep him warm. Who do you think is going to give the coat ? ” she added, her face brightening with pleasure.

“ You are, I suppose,” he replied.

“ Oh, no ; I haven't half money enough. I am making it for Ronald to give. It was so kind of him to think of it.”

“ So odd, you mean,” replied Clement.

“ Odd ! why ? ” She turned round quickly, and looked at him with wonder.

“ It's a queer thing for a fellow like him to think about a child's coat. That's a woman's business.”

“ Not to think about it, is it ? ” said Rachel. “ It's a woman's business to make it, and that is why I am working for him. But Ronald is odd, I suppose,” she added, thoughtfully.

“ Have you found that out for the first time to-day, eh, Rachel ? ” and Clement laughed a little satirically.

“ I don't think I ever should find it out myself,” replied Rachel. “ People say Ronald is odd, and so I suppose he is, but he never seems so to me.”

“ Much experience you must have had of him, little woman,” said Clement, patronisingly, as he patted her on the shoulder.

Rachel drew back with an air of annoyance. She could not endure familiarity, and answered, rather coldly, that she certainly did not see Ronald often ; but when she did she liked him very much, and thought him very good.

Clement laughed. "A doughty champion Ronald will have," he said, "when it comes to a fight for his character. But Rachel, you will have no one else on your side. I don't think Ronald's goodness is what the world admires him for."

"He is good, though," said Rachel, resolutely.

"Then he must make you his confidante, and tell you all his virtues," said Clement. "You wouldn't discover them yourself."

"I think I should," said Rachel; "I do indeed, for he never praises himself. That is one thing I like him for."

"Virtue the first; and what next?"

"He doesn't think about himself," continued Rachel; "I mean he will take any trouble for any one, and he is always civil; and,—I can't tell exactly everything,—but I am sure he is to be trusted."

"Trusted! yes, I suppose he wouldn't steal."

Rachel's eyes kindled. "I should think not, indeed," she exclaimed, laying down her work, and turning to Clement, with a flushed cheek; "but it wasn't that I meant; being trusted doesn't mean money, but honour. He wouldn't tell a story or deceive; or pretend any thing that wasn't true; and he keeps his word. When you look at him you feel that he is to be trusted."

Clement bit his lip, and answered coolly:—"No great praise after all. Most persons speak truth."

"Yes; but it is not speaking truth," replied Rachel, her musical voice becoming deeply earnest; "it is feeling truth. Clement, don't you know what I mean?"

“Perhaps I do, only you express yourself so oddly ; you always do.”

“Do I? I didn’t know it;” and in a moment she was the humble child receiving a reproof, as she added, “I will try and be clear, but I don’t quite know how.”

Perhaps Clement had no wish for her definition of truth, for he gave her no encouragement to continue. Yet, in her simplicity, Rachel did not perceive this, and thinking that he was waiting for her to explain herself, she went on with a blush on her cheek, and a little hesitation in her voice : — “I mean that Ronald never seems to be two persons, or to mean two things. When he promises any thing he does it, and when he says he likes any body, you always see that he really does. Sometimes I have heard him say he dislikes what papa thinks he ought not to dislike, parts of books and such things ; but that doesn’t prevent his being true. Papa says” — she continued, and she glanced at Clement doubtfully, in the fear that she might be relapsing into odd expressions — “that truth is formed of two halves, fitting into each other, and making one whole. I am sure Ronald’s words and his actions always fit ; and I dare say his heart and his words fit too, only I can’t tell so much about that, and it is so much more difficult to make them fit.”

“You are desperately given to metaphysics, Rachel,” said Clement.

“Am I? I only say what papa says. But Clement, I am sure you know what I mean about Ronald.”

“He’s a very good-hearted, honest fellow,” replied

Clement ; “ but I can’t tell how you seem to know so much about him, Rachel.”

“ He comes to talk to papa about his Latin,” said Rachel, “ and about Barney Wood, too ; and sometimes we have met him when we have been to see Barney. I don’t know much about him, really, though.”

“ And so he means to pay for that wonderful coat you are making ?”

“ Yes ; he asked Miss Campbell and me to get it ; and we went to Cleve, the other day, and chose it.”

“ Barney Wood is fortunate in having so many persons to look after him,” said Clement, carelessly.

“ He won’t want care very long,” replied Rachel ; “ so it is right to make him as comfortable as we can whilst he is here. I can’t think how he comes to be such a nice child, when he is Goff’s grandchild.”

“ Oh ! you hate Goff, like the rest of the world, do you ?” said Clement.

“ I don’t hate—I don’t hate any one ; but I don’t like him ; and I know papa thinks he does a great deal of mischief, and I am sure he is afraid that Barney’s father is going to be like him.”

“ And Ronald, too, then,” said Clement, “ as they are always together.”

He said it merely to tease her ; but she could not see this, and fancying him in earnest, she threw down her work, and starting up, exclaimed, “ Oh ! Clement, you don’t know any thing about Ronald ; you are very unkind to him ; and I used to think you were fond of him,” she added, more gently, but still very reproachfully.

“Perhaps I am just as fond of him as you are, Rachel; only I see more of him, and know more of his ways.”

“You don’t know more than papa does,” continued Rachel, taking up her work, and evidently trying not to speak as if she was annoyed; “and he thinks that if Ronald has good persons about him he will be a very good man.”

“Possibly. I wouldn’t for the world dispute it; only I don’t see where the people are to come from who are to make him good. His father won’t do much in that way.”

“I don’t know any thing scarcely about Captain Vivian,” replied Rachel; “but I am afraid of him.”

“He’s a good sort of fellow enough,” was Clement’s off-hand reply; “only not very pretty company for girls.”

“Then I shouldn’t think he could be good for boys,” observed Rachel, with a quick glance at Clement, which made him a little angry.

“I should be glad, Rachel, if you would decide for yourself, not for me,” he said. “You can’t possibly be a judge.”

Rachel looked distressed. “Did I vex you, Clement? I didn’t mean to do it. I only thought that papa is so sorry when you have been with Captain Vivian.”

“I can’t help being with him sometimes.”

“Can’t you really? Then I suppose it won’t do you any harm.”

The remark was made with such apparent childish simplicity, that Clement began to laugh.

“Was it any thing very odd that I said?” continued Rachel. “I thought nothing could do us harm which we couldn’t help.”

“What an absurd child you are!” exclaimed Clement. “You take up one’s words as if you were weighing them. Can’t help, doesn’t really mean, can’t help.”

“Papa won’t let me say I can’t help a thing,” replied Rachel, “unless I really can’t. He says that people teach themselves self-deceit by their words. And you know, Clement, nothing can be wrong which we really can’t help.”

“Then I am quite sure I am the most virtuous being in existence,” exclaimed Clement; “for I can’t help half—no, not three quarters—of the wrong things I do.”

“But if we ought to say, I don’t try to help it,” persisted Rachel, “that would be a great mistake.”

“I don’t read learned books, and study metaphysics, as you do, Rachel,” said Clement, sarcastically. “And, happily for me! My head would get addled in a month. You are enough to perplex a saint with your quibbles.”

“It is no quibble; and I don’t learn it from books, nor from any thing,” exclaimed Rachel, her naturally quick temper being roused by the taunt; “I learn it from my own heart. When I say I can’t help a thing, and I really can help it, it is something inside that tells me it is untrue. But——” she paused, her tone changed, and she added humbly, “I ought not to speak out so, Clement; please, forgive me.”

Clement murmured something in reply, which was

scarcely audible. He glanced at the door, feeling, he did not know why, that the interview with Mr. Lester would have been more endurable than this conversation with the open-hearted, true-minded child, whose every word was a reproach to him.

Rachel fancied she had deeply offended him, and again begged for forgiveness. She knew, she said, that it was her way to speak out, and she did try to keep her temper under; only not so much as she ought. "You will forgive me, won't you, Clement?" she added, in her most pleading voice.

It must have been a very hard heart that could refuse; and Clement was naturally good-tempered, and really liked Rachel, only he took pleasure in shocking what he called her matter-of-factness. He pretended to hold out a little, for the purpose of hearing her again beg for pardon in that very sweet, humble tone; and then suddenly changing and startling her by a laugh, he exclaimed—"Why, Rachel, you are more silly than I took you to be! I never said I was angry, did I?"

"I didn't know. I very often do speak out when I ought not," was the answer; and there was rather an awkward silence, which perhaps neither of them was sorry to have broken by the entrance of the servant, who summoned Clement to Mr. Lester's study.

CHAP. XXXII.

It is a marvellous and fearful subject, that of unconscious influence. It might almost paralyse us with its enormous responsibility, if it were not for the fact, which becomes obvious to any person who studies the formation of character, that the weight of indirect good always in the end preponderates over indirect evil. We advise, and warn, and reprove, and — either from some defect of manner, some deficient mode of expression, or perhaps some latent vanity or temper — we neutralise our own words; and the person whom we are attempting to lead in the right way, leaves us to follow the wrong; but, if we are not called upon to give counsel, and yet are in a position to act, each deed of self-denial, self-control, thoughtful kindness, — each word or tone which may tend to reveal our secret motives, comes unmarred from Him who has enabled us to serve Him, and brings with it a power which is, in its very nature, necessarily victorious over evil. A child brought up by two persons — neither attempting to direct in words, but the one practically earnest and good, and the other practically careless and indifferent, will cling to the former, and reject the latter. But a child receiving excellent advice from one person, and very bad advice from another will, in nine cases

out of ten, listen to the bad, and reject the good. Who has not felt the indirect influence of a child's goodness? Who would not have felt, as Clement did when he left Rachel Lester, that those few unconscious warnings, the result of her own honest, simple, high-minded spirit of truth and obedience, had a power which even impressive eloquence might have failed to exercise. Clement was in a different frame of mind, when he appeared before Mr. Lester, from that in which he had left the Lodge: then he had quietly made up his mind to say nothing; now, on the contrary, he was inclined towards candour and sincerity; and when Mr. Lester addressed him with his usual kindness, and told him he was sorry to have kept him waiting, it seemed as if he could at once have acknowledged his offence, and made reparation by promises for the future. But he was still trusting to himself, unaware of the weakness of his own resolution.

Mr. Lester began the conversation cautiously. "You went to the Hall this evening, Clement?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you returned late, and met Goff?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Lester paused, hoping for something besides the monosyllable; but Clement's courage was not equal to the confession, without help.

"Were you with him long?"

"I don't know the exact time, sir."

"Did he force himself upon you?"

"He came and walked by my side, sir." A keen pang of conscience, and a recollection of Rachel,

and Clement added :—“He said he was going my way, and so we went together.”

Mr. Lester’s countenance brightened. There was a tone of candour in this, which was cheering. He thought that Clement had told all. “I suppose you came straight home?” he said.

“No, sir; we went round by—the fields.” Another pang of conscience, worse than the first. He had almost corrected himself as before, and added,—by the Grange. But he waited for another question.

“Oh, by the fields. I suppose, then, that was what made you so late.”

Alas for Clement! the almost right was changed, as so often happens, into quite wrong; and, seizing on the suggested excuse, he replied, — “It was a good way round—farther than I thought.”

Something in his countenance and tone struck Mr. Lester painfully. “Clement,” he said, “you are above suspicion,—I cannot possibly doubt your word; but if there is any thing in this which I ought to know beyond the fact of your having been with Goff, I trust to your honour to tell me.”

A minute before Clement would have responded to the appeal, by at once acknowledging his visit; but the first equivocation, contrary to the voice of conscience, had done its work. He had not spoken out at first,—he was ashamed to confess his evasion, — and so he covered it by another, still intending to say the whole presently.

“I don’t think any thing Goff said could have done me much harm, sir. He talked about the loss of the steamer off the Irish coast, most of the time.”

“What he talked about, Clement, is not the question. If he had been giving you the most excellent advice all the time, I should still have objected to your being with him.”

That was an unfortunate speech for Clement's courage. If Mr. Lester so strongly objected even to a walk and an innocent conversation, what would he say to the visit to the Grange! The old excuses suggested themselves again, but the pang of conscience was intensely keen. Rachel's voice and words were ringing in his ears. To resist now would be a more wilful sin.

Mr. Lester seemed considering deeply. Clement stood before him in an agony of weak intention. He delayed;—and there are cases—many and most common—in which delay is all that the Tempter requires for his victory.

Presently Mr. Lester said, with a slight nervousness of manner,—“You must know, Clement, some of the reasons which make us all so anxious to prevent your having any intercourse with that man Goff.”

“I know people say he is a smuggler,” replied Clement.

Another pause. Mr. Lester's tone was still more uneasy, as he replied:—“There may be deeper reasons than that,—family reasons; you have heard of them.”

“Family affairs are a mystery to me,” said Clement, shortly.

“That is not the exact truth, Clement. You do know something.”

“I know that my father has been very ill used,” replied Clement; “and that we ought all to be much better off than we are.”

“Possibly,” answered Mr. Lester, drily. “But, Clement”—his voice became deeply earnest and serious—“your father has been suffering for years from the consequences of that same spirit of wilful independence which will infallibly be your ruin, if you yield to it. He was warned against companionship—against Captain Vivian’s companionship; he saw no necessity for the warning, and he would not take it. The result was the loss of home, friends, and fortune—exile for himself, poverty for his children.”

“My grandfather was unjust,” exclaimed Clement, indignantly.

“Let it be so. Your father erred, and has grievously repented his error.”

“If he was disinherited unjustly, I don’t see what there was to repent of,” replied Clement.

“What we suffer, Clement, has nothing to do with the extent of our offence. And there is one truth which I would most earnestly strive to impress upon you. It seems to be one of the marked rules of God’s Providential government, that seemingly trifling offences should, if committed wilfully, and against warning, bring upon us irremediable punishment. One thought of evil admitted into our hearts, by our own choice, will do us more harm than all we are taught by experience, without our choice, as we pass through life. The word or suggestion of sin which Goff or Captain Vivian may bring before you, when you are wilfully seeking their society, or, what is the

same thing, wilfully refusing to avoid it, will haunt you to your dying day; and one weak yielding to a slight temptation to disobedience may be, with you, as it was with your father, ruin for life. It is the first time I have spoken in this way," continued Mr. Lester. "It is intensely painful to me to bring up the remembrance of faults which have been expiated, as far as sorrow and amendment can expiate any guilt; but your father would be the first to bid me warn you by his example and his sufferings. In his name, Clement, I bid you remember that it is not the amount of our offence, but the wilfulness with which it is committed, which is our sin in the sight of God, and which brings upon us His just vengeance."

Clement's heart beat very fast; the words, "I have done very wrong, sir," escaped him. He might have added more, but Mr. Lester, seizing upon the acknowledgment,—almost the first which he had made without any attempt at excuse,—interrupted him by saying in a lighter tone:—"It is all I wish, Clement, that you should see that these little disobediences are very wrong. I dare say you have excuses for them. I dare say Goff thrusts himself upon you. Very often you may have a difficulty in ridding yourself of him. But that ought only to give you the more spirit in resisting. Where would be—I will not say the merit—one ought not perhaps to use the word—but the satisfaction, of victory, if there were no struggle?"

The expression was rather an unfortunate one, for Clement's vanity was piqued. He answered hastily,—"There is not much struggle, sir, I am sure, in getting rid of a fellow like that; I am not so des-

perately fond of his company, after all ; only he thrusts himself upon me, and I can't shake him off."

"Not can't, Clement ; you can if you will."

"He wouldn't go to night, sir ; I tried several times to take short cuts."

Quite true this was, as before, in the letter ; but the excuse had led Clement a long way from the spirit of truth. If he were to say now that he had gone into the Grange, it would seem as if he had spoken an untruth, or at least something approaching to it. Mr. Lester looked at his watch, being anxious to close the conversation. "Well, Clement, I can only say, what I have often said before, that I trust to your honour. I cannot possibly tell how much or how little you put yourself in the way of these men, or whether they only pursue you for their own bad purposes. They have some, you may be sure ; and if they could lead you into serious mischief, their end would be gained ; but in this, as in every thing else, your only real safety is openness. If you have been betrayed into disobedience, say it. Don't wait till you have been tempted to great sins, but acknowledge the small ones. Of course I believe to-night that Goff thrust himself upon you ; that you only walked with him through the fields ; and that he said nothing which I should object to your hearing. I very much disapprove of any thing of the kind ; and most unquestionably you were wrong in not taking the shortest path. If the thing should happen again, some stricter precautions must be taken, as it would be evident that you are not fit to be trusted."

Clement's heart was very full. He was upon the

point — all but upon the point of being candid; but he hesitated still; a knock at the door was heard — and he was silent.

So it is: we will not take the right step at the right moment; when we wish to take it the opportunity is past. Surely not in vain is it written, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens.”

Clement went home weak and miserable.

CHAP. XXXIII.

"HERE is a note from Grandmamma, Aunt Mildred," said Ella, entering Miss Vivian's morning-room with a countenance expressive of any thing but satisfaction.

"No bad news in it, I hope;" and then Mildred, catching the meaning of Ella's face, added, "She does not want you back again?"

"She says Aunt Bertha is coming to talk to you about it to-day."

It was Mildred's turn to look a little uncomfortable then. This visit of Bertha's had been hanging over her like a nightmare ever since Ella had been with her. Yet she answered cheerfully, "We must make the room look pretty and comfortable if Aunt Bertha is coming. I should like her to have a pleasant impression of the Hall."

"I am sure she will have one if she is like me," said Ella, drawing her chair nearer to her aunt's sofa. "But then she is not at all like me, that is the misfortune;" and she sighed.

"Or you are not like her, Ella, and that is the misfortune;" and Mildred looked at Ella, and laughed.

"Now you wouldn't wish me to be? Aunt Mildred, you must say it; you wouldn't be pleased if I were like Aunt Bertha."

Mildred considered. "I should be pleased, Ella, I am sure, if you were like her in some things."

"Some, yes; of course she is not a monster, she has some good points."

"A very great many, if report says truth."

"Report and Mr. Lester," replied Ella. "He lauds her to the skies."

"Then she must deserve to be lauded. I don't know any one more unprejudiced than Mr. Lester."

"But what is being unprejudiced, Aunt Mildred? It is one of the words I hear so often, and I never can in the least tell what it means."

"Derivations help one very much in the meaning of words," replied Mildred. "Prejudice is prejudgment, judging beforehand; unprejudiced persons, therefore, don't form their judgment before they are acquainted with facts."

"That scarcely applies to Mr. Lester and Aunt Bertha," observed Ella. "Of course Mr. Lester judges according to what he sees; and so would every one."

"I beg your pardon, Ella. One of the rarest qualities to be met with in this trying world is that of judging according to what a person sees."

"Is it?" and Ella looked extremely surprised.

"I will tell you how people generally form their judgments," continued Mildred. "They have their own preconceived notions of right and wrong, possibly correct, possibly incorrect; but, either way, these notions are their standard to which they think all ought to submit. When they become acquainted with any individual, they try him by them. If they

are religious, they find out whether he holds certain doctrines; if they are politicians, they test him by his opinions upon some of the questions of the day. They don't look upon his whole character, but without having had time to become acquainted with him thoroughly, they form their judgment and like or dislike him."

"I am sure that is natural enough," said Ella. "I can always tell after I have seen persons twice whether I like them."

"No doubt you can: but the mischief is that prejudiced persons allow their private feelings to blind them to facts. I will give you an instance of what I mean. Suppose you were reading a book written by a person you disliked; if you were prejudiced you would begin with a conviction that the writer held certain opinions, and instead of taking his words in their natural meaning you would twist them to suit your own preconceived ideas of what he thought. So again, if it were a book which you could not help admiring because it showed great talent, you would leave the beauty and dwell upon some small defects. This is especially common in the case of sermons. If a clergyman does not hold precisely the opinions approved by those who hear him, they will put aside all that is really true and right in what he says and harp upon what may be defective, till at last one is apt to forget that he really has told one any thing from which one might profit. Now all this kind of narrow-mindedness Mr. Lester is totally free from. He would give a candid and impartial judgment of his greatest enemy."

“Does that mean Aunt Bertha?” asked Ella, mischievously.

Mildred laughed. “Not quite. He admires Aunt Bertha extremely.”

“He hasn’t to live with her every day,” said Ella.

“That does make a difference, certainly. He sees enough of her though to know what she is really like; and he is quite aware of her defect of manner; but it would never make him form a false judgment of her.”

“Then you think I am prejudiced, Aunt Mildred?”

“Yes, very.”

“Thank you for being honest,” and Ella blushed, and tried to smile, but almost cried.

“Prejudice is a most common fault with young people,” continued Mildred; “one may almost say it is natural to them. But there is hope for you, Ella, for that very reason. The prejudiced persons whom one really grieves over are the well-meaning people who shut themselves up in their own fancies, and mix only with those who agree with them, and so never give themselves the opportunity of being cured.”

“Oh! Aunt Mildred an advocate for dissipation!” exclaimed Ella.

“I hope not. Worldly people are just as likely to be prejudiced in their way as religious persons are in theirs. But certainly it does vex one heartily to see the mischief that is done in these days by the prejudices of really kind-hearted people, who yet can see nothing good beyond their own narrow circle. The moment an unhappy individual differs from them on

certain points, he may be as earnest, and honest, and self-denying as a saint, but his words and actions are distorted until one begins to think that truth has left the earth. There, Ella," and Mildred laughed, "I have delivered my testimony, as Mause in Old Mortality would say. You didn't think I could get so excited, but if there is one thing in the world I dread more than another, it is prejudice. Perhaps," and her manner became graver, "it is because I know that I have a tendency to it."

"If I am prejudiced, I don't know how to find it out," said Ella.

"One can easily test oneself," replied Mildred. "You are fond of me, you are not fond of Aunt Bertha. Suppose each of us had done something very noble, or written something very clever, which should you admire the most?"

The reply was a hearty kiss.

"Thank you for the kiss, dear child, but not thank you for the prejudice."

"Seeing a fault is not curing it though," said Ella.

"It is the first step towards it. I found out my own prejudice before Mr. Lester came, when we had a clergyman whose manner I disliked extremely, but who really was a very good man, and preached excellent sermons. In those days I was not quite such a cripple as I am now; at least, I was able to go to church oftener. I discovered that, instead of thinking of what the clergyman was saying in church, I was always criticising his unpleasant manner, or some particular expression which I disliked. One day he

preached a sermon which my father admired very much, and as usual I cried it down, and seized upon certain sentences which I disliked. The next week I was reading a new volume of sermons by a person whom I especially revered, and I actually found this very same sermon amongst them. I really was shocked at myself, and from that day I set to work to cure myself of prejudice."

"I dare say you did it at once," observed Ella; "you could never have had any difficulty in conquering your faults, Aunt Mildred."

"I beg your pardon, Ella; it has been the work of years. You know I scarcely see any persons except the few living near Cleve and Encombe; and that kind of life certainly tends to encourage prejudice. However, I do try to guard against it."

"But how?" inquired Ella.

"When I am going to meet a person whom I think I shall dislike, I try to give up any preconceived idea I may have formed of his character, and to judge him only by what actually comes before me."

"That is so difficult," said Ella.

"Yes, and for that very reason a rule I have made for myself is never, if I can avoid it, to express an unfavourable opinion of any thing said or done by a person whom I don't like until I have thought the question over twice. If it is impossible to praise, I try to be silent."

"But, Aunt Mildred, I do dearly love hearty likes and dislikes. That constant caution is so tame."

"I go with you entirely, Ella. Like or dislike

actions or principles as much as you choose, and I will join with you to your heart's content. But there is no real, honest approval or disapproval in prejudice. It is a mere petty, narrow-minded, uncharitable giving way to personal feeling, the only thing about it which is not exclusive being that it is common to all sides and all parties."

"Good people as well as bad; then one need not be so ashamed of it," said Ella.

"Prejudice again, Ella. A fault is a fault whoever is guilty of it. I can't help thinking myself, indeed, that it is all the worse when it is found amongst the good, and I am sure it does more mischief. Truth requires no support from prejudice, it needs only the faith of those who profess to fight for it."

"Dear Aunt Mildred, you are so tired," said Ella; and she looked at her aunt anxiously.

Mildred smiled. "That is because I have been talking so much, Ella; but you don't know what a rare thing it is for me to find any one to whom I can speak out freely, except, perhaps, Mr. Lester, and I see him so seldom. I lie on my sofa and read in the newspapers what is going on in the world; all the prejudice, and bitterness, and party-feeling; till at last I become so interested and excited that I feel as if I really could bear my solitude no longer; and sometimes I write it all out, and sometimes I talk it out, and that is what I have done to-day. But it is not wise."

"When I am gone from you, you will be in solitude again," observed Ella.

“Yes, but you must come and see me often ; I feel as if I had learnt to know you now.”

“To know how bad I am,” replied Ella.

“To know how good you may be rather. Ella, dear, you have done wonders lately.”

“Because I have had you to help me and keep me up. I have had sympathy: Aunt Mildred, that is what I require.”

“What you would like, you mean,” replied Mildred. “We require only what we have.”

“It does not seem so at home,” said Ella, sorrowfully.

“Is any one of your duties too much for you?” inquired Mildred.

“Not any one exactly, but all together are.”

“That can scarcely be. Duties are not like soldiers. We don’t confront them in masses but singly. When two come together, one is forced to yield.”

“But it is possible to be wearied with fighting singly,” said Ella.

“Ah! there I grant you is the difficulty, especially with persons who are a little inclined to be lazy;” and Mildred looked at Ella and smiled. “But, Ella, there is a remedy for that too. To use another simile, indolent people, who have not strength to swallow their disagreeable duties at one dose, should learn to sip them by degrees.”

“I don’t understand what you mean by sipping,” replied Ella.

“Each day’s duty is a drop, and we are never required to take more at a time. However indolent we may be, we can rouse ourselves to swallow the drop ;

and if we do this every day, we shall have the victory in the end quite as surely as if we had endeavoured to take the whole at once."

"But persons never can take the whole at once," replied Ella. "They can't tell what will be required of them."

"They can rouse themselves to the effort of resolution," replied Mildred; "and if you inquire, you will find that in many cases this is done. When a duty is put before a very energetic, persevering person, it is generally seized and determined upon at once. I mean in this way: take the case of a bad temper. Energy generally goes with it. An energetic person making a humble resolution to strive against ill temper will not always succeed; yet the resolution once taken, its impetus is sufficient, through God's grace, to carry him on for years. Of course, constant watchfulness, and self-recollection, and, above all, fervent prayer, are necessary;—but once let it be determined that the evil shall be subdued, and, humanly speaking, it is subdued. The resolution made cannot be shaken. So it is with bad habits, evil company; one earnest exertion of the will, in dependence upon God's help, and the victory is gained for life. This I call being able to swallow the duties of a life at once; and a great advantage it is: only, when we are inclined to envy it, we must remember that special dangers go with special blessings. There is a risk of self-reliance in this strength of purpose. It requires great watchfulness not to be led to rest on ourselves, when we find that what we resolve to do we can do."

"It must make it much more easy to be good though," said Ella.

"Perhaps so, in some ways; but indolence is not so very difficult to cure if it is properly dealt with. What I meant in your case by sipping your duties was, that you should not try to make the strong resolution I have named to subdue a fault at once. Resolve for one or two days, or for a week, and learn to leave the rest to God. Don't ever allow yourself to think of what it will be to continue striving for your whole life. Our Lord's warning about earthly anxieties is equally applicable to spiritual ones, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." You must remember that to discipline ourselves properly, it is necessary to accept our characters as they are, not to deal with them as if they were what they are not. A very indolent and changeable person cannot possibly make the strong resolution which will carry him through life; but a continuous determination will do the same work as a strong one. And it is a great point, Ella, to keep ourselves from being disheartened. Half our task would be done if we were sure of success."

Tears gathered in Ella's eyes, and resting her arm upon Mildred's pillow, she said, "I have more cause to be disheartened than any one, for I have made so many resolutions, and strong ones too."

"Excitable resolutions, you mean, dear Ella," replied Mildred. "There is a vast difference between strength and excitement."

"I don't feel the difference."

"Strength is quietness, calmness; the power to foresee difficulties without shrinking from them. It

is the effect of reason rather than of feeling; and where it exists, it is accompanied by a certain consciousness of power granted by God, which is, in the warfare of the soul, what the courage of the soldier is who has never been known to retreat in battle."

"Oh! if I did but possess it!" exclaimed Ella.

"It is nature, not grace," replied Mildred; "and grace can make up for all the deficiencies of nature. Only we must remember that grace will not destroy nature,—it will but guide it. Once more, dear Ella, I would entreat you to deal with yourself wisely; and whatever resolutions you may make, let them be for a day, a week, or at the very utmost a month, and then renewed. So, through God's mercy, we may trust that you will have that prestige of victory which carries us half-way towards our next success."

"And I must go home to-day and begin," said Ella, mournfully.

"I hope not. My father would like to keep you here; and I think your Grandmamma will wish to please him."

"It is not Grandmamma, it is Aunt Bertha," said Ella; and then seeing Mildred look a little grave, she added, "Aunt Bertha thinks I am only a trouble here; but it is not quite that, is it?"

"Not since you have taken to reading out to Grandpapa at night, certainly," said Mildred, kindly.

"And he let me walk with him yesterday," continued Ella; "and we got on beautifully till he fancied, I am sure, that he saw Captain Vivian talking

to Clement, and then he turned away, and scarcely spoke again. I found afterwards that it was not Captain Vivian, but I didn't venture to tell him so; was I right?"

"Perhaps so. I can scarcely tell. It depends so much upon the mood he is in."

Ella looked thoughtful. "Aunt Mildred, there are some questions I should like very much to ask you, only I am afraid you wouldn't like them."

"Then don't ask them," replied Mildred, a little quickly, but checking herself directly, she added, "Doubtful questions are always better avoided, unless there is some good to be obtained by them."

Ella was evidently rather disappointed.

"You shall have them all answered some day, dear Ella, but I doubt if this is the time."

"There would be no opportunity, if it was the time," said Ella, as she went to the door. "I am sure I heard the hall bell. It must be Aunt Bertha."

She went a few steps into the passage without remarking how very pale Mildred looked, or in the least guessing her feelings. For herself there was some excitement in the idea of doing the honours of the Hall, in spite of the little pleasure she had in seeing her Aunt.

Ella was right; it was Bertha, and she ran up to her quickly. Bertha's manner was kind, but extremely nervous; and her first question was, whether General Vivian was at home?

"No; it is his hour for going into the park; he won't be in for another half-hour or more. How are they all at home, Aunt Bertha?"

“ Pretty well; tolerable. You are quite sure General Vivian is gone out?”

“ Oh, yes; Grandpapa is in the park, isn't he, Greaves?” and Ella turned to the grey-headed butler, who was the General's confidential servant.

“ The General went out about ten minutes since, ma'am. He will return to luncheon at one.”

“ And you will stay to luncheon, Aunt Bertha? I don't think you have ever seen the dining-room, have you? It is such a beautiful room.”

Twenty years before Bertha had once been in that room, on the occasion of a public meeting, the first at which she had ever been present. It was a dream of awful grandeur to her, — one of the most impressive of her youthful recollections; and she could recall the stately courtesy of the General, — the polished civility of his manner, giving that undefinable impression of dislike which can neither be reasoned against nor overcome; and Edward Vivian, — young, handsome, full of hope and energy, distinguishing himself by a speech of considerable talent, — and Flora listening with her head bent down, but with a rapt attention, which had been the first thing that awakened in Bertha's mind the perception of her attachment. Yes, they were memorable associations connected with the great dining-room at Cleve Hall. Bertha had no wish to disturb them by the sight of the stern old man, — the martyr to his own principle, — sitting alone in his proud consciousness of rectitude, amidst the ruins of happiness which himself had caused; and she hurried on with her eyes dizzy, her memory full of shadowy images, and scarcely con-

scious whether she was walking in dream or in reality, until she found herself at the door of Mildred's apartment.

Ella threw it open eagerly. She was amused and excited, and her eyes were bright with animation, — a strange contrast to the cold and self-restrained, yet somewhat furtive, glance which Bertha cast around her, as, for the first time, since the events which had shed a gloom over both their lives, she stood face to face with Mildred Vivian.

“Ella, dear, draw the easy-chair near for your aunt. I am such a cripple, Miss Campbell, that it is difficult to move; but I can give a welcome still;” and Mildred held out her hand, and the rebellious tears which rose to dim her eyes were kept back by a strong effort, as she added, with a winning smile, “I think I ought to quarrel with you for not having come to see me before.”

“I fancied you seldom received visitors,” was Bertha's reply, uttered with a quietness and precision which even Mildred's quick perception could not have discovered to be a cloak for painful feelings.

“Not very often; we have so few neighbours; but,” — Mildred was a little confused by Bertha's composed gaze, and rather hesitated, as she added, “I hoped that Ella's being here might have proved an inducement; but it is rather a long walk.”

“I am a very good walker,” replied Bertha, not accepting the excuse. “It is scarcely more than a mile and three quarters by the cliff.”

“Oh, you came that way, did you?” Mildred's

voice showed her relief at having reached an easy topic: "the wind must have been rather high."

"Rather; but it was deliciously fresh. Ella, shall you mind returning that way?"

"Return, must I? Oh, Aunt Bertha!"

"Grandmamma thinks you have had rather a long holiday," continued Bertha.

"But I have not been at all idle, have I, Aunt Mildred? especially the last week. I have worked much more regularly than at home."

"If Mrs. Campbell could spare her a little longer, I think my father would be pleased," said Mildred. "She reads to him in the evening, and I think he will miss her."

Bertha's face lighted up in an instant: "Of course," she said, "if General Vivian wishes her to remain, it would cause a difference."

"And she has been walking with him, lately," continued Mildred; "making herself much more useful than I can. I am only afraid," she added, with an air of interest, "that her absence will throw a burden upon you with the little ones. I wish I was near enough to help you."

With any other person the wish might have seemed only matter of civility; but there was an innate truth in Mildred's manner which made it impossible to take what she said for mere words. Bertha's "thank you," was cordial.

"Ella tells me that you give her a great deal of assistance always with the children," continued Mildred. "That must be rather troublesome, when Mrs. Campbell is such an invalid."

“Aunt Mildred tells me I am not to let you help me any more,” said Ella bluntly. “And if I were to go home now, perhaps I should be good and do it all myself quite properly. I have made a number of resolutions.”

Bertha's face was graver than the speech required, and Mildred, fearing a lecture, said lightly, “Aunt Bertha will think with me perhaps, Ella, that good deeds are worth more than good resolutions; however, I give you credit for both here.”

“I have had experience of Ella's good resolutions,” said Bertha, coldly; “but I am glad she has improved in any way.”

Nothing, perhaps, tests humility more than being told one is improved. Ella had not yet reached the degree of lowliness which would permit her to hear it with patience, and she said angrily, “I know, Aunt Bertha, you are not likely to give me a character for improvement.”

A very gentle sigh escaped Mildred; Ella heard it, and went up to her: “You are vexed with me, Aunt Mildred. I ought not to speak out so; but Aunt Bertha never gives me much credit for anything.”

“I dare say she gives you as much as you deserve, and perhaps a great deal more,” said Mildred smiling. “But suppose you take your books upstairs now, if you really are not going home, and leave Aunt Bertha and myself to talk a little together; we shall find a good many things to say which will not exactly concern you.”

The bright, loving face was very inviting for a

kiss, and Ella gave one, and said in a half-whisper, that she did not think she left her character in very good hands, and then departed ; whilst Bertha sat in silent astonishment at the ready obedience to a request which, if she had made it herself, would have been followed by the moodiness of hours.

CHAP. XXXIV.

WHEN Ella was gone, Bertha's manner was much changed. It was as though she felt more at ease with herself, and had lost the unpleasant consciousness that her acts were watched and commented upon. Mildred, on the contrary, was more awkward. It might have seemed that she had topics to bring forward which she was studying how to introduce. She made an observation upon Ella's unusual height, and then paused for an answer, which was given her by Bertha's walking up to the sofa, and placing a note before her saying, "Mr. Lester begged me to give you this: he is gone to London."

Mildred's speaking countenance in a moment betrayed her feelings whilst she read the note; her face was of an ashy paleness; when it was ended, she laid it down gently, and said, raising her eyes steadily to Bertha's, "Then the hour is come for action?"

"Mr. Lester thinks so," was Bertha's reply.

Mildred said in a low voice, "Thank God," and there was a pause.

"Suspicion is the worst of all evils," observed Bertha.

Mildred appeared scarcely to hear her, and only

answered, "Mr. Lester tells me you will give me details."

Bertha drew her chair nearer; it was an involuntary movement of sympathy. Mildred noticed it. "We have one feeling," she said.

"Yes, I hope so. Oh! Miss Vivian, how will it end?"

"Not Miss Vivian,—Mildred, if you will—we have so many interests in common." She took Bertha's hand affectionately.

That little movement! — Bertha could never have made it herself, — but it touched the secret chord of cherished and hidden feelings; she forgot that Mildred was a Vivian as she answered, "I always hear you called Mildred, but few call me Bertha."

"May I be one of the few? It would seem most natural, for Edward calls you so."

"It is strange that he should,—your brother."

"Why strange? where would his comfort, his hope, his children have been without you? I have so often longed to thank you."

"I have only done my duty," replied Bertha.

"But none can do more. He must thank you himself. He does deeply, heartily; but perhaps he has never found words to say it rightly."

"He has other things to think of than gratitude now," replied Bertha.

"He ought not to have. Yet perhaps we must forgive him if he is engrossed. Is this determination his own?"

"No; Mr. Lester's. He thinks that concealment is no longer safe. Goff has been making friends with

one of the servants at the Rectory ; taking the letters to the post ; and we suspect prying into them. We can't tell how much he knows, but something, we are nearly sure, he has discovered."

Mildred was silent ; but her hand shook tremulously.

Bertha went on. " We only found this out yesterday. Mr. Lester had no time to write, except those few lines. He left me to tell you all. He has no settled plan yet ; he says he can't form any till he has seen Edward ; then he means to write to you, and——"

" And what ?" Mildred regarded her anxiously.

" He must trust to you to prepare General Vivian's mind for the knowledge that Edward is in England, unless—— ; it struck me whether it might be better that they should meet without preparation."

" No, never !" Mildred started up. " I beg your pardon ; I did not mean to be so hasty ; but it might be his death."

Bertha's colour rose, and she looked much distressed.

" I know it has been Mr. Lester's notion," continued Mildred ; " and it might have answered last year, but my father appears very much shaken within the last few months. We might ruin all by such incautiousness. No one knows him," she added, her voice sinking. " Mr. Lester thinks him hard ; he is hard externally ; hard in his own eyes ; but he is a father still."

" But there must be no delay," said Bertha, with

something of her former coldness and determination.

Mildred shrank a little from her manner; but the feeling was scarcely perceptible in her tone, as she replied, "No, indeed; if there is danger for Edward, how could there be delay?" Yet she spoke doubtfully, perhaps unwilling to comprehend the possibility of danger.

"Mr. Lester thinks that both Captain Vivian and Goff have reasons for being your brother's deadly enemies," continued Bertha.

"I know it. There is a mystery; but my father has never allowed me to approach the subject. He has never mentioned Edward's name since—since that fatal day."

"If they are his enemies there must be danger," continued Bertha; "they are both desperate men."

Mildred clasped her hands in silent prayer. "The God who has protected him hitherto will protect him still," she said. "But I wish I could have seen Mr. Lester himself."

"He felt it better not to wait," replied Bertha. "It was only yesterday we discovered what Goff had been doing. Of course there was a motive for his interference. Perhaps it was unwise to send our letters as we did, but we had not calculated on any risk. It seemed only natural that Mr. Lester should write to Mr. Bruce, and your letters and mine were always inclosed in his. Mr. Lester said it was best to go to London immediately, for he could not trust to any more letters."

Mildred remained silent for some seconds, as if

forming some inward resolution ; then she looked up at Bertha, and said, "You will think of me, and pray for me ; none can tell the effort it will be to speak to my father."

Bertha's softer feelings were touched ; and she answered gently and kindly, "God's help is always with those who live for the happiness of others."

"I hope so ; if one does live for that purpose. Yet I have never been able to make my father happy."

"General Vivian does not give me the idea of an unhappy man," said Bertha, with a bluntness which was somewhat painful.

"Possibly not. I have heard it said before ; but, Bertha"—the name was spoken in a tone of apology—"must one not live with persons daily before one can venture to judge of that deep question of happiness ?"

"Yes, indeed," Bertha spoke eagerly ; "I know none can judge."

"Not the nearest and dearest at times," continued Mildred, "still less those who only see others as the world has seen my father—in public meetings and formal society. It has been his pride to appear happy, and he has succeeded with all but me."

"And Mr. Lester and Mrs. Robinson," observed Bertha. "They have always said that he was a crushed and broken-hearted man."

"The wound which God makes, God will and can heal," said Mildred. "There is no healing for that which we open for ourselves." She dashed away a tear from her eyes, as she added, in a low voice,

“My poor father! his sorrow is greater than Edward’s.”

“It would scarcely seem so to those who look upon them,” observed Bertha.

“Ah! I forgot,” and Mildred’s face became suddenly animated; “you have seen Edward. Is he changed? Does he look very old—older than I do?” and she smiled, and then, in a sadder tone, added, “Perhaps we may not recognise each other.”

“He does not look like General Vivian’s son,” replied Bertha.

“Then he is changed,—he was so like! See,” she unclasped her locket, “should you have known it?”

“I should have remembered it,” replied Bertha, regarding the miniature closely. The allusion was painful,—for an instant it carried both back to the days when they had met as strangers, having a mutual antipathy; and when the first thought of a near connection had been the death knell of their happiness.

Bertha was the first to speak again. “Ella is like it,” she said.

“Yes, very; much more so than Clement, though they are twins.”

“There is such talent in it,” said Bertha, still looking at the miniature.

“Yes, but Ella will surpass both her father and her brother in that. She is wonderfully clever.”

“Talent thrown away,” said Bertha shortly.

Her tone was like the opening of a closed door to Mildred. It revealed such intricacies of feeling. “Is it thrown away?” she asked with some hesitation.

"It may not be yet, but it will be. It produces no fruits."

"It wants culture," observed Mildred.

"A great deal has been given her, but it is useless."

"She seems young to say so."

"Yes, if she were not so clever."

"But disproportionate talent becomes awkwardness," continued Mildred.

"That didn't strike me before. I don't know now that I can tell what it means."

Mildred waited for a moment. An effort was needed for the reply, which at the moment she could scarcely make. Yet she conquered her reluctance, and turning from the subject of all engrossing interest, answered in a tone as unconcerned as Bertha's: "Moral powers and mental powers take different times for growth, I imagine. Mental powers appear to spring up rapidly, whilst moral powers require a lifetime to come to any thing like maturity. So one is continually struck with a sense of disproportion between talent and goodness, and then comes disappointment."

"Certainly, I don't know a more disappointing person than Ella," observed Bertha, in the same cold tone.

"I think she is very disappointing till one begins to understand her."

"Understanding doesn't help me," observed Bertha.

"Doesn't it? I should have thought it would have kept you from expecting too much."

"But how can you help expecting a great deal from a person who can talk and reason like a woman

of thirty when she is only sixteen, and can acquire more knowledge in a day than others can in months, or years?"

"According to my theory this is only intellectual growth," said Mildred, "and therefore must not be depended upon for action."

"But it ought to be power," said Bertha.

"Scarcely, — I should say indeed that it tends rather to weakness, like any other want of proportion."

Bertha looked doubtful, and again Mildred was obliged to urge herself to continue the conversation by remembering that it might be long before a like opportunity would recur.

"I confess to having a theory about proportion, very vague, and perhaps very unfounded, — but one must think of something when one is obliged to spend hours alone upon a sofa; — an idea, it is, that the principles of all beauty both physical and moral are to be found in proportion, — that perfect beauty is nothing more than perfect proportion, — and that perfect goodness is the same. But all that is very dreamy, and not much to the purpose; only I think one can see as one goes on in life, that the characters which leave the most lasting impress upon the world are those in which the mental and moral powers are the most equally balanced. So I fancy, if I had the management of a child, that is what I should the most strive to attain."

"And if you had the management of Ella what should you do?"

“I can scarcely tell till I have seen what she is at home.”

“But you can form some idea; what is it you think she wants?”

“Sunshine,” said Mildred smiling; and seeing that Bertha looked a little annoyed at not receiving a clearer answer, she continued, “Ella’s intellectual growth seems to have been so rapid as to cast a shade over her moral growth, if one may so speak. Perhaps, therefore, she wants hope, encouragement, cheerful sympathy, and patience, to expand and foster her better feelings. She is morbid now, and wayward, and has a great tendency to unreality.”

“She is very unreal,” observed Bertha.

“Would she be if she understood herself?” inquired Mildred. “She deceives herself now because she fancies that talking of goodness, which is an effort of the mind, is the same thing as carrying it out in practice, which is the work of the heart. But I think she is beginning to open her eyes to the vast difference; when she sees it clearly the danger I should fear would be despair.”

“She does have fits of despondency now,” observed Bertha.

“And I suppose then the right thing would be to give her encouragement,” said Mildred.

“It is so difficult, when she is continually vexing and disappointing one,” replied Bertha.

“Still, without encouragement — without sunshine, — how can there be any growth?” asked Mildred, gently.

“Yes, I suppose you are right. I dare say I manage her very badly.”

“She must be exceedingly trying, — especially to a person who has fixed principles of right, and always acts upon them.”

“Not always,” said Bertha quickly, “very seldom.”

Mildred smiled. “Perhaps others can judge for us better than we can of ourselves on such points.”

“I know we ought to give sympathy,” said Bertha.

“Yes, because one receives it; and what should one be without it?”

A shade of sorrowful thought crossed Bertha’s face; she said abruptly, “Can people acquire sympathy?”

“I think — I hope so. Most of us have very little of it by nature.”

“I have none.”

“Oh! indeed, indeed!” Mildred raised herself up eagerly; “if you had not sympathy, how could you have done what you have? And Mr. Lester tells me of others who are indebted to you. Ronald Vivian, for instance.”

“That is from circumstances,” replied Bertha, her changing voice showing the quickness of her feelings.

“But if we have sympathy in any one case, it proves that we have the power within us, only we may not know how to exercise it.”

“Then it is useless.”

“Yes, till we teach ourselves better.”

“That is the question. I don’t think we can teach ourselves; it is a feeling,”

“But we make ourselves feel by action.”

"I don't know that. I can act well without feeling at all."

"Perhaps you don't understand yourself," said Mildred. "I am sure you feel a great deal more than you know."

"Whatever sympathy I may have, it is not enough for the children," said Bertha.

"It may be their fault in a great degree; and they must be so different from you."

"Yes, Ella and Fanny are, and Clement too. I can understand Louisa better."

"But I suppose it may be possible to practise putting oneself in the place of the children," said Mildred, "trying as a matter of reason to see with their eyes and feel with their feelings."

"But reason won't be of any use," persisted Bertha.

"I should have thought it might be. I should have imagined that it was one of the chief instruments which God has given us to help us to guide others; one of the great causes of the superiority of a mature mind over a young one."

"I don't understand," said Bertha, as shortly as before, but with a greater show of interest.

Mildred felt that she must follow the leading of her strange companion, who seemed to have no perception that this was not the moment for carrying on abstract inquiries upon education, so she continued:

"I suppose this kind of reasoning, and trying to place oneself in the position of another, is the best way of learning sympathy; and children we see can't avail themselves of it thoroughly, for they don't know

what a grown-up person feels. But we have passed through childhood and youth, and have only to make an effort of memory to recall our own difficulties, and by that means understand their troubles."

"But all children are not alike," persisted Bertha. "How is it possible to reason upon feelings which we have never had?"

"Imagination, I suppose, may help us," said Mildred, "and books—fiction, which many grave people laugh at. Whatever displays human nature truly, is an assistance to the lesson of sympathy. And then too the least sympathy invites confidence, and confidence is experience, and experience enables us to give greater sympathy. You see there is a continued reaction if we can only make up our minds to begin."

"And how would you show Ella sympathy?" inquired Bertha, her mind turning at once from general theories to a direct object.

"I know how I should act myself," replied Mildred. "I could not venture to say what any other person should do."

"But what would you do yourself?"

"I think I should try always to bear in mind her constitutional indolence, and so, as a beginning, not expect her to be energetic; and whenever she did exert herself, I should praise her, even for a very slight amount of energy. Then as to her pride and self-will, I should endeavour to make allowance for them, by judging her not according to what strictly speaking she ought to be, but according to the effort which she would need to be humble and obedient. I should remember too that her very talents are her

temptation, causing her to be carried away by feeling and excitement, and I should try to throw myself into her pursuits, for the very purpose of being a balance to her mind. Perhaps by this kind of watchfulness I might avoid irritating her or being irritated myself, which I am sure I should be otherwise."

"Yes," replied Bertha, speaking more freely when she found that Mildred could share, or at least comprehend her difficulties, "that is the great trouble after all; she is provoking and I am angry, and then I dare say I speak out quickly."

"She has made me speak out quickly several times since she has been here," replied Mildred. "I am just beginning to learn to think twice before I find fault."

"But don't you find that spoils her?" inquired Bertha. "I am sure people require to be stirred by a quick word now and then."

"Quick words are sometimes very good for quick natures," replied Mildred, "but I doubt if they are good with slow ones."

"Ella, slow! oh, no; she is immensely quick."

"Intellectually, not morally. I think quick words repel her, and make her creep like a snail into its shell. Besides, I fancy they only do if one is generally very affectionate in manner; that in a degree neutralises the quickness."

"And I am not affectionate, I know," said Bertha, candidly. "I dare say Ella has complained of me."

