





Lovell's International Series

In the Heart of the Storm

BY

MAXWELL GRAY

AUTHOR OF "THE SILENCE OF DEAN MAITLAND."

Authorized Edition

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IN THE HEART OF THE STORM

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A TALE OF MODERN CHIVALRY

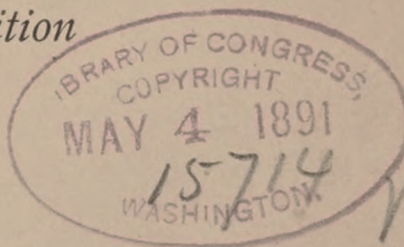
BY
MAXWELL GRAY
AUTHOR OF
"THE SILENCE OF DEAN MAITLAND," ETC.

M. B. Maitland
" "

"For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood, but this with burning and fuel of fire."

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Authorized Edition



NEW YORK
UNITED STATES BOOK COMPANY
SUCCESSORS TO
JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY
150 WORTH ST., COR. MISSION PLACE

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TO

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

AND

James Hinton.

“ Their ears are deaf to human praise,
Their lips to mortals mute;
But still their words deep echoes raise,
Their thoughts have endless fruit.”

“ Those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day.”

IN THE HEART OF THE STORM.

PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

STILLBROOKE MILL.

Stillbrooke Mill never looks pleasanter than on a hot summer afternoon, when the paved streets of Cleeve reflect a blinding sun-glare, and the brick house-fronts give out the heat they have been slowly accumulating all the long sunny day. Its position at the end of the town gives it a singular charm ; it is like an unexpected gleam of romance in a prosaic, toil-worn life. Turning from the principal street, loud with rattling wheels, the cries of street-hawkers and yelling boys, you pass to stillness beneath the shade of a linden-girdled garden wall, which partially surrounds a fine Tudor building of gray stone, with tiled gabled roofs and diamond paned casements. This is the old grammar-school, which rises above the flimsy, fleeting ugliness of the modern street, a silent and beautiful witness of a past and prophecy of a future. Thence the road falls steeply to a piece of emerald-green still water, beyond which the translucent golden greens of a grove climbing the opposite hill are even fresher and more liquid than the tints of the polished mill-stream, while the glowing of sun-steeped turf through the tree-trunks, and the soft massing of bright foliage against the pure blue sky, form a most restful contrast to the arid streets whence they can be seen.

A little way back from the road, on the town side of the bridged expanse into which the stream widens at the bottom of the hill, there stood, many years ago, a stone-built mill and house ; an undershot wheel turned drowsily to a drowsy music in the stillness, the brown roof-tiles were mellowed, the gray walls whitened, the trees in the garden and those by

the roadside slightly powdered by a drifting mist of floating meal.

There was about Stillbrooke Mill a genial publicity which opened one's heart to it. The fact of the high road having been carried straight through its ground and over its broadened stream, in some measure accounted for its openness and absence of walls, but only in part, for there was no reason why, though the stream was open for the convenience of the town water-carts and all the cows in the neighborhood, the wide space in front of the mill, where the fowls walked at their ease and the pigeons fluttered down from the dove-cot above to dispute the grain with them, and the mealy wagons stood for loading and unloading, should have opened unwall'd upon the highroad as it did. All must yield to the inexorable logic of facts, but Stillbrooke Mill yielded gracefully, and opposed no further barrier between itself and the public road than a large broad-leaved plane-tree, beneath which was a bench, where many weighty subjects had been discussed by the present miller, Matthew Meade, and his forerunners. A carved stone let into the wall above the second story bore in antique figures the date 1650, which made it nearly two centuries old on this summer afternoon. It was very hot. The sturdy horses attached to the wagon which was being laden with sacks of flour, winked their eyes, drooped their heads, and slept peacefully; the men attaching the sacks to the crane above had discarded their waistcoats and were thinking of the amber charms of a glass of ale; Matthew Meade pushed his cap far back upon his grizzled head and stood in the most draughty spot he could find, with his sleeves rolled up and his shirt open on his chest, while directing the work; one of the sleek mill cats slept in a tight coil on the low stone parapet between the yard and the water; the house-dog had left his kennel and stretched himself with hanging tongue and exhausted mien on the coolest accessible stone; the mill-wheel seemed half-asleep as it turned to its lulling music; the sunshine slept on the garden and house, it steeped the flowers and grass in a trance-like stillness, and dissolved itself in golden languors among the broad leaves of the spreading plane-tree; the depths of the pale blue sky seemed clouded with excess of sleeping light; the delicate drooping boughs of the mighty willow which grew on the further bank of the stream in the meadow, scarcely stirred their pale feathery leaves in the charmed stillness.

At the foot of the great willow, where the sunshine poured full upon him and clothed the grass about him with glory,

a sturdy boy of nine lay and basked, his great dark-gray eyes gazing into the infinite blue sky-depths above him, holding a ripe crimson apple into which his sharp pearls of teeth bit lazily. His brown face bore traces of recent fighting, and the brown hand he stretched out to reach another quarrender from the heap on the grass, looked as if it had been used in battle.

Near at hand a little girl of three, in a white frock and sun-bonnet, was playing with flowers and cooing happily to herself, her golden curls shining in the sunlight, as she turned with pretty baby gestures and rolled on the sunny grass, until her eye was caught by the snowy gleam of a swan sailing majestically toward the grassy bank.

The languid grace of the snow-white swan pleased the children. Slowly the beautiful creature glided over the still, jewel-like water, her proudly arching neck and erected sail-like wings repeated with such bright accuracy beneath her that the motion of her black oar-like feet was completely hidden, and she seemed to move like a thought in obedience solely to her will. The boy beckoned and she approached him with wayward dignity, pausing in majestic indecision, and then consenting to be coaxed onward again until she reached the brink and bowed her head coquettishly to the bread in his extended hand, having taken which, she moved dream-like away, and brooding pensively over the water, like some gentle memory on a quiet heart, passed under the stone piers of the bridge, the dark arches of which shadowed and engulfed her.

Philip's eyes followed her thither and then turned to the blue heaven into which the silvery willow leaves pierced, while his thought followed the gliding swan and his senses were charmed by the brooding warmth of the sunshine and the ripe sweetness of the apples. Under the bridge that white swan was floating, past the miller's garden on the opposite side of the highway, past an old farm-house of mellow-red brick, past an orchard and a meadow; perhaps the swan went no farther, but Philip's heart expanded with a sort of passion to think how far she might float, had she but oars and sails in place of wings and feet, beginning upon the sea-ward current of the little familiar Lynn. Then he thought of the origin of Lynn, a little pool a few miles hence of diamond-clear water, no broader than the length of his arm, so still that it seemed solid, but with so vivid a sparkle above its white pebbles that it seemed alive. From this clear and liquid sparkle, which lived on, never failing

through summer and winter, in some, to him, mysterious manner arose the Lynn, a deep trench, flowing stilly through lush pasture and edged with meadow-sweet and loosestrife, sometimes reflecting the sweet gaze of forget-me-nots, broadening in musical remonstrance over the rough pebbles of a highway, where it bathed the passing feet of cattle and horses, narrowing again through meadows, turning-mills, prattling through a village, and then flowing through a chain of willow-edged mill-ponds, singing its tranquil way to Philip and the swan, thence reaching the wharves and the quay where another stream joined it, and the two currents rolled on together bearing vessels upon their united wave to the great gray, mysterious sea. A few miles, he could count them on his fingers, brought the doubled stream to the sea, and once there one might girdle the great globe.

His heart died at this thought; the vast, vast world seemed within his grasp as he lay there in the sunny stillness and longed to be a man. The willows swayed gently above his eager face, their trembling shadows shot across it; the sun was passing westward, but how slowly. Some pigeons sailed above him, he followed their flight with longing eyes; swallows glided by steeped in sunlight, the mill hummed on, the child prattled to herself, the scent of mignonette came wafted from the garden; the floating swan was a stately ship, bearing Philip to the world's end; they seemed to be sailing on and on forever, bound to some far, unknown Happy Islands; crimson fruits sent their spicy fragrance over the mystic waves, things melted vaguely one into the other; Sinbad, the Roc, the Valley of Diamonds, blended with the swan ship and vanished. Philip was fast asleep, unconscious alike of his actual blessedness and of that he dreamed in the future.

The willow wrapped him wholly in its gentle shade and spread its coolness upon the water, while he slept on with even, long-drawn breath, until at last a piercing sound penetrated the balmy mazes of his dreams and he awoke.

It was the piteous wail of the little girl, accompanied by the splash of her body in the water, that had broken his charmed dream. Seeing Philip feed the swan from his hand, a thing forbidden to her, she wished to do likewise, and seeing her brother's eyes shut, she crept gradually nearer to the edge of the water, looking, like a baby Narcissus, into the clear green water, where her flower-wreathed gold aureoled face was clearly mirrored.

“Pitty Jessie! pitty dirl!” cooed the tiny daughter of

Eve, with complacent smiles at her own reflection. But the swan, which in the meantime had turned back and shot the bridge, caught sight of the little figure and steered toward it with a swift, even, gliding motion. Jessie looked up, with a cry of joy; the swan swam back and altered the beautiful curves of its neck, gliding with a broadside motion which showed the stroke of the black leg beneath the beautiful sweep of the wing; Jessie stretched forward over the brink and extended one hand; the swan, after a little majestic dallying, glided up and placed its beak in the dimpled pink palm, where it found nothing, and then drawing back in offended majesty, it shot itself swiftly at the child, caught her frock in its beak, and pulled her into the water.

This incident was very pretty to watch, as it was watched from the road on the other side of the pond by a boy of twelve sitting on a brown cob in the plane-tree shade, where was also a bay horse led by a mounted groom. When the splash came, he lustily echoed the child's cry, sprang from his horse, ran along a wall by the water close to the mill-race, which he leapt, and landed in the meadow just in time to see Philip pull the child out of the water and to beat off the angry swan, which refused to let go of the skirts it had clutched, until the new-comer plied his riding-whip.

"Naughty girl!" cried Philip, setting her down at a safe distance from the edge, and wringing the water from her clothes. "Straight to bed you go, miss, and a good whipping you deserve."

"Take her in, you young duffer, and have her stripped and dried. What's the good of jawing a kid like that?" remonstrated the other boy. Taking one of the little girl's hands and bidding the stranger boy take the other, Philip trotted her between them over the grass and through a courtyard to the kitchen door, faster than her little stumbling feet could carry her.

Having delivered her into the hands of a maid servant, Philip made off before he had time to receive the scolding he shrewdly suspected to be due, and having reached the plane-tree, put his hands in his pockets and whistled with a fine affectation of indifference; he was more slowly followed by the stranger, whose services he acknowledged by a brief: "Thank ye."

"I say, you fellow," said the latter on coming up and observing his blackened eyes, "what have you been up to besides letting the baby fall into the pond?"

"Nothing," replied Philip, loftily; "I had to thrash a fellow this morning, that's all."

"Had you? I dare say. What other poor child have you been bullying?"

"He was a little bigger than you," said Philip, with a scornful glance over him.

"I like that. As if any fellow of my size wouldn't scorn to touch a kid like you. Go indoors, my dear, and ask your mamma for vinegar and brown paper."

With such amiable and polite observations, the lads made a life-long acquaintance. Boys are like dogs, they walk round each other with contemptuous sniffs and growls, and after one or two trial snaps and a display of teeth, come either to a pitched battle or gracious tail-wagging.

In this case, luckily for Philip, tail-wagging was the result. He was introduced to the brown cob and allowed to mount it, the stranger taking Philip's boat and sculling about the pond. Knives were produced and compared, at which stage Philip deemed it time to say, "Who are you, and what's your father?"

"I'm Claude Medway, and my father's Sir Arthur Medway," replied the lad. "Are you the miller's son? What's your name?"

Philip colored before replying. Only that morning in school at catechism he had given his name as "Philip Randal," and been dumb when pointedly and repeatedly told to give *only* the Christian name. Until that moment, it had not struck him as strange that Randal was his baptismal and surname in one.

After school there was a fight in the playground in consequence of the frequent repetition of the usher's words, "But Randal is your surname."

It was considered a good fight, and traditions of it still linger in Cleeve Grammar School. Blood was shed on both sides, and how it would have fared with Philip against his older and stronger adversary, but for the untimely appearance of the head-master upon the scene and the consequent hasty flight of both contending parties, it is impossible to say.

Perhaps Philip was not very sorry for the interruption, when he walked home with the comfortable consciousness of having given "that great brute Brown" a good thrashing, before he was himself pounded into a jelly. A secret conviction that the affair might now honorably be considered at an end, together with a strong suspicion that Brown would think differently, made him very

glad to reach the mill, whither Brown would not dare to follow him.

"My name's Philip Randal, and Mr. Meade, the miller, is my father," he replied defiantly to Claude's question.

"How much?" asked Claude, thinking that all three names belonged to him. "Well, you're a queer little beggar, names and all. How far are you in Latin? Do they fag at your school? I suppose they are all cads at this."

"What's a cad?" asked Philip.

"Oh! Why, a day-boy that lives in the town."

"Then we are all cads," returned Philip, cheerfully, "and I ain't out of Delectus yet. I say, lend us that knife, Medway."

"I'm going to Eton next term," said Claude, handing him the knife.

"Where's that?" asked Philip, indifferently, going up to the window-frame of the best parlor to try the knife upon it.

"Well! you *are* a duffer!" muttered Claude, revolted at Philip's ignorance, and marching away to re-examine the mill.

Philip, in the meantime, was absorbed in cutting his initials on the frame, and, the windows being open, heard the well-known voice of Matthew Meade mingling with the less familiar accents of Sir Arthur Medway, heard without hearkening until something was said which interested him.

"The boy is mine, Sir Arthur," said Mr. Meade's voice. "He was left by his own flesh and blood, and already started for the workus when I took him and bred him for my own."