"She thinks you are more fond of the little ones," was Mildred's evasive answer, and Bertha, not satisfied, put the question again more directly.

"I can scarcely call it complaint," replied Mildred. "She thinks you don't understand her, but she is quite aware that a great deal is her own fault."

"And do you understand her?" inquired Bertha quickly.

"I am not sure that I do, but I see some things in her very like my brother. I don't encourage her though in that notion of not being understood; it is an excuse for a great deal of sentimentality, and even selfishness of feeling in young people. I always tell her that you and every one else would understand her if she would only try to act up to her principles, and be humble and considerate; but it is such an age for moods, and fancies, and pet griefs, one must be merciful to it."

Bertha had not been at all merciful to Mildred, who was nearly tired out, but there had been a painful fascination in this conversation with a person whom hitherto she had regarded with a kind of respectful antipathy, which carried her beyond what she had in any way intended. It was a pleasure to be drawn on, even though in a certain degree against her will. She did not see that on Mildred's side there was a continual effort; she only felt that even if they differed, they were not antagonistic. Mildred had said nothing hard of Ella, quite the contrary; yet she could see and acknowledge her faults: and neither had she been flattering to herself; she had suggested indeed, several possible blunders in education, but it was always as though she herself was the person liable to make them. The effect of the conversation was unquestionably soothing, and when at length

Bertha was recalled from it by the striking of the clock, which warned her that it was time to return home, she rose with evident regret.

The feeling was not shared by Mildred, — solitude, leisure for thought, was her one longing desire. Yet even then she could throw herself into Bertha's character; and she asked again, as a special favour, that Ella might be allowed to remain.

It was a well-timed and well-turned request. Bertha liked deference. She was a little sensitive as to her position with the children, and had an undefined dread of Mildred's influence and interference. Two aunts on different sides might very well have found matter for disagreement; but Mildred was thoroughly unselfish, and had no love of power. Bertha's answer was very cordial. She was quite sure that her mother would consent; there could not be any objection if General Vivian liked it.

The point settled, Ella was summoned.

The look of delight which followed the announcement of the permission was a little painful to Bertha; but she had learnt something, much indeed, in that half hour's interview with Mildred, and, instead of thinking of her own chilled feelings, she threw herself into Ella's pleasure. "Shall you want any books sent you, Ella? The Cleve carrier will call to-morrow morning."

"Aunt Bertha, thank you! yes;" and Ella's eyes sparkled at this unlooked-for instance of consideration. She ran out of the room to make out a list.

Bertha drew near to Mildred. Now, for the first time, she perceived that the conversation had been

carried on too long. Yet Mildred smiled, and said she should be quite well after luncheon.

“Strong people forget what weak ones feel,” said Bertha, in a tone of self-reproach.

“And weak ones are a great trouble and burden to strong ones; but I am most grateful to you for having come.”

“I hope I shan’t forget what you have said,” observed Bertha, bluntly.

Mildred smiled. “I dare say I make many mistakes. It is all theory,—I have had no practical experience.”

“But you must have thought a good deal.”

“About my own faults; that teaches more than any thing.”

“May I come and see you again sometimes?”

A very awkward question. General Vivian might not at all like to see Miss Campbell frequently at his house.

Mildred could only answer it honestly. “Will you let me write and ask you to come? It may be the best plan.”

Bertha understood, and coloured deeply.

“It is not my will, nor my doing, you will believe, I am sure,” said Mildred, timidly.

Bertha felt very contradictory, but she was too good to give way to the feeling. “I suppose it may be the best plan,” she answered, in a tone tolerably free from restraint.

“Thank you very much for understanding; but I shall hear from you.”

“Yes; if there is any thing to communicate. I scarcely see what there can be.”

“One lives always in fear and expectation,” said Mildred. She sighed, and the sigh revealed to Bertha that the sister’s anxiety was far keener than her own could be.

She reproached herself, and said, “I have been troubling you about Ella, and asking your advice,—I ought not to have done it now.”

“It has done me good, by distracting my thoughts. I shall try not to think till the time comes. Mr. Lester, you suppose, will write to-morrow?”

“I imagine so. He was going direct to your brother, and I know he is anxious that no time should be lost.”

“Then God help us all!” said Mildred; and Bertha silently echoed the prayer.

Ella came back again with the list of books, and asked a good many questions about home, to which Bertha answered fully and kindly; but Mildred did not speak again until just at the last moment, when, as Bertha was wishing her a final good-b’ye, she said, in a voice so low as to be inaudible to Ella, “If Mr. Lester is away, keep Clement at home.”

“Yes, if I can; but he is so wilful.”

Bertha departed; and Mildred, too tired to talk more to Ella, or even to listen to reading, lay quite still, thinking upon the practical experience which life had given her of all that is involved in that common word—wilful.

CHAP. XXXV.

"HAS the postman been yet, Louisa?" It was Mrs. Campbell's question when she came down to breakfast on the second day after Bertha's visit to the Hall, and it was addressed to Louisa as a matter of course, for no one else was so certain to be on the watch—at least so Mrs. Campbell thought. She was not aware that Bertha, in her anxiety, had stationed herself at the shrubbery gate to intercept the letters before they were delivered at the house. Louisa's answer was in the negative; but almost immediately afterwards Bertha entered, laid the letters on the table, and left the room. Louisa saw that Bertha had secured her own; Mrs. Campbell saw nothing but that there was a long epistle from an old friend, and this she began to read.

Bertha came back to read prayers and make breakfast; again, no one but Louisa noticed that she was less quiet and indifferent than usual, and certainly no one else would have had the quickness to suspect the cause, or the overweening curiosity to inquire into it. But Louisa had no mercy when the indulgence of her besetting propensity was in question, and as soon as they were seated at the breakfast table she began the attack. "Aunt Bertha, when is Mr. Lester coming back?"

“I don't know, my dear.”

“But he is only gone for a few days, is he?”

“I can't say, my dear.”

“Rachel said she hoped he would return soon.”

“Very possibly, my dear.”

A pause, and a little diversion of Louisa's thoughts, from the fact that Betsy came in with a message from a poor woman, which of course she fully attended to. But she began again. “Mr. Lester is gone to London, isn't he, Aunt Bertha?”

“I believe so.”

“Rachel said she thought you would hear if he were coming back to-day or to-morrow, because he told her that perhaps he might be obliged to send her a message through you instead of writing himself.”

“Perhaps so.”

“But can't I give the message for you? I am going up to the Rectory after breakfast.”

“Thank you, Louisa,”—Bertha's tone was chilling and reproachful,—“but I can take care of my own messages.”

“Oh! I beg your pardon, Aunt Bertha; I only meant to save you the trouble.” Louisa was satisfied then. She had learnt what she wished to know, that Mr. Lester had written. She went on: “Then if Mr. Lester doesn't come back, Rachel may come and stay here, mayn't she?”

“We will see about it.”

Here Mrs. Campbell interposed: “I can't have Rachel staying here. She can come to drink tea as she did last night; but I don't want her this week; the servants are busy.”

"Mr. Lester must be coming back by Saturday," persisted Louisa, in a disappointed tone.

"Very likely, my dear, but I can't have Rachel staying here; I won't allow it."

Louisa looked extremely disconcerted, and repeated that Mr. Lester would be at home on Saturday, and then they should not have Rachel for weeks.

"Louisa, that is very perverse," said Bertha. "You know that Mr. Lester never objects to Rachel's coming here, except when she has some special engagement at home."

"I don't understand. What is all this fuss about Rachel and Mr. Lester?" inquired Mrs. Campbell.

Bertha's quick reply was, "Oh! nothing of any consequence;" which did not satisfy Mrs. Campbell.

"But where is Mr. Lester? When did you say he was coming home?"

"Some time this week he hopes it may be," replied Bertha.

"When he does come he can bring down that packet of tea for us," observed Mrs. Campbell. "Remember you ask him, Bertha."

"I don't know the exact day when he is coming," replied Bertha.

"He must be back by Sunday," persisted Louisa.

"Or he must have some one to take his duty," observed Fanny, delighted at the idea of novelty.

"He will sure to be back by Saturday," said Clement, in a very moody tone. "I never knew him stay away yet."

"What is to keep him, Bertha; do you know? Have you heard from him?"

Louisa's eyes sparkled with amusement. Her grandmamma had asked precisely the question she was longing to put.

Bertha could not avoid a direct answer. "I had a few lines from him, this morning," she said. "He does not mention when he shall be at home."

"But is it business he is gone for, or what? It was quite a sudden notion."

"Rachel said she thought he was gone to see a friend," observed Louisa.

"My dear Louisa, I didn't ask you. Pray don't answer unless you are spoken to. Your aunt will tell me. Is it any friend we know, Bertha?"

Louisa whispered loudly to Fanny that she was sure it was Mr. Bruce, because she happened to see the direction of a parcel Mr. Lester took with him, and it was the same as that on Mr. Bruce's letters; and Fanny communicated the fact to Clement; whilst Bertha, blushing and hesitating, answered, evasively, that she never inquired into Mr. Lester's private affairs.

"That is no answer, my dear Bertha; what is all this mystery? I can't bear mysteries. Why shouldn't you say to me that he is gone to see Mr. Bruce, if he is gone?" Mrs. Campbell spoke very fretfully, and Louisa glanced at Clement in triumph.

Bertha felt she must speak out at once: "Mr. Lester talked of seeing Mr. Bruce," she replied; "and he says to-day that he is kept in London, because Mr. Bruce is not very well. He doesn't mention the day of his return, and he thinks it may be necessary to provide for his Sunday duty. He writes, besides, about some little parish matters."

“Well! but let me see the letter; can’t you show it me?”

“There are one or two things private in it,” said Bertha; “I am afraid he wouldn’t like it.”

That was sufficient to annoy Mrs. Campbell for the whole day. If Louisa had wished to render every one about her uncomfortable, she had most certainly succeeded; and she had punished herself too, for she was very quick in discovering the impression she had made, and could see plainly that it was not likely to be a smooth day with Aunt Bertha.

She said very little during the remainder of the breakfast, and when it was over went up to Clement.

“Clement, what is the matter about Mr. Lester and Mr. Bruce? and why does Aunt Bertha make such a mystery about it all?”

“I don’t know; how should I?” was Clement’s blunt reply.

“But you do know something, I am sure.”

“Not I. How you do teaze, Louisa!”

“And how cross you are, Clement! and you were cross all yesterday; it was that reckoning made you cross. Who gave it to you to do? Did Mr. Lester?”

“Nonsense, nobody. What on earth do you pry into my concerns for?” Clement spoke very impatiently, and made his escape as soon as he could; Louisa looking after him, and thinking that something strange must be going on, when every one was so easily put out. And what was Clement calculating? She would find out that, if she did nothing else.

Bertha had a better excuse for being put out than

any one else. The last thing she would have desired was that the children or her mother should believe there was at this time a mystery connected with Mr. Lester's movements. There was enough to make her anxious, without the dread of incaution and idle curiosity in those with whom she lived.

Mr. Lester's letter was short, and by no means satisfactory.

“My dear Miss Campbell,

“I arrived yesterday, about five o'clock, and found my friend very far from well. He has had an attack of influenza, which confines him to his bed. He is improving, but I don't think it would quite do to let him travel to-morrow. It is possible that I shall be obliged to make arrangements for having my Sunday duty taken; the week days are provided for. I have not been able to say any thing about business. I will write again as soon as I can. I shall send a few lines to Miss Vivian. Will you please give the enclosed note to Rachel. I trust her quite to your care.

“In haste, most sincerely yours,

“ROBERT LESTER.”

In the postscript were a few directions about some poor people, whom Bertha was taking charge of; and the last words were, “I need scarcely urge upon you caution and great watchfulness, especially as regards occupying Clement, and keeping him out of mischief. You may be certain I shall return the very earliest day possible.”

Perhaps Bertha could scarcely have expected, in

reason, any thing more decisive in this, Mr. Lester's first letter ; but suspense was intensely trying to her, and now it was aggravated by the knowledge of Edward Vivian's illness, which might protract it considerably. She felt sadly faithless, and conscience painfully reproached her for it ; but it seemed as if, for the first time, the magnitude of the interests at stake were revealed to her.

It was as though she had gone on in a dream of hope for years before, never really hoping or expecting any thing ; talking of the changes which might some day come, without really anticipating them. Only within the last few days, since Mr. Lester himself had acknowledged that the moment for action was arrived, had she dared to realise to herself the possibilities of success or of failure.

It required all Bertha's conscientiousness to bring her mind to the contemplation of her ordinary work. But she was a person who could never waste time in useless regrets or fears ; each hour in the day had its occupation marked, and she was almost scrupulously exact in keeping to it. A few minutes of leisure were however always to be found directly after breakfast, whilst the children were preparing their lessons ; and, taking advantage of them, she pleased herself by carrying Rachel's note to the Rectory instead of sending it. There was something in the gay smile and the affectionate glance that would meet her there, which was soothing even when she could not open her mind, and tell all her anxieties ; and perhaps one of Bertha's few self-deceptions might have been discovered in

the excuses which she made, when any thing particularly vexatious had occurred at the Lodge, to go to the Rectory, and spend a quarter of an hour with Rachel.

Rachel was met in the porch, with her bonnet and shawl on. She had expected a letter, and not receiving one, was going to the Lodge to make inquiries. She ran up to Bertha eagerly: "Dear Miss Campbell, how kind of you! and you have a note!" She seized it eagerly, and then recollecting herself, added: "May I read it? you won't think it rude? But you must come in and sit down by the fire; it is very cold this morning."

Even in her anxiety for news from her father, she could not forget consideration for one present with her; and Bertha was taken into the study, and the fire was stirred, and she was made to unfasten her cloak, and then Rachel turned away to the window to peruse her precious note. It was read through twice, and a kiss given to the name at the bottom; but still Rachel stood looking out of the window with a watery mist dimming her eyes. Bertha, seated by the fire, waited patiently. She knew well the struggle that was going on in the poor child's mind. Rachel had never calculated upon the possibility of her father's being away more than two days. But it was a calm voice which spoke at last, only rather lower and more restrained in its accent than was wont; and if tears were gathering in Rachel's eyes, they were not allowed to go further, as she stood again by Bertha's side, and said: "He doesn't know when he shall come back."

“Not exactly the day, dear Rachel; but it can’t be long.”

“Can’t it? but he promised, he thought he should be back to-morrow.” A rush of sorrow rose up in Rachel’s throat, but she swallowed it with a strong effort. “I don’t mean to be wrong, Miss Campbell, I want to bear it, — I will,” — and there was another effort at self-command.

“Yes, because small trials come to us from the same Hand as great ones.”

“Thank you;” and Rachel put her arm fondly round Bertha; “that is just what papa would say. It does me more good than telling me the time will soon pass,” she added, as an April smile brightened her face. “But you think he will come?”

“Certainly, the very first day he can. He must, you know, for the sake of his parish.”

“And for mine; what should I do without him? It is so lonely.”

That was a little unmeant reproach to Bertha. It seemed very hard that she could not at once take Rachel to the Lodge, but she knew it would not do to propose it. Her mind was set at rest, however, by Rachel’s saying: “Papa tells me that if I don’t hear from him about his coming home to-morrow, he shall ask Aunt Mildred to let me go to the Hall. I shall enjoy that excessively, but it won’t be like having papa.”

“You will have Ella, too, as a companion,” said Bertha.

“Shall I? How very nice! Yet I thought she was coming back.”

“Miss Vivian wants her to stay. She thinks her grandpapa will like it.”

“Will he really?” Rachel seemed about to add something very energetic; but she stopped, and concluded by saying, “Did you see Aunt Mildred yesterday?”

“Yes, for an hour nearly. We had a long talk.”

“And you think—yes, I am sure you think as I do—that she is very—I don’t know what to say—not at all like any one else.”

“No, very unlike.”

“And Ella is so fond of her!” continued Rachel. “She sent me a little note the other day, and told me that she was beginning to love her just as I said she would. It will be very nice going there; only if papa could be there too——” and she heaved a sigh.

“We can’t have all we wish,” said Bertha.

It was a truism; yet Rachel’s simple humility took it as it was intended, and she replied, “No, I ought to remember that; I ought to be thankful. And the Hall will be very pleasant, and——” she stopped, for tears would come in spite of her efforts.

“Doesn’t papa say any thing else in his note?” inquired Bertha, wishing to distract her thoughts.

“Yes, one thing—I forgot.” Rachel read it through again. “He has left his pocket-book behind him; he wants me to look in it, and send him a receipted bill that is in it. He says if I am in any doubt, you will tell which it is. It is a school bill, which he paid in Cleve the other day.”

“Perhaps we had better find the pocket-book at once,” said Bertha, looking at her watch. “I have

just ten minutes to spare. Then we can settle which is the bill."

"I saw it yesterday, I remember," said Rachel, searching about the room. "I thought why he had left it. Oh! here it is." She gave it to Bertha.

"You had better open it," said Bertha, returning it.

"There are such loads of papers!" Rachel took them out, one after the other. "This—no, it is a note; and this is a list of school children; and these are letters.—I don't think the bill is here."

"Perhaps that may be it," said Bertha, pointing to a folded paper which had a name written on the back.

"I don't know; it may be." Rachel opened and looked at it. "I don't think—it isn't a receipt—what does it mean?" She put the paper into Bertha's hands.

Bertha read:—

"Three months after the death of my father, I promise to pay John Vivian, Esq., or order, the sum of five thousand pounds. Value received.

"EDWARD BRUCE VIVIAN."

"Dear Miss Campbell, arn't you well?" Bertha's colourless cheek, her fixed gaze, might well warrant the question.

She started. "What did you say? Yes, I am very well, thank you. It is not the bill, I think. Hadn't you better ask the servants if they have seen it?"

“Perhaps I had.” Rachel was frightened by Bertha’s manner. She hardly knew what she was to ask the servants; but she ran away, glad to be out of the room.

Bertha was alone—the strange paper in her hand; but she could scarcely read it again—the letters swam before her eyes. Yet her thoughts, her powers of reasoning were singularly clear. It must mean, it could not mean anything but that Edward Vivian had deceived them; that he had really been involved to an extent five times as great as he had ever acknowledged; that he had extricated himself by means calculated to exasperate any father, most especially a man with General Vivian’s jealous sense of justice, his keen family pride and personal dignity, reckoning upon that as already his own, to which his only claim lay in his father’s will. She recalled Mr. Lester’s manner during his last conversation, and fancied now that his tone of despondency was greater than she had ever known it. Perhaps he had only lately, in his interview with General Vivian, been made aware of the extent of Edward’s offence; perhaps he had not liked to give her his true reason for going to London, and had seized upon Goff’s interference with the letters as an excuse; perhaps, when he said that the hour for the decisive step was arrived, it was from the conviction that Edward had sinned beyond the hope of pardon, except by a final, despairing appeal to mercy.

Bertha’s fears gave strength to her convictions; yet even in this there was much to perplex her. A paper so important left to chance, placed in a

pocket-book with trifling memoranda, and, as it seemed, forgotten,—very unlike that was to Mr. Lester, so careful and particular as he was in all matters of business. And how did it come into his possession? How long had he kept it from her? These were questions not to be solved. She heard Rachel returning, and her impulse was to restore the paper to its place; but a second thought made her hesitate. It might be unsafe. Mr. Lester might have forgotten it. It seemed better to take care of it, and then tell him what she had done. Happily, Bertha's conscience was so free from any double motive, that she had no cause to mistrust her own intentions, and safe in the certainty of Mr. Lester's kind interpretation of her actions, she took possession of the mysterious document; whilst Rachel came back with a forlorn face, having heard no tidings of the receipted bill.

Bertha was too anxious to be willing to wait till further search had been made, and even in the excitement of her feelings and the perplexity of her thoughts, was conscious that the ten minutes she had given herself were expired; and Rachel, knowing her strict punctuality, would not ask her to stay a moment beyond the appointed time, but insisted upon looking through the pocket-book papers again herself, and promised to bring the bill to the Lodge to be inspected if it were found. Just at the last minute Bertha thought whether it would be wise to tell Rachel that she had taken the paper; but she felt a little shy of confessing what might appear a liberty, and was afraid of exciting remark. She fancied, besides, that Rachel was not likely to miss it, as she

had scarcely looked at it, and certainly did not understand what it meant.

Bertha, therefore, went home to teach the children, give directions to the servants, wait upon her mother, and, in the midst of all, to ponder upon the painful light which had thus suddenly been cast upon the family affairs. Rachel remained in the study, and went through the papers carefully again; this time, perhaps because she was not flurried by Bertha's occasional glances at the timepiece, she found the bill without any difficulty: and then, having a vague recollection that she had missed something which ought to be there, took another survey in search of the old dirty-looking paper which she had put into Bertha's hands, and which at the time she remembered to have thought very unlike all the rest.

Most provoking it was, just as she was going to sit down to read, to be hindered in this way; but now the old paper was gone. Twice she went through the letters and notes as they were folded in the pocket-book; then she unfolded and examined them, looked under the table, under the chairs, under books and sofa cushions, in every place where such a paper was the most unlikely to be found, and at last went again to the kitchen to confide her troubles to Anne.

And Anne was standing in the back yard, and a door which led from it into the Rectory lane was open, and near this door was Goff, haunting the premises still, and trying to make friends with Anne at home, as he had not met her the day before in the village. Rachel came out, full of her annoyance, with

an idea that by means of a sweeping-brush Anne would be able to penetrate into the secret recesses of any hiding-place in which the tiresome paper should have secreted itself. And she gave a full description of it to the best of her ability ; said that it was old and discoloured, and was written in a scrawly hand, with a great name signed at the bottom which she thought was Edward Vivian ; and that she remembered what it was like especially, because Miss Campbell turned so pale just when the paper was given her that she fancied it must be something written on it which frightened her. Of course it was not that, because it was only an old kind of bill, and there was nothing really the matter with Miss Campbell. To all which details Anne gave very little heed, though promising to use her best endeavours to assist Rachel's wishes, and to pick up every piece of paper she might see on the ground in the hope of discovering the truant.

Anne did not heed, but Goff did ; and when Anne, at Rachel's request, went back with her to the study, Goff, cool, reckless, desperate in danger as in the carrying out of schemes of guilt, hurried to the Grange to communicate to Captain Vivian what he had heard, and discuss the plans which it might be necessary to adopt in the probability that the missing paper was the evidence of their guilt and the cause of Mr. Lester's sudden departure.

CHAP. XXXVI.

No news from Mr. Lester the following morning. Bertha had looked forward to the post with intense anxiety; and when the blank "no letters to-day" was heard from Louisa, as the postman passed the gate, her heart sickened with disappointment. She had waited hoping to hear of his return, and intending to delay any inquiry as to the paper in her possession until she could see him. Since the discovery of Goff's interference she had a superstitious dread of trusting any thing which might be of consequence to the post; and the more she considered the subject in calm moments, examining carefully the signature, and going over in her own mind all that she had ever heard as connected with Edward Vivian's affairs, the more her first feelings were altered, whilst a strong conviction forced itself upon her that the document of which in so singular a manner she had become possessed was false. The writing unquestionably strikingly resembled Mr. Vivian's, but it was stiff and careful; not such as his would have been under any pressure of anxiety. There were slight differences in the letters also, but these could not be so much depended upon, because years tend very much to alter handwriting, and she could not well recollect what her brother-in-law's had been so long ago. But

that which most weighed with Bertha was the full belief, impressed upon her mind by family troubles, that his debts had never amounted to more than one fifth of the sum named in the paper. Mr. Lester doubtless must, like herself, have had suspicions upon the subject, and the paper must be connected, she felt sure, with his London journey; perhaps he did not say so for fear of exciting false hopes; perhaps—but that was all a mystery, not to be dwelt upon if she wished to keep her mind quiet; only Bertha felt that whether her conjectures were true or false, the discovery of the paper threw light upon General Vivian's feelings, and gave him a claim to sympathy fully as much as to censure.

Nothing of this anxiety was shown outwardly. The quietness of Bertha's ordinary manner was an assistance to her in keeping up the necessary self-restraint. She was so grave usually, that no one noticed a shade more or less, except it might be Louisa, and even she was often baffled by her aunt's composure. Yet it was a serious effort during the day to keep her wandering thoughts in order, and go through the routine of lessons; and the pre-occupation of her mind, added to a natural want of observation and quick penetration into character, prevented her from watching Clement, or discovering in him any thing which might have led her to think that his heart was ill at ease.

That first deception had led him on much further than he intended. When Captain Vivian met him the day succeeding his visit, and proposed to him to repeat it, asking, as a favour, that, besides giving

him help for amusement, he would assist him in a case which was a question of business, Clement had nothing to fall back upon to support his weak will, and, of course, yielded; and a second visit involved a third, still apparently innocent, but making him, after the excitement was over, very uneasy, and enabling Captain Vivian to discover in the course of conversation all he required to know as to Mr. Lester's movements, where he was likely to be in London, and the probability of his return; Clement telling everything with perfect simplicity, and never for one moment suspecting a meaning in this apparent interest.

And he flattered himself, too, that he was gaining something by the intercourse. Captain Vivian talked to him of the sea and his fancy for it, and gave him some useful advice not unmixed with flattery, promising, any day that he could manage it, to take him for a short sail, merely that he might have a few practical lessons, which were better, he said, than any talking. If it had only not been against Clement's conscience, he would quite have enjoyed going to the Grange, especially as he found that by some means he was free from Ronald's warning voice. Both days he had been there Ronald had been absent, sent by his father on some business to Cleve, or over the hills; and Captain Vivian had cautioned Clement playfully against mentioning his visit, saying, that when they had made out their puzzling questions, he meant to surprise him with his cleverness, for Ronald never fancied he had a head for reckoning.

There had been a proposal that they should meet

again on this day, still with the excuse of what Captain Vivian called business; and Clement had given an evasive answer, which left it at his option to go or not, as he might choose. So his conscience was tolerably easy for the present, though the past weighed upon him most uncomfortably.

It was not likely that Bertha should suspect any of this evil. Clement had kept regularly to hours, and walked once with his sisters, and was attentive to his studies. This afternoon, also, after some demur, he agreed to go with them over the hills to Greystone Gorge, to see Barney Wood; and although Bertha was not at all fond of being left in any way in charge of Clement, feeling that her control was not sufficient for him, she was satisfied that he seemed more disposed than usual to be obedient. Perhaps it was the consciousness of his unacknowledged fault which made him particularly grave and quiet.

It was a long walk, and the days were now so short that it was necessary to leave home early. Without Clement, indeed, Bertha might have hesitated about undertaking the expedition; for it was unpleasant to return over the hills alone, or only with the children, when it was growing dark, and Barney Wood's cottage had not the best possible reputation. His mother, who was dead, had been Goff's daughter; and report said, that the crafty smuggler made use of his son-in-law's house as a resort for himself and his comrades, in case of necessity. It was certainly very much out of the way of inspection, although within an easy distance of Dark Head Point, and not very far from the Grange, — all advantages to persons en-

gaged in the contraband traffic carried on to such an extent upon that part of the coast. Dark Head Point was well known to be the general rendezvous of the smugglers. It was the highest headland in the neighbourhood, and from it they could keep a strict watch over the country for miles; and, though called inaccessible from the shore, it was said that the practised foot of the smuggler could find a footing upon narrow ledges, which scarcely a goat could venture to tread; and that the tubs, when landed, were often hidden in recesses of the cliffs, which the preventive men, with all their hardihood, could not reach. But all this was but hearsay. Smugglers have a code of honour peculiarly their own, and no one of the Encombe band had ever yet been known to betray the secrets of his comrades; whilst the villagers would have believed it an act of the grossest treachery to reveal aught, either by word or look, concerning the traffic in which so many of those nearest and dearest to them were deeply engaged.

It was a difficult task intrusted to Mr. Lester, that of guiding these lawless people: to himself they were uniformly civil, and, for the most part, there was little more to find fault with amongst them than amongst the generality of their class. Drunkenness was the prevailing vice, but there were few petty thefts; the children were sent regularly to school; the wives worked diligently at home; the attendance at church on the Sunday was as regular as it commonly is in a seafaring place; on the week-days, few men would have been found, in any village of the size, able to leave their daily work. Only

now and then, some affray with the preventive men roused the fiercer passions of the people, and revealed the depth of the mischief which, at other times, was doing its work secretly, but surely. And it was not easy to find occasions for warning, where the offence was so carefully concealed. The men called themselves fishermen; their boats were ostensibly fishing boats, and, indeed, often used for that purpose; they were connected, too, with other smuggling bands along the coast, and it was customary to shift the offence from one to the other, till it became almost impossible to attach it to any individual. But, worse than all, they were unquestionably supported and encouraged by powerful example; and whilst Captain Vivian remained in the village, Mr. Lester felt bitterly that all hope of really improving his people, or teaching them the actual culpability of their conduct, was vain. Yet with him there was even greater difficulty in fixing the offence, than with the lower classes. The vessel kept off the coast, and known to belong to him, and to be engaged in smuggling expeditions, was owned nominally by another person, and was ostensibly a trading vessel, which went backwards and forwards for apparently innocent purposes of business. It had even been searched, but nothing had been found. Yet there was no more real doubt of its being used for smuggling purposes, than that the man chiefly connected with it was a lawless villain; all that was needed was proof, and proof was never at hand.

It seemed hard to visit the sins of the guilty upon the innocent; harder still, when it was known that

temptation and threats were used in the village to no slight extent; and that those who would not join the smugglers from interest, were compelled to do so from fear. This had been the case, in some degree, with Mark Wood, the father of little Barney. He had been a quiet, respectable man, till he married Goff's daughter. Even then he seemed anxious to keep himself aloof from the evil practices prevalent around him; but once nearly connected with a man of bad principle, and he could not again set himself free. Mr. Lester had been a friend to Mark and to his wife; he had attended her through a long illness, and been with her at the moment of death; and at that time it seemed that the unhappy husband's heart was open to good impressions, and Mr. Lester, anxious to follow them up, had taken especial notice of his sickly boy, left without a mother's care. With the assistance of Rachel and Bertha Campbell, he had provided Barney with comforts, and even luxuries, in the wish to keep up his influence with the father by the means of his child. But the case was not as hopeful now as it had been. Goff was more frequently at the cottage; his son-in-law was with him oftener in other places. It had even been reported that Mark Wood was to be seen, late at night, watching on Dark Head Point; but this was only report, and Mr. Lester could not leave the sick boy to suffer, because his father was yielding to evil example. He still allowed Bertha and Rachel to visit him, and aided them in any little plans for the child's comfort, often making an excuse to visit the boy himself, with the desire of meeting the father, and gaining an

insight into his habits. But, once a smuggler, and Mark Wood's sense of honour and truth was as perverted as that of his companions. He would treat Mr. Lester with civility, listen to his advice, and show himself grateful for his kindness; but there was no more confidence between them. Mark had given himself to a service which would admit of no compromise; and if a lie could serve the purpose of concealment, he would not scruple to use it for smuggling purposes, though he would have scorned to avail himself of it for any other.

The visits to Barney Wood were very satisfactory to Bertha, for they were almost her only opportunities of seeing Ronald alone. His care of the child was watchful and unceasing. It seemed as if the little fellow was a safety-valve for the softer feelings which could find no other vent. For Ronald Vivian could not live without some one to love. The strong feelings which at times carried him beyond his own control in anger, or exhausted themselves in the better impulses of fiery resolve and strong determination, took also, occasionally, other forms of intense longings for affection, eager and passionate desires to find some work which should draw him away from himself, and give him personal love in return for devoted self-denial; and then he seized upon the first object which presented itself, and gave himself up to it unremittingly, and with the same spirit of intense reverence with which he had watched his mother, during her lingering illness, whilst receiving the impressions that had so often been his safeguard during his most perilous life.

We cannot forget purity when once we have been brought in contact with it. The memory of evil may die when the soul has long dwelt in the presence of goodness, but the vision of holiness is immortal, even as He from whom it proceeds. Ronald Vivian had learnt from his mother what a woman can be in meekness, self-devotion, endurance, and faith; and not all those terrible scenes into which he had since been plunged, had sufficed to eradicate the impression. Still the best resolutions of the present, and the strongest wishes for the future, were formed from the images of the past. In Bertha Campbell, and Ella, and Rachel, he saw, or fancied he saw, his mother's virtues reflected; and when he tended the sick boy on his suffering bed, he acted over again in imagination the scenes so deeply imprinted on his memory when his mother had in like manner watched over him.

It was a marvellous power which could thus keep before him a standard of goodness so infinitely beyond any thing actually present to his eyes. Bertha was wanting in his mother's grace and tact; and Ella, he could sometimes discover, was wayward; and Rachel was too young and seen too seldom to exercise any very direct influence; but to Ronald they were beings of a superior order. They had the refinement and delicacy—the soft voices and the gentle consideration of manner—with which all his better feelings were associated; and when disgusted by the coarseness and freedom of the rough men with whom he was so often brought in contact, his thoughts reverted to them with a feeling almost superstitious in its reverence,—

as if they, and such as they, alone prevented this earth from sinking to the horrors of Pandemonium.

And thus it was, from the longing to escape from the scenes he loathed into a purer atmosphere, that the care of little Barney had become Ronald's solace, as offering a vent for his pent-up yearnings, — a duty which would associate him with those who were as his better angels, pointing him the way to Heaven. When he found that Bertha and Rachel Lester were interested in the sick child, his work became ennobled: when he could act with them, or for them, in any plan which they might have for Barney's gratification, it was as though he had been raised above his natural sphere, and higher, purer pleasures and hopes were being placed before him; and in this spirit he had begun, and for a time carried on, his visits to the child. But a still deeper blessing, though yet an earthly one, was in time granted him. Love he must, in some form, either in remembrance, or reality, or hope. Whilst he lived alone with his coarse-minded father he had loved the memory of his mother, and it was long before he could persuade himself that any other affection could be vouchsafed him. But the possibility dawned upon him as a star rising upon the darkness of night, whilst he watched by the sick bed of Barney Wood. His father might be harsh and repelling; Bertha might be too far above him for everyday sympathy; Ella and Rachel had interests quite removed from his; but there was one face which always brightened when he drew near; one little voice which never failed to entreat in longing accents for his return; one eye which had learnt to know when

he was sorrowful, to look lovingly and anxiously for his smile ; and the pent-up fountain of Ronald's heart was touched by the loving hand of a child's sympathy, and the affection which had hitherto exhausted itself in regret, or been dried up by the scorching furnace of sin, gushed forth pure and free to revive the drooping spirit of the boy, and be in turn refreshed and strengthened itself.

It was now very nearly Christmas, and Greystone Gorge, inviting though it might seem in its wild loneliness beneath the beauty of a summer sky, looked mournfully dreary under the dark atmosphere of a December afternoon. There was not even the excitement of frost and snow ; the sky was a cold, hard grey, and though the sun tried to break through it at intervals, it had but little power ; the thin coating of turf had become brown ; the fern leaves were dry and withered ; the straggling bushes seemed only fit to burn ; all was faded, and the cottage itself had a mournful, neglected appearance. Barney had long ceased to enjoy being laid upon a matress out of doors, though he was generally drawn every day over the few paces of level ground in his little carriage. Bertha and Rachel had provided him with a thick wrapping-shawl, and Ronald had brought him a sailor's coat to put over him, so that he could be kept tolerably warm ; but since the winter had set in he had taken up a position on a small couch by the wide open hearth, and when he did go out, could bear the fatigue only for a few minutes. He was left very much to himself. An old woman who lived in a cottage lower down the Gorge was hired to take daily

care of Mark's household, but it was very little attention which the suffering child obtained from her. She dressed him roughly, then laid him on his couch, and proceeded to her household work; scolding Barney if he interrupted her, and now and then reproaching him with having so many friends that he wanted for nothing.

A grown-up person understands such a trial, and suffers from it; a child happily scarcely does, and Barney was quite contented when he was left with his picture book, and his scissors and paper, whether Mother Brewer, as the old woman was called, attended to him or not. He would occupy himself for hours together with them, whilst his brothers and sisters were at school; and when they returned, though it was fretting to be disturbed, there was excitement and interest in hearing all they had done; and they were not at all rough with him, and his father was especially tender; altogether Barney was not an unhappy child, and his little wizen face, though thin and sharp from illness, could brighten up with a smile which often became a hearty laugh, when Ronald told droll stories or the children amused him with their games.

He was looking out for Ronald this afternoon, fancying it a long time since he had seen him; and he had persuaded the old woman to move his couch to the opposite side of the hearth, and to leave the door partly open, that he might hear the first sound of footsteps. So he sat half upright, cutting pieces of paper into strange figures which he called men and women, and making a game of them for his own

amusement, all the time fully on the alert for what might be approaching.

“Such a litter! there’s no end to the work,” grumbled Mother Brewer, as she picked up the shreds of paper which, in a sudden move, Barney had scattered upon the floor. “Why can’t you keep quiet, child, eh?”

“He’s not coming yet,” was Barney’s reply,—giving vent to his own thoughts, without noticing the angry tones to which he was so well accustomed. He laid down his scissors, and listened again.

“Well! and what’s the use of an imp like you fussing? He’ll come if he can, and if he can’t he can’t. I won’t have you lie there with the door open much longer.”

Barney strained his neck to try and look round the door.

The old woman gave him a tap on the shoulder, sufficient to startle, not to frighten him. “Lie quiet, can’t you? Don’t you know the doctor says you must.”

“’Tis Captain John, and father, and grandfather, ’tishn’t Ronald,” said Barney. His face changed its expression; he would have cried if he had not been ashamed.

“What sharp ears the child has! I don’t hear any one.” The old woman went to the door. “Oh! yes, there they be; we must move you, my master;” and she drew the child’s couch back to the wall, placing him in a position where, even if the door were open, he could see nothing. “No crying; don’t let’s have any fuss; father will beat you, if you cry. The

threat was disregarded, for Barney had never experienced a beating; but he was very quiet, and self-controlled, and shrank up into a corner of his little couch, and turned his face away, as though he longed to escape notice.

The three men came into the room together; Captain Vivian first, Goff following him with the air of an equal. Mark Wood lingered behind; and when he did enter, went up at once to his child's couch, and patted his head.

"We don't want you, mother," was Goff's uncivil greeting to the old woman, who instantly left the cottage; "and we don't want him neither, eh, Mark?" he pointed to the child.

Mark looked at his boy for a moment. "No fear for him; here Barney, child, cut the Captain out a wolf; and he tossed him a scrap of paper. 'Tis a fuss to move him; it gives him pain, and besides we've no time to lose."

"No, that's for certain; your young fellow will be upon us before long, Captain; so now to work."

They withdrew to a distant corner, and carried on the conversation in an under tone. Goff began: "You're in for it Mark, remember."

Mark gave rather a sullen assent.

"And in for a good fifty pounds," said Captain Vivian, jocosely. "Why Mark, my man, you'll be off to America upon it."

Mark replied as gravely as before: "I should like to understand the work, though, better, Captain. I see no good in a man's undertaking a job till he sees where it will lead him to."

“Folly!” interrupted Goff. “Haven’t I told you ’twill lead nowhere? The young gentleman’s up to a frolic, and we are going to help him to it, that’s all. But we’ll have none of this nonsense. Do you mean to keep your word, that’s the question?”

Mark hesitated.

“It’s my own relation, my own flesh and blood, as you may say,” observed Captain Vivian, more gently. “I’m not likely to go in any way against one of my own kin. He and I are the best friends possible. It’s only a boy’s lark.”

“And the fifty pounds has nothing to do with it,” continued Goff, observing Mark’s perplexed countenance; “that’s for the other work, you know. Land your cargo safe, and then come and hold out your hand for the money. The boy’s affair has nothing to do with that.”

“And it’s not against the young gentleman’s will?”

“Not a whit, not a whit, man. And if the parson’s up in arms, why we know how to laugh at him.”

The allusion was an unfortunate one. Mark Wood might neglect Mr. Lester’s advice, but he respected him extremely. “I’ve no fancy to go against the parson,” he replied. “He’s been a kind friend to me and mine; and if I’ve sometimes gone contrary to him, more shame to me.”

“Of course, of course. But the boy’s not going to be a parson; so where’s the use of keeping him tied up as they do. Besides, Mark, my man”—and Captain Vivian, resting his hands upon his two knees, bent forward and fixed upon Mark a gaze of

stern penetration and defiance — “once ours, always ours. Who is it the Preventives would give their right hand to catch? and who may we give up to them in a moment, eh?”

Mark’s countenance changed. The threat implied would, he knew, be executed without remorse if the occasion offered. Once suspected by his comrades, he would on the first opportunity be left to the vigilance of the coast-guard, even if no deeper revenge were taken.

“It’s not I that am wishing to draw back, Captain,” he said, in a more yielding tone. “I’ve gone far enough with you, as you know, — too far, it may be,” he added, in a lower voice; “but no matter for that. Sink or swim together is a needs be, when men have done what we have in company. But I’ve no will to drag others in, specially a youngster who is only just beginning to know his right hand from his left.”

“Trust him for that!” exclaimed Goff, bursting into a loud laugh. “He’s as cunning a bird as any in England. But put aside all that rubbish, Mark, and tell us plainly, once for all — will or nill? that’s the question. Down on the beach with a quick, firm oar, to-night at half-past seven, or” — his voice sank ominously — “wandering like a skulking wretch, afraid to meet his bold comrades? Come, man, I thought better of you.”

“And his life is safe, you are sure?” said Mark.

“Life! safe! Why man, you are enough to drive a saint frantic, let alone Richard Goff. I tell you it’s a question of fun. He’ll be taken out safe and

brought back safe; and then, won't we turn round and have a laugh at the parson?"

"'Twill be the third night I shall have been away from him," said Mark, pointing with one finger to his child.

"Oh! he! nonsense! the old woman will take care of him, and thankful. He's not in your way."

"And we are to be away, how long?"

"How can I tell? It's according to what time you'll want. Just take your work, man, as it's given you, and don't trouble about any thing else. You're not in command yet; when you are, you'll know more about it."

Captain Vivian rose and went to the door. "I don't see my boy, yet," he said; "but he'll surely be here soon. We must have no more trifling."

"There's no disobeying you, Captain," replied Mark, surlily.

"To be sure not," said Goff, in a cajoling tone. "What would you be without the Captain, I should like to know?"

"Very different from what I am," muttered Mark to himself; and then he added, more loudly, "I must understand what's to be done clearly. To-night at half past seven?"

"Aye, down on the beach, in the West Cove, by the Point," replied Goff.

"And the vessel waiting outside," added Captain Vivian.

"Then, when we and the young one come down," continued Goff, "we shall put him on board; and you are to haul off to the bark. When you are there,

your business will be done as to orders, and you'll have nothing to think of but your own old concerns."

"And he is to go with us, then, across seas?"

"Yes, just for the sail. He'll be back with you."

"And we to show him all our sport? That seems folly enough," said Mark. "Why, he'll turn sharp upon us when he gets back."

"Never you trouble your head with that matter," said Goff. "We are not going to let him see an inch beyond his nose if we don't choose; and one way you may make special use of him,—if the sharks are after you, put him first, and see if good doesn't come of it."

Mark gave a start of horror. "Put him first! into danger? — why Goff, you are a scoundrel."

"Thanks for your good opinion," said Goff, carelessly; "I'm not more a scoundrel than my neighbours, only I speak out and they keep in. But I'm not saying the boy's to be put in danger,—only put first. Let the sharks know who he is, and there's feeling enough for the old General to keep them from doing him harm. And if they catch him, 'tis but an hour or two's rough handling for him. He's not such a tender chicken for that to hurt him. Come, trust me, Mark," he continued, seeing his companion's changing and undecided expression. "You've never got into mischief yet by trusting me."

"Pshaw! what signifies urging?" exclaimed Captain Vivian impatiently. "If he won't do it, there are a dozen others who will. And we shall know where to look for our friends for the future."

"And we shall have the boy with us, at all hazards,"

continued Goff. "We are not going to be balked of our plans by a downhearted fool, who hasn't a spark of fun in him."

The observation seemed to strike Mark in a new light. "You are bent upon it, then?" he said.

"Aye, to be sure. Who ever knew Richard Goff take a plan into his head, and give it up?" And Goff laughed loudly and harshly.

Mark considered.

"A loss of fifty pounds," muttered Captain Vivian.

Mark glanced at his child, who was sitting up on his couch, his large black eyes sparkling with eagerness as he fixed them upon his father. Probably he feared to attract notice to the boy, for the look was but momentary; and then he said, more boldly, "Fifty pounds paid down?"

"Sterling gold, if you will," said Goff.

"Fifty pounds, which will go a pretty long way towards paying the old General the rent of the cottage and the land," said Captain Vivian.

"And which if you don't have, you must needs go forth to wander where you can," pursued Goff.

A second quick glance at the child:—perhaps imagination pictured the little fellow's grief in having to give up the only home he had ever known,—perhaps there were images of bygone days and past happiness rising up before Mark Wood. It would be a terrible trial to leave the cottage in the Gorge; but so it must be, unless the rent of the house and the land could be paid before another month was over. His faltering resolution was betrayed by the question, again repeated,— "You are sure the boy's life is safe?" to

which Goff replied by shaking his hand violently, and exclaiming, "As safe as yours or mine, man! and what would you want more?" He laughed again, so did Captain Vivian. Mark Wood only replied sullenly, — "Then the matter's settled, and we'll say no more."

He took up his hat, intending to leave the cottage. Goff followed him to the door, looked out, and dragged him back. "Hist! I say; not a word to the youngster; he's coming. Captain, its time for us to be off. Where's your back outlet, Mark?" He tried a little door near Barney's couch. Mark went up slowly and opened it.

"Not a word, remember," said Captain Vivian, in a low, hurried voice, — he slipped half-a-crown into Mark's hand; — "I am glad we caught you at home; but remember, not a word."

They passed through the little door, whilst Mark sat down on a chair by the deal table, and, resting his elbows upon it, buried his face in his hands.

CHAP. XXXVII.

“ARE they gone, father?” Barney’s voice broke suddenly upon Mark Wood’s meditations.

“Aye, I suppose so. What do you want, child?”

“Grandfather speaks out so, and Captain John’s wicked; I wish they wouldn’t come here.”

“That’s a bad boy, to say so. We’ll have Mother Brewer back;” and Mark stood up.

“Ronald’s coming; I don’t want Mother Brewer,” said Barney.

“Ronald won’t come; nobody won’t come, if you talk like a bad boy. There, go to your cutting and clipping again.” Mark tossed him a piece of paper from a quantity which Rachel had provided for his amusement.

Barney scarcely noticed the gift; but as his father still stood moodily by the window, he continued, “Mother Brewer says Captain John makes folks wicked.”

“Idiot! what does she know?” Mark turned angrily upon his little boy; and the child, frightened at the expression of his eyes, began to cry. The father’s heart softened. “There, leave off; don’t fuss, Barney, boy; don’t whimper; take to your cutting, and we won’t have Mother Brewer back. And here’s Ronald; you’ll be glad to see Ronald.”

He placed the child more comfortably on his couch, gave an uneasy glance round the room, wishing to be certain that no traces of his recent visitors were left, and went to the door just as Ronald came up.

“Good-day to you, Mark; how’s Barney?” Ronald’s open face, and manly, good-humoured voice, were a great contrast to Mark’s clouded brow, and sullen tone of half welcome.

“The boy’s nigh the same, thank you, Master Ronald. You’ll be going in, I suppose?” and Mark moved aside, to let Ronald pass.

“There’s no one in, is there?” asked Ronald, stopping. “I thought I saw some one moving about in the back yard.”

“Mother Brewer’s been here, but she’s gone home for a bit,” was the evasive answer.

“I thought Goff might have been here, or my father; they were before me some way on the hills. But I suppose they turned off to the Point.”

“I suppose so. Will you please to walk in? The child will be glad enough to see you.” Then recollecting himself, and remembering that Barney would be sure to mention the visit he had just had, he added,—“The Captain and Goff were here for a bit; but they’re off now; I don’t know where.”

Ronald had early been taught the watchfulness engendered by guilt and suspicion; even these few words of Mark’s, showing an unwillingness to mention Captain Vivian’s visit, gave him the clue to something not satisfactory. He would have asked some questions, but Mark was evidently unwilling to stay and talk. He muttered a few words about

business and waste of time, and again begging Ronald to go in, for Barney would be mighty glad see him, he walked away with a lounging, idling step.

Ronald went up to Barney's couch, and the child threw his arms round him, and kissed him, but without speaking.

"That's enough! Why Barney, my man, I shall be stifled!" Ronald laughed, and tried to disengage himself, but the child still clung to him.

"I like you to come. I don't like Captain John; and Mother Brewer says he's wicked; but father won't let me say it." He stopped suddenly, catching the expression of Ronald's face:—"Is it naughty in me to say it?"

"Captain John is my father, Barney," said Ronald.

"He ain't a bit like you; and father is like me," continued Barney.

"All fathers and sons arn't alike, Barney; but what made you think of Captain John?"

"'Cause he's been here ever so long, and grand-father, and father; they've been talking."

"What, this morning? A long time?"

"Ever since Mother Brewer moved me up in the corner. Captain John doesn't speak out, like grand-father."

"And they let you stay here?"

"Father said 'twas a trouble to move, and they hadn't time; and he gave me this"—Barney held up his paper—"to cut out a wolf for Captain John; but I didn't cut—I listened!" His brilliant eyes were fixed with keen intelligence upon Ronald.

“But, Barney, they didn’t mean you to listen ; that was wrong.”

“They talked out, sometimes,” said Barney, quickly. “Grandfather made most noise.”

“And they went away just before I came, I suppose?” said Ronald.