"No doubt you are attached to the child, Meade, and of course it would be a hard pull to give him up——"

"I *can't* give him up," the miller broke in, with an agitated voice; "he's mine, he's all I've got. I've bred him up so far, and he's more to me—I tell 'ee I *can't* give him up, Sir Arthur."

"If you are indeed attached to the child——"

"I am, I am," Meade interposed.

"You surely would not stand in his light," continued Sir Arthur, gravely, "consider the advantages you refuse for him."

"I hev considered them, Sir Arthur," replied the miller, wiping his hot brow, "but money isn't everything, sir. The boy looks to me as a father, I've taught him so, and somehow—I've done that much for him, I've saved and scraped for him—aye, and I mean to save and scrape for him, and I'll bring him up to be a gentleman, please God——" he could say no more in the fulness of his heart.

Sir Arthur smiled, and looked silently at the rough man in his floury miller's clothes, whose chest was heaving with strong feeling; while the words broke gaspingly from him. "Better than my own blood, better, better."

"These feelings do you credit, Meade," he said, after some wonder as to how the miller proposed to breed up a gentleman. "But you would, I am sure, deeply regret that your affection for the boy should spoil his chances in life."

"It won't, it can't be," returned Meade, earnestly. "What do you care for him, sir? You've got yourn, there's Master Claude and the rest of them, and mine would be nobody, a poor stray bird among them all. What's money beside a father's heart? And a mother's, too?"

Again Sir Arthur gazed silently and thoughtfully upon the miller's earnest face, and when he saw him draw the back of his brown hand hastily across his eyes, his own became dim.

"I will say no more at present," he observed at last, rising and taking his hat; "we are both of us convinced of the child's identity, though I am not sure that we could prove it in a court of law. You will think over what I have said at your leisure, and weigh the pros and cons of it till we meet again."

"Yes, Sir Arthur," replied Meade, awed in spite of himself by the imposing presence of the baronet, whose head only just escaped the heavy beams of the old-fashioned parlor, a man in the prime of life, with a gracious smile and winning air.

The listener in the meantime, screened by the myrtle growing about the window, was pale as death, the knife falling from his nerveless hand. What should all this mean? Was the school-boy taunt but the bare truth, or how? When Sir Arthur came out of the porch with Mr. Meade, Philip had pulled himself together, and was able to come forward calmly at his father's call.

"So this is the boy," said Sir Arthur, laying his strong, slender hand with gentle firmness upon Philip's head, pushing back the tumbled hair and turning the face upward for the searching scrutiny he gave it. A long, long glance he bent upon Philip's flushing face, kind though stern, and with a mingling of sorrow, compunction, and yearning which vaguely touched the boy's self-steeled heart and gradually subdued the bold defiance of his upward gaze.

"You are tall and strong for your age, Philip," he said, removing his hand at last; "never misuse your strength; be gentle, loyal, and always think of others."

Then, calling his son, he went out through the garden

gate, first pressing into Philip's astonished hand a solid golden sovereign, the like of which the child had never handled before, and which he was at first afraid to keep lest it should have been given by mistake, and mounted the beautiful bay horse while Claude sprang upon the brown cob, and they rode away.

Matthew and Philip stood beneath the plane-tree and watched them clatter over the bridge and vanish up the hill, each with a tumultuous stir of feeling. The miller had taken the child's hand in his powerful grasp, and clutched it so firmly that the small fingers were all white and cramped together and aching; but Philip was unconscious of any physical sensation in the whirl of feeling with which he gazed upon the splendid steeds and their gallant riders, and especially upon Sir Arthur, who inspired him with mingled admiration and repulsion. It was as if all the glory of the world opened upon his spiritual vision through this man.

He looked up at his foster-father's weather-beaten face, which was drawn with anxiety and gray with care, at his striped collarless shirt and floury jacket, and for the first time he took his outward measure and reckoned him a common old man, more meanly dressed than the meanest working-man, and contrasted his stubby chin with Sir Arthur's carefully shaven, finely moulded face. Just then Meade looked at him and the boy's heart melted.

"How would you like to ride a little horse like Master Medway's, Philip? And go and live at Marwell Court with Sir Arthur, and have servants to wait on ye, and fine ladies to cosset ye, and books to read, and plenty of money?" the miller asked.

"Very much," he faltered.

"And leave poor old dad and mother and the little maid?" continued Meade, crushing the child's hand tighter.

"Not for the world," he replied, half crying, and they turned, both too much moved to speak, and went in.

Why did Sir Arthur want him? What interest could he possibly have in the miller's adopted child? Philip wondered.

Mr. Meade said nothing more on the subject to Philip that night, parrying his questions and bidding him wait. But when the children were gone to bed, he sat long by the light of the single candle in the parlor, smoking his short clay pipe and talking to his wife.

"Why ever hadn't you come, Martha?" he asked, testily; "Sir Arthur said himself you had as much right over the boy as I had myself."

“Me come? What, and me right in the middle of the plum jam? And Sarah no more fit so much as to stir a spoon when your eye’s off her,” returned Mrs. Meade, dropping the stocking she was mending and looking reproachfully across the candle’s dim pyramid of flame at her husband. “There, Meade, I will say this for ye, of all the men-folk I ever came across you’re the very worst for putting any understanding into. Not but you’ve your good points, and have been a middling husband, as husbands go.”

“Well, there, Martha, I can’t say what sort of a wife you’ve a been, for I haven’t had a many wives to try you agen,” the miller replied, “but I wish the deuce would fly off with your jam, I do. Anybody med think the world depended upon your jam.”

“The whole world may depend upon *my* jam,” retorted Mrs. Meade. “Any lady in the land might walk into my kitchen to-morrow morning and throw all the jam I’ve got across the room, if she’d a mind to; it’s jellied that solid.”

Matthew Meade did not stop to doubt the probability of high-born ladies wishing to throw jam across Mrs. Meade’s kitchen, but went on to explain the importance of Sir Arthur’s mission, to tell of the series of clues by which he had traced Philip’s identity, and of his great desire to take him into his own care and bring him up. The merits of Mrs. Meade’s jam were now as nothing to her; when the thought of losing Philip, which penetrated but slowly into her brain, did at last reach it, she put away her work and cried at the thought. “The many we’ve buried, Meade,” she sobbed, “and it did seem as though the Lord had sent us this one to make up.”

“And the Lord *did* send him,” cried Meade, smiting his fist on the table so that the candle jumped and the flame flickered. “You mind what I said, when I brought him home seven years ago, Martha. A voice seemed to whisper plain to me, ‘The same hand that made you childless, made this boy an orphan; save him from the workhouse, and he’ll bring a blessing on the hearth you take him to——’”

“Yes, Meade, and he did bring a blessing,” interposed Martha, drying her kind eyes; “there was little Jessie sent us in our old age——”

“Ay, the little maid was sent, bless her!”

“And such a boy as he was, to be sure, and no trouble with him. I mind that night when you came home from Chichester, ‘Here’s a present for ye, mother,’ you says, and it was long since you’d a called me mother; for it always made me sorrowful, thinking of them that was gone, and so I felt all a tremble. And I thought to meself, ‘I do hope

Meade haven't been spending his money on nonsense to pleasure me,' though my best bonnet was that shabbed I didn't like to go to church of a fine Sunday. 'It's alive, mother,' you says, sort of excited. And I thought 'sure it must be some prize poultry, he've got. Then I went out to the cart in the dark and heard a little child crowing to itself, and I began to cry thinking of them we'd lost. And you told me to look pleasant and not frighten the little boy. 'For,' you says, 'the Lord has sent us an orphan child, Martha.' And we brought him in and he cuddled up in my arms, and laid his little head again my arm and went off to sleep like a little angel."

"Right," corroborated Meade, "that's quite right, Martha, and you took to him as though you'd bore him in your own body. And we wasn't doing well, if you mind. So many farmers failed, and we'd been unlucky with the dairy, and there was bad debts in the town and one thing and another; but you said, 'the child's bite and sup was nothing, and I thought he'll be better off in the poorest place than in the workhouse, though I did want to breed him up a gentleman, knowing, as the landlady told me, the poor dead mother was a honest woman and real lady. But I thought may be we shall see better days before 'tis time to begin the boy's schooling. Right enough. So it fell out. Everything throve with us from the day the child came. And now I'm reckoned a warm man hereabouts."

"Yes, Matthew, you are warm, and thankful I am, when I think of them times," replied Mrs. Meade; "and so Randal was the wrong name after all?"

"Aye, she never said but 'twas wrong herself. She was hiding, and the lad had a right to his christened name."

"And they left him to the workhouse, his own flesh and blood!" she cried; "and now they think to take him from we after all we done for him, and he grown a fine lad, as well-spoke as you could wish to see, and a good boy, Mat, though I say it myself."

"Ah! But so fur as I can make out, they hev a right to en. Then there's his prospex! I reckon you wouldn't stand in Phil's light, Martha, just to let him bide long with us!"

"Prospex! what's prospex," she cried, "alongside of a mother's heart?"

Mr. Meade thrust his hands deep into his pockets and frowned over this question; the candle burnt down, he lighted another, and the two went on discussing the question till hard upon midnight.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST TURNING POINT.

All the next day Mr. Meade pondered silently upon Sir Arthur Medway's interview with him, until evening came again, and the children were gone to bed.

"The boy," he said to his wife, "is nine year old; he takes a threshing like a man, aye, and has the grace to be thankful for't. He knows already more book-learning than ever I known all my life. He'll tell you the Latin for a cow or a cat smother than you'll print off your pats of butter, Martha. 'Tis but right he should know how he was come by and what he've got to look to. Let en choose for hisself."

Mrs. Meade demurred at throwing such a responsibility on a child of nine years.

"It's like this," Meade replied; "there's no lawyer living, not the Lord Chancellor hisself, can make me believe I haven't a right to a boy I've took and bred up from his cradle and been a father to. But Sir Arthur, he've got a right over the child, too, and 'tis plain as plums we can't both hev him, and only the Lord himself can judge between us. I've tried opening the Bible hap-hazard, but can't light upon what'll serve the turn. Only I come to 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings' twice, and it was borne in upon me that Philip must settle for hisself."

The argument was unanswerable, and in much grief and trepidation, Mrs. Meade accepted the office of acquainting Philip with the choice that lay before him.

"Lither tongues," Mr. Meade continued, "was never meant for men folk, Martha. I never was good at putting words to what's going on inside of me. Think I can, as well as any man. But darned if I can tell what I'm thinking of. You may mind the time it took me to come to the point when courting."

"To be sure, Meade," she replied, with feeling, "I did think you was never going to say 'mum,' and folk knew I was ready to say 'budget,' and there was a laugh against me

in all the country-side. 'If you can't bring him on, Patty, you'd better throw him off,' Cousin Jane heve said many a time; 'if he had any nouse, he'd a known it was time to speak up long ago.' Whatever we should ha' done if it hadn't been for grandmother's great gander, I don't know; kept wiverin' on till now, I reckon."

"Right," replied Meade, gravely; "you're right, Martha, but even the girt gander would ha' ben nothing without your tongue. I beat the gander off of ye, and you cried and clung on to me, and there I stood like a girt zote and couldn't tell for the life of me what to say next. It did seem that simple to blurt out, 'Marry me, Martha,' all of a sudden right in the middle of the common with the wild gander and all the geese staring and hissing at us. I'd a given ye a kiss but I had to keep my eye on that gander all the time. Then you said, 'Please don't leave me, Mr. Meade; I'm that frightened!' And that put it into my head to say, 'I'll never leave ye, my dear, if you'll promise to go to church with me, afore two months are gone.' And so 't was done, but it drove the sweat out of me, and you was all of a tremble in a pink Sunday gown, and the church bells ringen. And the old gander kept on hissing and running, so I was forced to keep my arm round ye all the way across common. I never hear a goose hiss but I think on 't," he added, pensively.

"'T wasn't the first lead I gave ye, either," laughed Mrs. Meade, brightening at these tender recollections; "but there, courten is like a cool hand at pastry; its born with some, and there are those can't do it to save their lives. 'Mat Meade's that nog-headed,' Cousin Jane used to say, 'I'd rather die an old maid than put up with such a dunch chap.' But I thought to myself, 'Matt Meade has a good headpiece enough, if he is wanting in tongue. I've enough for both. And courten is only wanted ove a lifetime.'"

"I don't doubt things are ordered right," Mr. Meade commented; "but it seems a pity the courten isn't done by the women. I'd sooner unload ten wagons of flour than feel how I felt for months and months before your grandmother's great gander ran after ye. Any woman would ha' done it that easy, you'd scarcely know you'd ben through anything; their tongues twist and turn about like a well-broke, tender-mouthed filly."

"Ah, well, 't was soon done and over, after all," observed Mrs. Meade, regretfully; "fullish times they were, I'm sure."

"It's what all must come to," moralized Mr. Meade; "bound to be fullish once in a lifetime is all mankind. You

was a pretty maid, Martha ; not that I was one to be took by a pretty face," he added, severely, knowing that female vanity dies hard. "No, my dear, I somehow seemed set on ye, I didn't know why. Whether 'twas the dairy, or the cooking, or the goodness of heart, drew me on, I can't rightly say. But I was that dull and drug the days I didn't get a sight of ye. Bless me, how fullish we went on!" he exclaimed, suddenly checking this flood of tender reminiscence ; for he was a man of sober thought and staid demeanor, and knew what was due to conjugal propriety and their advancing years. "What was I a-saying? Words is what I never could handle easy. I can heft anything you like to name with any man of forty ; but when it comes to words, I'm bound to make a mess on 't. Words come natural to the womenfolk. So you tell the boy, Martha."

Thus it came to pass that Mrs. Meade ascended the steep creaking stair and went into the dim little attic in the ghostly twilight, her footsteps on the uncarpeted boards rousing the sleeping boy.