“Just a bit before. Father was cross then.”

“Barney, Barney, what does Mr. Lester tell you?”

“I ain’t to say father’s cross. I won’t say it, but he is.”

“But you do say it; and that’s naughty. You must try to be dutiful. I’ve told you so often.”

“Captain John’s cross to you sometimes, ain’t he?” said Barney.

A perplexing question! Ronald replied to it, indirectly, “He tells me when I don’t please him.”

“Then, ain’t you dutiful?”

Ronald’s countenance changed, and Barney’s quick eye noticed it. “When father’s cross I don’t like him,” he said; “that’s naughty of me; but you always like Captain John, don’t you?”

“We mustn’t talk about liking our parents; we must like them anyhow,” said Ronald.

Barney seemed perplexed; but presently he went on:—“Mr. Lester says that God likes good people; must we like wicked ones?”

Ronald made no answer; his head was turned aside, and a large tear was rolling down his cheek.

Barney caught his hand, and forced him to look at him. “Why do you cry? I didn’t mean to make you cry!” he said. “Is it ’cause Captain John’s wicked?”

“Because I am wicked myself, too, Barney;” and Ronald brushed his hand across his eyes, and tried to smile.

“Miss Campbell and Miss Rachel think you very good,” said Barney. “They say if I go to Heaven, that you’ll go, too. I asked them one day; for I shouldn’t like to go alone.”

“Miss Campbell and Miss Rachel may wish me to go to Heaven, but they can’t tell that I shall,” said Ronald; “and we must be very good, indeed, you know, Barney, to go there.”

“That’s why I shan’t go, then,” said Barney, quickly; “’cause I don’t like father when he’s cross.”

“But you know you must say your prayers, and ask God to forgive you, Barney, when you’ve been so naughty; and then, perhaps, He will let you go to Heaven still.”

“Is that what you do?” asked the child, with a strangely inquisitive expression in his worn face.

Ronald hesitated; but Barney was determined upon obtaining his answer. “Do you say prayers when you are naughty? Is it ‘Our Father,’ you say?” He would not let Ronald move, but kept his hand closely clasped between his own small, long fingers.

“Yes, sometimes. People don’t always say the same prayer, you know, Barney,” was Ronald’s answer.

“I like ‘Our Father’ best,” continued the child, “because Miss Campbell says it’s God’s prayer; but I don’t say it when I am naughty. I say, ‘Pray, God, forgive me, and make me a good boy, for Jesus Christ’s sake.’ Is that what you say?”

“Something like it, sometimes;” — Ronald still hesitated.

“I’m glad you say it. I like you to say the same things as me. But then you arn’t naughty when Captain John’s cross. What makes you naughty ever?”

“A great, great many things, I am afraid,” said Ronald.

“But tell me what; I want to know.”

“I couldn’t tell you; you wouldn’t understand.”

“Shouldn’t I?” A look of thought came over his face. “When I’m a man, then, I shall understand; but I don’t want to be a man.”

“Don’t you, Barney? why not?”

“Men are wicked,” said Barney. “Wicked’s worse than naughty.”

“Oh! Barney, Barney! who taught you any thing about wickedness?”

“Father taught me some, and Mother Brewer. She hopes I shan’t be like father, nor grandfather, nor Captain John, nor any of them; and so I say in my prayers, — ‘Please God take me out of this wicked world.’ Do you say that too?”

Something seemed to rise up in Ronald’s throat, to choke his utterance.

Barney kept his eyes fixed upon him intently, and, obtaining no answer, said, half reproachfully, — “You wouldn’t like to go.”

“Shouldn’t I? Oh, Barney, if I were but sure!” The words escaped apparently without intention; for, the moment afterwards, Ronald added, — “Never mind me though; you are sure.”

“ I ain’t,” said the child, quickly. “ Miss Campbell tells me to say, ‘ through Jesus Christ,’ to make sure ; and you can say it too.”

Ronald half smiled. “ Yes, I can say it, certainly ; but saying’s not every thing. You’ll know that, fast enough, Barney, when you’re a man.”

“ I shan’t never be a man ; but I know about that now,” was the grave answer.

“ What do you know ?” Ronald sat down by the couch, and leant over the child fondly.

“ I know He got us the place, and made it all ready for us ; and if we say our prayers properly, and try not to cry and be cross, He’ll give it us.”

“ But if we don’t say our prayers properly, and are cross, what then, Barney ?” and the sorrowful tone struck upon the child’s ear, though he could not comprehend its meaning.

“ Somebody else will take our place,” he said, with a scrutinising look, which seemed to inquire whether Ronald could possibly be alluding to himself.

“ And we shall be punished,” said Ronald.

“ You won’t be,” said Barney, “ because you say your prayers when you are naughty.”

“ Ah ! but Barney, that isn’t every thing. If we don’t do right, we deserve to be punished.”

“ Parson Lester says He was punished for us,” said Barney, quickly. Ronald made no answer, and Barney continued : — “ Parson Lester told me that one day after I’d had a dream ; and I thought God was going to put me down into a deep dark place, ’cause I’d called father cross. He said that if I’d say my prayers, and try to be a better boy, God wouldn’t

punish me, because Jesus Christ had been punished for me. It was very kind of Him to be punished, wasn't it?"

"Yes, very kind; but still, if we don't try to be good, we shall be punished," said Ronald.

Barney looked up rather impatiently:—"But I don't like to think about being punished,—I like to think about being good; and Jesus Christ loves me, and so He won't punish me."

"Oh, yes, indeed, Barney, He will; if you are naughty."

"But He won't if I try not to be naughty. Mother Brewer was scolding me last time Miss Campbell was here, and she said she wasn't to scold me, 'cause I was trying; and so, if I try, God won't scold me. And I do try," he added, looking earnestly at Ronald's face; "I didn't cry once all day yesterday."

"There's a good little man; I'm glad to hear that;" and Ronald stroked the child's head.

"And He loves me then, don't you think so? Miss Campbell says He does, and Miss Rachel said He loved me better than you do. Does He?"

"Ah! Barney, yes, I know He must; but I love you very much."

"And I love you with all my heart;" and Barney raised himself suddenly, and tried to reach Ronald's head, that he might bend it down to kiss him. "I love you now, and I mean to love you when I get to Heaven; and then by-and-by you'll come there. I'm sure there's the place ready, with your name upon it."

Ronald looked away, and busied himself with re-

placing the child's cushions. When he spoke again, it was to make some trifling observation.

Barney was perplexed ; presently he said, in a low, almost frightened voice, as if conscious that he was venturing upon forbidden ground, "I should like to know whose name's there, besides. Do you think Captain John's is?"

Ronald could bear it no longer ; and, careless of the child's presence, he leant his forehead upon the arm of the couch, and groaned.

"Don't take on ; what's the matter ? Please don't take on," said Barney. "I dare say he'll be there," he added, seizing upon the point the most likely to have caused such distress. "Don't take on," he continued, trying to draw away Ronald's hand, and force him to raise his head. But Ronald did not look up for many moments ; his countenance was so haggard, when he did, that the poor child gazed on him with alarmed amazement.

"If Captain John says his prayers he'll have his place there, too," he said, timidly. "And we'll ask God to teach him his prayers, shall we ? I'll ask it every day, if you will."

Ronald bent down and kissed him with a woman's tenderness. "Barney, will you ? I shall like that."

"Shall you ? I like to do what you like. I can say it when I pray God to bless father, and grandfather, and brothers, and sisters, and Ronald." He paused, then added, — "I never forget that ; one day I asked if you might have the place next mine, so I dare say you will ; and 'twill be so happy."

It was a strange, thrilling feeling which those few

words created in Ronald's breast; he could scarcely call it hope, and yet it was hope: even when he felt that they were but the expression of a child's affection, touching upon subjects immeasurably beyond its comprehension. They were so vivid, so undoubting; the faith was scarcely to be called faith, it was reality; and it is this which our dim-seeing, earthly minds require to give them strength.

A smile reassured Barney, and made him feel that the cloud had passed away; and suddenly, with a child's quick forgetfulness of the serious questions which had been occupying his mind, he insisted upon Ronald's sitting down by him to show him how to cut out some curious figures which he had promised him. All his thoughts were turned into that channel, except at intervals, when any sudden noise made him look up timidly. He was evidently afraid of the usual visitors at the cottage, and at last he begged Ronald to go to the back yard and see if Captain John was there. "I shouldn't like him to be out there," he said; "perhaps he'd stay there all night."

"Oh, Barney, how silly! People don't stay out of doors all night; and if he did, he wouldn't do you any harm."

"People do stay out all night," replied Barney, quickly. "Father's going to be out to-night."

"To-night? What for? What do you mean?"

"Mother Brewer's coming here; grandfather said she'd do for me."

"I don't understand. Do for you?"

"Father's going away," continued Barney; "but he doesn't like it."

Ronald's interest was excited; but he said, without expressing the least surprise, "Was that what father, and grandfather, and Captain John, were talking about?"

"They made a great hushing and whispering up in the corner; I couldn't hear."

"But you heard something?" Ronald's voice was tremulously eager.

"I heard grandfather say Mother Brewer should come when father was gone in the boat. They didn't stand here; they were out by the door."

"The boat? oh!" And Ronald's interest sank, for he thought it was only some smuggling scheme which had been planned.

"Is it any thing wicked, do you think?" continued Barney; "'cause father doesn't want to go."

"I can't tell. Was that all you heard?"

The question was too direct. The boy had been trained to silence, though he often forgot his lesson; and now, recollecting himself, he said, "I mustn't tell any more; father won't let me; he'll beat me, he says, if I do ever tell what I hear."

"But, Barney, if I want to hear, — if it is of great consequence that I should, — you would tell me then?" Ronald's conscience reproached him, as the words were uttered. He corrected himself quickly, and added, "But never mind, never mind. When is Mother Brewer coming back?"

"I don't know. You arn't going?"

"Perhaps so; I think I must. Which way did Captain John go, Barney?"

“Out at the back yard. D’ye think he’s there now?” The old, frightened look returned.

“No, no; lie quiet. There’s nobody.”

“There is somebody; I hear him. Oh! Ronald won’t you look?”

“Barney, that’s naughty, I tell you there’s no one; only—” he stepped to the window;—“yes, can’t you see? I’ll move you;—now, look out at the door, across the Gorge; who’s that coming? Some one you’ll be glad to see, I’ll answer for it.”

The child stretched his neck forward, so as to catch a glimpse of the pathway up the Gorge. His eyes sparkled with delight, “Miss Campbell and Miss Rachel!” he exclaimed, “and the young gentleman, too, and the little ladies!”

“What, Clement?” Ronald hurried to the door. The party were drawing near. Ronald returned again to the child:—“You are sure, Barney, that grandfather and Captain John are gone.”

“They went out at the back, you can see.” Barney paid but little attention to the question; his interest was given to the new arrivals.

Ronald quietly opened the back door, and went into the scullery, and from thence into what was called the yard. It was shut in by the hills, which rose immediately behind the cottage, but there was no regular enclosure. Nothing was to be seen from it, but the precipitous banks which formed the head of the Gorge; bare, and desolate, and scattered over with large, loose stones and rocks. Upon one of these rocks Ronald mounted, and gazed around with the quick sight of one who, from infancy, had been

tutored to vigilance. At some distance was the track which led from the secluded Gorge to the open common between Cleve and Encombe, and from thence to the headland of Dark Head Point. Along this path one figure was to be seen ; it looked like Mark Wood ; but no one else was near, except the party just arrived from Encombe. He heard their voices ; the children and Clement were running races,—Bertha trying to keep them quiet, lest they should come too suddenly upon Barney. They seemed all in high spirits. Rachel was with them ; and her laugh especially, with its sweet ringing tone, came distinctly to the ear. Ronald watched, and listened ; and the feeling, painfully morbid, which so often checked him in his happiest moments, riveted him to the spot. What was he, that he should attempt to mingle with those so much beyond him ;—whose innocence and ignorance of sin he could never hope to attain ? He left the rock, and walked a few paces away from the house, to a smooth bit of turf, almost the only level spot near. His inclination was to go away, without being seen, but there were other restraining feelings, one especially, which he could not account for ; a dread,—a thought that he must remain near as a guard, though why, or for what purpose, he could not reasonably tell. He waited till they had entered the cottage, and then sat himself down on the further side of the rock, upon which he had been standing, till he could quiet the tumult of his feelings, and summon courage to meet them.

There was an intense stillness immediately around him. The sea-gull, the only living creature to be

seen, was winging his flight towards the ocean noiselessly, and not even the tinkling of a sheep-bell broke upon the wintry quietness. And yet Ronald listened; and as he listened he heard the closing of a wicket-gate, which gave admission to the small plot of ground near the cottage, cultivated as a garden. It startled him, and his impulse was to stand up and look round; but he did not stand, he only moved so as to see without being seen. Two men passed from the back yard into the garden, one was Captain Vivian, the other was Goff. They stood and spoke together for a few moments; then Captain Vivian went down the Gorge; and Goff — Ronald did not see what became of him, but when he looked again he was gone.

There was no shyness nor morbid fancifulness in Ronald's mind now; his thoughts were distracted from himself; they were set upon suspicion — very incoherent, but still enough to quicken his perceptions. Yet his only definite idea was, that Goff was lingering about in the hope of meeting Clement, and that, by watching, he could be a safeguard. This idea made him go at once to the cottage, walk round it, ascend the hills a few steps to look about, and then go through the yard and the scullery, glancing quickly and carefully around. He could not see any one; but the door of the scullery (which Ronald remembered to have shut behind him, fearing the draught for Barney) was open, — an indication that some one had gone out since himself. As far as he could tell, no one was there when he went through, yet he could not feel quite sure. The scullery was large, for so small a cottage, crowded with things which did not all belong to

Mark Wood, — several casks, and boxes, and an old mahogany chest, which were Goff's property ; and it was dark, lighted only by one little window, and that dimmed by the hill rising behind the cottage ; a person might easily have been overlooked, standing in the farthest corner. Perhaps that might have been the case before ; but there was no one there now, Ronald made quite sure of that ; and then he fastened the door in the inside, and entered the outer apartment.

Bertha had taken Barney in her lap, and was showing him a book of prints, which she had brought with her, whilst Rachel, kneeling by her side, watched with eager interest the expression of the child's face. Clement was playing with Mark Wood's dog, in front of the cottage ; and Louisa and Fanny were running up and down the banks.

Barney recognised Ronald's footstep the moment he entered, and called out to him, without any introduction — "Here's a beauty, Ronald ! isn't he ? And ain't she kind ?" he added, lowering his voice to an aside, as Ronald came close to him.

"Very pretty indeed, Barney. What a house for you to live in !" And Ronald drew his attention to the brilliant white edifice, with yellow and green trees standing behind it, which formed the frontispiece. He was glad of any thing to cover his shyness, for he was always particularly shy with Bertha Campbell ; she knew so much more of him than any one else did.

"Barney told me you were gone, Ronald," said Bertha, giving him her hand with a cordial smile, which said more than any words.

“And I said I was sure you were not; that you had only run away to hide yourself,” said Rachel, laughing. “Do you know, Barney, that Ronald very often tries to hide himself when he sees us, only he is so tall that his head will peep out, wherever he is.”

“I don’t like hiding,” said Barney, quickly and bluntly. “Father and Captain John hide. Ronald went to see after them.”

“They are not here, are they?” Bertha inquired of Ronald.

“I think not; I believe not.” But Ronald’s manner was a little hesitating.

Bertha looked uncomfortable. “I felt sure,” she said, “that we should meet no one here, unless it might be you, Ronald; you told me your father was always on the shore at this time of the day.”

“My father is not here, now,” replied Ronald. “I saw him go down the Gorge. Goff, too, I think, is gone; but he has been here.”

Bertha turned pale. “He won’t be coming back, you think?”

“I hope not; I don’t know what he should come for;” but as he said this, Ronald glanced uneasily at the door.

“Look! Here’s a cow, and two sheep, and a big dog like father’s Rover! Look! you must look.” Barney drew Ronald towards him impatiently.

But Ronald did not look, his thoughts were wandering.

“Show them to me, Barney,” said Rachel, whose quick tact made her see that both Bertha and Ronald were full of anxious thoughts. She came close to the

child, and turned over the leaves of the book for him, and began, in her simple way, to describe the pictures.

“Can’t you come out with me for a few minutes?” said Bertha, addressing Ronald.

He followed her to the door without speaking; then, as he caught sight of Clement, he went up to him and shook him heartily by the hand.

“I did not expect to see you here, old fellow,” said Clement, good humouredly. “I thought you were buried in your books. What a rage you have for them now.”

“I came over to see the child. I come most days when I can. Have you seen any one go by here just these last few minutes?”

“Not a soul. Whom did you expect?”

“I fancied Goff was here, he was just now; but I suppose he’s gone,” said Ronald carelessly. “When does Mr. Lester come back, Clement?”

“I don’t know. Aunt Bertha is the person to ask.”

“He doesn’t say when he will come; he may be here any day,” replied Bertha.

“But not to-day?” said Ronald, quickly.

“No, not to-day, certainly. A friend of his is ill; that detains him.”

Ronald raised his eyes to hers, and read in her face that Mr. Lester’s absence was a source of anxiety. There was an awkward pause. Clement began to play with the dog again, and ran off scrambling up the bank, and trying to make the animal follow.

Ronald called him back. “Halloa! Clement, won’t you do something for me?”

Clement could scarcely refuse, but he came back unwillingly.

“I’ve got a word to say to Miss Campbell, but I meant, if I could, just to have drawn Barney once or twice up and down the green. He mustn’t stay out more than a few minutes. Would you mind taking him out for me? Rachel will wrap him up.”

“It won’t do to trust her,” said Bertha; “let me go;” but Ronald prevented her. “Please not; I am sure he will let Rachel put his coat on. Be off, Clement;” and Clement, naturally good-natured, and flattered at being trusted, went into the cottage.

Bertha followed him with her eyes, so did Ronald, till he was out of hearing; then he turned anxiously to Bertha, and said:—“I wanted him gone; isn’t Mr. Lester coming back soon?”

“Soon, but not directly; at least, I can’t be sure, Ronald; why do you ask?”

“I can scarcely tell. I wish he was here, or that Clement was away.”

“You must have a reason; why don’t you tell it me at once?” said Bertha, with slight impatience in her tone.

“Because it is not a reason—only suspicion—and it may all be wrong.”

“But tell me—tell me—this is mere tormenting;” and Bertha looked and spoke great annoyance.

Ronald was pained, and his answer was cold:—“The last thing I should desire is to torment any one, still less Miss Campbell. My father and Goff keep their plans secret, but that they have them I don’t doubt. It can scarcely have been for nothing

that Goff brought Clement to the Grange, the other night."

"To the Grange?—what?—where?"

"Surely you know. He was there three nights ago." Then seeing Bertha's countenance change, he went on:—"There is nothing to alarm you; he only came with Goff, on his way back from the Hall, and rested there for about a quarter of an hour. Clement may not have thought it worth while to mention it," he continued, in a tone of exculpation; "he does not know what I do."

"Unjustifiable!—disgraceful!" began Bertha; and she looked towards the cottage-door, as though she would at once have gone to reproach him.

Ronald interrupted her:—"I will ask, for my own sake, that the matter may pass now. He will feel that I have betrayed him, and he won't understand my motive."

"So mean!—so deceitful!" exclaimed Bertha; and, with a sigh, she added,—“These are the things which make one feel that one is working for nothing.”

Ronald made no reply to the remark. His attention was still directed to the cottage.

Bertha considered a little. "I shall write to Mr. Lester, and tell him that he must return without delay."

"Yes, that will be the best plan—much the best;" and Ronald spoke eagerly and earnestly. Till he comes——" he paused, not wishing to exaggerate her fears—"I will do my utmost to keep Clement from the Grange; so, doubtless, will you."

"Yes of course. Would he were to be trusted! But, Ronald, I may trust you for him."

“I would entreat you to keep him with you,” replied Ronald, gravely. “It may be quite out of my power to help him.”

Bertha’s fears were again awakened ; and she said, “You have a motive for speaking in this way, and you are afraid to tell it me.”

“No, indeed ; I could not fear to tell you any thing—every thing. I have a motive—Clement’s safety.”

Bertha looked round her anxiously, and said, “We had better go home at once.”

“Yes. Not that there is cause for fear now ; so far, at least, as I know. I dread more Clement’s renewed visits to the Grange ;” and Ronald sighed deeply.

Bertha saw the expression of his face, and read his thoughts. “Ronald,” she said, “I need scarcely tell you how I thank you.”

He stopped her. “Miss Campbell, that can never be required.”

Bertha, without heeding him, continued :—“You will believe, I trust, that, even if forced hereafter, from circumstances, to estrange ourselves apparently, neither Mr. Lester, Edward Vivian, nor myself, can ever really forget your noble conduct. We feel that Clement is safe with you as with us.”

“I have a debt to pay,” he replied, gloomily. “It is not yet discharged.”

“The debt is not yours,” replied Bertha. “I was unwise to lay the obligation upon you. Mr. Lester has made me see this. Let me entreat you to forget it.”

“Forget it!” he exclaimed. “Forget that the name

I bear can never be uttered without a thought of reproach—that even now I may be reaping the fruits of dishonour! Miss Campbell, tell me rather to forget my own existence; to bury it, as full often I fain would, in the grave!”

“Ronald, this is wild and wrong. Your position is the ordering of God’s Providence; and the grave, when we seek it for ourselves, is not the death of dishonour, but its birth for eternity.”

“Yes, I know it, I know it. But, Miss Campbell, there are feelings to which you, a woman,—nurtured in innocence, your name untainted,—must be a stranger. You have never known that goading feeling for which even Heaven’s Mercy has no cure—disgrace!” The word, as it escaped his lips, was almost inaudible.

“I may not have known it, Ronald, but I can imagine it, and feel for it.”

“Impossible! I also once thought I knew it by imagination,” and he laughed bitterly. Then, in a half scornful, half sorrowful tone, he went on, speaking rapidly:—“There is a tale—my father read it to me once, when I was a child—he little thought then that I should find its likeness in my own history;—it tells of the living man bound to the dead, and left to perish in the lonely wilderness. Miss Campbell,”—and his eyes flashed for a moment, and became dim again with struggling anguish,—“that is disgrace—the dead sin that clings to the memory—inseparable!”

“But, Ronald, it is not your own disgrace; and, as yet, it is not disgrace in the eyes of the world.”

He smiled grimly. "Who can separate the father and the son? When the living man sank beside his dead burden in the wilderness, there were none to see; but did he, therefore, feel its horror the less? The Eye of Heaven is upon him who is disgraced; and were it possible for that Eye to be hidden from creation — were he alone, the one, solitary, living being, in the vast universe — there would be the eye of his own heart, from which there can be no escape! Miss Campbell, do not try to comfort me; tell me only how I may serve you."

"I will not try to comfort you, Ronald," replied Bertha; "in your present mood you could not receive comfort. You have brooded over your position till its evils have assumed a giant magnitude. Years, and experience, and God's blessing upon your sincerity, will prove to you that even when disgrace is irretrievable in the eye of man, it is never so in the sight of God; that before Him we are all dishonoured, the best even as the worst; and that repentance, which has restored the one, can also give the place of honour to the other. It is but human pride which looks upon any disgrace as indelible before God, for it is only that which rejects the Atonement that can make 'the sins which are as scarlet to be even as white as wool.'"

"It may be so; the time may come when I may feel it."

"It will come; I do not doubt it," replied Bertha. "And, in the meanwhile, Ronald, there may be means ——" She stopped, afraid of being carried away beyond the limits of prudence.

Ronald waited respectfully, but, finding that the sentence was not concluded, he said, "What means? For what purpose? There are none which Miss Campbell could suggest that I should not be too glad to use."

Still Bertha's face expressed doubtfulness; but, after a few seconds, she replied, "Means of averting public disgrace, I was going to speak of; but I ought not to name them to you, except that they may be your father's safety."

"I am willing to hear them," he replied.

"It is but repeating what I have said before," continued Bertha. "You will, I am sure, understand that, if any influence of yours could induce your father to own the wrong we have every reason to believe he has done, Mr. Vivian is the last person who would press a charge against him. If it were only for your sake, he would overlook everything; he owes his life to you, and the obligation can never be forgotten. All that we desire is that any false impression should be removed from General Vivian's mind. Perhaps there would be less difficulty in bringing him to this point, if he knew that we may soon be in a position to compel what now we only request."

A cloud of haughty feelings darkened Ronald's countenance, and he turned away. But the feeling was momentary. He came back again, and said, with stern self-control, "It is not an easy task to require a son to bring his father to confession."

Bertha looked distressed. "I fear I have done wrong," she said; "yet I have spoken in the hope of averting greater evil. One thing is most certain,

that your father's danger will be as nothing if he himself will come forward and acknowledge the truth."

"And if he does not?"

"It may be, I must not say it is, imminent. Oh, Ronald!"—and Bertha's voice suddenly changed into earnestness most unlike her usual placidity,—“think, I beseech you, of what I say; think of what you may avoid, — for your own sake, for your mother's sake.” He stood by with a face pale as death, but made no answer. She read the working of his mind:—“Forgive me, forgive me, that I have so grieved you. At first, when I told you all, I scarcely knew what I was doing; I longed only to have a friend on our side. I thought you might do more for us than any other person.”

“I will do more. As there is truth in Heaven, I promise it; but not against my father's safety.”

“Not against it, but for it. Time presses, and events are hastening on. A few weeks, a few days even, may see Edward Vivian openly arrayed against your father; they may place a barrier, Ronald, between us for ever. I am not speaking from fear or fancy, indeed I am not. If you ever believed my word, count upon it now, if possible.”

He wrung her hand in silence, and, as with one consent, they both moved towards the cottage.

CHAP. XXXVIII.

THE twilight shades were gathering round the woods of Cleve; the heavy trunks and leafless branches were becoming one dark, indistinct mass, above which lurid clouds were gathering together in the wintry sky, piled into fantastic shapes of mountains gilded at their crests, and traversed by lines of fiery light; and islands floating in seas of liquid gold, appearing for a moment, and then passing into other forms, and sinking swiftly, yet almost imperceptibly, into darkness. And in the library at Cleve, in a heavy arm-chair, covered with crimson leather, drawn close to the wide hearth, sat General Vivian; on a low stool at his feet was Ella; whilst, resting on the sofa opposite, lay Mildred. The room was dark; yet the dancing light from the blazing logs flickered along the walls, and seemed to mingle mysteriously with the departing rays afar in the western sky, which glimmered faintly through the narrow diamond panes of a window, deeply embayed.

It was an hour for kindly thoughts,—the expression of those inward feelings which never come forth so freely as when twilight or darkness veil the changes of the countenance, and we speak, as it were, to ourselves, not willing to recognise the shadowy, ghostly forms of the friends who are scarcely visible in the dimness.

A change had come over General Vivian's home since Ella had become its inhabitant. Months before, he would have spent that sobering hour in reveries—severe, if not gloomy; and Mildred, fearing to intrude upon him unsummoned, would have used the lingering moments of day in thoughts of quiet meditation,—blessed indeed, and most soothing, yet solitary, as regarded aught of communion on earth.

Now they were together, talking little, thinking much,—and probably very differently,—yet with a certain feeling of common interest, of added cheerfulness and hope. Ella was scarcely to be thanked for this: at first, indeed, her presence had been a restraint; it had fretted the General's conscience, though he would not acknowledge it; and he had seized upon all the weak points in her character, which were many, and dwelt upon, and exaggerated them. Yet still she was an interest to him. The lonely, stern mind, which had, for years, lived to itself, brooding over its own plans, and building up a tower of self-confidence, was now, in a degree, diverted into another channel. Even when he found fault with her, he liked to watch her; and when he did watch her, his strong sense of justice assisted him against his prejudices. Ella was improved, under Mildred's guidance; she had made resolutions, few and simple, but they had been kept; and this had given her confidence; and, of her own accord, she had then ventured to do more. The General perceived this. Ella was more punctual at breakfast and dinner, and that pleased him; she read steadily, and when he questioned her, the answers brought out her talent; and, as Mildred had hoped,

he began to feel proud of her. When it was proposed that she should go home, he felt that he should miss her. Not that he would acknowledge it to himself; the excuse which he made was, that she was a comfort to Mildred. Yet once it had flashed across his mind whether it would be possible to keep her with them always,—he did not say to adopt her,—that would have brought up the old question of justice; but without minutely considering the arrangement, he fancied that she might just as well live at one place as the other. And Ella, on her part, was not without some degree of romantic reverence for her grandfather. His very faults inspired the feeling. She could see into, and through, most minds; she never seemed to reach beyond the surface of his. It was a painful fascination at first, and had sometimes rendered her perverse. She amused herself by appearing wayward, and expressing strange, wild opinions before him, and watching their effect upon him. It was a kind of play, in which she was the heroine; but she was baffled by him. His notice was too slight to be exciting; often she could not tell whether he even heard what she was saying; and when, with an absurd self-consciousness, she became more extravagant, and more wilful, she was put down by a sharp rebuke, which yet was not felt to be irritating; for it was the reproof of a strong, powerful character, given without petulance; and there is more pleasure than pain in this kind of subjection, especially to those whose strength is mental, rather than moral. She became in consequence more gentle and submissive; and the very difficulty of discovering whether

her grandfather was pleased, or the contrary, gave an interest to her efforts. There was a little quiet excitement always going on at the Hall, which afforded a stimulus to her indolence, and so satisfied her conscience, and put her in better humour; and at length, as the consciousness dawned upon her that he was beginning to like her, came the pleasure of power,—power over one whom every one else dreaded; and Ella loved power dearly, in spite of her indolence. She felt that she could amuse her grandfather,—that he was interested in her conversation; she had that sense of being appreciated, which especially tends to bring out talent, and this made her exert herself the more. All these motives were, of course, very mixed,—they could not, in any way, be depended upon for the steady improvement of character; but Ella's faults were not those which the labour of days or weeks, or even of months, could cure; they were insidious evils,—pride, wilfulness, indolence,—requiring patience and self-examination, and constant watchfulness; and Ella was only just beginning to understand her defects,—how then could she be expected, all at once, properly to apply the remedies? Mildred was often obliged to say this to herself, for Ella was continually disappointing her,—and even her good deeds were not seldom alloyed by some taint of the old leaven. Most especially it was difficult to make her see the effect which her faults had upon others. Indolence had rendered her selfish, and selfishness prevented her from putting herself in the position of those with whom she lived, and understanding their feelings. Besides, without being conceited, she had the consciousness of talent

which is inseparable from its possession; and knowing that she could make herself very agreeable, it was not easy to believe that she was often just the contrary.

Then, too, her offences, though very tiresome and irritating, were not the result of wilful malice, if the expression may be used. She was always wishing to be much better than she was, and fancied that every one must see this, and understand it; and so, when she had done wrong, the fault was blotted from her own memory quickly, because there was no depth of bad intention in it, and she forgot that without a confession or an apology, it could not be forgotten by those who witnessed it. She would be most provokingly disregarding of Mildred's wishes, and would even speak to her proudly and disrespectfully, and then go about her usual occupation as if nothing had happened, and return to Mildred in perfect good humour, without, perhaps, the thought once crossing her mind that her aunt had reason to be annoyed.

Every day made Mildred see more plainly how much Bertha must have had to bear with in a character so unlike her own.

Yet there was an improvement, an obvious one, and Mildred was by nature patient and hopeful, and Ella was very young, and had, it was to be trusted, a long life before her for the task of self-discipline, and so it was not difficult to give her encouragement; and this made Ella's life much happier than it was at home, and rendered even the silence of the old Hall more cheerful to her than the mirth of the Lodge.

She was cheerful now as she sat with her grand-

father and aunt in the twilight, ruminating upon her own fancies, and from time to time venturing to give them forth; and Mildred had a pleasure in listening to her, even though occasionally she saw cause to check her.

“Grandpapa, do you and Aunt Mildred never go to London?” was the question, after a silence rather longer than usual.

“What should we do in London, child? We can neither of us move about.”

“But it would be the world; Encombe and Cleve are not the world.”

“They form our world,” observed Mildred, “and that satisfies us.”

“But they are not *the* world,—the real world. It is like being in a dream living here.”

“And you don’t like the dream, Ella?” The General did not mind asking the question; he knew he was quite safe as to the answer.

“Oh, yes, grandpapa, I do. Sometimes I think it is a dream I should like never to waken from.”

The General patted her head, and Ella drew nearer to him. “But, grandpapa, don’t you know what I mean? There is a difference between dreaming and living.”

“A wide difference,” said Mildred, laughing, “but I should have thought Ella, that dreaminess was quite in your way; you don’t like active exertion.”

“But I like to see it in others,” said Ella, “and that is why I should like to live in London.”

“You would soon grow weary of it,” remarked the General, shortly.

“Did you, grandpapa?” The question was an experiment. Ella often tried to make him talk of his young days. Occasionally he would, but he was very uncertain.

“Yes, too soon for my own good, or for others’ pleasure,” was the reply. “They would have had me live in London, Mildred,” he added, less gloomily. “What would you have said to that?”

“Not part with Cleve, grandpapa!” exclaimed Ella, interrupting the answer.

“Aye, child, part with it, every acre; sell it, divide it, scatter it to the winds; the property which had come down from generation to generation for the last four hundred years.”

It was strange the impulse which made the General revert to such a subject; perhaps his conscience was never thoroughly satisfied as to the course he had taken in life, and so he tried to talk himself into the conviction that it had been in all respects a right one. He went on: “We should have led a different life, Mildred, if we had lived in London. I might have been a gay cavalier; a courtier; who knows? But it was a weary life, the little that I saw of it.”

“But you never went much into society, did you, sir?” asked Mildred, encouraging the conversation, since he seemed to enter into it.

“I had not the means,” was the quick reply. “Ella,” and the General turned to his granddaughter, and spoke with sudden harshness, “remember that; whatever you do, never live beyond your means.”

“I have no means, grandpapa.” She said it sim-

ply, without any purpose, but it had one unconsciously.

The General moved his hand, which had been resting on her shoulder, and relapsed into silence.

Ella was not aware what she had done. It was too common an occurrence for a conversation to break off abruptly, to cause any surprise. She looked into the fire, and made imaginary hills, and rocks, and roads, out of the red coals, and was quite happy.

Not so Mildred. The spirit of the old times was creeping over her; she waited anxiously for the General's next words.

"We had better have candles, Mildred." Very little there was in the words, but very much in the tone.

"Oh, please not, yet, grandpapa," exclaimed Ella. "I was just in the midst of such a charming story."

"A fireside story, I suppose," said Mildred, relieved by Ella's having given a turn to her thoughts.

"Yes, a fascinating one. I wish I could make you see it. There is the pass over the mountains, and the travellers have just got to the top, and now they are going down the other side, into such a lovely country. Do, grandpapa, let us have the firelight a little longer."

"Waste of time, child;" but the General delayed to ring the bell.

"Is it? But why were such fancies given if they are not to be indulged."

"They are very well for children," replied the General.

"Then, grandpapa, please, I am a child."

"There is no doubt of that," said Mildred, laugh-

ing. "You are much worse than either Louisa or Fanny, I suspect, in your love of stories."

"They won't help you on in the world, Ella," observed the General. "Trust my word for that."

"But, grandpapa, have you ever tried? Did you like stories when you were young?"

"Real stories; not such as you fancy."

"Stories of things which have really happened," said Ella, in a musing tone. "Perhaps every one's life is a story, if one could but read it."

"Yes, Ella,"—General Vivian spoke with mournful earnestness,—"a story only understood when it is too late to rectify its blunders; so I would have you consider it carefully before it begins."

"Mine is begun, grandpapa."

"Not begun so that it can't be altered, though," observed Mildred, with something of tremulousness in her voice.

"No person's life is such that it can't be altered," said Ella.

"Not exactly, but there is a very different feeling about it as one grows older. It becomes, as it were, fixed; circumstances and relations are formed; it seems as if one could better foresee the future. / Now your future, Ella, may be ——"

"Any thing," exclaimed Ella, quickly. "I like to think of it sometimes, it is so exciting; only frightening, too."

The General had been sitting in a musing posture, apparently only half hearing the last words of the conversation. He broke in upon it, however, here. "Why should it be frightening, Ella?"

She hesitated, and the General repeated his question more peremptorily.

"Because, — I don't quite, exactly know, why, grandpapa; but we have led a wandering life, and strange things have happened; and ——" a pause and a glance at Mildred. "You know we can't always live with grandmamma."

Mildred raised herself, and stretched out her hand to ring the bell.

"Not yet, Mildred; we won't have candles yet. You can't live with your grandmamma, you say, Ella. What change do you expect?"

"I don't know, grandpapa. Aunt Mildred," and Ella looked round for help; "do you think we shall always live with grandmamma?"

"Perhaps not, my love; we had better leave the future."

"Yes, much better,—a great deal better." The General spoke very gravely. "Ella, it won't do to make dreams of the future."

"Aunt Bertha tells me enough to frighten me about it," replied Ella; "she says, when she is angry, that I may have to work for my bread."

"Oh, Ella!" the words escaped Mildred involuntarily, and a sudden movement made it seem that, but for her helplessness, she would have sprung from the sofa to stop Ella.

"Let her go on, Mildred; what else does your Aunt Bertha say to you, Ella?"

"Nothing,—not much else." Ella felt she was getting into a difficulty.

"She thinks you will have to work for your bread, does she? Are you prepared for that?"

"I don't know."

"Should you like it?"

"Grandpapa! No. Does any one like it?"

"Persons with energy don't mind it," said Mildred, rather sternly.

"Stop, Mildred, don't interrupt her. Should you like it, Ella?"

"No, grandpapa, I don't think I should." Ella looked up at him, perplexed by the question.

He stirred the fire and spoke at the same time, turning his head away from her. The accent was low and trembling; it came from a weary heart: "Would you live here, Ella, with me, then; and I would provide for you?"

A strange, unbroken silence. Mildred could hear the beating of her own heart, running its rapid race with the ticking of the quaint old clock in the corner of the room. The General pushed back his chair as though he would rise. Ella felt the movement, and laid her hand on his knee. "Grandpapa, — Aunt Mildred, — what must I say?"

"What you feel, dear Ella," said Mildred.

"The truth," said the General.

"Grandpapa, I should like it, but — oh! Aunt Mildred, help me;" and Ella rose and went to Mildred's sofa, and knelt down by her.

"What is it, Ella? Speak, dear child, without fear," she whispered.

"I can't. I could tell you alone."

Mildred glanced at her father. A clear flame from

the fire cast a bright, yet ominous, light upon his features; it seemed to alter them,—to make them look more worn; the haggard face was set as in a framework of darkness.

“Go to him, and tell him what you mean,” whispered Mildred to Ella. And Ella looked round at her grandfather, and shrank from the cold severity of the fixed gaze directed to the fire. “Ella, he will be angry if you don’t,” repeated Mildred.

Ella went up to him. “Dear grandpapa, it is very, very kind of you;” she kissed his forehead. “I should like to stay here; I am very happy here; only” — her hesitation was almost suffocating — “would it be right if papa were kept away?”

A groan was heard, but the tall figure sat erect, cold, immoveable; it might have been a lifeless statue rather than a living being into whose ear the words were spoken.

“Ella, my crutches! Help me, will you?” said Mildred. Ella gave them to her. “Now, leave us; I will send for you when you may come back.” And Mildred moved slowly across the room, and seated herself in a chair which Ella placed for her by the General’s side.

The door was closed, and Ella gone. The General heard the sound, and slowly turned his head. “Mildred!”—She laid her hand in his; her eyes were raised to his face; she saw tears streaming down his cheeks.—“My child! clinging to me through all!” he murmured.

“To whom else should I cling, my dear, dear father?”

“Whom else, indeed. We are alone in this world; even Ella cannot sacrifice herself to live with us.” He said it bitterly.

“Hers is a strange nature,” replied Mildred. “I should not have expected such thought.”

“It has been her teaching,” said the General.

“Or the teaching of nature. Would you like her as well if she did not feel it?”

“She has no cause for it,” he replied, abruptly.

“If it were my case, you would expect me to feel it.”

“I have not brought disgrace upon you, Mildred.” The General averted his head, and withdrew his hand.

Mildred’s heart seemed to rise up in her throat as she said, “Ella does not see her father’s disgrace, dear sir. Neither, perhaps, do others.”

They were bold words. Month after month, and year after year, since the first outburst of anger, had the father and daughter dwelt beneath the same roof with that one mutual sorrow, yet never approaching it, except by distant allusions.

The General replied calmly, his tone and manner so unshaken that it struck Mildred as something fearful. “The world does think him disgraced, Mildred; though his relations may not.”

“He did very wrong, sir; his marriage was most unfortunate; indeed, we see it all.”

“Only it is not disgrace,” he replied, with cold sarcasm.

“Not his marriage, certainly.”

“And not his gambling? — his friendship with that rascal, John Vivian? Mildred, Mildred!” — he

put his face close to hers and lowered his voice — “I know, if you do not; he dishonoured my name once; and I would have it blotted for ever from the earth rather than trust him to dishonour it again.”

Still Mildred’s voice was gentle, though earnest. “I am aware I don’t understand it all, sir.”

“No, you don’t understand; no one does, nor can. And I have borne all; — Mr. Lester’s strictures, your sorrow, my friends’ judgments — all — all I have endured rather than tell” — his voice changed suddenly, it became fiercely eager — “but would you know it, Mildred? Shall I show you what your brother was? what he could do?” He stood up, pushed aside his chair, and turned to the ebony escrutoire which was close to it. Mildred gave him a taper; he lighted it, and, with an unsteady hand, tried the lock. The taper went out; he relighted it, opened the cabinet, drew out some small drawers, searched in them, then put his hand to his head, trying to recollect, and searched again.

“Your private papers are in the upper box, sir,” Mildred ventured to say.

“Yes, yes.” He was impatient at the suggestion, but he took down the box. The light of the taper was faint, and he could scarcely see by it, but Mildred did not venture to propose ringing for a lamp.

The General, however, did so himself, and till it was brought, sat silent in the arm-chair.

“Put the little table near me, Greaves, and that box upon it.” He watched the butler’s movements with an irritable eye. Then, when the man was gone, he began to look through the papers.

The search was perplexing, though Mildred thought at first that it was only painful. He muttered to himself, "It was here, — in this packet. I can't have mislaid it," and again he searched through the packet, whilst his features assumed a most distressed look of doubt, and effort at recollection.

Mildred said at length: "If you would not trouble yourself, my dear father, but tell me, if you don't mind. I would rather hear than see."

He took no notice, but went on as before. Mildred watched him anxiously, for she fancied he did not quite know what he was doing.

"I would look, dear sir," she said, "if you would tell me what to find."

"I can't; it was here; somebody — Mildred, who has touched my box?" he addressed her angrily.

"No one, sir. No one could; it is always in your room."

A sudden dawning of recollection crossed the General's mind. He muttered Mr. Lester's name.

"You were looking at papers the other day, sir, with Mr. Lester," said Mildred.

His face became more troubled, but he put aside the box, and leant back in his chair.

"Mr. Lester may be able to assist you in finding it," said Mildred, "but you could tell me if you would what it was; it makes me very anxious." And the tone certainly gave full effect to her words.

He raised his head, and gazed upon her as one in a dream; his voice, too, had something in it of a wavering, faltering tone.

"I don't know why I should tell it; he is gone

from us, Mildred,—well that he is ; he would have squandered all.”

“He was extravagant, but he might have learnt wisdom,” observed Mildred timidly.

“Extravagant! yes.” The General tried to raise the lid of the box, which he had unintentionally closed. Mildred stopped him.

“Do you wish to show me a list of his bills, dear sir? I think I know them.”

“Bills, did you say, Mildred? Little cared he for bills when he could give cheques, and promise away what was to be his after my death. His! his!” he repeated, and his scornful laugh struck an icy chill to Mildred’s heart. “But it was reckoning a little too much without his host, don’t you think so, Mildred? A man can’t build upon his own, when life stands in the way of possession. My life! his father’s! But that was easily set aside. His wish was father to his thoughts, eh, Mildred? He didn’t think I should have been such an old man. But I have outwitted him—stopped him, when he least expected it; he has no inheritance now to play ducks and drake with.”

“I don’t understand you, dear sir,” said Mildred, indescribably alarmed at his manner.

“No, how should you? What do women know of such matters? I would have shown it you, but I can’t.” He tried again to open the box, but his hand trembled so violently that Mildred took the key from him, yet without placing it in the lock.

“Do you mean,” she said, “that he drew upon you for more money, sir, than he had a right to?”

“Drew upon me, Mildred? Promised it, I say ;

—pledged it; would have given my lands to the Jews,—to worse than Jews,—to that scoundrel, John Vivian. Pshaw, why can't I show you the proof?"

"It is impossible! Edward could never have done it," exclaimed Mildred, in a voice of agony.

The General shrank from the sound of the name, but almost immediately recovered himself. "I will find it, and you shall see it; not now,—to-morrow, by daylight I can find it. I have it here," he added, with a tone of sad triumph; "in his own handwriting; the promise given to John Vivian, Esq., that after my death,—after my death, remember,—the sum of five thousand pounds should be paid to redeem his debts of honour; his own writing, his own signature."

"There must have been a mistake; it could not be; it is impossible," exclaimed Mildred again.

"Doubtless! a mistake! impossible! John Vivian must have been deluded; the evidence of my own eyes must have deceived me; the evidence of one who saw the promise signed must have been at fault. Why, Mildred, child, did I not say the same myself? Say it, almost believed it, when the actual proof was before my eyes. And did not John Vivian stand by, with his bold defiance, and urge upon me to call up the man,—the poor wretch who had been the plotter of that miserable marriage,—the confidant of both; he who had seen the actual words written? Talk not to me of mistake, Mildred; there are deeds in which there can be no mistake."

"Edward had no opportunity given him of explanation," said Mildred.

"What! child, when I wrote to him, and my letter

was unanswered. He had no explanation to give. He had been befooled himself. He gave his worthless bond to John Vivian, little thinking that it would be brought to me; and when it was brought, he was sunk in my eyes, and in his own, for ever."

"But you paid the money, and so owned the justice of the claim, sir," said Mildred.

"Justice to myself, to my own honour, for the last time. My son's debts were a claim upon the name which he bore, and I acknowledged them even to the utmost farthing. But from that hour he ceased to be my son; and now let him go and pray the winds to hear him; they will listen as soon as I."

Mildred's heart failed her. A few minutes before, she had fancied that the time might be near for telling him that Edward was in England. Now, she only said, "He has severely suffered for his offences."

No reply. She went on further, her words being uttered with extreme precision:—"He is very penitent, whatever he may have done."

"So are we all, when punishment falls upon us," was the stern answer.

"Years have given him experience," she continued.

"So have they given to me," replied the General.

"And you would not trust him, then?" She spoke in a tone of doubtful timidity.

"Trust him? Yes, I would trust every man whose hands are chained, and whose feet are fettered. He is doing well, you say. Let him thank God for it, as I do."

“But if he has suffered, and is penitent, my dear father, would there be no hope for him ever?”

“Mildred, you speak ignorantly. It may seem that you are addressing a cold, harsh old man,—nay, don’t stop me;—I am not blind to what is passing around me, though often it is thought I am. The world thinks me such, so do you, so does Mr. Lester. Cold, strict prejudice, that is my character;—a true one, in a certain sense. Do you know who made me so? My father—my grandfather—his father before him; for the sins of my ancestors have been my conscious inheritance from my boyhood. Listen, Mildred. As a little child I was generous, open-hearted, unsuspecting. I flung my money away to the right hand and to the left. I gave when I was asked; I promised when I could not give. I was a true Vivian. That was my disposition; it continued mine till I was twelve years old. Then came a change; how or when it dawned upon me I cannot say; but there is an atmosphere in every home, which we breathe insensibly; the atmosphere of mine was care—carking, harassing, lowering care. It crept into my heart, and dulled my spirits; it made me fearful and doubtful towards those with whom I ought to have been open as the day. It pressed upon me heavily and more heavily; and it pressed upon others also. I saw it in the countenances of the old servants; I heard it in the murmurs of my father’s tenants; I read it written on the broken-down fences, and the walls falling to decay. We were a family on the verge of ruin; and in striving to keep ourselves from degradation, we brought hardship and exaction upon those

of whom we ought to have been the protectors. The name of Vivian, once honoured, was now execrated. I was but a boy, Mildred, when first I realised to myself the true position in which I stood; and it may seem strange that I should have allowed the fact to weigh with me; it may appear more natural that I should have cast it away with a boy's thoughtlessness. But it did influence me; it tinged my visions for the future; it shaped my plans; and at last it gave me a definite object for which to work. I stood, one day, at the head of my class at school, and the murmur went on around me, among the masters, that I was capable of a great work; that whatever I set my heart upon I must attain. They spoke, I knew, of worldly distinctions; but I read their words differently. Distinction was mine by right of inheritance, for the Vivians, even before they came to Cleve, had been the lords and leaders of others for centuries; but it would never be mine in possession, unless I retrieved the follies of the last generation. My heart swelled within me, and in secret I vowed that, from that hour, I would toil without complaining, and suffer without repining, until once more I could face the world, a Vivian of the olden times, with my honour untainted, free to devote myself to the people amongst whom I lived, and regarded by them, not as an oppressive landlord, exacting to the last penny, but as a master and a father, living only for their happiness. There is no need now, Mildred, to tell you how my vow was accomplished. A mission was given me, and I fulfilled it; let those who know me best say how. But

do you think that, after the labour of those many years,—the self-denial of a life,—I am now to be persuaded to throw myself and my people into hands which will, which must, undo my work. Is the man who could act as—as your brother acted—fit to be entrusted with the happiness of others? Is his boy, is Clement, likely to be such a successor as I should desire for the accomplishment of the work for which I have lived? Put aside inclination, Mildred, put aside prejudice, and answer me fairly: my honour and the happiness of my people are at stake;—can I be justified in sacrificing them to the weak instinct of affection?”