"Mother," he cried, starting up, "I didn't take the plums, indeed I didn't."

"Dear heart alive," said Mrs. Meade, "who's thinking of plums? I know who had them, my dear, and it wasn't you. You're never stinted in anything that's good for children, so you wouldn't take plums, and you've never told me a lie yet, Philip."

Philip lay back on the pillow and wondered if the fowls had got into the garden when he left the gate open.

"Boys," said Mrs. Meade, giving him a kiss and carefully tucking in the bed-clothes he had dashed aside, "are made that lither and sprack they can't bide quiet long together, they're bound to be in some mischief, tearing and siling clothes, upsetting and breaking things, and stabbling all over the house. I cried terrible when mine were took, but I do think to meself at times there was mercy in it. For however I could keep the house decent with four stabbling about, the Lord only knows."

"I did mean to shut the gate," said Philip, "but I forgot."

"Never mind the gate, my dear, but mind to shut him next time," she continued, smoothing the sheet under his chin. "For a boy you've been a good boy, and me and your father has never repented taking you—" here Mrs. Meade's voice failed her and she took out her handkerchief to Philip's dismay.

"Taking me?" he asked, after a pause ; "where from?"

"From the workhouse," she replied. "Nobody knew so much as your surname when your poor mother died and left ye, and there was nothing for it but the workhouse, if Matthew hadn't come along and thought of them we'd lost and had it borne in upon him he was to take and breed you up in their place."

Philip had seen the workhouse boys in their thin and poor uniform at some holiday gathering in which they were included, he had marked their pinched and often vicious faces, had heard them use foul words, once he had been taken to see some one at the workhouse, once a man in Cleeve had been tried for ill-treating a young workhouse apprentice and he had stolen into the court to hear the case. He wound his stout little arm into that of the kind soul who had been a mother to him, and she kissed him and stroked the thick hair off his forehead. Then she told him how Matthew had brought him home one night, that he was of gentle blood and of an origin known to Sir Arthur, who wished to educate him with his own sons.

All this, in spite of her husband's tribute to her eloquence and Philip's eager interest and frequent questioning she effected not without difficult and much digression and repetition.

"But mother, what is my name?" he asked for at least the ninth time, for he was tired out with eight evasive answers to this important question.

"My dear," she replied, on being thus brought to bay, "it's little chance you have of keeping the Fifth Commandment with your poor mother in her grave this seven years. It's only her dying wishes you can obey, which is, you was to be called Philip Randal and ask no questions."

Philip sighed; he had long since discovered that the whole duty of youth consisted in not asking questions, and the whole interest and joy of youth in doing so. He gave Mrs. Meade's ample form a tight squeeze and asked if he was to be sent to Marwell Court to live.

"Not if you don't want to go, my dear," she replied, tenderly stroking his hair on which the bright silver of the moon now shimmered. "Me and your father wants to keep you bad enough, but we can't bring ourselves to stand in your light, Phil. Sir Arthur would make a gentleman and a made man of ye."

Mrs. Meade went on to speak of college education and of the expenses, reaching far into manhood, of launching a youth in any profession. "Then, my dear," she continued, "your

father and me are plain people, though comfortable, and we know manners as well as most ; and I will say that for Meade, never a bad word comes out of his mouth, and always takes his hat off to his betters ; and aggravating as Cousin Jane may be, while under his roof he's never nothen but civil to her. The worst he ever said was one Christmas time when Cousin Jane was onluckier than ever I knew, and said things made me wish the vittles might choke her. 'I could wish, ma'am,' says Meade, as smooth as cream, 'your tongue had a been made no longer than your temper. You'd ha' been a happier woman.' She looked pretty straight at him, but it done her good. Your father's a good man, my dear. You never see him sit down to meals without washing his hands. But he and me haven't got the manners of Sir Arthur and her ladyship. They're high fol with manners to match. There's manners and manners, same as there's plain sewing and fine needlework, and there's nothen, no, not whooping-cough or scarlatina, catchinger than manners. So you must think hard about it, and perhaps you might put it in your prayers, my dear, to have a right judgment."

With these words and a final kiss and tucking-up, Mrs. Meade stole out of the moonlit attic, leaving Philip in a fever of confused and agitating thoughts and bewildering feelings.

He thought he should never go to sleep ; he heard the tall clock on the stairs strike ten just as his mother left the room, but before her footsteps had ceased to echo along the boarded passages, with his arms still flung wide, the sudden sweet sleep of childhood descended upon his tired eyes and remained there till morning.

A few days later Philip, in his Sunday suit and clean collar, with hair freshly cut and an odor of soapsuds pervading him, started for Marwell Court in a high dog-cart, driven by a young groom, who was inclined to smile at the tender farewell which took place at the door. Philip looked back as long as he could see them with a sad, half-reproachful feeling ; he seemed to be deserting. But this lowness of spirits was completely forgotten when he reached Marwell Court, which he had seen many a time from a distance but only once entered. On that occasion he was staying with Cousin Jane, the wife of a farmer in the neighborhood, and accompanied her on a visit to the house-keeper, who patted him on the head, which he did not like, and gave him plum-cake and currant wine, which he did.

That he might ever be master of that fine building did not

enter among the many thoughts jostling in his small brain as he swept up the avenue, past one wing and reined in before a wide porticoed entrance. Like a dreamer, he got down from the dog-cart and went up the steps and through doors magically flying open of themselves to admit him. Here were tall splendidly dressed gentlemen in colored velvets, silk, and gold, their heads more floury than those of the men at the mill at home; kind and polite in spite of their bewildering splendor. No longer Phil Randal, the miller's boy, but a fairy prince penetrating to the heart of some dark enchantment, he passed through a spacious and beautiful hall, with a shining marble floor, with pictures on the walls and white figures poised on pedestals like wingless angels ready for flight, with rich hangings half-shrouding doors and windows, and was almost startled when the handsome lad who had played with him in the garden at home came bounding down the wide soundless staircase to receive him.

"Hullo, Randal, here you are at last," cried Claude, bringing the fairy prince from regions of dim enchantment to the solid earth with a bounce. "How are you? Come to my mother's room."

Philip answered him in a dazed way and followed him upstairs and along thick-carpeted corridors to a room full of strange flower-scents and pale blue satin.

"Lady Gertrude's room," Claude said before he opened the door, in a low tone that implied something like awe.

"This is Philip Randal, mother," he said, presenting him to the beautiful, plainly-dressed lady reclining by the open window.

"So you are Philip," she said, looking thoughtfully at him.

"Yes, if you please, ma'am," he replied, respectfully; "and I have a mother, too," he added, standing in front of her and resting his elbow on the arm of a sofa; "she sent her duty to you."

"So you are not afraid of us?" she asked, smiling as Philip supposed that angels smile, and caressing his reverent, upturned face with her dainty hand, white as a lily and soft as a rose-leaf.

"No, ma'am. And I like your house, though it's the biggest I ever was in."

"Do you like small houses best, Philip?"

"Well, you see, ma'am, I've been used to small houses all my life," he explained, "and just at first a big one feels strange. Besides, I didn't know that people *lived* in such fine places."

"I hope you will be happy in our house," she said, graciously; "Claude will show you everything. Run away now, boys, and don't get into more mischief than you can help."

Philip kissed the hand that was under his chin with a natural unconscious grace that gave pleasure, and the boys left the room, Claude with an air of relief.

"By Jove, Philip," he said when they were outside the door, "you've made a conquest of her ladyship. She can't bear boys." And, taking him to the library to Sir Arthur, he forthwith, to Philip's surprise, described the interview with Lady Gertrude, at the recital of which Sir Arthur smiled and pinched Philip's ear. "A born courtier," he said, enigmatically. Then sending Claude away, he spoke to Philip of his origin and his intentions concerning him, as Mrs. Meade had already done.

"Your foster-father," he said, in conclusion, "wishes you to do exactly what you like best. He is quite ready to give up all claims upon you, if you like to live with us and share my son's education and other advantages. There is a pony for you already. You will go to school with Hugh till you are both ready for Eton. Run away with Claude now."

Dismissing him with a wave of the hand, Sir Arthur dismissed the subject as well, considering the event of Philip's preferring Stillbrooke to Marwell as too improbable to be taken into account.

The few days spent at Marwell seemed months to Philip, everything being so new and strange. Claude and Hugh were capital companions, for a boy without brothers the younger children and the little girls, too, were companionable. There was so much to enjoy, such variety of games and pastimes, so many books, so many objects of interest, such space for play. Claude even had a gun, besides fishing-rods, cricket-bats, carpenters' tools, and a boat.

Their rides in the park were delightful; the pretty shy-eyed deer starting away from them, the pale gray mass of masonry everywhere showing itself in some new and imposing light, the large gardens, the home farm, the harriers, all either pleased him or impressed his fancy. He liked to go with the other children after dinner into the long drawing-room, opening into a long vista of drawing-rooms, and glorified when he first saw it, by a blaze of sunset falling through the tall western windows; he wondered at the ladies' gleaming arms and shoulders, their jewels and silken clothes, and liked their gentle manners and refined accent.

"Well, Philip," said Lady Gertrude, when he stole up to a

position behind her sofa just after dinner, "do you still think this a beautiful house? And what do you think the most beautiful thing in it?"

"You, ma'am," he replied, without hesitation, to the great amusement of some ladies staying in the house, who were near.

It was a new wonder after this glimpse of enchantment, to see the familiar hedge-rows and fields floating past him in the summer sunset when he was driven home again.

He arrived just as dusk was falling; the lamps shone sparse and dim in the gray streets and were reflected from the bridge in the still mill-stream and there, under the plane-tree, sat Mrs. Meade in her homely, familiar dress, with Jessie half-asleep on her knee, and there, issuing from the green shadows, was Matthew himself.

How glad they were to see him again, how Jessie clung to him; and how pleasant and cosy the homelike parlor seemed with the candle lighted, the supper spread, and Sarah coming in with smiles of welcome.

"Take your time, Phil, take your time," his father said after supper, when questioning him about his visit; "mind, it's for life, so don't decide in a hurry. Philip looked in his face and then in his mother's, and said nothing, but in his heart he decided once for all, "I'll never leave them," he thought.

CHAPTER III.

PHILIP'S SECOND TURNING.

So the child's will prevailed. Philip knew nothing of the controversy between the Medways and the Meades as to which house he should belong. Sir Arthur had weakly consented to refer the question to the boy, without dreaming that a lad of that age would hesitate for a moment in preferring such a home as he had to offer to the gray solitude of Stillbrooke Mill.

"Very good, sir," was Meade's last words. "If you takes the bwoy, I goes to law."

This clinched the matter; the Medways dreaded the publicity of a legal process beyond everything. As Matthew had represented, Philip was practically at Sir Arthur's gates, he could watch him and make sure of his welfare. His adoptive father pledged himself to give him the best education to be had in Cleeve and start him afterward in a profession; when he failed in those conditions, Sir Arthur could step in. So the visit to Marwell Court soon faded to a dim golden memory in Philip's mind; he forgot Claude and Hugh's description of their schools and sports, and the glowing picture of the Eton life now to be Claude's, and the lad's congenial companionship. Everything connected with them slept out of sight in his mind while the quiet years slipped by like a peaceful dream, and Philip grew a tall, lanky lad, a sore puzzle to the miller now that the time was come for choosing a profession.

As usual the wishes of youth did not chime with the counsels of riper age. The navy alone had charms for Philip; the church for his parents. A vision of the boy's merry face rising above a black gown and white bands, in the oaken pulpit of Cleeve Church, haunted Mrs. Meade's mind with beatific persistence, while Mr. Meade felt it would be a grand thing to hear Philip read the burial service over him and perhaps preach his funeral sermon.)

Philip's only alternative proposition was the army. The question was seriously debated at a Christmas gathering at

Stillbrooke Mill by a small knot of elders grouped, churchwarden in hand, round the fire in the common parlor while the young people played games in the best parlor.

"You may depend upon it, Meade," observed Cousin Jane, an uninvited presence in the smoking parliament, "you'll hev to pay for bringing the boy up above plain folk."

"I've paid already, ma'am, for this year," replied Meade, "and got schoolmaster's receipt upon the file."

Cousin Jane's husband's mouth went upwards at this observation.

"You've a right to mock at your wife's relations at your own fireside, Mr. Meade," she returned mournfully, "but mocking won't undo the wrong you done my poor sister's child for the sake of a foundling and a castaway. But it's none of my business. You may make the boy prime minister tomorrow for all I should meddle. And let Jessie go barefoot. Not that she'll ever come to good, spoiled and muddled up as she is."

"Make a land agent of him, Meade," interposed Mr. Plummer, Cousin Jane's husband, with some haste. "Sir Arthur's agent's fine gentleman enough for anybody, so's his wife."

"A lawyer," observed Mr. Cheeseman, the corn-dealer and town councillor, "is a gentleman by act of parliament. I'll warrant law's a fine business. It takes brains and it makes money."

"Lawyers," added Mr. Symes, the clockmaker, "have a finger in everybody's pie. Mr. Westley has half the town under his thumb."

"You may say what you like," added Mr. Plummer, "whatever business a lawyer's in, the money sticks to en. Whether it's drawing of a lease, or raising of a morgige; the sovereigns cleave to his fingers. Give a lawyer money to lay out and you're a lucky man if you lives to see the half of it agen. Whoever fails, a lawyer's never broke. There's money in law, Meade."

"Aye, but think of the rascality, Plummer," sighed Mr. Meade.

"To be sure," was the chorussed reply, "whoever heard of a honest lawyer?"

"Millers haven't always been reckoned straight men," observed a hitherto silent smoker, Mr. Reade, grocer and churchwarden. "What's that about the miller's thumb, Meade, eh?"

"Mr. Reade must hev his joke," commented Martha, coming forward to see if people's glasses were properly filled, amid a chorus of chuckles over the jest.