“My dear, dear father, don’t ask me. I cannot put aside prejudice,—if it be prejudice; it is impossible.” Her arm was flung around his neck, and she rested her head on his shoulder. “Let him be as he is—disinherited—yet let him return.”

“Madness! Mildred, madness!” He almost shook her from him, as he sat more upright, and every limb seemed to become stiff with the effort at self-restraint.

“My father, not madness—but mercy;” and she clung to him so that he could not release himself.

“Leave me, Mildred; let me go.” With a great effort he withdrew himself from her, and rose, and stood with his back to the fire-place, looking fixedly at her; but Mildred saw him not, for her head was buried upon the arm of the chair, and her sobs came fast and bitterly.

He spoke again, seeking to excuse himself:—“Your fancy is a woman’s weakness, Mildred. Were it good for me, it would be misery for him.”

Something in the tone struck her as relenting, and she raised her head, and dashed away the tears from her eyes. "Misery! oh, never! it is his one last hope."

General Vivian crossed his arms on his breast and made no answer.

Mildred's voice was heard again, clear, and slow:—"Mercy for him father, even as you would find mercy yourself."

"It cannot be. To live with me as my son, and not my heir—Mildred, you don't know what you are asking."

"Perhaps not to live with you, but to see you, if but for once only, to hear that he is forgiven. It is for you and me, and the sight of his home he yearns."

"Lost through his own fault." And silence fell again upon the darkened chamber; and the flickering gleam of the dying fire showed the General standing in his place, immoveable, and Mildred's slight figure rigid as if carved in stone.

Yet once more she spoke, and the tone was that hollow whisper which speaks the agony of a broken heart:—"Father, pardon him, and see him, he is now in England."

A strange gurgling, convulsive sound struck upon the ear! General Vivian staggered to a chair, and sank back senseless.

CHAP. XXXIX.

“BERTHA, how late you are; and where have you left Clement?” Mrs. Campbell, having enjoyed her afternoon’s siesta, and then worked whilst there was light remaining, had begun to feel impatient for the return of the party, who had been wandering over the hills.

“I can’t say, exactly,” was Bertha’s reply. “He was with us just as we came off the hills; but he will be here presently, I dare say.”

“He staid behind with me first,” said Louisa; “and then he clambered up the bank to get a stone, which I thought was a fossil. He was so long finding it, that I didn’t like to wait for him.”

“If he doesn’t come in time we can’t have tea kept for him,” observed Mrs. Campbell. “I have no notion of every one’s being put out for a boy of his age.”

“It is not tea-time yet,” said Bertha. “Louisa and Fanny, you have your history to read for to-morrow; you had better fetch it.”

“Poor little dears! after their long walk! I am sure they can’t possibly read history. You must let them off, Bertha. Take off your things, my dears, and then come down and warm yourselves, and tell me all you have been doing.”

“There is not much to tell,” observed Bertha, in an uncomfortable tone, which was the only safety-valve she allowed herself, when interfered with; “we only went to Barney Wood’s Cottage.”

“But you took him his coat, didn’t you? You always take him something.”

“The coat wasn’t quite finished,” said Bertha. “Rachel had been busy writing to her father.”

“Oh, Mr. Lester is not coming home, then. Betsy told me that, and she heard it from Anne.”

“They are both great gossips,” observed Bertha, quickly. “I don’t think any thing is settled as to Mr. Lester’s return. Rachel only wrote in case he might not come.”

Her manner fretted Mrs. Campbell, and, being inclined to complain, she returned to Clement:—
“Where do you say you left him, Bertha? You ought not to have left him; there are a great many bad people about; no one knows what mischief he may be led into.”

“A boy of his age must learn to keep himself out of mischief,” said Bertha, rather proudly. But though she spoke with seeming unconcern, she looked out of the window to see if he was coming.

“I am glad he has given up being with Ronald,” observed Mrs. Campbell, “now that we know what a mess Captain Vivian is likely to get into.”

“Is there any thing new about Captain Vivian? any thing particular?” asked Bertha, with quick interest.

“Betsy tells me that the Preventive officers are not going to be outwitted any longer; and they vow

they will search the Grange from the garret to the cellar," said Mrs. Campbell.

"And very much they will find there!" said Bertha. "If they mean to do any thing, they should not let Betsy know it."

"She can't help knowing it; it's talked of every where," continued Mrs. Campbell; "and what's more, Betsy has a brother somehow mixed up with them."

"Poor girl! that is trouble enough," said Bertha, thoughtfully.

"She asked me to let her go out and see him," continued Mrs. Campbell; "and I said she might, if she was in in time; so she went about four o'clock."

Bertha was too much occupied with painful thoughts of her own, to take any particular notice of this piece of information; and Mrs. Campbell continued:—

"Betsy thinks there's something going on now. Mark Wood had come for her brother, and had taken him out with him, so that she couldn't see him. She takes it to heart a good deal. I think, Bertha, you might just as well see her presently, and find out what she is afraid of."

"Perhaps the less we know about such matters the better," replied Bertha, looking again out of the window. "If Mark Wood has been in Encombe," she added, with an air of consideration, "it must have been after we saw him going down the Gorge."

"He and Stephen Hale had left Betsy's cottage just ten minutes before she got there," continued Mrs.

Campbell, evidently pleased at having something to talk about, which seemed to draw Bertha's attention. "Betsy was told they went off towards the Point; it is the place they all go to. There is a cave, or some such place, I believe, where they meet."

"Not a very convenient rendezvous," replied Bertha; "it must be so difficult to reach. But it must be all talk about any thing particular going on now; if there were, they would never let it out in that way."

"I don't know, I am sure," replied Mrs. Campbell; "at any rate, it is high time that something should be done. The village is getting into a sad state. Betsy says her brother is quite a different person since he mixed himself up with the smuggling. I can't think, for my part, what Mr. Lester can be doing, to let things go on as they do. He calls himself a good parish priest; I know his parish is the worst in the county."

Any suggestion to Mr. Lester's disadvantage was felt as a personal incivility by Bertha, and she immediately began saying, that no one could be better aware than Mr. Lester himself of the bad state of his people, or do more to remedy the evil; but whilst things were carried with such a high hand by those who ought to set a good example, there was little hope of amendment. Whilst Captain Vivian remained at Encombe, it must and would be a disreputable place.

"Well, then, he will be taken from it soon, we may hope," replied Mrs. Campbell, rather triumphantly. "Betsy has a cousin in the Preventive service, so she hears both sides; and she tells me

that they vow they will have the smugglers in their power before the new year begins; that is what makes her so afraid for her brother."

"They must be quick about it, then," said Bertha. "It wants but a very short time to the new year."

"We shall see something before it comes," said Mrs. Campbell, oracularly; and Bertha echoed the words in her own mind, though with a different meaning. Mrs. Campbell relapsing into silence, she took the opportunity of leaving the room, and going, not up stairs to take off her things, but into the garden and the lane, to look for Clement.

Bertha went a little way down the lane without meeting any one; then, hearing some persons approaching, talking noisily, she turned into a by-path, by a cottage garden, and stood there till they had passed. The voices, which she recognised, made her very glad that she had avoided the meeting. Mark Wood, Stephen Hale, and Goff, were together, apparently disputing. Bertha watched them till they were nearly out of sight, — if sight that could be called which was only the indistinct perception of twilight, — and, even when they were gone, felt unwilling to move from her hiding-place, lest they should return. Not that she had any cause to fear, — it was unlikely that they would notice, still less speak to her; but the rough voices, and the very distant possibility of being brought in contact with them, made her shrink into herself. She waited what seemed a long time, — though, in fact, it was only a few minutes, — then, scolding herself for folly, ventured back into the lane, and had gone some little distance, when

once more, as she had dreaded, the voices were heard, and very near. The men had taken a short cut, and were returning. Bertha did not like to run back, that would attract notice; still less did she wish to proceed. For a moment she stood irresolute; but the sound of a footstep behind gave her confidence, especially when, on looking round, she recognised Ronald. His finger was raised to his lips, as a sign for silence, and without noticing her, he turned shortly, strode down the lane at a rapid pace, and entered the path which Bertha had just left.

Bertha was surprised, yet her momentary feeling of fear was over. She felt that a protector was near; and went on boldly, smiling at her own weakness, as the men lowered their voices when she passed, Mark Wood and Stephen Hale even touching their hats.

Five minutes afterwards, as she stood at the Lodge gate, Ronald joined her; his voice was agitated, and he began without apology or explanation. "Clement is with you, Miss Campbell, of course."

"No, not yet! I expect him."

"Not with you? When did you leave him?"

"He left us just as we entered the village; he stayed behind."

"Behind? Alone?"

"Yes; that is Louisa was with him; but she came back to us. What is the matter, Ronald?"

"Nothing. Have you been long returned?"

"Not very; we were all late. For pity's sake, Ronald, tell me what this means?"

"I thought Clement might be with Goff. I knew he was loitering about the cottage, and I watched

after you were gone, but could not see him at first ; I did afterwards. He followed the path you took, and I followed, too, some distance. Then ——”

“ Well ! what then ? ”

“ I met my father ; he sent me back to the cottage on a message ; and I lost sight of you all. Good night, ” — he broke off abruptly ; “ I will look for Clement ; ” and he hurried away.

His course was rapid and intricate. He knew all the by-lanes and short cuts of the village, and every cottage garden was open to him as to a friend ; and so, with almost a direct course, he made his way to the Grange, noticed only by a few stragglers returning late from work, who, recognising his step, greeted him with a laugh and, “ How are ye, Master Ronald ? ” but not troubling themselves as to his wandering movements, and scarcely even making a remark upon his evident haste.

The shrubbery gate of the Grange was wide open, and the large, lonely house was silent and dreary in the glimmering twilight, neither fire nor candle to be seen through the uncurtained windows of the deserted apartments ; and when Ronald entered, his footsteps sent a hollow echo through the long stone passages. He went first to the parlour, which was empty ; but the cloth was laid for dinner, and the shutters were closed. A rough, club stick lay on the table, and a glove was on the floor. Ronald, without any particular thought, picked up the glove and laid it down carelessly, whilst he stood for a few moments thinking whether to remain for his father or return to the Lodge to satisfy his mind about Clement. An

uncomfortable misgiving was still haunting him. Barney's imperfect hints of a mystery returned to him, and with it came the impulse to go at once to the Point and watch whether any thing more than usual was going on there. But the evening was growing darker and darker, and the moon would not be risen for another hour; he could see nothing, even if he were to go; and, in the meantime, if any mischief were afloat it would most probably be something which would bring Clement to the Grange. Just at that moment Ronald's eye fell upon the glove, a rough winter glove—too small, surely, for Captain Vivian's hand. He tried to put it on; it was too small for himself; it must be Clement's, left there probably the previous night he had been there. But no, Ronald recollected now that he had seen Clement wearing it that very day, and had thought at the time that he would try and procure a pair of the same kind for Barney.

He rushed out of the room; but still, habitually cautious, controlled his eager step as he passed through the hall and the back passages, and softened his voice when he encountered the solitary domestic, of whom he inquired whether his father had returned to the Grange within the last hour.

It might or it mightn't be an hour, the woman couldn't say, but the Captain had been in and put off dinner;—and she walked away, sulky from the additional trouble.

“Stop, Madge! can't you! Was my father alone?”

“Who's to say Master Ronald? not I. D'ye think I showed my nose in the parlour?”

“But you may have heard. Was he speaking to any one? Did he seem as if he was alone?”

“Seem? Why he was alone when I saw him. What should you keep me here talking such daft folly for?”—and Madge retired within the precincts of her own domain, and closed the kitchen door violently, as a hint to Ronald, that he was on no account to follow.

Ronald opened the hall door, and went out into the gravel sweep, and listened; and he heard the distant trampling of a horse's hoofs, and the cry of a sick child, in a cottage occupied by one of the farm labourers. But the wailing wind drowned all other sounds, save that which mingled with and deepened it—the hoarse rush of the waves beating against the precipitous cliffs.

For several minutes he stood there, his face turned towards Dark Head Point. A rising mist had now obstructed even the faint gleam of lingering day; but twice Ronald fancied he saw a light gleaming in that direction, though so far off that he knew it must be from a vessel at sea; and then, again, there seemed another moving, and higher up, upon the cliff; but the mist gathered over again, more thickly, and all was obscure.

Some one clapped him on the shoulder, with a heavy hand. “What, Ronald, my lad, watching? what's that for?”

“For you, father; I wondered where you were.”

“No cause for wonder, I should think; I'm out often enough many hours later than this. But, come, let's in to dinner.”

Captain Vivian hurried on ; and when Ronald would have lingered to watch the light on the cliff, he called to him impatiently, saying that they had both waited long enough, and he was ravenous. Yet Ronald did linger, for some seconds, and when his father had entered the house, he stood for several moments on the step of the door with a longing, which he could scarcely resist, to brave Captain Vivian's displeasure, and run back to the Lodge, to gain some tidings of Clement.

“ Ronald, where are you ? Come in, I say. I won't have that wind through the house ; shut the door, and come in.”

And Ronald obeyed mechanically.

They sat down to dinner. Captain Vivian talked more than was his wont. Ronald gave but short answers. He was considering in his own mind, whether it would be wise to mention Clement's name, and ask how his glove had been found there. Nothing in any way, however, led to the subject. Captain Vivian's conversation was confined to discussions upon the superiority of the little smuggling vessel over the regular traders upon the coast, and anecdotes of the wonderfully short voyages she had lately made. Once, Ronald mentioned Barney Wood, and made a remark upon Mr. Lester and Miss Campbell's kindness ; but it was badly received, Captain Vivian turned it off with a sneer, and went on as before, somewhat incoherently and unconnectedly—his words uttered very fast, his tone half jocular, half hasty. Ronald could not think, he could only listen and reply.

A loud peal at the Hall bell! Captain Vivian went himself to answer it; Ronald also followed a few paces behind. A message from the Lodge was brought by Mr. Lester's gardener. "Mrs. Campbell's compliments, and she would be glad to know if Master Clement was at the Grange."

Captain Vivian burst into a loud laugh, and almost shut the door in the man's face. "Master Clement here? What folly will be asked next? My compliments to Mrs. Campbell, and Master Clement doesn't trouble me much with his company. She must look for him elsewhere. What, Ronald!" he grasped his son's shoulder, as Ronald was going to re-open the door; "rushing after? what for? Do you think the tender chicken's lost?"

"He has been here. I know it; I have a proof." Ronald tossed Clement's glove upon the floor.

Captain Vivian kicked it from him; his face was livid either with anger or fear:—"Clement was here. He is gone home, or he ought to be. Now, back to dinner, and no more of this folly."

He led the way to the parlour; Ronald followed moodily. Both sat down to the table, but only Captain Vivian talked. He had apparently repented his hasty show of authority, and tried to bring Ronald round, pressing him to eat, urging him to take wine, joking him about his books; but Ronald still sat with his abstracted gaze, listening for distant sounds, and giving only such short answers as were absolutely necessary. Irritated by his total absence of interest, Captain Vivian began in another strain:—"So Ronald, you mean to show yourself a pleasant companion, to

leave the conversation in my hands; I thank you for it; it is all, of course, I have a right to expect from my only child. Yet I might have thought that so much woman's teaching might have given you a touch of good manners. Bertha Campbell sets up for a lady, but it's little enough of a gentleman that you have shown yourself since she set foot in Encombe. Don't think I am surprised, though; it's the old grudge, malice carried on for a dozen years — cunningly, too, setting my son against me."

Ronald had given his full attention to this last speech, but he could not answer it. Had not Bertha Campbell, though unintentionally, been the means of embittering the feelings which, even before, were but too acutely conscious of his father's faults?

Captain Vivian went on more painfully, because with less of sarcasm:—"I am not what many fathers are, I know that. I'm not the man to set up for a Squire, and make a fuss about my boy, and put him in the way of fine people. It never was my way, and it never will be. I was brought up roughly, myself, and I've led a rough life, and it's too late now to mend it; and what I am my son must be. But I should never have thought that for that reason he was to be made to turn against me, to plot with my enemies."

"Plot with them? Oh! father, how little you know!"

"Aye! plot with them," continued Captain Vivian. "You don't think, do you, that I'm so blind as not to have an eye for what's going on close at my door?"

“I don't know what you refer to, Father,” replied Ronald.

“Probably not! You would be the last person to own, if you did.”

Captain Vivian's manner was proud and coldly determined. It might have been the manner of his early days, never entirely forgotten; and it struck a chill, and something of a feeling of awe, into Ronald's heart. It was as if, after all, there was something better left than that low recklessness, which had of late been his chief characteristic.

Ronald answered more quietly, and even respectfully: “If you are suspicious of me, Father, and will tell me your suspicions, I will try to remove them.”

“What! how?” Captain Vivian started up and went to the door looking out into the hall: “Folly; it's only the old woman's tramp.”

He came back again, and stood with his back to the fire: “Suspicious you were talking of, Ronald: what would you give to hear them?”

“A great deal, Father, if I could make you believe they are unfounded.”

“Well then!”—a pause—a second commencement, and a second pause—at last the words came with thundering emphasis: “Suspicious that I have a traitor in my camp, who would desert me at the last gasp!”

Ronald pushed aside his plate, and rising paced the room in a tumult of excitement.

Captain Vivian went on coldly: “What is the care for this miserable boy, Clement Vivian? What is the devotion to Bertha Campbell, and the obedience to

Mr. Lester?—treachery, treachery from the beginning to the end.”

“Are they your enemies, Father?” Ronald’s voice was husky with agitation, for his promise to Bertha was present to his mind, and even now it seemed he might be called to fulfil it.

“Circumstances made them my enemies,” was the reply; “that’s enough for you to know.”

“Then Clement is your enemy for his father’s sake?”

Captain Vivian answered cautiously: “Such a boy as that my enemy! he is beneath me.”

“Yet”—Ronald hesitated—“through him you might work harm to his father.”

“Who tells you that?” and Captain Vivian turned upon him fiercely.

“My own reason partly,” replied Ronald; and summoning more courage, he added: “I know through Miss Campbell that you have, as you yourself say, cause for mutual enmity.”

“Ha! the family secrets! And pray what may Miss Campbell have thought proper to confide to you?”

“She has given me warnings rather than confidence—warnings, Father, which I would fain give to you.”

“I am obliged to her;” Captain Vivian’s face showed a change of colour. “Threats, I presume; a notice that I shall be taken up for a smuggler, as they call me.”

“They were very vague, indirect threats,” replied Ronald, in an unmoved tone, though his heart beat

painfully; "yet they made me feel that danger might be at hand."

"Danger at hand, and you not tell me of it—ungrateful boy!"

Bitter reproaches followed, which Ronald, leaning against the wall, heard, yet without hearing, for still his thoughts reverted to Clement; and the words fell upon his ear, as they had often done before, almost as sounds without meaning.

Captain Vivian stopped at length, and then in a calmer voice insisted upon knowing every thing which Miss Campbell had dared to say. Ronald was hesitating for a reply, when another and more violent ring at the hall door a second time interrupted the conversation.

This time Captain Vivian did not go out himself, but stood in the open doorway; and both he and Ronald, as by mutual consent, paused to hearken.

It was a man's voice speaking, and angrily. Mrs. Campbell had sent another message: "Master Clement had been seen, with Captain Vivian, going to the Grange. Mrs. Campbell desired to know when he had left it, and what direction he had taken."

Ronald turned upon his Father a look of keen distrust.

Captain Vivian's countenance did not alter. He went directly to the door, and said: "My compliments to Mrs. Campbell. Master Clement was here for two minutes, and I walked with him a little way down Long Lane, but he turned off at the end. Is she uneasy about him?"

"He hasn't been home yet, and it's past eight," said

the man, gruffly. "Mrs. Campbell said she was sure the people at the Grange knew something about him."

"Who is looking for him?" inquired Ronald, anxiously.

"One or two people have been asked; but we have been expecting him in every moment, when we were told that he wasn't here."

"We will go to the cliff," said Ronald, and he took up his hat, and stepped into the porch. To his surprise his Father made no attempt to stop him.

"We thought he might have been with Goff, and some of his men. He's fond of getting about with them," continued the gardener, more cordially; "but Goff's at home, and doesn't know any thing about him."

Captain Vivian came out, and stood with Ronald in the porch: "You may tell Mrs. Campbell, that my son and I will go down to the shore, and make inquiries," he said.

"Yes, tell her we will go in every direction," added Ronald, eagerly; "we will not return till we have had tidings of him. You may trust me, man," he continued, laying his hand on the arm of the gardener, as he lingered with an evident feeling of hesitation.

The light from a little oil lamp in the hall fell upon Ronald's face; it bore an expression which could not be doubted. Captain Vivian's was hidden in the shade of the porch. Ronald repeated again: — "You may trust me," and the words were received

with a hearty "To be sure, Master Ronald; every one trusts you."

The man departed; and Ronald would have set off instantly for Dark Head Point, but a strong hand detained him: "You don't escape me, my lad, in this way. Every word that Bertha Campbell has uttered about my affairs before you stir."

"I have told all," replied Ronald; "and yet,—no, I have not told all. She has said, Father, that whatever wrong there might be between Mr. Vivian and yourself, he would be the last to press it against you, if only you would acknowledge it, and clear him in the General's eyes."

A mocking laugh interrupted him: "A woman's folly! And you believed it? Was that every thing? At your peril deceive me."

Ronald paused,—in the tumult of his mind, he could scarcely tell whether he was at liberty to betray more of what had passed; he added, with hesitation, "She warned me also that it might soon be in their power to enforce what now is only a request."

Not a word escaped in reply, but the dim thread of light from the little lamp showed a face ghastly with conflicting passions; and Captain Vivian, seizing Ronald by the arm, strode forth into the darkness.

CHAP. XL.

MORN rose gorgeously over the sea ; an atmosphere of orange light seeming to penetrate and mingle with the long line of grey clouds, which stood as a wall against the horizon, and here and there breaking through it in a crimson line, until at length the full burst of radiance flooded the eastern sky, and shed its myriads of golden sparkles upon the waters ; not resting upon them with the long and lingering gaze which sunset gives to the world its brilliancy has gladdened, but lightly playing upon the surface of the rippling ocean, and tracing upon it, in a pale yet far-spread glory, the joyous smile of the opening day.

Ronald Vivian wandered alone upon the sandy beach. Behind him were the red cliffs, and the dark headland worn by the fretting of the sea, hollowed into caves, cut into projections, and in parts clothed with scanty lichens ; before him spread the interminable expanse of ocean, without a sail to mark its distance. Ronald's eyes were fixed upon the beach. He would have appeared deep in meditation, for the water plashed gently against the rocks, and rippled closed to his feet, and still he seemed unconscious of the tide ; whilst, with folded arms and a slow and weary step, he walked towards the jutting point

forming the western extremity of Encombe Bay. Occasionally, however, it might have been seen that he was not so abstracted. As the passing breeze brought to his ear what might have been the echo of a school-boy's shout, or the morning greeting of the labourers passing to their work, he would pause for a moment and listen, and then glance quickly round, and perhaps stoop to examine some dark object at his feet — a stone, or a knotted mass of sea-weed : he was looking, and watching, and searching still, but it was not the search of hope.

Three hours of that night had Ronald spent in fruitless, and, in a great degree, irritating inquiries. His father had been with him, allowing him no freedom, stopping every question which might possibly have led to the discovery of Clement's movements, whilst pretending the warmest interest in the result. Ronald had at times been tempted to break from him, and insist upon carrying out his own views in his own way ; but it was difficult to resist a parent's authority, and Captain Vivian had always some plausible reason at hand to silence his remonstrances.

Yet he was kind in his manner, — much kinder than Ronald had supposed possible, when they left the house together, after Ronald had communicated Bertha's warning. A moody silence had followed for some little time, and then all seemed passed away and forgotten, except that the softness which succeeded, carried with it at times a tone of mockery more galling than reproaches.

One thing, however, was quite clear to Ronald — whatever might be concealed under Bertha's hints,

they had worked upon his father to a degree which gave cause to think they were well founded. The defiant, self-reliant manner which had been Captain Vivian's characteristic was gone. He was fitful, abstracted,—often lost in thought, only fully conscious, as it seemed, of one fact, that he must not lose sight of Ronald; and when, after their long search, they had returned for a few hours' rest to the Grange, it was with a promise that they should go again, at day-break, to the shore, to renew their inquiries together.

This was now Ronald's purpose. He had risen very early, disturbed by anxiety and foreboding. But his father was gone before him, and had left a peremptory message in writing that he was to join him directly at the cave under Dark Head Point; the reason given for the order being, that Captain Vivian was himself going to the shore, as the most likely place to hear what they wished. Ronald felt bound to obey, yet his step unconsciously lingered as he drew near the place appointed for the meeting. Sleep had raised a barrier of years between his present feelings and the excitement of the past night. He looked back upon it, in a degree, as men look upon the turmoil of youth from the dreary waste of middle life. His spirit had been roused to anger then—now he was only saddened. His thoughts had been full of eager excitement for Clement then; now he was tempted to consider his absence as possibly a boyish freak. Doubt and delay were wearing his spirits, whilst exhausting his energy. More than all,—then, in the bitterness of his heart, and the rush of his fiery temper, he had felt able to cope even with

his father, and dare and suffer peril or misery, if only he might save Clement, and redeem the evil which had been wrought; now, in the glad light of morning, with the sights and sounds of daily life and daily toil around him, spirit, and heroism, and self-devotion had vanished, and all that he could feel was the consciousness of his father's degradation, and the stain of disgrace which had not even the strength of passionate feeling and impulse to enable it to be endured.

The test of our true selves is to be found in the morning resolution and the morning feeling; and Ronald had yet to acquire the temper of mind which can be as resolute to begin work, without previous excitement, as to pursue it, when circumstances both moral and physical have aroused the imagination, and given force to the nervous energies.

Yet that quiet walk along the sea-shore was soothing to him, and in its measure supporting. The ocean is always great, and it was the feeling of greatness which Ronald needed. The hard beach, furrowed with ridges, spread for about half a mile before him, crossed at times by little streams, tinged with deep yellow from the iron-ore of the rocks. The water in some places was deep above his ancles; yet he turned neither to the right nor left, but went on, directing his course by a dark spot visible at the height of about one-third of the cliff. This, on a nearer approach, was seen to be a hollow, perhaps the opening of a cave, perhaps only a cavity formed by the mouldering away of the rocks. There were many such along the coast, and report said they were

often used by the smugglers for the concealment of contraband goods.

The cliff at this point projected far into the sea, and at high tide could only be passed with difficulty, by scrambling over the huge broken rocks which, having fallen from above, were heaped around its base. Ronald, however, made his way over them with the ease which showed that every stone was a familiar resting-place, and paused only upon the summit of one of the highest rocks, when a glance along the beach showed that no one was in view; then stepping upon the nearest point of the cliff, a few bounds brought him, slightly out of breath, but in no other way exhausted, to a level with the opening, which was now seen to be not so much a cave as a passage, formed partly by nature, partly by the hand of man.

It was carried for about a distance of twenty feet inwards, and where the cliff had fallen away, it had been built up by stones; then it terminated in a more regular cave, remarkable only for being a clear, hollow space, capable of containing perhaps a dozen men. The walls were smoothed artificially, but one large stone had been left at the further end, probably to serve as a seat. The place was evidently used for the purposes of rest or concealment. Some burnt sticks showed that a fire was occasionally lighted in it, the smoke escaping through vent-holes at the side; a hammer and hatchet lay in the corner, and a rough wooden bench, and small deal table, gave it some appearance of a human habitation.

It was empty, however, now; and Ronald, throwing himself upon the ground, rested his back against

the wall of sandy rock, and bending his head forward, so as to catch the glimpse of sea discoverable at the extremity of the passage, awaited in gloomy meditation his father's arrival.

The delay was not long. Five minutes had scarcely passed, when a long shrill whistle from below gave notice of an approach. Ronald answered it, but without moving from his resting-place; and not till his father appeared in sight, ascending the cliff by what was something of a regular pathway, did he remove his gaze from the fixed point in the far horizon, upon which his attention seemed to have been concentrated.

Then he rose slowly, and went forward a few steps. The greeting was abrupt on both sides; yet Captain Vivian expressed himself well satisfied with Ronald's punctuality. "I should have been here myself before," he said, in a tone of indifference, as he sat down upon the bench; "but there were more searchers being sent out for this young scamp. A pretty game he has played us!"

He raised his eyes stealthily to Ronald's face, as he spoke, seeking, probably, to read there the difference between his evening and his morning mind.

Ronald replied, that if searching was still going on, he was willing to take his part as before.

"That's as may be. I don't see why we are to put ourselves out of our way any more for those who, if the opportunity came, would do us an ill turn as soon as not. The boy's off, and let those look after him who have driven him off."

"Driven him!" repeated Ronald.

“What else has done it, but the being shut up with books, and tied to his aunt’s apron strings? What boy of any spirit would bear it? Not you, Ronald, I am sure.”

“If I were in Clement’s place, and did not bear it, I should be to blame,” answered Ronald.

“Eh! what? But it’s folly even to name you two in the same breath; even Bertha Campbell would own that. You have seen her, I suppose, this morning?”

It was a conciliatory question, but Ronald’s answer was cold: “No; I came here direct, as you had appointed.”

“Good!—obedience for ever, say I. It’s Mr. Lester’s lesson, isn’t it, Ronald?”

“Mr. Lester tells me I am bound to obey you in all things in which I lawfully may,” replied Ronald.

“Good again,” repeated Captain Vivian. He rested his elbows upon his knees, and leaned his forehead upon his hands. Presently he looked up, and said, “Lawfully—what does he mean by that, Ronald?”

“I understand, though I mayn’t be able to explain,” replied Ronald.

“You understand; that won’t do for me: what I understand, is the question. It’s my belief that Mr. Lester and I have different views upon that same point of obedience. Before long it may be we shall test them.”

“I am willing, I hope, Father,” replied Ronald, “to show you all the obedience you have a right to require; but”—he paused for a second, the flash of his father’s eye startled him—“I should be sorry to have

the trial carried too far. Perhaps, though, you will tell me without delay what you wish, for you do wish something."

His frankness seemed to take Captain Vivian by surprise. He hesitated, stammered, uttered a few broken words, and at length laughed; but it was a dreary, skeleton laugh—the body without the soul; and the wind bore it through the arched passage, and its echo died away in the faint wailing of the breeze which murmured over the sea.

Ronald spoke again: "I thought we were to plan another search; if you have nothing to say, we ought to lose no time." He moved, as though he would have gone out.

"Sit down;" Captain Vivian touched Ronald's shoulder with his stick. "You are a brave boy, Ronald; I trust you."

"I hope so, Father. I don't know what I have done to cause distrust."

"Yes, I trust you. You wouldn't go against your father, Ronald."

"Never, Father, never;" but Ronald's voice was faint, for his heart beat quickly.

"I thought not—I knew not; I told Goff you couldn't."

"Goff! Father, do you consult him about me?"

"I didn't consult, we talked it over. He doesn't do you justice, Ronald."

"A matter of very little consequence," was Ronald's answer.

"To you, perhaps,—not so to me. Ronald, if I didn't trust you"—he paused.

“ Well, Father ; if you didn’t trust me ? ” — Ronald looked at Captain Vivian steadily, and the gaze which he encountered sank.

“ If I didn’t trust you, I couldn’t ask you to help me out of a difficulty.”

A pang of doubt shot through Ronald’s heart, yet still he answered quietly : “ You know that you may reckon upon me in all things in which there is no breach of the laws of God and man.”

“ Umph ! ” the limitation was unsatisfactory. Captain Vivian considered a little. “ Are you ready for a long story, Ronald ? ”

So steadily was the question uttered that even Ronald could not perceive the trace of any inward agitation.

“ I will listen,” was all he could say. He rested against the rock, and turned his face from his father ; but the changed voice, which spoke in accents low and deep, made him look round again.

“ A promise, an oath never to betray, that must be given first.”

“ A son may be trusted without an oath,” replied Ronald.

“ Not so, he may be led away.”

“ Never to betray his father to ruin.”

“ A quibble ! an unworthy quibble ! ” exclaimed Captain Vivian.

“ Yet all which I will give,” replied Ronald.

A look of fierce anger crossed Captain Vivian’s face ; yet there was less real indignation in the softer tone in which he said, “ Then my son will not promise, but forsakes me.”

“Your son will promise to do nothing, and to reveal nothing to his father’s injury.”

“A play upon words; but”—Captain Vivian took out his watch—“there is no time to argue the point.”

“No arguments would alter me. If I am worthy to receive confidence at all, I am worthy to receive it freely. Father, if this is all you have to say, I will leave you.”

“Proud boy! wilful from your childhood. But you must—you shall hear. Betray me, and a father’s curse will be yours, and it lights surely and heavily.”

Ronald shuddered, but he was silent.

Captain Vivian went on: “I take your promise, I hold it to be binding. You have heard Bertha Campbell’s threats; you know what she is always hinting at, aiming at. She talks of my standing between the General and Edward Vivian;—did she ever explain herself more clearly?”

Ronald felt his father’s eye upon him as he answered, “She told me Mr. Vivian’s early history and yours.”

“She told it, did she? In her own way, doubtless. She said nothing, of course, of deception, treachery,—how I was led on to believe myself secure—encouraged, flattered, befooled, triumphed over; as they thought,” he added in an under tone, “but I had my revenge.”

“She told me that you were led away by false hopes,” replied Ronald.

“False! yes, false with a woman’s falseness! What that is, let those tell who have experienced it.

Flora Campbell deceived not me only, Ronald; she deceived her father and her mother. Again and again they told me that I was safe, that she had no other attachment, and her honied words and her treacherous smile said the same. I loved her—Heaven knows how—I can't talk of it; and she might have made me what she would." He paused, and Ronald, touched by a confidence so unlike what he had expected, said in a tone of sympathy, "It must have been a hard trial."

He received no answer for some seconds. Then the momentary softness seemed to have passed away, and Captain Vivian spoke again: "Mean spirits sink under hard trials, as they are called. That was not my way: I lived for revenge, Ronald; you would do the same."

"It would be my temptation," he replied.

"Temptation! pshaw! What a man is made, that he must be. Neither you nor I could ever live to be trampled on. Yet revenge must be taken according to circumstances; and if it falls in with profit, where's the blame? What I did might not suit all. Some would have called Edward Vivian out and shot him; but I had no fancy for that game."

The mocking laugh which followed the words curdled the blood in Ronald's veins; and, without lifting up his eyes, he said, in a hollow voice, "You ruined him."

There was the hesitation of a moment, but the assertion was a relief, and Captain Vivian continued, hurriedly, "Well! let it be said, I ruined him. He was a fool, Ronald; it was not fit to deal with him

as with a man of spirit. And he threw the game into my hands. For months he had let himself be led blindfold. He told me all his follies; I even wrote his letters for him. He had not the sense to see I was his rival; not, at least, till the very last. Then he turned round and reproached me with plotting against his happiness—he who, at the very moment, was plucking from my grasp the prize I valued above all on earth. Surely, when he had succeeded I had a right to take the advantage he had put into my hands. I knew his debts and his difficulties; he had placed me in possession of all before his miserable marriage, and had arranged that I was to go to England, and see the old General, and get from him all I could, whether in fair words or good deeds. That, again, was his folly—for the General hated me—but his fate blinded him. ‘*Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat,*’ as they used to teach me at school. How I laughed in my heart as he played into my hands. It so happened, too, that just at that time I had another ally,—Goff, who was his servant. Long before I had bought the fellow over to my side, and a good deal I learnt through him; nearly enough to have stopped the marriage, only, as ill luck would have it, they had a desperate quarrel about a week before it came off, and Goff was turned away at an hour’s notice, and came straight to me. When the deed was done, and the marriage could not be prevented, he was my right hand in my plans, for he knew all the ins and outs of Edward Vivian’s life, and was as much his enemy as I was; why,—he didn’t tell me then, but I found out afterwards. There was some question of

honesty pending. Goff was never very scrupulous, and there were threats of inquiry into his doings. But all that was nothing to me. I had got the man I needed, and he had got the master who suited him. We understood each other, and he was willing to back me; and so we started for England directly upon the news of the marriage, I taking care not to betray my disappointment, but still writing to Edward to trust me and I would put all straight with the General."

A groan was uttered by Ronald.

Captain Vivian laughed faintly. "Tut! lad, cheer up. You don't understand such matters. Well for you! perhaps. But a man who means to carry out a scheme musn't be scrupulous; and you know it's all gone by now. I was young then, and hot-headed, and what I'd set my heart to do I would do. 'Twouldn't be the same now. Cheer up," he repeated, as Ronald still hid his face from him.

"Go on," was all he said; and his father went on, yet less carelessly than before. He was approaching that part of his story where even his hardened spirit shrank from the confession of its guilt.

"We came to England, and saw the General; and there was a long talk about the marriage and the money affairs. He was primed to take offence, and, of course, I didn't let matters appear too smooth. I had full credentials given me some weeks before, so there was no question that I was an accredited agent. To do the old man justice, he was so straightforward he would have run his head against a stone wall if it had been built up right before him. He took my word for truth, and if

there was a doubt, Goff was at hand as a witness. So we told him some pretty gambling histories,—a little embellished, perhaps, as was fair—and the marriage history as a conclusion; and he was willing to consider me as his son's friend, and talk over arrangements for settling the debts. But that wasn't quite my notion. He was stiff and hard, but there was a twinkle in his eye which told of yielding and forgiving; and if it had come to that, good b'ye to all hope of revenge. No; I wasn't to be baulked in that way!" Captain Vivian uttered the last words as though addressing himself, for something seemed to check him when he would have pronounced Ronald's name; and he rose up, and walked once or twice up and down the cave, and went to the extremity of the passage to look out upon the sea. Then he came back again, and said, in a tone of icy unconcern, "That was the tug of war between us, but I gained the day. When nothing else would answer, I handed him a paper which did for Vivian: a promissory note for five thousand pounds."

Ronald started up. "A forgery, father! Say it was not a forgery! Oh, God! have mercy!"

Miserable he was, but not so miserable as the wretched man, from whose face every tint of colour had faded, and who stood, haggard, yet defiant, convicted by the confession of his own mouth.

A long, long silence—whilst the waves plashed softly upon the smooth-sanded beach, and the cry of the sea-gull was faintly heard amongst the rocky cliffs.

Captain Vivian was the first to recover himself.

“The deed’s done, Ronald, and the day’s gone by; and if you wish for sorrow, I’ve had sorrow enough. But, good or bad, its not for a son to go counter to his father, or refuse to lend a helping hand when the time is come to save him from ruin.

Ronald did not answer, and he continued:—“It’s what I have always looked to. When it has crossed my mind that things might take an awkward turn, I felt I had a friend at home. Your mother said it.”

“My mother! Thank God she did not live to see this day,” and Ronald, roused for a moment, sank again into his former attitude.

A trace of emotion was visible in Captain Vivian’s face. “Thank God, too,” he said, “but she would have helped me.”

“Father, what would you have me do?” Ronald looked up steadily, with a glazed eye, and a countenance which in those few moments seemed to have been stamped with the suffering of years.

“Edward Vivian is in England,” was the reply.

“Yes; I know it.”

“He has been at Encombe; he is coming again. When he does come, it will be to reclaim his inheritance.”

Ronald only bent his head in assent.

“His success will be my ruin,” continued Captain Vivian, “unless——. There is a paper, Ronald—that which did the mischief; it is in Bertha Campbell’s hands. How she got it passes my comprehension, but it is there. It would be proof certain, and your father would end his days as a convicted felon. That paper must be in my possession before another

day has passed over our heads." He paused, and in a lower tone added, "You must contrive to lay hold of it."

Captain Vivian's penetrating glance rested upon his son, and a secret, yet irresistible, influence seemed to compel Ronald to confront his gaze. Their eyes met, but neither of them spoke for some seconds.

"Well!" burst at length from Captain Vivian's lips.

"You must find another to execute your purpose," was the answer.

"Traitor!" exclaimed Captain Vivian.

Ronald continued, in a tone cold and hard, as if every feeling were petrified. "Mr. Vivian's claim is just; to destroy the proof of his innocence would be unjust."

The rocky walls of the cavern rang with a fearful imprecation, and, standing before his son, Captain Vivian poured forth a torrent of reproaches, which yet only served to deepen the immovable expression of Ronald's face. When his father's violence had in a degree exhausted itself, he said,—“Ask me what you will, that may be granted without sin, and were it to give up my life it should be done.”

Captain Vivian laughed scornfully. “Sin!—to save a father, by the destruction of a paltry paper! The boy is mad.”

“Then God grant that the madness may last!” replied Ronald. Changing his tone, he continued, in a voice of pleading earnestness, which might have been the whisper of that womanly tenderness inherited from

his mother :—“ Father, you have asked a favour of me, and I have refused to grant it. I have no right, therefore, to seek kindness from you ; yet I do—I must. Miss Campbell’s warnings are clear to me now, so also are her promises. Trust her—trust Mr. Vivian—and, by all that is sacred, I do affirm my conviction that you are safe.”

Captain Vivian looked at him wildly.

“ Yes,” repeated Ronald, “ safe by their own promises, by all the obligations of gratitude. Once I have saved Mr. Vivian’s life—once I assisted in saving his daughter. He acknowledges the claim ; I have heard it from his own lips—no matter how or when—but for my sake he will dread to injure you. As surely, father, as there is truth in man, he will be true to you, if only you will trust him.”

He was interrupted mockingly. “ And give myself up to the nearest magistrate? Ronald, you are a desperate fool!” and Captain Vivian paced the floor of the cave with short and hurried steps.

After a few seconds he stopped. “ You have seen Edward Vivian ; I guessed as much. Let me know the how and the when.”

“ I saw him the last evening that he was here ; we had met upon the Croome, and he had betrayed himself. I knew then that there was enmity between you. I did not know for what cause.”

“ Mean, wretched boy ! Plotting against your father, deceiving him for months ! And Edward Vivian—an idiot still, preaching of promises and trust, when wealth or ruin was at stake ! The experience of centuries would not be enough for such a man.”

“It was I, father, who extracted the promise. I who spoke of trust. I who do, and will, trust.”

“And you who sold yourself to his purpose, and promised to aid him for your father’s destruction.”

“Oh, God! pardon me! Have pity upon me! I am very miserable.” Ronald’s spirit gave way, and he cast himself upon the floor in an agony of grief.

Captain Vivian stood by him silently. Whatever might be his feelings of indignation against his son for having kept from him his communication with Mr. Vivian, it was not then the moment to shew it. Too much depended upon Ronald’s consenting to be a partner in his schemes to admit of any expression which would be likely to repel and irritate him; and during those first few moments of suffering there was sufficient time for self-recollection to convince him that if his object was to be obtained, it must be by very different means than threats or violence.

When Ronald, somewhat calmed by the outburst to which he had given way, at length rose and moved towards the entrance of the cave, willing, apparently, to put an end to the conference, he was stopped by a voice which sounded rather like the entreaty of a brother, than the command of a parent: — “And you leave me, then, Ronald, to ruin?”

“I leave you, father, because I cannot help you as you would be helped; but I will wait your orders at home.”

“Home! I have none. I am a wanderer, sent forth by my own child. Is it so that you keep your mother’s last wish?”

Ronald put his hands before his eyes. "My brain is dizzy, — I can't think; give me but an hour's rest."

"When we are in safety, — not before. Your father's shame will be yours also."

"I know it; oh, yes, I know it, too well!"

"And if it is so that Edward Vivian is under such deep obligation, he can never find fault with you for taking from him what, according to your own story, he would never consent to make use of as proof."

"I don't know, father; I can't understand. My head is burning." Ronald leant against the wall for support.

Captain Vivian went on slowly. "He says that he is willing to hush the case. It may be so, but I won't put my head into the lion's mouth; or, if I do, I will first draw his teeth. Granted that he takes no measures against me, who is to answer for the General? I have not lived fifty years in the world to be duped by promises. The paper must be mine; if not by fair means, then by foul. But with you, Ronald, it would be an easy matter. Bertha Campbell puts faith in you, even to folly."

"Impossible! I have no excuse. I could make no pretence."

"Pshaw!" Captain Vivian's tone relapsed into coarse good humour, as he fancied himself gaining the ascendant. "You don't think I have learnt what I have without forming my plans accordingly. The thing is easy enough. Mr. Lester had the paper; it must have been given him by the General. In my folly I fancied that the old man, in his stiff, family

pride, would destroy it, that it might never tell the tale of his son's misdeeds. Doubtless Edward Vivian and his friend are, at this moment, planning to make use of it. But while there's life there's hope. It is not in their possession now. Bertha Campbell has it,—she keeps it about her in her pocket-book. I learnt that by ways which you would never guess. You must go to her with news of the boy,—of Clement; the story is easily concocted. He shall be suspected to have gone off on a lark, with some strange friend of Goff's,—a smuggling friend, if you will,” and Captain Vivian tried to laugh. “You may guess that they'll be back some particular day, and have a fuss about the date; any thing to induce her to bring out the book. Then let Goff or me be near, with some sudden message which shall make her lay it down at the right moment, and leave you with it, and good luck to your cleverness in taking advantage of the opportunity. A good scheme, eh? Don't you think so?” and he pryed keenly into Ronald's pale and stony face. Obtaining no answer, he added:—“What's an easy job for you, would be desperately difficult for me. She's on her guard the moment she sees me. Ten to one that I should ever get admittance to the house; and twenty to one that if I did, I should make her forget herself enough to leave the book with me. And there's no time for failure; what's done must be done to-night, or good b'ye to Encombe, and hurrah for Botany Bay!”

Ronald neither moved nor spoke.

“Well, are you agreed?” was his father's next impatient query.

He shook his head, but he could not utter a word.

“Senseless boy! this is no time for jesting. Say, shall we be off?”

“Impossible!” The word seemed to come from the depths of his heart.

Captain Vivian caught its accent of resolution. “Impossible! Let Heaven be witness, it shall not be impossible. Yet stay; it may be as well to hear the wise reasons which you can produce for bringing your father’s grey hairs to the grave in shame.”

“It is false and unjust; and I have pledged myself to repair injustice,” was Ronald’s answer.

“Pledged yourself against me!”

“Not against you,” replied Ronald, “but to restore Mr. Vivian to his right. Father, your son would sacrifice life for you, but he cannot sacrifice honour. And if your plan were carried out,” he continued, more calmly, “it could but partially save you; all feeling of obligation as regards myself would be cancelled. Mr. Vivian would be your open enemy, and mine also, and every motive of self-justification would induce him to sift the matter to the bottom. What the event would be who can say? Disgrace! yes, at least, disgrace!” he repeated, shuddering at the word.

“A noble, cautious boy! Most sagely prudent! And what then would be your wise advice?”

“A wrong has been done,” replied Ronald, “therefore let the wrong be repaired. I do not ask, father, that you should put yourself into danger, or trust even Mr. Vivian as I would trust him. If you will, let us leave the country, and place ourselves in safety,

and then let the confession be made by writing. So far all will be done that could be to replace Mr. Vivian in his right position with the General. As regards the debt, let me work. Father, you do not know how I can work,—how I can endure. Give me but this object, and death only shall hinder me from obtaining it. And when we have restored to General Vivian, or to his family, the sum unlawfully taken from them, even though we may never return to England, we yet may live honoured and free.” A gleam of bright hope shot across Ronald’s face as he stood up proudly; and the expression of his young and noble features told how earnestly, how unwaveringly, the plan he had proposed would be carried to its conclusion.

But the unhappy man to whom he addressed himself was too far entangled in his own snares to be willing to adopt it. He did not indeed ridicule it; perhaps even a softened look of admiration might have been traced in his countenance; but he put the idea aside, as he would the dream of a simple child, and merely replying, “Good enough, perhaps, for some people, if it were only possible,” again inquired whether Ronald would consent to yield obedience to his will.

And Ronald answered, “On this point, never!” And both were silent.

Then Captain Vivian spoke once more abruptly: “So the boy’s doom is fixed.”

Ronald caught his arm. “The boy? Clement? Father you know where he is.”

Captain Vivian withdrew himself, and strode to the entrance of the cave, muttering as he went.

“Father, in mercy—in pity tell me! Let me save him.”

“You may, but you will not,” was the answer.

“Cruel, cruel!” exclaimed Ronald, and he covered his face with his hands.

“Do my bidding, and he is safe,” continued Captain Vivian. “Refuse, and this very day I leave England, and give him up to his fate.”

“His fate! what fate? Oh, father, where is he? Let me only know that I may judge.” There was yielding in Ronald’s tone, and in his words.

Captain Vivian returned again into the cave and sat down. “Where he is I can’t say just now. Where he may be, I can guess. In a desperate scrape,—in prison, probably, before the night is over our heads.”

Ronald looked at him in wild terror. “In prison? Then he has been tempted,—led away.”

His father interrupted him. “Led away! The boy’s of an age to judge for himself.”

“Help me,—help me,—what can I do for him?” And Ronald clasped his hands together in the anguish of his entreaty.

“I have told you. I am not going to trust more to a son who won’t stretch out his hand to save his father from public disgrace. Clement’s fate is in your hands.”

“I can’t tell,—I can’t think.” Ronald threw himself upon his knees, and words of earnest but incoherent prayer burst from him.

His father turned away,—he could not mock him.

The long, shrill, well-known whistle! Ronald started up.

“’Tis he! Goff!” exclaimed Captain Vivian. “He comes to know your determination.”

Ronald’s face had recovered its expression of calm resolution. “Tell him that I will not do evil that good may come. Father, God grant you repentance and pardon.”

He would have rushed away, but a powerful grasp arrested his movements. “We will talk of this again, in another place; you go with me now to the Grange.”

Ronald had no means of escape. They were met at the foot of the cliff by Goff. A hasty glance and murmured words told that the interview had been fruitless, and Ronald had no will to enter into explanation with his father’s base accomplice.

They reached the Grange. Captain Vivian led the way into the house. He had not uttered a word on the way. Now he said, moodily, “We have much to talk of still. Ten minutes hence I will call you, and you shall hear more of my plans; in the meantime you will wait in your room.” Ronald hurried to his chamber unspeakably thankful for the few moments of rest and solitude. He did not know that he was watched, he did not see that his steps were followed; but as once more he knelt by the side of his rough bed, seeking relief in prayer, he heard the heavy lock of his door turned on the outside, and realised that he was a prisoner.

CHAP. XLI.

THE same glorious sunrise which Ronald had beheld as he walked along the beach was watched also by Bertha Campbell, whilst she stood at her bed-room window. Yet to her, as to him, it brought but little perception of beauty.

She had stood there very late on the preceding night, and she had stationed herself there again long before dawn; and now she was lingering still with that heavy load of wearing suspense and responsibility, which deadens both heart and intellect to every sense but that of wretchedness.

Bertha had but a woman's power, and even that had never been fully exercised. She did not know what she could do, and she was not confident what she ought to do. That last night had been a terrible trial. Mrs. Campbell's nervous, angry uneasiness, the children's fears, and her own infinitely worse forebodings, were all to be borne; and they were borne with Bertha's characteristic composure, but the trial did not work the less inwardly. Messages were sent, and men dispatched in all directions, and every necessary inquiry was made; and at length, about half-past eleven o'clock, Captain Vivian and Ronald made their appearance at the Lodge, to announce that they had traced Clement to the shore, where he had been

seen in company with some strange men, supposed to be a party from Cleve, but beyond this no tidings had been heard. Mrs. Campbell found comfort in this. It proved, she said, that he had not fallen over the cliffs, or been drowned. She thought it might be a boy's freak, — perhaps planned for the very purpose of frightening them, and she confidently anticipated his return the next day; but Bertha's mind had, from the beginning, been more harassed by the idea of his being led into evil company than by the dread of an accident; and the information only confirmed her worst forebodings, except that it seemed to exonerate Captain Vivian and Goff from any share in misleading him. She had parted from Ronald with the earnest assurance, on his part, that he would, with the earliest dawn of light, prosecute his inquiries, and would not rest till they were satisfied; and then she had gone to rest, but not to sleep. Conscience, stimulated by anxiety, was busy with reproaches, and, perhaps, not all unfounded. She felt that she had not watched over Clement rightly; she had lived apart from him, allowing herself to be engrossed with interests peculiar to herself, and not realising that, having been placed towards him in the position of a mother, or, at least, of an elder sister, she was called upon for sympathy which should draw him out, and make his home happy. Mr. Lester had often warned her that irritation and coldness might drive him to seek amusement from home; and yet she had not always, — she had very seldom, indeed, — been able to command herself. So she had thrown him entirely upon Ella's companionship; and this, —

wayward, indolent, proud, and self-indulgent,—had tended to strengthen his faults, and made him fall a more easy victim to slight temptations.

Doubtless Bertha exaggerated her own shortcomings, and ascribed to them worse consequences than could properly be said to fall to their share. We are all responsible for our misdoings, whatever may be the defects of those set over us; and Clement had received instruction and warnings sufficient to keep him from evil, if he had been inclined to attend to them. But it is nevertheless true, and it is one of the great mysteries of our present state of being, that the influence which we exercise without thought, daily and hourly, is working, either for good or ill, upon the moral character, and consequently upon the eternal condition of those with whom we dwell.

We go on, it may be, sinning and repenting,—making faint resolutions, and breaking them, fancying we are in the right way, and that if we offend, our offences are those of human infirmity, upon which God will look mercifully; and so, searching only into our own hearts, we are, upon the whole, satisfied.

But there is another reckoning,—it will be seen at the Judgment Day,—which tells the effect of every hasty word, every proud, cold look or tone, upon the hearts of those who dwell with us. God have mercy upon us when that revelation is made!

Even now its bitterness is, at times, forestalled. Petulance, coldness, selfishness, proud reserve, an overweening love of power, labour silently, day by day, in raising up barriers in our homes; and at length some unlooked-for circumstance shows us that the work is

done,—that we have estranged affection, and lost respect; it may be that we have saved ourselves, but ruined the souls intrusted to us.

Not that all which has been said could be applicable to the case of Bertha Campbell. With her the evil was but in its infancy, and she was beginning to open her eyes to it, before Clement's unlooked-for disappearance had called forth her self-reproach so bitterly. But it was quite true that Clement had often been induced to linger with Ronald, or to idle his time upon the shore, because Bertha's cold words, and constant habit of finding fault, made home distasteful to him. It was quite true that his indolence and wilfulness had been fostered, because Bertha, by never taking any interest in his pursuits, had thrown him entirely upon Ella for sympathy; and now, when foreseeing the fatal consequences which might arise from such apparently trivial circumstances, it was not to be supposed that she could exactly discriminate what her own share in the evil had been.

They were very mournful moments which she passed standing by the window, watching, as she thought, but in reality lost in reverie; and the sun, as it rose higher in the eastern sky, brought to her mind only a burdensome sense of chill and darkness in her own heart, rendered more evident by the contrast of external brightness. She was physically weary also; her rest had been broken, and the atmosphere of a December morning, though the season was unusually mild, made even the fur cloak in which she had wrapped herself a very insufficient covering

Yet it required an effort to dress, and prepare for the business of the day. All order seemed broken up: she did not know what to do, — what to think of; and this to a mind usually regulated like clock-work, was a considerable addition to every other trouble.

The post was late, and Mrs. Campbell's excitement much increased in consequence. The point to which every one looked was Mr. Lester's return, and this, Mrs. Campbell now asserted, was impossible. There were no letters, and, if he did not write, it was certain he would not come. It was in vain that Bertha pointed to the clock, and showed that the postman was only five minutes behind his time, which was a common occurrence, and therefore there was no need to despair. Mrs. Campbell's fears were as quickly excited as her hopes, and her anxiety showed itself by incessant suggestions and orders, mingled with complaints of Bertha's quietness, which she called indifference, and reproaches against Mr. Lester for being absent; whilst every now and then she wandered into murmurs against General Vivian, and reminiscences of things said and done in by-gone years, which had doubtless, in her own mind, some connection with the present uneasiness, yet which it was not very easy to follow.

Bertha bore all quietly, not attempting to reason, but listening to what was said, with her head turned towards the window. At last she observed, in a very calm voice, "I think that is Rachel coming up the garden."

Louisa was at the front door with lightning speed. "A letter, Rachel! — have you heard?"

“Yes, he comes to-night,” was Rachel’s answer, but her face was only partially brightened; yet she followed Louisa quickly to the parlour, and meeting Bertha at the threshold, repeated the fact instantly.

“Thank God,” was Bertha’s whispered ejaculation, and she kissed Rachel heartily; but it seemed as though she had no power to say more.

“Come here, my dear—sit down by me: tell me what message your papa sends,” said Mrs. Campbell, beckoning Rachel to her.

Rachel sat down and unfolded her letter, with a slight feeling of pride at being the bearer of an important communication.

Bertha sat opposite, her breath coming quick and faint.

“He says,” began Rachel, reading aloud,—“my friend seems better, and I think it possible I may bring him down with me for a little change; we may be at home to-morrow night. Don’t depend upon us, but don’t be surprised if you see us.”—“That is very nice, isn’t it?” she added, looking up doubtfully in Mrs. Campbell’s face, as if nothing could be very nice just then to any one.

“Yes, my dear; but I wish, — oh, dear! Bertha, what time does the coach come in?”

“There are two coaches,” replied Bertha. “Mr. Lester doesn’t say which he shall come by.”

Rachel turned immediately to Mrs. Campbell to answer the question: “Papa comes by the five o’clock coach generally,—when he does go away, that is. Dear Miss Campbell,” and she addressed herself

to Bertha, with an accent of gentle sympathy, "won't it be a comfort to you to have him back?"

"Yes, great; but the letter with the receipted bill may go astray."

Even at that moment of anxiety, Bertha's mind would fix itself upon any thing which happened to be irregular.

"Oh! it won't signify. Every thing will be right when papa comes." Rachel paused, for she was thinking of Clement, yet could not bring herself to mention his name. She repeated again: "Every thing will be right when papa comes."

"Do you think Clement will come with him?" asked the blundering Fanny, who had only paid a half attention to what was being said.

Louisa caught up her words: "Fanny, how silly! You always do say such silly things. What bill was it, Rachel?"

"Never mind, my dear; it is not your concern," said Bertha, alive directly to her duty as monitor.

Louisa still persisted: "But I thought, Aunt Bertha, that you didn't send the bill; it was in your pocket-book."

"What bill, Louisa? You astonish me. What do you mean by prying into every person's concerns in this way?"

"I didn't pry, Aunt Bertha"—and the angry flush rushed to Louisa's cheeks; "but if you remember, when I told you yesterday that Anne at the Rectory was still fussing about a lost paper, you said, 'Oh! she needn't trouble herself; Rachel knows all about it: I took it and put it in my

pocket-book.' I remember quite well that was what you said; and I told it to Anne when I saw her, as we came back from our walk."

"I wish you to have no gossip with Anne of any kind," observed Bertha, quickly; "I won't have you speak to her."

"I don't think Anne gossips more than other people," muttered Louisa.

"She does, though," exclaimed Fanny, anxious to put in her opinion upon the state of passing affairs. "She was talking a long, long time to Goff last evening, after we came home—I saw her from my window; and he looked so ugly and fierce, I wond she wasn't frightened at him."

"I want to hear no more of either of them," observed Bertha. She turned to her mother, and added: "I am thinking of going to the Hall. Miss Vivian will be anxious to know what we have heard and done."

"I don't know what there is to tell," replied Mrs. Campbell; "I can't understand myself what any one is doing."

"The gardener is gone off to Cleve, trying to trace the men who were on the shore last night," answered Bertha, without endeavouring to excuse herself; "and there is another man sent to give notice to the police; and Job Horner is over the hills by Barney Wood's cottage; and Ronald said he and his father would search along the cliffs, and keep a watch upon the beach. I don't think we can do anything more till Mr. Lester comes, — only wait;" and she sighed deeply.

“I wish you could cheer one up, Bertha; you always take the black side. Poor boy! I am sure he will be back soon. But those dreadful men must have led him into it for a freak. I am sure he will be back this evening. Where did you say you were going?”

“To the Hall,” replied Bertha. “I think some one ought to see Miss Vivian. Rachel, will you go with me? Fanny and Louisa have colds.”

Mrs. Campbell, not choosing her consent to be taken for granted, began to make objections. She disliked, she said, to be left; if persons came in, she shouldn't be able to see them, and Bertha ought to stay at home and give orders; and Bertha acquiesced, and began to prepare for the children's lessons. And then Mrs. Campbell changed her mind, and was surprised that Bertha could be so indifferent, and thought that all kinds of stories might reach the Hall if some one did not go and explain matters. She was in that irritable, nervous state in which nothing can please, and when to see others quiet is only an aggravation of suffering. But Bertha felt that she must do something, if it were only for the sake of the children. No good could accrue to them by sitting down in idle lamentations, or walking continually from one room to the other, and looking out of every window; so a compromise with Mrs. Campbell's conflicting wishes was made at last; and it was settled that Bertha should wait till after the early dinner, set the children to their lessons, and hear all that might be heard of the result of the different inquiries, and in the afternoon walk with Rachel to

the Hall; whilst Louisa and Fanny were left with their grandmamma.

This was the best arrangement Bertha could think of, but it did not thoroughly satisfy her. She disliked leaving the children at home, for with Louisa's curiosity there was always the dread of gossip with the servants, and though Betsey at the Lodge was very discreet, the same could not be said of Anne at the Rectory. In spite of her promises of amendment, Bertha had reason to believe that she was by no means thoroughly to be trusted; and the little hint which Fanny had thrown out respecting the last evening's conversation with Goff, rested in her mind with a very uneasy feeling. Anne had nothing to tell, so far as Bertha knew, which all the world might not hear; but Goff's constant communications made it evident that he must have some object in keeping up the acquaintance. Bertha resolved that Mr. Lester should be put thoroughly upon his guard, and Anne's place was already, in her own mind, vacant. That was not, however, to be thought of at present; Mr. Lester was to return in the evening; and then all this trouble, anxiety, and responsibility would be lessened, even if before that Clement did not make his appearance.

CHAP. XLII.

BERTHA and Rachel had a very quiet walk. They were both too thoughtful to talk—at least, at first. Rachel often looked round, fancying she might hear or see something of Clement. Bertha went on, apparently noticing nothing, but in reality with eye and ear thoroughly open, whilst the mind was dwelling upon the most painful and, as it might have been supposed, absorbing topics. And absorbing they were, only all connected with the one idea of Clement's absence. She thought of what he might have been led to do; of his father's horror; Mr. Lester's pain; General Vivian's indignation; the downfall of that fabric of hope which for the last few months they had been building. And then her own share in it! That came back again and again, and always with the despairing feeling that she did not know how to amend, that she gave offence without meaning it, and had no power of expressing her feelings, and was thoroughly misunderstood—even by Edward Vivian, for whom the best years of her life had been sacrificed. At length the lonely feeling could be borne no longer, and it came out to Rachel, in answer to a passing observation of delight at the prospect of her father's return. "Yes, it will be very nice for you. It must be very delightful to have some one to whom you can say every thing."

“So pleasant!” exclaimed Rachel; and then, checking herself as though it were wrong to think of any thing pleasant just then, she said, “But it won’t be pleasant to-night, — unless we have news, that is.”

Bertha avoided the painful allusion, and answered the first part of the speech: “Very few people have that happiness, Rachel; you should learn to make the most of it.”

“I do try, I hope; but I suppose grown-up people don’t want it as much as children.”

“Yes, they do — quite as much,” said Bertha, abruptly.

“But they don’t want human beings to tell things to, I suppose,” replied Rachel, reverently yet timidly.

“They want them, but they don’t find them,” continued Bertha; “and that is why they are unhappy.”

“I shall tell every thing to papa as long as I have him,” said Rachel; “but if he were not with me, I don’t think I could go and talk in the same way to any one else.”

“Then you would miss it dreadfully,” replied Bertha.

“Yes, dreadfully; I know that. It used to make me unhappy to think about it, till papa said that love for him was like a stepping-stone, that it was meant to teach me how I was to love God; and since that, I have tried sometimes, when he has been away, to think that I had God to go to; and now and then — not always, only now and then — it seems as if that would make up for every thing.”

“ Ah, yes ! Rachel—now and then ; but what one wants is to feel it always,” said Bertha.

“ It would be wonderfully pleasant, wouldn't it ?” replied Rachel. “ How it would help one in the world ! But, dear Miss Campbell, persons who are as good as you are must always feel it.”

“ Oh, no, Rachel ; what a mistake !” and Bertha stopped suddenly.

Rachel was thoughtful and silent. Presently she said, without any attempt at a preface, “ One day I was going up the hills, feeling very tired, and trying so to get on, and then being quite out of breath ; and at last papa came, and put his hand at my back, and it made such a difference—I went on almost without feeling it. And afterwards papa reminded me of it, and said it was like the different ways in which I could go through life ; trying to overcome difficulties by myself, and thinking I had a point to reach, and then God would love me, and be pleased with me—that, he said, was acting from duty alone ; or else, feeling that God was really with me now, helping me on at every step ; and loving me, not because I had done the things, but because I was trying to do them—and that, he said, would be acting from love. And, do you know, Miss Campbell—it is so odd—I have had it in my mind ever since ; and when I feel cross and lazy—and I do very often—then I think that God is quite close to me. And I have a kind of fancy—I hope it does not sound irreverent—that He is really putting His hand at the back of my heart, and telling me, that if I will move, He will keep it there, and make the

tiresome things easy. Is there any harm in such thoughts?"

"No harm, dear Rachel"—and a melancholy smile crossed Bertha's face—"if you can really keep such notions in you head."

"And it is true, isn't it?" continued Rachel, earnestly. "Not, of course, quite as I say—that is only my way of fancying it; but you know God does love us now, and help us on, and make things easy."

"Yes, of course"—but Bertha's answer was not quite as hearty as Rachel had expected; yet she went on, as was her wont, with her own thoughts.

"It makes such a difference to me now I think of these things. When I only try to do what is right, it all seems hard, and I get cross with myself because I don't do all I want to do—it is just like a cold, sharp, March wind blowing over one; but when I have the other feeling, it is like sunshine, and I go on so happily. It is quite a pleasure to do disagreeable things, because, you know, the Hand is there to help me; and when they are done, I can turn round and see that God is pleased. I wish I could make you understand; it is almost like seeing, it is so real."

"Yes, very real, undoubtedly."

The full, implicit, childlike belief lit up Rachel's thoughtful eyes with a brilliancy that was even startling—and the flush of excitement was on her cheek; and in her eagerness she paused in her walk, and resting her hand on her companion's arm, looked at her with a gaze which thrilled through Bertha's heart, for it might have been the expression of an angel's love.

Strange! the power which touches one heart by the influence of another. That look did its work. Not then — Bertha's thoughts were too occupied, her heart was too full of home cares to understand it — but it lingered by her till other days, haunting her with its only half-understood meaning; it did more than Mr. Lester's instruction, more than Mildred Vivian's suggestions — for it was the soul speaking to the soul; and He who made the soul, gave its language a power beyond words. It was Bertha's first vivid perception of the softening influence of the motive of love.

The short conversation ended there as suddenly as it had begun. Bertha felt, though she did not quite know why, that she could not continue it; and Rachel had said what was in her mind, and relapsed into silence. They walked for a short distance; Bertha pondering upon Rachel's simplicity, wishing that Ella was like her, and thinking that she might have been if she had been brought up in the same way.

That, however, was a mistake; the two characters were essentially unlike, and what was extremely good for one would have been very bad for the other.

Mildred Vivian's personal rules and suggestions as to strict self-scrutiny were absolutely necessary for Ella, because she never took the trouble to think about herself at all. They would have been injurious to Rachel, by engendering self-consciousness, and irritating a naturally sensitive conscience into a state of constant scruple and morbid search into the state of her own feelings. Ella required to be taught to

live in herself—Rachel out of herself. But Bertha was not quick in perceiving such distinctions, and the medicine which was good for one, she would have considered good for all.

Her meditations were not left long uninterrupted; a man's quick tread was heard behind her, whilst at the same moment a rough voice called out, "Why, Miss Campbell, you walk so fast, one would think you were running for a wager."

Bertha stopped, telling Rachel to go on, and let her speak to Captain Vivian alone. He had probably, she thought, something to communicate to her about Clement; and since his kindness in the search of the preceding evening, she felt a strange mixture of suspicion and cordiality towards him.

Captain Vivian came up and held out his hand: "Good-day to you, Miss Campbell. I was thinking of coming up to the Lodge, but I was afraid it would be no good."

"Then you have heard nothing?" said Bertha, in a tone of keen disappointment.

He shook his head: "Two of my men have been out, round by Cleve, trying to hear something of the fellows we traced last night; and Ronald's off somewhere. We must have some tidings before night."

"I trust so;" but Bertha's tone was not hopeful.

"Come, cheer up; it's no use to be cast down," continued Captain Vivian, rather good-naturedly. "'Tis but a boy's freak, after all. I'd have done the same at his age. But where may you be going now?"

“To the Hall. Miss Vivian and the General will be anxious.”

“You have heard, of course, that the old General is ill,” said Captain Vivian.

“Yes, we had a message. He had an attack of faintness last night, but he is better this morning.”

“He does not leave his room though, and at his age attacks of faintness are serious matters.”

“Yes, but Miss Vivian doesn’t seem alarmed. Is there any thing else you think we can do?”

“Nothing, unless — when do you expect Mr. Lester home?”

Notwithstanding Bertha’s newly-awakened friendliness, she had an instinct of caution, and answered ambiguously, that it was not quite certain.

“It ought to be. Haven’t you sent a message to him?”

“No.” Bertha was caught in a snare then, and felt herself obliged to add, “He may be at home this evening.”

“Ah! very good. The sooner he comes the better. And his friend comes with him, doesn’t he?”

“I can’t say.” Bertha looked up in surprise.

Captain Vivian laughed: “You’ll think I have a wonderful knowledge of what goes on; but it so happened that one of my men was at the Rectory just now, about this business, and heard say that Mr. Lester was expected, and perhaps a friend with him; so you see I’m no magician after all.”

“No.” Yet Bertha felt uncomfortable.

“They’ll be here by the five o’clock coach, I suppose?”

“Probably, if they come at all.”

Captain Vivian considered a moment; then his eye glanced at Rachel, who was standing a few paces off, just sufficient to be beyond reach of hearing: “You have a little companion with you, I see. Is she going to the Hall, too?”

“Yes; we are rather in a hurry. I must wish you good-b’ye, if you really have nothing more to say.”

“Nothing more just now; but I may have. What time shall you be coming back from the Hall?”

“I can’t quite tell; it depends on how long I may be kept there.”

“But you’ll not come home in the dark, I suppose?”

“I shall have a servant with me, if I do,” replied Bertha, rather surprised at his thoughtfulness.

“Oh!” Not a very well-satisfied “Oh!” and Captain Vivian’s face bore a gloomy and troubled expression, though he tried to laugh, and said, “I would offer myself as an escort, only I know you would not accept me.”

Bertha showed involuntarily how she shrank from the suggestion, and she began a hurried excuse. He laughed again: “Of course I don’t offer myself; only perchance you’ll be anxious to know what we’ve been doing, and as it will be rather out of my way to come to the Lodge, perhaps we might manage to meet again half way. What do you say? Shall it be the turning into Encombe Lane, just as you get out of Cleve Wood?”

“I can’t say; I don’t know.” Bertha did not at all like to promise a second interview. Even this,

short though it was, made her nervous and impatient.

“Ronald promised to let me know every thing,” she added, after a moment’s thought. “Perhaps you could be kind enough to send him to the Lodge, even if you can’t come yourself. I don’t at all know what time I shall be returning from the Hall myself, or whether it will be before dusk or after;—the days close in so soon.”

“I can’t say for Ronald; he’s off somewhere. He mightn’t be back before midnight; any how, I dare say you’ll hear news before long.”

He turned from her, without even wishing her good-b’ye.

Bertha fancied she had made him angry, and feared she might be throwing away a hope for Clement. But in another minute he returned: “I say, do you chance to have an almanac in your pocket? I wanted to make a reckoning about some sea matters I happen to be acquainted with, which might help us to a glimpse of Clement.”

Bertha took out her pocket-book, and asked what he wanted to know.

“I can’t explain exactly. Perhaps you’d just let me look one minute,” and he held out his hand for it.

Villain though he was, the moment was too anxious for him to be quite calm. The faltering tone of his voice struck Bertha, and she instinctively hesitated.

“Oh! I beg pardon; I didn’t mean to pry into secrets.”

“There are no secrets,” said Bertha, slightly blushing; and not knowing what excuse to make, she was on the point of giving it to him. At that instant Rachel ran up to her: “Oh! Miss Campbell, some one so like Clement—so very like! He has just gone down the lane to the Common: do come!” And Bertha forgot every thing else, hurriedly replaced the book in her pocket, and ran after Rachel.

It was happy for her that Captain Vivian’s muttered exclamation was lost upon her. Standing upon a bank overlooking the Common, he satisfied himself, by his small telescope, that Rachel was quite mistaken, and then walked away across the fields to the village.

He went on, looking neither to the right nor left—gloom on his brow, passion and fierce disappointment in his heart. Could he but have possessed himself of the paper, so close within his grasp, all might have been well. But the opportunity was gone, and now what remained?

The question could only be solved by an interview with Goff, and to his cottage Captain Vivian repaired. His own mind was bent upon escape. Perhaps he was weary of the load which for eighteen years had burdened his breast, reminding him day and night that the hour of discovery and retribution might be at hand; perhaps, too, the morning’s conversation with Ronald had touched some latent feeling of remorse, which made him long to flee not only from danger, but from the scenes associated with the pangs of a guilty conscience.

But the influence of the comrade with whom he

had connected himself, was more powerful than the weak impulse of a heart softened only because it despaired of success. When told of the failure in the attempt to obtain the paper from Bertha, Goff only scoffed at Captain Vivian's cowardice, and insisted that if the undertaking were intrusted to him, he would even now gain possession of it before the evening closed in.

They had succeeded, he said, hitherto; Clement was in their power, a hostage. Through him any terms which they chose to impose were certain to be accepted by Mr. Vivian. Why was all to be given up without one more effort? Even if they failed as regarded the paper, he would, if it depended upon himself, brave the question, and by threatening Clement's life, force Mr. Vivian to destroy it. It was not even certain, indeed, that the paper was that which they imagined — notwithstanding all they had learnt from Mr. Lester's servant, they were acting only upon suspicion; and if it were not, nothing could be more senseless than to flee and leave the game in their enemy's hand.

His arguments were plausible, and aided by one which he had always found sufficient to stimulate the sinking spirit of his companion. To bind Mr. Vivian to secrecy would be to complete the revenge already taken, by shutting him out for ever from the hope of restoration to the General's favour; whilst by driving him from Encombe, and probably from England, they would be left free to carry on their schemes as before. Goff dwelt upon these points cunningly and successfully; yet it was long

before any fixed agreement could be attained between minds so differently bent, and each with a deeply-rooted selfishness of purpose—Goff, desperately bold, and willing to run all hazards for the furtherance of his own schemes, and the opportunity of pursuing his profitable trade at Encombe; Captain Vivian shrinking from the prospect of meeting the man whom he had injured, dreading the evils which his misdeeds had brought upon him, and brooding in bitterness of heart over Ronald's alienation and his own degrading position.

A compromise between the two was at length effected. It was arranged that Captain Vivian should linger upon the shore or amongst the cliffs till dusk, taking care to conceal himself carefully from observation; whilst Goff should be on the watch for the return of Bertha from the Hall, when he was to make another attempt to obtain possession of the precious paper. In the event of success, immediate notice was to be given to Captain Vivian, who might then put in practice the scheme which he had so long planned—meet Mr. Vivian, threaten him with Clement's perilous position, as certain to be engaged in a smuggling affray, and induce him, in the hope of saving his boy from danger and public disgrace, to agree to any terms of silence with regard to the past which his cousin might demand.

If, on the contrary, the important document on which so much depended could not be secured, Captain Vivian still insisted upon escaping without delay. A boat was therefore to be in readiness which would carry him off to his vessel. In that

case, Clement was to be left to his fate. Ronald, the only person likely to help him, was a prisoner, and to remain so till night; there would, consequently, be no one to interfere with the iniquitous scheme, so cruelly laid, to ruin him in his grandfather's eyes, and raise, if possible, a still more formidable barrier than that which now existed between Mr. Vivian and the General. All minor arrangements as to Ronald's release and future movements were left till the main points were settled. Goff agreed apparently to the plans proposed; but he had his own views for the future, and his own plans as to their furtherance. They were such as could not be communicated; yet in the secrecy of his heart there lay a desperate and fixed resolution that, come what might, the stake for which he had already dared so much should not be yielded without a struggle even, if it were necessary, to death.

CHAP. XLIII.

GLOOM and silence brooded over the oak-pannelled apartments, the deserted lobbies, and mazy corridors of Cleve Hall. Stealthily passed the measured footsteps of the old servants; and when, occasionally, a lighter or a quicker tread ventured to break upon the stillness, it seemed a profanation of the solemn grandeur of the stately mansion. General Vivian would not leave his dressing-room; Greaves waited upon him, Mildred sat with him, Ella occasionally went in and out with messages. He was not ill, it was said, and he would not consent to see a doctor. That was not surprising; he hated doctors, and professed to have no faith in them; and he was never known to be nervous about himself. He often talked of death, but never seemed to realise in himself the possibility of dying; and he was not going to die now, as far as any one could judge. The attack of the preceding evening had passed and left no very marked effects. Yet he would neither leave his room nor enter into conversation, nor do anything except attend to what he called necessary business. That he appeared to be engrossed in, only Mildred saw that his eye was often fixed as in inward thought when it seemed to be resting on the papers or book before

him; whilst his hearing, lately rather impaired, had suddenly acquired a singular keenness—the distant opening or shutting of a door, the roll of a waggon, even the shouts of children in the distance, were all observed. No, whatever there might be of mental suffering, there was nothing of death in the quick flash of his eye and the instantaneous turn of his head; but rather life,—vivid, active, most keenly sensitive, yet crusted over by an exterior so petrified that only those who watched him narrowly, and understood him by the experience of years, could have traced the current that flowed underneath it.

Mildred seldom sat with him in the morning; he said generally that it was an interruption to him, but now he could scarcely bear her out of his sight. Yet he spoke to her seldom, and then never upon the subject so paramount in its importance to both. It had come, and it was gone. Who could tell what he thought of it, or how it would influence him.

Mildred was brave by nature—the gift of moral courage had been her's from infancy—yet she could not venture to break in upon this ominous silence. Her father's character was still an unknown and unexplored region. Though they had lived together, one in interest and in love, for years, she could rarely venture to speculate upon the way in which events, or words, or actions would be taken by him. She could not say but that by attempting to turn the stream into one channel, it would, in resistance, be diverted into the opposite course. All with him was artificial;—not untrue or put on for show; but his was

a heart which had been drilled into obedience to self-imposed laws, and the free instincts of nature had been curbed till it might have seemed that they had ceased to act.

Long and weary were the hours that morning; memory lingering upon the past, fear busy with the future, and a sharp, present anxiety goading the natural despondency incident to such a position into suffering which it was almost impossible to conceal.

Clement's disappearance had been known at the Hall on the preceding evening, yet not so as to occasion any peculiar uneasiness. But in the morning, soon after Mildred and Ella had finished their breakfast together, another message brought the intelligence that he had not been at home all night, that a search had been instituted, ponds dragged, messengers sent out,—but hitherto all in vain, except that there was a report of his having been seen in company with some desperate-looking men on the road to Cleve.

Mildred's head turned sick and faint with fear. Almost her first thought was of her father, and strict orders were instantly given that the General was not to be alarmed,—it might do him injury. Greaves, who was the only person that ever waited upon him, promised to be careful. Yet Mildred could not be satisfied unless she sat in his room; and it was a source of infinite thankfulness that, on this most trying morning, he was not only willing but even desirous of having her with him. Still, every time the door opened she fancied that some one was about to enter with painful tidings; and Ella's careworn

face was sufficient in itself to have excited the General's remark, if his thoughts had not been otherwise and so intently preoccupied.

"You had better sit down quietly and read; you disturb me, coming in and out so often," said the General, impatiently, as Ella entered for about the sixth time, to glance at Mildred, and tell her by mute signs that nothing new had been heard.

"Thank you, Grandpapa, but I have my music to practise," and Ella went out again.

The General did not like a will contrary to his own, however small the matter in question might be, and Mildred seeing it, ventured upon an apology: "Ella won't come in again, Sir; she was only anxious to see whether I was comfortable."

"She might have trusted that to me. You are not uncomfortable, are you?"

"Oh, no! not at all, but—" Mildred fancied she heard distant voices, and stopped to listen; then remembered she had better not do any thing to attract attention, and murmured something unintelligible, whilst the General looked at her a moment in surprise, and continued his writing.

A long silence followed—in the room, at least; below there certainly were loud voices. Mildred was in an agony to stop them, but the General took no notice until two persons were heard talking in the lobby leading to his room: "Ring the bell, will you, Mildred? I think it is within your reach. I won't have that noise in the house."

Mildred rang, and the General laid down his pen, preparatory to a reprimand.

Greaves entered, turning the handle of the door noiselessly.

“Who is that talking in the passage, Greaves?”

“Mrs. Robinson, Sir”—and Greaves looked at Mildred, doubting how much more he was at liberty to say.

“Mrs. Robinson! What is she come for?”

“To speak to Miss Vivian, I believe, Sir, upon business. I was just coming to say so.”

“Let her come in. There are no secrets, I suppose, Mildred.”

Mildred turned very pale; but the General was busied with himself rather than with her. He was working himself up into stern coldness. Of all persons he would least have desired to show weakness, either in feeling or in action, before Mrs. Robinson.

It was a curious meeting. She came in as stiff and rigid as himself, and made her respectful yet rather proud curtsey, and sat down at a little distance from the table—all without speaking. And the General bent his head, and hoped she was well, with the stiff civility of a gentleman of the old school; but the merest stranger might have perceived that they did not like each other.

Mildred broke the silence: she asked whether Mrs. Robinson had come about parish business.

“Not exactly, Ma’am. Mr. Lester, they say, is to be home this evening, so I could go to him if I wanted any thing.”

The observation was made quite unconcernedly, yet Mildred read in the tone that it was intended for her comfort.

“My lodger comes back to Encombe with Mr. Lester, I believe, Ma’am,” continued Mrs. Robinson; and Mildred involuntarily made an eager gesture, which the General perceived, though his eyes never moved apparently from his letter.

“You have had a lodger, have you, Mrs. Robinson?” he said, inquiringly.

“Yes, Sir, a little while ago.”

“A little while? but how long?”

“I can’t say exactly how long, Sir; it might have been three months or more.”

“Oh!” the General’s pen moved with greater decision.

“Does he come with Mr. Lester, did you say?” asked Mildred; and in spite of herself, her voice trembled.

“I believe so, Ma’am, but I don’t know whether he is going to stay at the Farm again.”

The General laid down his pen and listened.

Mrs. Robinson went on, quite unmoved: “I was going to send down to the Rectory to learn for certain, but our farm people are all engaged. They have been all day, and I don’t know when they will be at leisure; and as I was coming up here, I thought I would ask, Ma’am, whether you had heard any thing about Mr. Lester’s plans. But, perhaps, you haven’t, so I won’t disturb you;” and Mrs. Robinson rose from her seat, and was about to retire, when the General spoke again: “You don’t take in lodgers, Mrs. Robinson, do you, generally?”

“Only sometimes, Sir, in the summer. This was a very civil-spoken gentleman.”

“And he is coming again, you say?”

“There is a talk of it, Sir.”

“I thought you said he was to be here with Mr. Lester.”

A scrutinising glance accompanied the words, which might have perplexed any one but Mrs. Robinson. She, however, was perfectly imperturbable, and answered, “He may come with Mr. Lester, Sir, but I can’t be certain. I thought Miss Mildred might have heard. I won’t disturb you any more, Sir, now. I wish you good morning.” A respectful curtsy! and Mrs. Robinson addressed Mildred, as though merely completing her sentence: “If you were coming into your bedroom, Ma’am, I might show you the patterns of print for the school children; I got them at Cleve yesterday. Mayn’t I help you?” Without waiting for an answer, she handed to Mildred the crutches which were her support in walking, and offered her arm.

Mildred turned to the General: “My dear father, I shall be back again directly; you don’t want any thing before I go, do you?”

“Nothing.” The General looked as if he would have said more, but Mrs. Robinson did not give him the opportunity. She fidgeted with Mildred’s shawl, and talked about the cold, and hurried her to the door. The General called out, “Mildred, you must be back directly; I want you to copy a letter for me.”

Mrs. Robinson answered for her, with another curtsy: “I won’t keep Miss Mildred five minutes, Sir;” and the General, having no other excuse for detaining them, suffered them to go.

“The General looks ill this morning, Ma’am,” was Mrs. Robinson’s first remark, after the door closed behind them.

“He fainted last night,” said Mildred.

“I heard so, Ma’am ; perhaps there wasn’t so much harm in that. He has kept clear of Master Clement.”

Mildred stopped, and leaned against the door of her own chamber, which she had just reached : “You are come to tell me something about him, Granny.”

“Just come in, my dear, and lie down for a moment. I’ll go presently and tell Greaves to take the General’s lunch up, and then he won’t fuss so at your staying.”

She led Mildred into the room, placed her on the sofa, and continued, without requiring any questions to be asked ; “He’s off with the smugglers, Miss Mildred—certain ; and the Captain’s in some way at the bottom of it.”

Mildred caught her hand : “Quick, quick ; how do you know ?”

But Mrs. Robinson was not to be turned aside from her own course : “One of our farm boys was coming over the hills last night, behind Miss Campbell and the children. He saw Master Clement stay behind, as they were near the village ; the Captain was close by—he’d been following them. He went up to Master Clement, and they talked a little,—the boy saw him go off with the Captain to the Grange, for his road lay the same way.”

“We heard something of that last night,” interrupted Mildred.

“The Captain says he went home afterwards,” con-

tinued Mrs. Robinson ; “ but the boy declares that, as he was going across the Common an hour later, he heard voices off towards the Point, and one he was sure was Master Clement’s. He had a message to carry to Rock Farm, out by Cleve, and he went; and coming back, there was a light upon the Point, as if men were moving about with a lantern, when all of a sudden it disappeared. Joe was going along the path near the edge of the cliff then. He didn’t like much, he says, to go and put himself in the way of meeting them, for he knew they must be folks that wouldn’t fancy being interfered with ; and so he kept quiet amongst the bushes and the furze for some little time ; and he declares that he quite plainly heard a party of them scramble down. Master Clement was one, he’s pretty certain, but he thinks that he didn’t much wish to go. The boy didn’t wait to see what became of them ; only he knows all the boats along the beach, and he says that Mark Wood’s was there in the morning, and it’s not there now. And Mark himself isn’t at home ; and the child Barney’s been questioned, and they’ve got out of him that his father had settled beforehand to be away all night. Putting things together, it’s pretty clear, Ma’am, what the young gentleman’s been after.”

No voice came. Mildred’s hands were folded together, and her countenance expressed the most intense dejection.

“ I shall go and tell Greaves to take up the General’s luncheon ; and you’ll have yours brought in here, my dear,” continued Mrs. Robinson. “ It was best for you to know the worst at once.” Not wait-

ing for Mildred's assent, she departed to give her orders.

Poor Mildred! she did indeed feel crushed. Edward—Mr. Lester—Bertha; none could help her now. Far better than others did she know the fixed prejudice, the stern laws which governed her father's conduct. Far more truly could she read that martyr spirit of self-torture, which had shown itself for years in General Vivian's every word and action. If there had been a glimmering of hope before, it had faded since the preceding evening, and now it was utterly quenched. An offence deadly in the rigid judgment of General Vivian, even if capable of extenuation in the eyes of the world, had been laid to her brother's charge; and when her last hope was in the acknowledgment of his fault, and a final appeal to mercy, on the plea that its punishment had been borne uncomplainingly for eighteen years, a further excuse for severity was to be found in the fact, that the sins of the father had descended as an heirloom to the son—that Clement was what his father had been, when he brought sorrow and desolation to Cleve.

Mrs. Robinson returned. Greaves was gone up to the General with his luncheon, and would take care that Miss Mildred should not be wanted again just yet; only she remarked that it would not do to stay away very long—people might come upon business to see the General, and talk; and the story was getting about fast.

“He must know it before long,” replied Mildred, in a low voice.

“It mayn't be till to-morrow, Ma'am; and before

that Mr. Lester and Master Edward will be here, and it will be better broken to him."

"And that unhappy boy! What will become of him?" said Mildred.

"My husband and two of the men will be down upon the shore to-night waiting, if they should land again," replied Mrs. Robinson. "But it's scarcely to be thought they'll be back so soon. It's the spirit of a Campbell that's in him," she muttered to herself.

Mildred looked at her sadly and reproachfully: "A Vivian, rather, Granny; Edward might have done the same."

"Master Edward would never have taken to such a low set," exclaimed Mrs. Robinson, with sudden animation. "When he consorted with the Captain, he was not at all the man he is now. No, no, Miss Mildred; my dear, it's the Campbell blood; and when once it's in, there's no rooting it out."

Mildred would not argue the point, for Mrs. Robinson, like the General, was strong in her prejudices. She could only murmur, "What tidings for Edward and Mr. Lester!"

"I've been thinking of going on to Cleve to meet them," continued Mrs. Robinson. "It would be better for Master Edward to hear it from some one who is up to things, and can help him to keep his own counsel. He was never to be trusted when things took him by surprise."

Mildred took her hand affectionately. "Always kind and thoughtful," she said. "Yes, it would be better; but, dear Granny, it is giving yourself a great deal of trouble."

Mrs. Robinson drew back her hand rather proudly. "I was not one of the family for eight-and-twenty years for nothing," she said. "Who should I take trouble for but those who are like my own kin? Master Edward will be wishing to put himself foremost in the search; but he mustn't."

"No, indeed. But, Granny, my father must know of his being here before many days are over. He has been told now that he is in England."

"Know it? does he?" Almost for the first time Mrs. Robinson's face changed colour, and she spoke anxiously: "Ah! Miss Mildred, my dear, who had the courage to tell him?"

"I had, Granny; there was no one else."

Mrs. Robinson shook her head sorrowfully: "Ah! no one. It has all come upon you. Strange that it hasn't carried you to your grave. But he's softened; surely he's softened?"

"I fear not. You saw him just now. He has been like that ever since — sharp in manner; and when he has spoken, saying only a few words."

"Conscience troubles him," was Mrs. Robinson's comment. "I knew he had a meaning in his questions."

"Yes, I knew it too. He is full of suspicion. He thinks we are all plotting. What will it be when he hears about Clement?"

"He will say, as I do, that it is the Campbell blood, and there's no hope for it. Oh! Master Edward! — the marriage was the worst thing of all. But you mustn't stay here, my dear. The General will

be asking questions, and it will never do to let him know what's going on till Mr. Lester comes. Let me help you back to him, and then I'll set off for Cleve."

Mildred could scarcely summon resolution sufficient to move; and said she dreaded encountering the General's questions, and felt she had a thousand other things to say to Mrs. Robinson.

"It won't do to wait, my dear, or ;—hark! There's a visitor. I heard the bell." She left Mildred, and went to the head of the stairs to listen.

Her face was discomposed when she returned: "Miss Campbell and Miss Rachel. Miss Campbell wants to see you. We mustn't let the General know she is here. He is not in a mood for that. Hadn't I better send Miss Ella to talk to him? and perhaps he will let her copy his letter."

Mildred smiled gratefully: "So like you, and the old times, Granny; managing for every one. Perhaps it will be best; and Miss Campbell can come and see me here. And Rachel,"—she considered a moment,— "Rachel must wait in the morning-room. Thank you so much for arranging it," she added, as she pressed Mrs. Robinson's hand affectionately.

"No thanks, my dear; but God help you and all of us."

The prayer was needed, for Mildred's complexion was of a livid paleness; and even that one day of anxiety seemed to have made her cheeks thinner, and shrunk her slight frame.

CHAP. XLIV.

BERTHA and Mildred met as old friends. The one common fear had melted away whatever remains of by gone antipathy might have been lingering in their minds. Bertha entered, tired with her walk and worn with suspense and watchfulness ; but Mildred's hearty " Thank you for coming ; I have been hoping you would," cheered and encouraged her ; and when she unfastened her bonnet, and sat down by the fire, they might have appeared to be even sisters in cordiality.

Mildred began the conversation, for she had the most to tell. Mrs. Robinson's intelligence had given a definite form to her fears, and so, after the first startling announcement, had in a measure relieved her. She believed, she said, that Clement's absence was a boyish freak, — the love of adventure, — that he had gone for a sail, and would return. She thought they might expect him at any moment ; and her mind did not rest upon the thought of him with overwhelming uneasiness, except so far as his conduct might ultimately influence his father's fortunes.

And Bertha sat still and listened, taking in what was said, yet not able to receive comfort from the removal of suspense. Clement was more, personally, to her than his father could be ; and Mrs. Robinson's intelligence confirmed the worst suspicions which she

had entertained. Mildred had lived in retirement, hearing only of evil, never being brought in contact with it. Bertha had, from circumstances, learnt the real facts and roughnesses of life; and the dangers which to the one were a dream of imagination, were to the other a vivid and terrible reality. When Mildred at length paused, Bertha sat for some time in deep thought. She was pondering in her own mind a question which had suggested itself whilst Mildred had been speaking—the paper in her possession, should it be shown to her?—or would it be a breach of confidence? She could not decide, and the doubt made her reply in an abstracted tone to Mildred's inquiry, whether she could think of any thing necessary to be done on Clement's account before Mr. Lester's return.

“You are not satisfied with what Mrs. Robinson says?” continued Mildred, anxiously.

“Not quite. Did you tell me,—did you say that the farm people would be on the shore watching for him?”

“Yes; it seemed all that could be done. And Mrs. Robinson herself is gone to Cleve to meet Mr. Lester. He will be here, if he comes at all, soon after five.”

“There must be no if,” murmured Bertha to herself. She rose and looked out of the window; it commanded a distant view of the sea.

Mildred followed her with her eye: “You don't see any thing?”

“Not close. There are several vessels far out in the horizon. How the days close in!”—Bertha took out her watch: “five and twenty minutes to four.”

Mildred started: "And I have been away from my father all this time; yet there seems a great deal to say still."

A quick step was heard along the passage, and Ella ran into the room.

"Aunt Mildred, grandpapa wants you this minute—this very minute; let me help you?" She gave Mildred her arm. "Aunt Bertha, I will be back with you in a minute; please wait for me."

"And bring Rachel up," said Mildred; "she must be tired of being alone. I am afraid I shall not come back; but you will rest here without me," she added, addressing Bertha.

"Shan't you come back?" said Bertha. "I wished——"

"Grandpapa is in such a hurry," whispered Ella.

Yet Mildred lingered: "I don't think there is any thing to settle, or that we can do."

"Grandpapa wants you to help him to find a paper," continued Ella—"one he has lost out of the box in his study. He has had the box up, and has been looking for it."

Mildred turned pale, and sat down: "I don't feel very well, Ella dear. Tell grandpapa I will come to him as soon as I possibly can." Ella left the room.

Bertha gave Mildred some water. "Thank you. I ought not to be so silly; but it brought back last night to me. I thought I would not say anything till I had seen Mr. Lester; but I had better tell you now. There is no real hope for Edward. He drew a bill for five thousand pounds, payable after—after my father's death. That was his offence—you understand now.

But no, you can't—no one can understand my father who has not lived with him."

Bertha put down the glass upon the table, and said, very quietly, "I had heard of this."

"And I had not!" exclaimed Mildred. "Does Mr. Lester know it?"

"I don't know; I think he must. I think General Vivian must have given him the paper."

"He said it was mislaid. Last night he looked for it," said Mildred, hurriedly. "Once"—and she sighed deeply—"I fancied it was a mistake, and that his mind was wandering. He didn't mention it again this morning; but then he was not up till late, and he has had business ever since he was dressed."

"Is this it?" Bertha produced the paper from her pocket-book, unfolded it, and gave it into Mildred's hands.

Tears, bitter, scalding tears of anguish coursed each other down Mildred's worn face; less, perhaps, for the offence which had been so deeply repented, than for the agonising remembrance of the direful evils which had followed in the train of that one act—death, desolation, exile; and she laid her head upon Bertha's shoulder, and murmured, "Edith! my sister! if he had told her the truth, she would not have died."

She held the paper in her trembling hands, and tried to read it.

Bertha bent her head down to examine it: "That is not like Edward's signature now," and she pointed to a peculiar turn in the letter V.

Mildred assented mechanically.

“It is a very careful signature, not such as a man would write in a fit of desperation,” continued Bertha.

Mildred looked at it now more closely: “Yes, it is very careful;” but it did not seem to strike her that it was in any other way peculiar.

Bertha’s heart sank. It would be too cruel to suggest the possibility of forgery, if after all the idea were but the coinage of her own imagination; and concealing her disappointment, she said, “I should scarcely have thought it an offence so unpardonable, after eighteen years of suffering and repentance.”

“It might not have been with any one but my father; but—I can’t talk of it—may I have it to take to him?”

Bertha hesitated, and said she had no right to give it up; it was found in Mr. Lester’s pocket-book, and she must return it to him.

Mildred looked annoyed: “It is my father’s,” she observed; “he is inquiring for it.”

“He must have given it himself to Mr. Lester,” replied Bertha.

“I don’t know—at any rate, it is his.”

Just then Ella came back: “Aunt Mildred! Aunt Mildred! indeed you must come! You can’t think what a state grandpapa is getting into.”

Mildred turned to Bertha: “Trust me with it; I will keep it for Mr. Lester if I can. My father may have forgotten that he gave it, and it would work upon his mind terribly to think he had lost it.”

“You are at liberty to say where it was found,” replied Bertha, rather proudly, “and to assure Gene-

ral Vivian that immediately on Mr. Lester's return I will speak to him about it. I can't possibly do more." She replaced the paper in the pocket-book; but seeing Mildred's face of vexation, she added, "You must forgive me; but it is against my conscience."

Mildred scarcely trusted herself with a reply. She merely said, "I hope you are right; I cannot tell," and left the room.

Bertha waited about ten minutes at the Hall after seeing Mildred. Ella came back to her, and they went down stairs and talked with Rachel. Ella was uneasy about Clement, yet not so much so as Bertha expected, now that she knew what had become of him. Her's was not an anxious nature; and besides, she had often heard Clement boast of what he would do some day, when he was his own master, and so it seemed less strange to her that he should take the opportunity of Mr. Lester's absence to indulge himself in an adventure; and she decided that he must be back either that evening or the next morning. She seemed unable to understand the possibility of danger, and her sense of duty and obedience was not yet sufficiently strong to make her regard the offence in the same light as Rachel.