"I've heard say 't is a fine thing to be a barrister," Mr. Meade continued, "but meself, I can't see it. Before ever they earn so much as a penny piece they've got to eat dinners for a year or two in a sort of church. And when they get a job 't is mostly a dirty one so far as I can make out. A barrister that gets a scoundrel off hanging is a made man, they tell me, and run after by every villain in the land. Philip can eat dinners at home, and the fewer scoundrels get let off the better. Doctoring I've laid awake over many a night. But I shouldn't like the boy to live off other folk's ills. As for a clergyman, he won't so much as look at it."

"It does seem hard work to be a honest man and a gentleman to be sure," commented Mrs. Meade. "Many a time I've said to Meade, 'let the child be plain and honest.'"

"You may warrant," added her husband, "gentle or simple, 'tis a heavy thing to be honest and rich, whatever trade you take."

A chorus of denials followed, for nearly all present were men of substance and each convinced of his own integrity, though doubtful of that of others.

The end of this and many such conferences was that Philip found himself one fine morning perched upon a high stool in Mr. Westley's office, an articulated clerk. He came home at night, pale and silent; at the end of a month, a doctor had to be consulted. The doctor recommended air and exercise; which being taken speedily restored the patient. Six weeks more in the office reduced Philip to the same low level. His release came; Mr. Meade's purse was lightened, and there was Philip free, and a standing problem once more.

A period of idling followed, then Philip, having neatly set his dog's broken leg in splints, suddenly took it into his head to be a doctor, remembering that a doctor can enter either army or navy. Therefore one memorable night in the memorable year of the Crimean war, found Philip making pills in Dr. Maule's surgery, with a listless air and dispirited face.

He had been apprenticed for more than a year and a half, and felt himself little wiser than he had been at the beginning. As for old Maule, as he called him, he soon found out that all his skill was built upon experience, and that he was as incapable as he was unwilling to teach him.

Many a headache did the poor lad get over Dr. Maule's medical books, his bones, and his instruments; the names of different bones and muscles refused to remain in his head, the books were a hopeless maze without a clue, he began to think that he had no aptitude for the profession, and to crown

all he had to be interrupted so perpetually in receiving patients, taking their messages and mixing their medicines that no sooner had he succeeded in making himself acquainted with the carotid artery or the thyroid cartilage than a report upon old Mr. Robinson's gout drove both cartilage and artery out of his mind.

"Teach!" the old doctor would say with a hearty oath, "how the devil am I to find time to cram your thick head? Nobody ever taught *me*; I picked up what I could in old Pestle's surgery, with the assistant and the other apprentice swearing at me and boxing my ears from morning till night, but damn me I took care to pull through the examinations. I wasn't cockered like you. Learn, you lazy young dog, learn!"

He was a kind old fellow, with a sort of bluff cordiality, and did not swear with his patients more than enough to give his discourse a pungent emphasis; he took care not to be the worse but rather the better for his powerful potations when on duty, he was shrewd too and knew men, thus he was popular, and when his patients died people said it was the will of God, and when they recovered (as they sometimes did) the skill of Dr. Maule.

Suddenly, while Philip was musing over his pills, the surgery door opened violently and in stormed the old doctor, pouring out a broadside of oaths. Philip knew that he had been dining out and had not expected him to return for another hour or two. Having consigned Philip piecemeal to perdition in company with his own soul, he suddenly thrust a bottle into his face and asked him what he meant by that.

"Mean, sir?" returned Philip, "I suppose I meant it for cough mixture."

Alas! it was a poisonous compound intended for outward use and clearly marked for inward in Philip's handwriting.

"You murderous young dog!" shouted the doctor.

"I'm not a dog," retorted Philip. "I have not made a beast of myself," he added with sarcasm.

"What do you mean?" cried the doctor with a thick utterance.

"I mean," cried Philip, suddenly and passionately, "that I came here to study medicine, and not to be bullied and sworn at and made to do all your work."

"Take that," roared the doctor, with embellishments, boxing his ears, whereupon Philip seized him by the collar and laid him flat on the floor, in which position Dr. Maule's grown-up son entering, discovered them.

"This is nice manly behavior, Randal," said young Maule,

picking up his irate parent and placing him in a chair ; and after much blustering on the old man's part, and vain attempts at peace-making on the son's, Philip found himself in the street, with the information that his indentures would have to be cancelled and he need not return.

So ended Philip's second professional career. "What's the good of a fellow like me?" he thought, marching defiantly down the street and whistling savagely.

He finished the evening with some fellows of his own age, not a very steady set, and tried with loud merriment, jovial songs, and deep potations, to bury his chagrin.

It was late when he bent his wavering steps homeward, wondering why in the world the houses kept knocking up against him, and who was that villain continually pushing him off the pavement. To solve these problems, he leant against a lamp-post, mournfully wailing :

"Why did my master sell me
Upon my wedding day?"

with his hat tipped over one eye. Just at this moment who should come around the corner but his *bête noire*, the vicar, returning from Mrs. Carlyon's dinner party.

"Come, Randal," said Mr. Bryan, roughly. "What are you doing here? You are drunk. Get home directly."

"Get home 'self," retorted Philip, thickly; "'sgraceful time of night for parson."

Waxy Bryan, as the street-boys called their hot-tempered Irish pastor, instead of leaving the luckless boy to grow sober before going home, angrily pushed him away from the lamp-post. Philip, to save himself, caught at him, the streets were slippery with rain, and after a brief struggle the two fell full length in each other's arms on the pavement, just as a policeman sauntered around the corner.

Mr. Bryan was soon on his feet and promptly gave Philip into custody for knocking him down, and the unhappy boy finished the night at the police station.

What a waking was his next morning! Racking headache, sickness, bodily depression, and heavy shame.

The brawl had not been without witnesses, and when Mr. Bryan woke in the morning with a cool head and remembered that he had in sober truth committed the assault, vindictive as he was, he considered it better not to prosecute Philip. He therefore repaired to the station early and withdrew his charge.

Philip, haggard and dishevelled, with the disreputable air

that always clings to people who have passed the night in their clothes, took refuge in a small public-house, feeling that he could not go home yet, and sat down to write home. His dizzy throbbing head weighed upon his hands as he sat with elbows on the table and tried to find words fit for his narrative. An hour went by and he had not got beyond "dear father;" he heard loungers at the bar discussing "this here Rooshian job;" the smart, quick music of fife and drum called all to doors, and windows, and street corners. Even Philip raised his heavy head and looked up to see a recruiting-party with streaming ribbons step briskly past to the tune of "Come cheer up, my lads, 'tis to glory we steer!"

The whole thing was inspiriting to one so downcast as Philip, and offered a sudden solution of his life's problem; war was coming, men were wanted, volunteers were offering, promotion would be quick. In a very short time, Philip was the richer by a silver shilling in his pocket and the smarter for a bunch of ribbons in his hat.

In the meantime there had been sorrow at the mill, and Mr. Meade had hurried early in the morning to Dr. Maule's to see if he could throw any light upon the boy's disappearance.