It was very trying to Bertha to hear the kind of discussion which went on, and to listen whilst Ella talked confidently of things of which she knew nothing, and excused faults which were likely to be of the utmost importance to so many in their consequences. It was an exaggerated form of the trial which all must bear who are in earnest in education,

insisting upon duties and habits which children will think trifles, because they have not the understanding to see whither they are tending. Often she was tempted to break in upon the conversation, and remind Ella that, whatever might happen, she must be answerable for many of Clement's misdeeds, since it was from her he had first imbibed the spirit of disobedience. But Bertha's conscience was busy with herself also; and besides, she was learning to leave Ella for awhile to the nurture of God's Providence—the clouds, and rain, and sunshine of life—which, when the weeds have been taken from the soil, and the heart is in consequence open to good impressions, will do far more for its improvement than any direct culture.

Ella was unwilling to let them go. She prized their society more now that she had so little of it; and since Mildred had been so occupied with General Vivian, the hours had seemed long and lonely. Bertha also waited in the vain expectation that Mildred would return, and that she should hear the result of the interview with the General. She was not thoroughly satisfied with her own pertinacity—there had been some pride in it; yet strict right was on her side—feeling on Mildred's. She thought that, if Mildred came back, they would discuss the point again; but the clock in the hall striking a quarter to four, and reminding her that if she lingered longer it would be dark before they arrived at home, she set off with Rachel, after giving a promise to Ella that the very earliest tidings of Clement should be sent to the Hall.

There were two ways by which they might reach the Lodge: one through the Cleve Woods and the village; the other across the Common and the cliffs. Bertha chose the latter; she could then look over the sea, and watch for the vessels which might be coming in. There were several in the distance, and she was tempted to linger and observe them. They walked near the edge of the cliff, and looked down upon the shore. Rachel remarked that there were fewer boats than usual on the beach. But there was one near the Point which she thought looked like Mark Wood's. That seemed rather to contradict the report brought by Mrs. Robinson; and Bertha, uncomfortable at any thing which disturbed what was now her settled impression as regarded Clement, said they would go nearer, and make certain of the fact.

"There are two men out there," said Rachel, pointing to a spot where the Cleve Plantations joined the open Common; "perhaps they can tell us."

"I don't see them," replied Bertha. "Oh! yes, there they are, keeping close by the hedge. I wonder whether they belong to the Grange."

"If they do, they are smuggling people," said Rachel. "And they will be sure to be civil to us; they always are to ladies and children."

"But not if we ask questions about their boats," replied Bertha; "they will think that interference."

"Will they?" and Rachel went nearer to the edge of the cliff, and looked over it again. "Do come where I am, dear Miss Campbell. Now that it is low tide, one can tell so well how they get up to the cave. Don't you see the kind of steps up the cliff?"

“Yes;” but Bertha cared more for the boat than for the cave just then.

Rachel went on in rather an excited tone, keeping close to Bertha as she spoke: “Shouldn’t you like to go into the cave? Anne told me, a long time ago, it was such an odd place, and that the preventive men never can find the smugglers when they get in there; they always escape. But I don’t talk to Anne now about such things,” she added, seeing that Bertha’s countenance was grave. “I have never done it since papa told me not.”

Bertha was not grave on account of any thing which Rachel said, she was watching the men who had left the path by the Plantations, and were coming towards them, across the Common.

“Isn’t that Goff, Rachel?”

“Oh, no; it’s too tall.” But Rachel looked a second time, and changed her mind: “Yes, though, I think it must be; he walks like him.”

“Never mind the boat,” said Bertha, turning quickly homewards. “It is too late to wait.”

“They are not coming this way, they are going towards the Point,” observed Rachel.

They went on a few paces further. Rachel looked back: “How very strange! He’s gone,—one of them—all of a sudden. There were two, Miss Campbell, weren’t there?”

“Never mind, my dear; come on. You can’t see because of the brushwood.”

“Yes, I can indeed;” and Rachel could not resist another stealthy glance. “The brushwood couldn’t possibly hide him. Dear Miss Campbell, do you know,

that is where Clement says the smugglers get down in some way to the shore. We never could find out how; but he says they do. It has something to do with the cave."

"Never mind, my dear, now; it doesn't concern us."

"I think the short man is coming behind us," said Rachel. "Shall I look?"

"No, don't look; come on."

"Are you frightened, dear Miss Campbell, you walk so fast?"

Bertha slackened her pace.

"The Common seems so long always," said Rachel, in a timid voice.

"We should have done better to go by the village," observed Bertha; but then she reproached herself for alarming Rachel without cause, and added: "It is only that I dislike meeting that man Goff, if it is he; but we shall be near the Cliff Cottages soon."

"No, indeed—not for a long time; the nearest is half a mile off. But there is the gamekeeper's cottage behind us. The man won't do us any harm, will he?"

"Oh! no, of course not: what harm can he do us?" yet Bertha's trembling heart belied her brave words.

"If we could go across to the Plantation, we should be near the gamekeeper's; and Hardman would walk home with us," said Rachel.

Bertha thought for an instant; "Perhaps it might be better: we can get in at the little gate, and you can run on and ask Hardman."

“And leave you?”

“Yes — you will be back again directly ; and he won't follow us into the Plantation.”

Again Rachel glanced round : “He is coming, but he is not very near. We had better go this way ;” and she went on in the most direct course, finding her path through the furze, without considering the prickles, and not stopping until, nearly out of breath, they reached the Plantation gate. It was locked.

“Get over it, and run on to the cottage,” said Bertha.

“And you will come too?”

“Yes, after you ; only you will be quicker than I shall.”

Rachel clambered over the gate, and wished to wait and assist Bertha ; but her help was refused, and she hurried on through the Plantation, and was soon out of sight.

Bertha put her foot on the first bar, but the gate was an awkward one to mount, and she slipped back, and nearly fell. Looking back, she saw the man coming towards her. She tried a second time — a bramble caught her dress and entangled it. He was so close now that she could hear his footsteps, — nearer and nearer. She tore away her dress, — made a third attempt, — reached the second bar, and was upon the point of jumping over, when a hand grasped her shoulder, whilst another covered her mouth, and a harsh voice said, “Silence ! as you value your life.”

She turned. It was Goff.

Fear was gone then. She confronted him without shrinking : “Your business with me ?”

“You have a paper signed by Edward Vivian; give it me.”

“If I have, I will keep it; you have no right to it.”

“Power is right. I must have it;” and he touched the trigger of a pistol concealed under his coat, adding: “Take care, this is no child’s play.”

“Let that come which God may appoint. I will not give it,” replied Bertha.

He again put his hand upon her mouth: “Attempt to scream and you are a dead woman. Now, let me see every thing you have in your possession.”

Bertha threw her keys and handkerchief upon the ground.

“That’s not all—the pocket-book;” and seeing she hesitated, he thrust his hand himself into her pocket and drew it out.

The first paper which presented itself was the old discoloured bill. Holding her very firmly with one hand, Goff unfolded it with the other; and then putting his face close to her’s muttered: “The first word that whispers to man or woman what has passed, your life is not worth an hour’s purchase.” Still keeping the paper, he relaxed his grasp; and Bertha, with a speed which only extreme fear could have given, climbed the gate, and ran towards the game-keeper’s cottage.

Goff carefully tore the paper to atoms, and scattered it to the winds; and making his way across the Common to the Headland, disappeared almost instantaneously amongst the brushwood.

CHAP. XLV.

THE path which Rachel had taken towards the gamekeeper's cottage was not very well known to her. It was seldom that she had occasion to go through that part of the Plantation; but it seemed direct enough, and she ran on without fear till she came to a point where it branched off in two opposite directions—one leading to the right, into the wood; the other to the left, keeping near the outer fence. She paused for an instant, and then chose the latter, under the impression that Hardman's cottage was near the Common. On she went till she was out of breath; but the cottage did not appear; and at length she became fully alive to the fact of having missed her way. But she was not frightened for herself, only worried for Bertha. She was safe within the Plantation, and the cottage certainly could not be very far off, and there must be some cross paths leading to it. It would be a very long way back; and wishing to take a short cut, she proceeded still a little further, and then saw, to her great satisfaction, a chimney rising from amongst the trees to the right. The sight gave her renewed vigour, and she ran forward hopefully, until turning an angle in the path, she discovered that the cottage just seen was not in the Plantation, but on the outskirts of the Common, and immediately in front of the Grange.

The dreary old house, which was full in her view

as she leaned for an instant over the fence, showed her how far she had gone out of her way; but the sight of the cottage was a comfort. It was inhabited by a man and his wife, very civil, respectable people, who would be as willing to render her any assistance as the gamekeeper; and now that she had made such a stupid blunder, it seemed wise to take advantage of their help. And Rachel, trained to decision from infancy, lost no time in thinking what she would or would not do, but mounted the fence, tearing her dress and hurting her hand in the act, and in another minute was at John Price's door.

A knock, but no answer—a second knock, equally unsuccessful. The door was locked; and when Rachel peeped in at the latticed window, she could see no symptoms of fire. John Price and his wife had evidently gone out together. Exceedingly vexatious that was; and something like fear did then creep over Rachel's heart, for the light was growing faint, and the Common looked interminably dreary; and she had a notion, that if she were once to find herself again in the Plantation alone, she would never be able to make her way out.

And what was that coming across the Common, looking like a speck, but certainly moving? Could it be Goff? Rachel hid herself on the other side of the cottage, and did not venture to peep round the corner for several seconds; when she did, the black speck was gone. But she was still fearful it might be Goff; and how could she cross that piece of the Common again to get into the Plantation, if he were lurking near.

A thought struck her—but not a very bright one—should she go on to the Grange? Perhaps Ronald would be there, and he would be sure to help her. But, no, it must not be; her papa would not like it. Yet she looked with longing eyes at the rough road, worn into ruts, which conducted to the farm premises and the back of the house. Just then a man, whom Rachel felt nearly sure was John Price, came from a paddock behind the cottage, and turned into the road as if going up to the house. Rachel ran after him and called, but he did not hear. The road terminated by a gate opening into the farm-yard, which was heavy for her to open, and this trouble delayed her a little; and by the time she had managed to get through, she had lost sight of the man. This could not well have happened unless he was gone to the back of the house, for Rachel must have seen him—at least, so she thought—if he were crossing the yard; and she passed through the gate which separated the farm premises from the shrubbery, and found herself in a small overgrown flower garden, completely screened from the rest of the grounds and from the farm-yard by tall trees rising up immediately in front of the high turret built at one angle of the house. It was difficult to know what to do next. She dared not go round to the front of the house and ring at the bell, and run the chance of meeting Captain Vivian—and she did not like the thought of skulking about at the side; still less could she make up her mind to go all the way back alone; and at last she ventured to call, “John! John Price, is that you?”

An answer!—but not as Rachel had expected. A voice came from above, from a window high up in the turret: “Rachel here! What is the matter?”

It was Ronald’s voice, and Rachel actually screamed with delight.

“Hush! hush! don’t speak loud. What is the matter?”

Rachel told her tale. She had been with Miss Campbell, and they were late and frightened; and Goff had come in their way, and they wanted some one to go home with them. She had left Miss Campbell waiting at the Plantation gate. “Please come, Ronald; be quick,” was the end.

He spoke again, in a voice so low that she could scarcely catch his words: “Come near, Rachel—under the window, as close as you can. I can’t come to you, I am kept here as a prisoner. They have fastened my door. I can’t get away, unless you will help me.”

“Help you, oh! yes; I will go round directly.”

He stopped her with a voice agonising in its eagerness: “Stay, Rachel: be silent and listen. Don’t be frightened, no one will hurt you; they may hurt me. Have you seen any one here?”

Rachel’s excitement was perfectly subdued now; she answered, “No one, except one man; I think it was John Price.”

“Where is he now?”

“I can’t tell. I think he went round at the back.”

“Go to the corner of the house, and look if he is there still: don’t show yourself.”

Rachel did as she was desired, and came back: "I can't see any one."

"You are certain it was not Goff?"

"Quite, it was a taller man; and Goff is out upon the Common."

"It was not — my father?" he uttered the name reluctantly.

"I don't think it could have been; it was not like him."

A pause. Rachel thought of Bertha, and said, "Can you come with me, Ronald?"

"If you will — Rachel, will you do as I bid you?"

"Yes — that is, if I can;" and Rachel's voice trembled a little.

"You must go round to the back door: don't be frightened. If you meet any one, say what you said to me about wanting help, but don't mention my name. In that case you must go home, for you won't be able to do anything for me. But tell Miss Campbell from me that I am a prisoner here; that Clement is in great danger; that if I could be set free I might aid him; but that, anyhow, there must be a watch kept upon the shore, for Clement is with the smugglers, and there will be a landing to-night, and a skirmish with the coast-guard. Do you understand?"

"Yes, quite."

"That is what you are to do if you do meet any one; but I don't think you will." He paused, as if hesitating whether it would be right to say more: "What I am going to ask you to do, Rachel, I would not ask only it may be a question of Clement's safety,

and of other things — more than I can tell now. Will you do it?"

"If papa would not mind—if there is nothing wrong."

"There can be no wrong, and—but you will be frightened."

"No, indeed, Ronald; God will keep me from being frightened."

"I would ask you to get me a ladder, but you couldn't bring it; and you might be seen by the farm people. I could fasten the sheets and blankets of my bed together, and let myself down, but the window is too high. I want more; if you could go into the house, you could give them to me."

"Yes, — how?" Rachel's heart a little failed her.

"There is an attic over mine — you see the window;—if you were in that attic, you could let them down to me, and I could catch them."

"Yes, I see; but I don't know the way — and I shall be heard."

Ronald's heart smote him. It seemed putting the poor child in such danger. And yet not really so; if she were discovered, the punishment would fall upon him. But her fear — no, it was cowardly to let her suffer for him; and he looked again out of the window, and calculated the possibility of reaching the ground without more help. A broken leg, if not a broken neck, seemed the best he could expect. And in the meantime what might not be plotting against Clement! Not without a purpose, surely had he been detained a prisoner, threatened with unknown

danger if he attempted to obtain help, kept hour after hour in expectation of Captain Vivian's return; and now, just when he was growing desperate with anxiety and indignation, escape was within reach, yet in a form in which he could not make up his mind to avail himself of it. It was a moment of cruel uncertainty, ended by Rachel.

"Ronald, I have prayed to God to help me, and I will do whatever you wish."

Still Ronald hesitated: "Are you sure you won't be frightened?"

"I will try not to be; please tell me what I must do."

"Dear Rachel, I can never thank you enough."

"Let me do it, Ronald; thank me afterwards. Must I go into the house?"

"Yes, at the back door; it is almost always open. A long passage leads from it straight into the hall; the kitchen is away at the right. Old Mrs. Morris and the girl are not likely to be in the passage. When you get into the hall, you will see the staircase; and you must go up. There is a lobby at the top. The farthest door on the right opens into a passage by the back staircase. Then you must go up the stairs, up to the very top; and just before you will be the door of the attic above me."

"Stay, let me say that over again," said Rachel, speaking firmly, though she trembled from head to foot. She repeated the direction correctly, and added: "What then?"

"You must open the window, and let down the sheets; I will catch them. After that you had better come back, and wait for me here."

“Yes; is there any thing else?”

“Nothing—except, if you meet any one in the passage, give your message about wanting some one to go home with you. If you meet any one on the stairs, or in the bedroom, say it was I who sent you; and no harm will come to you, whatever may to me.”

Rachel moved away a few steps, but returned: “Are you sure I shan’t meet Captain Vivian?”

“Very nearly; I can’t be quite sure. Dear Rachel, don’t go if you are frightened.”

“I won’t be frightened. This way, isn’t it?”

“Yes, to the right—round the corner.”

“Good-b’ye,” and Rachel was gone.

The back door was soon reached. Rachel would not give herself time for thought, and entered. The passage was very long and dark, and she heard voices talking in the kitchen, quite close, so it seemed, but no one came out. A heavy swing door closed the passage; she pushed it open, feeling almost sure that she should meet some one on the other side; but there was no one, and her light footsteps sounded ominously loud on the uneven stone floor of the large hall. On one side of the hall were the doors opening to the other parts of the house; on the other the wide, shallow staircase. Rachel touched the first step, and it creaked. She stood still, and thought she heard a door slam—her heart beat so that she could scarcely move; but on she went, and creak, creak went the stairs, so loudly that it made her bold. She reached the lobby in safety. Then her recollection became confused. Was she to go straightforward or turn

to the right? Straightforward she thought, and she pushed open a door. A pair of man's boots caught her eye, and she almost screamed,—happily not quite, and recovering herself, went back again, seeing that she was wrong. The back staircase was before her, as she opened the right hand door, a girl was singing below in the kitchen—that was a great comfort. She almost ran up the stairs, but they were steep and worn,—they grew worse and worse as she went on; and when she stood, as she thought, at the top, there were others still above. Again she paused to take breath. A door did slam then,—there was no doubt of it,—a door below; and there was a footstep on the stairs, slow and heavy. Rachel's knees tottered. She hurried on: the slow step came behind, and stopped at the foot of the last flight. Was it coming higher? No; to Rachel's inexpressible relief, old Mrs. Morris, the housekeeper, slept in one of the lower rooms; and she could hear her muttering to herself whilst wandering about her chamber, and then descend again with the same ponderous tread as before.

Rachel was now in the attic—a large, comfortless apartment, with two beds, which seemed half buried under the sloping roof. The window was high, and she had to climb a chair to unfasten it; and the chair was heavy, so that she could not lift it, but was obliged to drag it along the floor.

A fearful noise that was! But Mrs. Morris was by that time in the kitchen again, and Rachel was grown desperate in her boldness; and at length, after considerable difficulty, the window was un-

fastened, a sheet dragged from the bed and let down, and in a moment caught by Ronald from below.

“Any more?—do you want any more?” she ventured to say.

“Yes, one more. Stay; not till I put out my hand;” and Rachel, stationed at the attic window, looked down, and saw the man whom she had fancied to be John Price, but whom she recognised now as one of Goff’s constant companions, pass through the farm-yard.

When he was out of sight, Ronald waved his hand from the window: “Now, then.”

The second sheet was let down.

“Is that all?”

“Yes; come down quickly.”

Rachel left the window open, and went to the head of the staircase. Her impulse was to rush. And she did rush, not heeding the creaking of stairs, or listening for the sounds of doors, or voices, but going on blindly, desperately—by the worn steps, across the lobby, flitting like a gust of wind down the broad staircase, and across the hall, till she had passed through the dark passage, and was again in the open air, and under Ronald’s window.

Ronald looked out: “Rachel, are you there?”

“Yes, safe. Are you coming?”

“Directly. I am tying them together. Keep close under the wall,—away to the left.”

She waited, it seemed, an interminable time: she did not understand what he meant to do.

The rope of sheets was fastened at the top, and was let down.

“ Now, Rachel, keep away; don't be afraid, it will hold me.”

She hid her face, and prayed.

When she looked up, he was standing by her side: “ Oh! Ronald, I am so thankful!” Her voice was faint and trembling.

He pressed her hand earnestly: “ Thank God first, Rachel;— you afterwards;” and they went on together in silence.

Their steps were directed towards the gamekeeper's cottage. There Ronald proposed, in case Bertha was gone, to give Rachel in charge to some person who might accompany her home, whilst he went in search of Mr. Lester or Mr. Vivian. It was the only plan he could form on the spur of the moment; but as he went on it occasioned considerable misgiving. He was not able at first to think. Every dark object, every gate post or trunk of a tree, suggested the idea of some one tracking his footsteps, or stopping him on the way; but when they had crossed the Common, and were again within the shelter of the Plantation, he ventured to pause for a moment, to consider whether the course he had determined upon would be the best he could adopt.

So little knowledge had he of his father's movements, that he was unable to tell to what degree the danger which he supposed menaced Clement, might or might not implicate Captain Vivian; and the doubt upon this point, so intensely painful, pressed upon him overwhelmingly, at the very moment when it was most necessary to act with decision.

True, Mr. Vivian had promised to take no advan-

tage, to his father's injury, of any communication which he might make. But this was not now the point. Whatever might be his duty hereafter, as regarded the terrible secret which had that day been confided to him, there was no time now to ponder upon it,—Clement was his object. But in saving Clement he might be brought into personal opposition with his father. If Captain Vivian should, himself, join the smuggling party; by aiding Mr. Vivian, Ronald might be forced to act against him. The thought was horrible. But how could he leave Clement, knowing that machinations were going on, having promised again and again that he would watch over him? It seemed equally impossible; the sense of honour and gratitude, which lay as a burden upon his conscience, forbade it. He stood for a few moments irresolute, gazing upon the flag-staff on the Headland, as it was seen through an opening in the trees.

Rachel drew near: "Look, Ronald; there is a light on the Point. Is it any one moving?"

"It is a fire, not a lantern."

"A fire there! What for?"

"Never mind; there are often fires on the Point."

Rachel continued: "Some one said one day that they were always lighted by smugglers; will it have any thing to do with Clement?"

He made no reply.

"May we come on, Ronald? Miss Campbell will be so tired and frightened."

"Yes; I had forgotten;" and he went on quickly, still, however, looking towards the Point.

“Are you very much afraid for Clement, Ronald?”

“I don’t know; I hope not. See, Rachel, there is the cottage. Should you mind going to the door alone?”

“I would rather not, if you don’t care;” and she drew nearer to him. “If Hardman should be out, or Miss Campbell shouldn’t be there, what should I do?”

“But I would wait for you here; I would be within sight.”

“Hark! there is a voice — papa’s voice; and there he is at the door, and Miss Campbell with him. He must have come by the Cleve coach. Mrs. Robinson went to tell him about Clement.”

“Mrs. Robinson! Did she know?”

“Yes, about his having gone with the smugglers. I don’t know how she heard it. Please let me go;” and she would have sprung forward, but Ronald kept her back.

“Listen, Rachel. I can’t see Mr. Lester. Tell him what I said. He must watch for Clement on the beach. Say to him that I will watch too. Say to Miss Campbell that I remember my promise, and”—his voice failed him —“good-by’e, Rachel. I shall never forget this evening.”

“Good-by’e, and thank you so very, very much, Ronald.”

She ran to the cottage, and Ronald turned into a narrow track in the wood.

CHAP. XLVI.

THE day closed ominously, though the upper part of the sky was clear, for thick masses of vapour were collecting in the horizon, and gusts of wind rushed threateningly over the chafed waves.

Captain Vivian, wrapped in a rough seaman's coat, watched the failing light from the shelter of the rocks gathered around Dark Head Point. Immovable as he stood for a long time, he could scarcely have been distinguished from them; yet, as the glimmer became fainter and more faint, he might have been seen slowly ascending the rough path cut in the cliffs, till he stood before the passage entrance to the cave, in which he and Ronald had met that morning. The light yet lingered within, forcing its way through apertures in the rock; and flinging himself upon the ground, so as to command the entrance, Captain Vivian placed a pistol by his side, lighted his cigar, and waited, as it appeared, with tolerable tranquillity the course of coming events.

His watchfulness, however, was not chiefly directed to the entrance of the cave; more frequently he turned his head towards the large stone near the rough hearth, and several times he took his cigar from his mouth and listened. He grew impatient at

length, and rose and paced the cave; and once he touched the stone, as if to move it; but then something checked him, and he sat down again near, still listening.

The long, low whistle so familiar to him was heard at last, very faint, coming, as it seemed, from within the rock. Captain Vivian answered it, and immediately pushed aside the stone, rolling it from him with the strength of a giant. Behind it only the side of the cave was discovered; but the surface was uneven, and pieces of the rock had been detached one from the other, and heaped together against it. Some of these Captain Vivian removed carefully, and a small opening was seen behind it. He put his head close to it: "Goff!"

"Ay, Captain!"

It was but the work of a minute to remove a few more of the stones, and an opening was made large enough to admit the body of a man; and through this opening crept Goff.

"Better close our door, only not too close," said Captain Vivian. He pushed the stone against the opening, but without building it up as before.

Goff sat down on the wooden bench without speaking.

"Successful?" said Captain Vivian.

He nodded his head.

"What! in earnest?" and a gleam of wild exultation shot across Captain Vivian's face.

"What else should a man be but in earnest! They may search to the poles now for the bits of their precious paper."

Captain Vivian drew a deep breath : “ One of ten thousand ! Did she give it ? ”

“ Give it ! she’d have fought single-handed first ; but it’s quick work with a woman. ”

“ You have done her no harm ! ” exclaimed Captain Vivian, quickly.

Goff laughed : “ Frightened her little wits out of her, no more. You might have done the same if you’d had but a grain more of pluck in you. But now to business. ”

Captain Vivian sat silent ; and Goff spoke again : “ The work’s not done, — remember that, Captain. ”

He started. The mood of thought had passed away, and the first success stimulated his longing for greater. “ I’m ready, ” he said ; “ the time draws near. Mr. Lester and Edward Vivian are returned. ”

“ You have seen them ? ”

“ I watched amongst the brushwood, after we parted, till they were in sight. They came by the Cleve road, and went straight to Hardman’s cottage. I came off to the shore then. If they had an inkling of the state of affairs, their object must have been to get help. ”

“ Then they will be here soon, ” said Goff.

“ I care not, ” was the reply. “ Edward Vivian is in my power now. I will meet him, and make him yield to any terms of silence as to the past. ”

“ When and where ? ”

“ Here on the shore. I will watch for him. You have sent abroad the report of the landing ? ”

“ It’s over the village by this time, ” replied Goff. “ A hint I gave to the boy Styles has set it going. The

preventives are on the look-out; and the woman at the Farm has been spreading the tale at the Hall. I heard Bertha Campbell and Rachel Lester talking of it, as I followed them when they first came out of the Hall grounds. They little thought I was so near."

"We light the beacon then, and the vessel makes to shore."

"Yes. When the first fire burns, she tacks in; at the second, she sends off the boat with Clement on board. Between the two, therefore, is the time for Edward Vivian, if you still keep your purpose."

"Keep to it! It will be my triumph or my revenge."

"There might be a surer one," muttered Goff, handling his pistol. "But as you will—safe's safe, all the world over. But how if Edward Vivian refuses to give in?"

"Then let the boy meet his fate; and for ourselves—there's the boat and escape to the vessel, and a run on the coast opposite till we see the turn things take. There's no fear."

"Fear!" and Goff laughed scornfully. "If I had feared, I should never have ventured myself into the deep waters with you, Captain: you are the last to lend a helping hand to get one out. But it's settled then."

"Yes, settled—certain. We keep near the boat, and can be off at a moment's warning if necessary. It's waiting by the East bay; I took care it should be in readiness before I joined you just now on the Common."

"The beacon must be lighted," said Goff, surlily.

Captain Vivian was silent.

“Do you repent, Captain? Will you leave it to me to settle?”

“Repent! when we have triumphed!” There was scorn but no triumph in Captain Vivian’s tone; perhaps he thought of Ronald.

Goff spoke more lightly: “Stop a minute then, whilst I light the beacon which will bring the little craft to her duty; and we’ll go along the beach towards the boat. We shall have a watch over Edward Vivian at the same time, for he’ll be down before another half hour is over.”

Goff left the cave as he had entered it, and in a few minutes returned again. “It burns bravely,” he said. “We’ll leave the passage open — with only the door shut, I mean. It may be useful.” He pushed the stone again into its place. “Now for the boat.”

They went down the cliff together; as they reached the bottom, Captain Vivian approached his companion, and drew him within the shadow of the rocks: “Hist! hist! d’ye see?”

Three men were walking at a little distance along the shore. They exactly intercepted the course which must be taken to reach the boat.

“Preventives!” whispered Captain Vivian. “They’ll not disturb us yet.”

“I’m not sure; the middle one has something like Edward Vivian’s stalk.”

The men drew nearer, then turned again: they were evidently keeping watch.

“Risk it, and go by,” muttered Captain Vivian.

“Not safe. We don’t know what he may be up to;

and we must catch him alone for your purpose — and for mine too,” was added in an under tone.

They stood still deliberating. Goff looked up at the cliff, considering whether it were possible to scale it. It was rugged, but not by any means inaccessible; yet he seemed unwilling to attempt it. “It’s safest where we are,” he said: “keep down amongst the rocks, and bide your time. He must pass this way; if not, I’ll give him a hint that will send him. Leave me to look after the boat: when needed, it shall be in the inner bay. Yet stay; — how is the second blaze to be cared for? I said it should be lighted at the East Point.”

“If Edward Vivian comes I will take him there. The boat will then be below us, ready.”

“Good! Then you set the second light yourself.”

“Ay, and Edward Vivian’s obstinacy shall kindle it; and when it blazes, it shall destroy his hopes for his boy for ever.”

An hour and a half later the moon had risen; but her light was obscured by passing clouds, and the wind was still moaning sadly, and occasionally rising into shrill, prolonged howls. But it was a land wind, and the sea was as yet sufficiently calm to enable a boat to approach the shore.

The little smuggling vessel was riding at anchor at a considerable distance to the west of the Headland. The sands were covered, for it was recently high tide; and heavy waves crashed upon the stones of the beach, and tossed themselves against the sea-weed covered rocks.

There were no signs of any one upon the beach;

but once, as the moon glided forth from the clouds, her light touched a figure moving high up along the face of the cliff, to the east of the Headland; and then, in a sudden lull of the wind, came the rush of loose stones detached from their position.

The flash of a dark lantern was seen from behind the rocks below the Smugglers' cave; and two men in the dress of the coast guard advanced and looked up towards the cliff.

"They've not given us the slip, surely?"

"Not they; and if they have, there are enough waiting for them. 'Twas but a fall after the rains."

The man who had spoken first stepped cautiously over the rocks to a little distance, and then returned.

"They've help waiting for them, Ryan," he said: "I heard a call above there, behind us."

"A call!—for us perhaps."

"No, no; I saw them away to the right. Now look, they are moving."

A very keen sight might perceive the objects pointed out, but they were now stationary again. Ryan seemed certain that they belonged to the coast-guard, though he kept his attention directed towards them.

"Why! Dennis, man," he said, "the landing was to be made to the west, so their friends would be away beyond the Point!"

"I don't hold all that for Gospel," replied Dennis. "Ten to one but the hint we had was putting out a false light; I thought so at the time. Now, don't you see? They're creeping along again."

Four persons could now clearly be distinguished near

the edge of the cliff, but the dim light was not at all sufficient to determine their dress; and a rather eager discussion began in an under tone between Ryan and Dennis,—the latter insisting that they should move to the east side of the Point, and keep guard upon the movements of the suspicious individuals above; Ryan as firmly holding to his determination to remain where he had been placed, according to a hint given through a boy in the village, known to be connected with the smugglers, that the landing would be made, if possible, west of the Headland.

“A few steps up the cliff would settle the matter quietly,” said Dennis, tired at length of endeavouring to persuade his comrade of a fact of which he himself was firmly convinced. “Keep your stand here, man, if you will; I shall be with you in half a second, if there’s need.”

Without waiting for an assent, he climbed up several feet, and threw himself with a spring upon a square projecting rock, standing forth like a table, from which his eye could reach any objects moving either to the right or left along the cliffs, besides commanding an extensive reach of the coast.

Voices sounded above, but they were not distinguishable. The cliff was in this place tolerably easy of ascent, for it was worn into ledges; and the preventive man, accustomed to scale it under all circumstances, found no difficulty in approaching still nearer, so as at length to be very near the summit, yet not himself within view.

Mr. Lester’s voice was the first recognised: “The coast-guard fellows are away beyond the Point; that ought to be our direction.”

Hardman, the gamekeeper, answered: "They are all along, Sir. Three of them have been upon the shore, near the boat house, for the last hour, so John Price here says. He saw them as he came back, after taking Miss Campbell and Miss Rachel home. We might ask them what they are after."

"No, no," interposed another voice, stopped suddenly by Mr. Lester.

"Impossible to ask them, Hardman. They have their duty to perform, without respect of persons. It must be our own work."

A slide of stones, as Dennis retreated down the cliff to give the information he had gained to his companion, startled the little party into silence.

Mr. Lester drew Mr. Vivian aside: "Once more, Vivian, think: this can be no work for you."

"If it is not mine it is no one's. I am resolved. And I can defend myself now: I am armed."

"No protection from a pistol bullet; but you are wilful;" and Mr. Lester turned to Hardman. "We had better separate; the cliffs for you, the shore for us. If the landing is made safely, and Clement is of the party, you have but to meet him and force him to return with you; if there should be an affray, twenty pounds reward to each, if you succeed in saving him from being engaged in it."

"Twenty pounds! Forty! fifty! a hundred!" exclaimed Mr. Vivian; then seeing the men's start of surprise, he checked himself, and added, "What sum can be too great to save General Vivian's grandson from public disgrace?"

The men touched their hats in silence, and moved

on along the cliffs. Mr. Vivian and Mr. Lester took a more difficult path downwards.

The descent was about half made when Mr. Vivian stopped: "I know a better road than the shore, Lester. The tide is high, and we shall have hard work to get on. There is a ledge along the cliff—or there used to be in the old days."

"It passes the cave; I know it."

"Above or below, as we will. It will carry us round the Point if needful, and if your head is firm; and we shall command the shore."

"My head will carry me wherever your heart carries you, Vivian."

They moved on slowly for some distance. The ledge was narrow and uneven—in some places the cliff sank perpendicularly below them to the depth of a hundred and fifty feet; in others it was more a path over fallen rocks and projections.

"Look! Lester"—Mr. Vivian delayed for an instant—"one of the preventive men in his hiding-place." He pointed to some large rocks, brought out into strong relief by the passing of the moon from amongst the clouds. It was just possible to distinguish a man crouching behind them.

"Yes; that seems as if the landing would be on this side." The figure below stood up in a listening attitude. "We had better not make ourselves remarked," whispered Mr. Lester, and they drew back from the edge; but Mr. Vivian seemed inclined to pause.

"I might get something out of him," he said, "if I were down on the beach alone. None of them know

me; and a few chance questions might help us a good deal as to the point at which these fellows will land. Wait here, and I will see what I can do."

Mr. Lester demurred to the separation; but Mr. Vivian's eagerness would not stand opposition, and he immediately began the descent. It was much more difficult in this spot than he had expected; and, in trying to find a safe footing, he was led away from the place where he had, as he thought, seen the preventive man hiding; and when at length he stood upon the beach, the rocks appeared heaped one upon another in such confusion that, without instituting a regular search, it would have been impossible to discover him.

Feeling provoked with himself for his useless trouble, Mr. Vivian walked along the shore to the East Point, under the idea that he should probably meet the other preventive men of whom Hardman had spoken. His thoughts were painfully busy, and his attention in a measure withdrawn from the purpose before him. That rolling, tossing sea was as the image of a remorseless fate; its dark, green, glassy hollows were types of the dangers which had opened in his own path, and seemed now about to engulf his boy. And on it came, — pitiless, irresistible, foaming in its mocking brightness, tossing itself in the pride of its tremendous power. Could there be the hope of success in struggling against it? Mr. Vivian's heart failed him for the moment, for in the keenness of his fears for his boy, he forgot that to the tide of life's dangers, as to the flow of the great ocean, the decree has been pronounced, "Hitherto

shalt thou go, and no farther." He wandered on to the East Point. A boat was lying close under the cliff, upon a point of sand left by the tide, which had just begun to ebb, but there were no signs of the preventive men; and it seemed better to make his way back to Mr. Lester. He turned; but suddenly found himself confronted by a square-built man, wearing a slouched hat very much drawn over his face, and a shaggy sailor's coat. They stopped as by mutual consent.

"Rather a rough evening," remarked Mr. Vivian.

"Rough now, and likely to be rougher before nightfall," was the reply. The words were uttered in a tone of careless boldness, and they struck Mr. Vivian's ears with a painful shock of recollection; yet he was not certain, and he dreaded to betray himself. The man placed himself directly in his way, and continued, "Are you going farther?"

"I thought of reaching Dark Head Point yonder. There is no way of ascent here."

"An easier one than you think for;" and the man struck his foot upon a little step cut in the cliff. "These steps will carry you to the top direct, and from thence it's plain sailing to the Point."

"Thank you, but I prefer the shore." Mr. Vivian would have passed on.

"We don't part quite so quickly"—the slouched hat was pushed back, and the speaker stood forth in the moonlight: "Edward Vivian, there is no disguise from me; I know you, and I would have a word with you."

"John!—at last!" and Mr. Vivian instinctively looked round to see if they were alone.

“At last met, and well met!”

“Well met—never! There is that between us which it were wise the ocean should bury.”

“Perhaps so; yet old ocean herself cannot always keep her secrets.”

“I have business on my hands which cannot wait,” said Mr. Vivian. “Since you know me, you will know also that I am likely to give you many more opportunities of explanation.”

“Were it the business of the united world, it must wait my pleasure; and for once”—and Captain Vivian laughed bitterly—“our interests are the same. I would speak to you of Clement.”

“Clement!—my boy!” Mr. Vivian started forward, and his voice was lowered with intense eagerness: “John! you have done many a deadly deed to me and mine, but help me to save him, and——” he paused.

That very evening, when he had met Bertha at the cottage, he had heard, in hurried words, interrupted by anxiety for Clement, the suspicions, almost the certainty, of his cousin’s deep treachery. He dared not promise to forgive.

“And what?—what offer of good will Edward Vivian make to the man whom he basely deceived—whom he robbed of all that his heart desired!”

“Deceived!—robbed!—but you have the strong hand over me, John. Say what you will, we will seek another occasion for that tale.”

“This night’s meeting is our first and last. Do you suppose that I intend to wait tamely, and witness

my enemy's triumph? I must be a different man now from what I was eighteen years ago for that to be!"

"The questions between yourself and me are too complicated, and lie too far back, to be reached at a time like this," replied Mr. Vivian. "They concern not my present need; and be the consequences what they may, I will not enter upon them." He would have passed on.

"The questions between yourself and me do indeed lie far back," replied Captain Vivian, placing himself again in his way, and setting his teeth firmly together; "but if they are not remedied now they will never be; and, what is more, the hour will come—yes, even before this night has passed over your head—when you will wish that the sea had sunk you in its depths, rather than you had refused to listen to me."

"If your words apply to my unhappy boy," replied Mr. Vivian, "I say again, you have the strong hand over me. Speak your will."

"Not here; we may be interrupted. The preventive men are on the look-out, and will be coming by."

"Here, or nowhere. From this point I keep watch over the shore, and may aid my boy when he may not be able to aid himself."

"Pshaw! the boy's fate is in my hands. Till I lift my finger, not a shadow of harm can happen to him."

"You!" Mr. Vivian drew back from him, and murmured, "Can revenge be carried so far?"

“So far! ay, and much farther! Will you come?”
He placed one foot upon the cliff.

Mr. Vivian hesitated.

“Trust me or we part instantly, and Clement’s fate is fixed.”

“I follow you;” but Mr. Vivian laid his hand upon his pistols.

Captain Vivian saw the movement, and laughed: “Coward!” he exclaimed; “if I had willed you mischief, could I not carry out my purpose now, even here as we stand? But even in the days when you did me the deepest wrong, your life was safe in my hands.”

“You are right!” was Mr. Vivian’s bitter reply; “the life of the body was always safe;—it was the life of the heart at which you aimed! But go on; we are at least equal in power;” and silently and hastily he followed Captain Vivian up the rugged steps.

They stood together on the top of a cliff which had a lower elevation than Dark Head Point, yet, like it, commanded a wide view over the sea. The little smuggling vessel was still at anchor to the west of the Point. There were no lights on board, nor any signs of movement. On the summit of the Headland several figures were indistinctly seen, and two were pacing up and down at some distance from the East Point. Captain Vivian cast a hasty glance around him, and then drew near a pile of dried fern, furze, and brushwood, collected, as it might have appeared, accidentally, or perhaps with the intention of being carried away for fuel.

“We are safe from interruption here,” he said. “The preventives have gathered together after their prey yonder”—and he pointed to the Headland. “They may wait to-night, and to-morrow night, and the next, if I will it,—or rather if you will it.”

“Let us have few words, John: for what purpose have you brought me here?”

“To give you the opportunity of saving your boy from disgrace and deadly peril. He is on board that vessel yonder: when I raise my signal he will come on shore. Would you know who are after him? Three men on the Headland—three on the shore—others waiting within call. But the smugglers are not men to give up their prize without a struggle. They will put your boy first, thinking it for their safety, and that the preventives will deal gently with him. Trust to that if you will. His life is in danger; and should he escape, his deeds will be blazoned over the country, as a disgrace to the proud name he bears.”

“Serpent!” exclaimed Mr. Vivian; “and it is your doing.”

“That matters not. If it has been mine, it will be yours. Say but the word, and the smuggler lies quietly at her anchorage; the preventives are outwitted; and a boat brings your boy on shore, with nothing against him but the rumour of his frolic.”

“Your price?—name it!” The tone was agony but ill concealed by a cold haughtiness.

“I might take you at your word and ruin you, but you are poor enough already”—and Captain Vivian

laughed mockingly. "I have no wish to injure you; I require only that, whatever your purpose may be in returning to Encombe, there shall be no raking up of the grievances of past days — a small favour to demand for saving your son from disgrace and it may be death."

"A small favour, indeed; too small if it had not a hidden meaning. John"—and all the bitterness of long-smothered enmity broke out in the words — "from my heart I distrust you."

"From my heart I hate you might have been better," was the sarcastic reply.

"No; I may have had cause enough, but God knows I have forgiven,—I would forgive, if I dared. You have played a desperate game against me. I see it now, for my eyes have been opened. It was you who ruined me with my father."

"And you who ruined me with the woman who should have been my wife." Then with a taunting sneer, which perhaps concealed the pang of some painful memories, Captain Vivian continued: "Let by-gones be by-gones; it is all I ask."

"And if it is only by recalling by-gones that I can explain myself to my father, then to promise is my destruction."

"And not to promise, is your boy's."

Mr. Vivian turned away to control the agony of his feelings. "We will endeavour to understand each other," he continued, after a moment's pause. "It is useless to endeavour to persuade me that the stipulation you demand is of no consequence. It is, and it must be of the very utmost consequence to me; yet,

do not think to deceive me, too well I know that it is far more so to you."

"Prove it! prove it!" exclaimed Captain Vivian, scornfully. He clenched his hand, and muttered between his closed teeth, "Would I have put myself in your power, if you could prove it?"

"I care not for legal proof; but were the deed hidden in the depths of the earth, it should come forth to clear me with my father, and to be an eternal dishonour to you. I make no stipulations with a forger."

"As you will." Captain Vivian slowly took a match box from his pocket, and held it as if about to strike the light: "The first blaze, and the boat makes for the shore."

"Stay! stay!" exclaimed Mr. Vivian. "There may be a compromise."

"No compromise! Silence for ever with the General and with the world upon all points—sworn for yourself, your sister, Mr. Lester, and Bertha Campbell."

"My oath must be for myself; I cannot bind others."

"It must be given by them also,—and to-night, before two more hours have passed."

"My father is generous; he will never raise a word against you when he finds that I am under a promise of secrecy."

"General Vivian's generosity! Ask me rather to trust to the mercy of the winds and of the waves. Silence or disgrace: make your choice between them."

He struck the light. Mr. Vivian caught him by the arm, and the movement brought the burning match in contact with the light dry brushwood. The flame sprang into the air, and fast and wide spread the rushing blaze, hissing and crackling among the withered leaves and the broken twigs,—and far away across the sea gleamed the cold light of the moon,—darkened by one black speck, as the smuggling-boat made its way over the surging waters to the shore.

CHAP. XLVII.

THE shore was safe, for it was deserted before the boat had landed. The four men who rowed, had loaded themselves with the tubs, and were making their way towards the cliff. A fifth lingered behind, and with him came Clement Vivian. He walked slowly and doubtfully,—not with the eager energy of a boy in the height of his adventurous spirits. His step was unequal; his head turned quickly from one side to the other. Perhaps he was planning an escape, but his companion kept close by his side and urged him on.

They reached the foot of the cliffs, and the men paused and gathered together. Mark Wood was foremost. They looked up at the cliff, then took a survey of the shore.

“Safe! now for it; along the ledge to the cave! Come, youngster;” and the man who seemed to have charge of Clement stood back to put him first: “It’s plain sailing.”

Clement delayed: “I have had my frolic; I will go no farther.”

“What! that’s new talking!—up I say.” He would have pushed Clement forward, but the boy drew back indignantly: “Touch me again, if you dare.”

“On, young Master—on, for your life;” and Mark Wood drew near, and pointed to a projecting angle of the cliff above them, where a dark immovable spot was to be seen.

The men as with one consent began to scale the cliff, not by the path, but by ledges, corners, shelving rocks, often with a footing which a goat could scarcely have held; and not in the direction of the cave, but away beyond the Headland, to a point which all seemed to know as by instinct. They reached a smooth ledge, wide enough for them to stand together. The cliff rose perpendicularly behind them; before them a huge rock, which seemed about to precipitate itself into the sea, threw a dark shadow on their resting-place. They waited to take breath. Clement, who had followed them with difficulty, approached Mark: “Is there danger? Are the preventives abroad?”

“Above and around, that black head was on the look-out,—now on.”

Before Clement could ask another question, Mark was leading the way again, but now in a different direction, towards the cave. He stopped after he had gone some paces, and muttered a few words to Clement’s first guide. The man evidently differed from him, and Mark spoke angrily, and went on by himself. The four who were left kept close to Clement. A sound like a call, which might, however, have been nothing more than the wind, fell on the ear, and it was answered by Clement’s guide. The others interchanged a few words: “The cave’s free for us!”

“Was that the cry?”

“Yes; didn’t you hear?”

“All right!” and they went on.

They were drawing near the cave. From the west side it was difficult of approach—the ledge was narrow, and the angle by which it was entered sharp. The men settled the tubs on their shoulders, and seemed prepared for a false step. Mark Wood, who had been considerably in advance, came back. Clement heard him say: “I’ve a doubt that we’re in for it, Hale; let him go.”

“Go, and peach,” was Hale’s answer. “You are a fool; on with you.” He thrust Mark forward, and then looked back to Clement: “Keep close, youngster. If I throw you the tub, you’ll know how to carry it;” and they moved forward again, one by one, with slow and cautious steps, clinging to the cliff, and once or twice sliding where the footing was too unsteady for support.

Mark turned the corner first; Clement and Hale followed. They were then before the entrance of the cave.

“Now, youngster! I must be left free.” Hale took the tub from his shoulder.

“Best not,” whispered Mark, drawing him within the passage: “look below.”

A body of the coast-guard were at the foot of the cliff; a little behind lingered Mr. Vivian.

“In with you, man,—in: clear the way;” and Hale forced Mark into the cave, and tossed the tub upon the ground. The others followed his example.

A shout rose from below, and the preventive men hurried up the cliff, followed by Mr. Vivian.

“Stand to it boldly! for your life.” The smugglers placed themselves before the cave, and Clement stood with them,—his spirit excited by the danger.

“Clement! Master Clement! this way,” shouted Mark from within; but Clement did not or would not hear. The preventive men were nearly on a level with the Cave—Dennis and Ryan foremost.

“A step nearer, and we fire!” shouted the smugglers, and the preventive men drew back.

There was a mutual pause. Whilst the two parties confronted each other, Mr. Vivian unperceived, scrambling, clinging to the side of the cliff, advanced to the smugglers’ rear, and seized Hale’s arm. The preventive men rushed forward. Hale strove violently to extricate himself, and his companions came to his rescue. A desperate, deadly struggle began.

“Clement! Clement!” called out a voice of thunder, in the tumult, “up the cliff,—to the left! for the sake of Heaven—for your father’s sake!” and the boy, terrified yet excited, looked round him with the impulse to obey.

“Not to the cliffs—through the cave; Mark Wood waits you there.”

It was Ronald Vivian, who standing before the cave, spoke hurriedly, yet in tones low, and deep, and clear.

Clement paused for one moment in indecision, and the grasp of Dennis, the preventive man, was laid upon his collar.

“A prisoner! a prisoner!” he exclaimed; but a

sudden blow from Ronald felled him to the ground. He rose again instantly, and they grappled together.

“Into the cave,” shouted Ronald, turning his head for a second ; and Clement waited no longer.

“Ronald Vivian to be dealt with at last!” burst from the lips of Dennis, maddened at recognising the boy from whose hands the blow had been received.

Mr. Vivian heard the call : “ Save him !—do him no injury ; I will bear you free ;” but his call was in vain.

The contest with Hale and his comrades had ended in Hale’s capture. The other smugglers had escaped, but not without pursuit from the preventive men. Ryan, however, remained behind, and came to the assistance of Dennis.

“ Yield, or we fire !” was the cry.

But Ronald fought desperately, for danger to him was safety to Clement.

“ Yield ! Ronald, yield !” called Mr. Vivian, and he placed himself by his side.

A dark face, not till that moment seen, peered from behind a rock, and a pistol was levelled at Mr. Vivian’s head.

“ Ha ! Goff ! the scoundrel !” shouted Ryan, catching the outline of the well-known features. He moved aside, and a bullet aimed at Mr. Vivian, whizzed past, and Ronald, struck by it in the shoulder, fell to the ground.

“ Murder !” The cry echoed wildly amongst the rocks, as the men, catching a momentary glimpse of Goff, followed him down the cliff and along the shore. It was a frantic chase, over the loose shingles, and

rough stones, with masses of broken cliff impeding them. Goff kept close by the cliff, the path most difficult of pursuit. On, with the speed of a maniac, — for safety or for ruin; on, to the East Point. Behind it, in a little cove, lies a small boat; and there waits Captain Vivian, ready, eager to carry him to the vessel which will be his harbour of safety.

He was close upon the Point; the path was difficult — the moon had become darkened; he stumbled, and the delay brought his pursuers near. Their voices were heard high above the booming of the waves, and the increasing roar of the wind. Concealment! no, it was impossible; the spot which he had reached was bare of the sheltering rocks. Escape by the cliffs! impossible also; they rose frowning above him, — no longer easy of access. He turned towards the edge of the shore, and shouted long and loud; and a little boat manned by one person rounded the Point. It was lifted high by the waves, then again it sank, — for a moment it might have been thought engulfed, — it could not near the beach.

“Rascal! scoundrel!” shouted the preventive men. They were rushing from the cliff; their feet were crashing the pebbles. He almost felt their grasp; — one plunge, and he was breasting the waves towards the boat. The foaming water rose high, and he was hidden; — it broke upon the shore, and his black, shaggy head was seen rising as a spot in the moonlight.

Fierce and strong are the angry billows, — they are bearing him away from the boat. He sees it, and one hand is uplifted, and a howl of terror comes

across the watery waste. He is struggling, — his head is tossed as a plaything by the crested waves. The boat is drawing near : he will be saved, — yes, he must be ; — his hand is actually touching the boat.

And the grasp is faint, and the waves are strong, and — the wretched, guilty head moves with one agonising effort, and sinks, to be lost to sight for ever.

CHAP. XLVIII.

RONALD lay upon the ground, the blood oozing fast from his shoulder; by him knelt Mr. Vivian, vainly endeavouring to stanch the wound. The shouts of the men, and the cries of pursuit, reached them as distant echoes. Mr. Vivian thought that Ronald had fainted, but he was still sensible, only growing weaker and weaker — his sight becoming dim, his lips refusing to utter a sound. Mr. Vivian made him rest against his knee, and spoke to him. There was a feeble smile upon the cold, white lips; and Mr. Vivian took off his coat, and making it into a pillow, laid Ronald's head gently upon it, and leaving him for an instant, went a few steps forward and called, but received no answer. The spot a few minutes before so dizzy with tumult, was now utterly deserted.

He came back again, and groped his way into the cave. It was quite dark; but something soft lay on the ground,—a coat, and he took it up and felt in the pocket. It contained a small flask. Mr. Vivian brought this out into the light, and moistened Ronald's lips with the brandy which was in it, and covered him with the coat. He was a little revived then, and it seemed possible to move him within the shelter of the rock; but the start when he was touched, showed that the attempt would be agony.

In despair Mr. Vivian called again; and this time a voice answered him, but from within the cave; and the rattle of stones, accompanied by a few hasty ejaculations, was followed by the appearance of Mark Wood.

He came forward with stealthy steps, glancing doubtfully at Mr. Vivian; but the sight of Ronald's ghastly features seemed to give him courage to draw near. "You called," he said.

"Yes, I called." Mr. Vivian pointed to Ronald: "He has been wounded in the skirmish, and we must move him."

"The sharks! Cowardly villains! Are they gone?" Mark went a few steps down the cliff.

Mr. Vivian called him back: "Gone now, but they may return. It was not they who did it."

"All safe now," muttered Mark. He put his arm under Ronald tenderly.

"We must have more help," said Mr. Vivian.

"By-and-by; we'll take him inside first. Stay!" — he lighted a match and set fire to a brand, which he thrust into a crevice of the rock, — "that will do to show the way. Now then;" and with Mr. Vivian's assistance he raised Ronald, and disregarding the moaning which showed the suffering he caused, bore him into the cave.

Some straw and dried fern leaves lay in a heap in one corner, and over this Mr. Vivian stretched the coat with which Ronald had been covered. He was then laid upon it; and Mark proceeded to collect together some dried sticks, which he lighted.

Mr. Vivian looked at him with some surprise. "Is

he safe?" he said. "The preventive men may be back."

"Safe enough just now. We've left a couple of kegs in their way at the foot of the cliff, which they'll seize, and then, ten to one, be off. They've caught Hale, and are after the others."

"But if they look for him?" and Mr. Vivian glanced at Ronald.

"He's as safe here as elsewhere. If we tried to get him home, we should meet them on the cliffs. An hour hence it will all be right enough. Now, give him another taste of the brandy-flask, and see if he'll come-to more."

The warmth of the fire, and the cordial, had the effect desired for a few moments, but Ronald soon sank back again into his former state; and Mr. Vivian, greatly alarmed, insisted upon the necessity of summoning more aid. Mr. Lester, he said, was certainly within reach.

"The Parson! He's off home with the young gentleman. 'Twas he who met me, and bade me come back. I shouldn't have ventured myself so soon again within reach of the sharks, if it hadn't been for him."

Ronald slowly opened his eyes, and by the lurid light of the fire Mr. Vivian saw that his lips moved. He bent down, and heard the word "Clement."

"Safe, thank God!"

Ronald smiled, and his head fell back.

They waited for nearly a quarter of an hour longer in silence—Mark keeping up the fire, and occasionally watching at the entrance of the cave; whilst Mr.

Vivian, supporting Ronald, stanching his wound, and from time to time forcing him to sip the flask of brandy, succeeded at length in restoring him to some degree of strength.

His sufferings, however, became greater as his power increased. A suppressed groan followed every attempt to move him, and a clearer consciousness brought a look of anguish to his face, which Mr. Vivian vainly endeavoured to read.

“If we had another hand we might move him now,” said Mark, returning to Ronald’s couch, after another survey of the cliff.

Ronald raised his hand, as a sign against it.

Mr. Vivian replied to the gesture: “You must not remain here, Ronald; it will kill you. Mr. Lester will come, and we will carry you very gently.”

He looked impatient, and beckoned to Mark. Mr. Vivian moved aside.

“Sad work, Master Ronald,” said Mark, compassionately. “What made you mix yourself up with us?”

“My father,” murmured Ronald, taking no notice of the question — “where is he?”

Mark glanced at Mr. Vivian, who was, however, too far off to hear the answer.

“Gone on board by this time. He was to be off to the vessel, so we were told, as soon as the second light flamed up.”

“On board, — away!” A look of convulsive agony crossed Ronald’s face.

“Not away yet. She’s off there still, I take it; and pretty close she was five minutes ago.”

“ I must see him.”

“ To be sure; he'll be back, if not to-night, to-morrow.”

“ No, no; to-night, — now.”

“ Not so easy that — the Captain's not to be sent for in a moment; and he's gone for a purpose.”

“ It must be, — it must. Mark, who knows? I may be dying.”

“ Not so bad as that, Master Ronald. You've had a good knock, however it happened; but you'll come round. Let me just go and get a helping hand, and we'll have you at the Grange before half an hour's over our heads.”

The mention of the Grange renewed Ronald's excitement, and he exclaimed vehemently, “ Not there.”

His accent caused Mr. Vivian to draw nearer. Ronald raised his glassy eyes to his with a glance of mingled confidence and despair; and as Mr. Vivian stooped to be nearer to him, he took hold of his hand, and held it within his own, and tried to speak, and then the words seemed to fail, and he muttered something unintelligible.

“ You have a wish, — let me hear it; it shall be granted.”

“ Let my father come, now — safe.”

“ He shall come, and be safe, if it is in my power to bring him; we will take you home, and you shall see him.”

“ Here! here! — not home.”

Mark interposed, and drew Mr. Vivian aside. “ It would never do,” he said, “ to take Master Ronald at

his fancy ; it might be easy enough to get hold of the Captain, who was sure to be on board the vessel, and within call ;—but to leave him there on the ground, — he would be shot himself sooner.”

“It frets him to insist upon moving him,” replied Mr. Vivian ; “and it will really make but little difference. Let Captain Vivian come, if you know where to find him ; and when he comes, let me go into the village for further help. I will bring back a surgeon with me. There will be less delay then, and ——”

A faint call from Ronald summoned Mr. Vivian again to his side. His face was bright with thankfulness : “Let Mark tell him quickly. To-morrow” — and the light of his eye became darkened, and his voice grew fainter — “I may not need him.”

Mr. Vivian pressed his hand affectionately, and repeated the order.

Yet Mark still lingered. “’Twas a mad errand,” he said, as he once more appealed to Mr. Vivian ; “and likely to be the boy’s death — waiting there instead of being tended. And if the Captain came, it might be sore work for them : no one knew what he would be like when things went contrary. If they might have taken Ronald to the Grange ——” He stopped suddenly, for a moan escaped from Ronald, drawn from him by excessive pain. Yet even then he waved his hand for Mark to leave him ; and Mr. Vivian seconding the entreaty, the man departed.

The time of Mark’s absence seemed hours to Mr. Vivian. It would have been unendurable but

for the thought of Clement's safety — that was comfort through every thing; and Ronald's wan face was a sufficient reproach, when impatience was about to master him. Yet as the moments passed on, many doubts as to the prudence of agreeing to his wish suggested themselves: danger from the preventive men; the possibility that Mark would not be able to manage his boat; the difficulty of landing again; — obstacles which Mark had not appeared to contemplate, but which seemed aggravated, as Ronald's suffering evidently increased, and the necessity for surgical aid became more and more urgent.

He scarcely thought of himself, his own fears and hopes, and plans for the future. He could but look at the pale countenance of the noble boy; so suddenly struck down in the pride of his strength, and think of the short, stormy life, with its strong impulses, its earnest resolve, and unflinching will — and ponder upon the deep mystery that one so formed for good should have been placed under the dominion of evil. It was a thought only to be borne by the remembrance of that inscrutable Wisdom which "searcheth the heart," and "knoweth what is in man," and will require only what has been given. And bitterly in contrast rose up before Mr. Vivian's memory the recollections of his own boyhood — with virtuous examples, the rules of strict rectitude, the support of an honourable name, the prospect of a fair inheritance to lure him to good; yet all deserted, and bringing upon him only a severer condemnation. What we might have been! It is a terrible thought to realise?

“Mr. Vivian,”—Ronald stretched out his hand and touched him; “are they coming?”

“I don’t know; I think not; but I will see.” He went out to look, and returned: “The boat has left the vessel; I can’t tell who is in it.”

“My father will be here — you must go.”

“Not till he comes.”

“Yes, before — now; raise me.” And Mr. Vivian lifted him up, and made him support himself against the wall. He spoke more easily then, and seemed relieved by the change of position: “Now go, please; quickly.” Yet as Mr. Vivian looked towards the entrance of the cave, he held him back: “One word. I have done what I could; you are satisfied?”

“Fully — entirely — thankfully; more than tongue can tell.”

“But I have not done all. I will try.”

“But not now. Oh! Ronald, is it for my sake you would see your father?”

“I told Miss Campbell I would do the utmost; if I am to die, I must do it.”

“You have done every thing that could be required; and more, a thousand times. It is for Clement’s sake that you are here now.”

“The utmost,” repeated Ronald; “it was my promise. Tell her I kept it. And you will pardon him if the offence were —” he stopped suddenly.

“I know what it was.”

Ronald let Mr. Vivian’s hand drop, and turned his face to the wall.

Mr. Vivian continued, quietly, “I will not tell you now, Ronald, how it was discovered. But one thing

may satisfy you, — there is no legal proof; I could not bring it home to him, if I would.”

Ronald turned slowly round and fixed his ghastly eyes upon him: “Then the evil to you is done.”

“Yes.”

“And without remedy?”

“Without remedy from him, except by his own confession: that might indeed help me with my father.”

“You shall have it. When it is in your hands, and I am gone, Mr. Vivian, you will save his name from disgrace.”

Mr. Vivian seized his hand: “Disgrace cannot attach to the name you bear, Ronald: whatever your father may have done to tarnish it, you have nobly redeemed it.”

He did not smile nor answer, but a tear rolled down his cheek, and his lip quivered with anguish. He recovered himself again quickly, and pointing towards the entrance, said: “Look out; when they are at the foot of the cliff, you must go. Hark!”

“God bless you, and help you, Ronald;” and Mr. Vivian held Ronald’s hand with lingering affection.

“Go! go!”

Ronald’s face grew troubled and eager; yet as Mr. Vivian left the cave, his eye rested upon him with an expression that would fain have asked him to return.

CHAP. XLIX.

EH! Ronald! my lad! in a scrape and calling for me to help you out! That comes of not keeping to quarters. How on earth you got loose passes me." Captain Vivian entered the cave blusteringly. He would not listen to Mark's request to tread with caution, and in the dim light of the dying embers scarcely distinguished where his son lay stretched upon his rough bed.

"No one here," said Mark groping around, and collecting some more sticks. "You'll see, Captain, that it's as I said; he's mortal bad"—and he held a lighted brand so as to cast a gleam upon Ronald's face, and then walked away to the entrance.

Captain Vivian snatched the brand from him, drew near, looked,—then throwing the torch aside, staggered back against the wall.

"Father!" Ronald's voice was hollow as a call from the grave.

Captain Vivian threw himself on the ground beside him.

"Shot! my boy, my poor boy! The rascals! But we'll be revenged. We'll get you on board, and look after you, and you'll do well; there's no doubt of that. Many's the ugly touch I've had myself. Here! Mark."

“Stay, Father. I must not go: listen.”

“Listen! to be sure. The rascals! I’ll be revenged.”

“It was not they. It matters not who it was; I would forget revenge.”

“Forget it: you may; but I tell you, Ronald, the reckoning shall be kept till the last hour of my life—ay, and paid too.”

“Then your reckoning must be with Goff. He raised the pistol; I saw him. It was levelled at Mr. Vivian.”

No answer came, only a quick gasp of breathless horror.

“It is for Mr. Vivian to revenge,” continued Ronald. “Father! can you hear me? can you listen to me?” for Captain Vivian was kneeling upright,—his form rigid, his eyes fixed.

“Revenge! let him seek it down in the green ocean—down, down; he will not find it. Let him look for it,—it is gone.”

“Father! speak to me,—oh, horrible!” and Ronald raised himself for a moment, and sank back shuddering and exhausted.

“He’s gone, my boy; don’t think of him, Ronald. Rouse up—we’ll forget. Where’s Mark?”

Mark came, and Ronald’s lips were moistened with brandy, and he found strength to utter, “Is he killed?”

“Drowned, Master Ronald,” said Mark, coolly. “I heard it said as I came across the Common; but I don’t understand the rights of it all.”

“Drowned, Ronald, my boy;” and Captain Vivian

stood up, and drew near to Mark with an air of restored confidence. "But we won't talk of him now. Mark and I will put you into the boat, and be off to the vessel, and see to you to-night; and to-morrow, if it's needed, we'll get more help—but I'm a clever surgeon myself."

Ronald motioned Mark away: "Raise me, Father. Drowned, lost in the deep waters!" He hid his face with his trembling hand. "Oh, God! have mercy! it is Thy judgment."

"Cheer up, my boy; don't think."

"He is gone, Father. I may be going too. Where?—where?" he repeated, and he caught his father's hand, and held it with all the little strength he retained.

"We can't think; we don't know till the time comes. Why trouble yourself, my poor lad?"

"Oh! it is time now; there is no other time. Father, think, repent. God will hear now."

"Too late for me!" and Captain Vivian's voice slightly trembled. "Well enough for you."

"His body lies beneath the waves, his soul is before God," murmured Ronald, shuddering; "and he had so many crimes to burden it."

"May be so; but none can tell what excuses may be at hand for him or for any one. There's no need to talk of him."

"Father; yes, — let me but speak now. If only one sin could be lightened, death would be less terrible. Is it not so? tell me; answer."

"If it could be, but past is past."

"No, no, it is present; it never dies; it will come

full again. But it may be repented of, then it cannot harm."

"My poor lad! He's wandering." Captain Vivian bent down anxiously.

"Father, I speak truth; I know what I say. Oh! by the thought of that fearful death—that awful judgment, do not turn from me."

"If sorrow's necessary, I'm sorry enough," was the moody answer; "but I didn't come here to talk of it."

"Yes, indeed," and Ronald almost sat upright in his eagerness. "It was for that I sent for you. I may be dying; God knows. I could not carry the load to my grave. Father, our name has been pledged to dishonour,—disgrace; it has caused Mr. Vivian's ruin."

"Not caused it: it was his own doing. None could have touched him if he hadn't dealt the first blow himself."

"But the work he began—it was completed by you."

"Then it's done, and it can't be undone."

"It may be. Oh! indeed it may. It may be acknowledged, and, to the utmost extent of your means, the sum may be restored."

"Acknowledge! Restore! Why, he knows all; he would pursue me to the last gasp to be revenged on me. He would take from me every penny I possess, and leave me to beggary if it were possible."

"He has promised to forgive, and his word is honour. If it were not, when we have injured others, God will never forgive us, without confession and reparation."

"I don't know where you learnt your teaching; it's not my doing."

"I learnt it from my mother, when I said my prayers to her. She talked of it when she was dying. She would repeat it now. Father, your confession may replace Mr. Vivian at once in his home."

"And balk me of the last hope of carrying out the revenge for which alone I did the deed. Was it the paltry money, boy, for which I hazarded ruin? Would the miserable thousands have tempted me? If they had been multiplied ten, twenty, a hundred, a thousand-fold, I would have scorned them all rather than lose my revenge."

"God also can revenge," replied Ronald faintly. "And you are safe; he says himself there is no legal proof."

"If there had been would I have ventured myself within his grasp? No; he has chosen his course, let him follow it out."

"To-night will go against him," said Ronald.

"Of course; I know it. I should never have troubled myself with the boy if I had not known it. He may thank his stars that it is no worse,—that the young scapegrace is not now in the hands of the magistrates. Let him make his way with the General as he can, with only his bare words to fortify him, and Clement's folly to stand against him."

"Mercy! Father! His life has been most miserable."

"He had no mercy on me," was the bitter reply.

Captain Vivian was about to rise, and again summon Mark, but Ronald's feeble hand rested on his arm.

“Father! if the gurgling waters were closing round you, as they closed over that wretched man, would you not wish that you had done it?”

“I could never wish that I had disgraced myself.”

“The disgrace was when the deed was done. God help us to bear it.”

“We will not bear it,” exclaimed Captain Vivian. “We will be off. We will set up our fortunes in another place.”

“The future is with God,” said Ronald. “May it please Him to spare me that sorrow.”

“What! would you forsake me?”

“I would die, if it be God’s will, for life without honour is very terrible.”

“Mad boy! yet you wish me to disgrace myself.”

“Because what you call disgrace is to me the only road to honour. Father, grant my request, and if God should spare me, I will follow you, labour with you, slave with you, die with you,—so that the path you take is one in which there is no sin. Refuse me, and there is another duty before me. The debt to General Vivian shall be repaid, and by my hands. I will travel the world over, but I will work; I will toil, if necessary, with the poorest; I will live the life of an anchorite, and die the death of an outcast; rather than he shall be defrauded of one penny of that which is his just due. We part to-night for ever!”

The words might have seemed prophetic, for Ronald sank back exhausted with his own energy, and pale and motionless as in death.

“Ronald, my boy, speak to me, only one word.”

Captain Vivian bent over him in agony. He opened his eyes, and at that moment Mark re-entered the cave.

“Quick, Captain, one way or t’other. They are coming from the cliff. The strange gentleman, and the surgeon, and Mr. Lester. If you’ve any reason for wishing to be off, you’d best be quick.”

Captain Vivian looked at Ronald. “We’ll take him with us.”

“Can’t be. He’s too far gone. We may come for him to-morrow. They’ll take care of him to-night; but you must be quick,” and Mark went out again to watch.

“Father!” Ronald held Captain Vivian’s hand; his glassy eyes rested on him long and steadily.

The hand was withdrawn, and with the other Captain Vivian roughly dashed away a tear.

“If I die, still think of me.”

“Think of you! Ronald, Ronald! forgive what I have done to you.”

“Not mine, God’s forgiveness. Oh! if the truth were told. It might be written, even now, before you go. Then I should be at peace.”

“There is no forgiveness for such as I, Ronald.”

“Yes, Father, yes; one act; it may be the entrance on the right way. God grant us to meet at the end.” He spoke very feebly.

Captain Vivian pondered. “If it is done, I go disgraced by my own word, never to be heard of again in England.”

Ronald raised his hand to his head: “My eyes are dizzy; I can’t see you. Will you do it? Will you write?”

Captain Vivian took a card from his pocket, wrote a few words upon the back, and put it into Ronald's hands. "It is done," he said; "your father is a lost man."

"Saved! Saved!" exclaimed Ronald, and he fell back and fainted.

CHAP. L.

THAT had been a long and intensely trying day to Mildred Vivian. When Bertha left her she had spent several hours with her father, vainly endeavouring to persuade him to dismiss the thought of the lost paper, until Mr. Lester could appear himself, to account for it. But General Vivian was not easily to be persuaded in any matter, least of all in the control of his own mind, when he was touched upon one of the tenderest points of honour.

His keen sense of justice was connected with the strong feeling of personal claim to his property, and this had aggravated his indignation, when his son's supposed misdeed was first brought before him. But the offence had been punished, as he said to himself, rightfully, and then he felt at liberty to bury it from all knowledge but his own.

That Mr. Lester, Mildred, above all, Bertha, should be acquainted with it, wounded him almost beyond endurance, and the mind which had so long allowed itself to be warped by a one-sided justice, was no longer proof against the prejudice which in any other case he would have despised.

He spoke to Mildred of plots and conspiracies ; he questioned her as to the stranger whom Mrs. Robinson had received at the farm, and whom she imagined might

return. He would allow of no evasion, and drew from her at length, the confession that Edward was expected — that he might be at Encombe that very night. He was satisfied then so far that he asked no more questions ; but it was evident that his mind had taken a wrong turn, and that the step his son had made in coming back to England, unsummoned, was likely to prove a stumbling-block, rather than an assistance, in the way of his restoration to favour.

Mildred was very gentle and patient, but she could not help being sad, and this irritated the General. It was a reproach to him. He said at last that he would be left alone, and when Ella offered to read to him as usual, he refused ; and then Mildred went back to her own room, to bear as best she might the burden which had fallen upon her.

Night drew on, and still the General did not send for her. She tried to work, and made Ella read aloud, but it was impossible to attend. She was thinking of her brother, and longing for news of Clement. Greaves was on the watch, and came in every now and then to tell her any thing he had heard, but it was all unsatisfactory. The smugglers were certain to land ; they had a traitor amongst them, supposed to be Mrs. Robinson's farm boy, Joe Styles, and he, it was said, had given warning to the preventive men who were on the watch. No doubt if they did land there would be a desperate struggle.

Then came a report from the gamekeepers. Mr. Lester and his friend had arrived ; they had walked over the cliffs from Cleve to Encombe, and had gone straight to Hardman's, and from thence to the shore.

Somebody declared that Miss Campbell and Miss Lester had been very much frightened by a smuggler on their way home, but it was thought that could not be true, because the smugglers were proverbially civil to ladies.

Eight o'clock came, and tea was brought. Mildred sent a message to know if they might have it with the General, in his room; but the answer was brought — No, the General would drink tea alone; Miss Ella might go to him afterwards. That was a little comfort, and when Ella was gone, Mildred lay quietly on the sofa, feeling it a relief to be as anxious as she pleased, without the fear of dispiriting Ella.

Nine o'clock! Ella came down, and said, grand-papa was tired. Greaves was to go to him in a quarter of an hour. He would not have Mildred see him again, because it was such a trouble to her, but he sent his love, and begged she would take care he had his sleeping-draught.

“Ring the bell, Ella, and I will ask about it,” said Mildred. The bell was rung but not answered directly.

“Ring again, my love, I can't think what the servants are doing.”

They waited still some time.

“Just open the door a little, Ella; I am sure I hear a good deal of talking.”

Greaves was trying to silence some one who was speaking, and he came himself to answer the bell.

“The General will want you, Greaves, in a quarter of an hour; he is going to bed. I rang to remind you of his sleeping-draught.”

“Yes, Ma’am.” Greaves looked at Ella, doubtfully.

“Go again, to grandpapa, Ella; tell him Greaves will bring him his draught directly. I send him my very best love, and trust he will have a good night. Greaves,”—and Mildred turned to the butler almost before Ella was out of the room,—“you have news.”

“Not much, Ma’am; that is,—pray don’t be frightened, Miss Mildred; it’s better than could have been thought. Master Clement is safe.”

“Thank God! but he must have been with the smugglers.”

“He was with them, and landed with them,” replied Greaves, rather sternly; “and the preventives were down upon them, and there was a skirmish; more than an hour ago that was. But Master Clement got away, I am told. Some say Mr. Bruce, that came with Mr. Lester, this evening, helped him; others, that it was the Captain’s son; but any how, he got free, and Mr. Lester went home with him. One of the smugglers was taken, and ——”

“Well? what?”

“It’s an ugly story, the rest, Ma’am. I can’t say how much is true. But that wretched fellow, Goff, is put out of the way.”

“Killed? By the preventive men? How horrible!” and Mildred turned very pale.

“Worse than that, if the tale’s true. Hardman, who was watching about the cliffs with Mr. Lester, says that he had kept himself hid when the skirmish began, and just at the end fired deliberately at Mr. Bruce.”

Mildred uttered a scream of horror.

Greaves paused for a moment: "The General's waiting, Ma'am, I must not be long."

"But Mr. Bruce—Mr. Bruce!" faintly ejaculated Mildred.

"He escaped, Ma'am; which was all very well; though, being a stranger in these parts, one doesn't seem to care so much about him. But the poor young gentleman at the Grange has been mortally wounded, and there's many a sad heart for him. The preventives were after Goff in a moment, and, trying to escape, he was drowned."

Even in his haste to go to the General, Greaves watched Mildred's countenance narrowly; but she exercised immense self-control, and, uttering inwardly her thankfulness for her brother's safety, only said aloud: "Oh! Greaves, how terrible! So desperate—so unprepared. And the poor boy—what have they done with him?"

"Carried him off to Mark Wood's cottage in the Gorge; so I'm told, Ma'am; though I can scarce believe it, with the Grange so near at hand. But they say, too, that he insisted upon it, and that the Captain is off somewhere. People think there must be something more in it all than a mere smuggling fray; and why that fellow Goff should have had a spite against Mr. Bruce no one can say."

"Yes, very strange; very strange, indeed!" but Mildred spoke wandringly. "Was that the Hall bell?" She raised herself up, and listened.

Greaves listened too. "I think so, Ma'am; I will see," and he left the room.

Mildred's heart beat with painful rapidity; every

thing seemed to swim before her; her eyes were dim, and her knees trembled. She tried to hearken, but could catch no sound. The rush of roaring waves, the noise of tumultuous voices, the phantom sounds of an excited imagination, were filling her ears with their ghostly echoes; and the undertone of voices approaching, with the tread of footsteps across the stone hall and along the corridor, mingled with her fancies, so that she could scarcely distinguish their reality.

Yet the door opened, and two persons entered, Mr. Lester first, and Mildred's exclamation of pleasure was changed into a sharp cry of almost terrified delight, as the next moment her brother knelt by her side.

She flung her arms round his neck; her tears fell fast and long. When she did speak it was to say, "I have prayed for this, and God has heard me!"

Mr. Lester looked round and closed the door. "I sent Greaves away, but he may come back. Remember, you are still to be careful."

"Not after to-morrow," exclaimed Mr. Vivian. "All must be decided then."

"So soon!—My father must be prepared. Oh! Edward, you little know what you have to contend with. And it seems—if I could but keep you here with me as you are,"—and again she clung to him, as though fearing he would escape from her grasp.

"It is useless to delay," replied Mr. Lester; "and we have arguments, Mildred, which may work a great change in General Vivian's feelings. You are ignorant of the charge brought against your brother, and

therefore you cannot hope, as we do, that it may be refuted."

"I do know it," said Mildred; and turning to Mr. Vivian, with a look of sad, yet tender reproach, she added: "When I learnt the truth, I judged my father more reverently and charitably. He was wounded in the point on which his feelings are the most sensitive."

"Not by me!" and Mr. Vivian started to his feet. "As there is truth in heaven, Mildred, it was a forgery; a base, miserable forgery!"

"The paper!—the handwriting! Is it possible?"

"It was not mine. I would have died rather than do such a deed. John Vivian is responsible for it. I have heard the acknowledgment from his own lips."

"Oh, Edward! God indeed be thanked!" She sat silent for some seconds, then turned to Mr. Lester: "I can't understand. The paper—did my father know about it?—did he give it to you? He says that he has forgotten it."

"There is a mystery about that," replied Mr. Lester. "Miss Campbell says it was found in my pocket-book. I had not the most remote idea that it was in my possession. Yet I can so far account for it, that on the day when I was here, talking with General Vivian about Clement, a box of papers was upset, and several were scattered. I picked up all, and restored them, as I thought; but this I must have carried off accidentally. Miss Campbell says she recollects seeing it drop out with my handkerchief, when she was conversing with me the same evening, and that I took it up, without looking at it,

and put it in my pocket-book. Of course she did not know then what it was."

"And you have it, and will return it, and it will all be proved."

"Ah! Mildred, no," exclaimed Mr. Vivian; "that is a sore point; it is gone. Almost the last act of that wretched man Goff, who has to-night been summoned to his dread account, was to take it from Miss Campbell by force, and to destroy it."

Mildred sank back on the sofa.

"I have nothing but my word to support me," continued Mr. Vivian. "That, and Bertha Campbell's evidence that the paper was taken from her. Yet what need is there of more?" And he drew himself up proudly.

"He does not know my father." Mildred spoke despondingly to Mr. Lester.

"I hope he does. I can't imagine General Vivian's doubting him."

"Doubt me!" Mr. Vivian withdrew the hand which had been clasped in Mildred's, and strode up and down the apartment rapidly: "Let him breathe but the thought, and I will go back to Jamaica—to India—I care not where. Doubt me?—doubt his son?—a Vivian!"

"Edward! dearest, he is old; his mind has lost its elasticity, and it has been warped by sorrow."

"Yes, through me,—my faults. Oh! Mildred, Mildred, help me to be patient!"

"God will help us all," replied Mildred; "only let us trust Him. My father may believe, yet he

may insist upon proof. Is there no other to be brought forward?"

"None, at least forthcoming at present. John Vivian is beyond our reach; if he were not, I scarcely see how we could substantiate our charge."

"And Clement's conduct will work against you," continued Mildred. "He must, perhaps he ought, to hear of it."

"To condemn me for my boy's follies! Mildred, is that justice?"

"It may be his justice," replied Mildred; and a long pause followed.

Mr. Vivian broke it: "It matters not, Mildred; delay cannot help us. If it would, I could not bear it. Even now, the suspense of my position is often almost maddening. Let my father reject, — let him even doubt my word, if he will; the honour of a Vivian rests not on words, but on the consciousness of the inmost heart. One thing at least he cannot take from me, — the comfort of having cleared myself in your dear eyes; of having seen you, — talked with you, — looked again upon the old familiar walls. Home! my childhood's home!" and his eye wandered round the well-known apartment. "Does my father know what home is?"

"Too well! dearest Edward. If he had cared for it less, he might have been less severe in his endeavour to uphold it."

"Rejected again! Dishonoured! doubted!" murmured Mr. Vivian. "Yet I have loved and revered him, oh! so deeply. Mildred, he must see

me; he must give me his blessing. I cannot die in peace without it."

"Hope, Edward. I have lived upon it for many years. It may seem impossible," she added, speaking to Mr. Lester, "to reject such evidence; yet no one can calculate upon the turn his feelings may take."

"He will not reject it," replied Mr. Lester. "I have no fear upon that point; it would be an insult to his feelings as a gentleman. I have but one misgiving, that the old prejudice may still linger so as to bias his mind, and that the absence of proof will, without his being aware of it, rankle in his breast. I believe he will grant John Vivian's offence, and yet I do not say that he will forgive your brother, so as to restore him to his inheritance."

"Then be it so," exclaimed Mr. Vivian. "Let the paltry acres go; it was not for them that I grieved when he disinherited me, and it is not for them that I have sought him now. Let him acknowledge that I am not the base wretch he thought me, and admit me to intercourse with my home, and I will be content. The labour of my own intellect shall, through God's aid, support me for the future, as it has supported me during the past, and when I die I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that not even to my father was I indebted for my own prosperity, or that of my children."

"Proud, dearest Edward, still," said Mildred gently.

"Oh! Mildred, does not this unjust world make one so?"

"Yes," and Mildred sighed; "it is one's struggle."

“To bear punishment and own it to be punishment, Mildred, that is what I find so hard. Yet I have had many years in which to learn the lesson.”

“And many things to teach it you. I must hear all before long.”

“Not till you have told me all. One question I must ask now.” His voice became tremulous and sank, and Mr. Lester withdrew himself, and walked to the other end of the apartment. “Mildred, did Edith think of me as my father did?”

“Not as he did. He would not tell her what he thought the truth.”

“But she suspected me?”

“She feared, and the fear ——”

“Killed her; I knew it. God forgive and aid me.”

“She had been ill and anxious before,” continued Mildred; “the shock was very great, but it might only have aggravated, not caused, the evil. She had a brain fever at the time, but she rallied from it, and lived many months afterwards.”

“And did she speak of me? Did you talk together?”

“Alas! no, that was my grief; but it was all pent up; it worked inwardly. It was very strange, she who had been so unreserved before.”

“John Vivian’s doing,” he murmured. “Can it be possible to forgive? And all that time she considered me a wretch, Mildred; lost, — sunk.”

“Forget it now, Edward. If the dead know the secrets of the living, she has long since learnt that you were innocent. If not, the day will come when

she must know it. It was God who appointed her trial and ours."

"She thought me guilty," he continued; "and I was so, though not as she believed. Oh! Mildred, the indescribable wretchedness of that time!—but for my wife, I must have been overwhelmed by it."

"And the years of misery that have followed!" continued Mildred: "when my father thinks of them, he must yield."

"Yet remember, Mildred, it must be to justice, not compassion. He did me wrong unknowingly; when he is convinced of his error, he must do me right freely. I can accept nothing but pardon for the offence I did commit—restitution for the sufferings borne for those which I did not commit."

"You are like him," said Mildred, smiling sadly.

"Then there is the more hope that we may understand each other. For my own reputation's sake,—my character in the sight of the world,—I must demand a full acknowledgment that I have been wronged."

"And for his own reputation's sake,—his character in the sight of the world,—he will demand a full proof that he has wronged you."

Mr. Vivian was silent and very thoughtful.

The remembrance of Bertha's refusal to deliver up the paper crossed Mildred's mind, but she would not speak of it; her brother's countenance showed feelings which needed no aggravation.

Mr. Lester came up to them: "We must go now, Vivian: remember we have business on our hands, and explanations to be made to the preventive men,

—possibly to the magistrates also, if we wish to prevent inquiry as to Clement's share and Ronald's, and your own, in this unhappy affair; and to-morrow early I have promised to be at the Gorge."

"To see Ronald?" inquired Mildred. "Is it not a miserable place for him?"

"Not miserable, but very uncomfortable. He insisted upon being taken there, as well as he could insist upon any thing, so utterly exhausted as he was. He dreaded the Grange evidently."

"He will have no one to take care of him or nurse him."

"I said so. I urged Mark to carry him to the Rectory, but his agony of distress at the idea was so great that we were forced to give way. The old woman who has the charge of Barney is a tolerable nurse, and Mark has given him up his own bed, and is off himself to get out of the way of observation. Vivian and I went with Ronald, and saw that he was in no want of any thing for the present; and so we must leave it. To-morrow he may rally, — and then we may bring him to reason."

"You don't speak very anxiously," said Mildred.

"The medical opinion is favourable. A good deal of the exhaustion we found proceeded from his having eaten nothing for many hours. But I don't venture to say he will recover."

Mr. Vivian had been standing by them in silence. He bent over his sister and kissed her: "My doing! Mildred; the curse falls on all connected with me."

"Dearest Edward! — the curse is taken away when there is repentance."

“Not in this world, as regards temporal suffering,” he replied.

“Save that the suffering may be converted into blessing,” observed Mr. Lester. “And for Ronald, sorrow would be idle: should he live, he will live to redeem his name; should he die, who can doubt that mercy is in store for him?”

CHAP. LI.

“THE General has had another attack of faintness, Sir ; Miss Vivian is with him.”

That was the information which greeted Mr. Lester when he appeared at the Hall the following morning. Greaves looked uneasy, and spoke anxiously, but said that Dr. Lawes assured them there was nothing to be alarmed at.

The intelligence was seconded by a note from Mildred, written in pencil : “ We must be patient. It is worry of mind. Nothing can be said to him yet.”

Patience was comparatively easy now—at least, for Mr. Vivian. He had taken up his abode at the Farm in preference to the Rectory ; and thither Ella was sent to make what might be called her first acquaintance with her father. Louisa and Fanny also were with him ; whilst Bertha was preparing Mrs. Campbell’s mind for his return. Only Clement was absent.

Mr. Vivian’s was one of those easily depressed, easily excited minds, which seem never entirely to lose their elasticity ; and now that personal danger was at an end, and he was restored to the free companionship of his family, he would scarcely allow the happiness of the present moment to be disturbed by any fears for the future. He was charmed with

Ella's talents, Louisa's sense, and little Fanny's beauty, and turned from any remembrance of Clement's misconduct; till it was forced upon him at last, when Mr. Lester came, and it was necessary to make inquiry into all that had taken place.

Clement's story was short but full of warning. He had not offended to the full extent intentionally—that was his excuse; and yet every word he spoke showed that most fatal of all intentions, the determination to follow a weak self-will.

To do him justice, he did not for a moment endeavour to evade blame by equivocation. The first most marked and wilful wandering from the right path had been the concealment of his visit to the Grange. Had it been confessed, Mr. Lester's strict injunctions would have supported his weakness, and probably enabled him to withstand further temptations. But once on the downward path, and the impetus of evil carried him easily forward. His vanity had been excited by the praises bestowed upon his quickness in figures; and under the pretence of being further useful to Captain Vivian, he had for the fourth time been enticed by him to the Grange, as he was returning from the hills. Clement knew he was doing wrong—he quite confessed it; but Captain Vivian, he said, was pressing. In the course of conversation it was suggested to him that Captain Vivian's vessel was at Encombe, and upon the point of making a short sail of about an hour round by Cleve; if he would only go on board, he was to have a good lesson in seamanship, and might return almost before he was missed.

The offer, accompanied by flattering prophecies that he would make a first-rate sailor, was too tempting to be refused. And Clement went with Captain Vivian to the cliff; and then finding it growing dusk, wished to return. But he was laughed at, as being inclined to sneak out of an adventure, and told that the moon would be up directly; and so having, as he fancied, no good excuse, he went. Captain Vivian he thought meant to accompany him, but at the last moment he put him in charge of Mark Wood.

From that time Clement's existence had been one almost of terror. The vessel sailed in the direction of the opposite coast; and he found himself in the hands of men who would neither listen to him nor explain their intentions. They treated him civilly, but were deaf to his remonstrances—except that Mark Wood assured him, from time to time, that no personal injury was intended him.

If he had erred greatly, the agony of mind of that one night had been a punishment in which seemed condensed the lesson of a life. Of what went on in the vessel Clement was very ignorant. They had met and spoken with another vessel, and he imagined had received contraband goods on board; but he was kept close in the cabin, and, indeed, was too ill a great part of the time to enter into anything but his own sufferings.

Mark Wood waited upon him, and told him when they were about to return; but as they neared the shore Mark left him, and another man, Hale, took charge of him. He felt himself then a prisoner; and from the casual observations which were dropped

before him, understood the nature of the expedition in which the men were engaged, and resolved at all hazards to leave them as soon as they touched the land. But this he soon found to be impossible. Hale kept close to him, and had even threatened to shoot him if he attempted to escape. The result Mr. Lester and his father already knew.

It was all told concisely and abruptly, drawn from him in a great measure by questions; and when at last the history was ended, Clement stood humbled and silent, not even venturing to ask for forgiveness. His father pitied him—perhaps there were too many and too keen recollections of his own follies to condemn him. Mr. Lester pitied him also, yet his manner was coldly stern. One comment only he made upon the facts he had heard: “Absence of intention, Clement, will not save us from the consequences of our faults. There is a straight and narrow path to Heaven: no one who leaves it intends to go to Hell.”

“I have had a lesson for life, Sir; I don’t mean to forget it,” replied Clement.

“A lesson for Eternity it ought to be, Clement. If small disobediences will produce such terrible consequences on earth, we may be quite certain that they will, without repentance, produce a thousand-fold more terrible consequences hereafter. I would say it to you and to Ella also. Neither of you have as yet learnt what strict duty means; and if you do not learn it now, it will be taught you by the bitter experience of life.”

Clement turned to his father. From him it seemed

that he expected greater palliation of his faults ; but Mr. Vivian sat with his forehead resting on his hands. Only once he looked up for a moment, and said that he should like Ella to be sent for.

She came, bright, excited, full of hope and happiness, having only just begun to realise that the quiet, strange Mr. Bruce could possibly be her own father. The sight of Clement, and the grave countenances which she saw, awed and subdued her. She sat down by her father ; and he put his arm round her, and looked at her tenderly, but his eyes were dimmed with tears, and he did not speak.

“ You have forgiven him, dear Papa,” whispered Ella.

“ Mr. Lester says he is not the only person to require forgiveness,” replied her father, evasively.

Ella looked up inquiringly.

“ Am I very strict, Ella,” observed Mr. Lester, “ in saying that, if your influence had always been exerted on the side of obedience, last night’s sufferings might have been spared us ? ”

Ella’s colour rose. She could bear her aunt Mildred’s gentle and sympathising reproof, but Mr. Lester’s cold, severe tone touched her pride.

She was not aware, she said, that any influence of her’s had induced Clement to join the smugglers.

“ I didn’t join them, Ella ! ” exclaimed Clement ; “ I wouldn’t for the world have been mixed up with such a low set. I was taken off against my will. But I was very wrong,” he added, more gently.

Ella glanced at him in surprise.

“ You will think me hard, I know, Ella,” continued

Mr. Lester; "but I can easily make you see that I have reason on my side. Who encouraged Clement to spend the time that should have been devoted to study upon the shore, and so gave him desultory habits?"

Ella blushed, and was silent.

"Who set him the example of disrespect, disobedience, wilfulness, in small every-day matters; and so led him into the same in greater ones? Who never would allow that punctuality to hours was a duty; and so made him think it of little consequence whether he stayed with those men or not? Who used to excite him by talking of chivalry, and adventure, and daring — and forgot that the noblest daring is that which shall conquer self?"

No reply; but Ella leant her head on her father's shoulder, and burst into tears.

Clement was much distressed. "If you wouldn't be angry with her, Sir. Indeed it was my own doing. I ought to have known better; and I did, too."

"Ella won't be angry with me by-and-by," said Mr. Lester; "she would rather hear the truth."

"I am not angry, now," — and Ella looked up, and half smiled through her tears; — "Aunt Mildred has told me all before."

"And Aunt Mildred has taught you to be a very different person from what you were, Ella," replied Mr. Lester, kindly; "and if there had not been something of a sense of justice in my mind, which made me feel that you could scarcely be exonerated from a share in Clement's faults, I doubt if I should have spoken to you as I have: certainly I should not

have chosen to do so the first day of your father's being with you."

"Mr. Lester has lectured me, too, very often," said Mr. Vivian, kissing her fondly. "You know he was my tutor, so he was accustomed to it years ago. God grant they may profit by it better than I did," he added, in a lower voice.

Clement came forward boldly: "I am willing to bear any punishment, Sir, which my father or you may think right. And I would rather."

"You have had your punishment, Clement, from God; if that should fail, nothing else will have any effect."

"And you won't trust me, Sir, again?"

"Yes, you will; it is impossible not to trust him," exclaimed Ella.

"I trust him entirely, implicitly—as a general trusts a prisoner on his parole," said Mr. Vivian, quickly.

Mr. Lester was silent.

Clement looked disheartened; Ella inclined to be angry.

"Shall I tell you, Clement, why I scarcely dare to say I trust you?" replied Mr. Lester. "Not only because of that one instance of deception, most grievous though it was, for I believe you are heartily ashamed of it; but because your besetting sin—almost more fatal to a man than to a woman—is vanity."

Clement winced under the accusation.

"It is very painful, I know, to hear it. It is such a weakness, so entirely opposed to a manly spirit, that

we are apt to give it any name rather than its true one. You think that you like adventure—deeds of enterprise: what you really like is admiration of any kind. Let it come from your father, from me, from the fishermen on the shore—it matters not who or what may be the source—if you are admired you are satisfied. There, Clement, is your snare.”

“Yes, Sir, I know it.”

Mr. Lester’s countenance brightened a little, and he laid his hand affectionately on Clement’s shoulder: “Remember it as well as know it, and I shall be satisfied. Own that you are vain; repeat it to yourself; think of it; watch against it; pray most earnestly that you may be saved from it, and you will, through God’s mercy, be all that we most earnestly desire; for a man who is fighting against vanity posts a sentinel upon eye, and ear, and tongue, and every imagination of the heart: yield, and there is no surer way to mar success in this world, or to destroy your hopes for another.”

Clement stood silent; and Ella, longing to withdraw attention from him, said, rather lightly: “You won’t tell me my great fault, Mr. Lester.”

“Perhaps I don’t know you as well as I do Clement,” he replied, coldly; “besides, I have said enough for one morning.”

“But I should like to know; please tell me.”

“Really?—can you bear it?”

“Clement can bear it, and so can I, I hope,” replied Ella, drawing herself up.

“I could see one great fault peeping out in the way you spoke just then,” replied Mr. Lester—“pride!”

“Yes, I know I am proud,” said Ella.

“But you are not ashamed of it.”

“It is very wrong, I am quite aware of that.”

“But it doesn’t lower you, you think, in the eyes of others. You wouldn’t shrink from being called a proud person?”

“Not very much”—and Ella coloured, though she almost smiled.

“No; and there is the great danger of pride;—persons are not ashamed of it. I have known many who rather pride themselves upon it. But, Ella, that is not according to God’s judgment; and it will be no satisfaction to us, when Heaven is lost, to know that it was through a sin which we fancied was a noble one.”

“I don’t know that I thought it noble exactly,” observed Ella, “only not so silly as some others.”

“But even in that you are mistaken,” replied Mr. Lester. “Proud persons don’t think they are ridiculous, but they are so; and many times, when they imagine they have only been upholding their dignity, they have actually made themselves absurd.”

Ella looked grave and uncomfortable, and said that it was very difficult to know when she was proud.

“Of course it is,” replied Mr. Lester. “You think that pride is a family failing, and you admire it for its antiquity. I can trace it back farther than you do, Ella; it was Satan’s sin when he rebelled against God.”

Ella looked towards her father, to hide from Mr. Lester the blush which crimsoned her cheek.

“Pride and indolence,” whispered Mr. Vivian—
“these I have always been told were my child’s
great faults.”

“Yes, Papa, indolence, I know; but I never
thought so much about pride, and ——”

“And what?”

“It seems hard upon me.”

“It is just what I used to say, Ella; he was so very
unsparing when he told me my faults.”

“But I would rather know them; I would rather
he should tell me of them. I don’t want any one to
think better of me than I am; only it always seemed
that indolence was much worse than pride.”

“There is not much to choose between them, I am
afraid,” said Mr. Vivian.

“But pride!—people would be nothing without
pride,” exclaimed Ella, and she sat up, and turned to
Mr. Lester for an answer.

“Nothing without self-respect,” replied Mr. Lester;
“and that must be founded upon truth, and those
who see themselves truly can never be proud.”

“I don’t know what you mean by self-respect.”

“A respect for ourselves as being God’s creatures,
redeemed and sanctified by Him; made the dwelling-
place of His Spirit, and destined to live with Him
hereafter. That respect will make us fear to do, or
say, or think any thing which may lower us in His
Eyes; but when we have done so, it will force us at
once to acknowledge our fault, because it is only by
that acknowledgment that we can be restored to
His favour.”

“That scarcely meets Ella’s notions,” said Mr. Vivian, as he watched his child’s face; “she is thinking of this world.”

“Well then as regards this world; self-respect, Ella, is but a phase of that foundation of all things, truth. Proud people place themselves in false positions; persons with self-respect see exactly what they have a claim to. No one calls a prince proud because he requires to be honoured as a prince; self-respect teaches him to claim such attention. But when he forgets that other persons have their stations requiring honour also, then pride begins, and self-respect ceases. In this point of view, however, self-respect is only a natural virtue, and may be possessed where there is no real religion. The genuine feeling is that which I spoke of before, and which must always go hand in hand with humility. But we have had enough lecturing upon faults this morning,” added Mr. Lester, suddenly stopping, and changing his tone. “I must go and see after my other parishioners, and talk a little to Rachel. I only saw her for a minute last night, and she had a wonderful story to tell me of her adventures yesterday.”

He held out his hand to Ella; she took it shyly but cordially and said, “Thank you.” Her heart was quite full.

“Don’t consider me very severe, dear child, if you can help it; I only want you to be perfect now papa is come.”

He went up to Clement, who was standing in the background.

“It may be all forgotten,” said Mr. Vivian, “may it not?”

“Yes, indeed, as far as I am concerned. And one thing, Clement, I say from my heart; I trust you now more than I have ever done before. I am sure you are heartily sorry.”

Clement’s eyes sparkled through tears: “You shall have cause, Sir; indeed I don’t mean to forget.”

“God bless you, my dear boy, and give you strength to keep your resolution.”

Mr. Lester departed, and Clement threw himself into his father’s arms, and sobbed.

CHAP. LII.

WEARY and anxious were the hours spent by Mildred Vivian in her father's sick chamber. She was told there was nothing to fear; she scarcely thought there was; and yet the suspense and watching, the sense of personal helplessness, the boding care for her brother, the longing to search into the depths of her father's thoughts, aggravated every symptom in her eyes. One fear after another presented itself. He lay still and silent, and she thought that some sudden weakness had paralysed his powers. He was restless, and she fancied that fever was coming on. He looked flushed, and she thought there was a rush of blood to the head. But the fear which most haunted her was that of paralysis. Such an attack, common at his age, might weaken his mental powers, and render futile all endeavours to explain her brother's conduct. She was with him constantly, but he said very little to her. He did not sleep, but his mind seemed absorbed with thoughts which he would not communicate, but which seemed working and goading him almost beyond endurance.

As he neither questioned her concerning Mr. Lester's return, nor referred to the missing paper, Mildred feared to agitate him by bringing the subject before him. Yet it was evident that such a state of

things could not long continue. The feelings preying upon him would inevitably work their way fatally, if some stop were not put to them; and on the fourth day after the beginning of this miserable suspense, Mildred ventured to mention Mr. Lester's name, and ask whether her father would be willing to see him.

"If he will, he may come;" that was all the answer: but it was sufficient for Mildred, and she dispatched a messenger to the Rectory, with the request that Mr. Lester would, if possible, be at the Hall in the course of the afternoon.

The General insisted upon dressing and sitting up then, though he had been told that to rise might bring back the giddiness and faintness. He was very weak, but he would scarcely allow Greaves to wait upon him, and when he went into his dressing-room, he ordered his books and papers to be brought, and endeavoured to write a letter; but his hand shook so much, that he was obliged to give up the attempt. Mildred was sitting with him at the time, and offered to write for him. He refused. "It was no matter of consequence," he said, "and would do just as well another day. His hand was a little shaky from lying in bed so long." It was evident that he did not choose to be thought ill.

Luncheon came, and he made an effort to eat, but nothing suited his taste. He was full of complaints, and at last took only a little wine-and-water and a biscuit; even that he only pretended to eat, and soon put it aside, and sent for the newspaper.

Greaves brought the "Times."

“Not that; the county paper. Where is it?”

Greaves looked at Mildred.

“I thought you wouldn't care to read that, Sir, and I took it to my room,” replied Mildred.

“Bring it;” and Greaves went unwillingly.

He came back: “I am very sorry, Ma'am, I have looked every where in the morning-room, and can't find it.”

Mildred regarded him scrutinisingly: “Are you sure it is not there, Greaves?”

“Very nearly, Ma'am. I will look again if you wish it.”

“Ask Miss Ella; she may have it,” said Mildred; but Greaves showed no alacrity to obey.

“Ella! what has she to do with newspapers?” inquired the General. “You don't let her read them, do you?”

“Not often, Sir; only ——”

The General interrupted her: “Go and ask Miss Ella for the paper, Greaves. Tell her to bring it herself, if she has it.”

He sat bending over the fire, and did not even look at Mildred.

Ella came, the newspaper in her hand: “Do you want me, Grandpapa? Shall I read to you?”

“What is there in the paper worth reading? Any thing particular?”

Ella became as pale as death, — then the blood crimsoned her very temples.

The General repeated the question: “You have been reading it yourself, child. What was there in it?”

“Aunt Mildred let me see the account of the smuggling fray,” replied Ella.

“What smuggling fray? At Encombe? Let me see it?” He adjusted his spectacles, turned to the light, but could not read, and gave the paper back to Ella. “It tires me, my dear. Lying in bed so long makes one’s eyes weak. Read it out.”

Ella would fain have handed the paper to Mildred. The General observed it.

“Read it yourself, my dear; don’t trouble your aunt.”

And Ella read a long prolix account of the landing of the smugglers, and the watchfulness of the coast-guard, with some uncomfortable particulars of the struggle between them, and the detail of Goff’s death. Then she stopped.

“Is that all, my dear?”

“Nearly all, Grandpapa.”

“Well, make haste, finish it. Mr. Lester will be here.”

“It isn’t exactly about the smugglers, Grandpapa; it is only ——”

“Read it, — read it, child.”

Ella’s voice shook so that her words were scarcely intelligible: “We regret to say, that a rumour is abroad implicating a young gentleman of honourable birth in this disgraceful affair. The circumstances are very mysterious, but are said to be connected with a train of unfortunate events by which the succession to one of the finest estates in the county has been alienated.”

“What?” General Vivian caught the paper from

her hand and looked at it, though it was clear he could scarcely distinguish the words. "Carry it to your aunt, Ella."

"I have read it, Sir, thank you. Ella, you may go."

The storm was about to burst when Ella closed the door. Mildred said timidly, "I did not like to worry you, Sir, when you were so unwell."

"Nothing worries me. When did it happen?"

"Four nights ago, Sir: the evening you were taken ill the second time."

"Where is the boy?"

"At home, Sir, with Mrs. Campbell. But indeed the papers are hard upon him."

"Of course, when they say disagreeable things. Does he mean to take up smuggling as a profession?"

"My dear Father! indeed, indeed, you are cruel upon him. He did not join them,—at least not willingly; he was led away."

"No doubt: all persons are who go wrong."

"I think, Sir, if you could hear him,—if you could see him, you would judge him more gently. He is so entirely penitent for his folly."

"All persons are when they are suffering from the consequences."

"But he is so young," continued Mildred,—“such a mere boy; and he did not in the least intend to go with the smugglers,—he was entrapped. It was Captain Vivian's doing."

"Doubtless; the same game which he played years ago."

"Mr. Lester will say more for poor Clement than I can," continued Mildred; "he has heard all the

particulars, and he is thoroughly convinced that Clement is deeply grieved for what has happened, and is resolved to amend."

"I never said that Clement was not grieved. But since Mr. Lester knows every thing,"—and there was a peculiar stress upon the words,—“no doubt he can explain more of the mysterious circumstances alluded to.”

Mildred looked thoroughly disheartened: “I would rather Mr. Lester should talk to you, my dear Father. I know all so indistinctly,—by hearsay.”

“Hearsay troubles itself with things which very little concern it,” observed the General, “when it remarks upon the disposition which it may please me to make of my property. Whoever wishes, however, to know my final and irrevocable decision upon the subject, is perfectly welcome to do so. The old lands of the Vivians shall never, with my consent, descend to the hands of base swindlers, or be wasted by the companion of smugglers.”

“Edward a swindler! My dear, dear Father, how little you know!”

“What else is it but swindling,” continued the General, “to promise that which you have no power to pay; to give away that which is not your own; to mortgage an inheritance which a single word may alienate? Like father, like son. Let them go. And for you, Mildred, and Mr. Lester,”—he paused—his words came thickly—“you may plot too deeply for your own honour and for mine.”

“Father, you mistake me; you do me wrong.” Mildred’s voice was eager, and her cheek flushed

with all the inherent pride of her race; but in one moment it was checked. "I am sorry,—forgive me—I will not speak of myself; but, indeed, you are unjust to Mr. Lester. And for Edward,—Oh! believe me; there is indeed a mystery, but he never did the deed for which you disinherited him. The paper brought before you was a base forgery."

General Vivian's eye was stony and fixed, his face was rigid. Mildred drew near, and sat down beside him. "My dearest Father! You hear it; it is truth. Edward himself says it. May he not—will you not let him come to you and tell you so?"

He regarded her almost vacantly, yet he repeated the word "forgery?"

"Yes, indeed," she continued; "you can't doubt him. It was revenge,—Captain Vivian's revenge. It is certain."

"Let me see the paper." The General passed his hand across his forehead.

"Dearest Father! will you listen to me? Shall we wait? Mr. Lester is coming, and will explain."

"I must see it,—it was his handwriting—his own. Give it me,—in the box; but it is gone, Mr. Lester took it. Oh, Mildred! my child! plots, plots, everywhere!" and he turned his head away from her and rested it in utter feebleness and exhaustion against the back of his chair.

Mildred allowed him to remain thus without interruption for some seconds; then she again said, very gently: "Mr. Lester's coming will make all clear to you, Sir. He will be here almost directly."

He kept her hand clasped in his, clutching it at

times convulsively. She thought he did not hear when the hall-door bell rang ; but he raised himself with a sudden effort, pushed her aside, and tried to draw the table near to him, then sank back again powerless.

Mildred watched him with anxiety. "If it is Mr. Lester, dear Sir, will you see him?"

He bent his head in assent, and again tried to sit up. Mildred put a cushion behind him, and made him rest his feet on a footstool. Even at that moment, it struck her how old and worn he looked—much older than his age. "Shall I stay for Mr. Lester, or will you see him alone?" she asked.

"Stay ; put a chair ; tell Greaves to bring me my draught first."

That caused a little delay, which Mildred did not regret, earnestly though she longed for the interview to be over. It was a breathing time ; it gave her a moment for prayer. Greaves bustled about in the room longer than seemed necessary ; but he did good ; he distracted the General's attention and roused him. He said, at last, "That will do ; go." And the irritable tone was a comfort to Mildred.

One glance interchanged between Mildred and Mr. Lester told little to either of aught except suspense. Mr. Lester went up to the General : "I am afraid I find you ill, Sir."

"Better, thank you ; I am sitting up."

"Yes ; he has kept his bed the last four days," observed Mildred. "I don't exactly know what has been the matter."

“Gout hanging about. You have been to London, Mr. Lester?”

“For a day or two, Sir. I returned just before you were taken ill, and should have called to see you if I had been allowed, but they said you ought to be kept quiet.”

“I have business with you.”

“Have you, Sir? Might it not be as well to delay it till you are rather stronger?”

“I am obliged to you, but I am the judge of my own strength. You have a paper of mine. I gave it——” He stopped, and looked distressed, and turned with an appealing glance to Mildred.

“No, dear Sir; if you recollect, you did not give it. It was that which worried you. But Mr. Lester will tell you about it. He was telling me last night.”

That acknowledgment was repented of as soon as made, for a frown rested on the General’s face.

“It must have been taken up by me accidentally,” observed Mr. Lester, “the day I was with you, Sir, looking over your papers. That is the only way I can account for its having come into my possession. Certainly I was not aware that I had it, until Miss Campbell told me she had found it in my pocket-book.”

“Campbell! Campbell!” muttered the General to himself. “Is she in it?” The mention of the name had evidently awakened some old prejudice and dislike. He spoke more distinctly, “I must have it back; it is important. Mildred says——”

“What is quite true, Sir,—that it is a forgery.”

“I would look at it,—fetch it for me, Mildred. I

beg your pardon, Mr. Lester, I don't know who has it,—it has been taken from me—I must see it." The tone became more and more excited.}

Mildred and Mr. Lester glanced at each other in alarm.

"What makes you look so? Why don't you speak out? If it's a forgery, why isn't it proved? It shall be proved; I will have it tried. The last penny I have shall be spent to try it."

"If you will see your son, Sir," said Mr. Lester, mildly, "he will convince you. Had you not better see him? He is at Encombe, longing to be admitted to you."

General Vivian turned round upon him sharply: "Is that your object, Mr. Lester?"

"My object is to see justice done, Sir."

"And mine,—mine too. I don't doubt you, Mr. Lester. You are a gentleman. Where is the paper?"

"Destroyed, Sir;"—there was no escape from a direct answer;—"by a most unhappy mischance. The villain Goff, Captain Vivian's witness, and the sharer, I presume, in the profits of his crime, took it by force from Miss Campbell, as she was returning the other evening from the Hall, and tore it to atoms. How he obtained the information that she had it, I cannot tell."

The General was quite silent.

"I need not say, Sir, that Miss Campbell's word is above suspicion."

"You saw the paper, Mr. Lester?"

"No, Sir; I knew nothing about it until my return from London."

"I saw it," exclaimed Mildred.

"Then you can tell; yes, you must be the best judge of all. Was it your brother's handwriting?" and the General's eye rested upon her with its cold, clear, scrutinising glance.

Mildred felt herself defeated by her own words. She could only say that certainly it was very like it, but that of course it would be, to be a successful forgery. She had not examined it minutely.

"And Miss Campbell obtained possession of it," murmured the General to himself.

"Accidentally, Sir.—She found it by mistake in my pocket-book."

"Where it should have been left, Mr. Lester. It was not Miss Campbell's business to pry into the concerns of another family."

"She meant no harm, my dear Father. It was very natural; she felt the paper to be of importance."

"Of the greatest importance. — So much so, Mildred, that without it"—he stopped—"Mr. Lester, I don't doubt you."

"Then, Sir; you will see your son."

"My son,—tell him from me that I forgive him."

"My Father! My dear, dear Father, have pity upon him. His heart yearns to see you," exclaimed Mildred.

"I have pity, I forgive him. Justice forbids me to do more without proof. Mr. Lester, bid him look after his boy, or there will yet be a further disgrace awaiting us. Mildred, ring for Greaves. I would go to my room."

Mildred delayed, with her hand on the bell, and looked entreatingly at Mr. Lester, then doubtfully on her father.

The General read their countenances.

“You think me hard. If you could stand in my place you would judge me better.” He tried to rise himself from his chair, but he was too weak. And as he sat down again, and leaned his head upon his hands, Mildred saw tears trickle through them.

She kissed his forehead, and he did not repel her, though he would not notice her.

She whispered to him: “Is there not comfort in the thought of his innocence?” And then he dashed away the hand which lay upon his, and told her to leave him.

Mr. Lester made one more effort. “General Vivian! You speak of justice. It is unjust to refuse to see your son, and to hear what he can say in his own defence.”

“Proof,” murmured the General; “let him bring proof.”

“But if he cannot, my dearest Father; if you insist upon that which it is impossible to obtain?”

The General shook his head, his clearness of intellect seemed failing again.

“We must not urge it,” whispered Mr. Lester to Mildred.

She rang the bell, and when Greaves came, Mr. Lester left the room, the General taking no notice of his departure.

CHAP. LIII.

RONALD VIVIAN sat in a large arm-chair, by the side of the low, open hearth in Mark Wood's cottage. Barney's couch was opposite: the child was much attenuated, and his face expressed more constant pain. In a distant corner, Mother Brewer was busied in knitting a pair of small woollen socks. The traces of what might have been years of sickness and sorrow were visible in Ronald's worn countenance, yet still more visibly was stamped upon it the energy which might still struggle and conquer, grounded upon the endurance which might suffer but would never yield.

His wound was not deep, though it was very painful. He spoke of it himself now as something light, scarcely worthy of a thought. Yet it distressed him so much to move, that it was clear that great care would be needful before it could be expected to heal. Barney was trying to amuse himself with cutting out figures, but it was an effort to him to hold the scissors. From time to time he looked up wistfully at Ronald, whose eyes were closed.

"He's asleep, isn't he?" said the old woman, laying down her knitting.

"Not asleep, thank you, Mother;" and Ronald opened his eyes and smiled.

“Why do you shut up your eyes if you ain’t sleepy?” asked Barney, rather sharply.

“Because it rests them. When one’s ill one’s eyes ache.”

“I’m ill, but my eyes don’t ache. Is it ’cause they shot you, that your eyes are bad?”

“I suppose it is; but I dare say they won’t ache long. You know I’m getting well.”

“Sooner talked of than done,—that,” muttered Mother Brewer from her corner; and Barney turned round and looked at her, but did not trouble himself to ask what she said.

“I don’t want you to get well, Ronald. I like you best to be ill; only you can’t play so easy.”

“I don’t know that it’s very kind of you, Barney, to wish that I should always be ill; but I suppose you mean it so.”

“You’ll be going off if you get well,” said Barney; “and father said one day that if you didn’t you’d go to Heaven with me, and that’s what I should like.”

“But, Barney, you know we may travel the same way, and meet at the end, though we don’t go quite together. I’ve got a good deal to do before I get to Heaven.”

“I dare say you’d be let off, if you asked,” said Barney; “and you’d like best to go.”

Ronald was silent.

“You would like it, sure,” continued the child; “every body likes to go to Heaven, ’cause it’s so beautiful. I want to see the golden streets: Mother Brewer thinks that they shine as bright as Miss

Rachel's picture-frame yonder, when the sun's on it. Shouldn't you like to see them?"

Ronald still delaying his answer, the question was repeated again rather querulously. "Yes, by-and-by; very much indeed," was the reply. But Ronald spoke as if his thoughts were scarcely in his words.

"It's wicked of you if you don't wish it," continued Barney. "Parson Lester says, nobody ever speaks cross there, or says bad words."

"No indeed, they don't," said Ronald, sadly.

"And there are beautiful angels all dressed in white, and singing wonderful," continued Barney; "and a river so clear, you can see quite through, and fine trees, and fruits.—Don't you want to go?"

"If God is pleased to take me, I hope I shall be quite glad to go," replied Ronald. "But, Barney, I don't think God does wish me to go yet; and so I would rather stay and do His work here."

"Work! what work? Captain John don't work."

"But I must."

"Fishing?" asked Barney.

A smile came over Ronald's face; but Barney looked at him quite steadily and earnestly.

"Not that kind of work, but trying to make myself good; and others too," he added, in a lower voice.

"That's not work," said Barney; "that's praying."

"But praying is a kind of work, because sometimes it is a trouble to say one's prayers."

"I don't like it, sometimes; but that's 'cause I'm not good. When I get to Heaven I shan't say my prayers to Mother Brewer; and then I shall attend."

"Ah! but, Barney, we must learn to attend before

we get to Heaven; and we must do a great many other things besides, which are hard to us, and we must try to set a good example."

"What's 'sample?" asked Barney.

"Behaving well before others," replied Ronald, "and so showing them how to do the same."

"Well, then, if you and I go to Heaven, we can set a good 'sample there."

"But people don't want to have any examples set them in Heaven, because they live with God and Jesus Christ, and so they have the best example before them, and never do wrong."

Barney was thoughtful. Presently he said: "Father don't set me a good 'sample; he says bad words, and speaks out. And Captain John don't set you one, does he?"

"He speaks out sometimes," replied Ronald evasively.

"Then do you mean to set him a good 'sample instead?"

"If I can."

"And that's why you want to stay," said Barney, still looking as if he were pondering deeply. In another moment he turned his head aside and sobbed as if his little heart would break.

"Barney! my poor child!"—Ronald was going to move from his chair, but was stopped by the old woman, who put down her knitting and went up to the couch.

"What's the matter now? what's a crying for? Come, stop; be a good boy, leave off," said Mother Brewer, alternating between anger and coaxing.

“I want to be put next Ronald, in my chair,” sobbed Barney.

“You shall be put next me if you leave off crying; but I can’t let you come till you do,” said Ronald.

The child exercised singular self-command. His tears were swallowed almost instantaneously; but his neck still heaved convulsively.

The old woman placed him in a high chair, propped him up with pillows, and carried him to the opposite side of the hearth.

He put his hand in Ronald’s, but did not speak till Mother Brewer had retired again to her corner; then he hid his face on Ronald’s shoulder and whispered in a voice interrupted by sobs: “I don’t want to stay and set father a ’sample. Must I?”

Ronald passed his arm lovingly, for support, round the poor, little skeleton-frame, and answered: “I don’t think God wants you to stay, Barney; He only wants you to be good whilst you are here.”

“I’ll be very good,—I won’t cry once, and I won’t look about when I say my prayers, and I’ll say all my hymns through; only I don’t want it to be long; it pains me so;” and again he began to cry, but more gently, from weakness and over excitement.

Ronald let him rest quietly, and hoped he might go to sleep; and he did close his eyes for a few moments, but opened them again to say, in a dreamy voice, “You’ll come too, Ronald?”

And Ronald answered cheerfully, “Yes, soon; by-and-by;” and that seemed to satisfy him. At length he fell asleep, and Ronald, motioning to the old

woman, he was taken back to his couch, and laid upon it.

Mr. Lester came whilst Barney was still asleep. He saw Ronald regularly; and his visits were comforting, yet not to himself quite satisfactory. Ronald was very reserved, and seemed unwilling to say what was on his mind; and though Mr. Lester knew what had passed between him and Mr. Vivian, and that he was fully acquainted with his father's conduct, he dared not bring forward a subject so full of pain. Yet there were many allusions to it. Ronald's chief interest was for Mr. Vivian, and the probability of his being admitted to an interview with the General, and obtaining his pardon. Almost the first question he asked when he saw Mr. Lester the day after the smuggling skirmish, had reference to this point; and he was now frequently referring to it. It was indeed an engrossing subject of thought; for on the failure of the meeting depended the necessity, so intensely painful, of coming forward with his father's written confession. Mr. Lester once proposed that Mr. Vivian should come and see him, but Ronald seemed to dislike the idea. He had not even as yet begged to see Miss Campbell, though he always sent a message to her. A spirit of torpor seemed, for the most part, to have succeeded his natural daring excitement of temperament; and he was willing to sit for hours brooding over the fire, now and then apparently asleep, but in reality alive to every thing which might take place around him."

He was more like himself this day, for Barney had done him good by making him anxious, and when

the old woman had left him alone with Mr. Lester, there was a topic to enter upon at once, without the preliminary questions as to his own health, which were always irksome to him.

“He is looking worse to day,” was his remark, made in a low voice, as he pointed to the child.

Mr. Lester went up to the couch, and stood for a few moments, watching Barney’s irregular breathing, and the burning spot on his little thin cheek.

“Yes, he does look a good deal worse,” he said, coming back to Ronald’s chair, and drawing his own near the fire. “Has the doctor seen him?”

“He is coming by-and-by; but no doctor will help him now;” and Ronald brushed his hand across his eyes.

“One can’t wish it; it would be no good to him to keep him.”

“And it won’t matter to me,” said Ronald. “Any how I shouldn’t be here to see him; and I would rather think of him as safe.”

“And look forward to joining him,” replied Mr. Lester. “That may be before very long for any of us; though it may seem long to you, Ronald, with life before you.”

“I musn’t think of that yet,” replied Ronald. Changing the subject, he said quickly: “Is Mr. Vivian still at the Farm?”

“Yes.” Mr. Lester seemed doubtful what further to add.

“And the General is not better, then?”

“Yes, he is better, in a way; though he looks ill.”

“Then you have seen him, Sir?” and Ronald waited for an answer, with evident anxiety.

“For a little while, just before I came here. He is a singular man, Ronald. The wall of prejudice and warped principle is too strong for us.”

Ronald leaned forward eagerly. “It musn’t be. Oh, Mr. Lester,” and his voice sank, “if he has dealt hardly unintentionally, surely, surely he will make amends.”

Mr. Lester’s reply was delayed for a few seconds. Presently he said, not looking at Ronald, “He knows all, but I can’t say what impression it has made upon him; he demands proof.”

Ronald’s face, before very pale, became quite colourless. “Then he would have vengeance,” he said.

“He would call it justice, not vengeance.”

“And it would be justice,” murmured Ronald.

“But he cannot have it; there can be no legal proof; your father is safe. My poor boy!” and Mr. Lester laid his hand upon Ronald’s, “you musn’t think of that.”

“I do; I think of it always, and I try to feel the comfort.”

“You will do so by-and-by. You are weak now; you can scarcely realise it.”

“But I do realise it. I know that some might say I should be content. They would feel the outward, not the inward, wound.”

“Even that God can comfort, Ronald, and He will as years go on.”

“He is very merciful; I pray to Him to help me; but to begin life with disgrace!” And he shuddered. The next moment he turned from the thought, and asked, “Has the General seen Mr. Vivian?”

“Not yet. There is an immense amount of hidden excitement preying upon him, and I dread the consequences. It is the strong-indulged will, and the warped spirit of manhood, working upon the enfeebled body of age, and becoming its torture. No one has, and no one, I believe, ever will, influence him.”

A long silence followed. Mr. Lester again went to Barney’s couch, and looked at him attentively. When he came back, Ronald was seated more upright, his face and attitude expressive of some strong self-control.

He returned to the subject without any preface, and said: “Then there is no hope?”

“I don’t allow myself to think so; it is too hard and unnatural. I must, to-morrow, speak to him myself, alone—as only a minister of God can speak. He has no right to demand proof against his son’s word.”

“He shall have proof, to-morrow,” repeated Ronald quietly.

Mr. Lester looked at him, doubting whether his ears had rightly caught the words.

“He shall have it, to-morrow,” repeated Ronald, “If Mr. Vivian will meet me at the Hall, we will see the General together.”

Mr. Lester felt uneasy. Ronald’s voice was so changed and hollow, and his eye had a fixed glare. “You could not go with him, my dear boy, even if

you wished it," he said, gently ; "remember how weak you are."

"Mark Wood will help me. To-morrow, at three."

"My dear Ronald, this will not do ; you are dreaming of what it is impossible you should perform. And your notions are wrong. You can't think that you are bound to come forward in this sad business. It is a feverish fancy."

Ronald touched his pulse. "Feel it, Sir, I am quite calm. Say to Mr. Vivian that I rely upon the promise solemnly made, when I had aided in saving his child's life. Now, will you read to me? It will do me good."

Mr. Lester paused, but there was that in Ronald's countenance which made him shrink from pursuing the subject, or attempting to gainsay his will, at least without consultation with Mr. Vivian. He read to him and prayed, and Ronald thanked him gratefully and affectionately, but he made no more reference to his determination, except by repeating when they parted, "To-morrow, at three."

The remainder of that afternoon Ronald spent in sitting by Barney's couch, holding the child's hand, smoothing his pillow, repeating verses of hymns,—trying, in every way that he could think of, to soothe his pain. And from time to time the little fellow dozed for a few moments, and then woke again to ask that Ronald would please to say the prayer for God to make him patient, for he was very tired of the ache. The other children returned from school, and were taken into the back room by Mother Brewer, and kept quiet with playthings ; and about six o'clock

Mark Wood, who, finding that he was likely to escape detection, had ventured back to his cottage, came in and had tea with them ; but Barney was in a great deal of pain just then, and Ronald had no heart to join them, though he was very weary.

The old woman put the little ones to bed early ; and Mark said he would go into Cleve to get something from the doctor to make his boy sleep ; but Mother Brewer muttered that there was no need for that ; he'd sleep sound enough before many hours were over ; and Mark gave up his intention, and sat down moodily by the fire.

So they went on till about eight o'clock ; about that time the pain ceased entirely, but Barney was almost too exhausted to speak. He asked Ronald once to move, that father might kiss him, and bade Mother Brewer say " Good night " to little brothers and sisters, and tell them to be good ; and after that he went to sleep, and they thought he would wake refreshed, as he had often done before after similar attacks. He was quiet for more than two hours ; then he roused himself, and Mark gave him a little water. The child looked at him intently for an instant, and said, " Thank you, Father. Please say prayers." And Mark knelt by the side of the little bed, and buried his face in the coverlet.

Barney felt feebly for Ronald's hand : " You'll set the 'sample, Ronald, and then you'll come." And the light grasp relaxed, and Barney fell asleep, to wake to the sight of the golden streets, and the river of pure water, and the fruits of the trees of everlasting life.

CHAP. LIV.

BRIGHT were the gleams of the December sun, although it had already passed its low meridian height, as Edward Vivian and Mr. Lester walked slowly through the Cleve Woods on their way to the Hall. They spoke of many things; the past perhaps more than the present or the future. It was a natural feeling, which would fain linger over the recollections connected with those scenes of happier days now, before the sentence might again be spoken which was to be the decree of separation from them for ever.

Mr. Vivian was greatly depressed, yet a tone of only partially subdued indignation occasionally escaped him. He felt bitterly the doubt which had been cast upon his word, and would with difficulty listen to Mr. Lester's explanation. It was useless, he said, to tell him that he was not doubted. If it were so, why was he not received, and the wrong acknowledged? There could be no alternative in such a case. Even duty to his father seemed scarcely to call upon him to enter into more detailed explanations.

"Years ago it might have been so," was Mr. Lester's reply. "But you are fighting against a feeling first fostered as a duty, and encouraged the more since

it has been against natural inclination. General Vivian fears himself. He has rested upon his sense of justice, and made an idol of it; and now, conscious of his own weakness—such, at least, he would call it,—he dreads being betrayed into an offence against it. He thinks himself bound to treat you as he would a stranger. There is prejudice in this, the rankling of former grievances, but he does not see it. His is the spirit of the old Roman who would sit in judgment upon his children, and condemn them.”

“I don’t understand it,” exclaimed Mr. Vivian, hastily. “We are Christians, not heathens.”

“Even so. But General Vivian’s principles are—I say the word in all reverence, and, of course, with great limitation—heathen. I mean that he has formed his own standard of right, without looking at that given in the Bible. If justice were the one virtue alone to be upheld, where should we all be?”

Mr. Vivian stopped suddenly. “It goads me,” he said; “it makes me feel that I would give up every thing and go. If it were not for my children I think I could.”

“My dear Vivian, that would be an action which you would repent for ever. You have no right to act upon pride. Remember—forgive me for saying it—that your own conduct was the first cause of offence. If it has since been exaggerated and misconstrued, yet the original evil lies at your own door.”

“You are right, Lester. I must bear all. And if

I could see him—Oh! were he ever so stern—ever so cruel—all angry feelings would go. I could throw myself at his feet and ask for pardon, as in my childish days. But he will not see me; there is no hope of it.”

Mr. Lester, without answering, opened the little gate which led into Mildred's flower-garden. From thence a private door admitted them into the morning room. It was empty. Mildred was with the General; but her work-basket and books were lying about; she had been there only lately.

“Eighteen years!” murmured Mr. Vivian. “It seems but yesterday.” He went to the lower end of the room, and drew aside the curtain from the picture hanging there; looked at it for several minutes, then covered it again, and sat down without making any comment.

“If Ronald should come, as he said, he must wait here,” observed Mr. Lester.

“Yes.” But Mr. Vivian would take no comfort from the thought of Ronald's promise. “My father wants proof; and words are no proofs to him,” he said indignantly. “And the boy will not speak to his father's prejudice. Who could ask it of him? I would not accept restoration on such terms.”

“He was bent upon being here,” observed Mr. Lester.

“He was feverish and excited yesterday, no doubt. If he had anything that would really help us, he would have come forward before.”

“He was not in a state to do so,” remarked Mr. Lester.

“I can’t hope, Lester. I would rather fear the worst.”

And Mr. Lester was silent, and rang the bell.

“Will the General see me, Greaves?”

Greaves, now fully aware of the interests at stake in the family, looked important, and was doubtful. The General had slept badly, and was, he thought, inclined to doze; but he would see.

Ella and Rachel appeared at the window, and drew back, startled at seeing gentlemen; but they soon came forward again, laughing. Rachel’s bright eyes were raised lovingly to her father, as she exclaimed, “We didn’t know you were here, Papa. Ella had been at the farm, and was coming back, and I said I would walk with her. Mrs. Robinson was coming too, and said she would go back with me. There wasn’t any harm, was there?”

“None at all, my child; but you mustn’t disturb us now.”

“Let them come in,” said Mr. Vivian. He seemed glad of any thing which would distract his thoughts; and Ella and Rachel were admitted.

“We saw Mark Wood, Papa, as we were coming,” said Rachel; “he looked so very sad; he was driving Hardman’s little cart, and said he was going to take Ronald out. I didn’t like to ask if Barney was worse.”

“He died last night, Rachel. I was going to tell you.”

Rachel walked away to the window. Her father followed her. “We mustn’t grieve for him, Rachel.”

“No, Papa, only—I will try not;” and she struggled

against her tears, and smiled, and then gave way again, and cried bitterly. "I don't want him back, but I loved him so."

Ella looked very grave and sorrowful, yet she could not quite feel with Rachel. She began telling her father about Barney, and Mr. Vivian was interested, and made her repeat to him what Ronald had done for the child; and when Greaves returned and said that the General was ready, and would see Mr. Lester, if he would walk upstairs, though he turned pale for the instant, yet he went on talking to Ella, whilst Rachel sat down on a stool in the recess of the window, gazing at the pale sunlight which still flickered upon the lawn.

Mr. Lester passed through the dressing-room, and found Mildred there. The door into the bed-room was open, so that he could only press her hand kindly, and ask a few ordinary questions. The General's hearing was wonderfully quick for his age, and he dared not stay to talk with her.

"You will find him very weak," she said, in an under-tone, when he asked what she thought of her father; "but he has referred to nothing; only he has been trying to write this morning, sitting up in bed. Now he is dressed, and in his arm-chair."

The General looked at least eighty, but that might have been his position, supported by pillows, and with only a partial light falling upon him through the half-closed curtains. He spoke with tolerable firmness, and thanked Mr. Lester for coming, and accepted his offer of reading to him.

"Mildred is not strong enough to read much to

me," he said; "and Ella has been out, they say, this morning. I should like to hear the Morning Lessons for the day." He spoke decidedly, as if he did not choose any other subject to be discussed.

Mr. Lester turned over the pages of his Bible slowly, and remarked that in another week it would be Christmas Day.

"Yes; I forgot it was so near, till Mildred reminded me. She will receive your lists of the poor, as usual."

"You are very kind, Sir. The poor people are extremely grateful."

"It is no kindness, Mr. Lester; it is their right. I am their steward."

"I wish all persons with property would think the same, Sir; but it is in many cases a difficult lesson to teach."

"I learnt it in my childhood, from warning. When I came into possession of my property, I vowed that the poor should never be defrauded."

"It is a happy thought for old age, General, that the vow has been kept; and yet——"

"Well, Sir, have you any fault to find with it?" and the General turned his keen eyes upon Mr. Lester.

"I was thinking of the completeness of God's demands upon us," replied Mr. Lester; "that one good deed will not stand in the stead of another."

The General was silent, but there was an uncomfortable, nervous twitching about his mouth.

Mr. Lester again turned to the Bible, and opened it, not at the lesson for the day, but at the Epistle of St. James: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law,

and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” “That has always struck me as one of the most fearful texts in the Bible,” he said. “It strikes at the root of such a common error. May I say to you, dear Sir, that it has been upon my mind very much since our parting yesterday?”

It was an immense effort to him, and he watched the General’s countenance with an anxiety which made his voice tremble.

“You mean rightly, Mr. Lester; go on.”

“You are most kind, most thoughtful, and considerate for your poor neighbours, Sir. It seems strange to beg that you will be equally so toward your son.”

“My conscience is clear upon that point,” replied the General, “and my judgment, Mr. Lester, lies with God. If I have wronged my son, I will repair the wrong.”

“And see him, Sir; hear his confession; restore him to your love; that is what he asks?”

The General tried to take up a paper which lay upon the table, but his hand trembled too much. “I have tried to write it,” he murmured to himself.

Mr. Lester interrupted him. “But will you not tell me, dear Sir? Speaking is better than writing; there is more truth in it.”

“No, Sir, no; I can’t. Mr. Lester, you mustn’t urge it. I am old—God knows I have been tried—you must leave me.”

“I would speak to you, Sir, because you are old. Life may be very short. I would not have you go, unforgiving, to your grave.”

“I do forgive—all. I did him wrong, perchance. He mayn’t have done what I thought. He says it;

Miss Campbell says it. Let it be tried and proved ; but let me rest, let me rest, for my days are few."

"There will be rest in mercy," replied Mr. Lester, solemnly ; "for so only can we hope for mercy. General Vivian, at whatever risk, I must speak to you as God's minister. Whilst you thought your son had dishonoured your name, there was doubtless an excuse for the severity with which he was treated. Whether it was right to cast off his children also, need not now be discussed. But you have at length the proof that you suspected him wrongly. Not the proof which would stand, it may be, in a court of justice, but the word of an honourable man, and the corresponding testimony of a lady, who, whatever may be your prejudice against her family, lays claim to universal respect. If you still persist in your suspicions, if 'judgment without mercy' is still to be your motto, think what will be your condition when you are summoned to that awful account, at which our only hope must be in the 'mercy that rejoiceth against judgment.'"

The General's countenance underwent many changes during this speech, — surprise, anger, — then a more chastened, solemnised feeling ; but it would have seemed that the indomitable will remained unshaken. "Mr. Lester, I asked you to read to me," he said, his voice sounding hollow and tremulous.

And Mr. Lester read, and when he had finished reading, he knelt in prayer ; and the General's voice was heard in the confession, that he was a miserable sinner, that he had erred and strayed from God's ways like a lost sheep. At the close Mr. Lester

paused, remained for a few moments in silent petition, and rose.

The General turned to him hastily: "Your prayers are short, Sir," he said.

"I leave it to yourself, General, to pray; 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.'"

The old man turned away his head, and wept.

A knock was heard at the door; it was Mildred. She came in, and stood by the General's chair.

He gave her his hand without looking up: "Mildred, child, your father is very weak."

"You have been tried, dear Sir, very much. It is no wonder."

"Mr. Lester would have me see him, Mildred. I would do it, if it were right,—if it were good; but it mustn't be,—there is no proof. My people would be sacrificed; and the Campbells,—they are not to be depended on. Years ago they defrauded and ruined us. He married a Campbell, and they uphold him. The boy, too,—it would all be ruin." He spoke with difficulty; his eyes were dulled, and his voice was weak. Old feelings of dislike and prejudice were working together, with more newly-excited mistrust, to cloud a mind already, in a degree, enfeebled by illness.

"Don't think of the future, my dearest Father; let it be as you will. See him, that is all we ask,—all he would ask either."

"But Mildred, if I see him,—help me,—I said I wouldn't,—I must keep my vow. I mustn't yield."

"You said it when you thought him guilty of a

grievous offence, dearest Father; he comes now to prove his innocence."

"Proof! proof!" The General repeated the words to himself again and again. Then he said suddenly, "Is he changed?"

"Not as much as I expected; he looks older, of course. But he is changed in mind wonderfully."

The General shook his head, and motioned her from him: "You tempt me,—go." His complexion became of a livid paleness.

Mr. Lester gave him some water, and he recovered a little, and murmured "To-morrow."

Poor Mildred looked at Mr. Lester in despair: "And Ronald Vivian is here," she said, "on business."

The General caught at the word as a relief: "Business! let me hear it? I am well enough now."

"Impossible!" whispered Mildred to Mr. Lester.

To her surprise Mr. Lester answered quietly also, "I will go to him; perhaps it may be as well."

He left the room. The General leaned back in his chair, perfectly still. Mildred sat down by him. The minutes were very long. She dared not speak to him again. Steps were heard along the corridor,—in the dressing-room. The General moved, and pushed away the footstool, and placed his writing-case before him.

"May we come in?" Mr. Lester entered, Ronald with him: another shadow darkened the doorway.

The General bent his head stiffly, with all his former precision of manner. Ronald scarcely returned

the greeting. His eye took a rapid survey of the room, and rested on Mildred. She moved to go.

“If it is private business, Mildred, you can leave us,” said the General. “Young gentleman, you look ill; you had better sit down.”

“Miss Vivian, pray stay.” Ronald drew near the table, and rested one hand upon it; his countenance, naturally pale from illness, was ghastly in its expression, but his eye was calm and cold. “I have intruded upon you, General Vivian,” he began, —

“No intrusion, young gentleman. I have had a slight illness, but I am recovering. Can I, in any way, help you?”

“I have no claim upon you, Sir. I am the son of — Captain Vivian.”

Mildred’s eye glanced uneasily at her father; the nervous motion of his mouth was visible again.

“Captain Vivian may have done my family injury; yet I would not visit the injury upon his son. What do you ask of me?”

Ronald paused.

“I beg you to explain yourself quickly,” repeated the General, rather sternly. “What do you need?”

Ronald approached nearer. His figure was erect, whilst pride was giving its impress to his countenance.

“Speak, Sir,” exclaimed the General.

And the tall form bent as though crushed by a mighty load, and the agony of humiliation convulsed every feature, as, laying a paper upon the table, Ronald said, “You require proof of your son’s innocence, General Vivian; you have it.”

Mr. Lester pushed a chair towards him, but he still stood.

“Read it, Mildred,” said the General; and Mildred read tremblingly:—

“I forged the bill. They can take all I have to repay themselves.

“JOHN VIVIAN.”

The General caught the paper from her hand, and there was a long, death-like silence. He looked at the words fearfully,—doubtfully.

The shadow passed from the doorway, and Edward Vivian knelt by his side. “Father, forgive,—forgive me!”

The General sat as one paralysed; but his hand rested, with a tremulous touch, on his son’s head.

“Pardon me, Father! Speak to me!”

The white lips moved, and the glassy eyes became dim; and, leaning forward, the old man threw his arm round his son’s neck and kissed him.

He looked up again, and his eye wandered for an instant round the room, as if in search of Ronald; but even in that moment he had left the apartment, unnoticed by all save Mr. Lester; and the General, worn and exhausted, could only say, “I was so wrong, Edward, so wrong. God forgive me! I was so wrong.”

The bells rang merrily from the tower of Encombe church, on Christmas morning; cheerful were the greetings, hearty the good wishes, which met at the

entrance of the old Norman porch ; and fervently went up thanksgivings to Heaven, whilst the notes of the Angels' hymn rose, and echoed, and died away amidst the arches. Eighteen years before, Mr. Vivian had knelt in that church, proud in his self-reliance, a young man ; with the hopes, the fears, the follies, the offences of youth upon him. He knelt there now, humbled, chastened, penitent, yet unutterably thankful, with one prayer, earnest above all others, that his children might never learn the same lesson at the same price of sin and suffering.

That day was the first of Christmas-days spent as in the olden time at Cleve Hall, since sorrow and death had laid their chill grasp upon it, and rendered it desolate.

The General, infirm and shaken though he was, sat at the head of his table, and told of his plans for the poor, and discussed alterations in his farm, and seemed to forget that the lapse of years could be a difficulty in the way of his son's understanding any thing which he wished him to undertake ; and Mildred, smiling as she had never smiled before since her sister's death, talked with Ella of what must be done to make the old home happy in its new character, and devised schemes by which they might do all she needed in the village ; and read with her, and have lessons, and be constantly with her ; helping her, as she said, to grow old without feeling it.

Mr. Vivian's feelings were mixed. Moments there were when he paused in the midst of his children's merriment, to think anxiously of Clement's future course, and watch the impression which he made

upon his grandfather ; or to recur to the memories of the past, and dwell upon the joys which could never come again. But the sadness was transient, the brightness lasting ; and when the recollections of those bygone days most oppressed him, he could think upon the mercy vouchsafed to the repentant on earth, as the type of the free and perfect pardon of Heaven.

It was a glad day of hope, a second spring in winter, the beginning of the sunshine which was to gild the old General's pathway, for the few remaining years of his earthly existence.

Mrs. Robinson, when she came in the evening to drink Master Edward's health, in the dining room, was heard to say, as she went back to the servants' hall, that it did one's heart good to see the General, taking, as it were, a new lease of life ; and Greaves, as partial to the old master as Mrs. Robinson was to the young one, insisted that it was trouble which had furrowed the General's cheek, and made him feeble before his time ; and now that trouble was gone, who was to say that the best landlord, and the kindest master in England, was not to outlive the halest and heartiest among them.

And there was gladness at the Rectory, quieter, yet perhaps, with Mr. Lester and Rachel, even fuller. Mrs. Campbell and Bertha were with them, and although missing the children's mirth, it was impossible to feel otherwise than grateful and happy at the load of anxiety and responsibility which had been removed. The object desired for years had been attained, and if, as is the case in the attainment of all human wishes, success was accompanied by alloy

it seemed unthankful to allow the mind to rest upon it. Bertha's energy already made her turn to the thought of being useful to Rachel, and finding employment amongst the poor, more congenial than that training of the mind which she had yet to practise successfully for herself; and but for one thought, she could have called it the happiest Christmas Day that had been granted her for many a year.

There was an evening service; the church was full. Bertha sat near the east end with Rachel, and was amongst the last to depart. Mr. Lester was detained in the vestry, and they waited for him, until all the lights were extinguished, except those in the chancel.

They walked to the lower end of the church, and looked back. "Passing from darkness to light, like it will be from earth to Heaven," whispered Rachel.

A sigh answered her, but it did not come from Bertha. Some one passed her quickly, from the side aisle, and went out into the porch.

A minute afterwards Mr. Lester joined them, and they left the church. The moon was shining on the tombstones, and a long line of pale light was traced upon the distant sea.

"Papa," said Rachel, "should you mind? I should like to see where Barney is buried." Mr. Lester took her hand, and they went on together. Bertha lingered behind.

"Miss Campbell!" She started; though the voice was well known, it was very changed.

"Ronald! here! That ought not to be; it is very imprudent."

He tried to laugh. "Mrs. Robinson allowed me. I am at the Farm now, and well."

"Yes, I heard that. Mr. Lester told me; I had hoped to see you, to thank you."

He would not hear her gratitude. "I go to-morrow," he said: "you will still think of and pray for me."

"Go? Where? So soon? Surely General Vivian, Mr. Lester ——"

He interrupted her: "They have done all, and more than all, I could have dared to expect. They would do far more than I could allow."

"That may be pride, Ronald."

"Pride! Miss Campbell!" he repeated the word bitterly; "pride for me! yet it may be so. If it is, I pray God to make me humble. But I do not feel that it is. They would provide for me. I would accept their help but only to provide for myself. My father's property is heavily mortgaged. When the debt to General Vivian is paid, if any thing should remain of the little that I might once have expected to inherit, it must of course be appropriated for my father's comfort. I go to make my own way in the world."

"Alone?"

"Where my father is, there is my duty, and there will be my home."

"Oh, Ronald, what a sacrifice!"

"You would not wish it to be otherwise; you, who first taught me the claims of duty."

"No, I cannot, and yet the example may be terrible."

"I do not fear it," he said, meekly: "God who

saved me from it, before I sought Him, will strengthen me to withstand it when I have learnt to seek Him."

Bertha gave him her hand,—but her voice failed her.

"From darkness to light, from earth to Heaven," said Ronald, thoughtfully. "I shall not forget it." He looked towards the little new-made grave, beside which Rachel and Mr. Lester were standing.

They drew near it. Rachel was the first to see Ronald. She ran up to him directly. "I didn't know it was you, Ronald; but you don't mind our coming, do you? I asked papa if I might."

She felt instinctively that the little grave was his charge.

"Who could mind Rachel? No one has more claim to be here than you who made him happy."

"He doesn't suffer now," said Rachel. "I think of that."

"I try to think of it too," said Ronald. "I shall more by-and-by. When I am gone, Rachel, perhaps Mr. Lester will let you plant some flowers here. I should like that."

"Yes, of course; indeed I will," but Rachel was perplexed; she could not understand what he meant by going, and was too shy to ask. She turned to her father, who had been talking with Bertha.

"You must go home, my child," said Mr. Lester, "it is too cold for you,—and for Miss Campbell,—and, Ronald, for you too," and he kindly touched Ronald's shoulder.

“Good night, Ronald. Did you understand? I promise, if papa doesn’t mind,” said Rachel.

“Good-b’ye, Rachel.” He kept her hand for a moment, then let it fall suddenly; “your word needs no promise.”

He watched her, so did Mr. Lester, as she walked with Bertha through the churchyard, till the gate closed behind them.

Then Mr. Lester said: “You go to-morrow, Ronald.”

“To-morrow, Sir. The vessel is even now ready, and my father waits for me. When my way for the future is clear, I will write.”

“May God guard you, Ronald, hitherto, as He has guarded you before. You have no wishes that I can fulfil?”

“I had one, Sir, but it has been told to Rachel. I have no other, but—that my name may be forgotten.”

Mr. Lester’s voice faltered: “That should not be the wish at your age. Life is before you to redeem it.”

“In another country, in another home; but never here,” replied Ronald.

Mr. Lester was silent.

“I am not desponding,” continued Ronald; “the load is taken from me; I can breathe freely. Mr. Lester, I would not have you think of me as weak.”

“Weak! oh no, Ronald,—most strong. I only pray you may feel that there is hope always on earth.”

“I have a work to do,” replied Ronald, “therefore I must have hope.”

“And it will be accomplished,” replied Mr. Lester. “The prayers and the labours of such a son will surely be answered. God bless you!” He wrung Ronald’s hand and left him. And Ronald, kneeling by Barney’s grave, prayed fervently; and rose strengthened and comforted, whilst still the little voice seemed sounding in his ear, “You’ll set the ’sample, Ronald, and then you’ll come.”

Cleve Hall yet stands, gray and stern as him who was once its master; the sea washes the sandy beach round the dark Headland; the Encombe Hills frown over the deep ravine. And, whilst changes of joy and sorrow, of life and death, have passed over the human hearts which sought their resting place amidst those scenes of beauty, the name of Vivian lives associated with them, as in bygone years; the heirloom descending from generation to generation.

Its echo has been heard even in distant lands. There is a tale told of one — an exile, lonely, unaided, exposed to many and dread temptations — who entered upon life with the inheritance of a stained name and a ruined fortune, and looked back upon it with a conscience which angels might approve, and a reputation which princes might have envied. It is said that he laboured,—and successfully,—for one object; the restoration of a father who had sunk, it might have seemed, beyond hope; and that, in the progress of that work, — spent for the most part in the drudgery of a merchant’s office — he

gathered round him, by the force of an intense earnestness, young and old, the cultivated and the ignorant, — warning, guiding, aiding them on their path to heaven.

They tell of him, that he dwelt apart, mingling little with the gaieties of life; a man of quiet exterior, gentle and reserved, and with the deep traces of early suffering stamped upon his brow. The happiness of a loving home was never his, the voices of childhood never gladdened his hearth, — it may be that he dreaded to transmit the stain which he himself had felt so deeply. But the widow and the orphan were his family; the desolate, the poor, the tempted were his friends: and when the honoured Vivians of Cleve Hall recount the histories of their race, the name of the exiled Ronald stands first in the list of those who have been prized on earth because they sought their inheritance in Heaven.

THE END.

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