Dr. Maule was sober and melancholy at this hour of the day. Though a hard drinker he was seldom as overcome as on the preceding night; he greatly regretted the affair with Philip in the surgery, which he related to Mr. Meade with impartial accuracy.

"He won't do for physic, Meade," he said; "he's lazy and won't bear the curb. Put him to hard out-door work."

But the doctor could not tell where the boy was, and Mr. Meade returned disconsolately homeward, on his way meeting Mr. Bryan, whose account of the preceding night's adventure was acrid and disquieting.

"I always said that boy would come to no good," the vicar added, consolingly, "he is one of the wildest young fellows in the parish. You give him too much liberty, Mr. Meade."

"As well hang a dog at once as give him a bad name," cried the miller, indignantly, "you was always hard on my poor boy, sir. I'd sooner be a poor black heathen than your sort of Christian."

Then he met Mr. Ingleby, the curate, a good-hearted young fellow, who had often done the lad a kind turn, and to whom Philip had just gone with his confession, desiring him to communicate all to his father.

It was a heavy blow to Matthew and Martha, whose first thought was to buy Philip out at once; but Matthew Meade

was not a man to do anything in a hurry. He considered the subject well first, and finally Mr. Ingleby's advice, coupled with Philip's own earnest supplications and urgent reasonings, together with Dr. Maule's report upon the lad's capacities, induced Mr. Meade to yield a reluctant consent to his prodigal's remaining in the ranks. Mr. Ingleby had taken an interest in the boy for years, and his verdict was that he suffered from being educated above his surroundings, and would infinitely profit from the discipline in the ranks. He also undertook to interest his brother, a captain in the same regiment, in the new recruit.

So it came to pass shortly after that Philip, looking, as little Jessie thought, very smart and handsome in his infantry uniform, and feeling very gay and hopeful, marched with his regiment on board a troop-ship bound for the East, amid the thunder of a vast crowd's cheers, the weeping of women and children, and a thousand piteous little farewell scenes.

Matthew Meade, with Martha and Jessie, now a pretty playful girl of twelve, with deep blue eyes and hair of woven sunbeams, stood amid the crowd to watch the embarkation and wave Philip a last farewell, with deeply moved hearts.

It was indeed a moving scene, calling a complexity of the deepest feelings into play, one which few Englishmen could witness without strong thrills of patriotic pride and fear and hope, and few human beings without the stirring of tenderest sympathies. The great ships lay like giants at rest on the blue waters, the beautiful winged wooden warships looking like living creatures, and the great troop-ships; the shore was lined and covered at every coign of vantage with human beings, all moved by one vast common interest, all more or less sorrowful; for as regiment after regiment marched by with firm, even step the spectators could not but remember the certainty that many of those fine men would return again no more. On that late winter day the justice or injustice of the impending but as yet undeclared war with Russia was forgotten; for as cheer after cheer thundered along the shore and echoed back from wall, bastion, and church tower, and was taken up and repeated from ship to ship and from rank to rank of that moving mass of armed men and broken by the gay defiance of the martial music, those present could only remember that they were Englishmen, animated by one hope, stimulated to one common duty, citizens of a great nation with centuries of honor and achievement behind her and the dim splendor of a great future before her, and that the honor of England would perhaps soon be at stake,

And so the war passion took them ; for the English are, as every truly great nation must be, a martial people ; they do not rush into war with a light heart, or, knowingly, for an unjust cause ; the waste, the agony, the pity of it appals them ; for they are too brave not to be humane ; but once convinced that it is their duty to fight, they fight heroically, silently, patiently, with an unquestioning discipline unknown to other nations.

And after all is not that magnificent terror, war, the school of heroism and self-sacrifice, the purge of covetousness, the cementer of friendship and patriotism, the curb of cruelty and nurse of pity, and does it not foster kindness and mutual admiration between nations even as the sea unites the land it seems to divide ?

At least, so thought Philip Randal. As for little Jessie Meade, she cried to her heart's content, not so much because Philip was going away, as because the vast enthusiasm of the crowd, and the stir and color of the scene upset her nerves and woke dim and inexplicable feelings of grandeur and glory within her.

"Oh, mother," she cried, "look ! The big soldier and the white kitten !" And there, distinct against the soldier's red tunic and undisturbed by the music and martial tumult, a tiny white kitten rode gravely to the war on her master's shoulder. In front of the kitten marched a little boy-soldier, crying bitterly at leaving his mother, but beating his drum manfully all the time.

"If Philip were only a horse-soldier like Mr. Medway !" said Jessie, her quick eye singling Claude out from some picturesque hussars. This fine young officer was one of the immortal Six Hundred who were destined to cover themselves so soon with glory.

"I wish I'd bought the lad a commission !" Mr. Meade said, turning away to go homeward.

"If only the dear child comes back safe and sound ! That's all I care about !" sighed Mrs. Meade.

But Jessie's imagination was dominated by the picturesque brilliance of the hussars.

PART I.

“Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.”

CHAPTER I.

PEACE.

The war cloud had burst in tempest and raged itself to stillness; England breathed freely once more. For two weary years voices of humiliation and exultation, of indignation and mourning, of sorrow and pride filled the land. There were vacant places at many a pleasant hearth, desolate homes, fatherless children, age bereaved and strong youth hopelessly crippled, but there was peace at last. The sword of England, the army, had been tested and found wanting; the material was excellent, but the organization vile, and what avails a sword of finest temper without a skilled hand to wield it? Yet this splendid sword reaped laurels.

When the daffodils of 1856 shot up in graceful battalions by warbling streams in low, lying meadows, welcome rumors of peace floated through the land and mingled with the breath of opening violet and the sweet promise of the young primroses; gradually they grew to certainty, and the music of joy-bells pealing from countless steeples and the roar of cannon proclaiming the peace blended with the innumerable wild bird-songs of the springing year.

The first swallows came about Stillbrooke Mill bearing this gentle message on their wings. Mrs. Meade shed tears of joy on hearing the news one bright morning, then instantly began to make grand household preparations for Philip's reception. Mr. Meade went out into the garden, where everything seemed to be putting forth its strength and beauty to welcome the returning exile. He went to stick a row of young peas with a slow smile deepening the numerous wrinkles about his mouth, while Jessie flitted about the sunny garden, tangling the sunbeams in her flowing hair, gathering

spring flowers and singing patriotic songs in her bird-like voice.

"Phil 'll never know the little maid, she's shot up that tall and slim," he thought.

Looking back on those two years of wearing anxiety, the Meades wondered how they had ever lived through them, much less gone about their daily occupations as usual.

News did not travel so rapidly then as now; war correspondents then only began to be; papers were fewer, dearer, and less accurate and well-informed than now, rumors from private sources circulated vaguely and inaccurately. It was terrible to the Meades to hear of Alma and then wait in long suspense ignorant of Philip's fate, the more so as Mr. Ingleby's brother fell in that action, and his name was duly reported with so many nameless rank and file of his and of Philip's regiment among the killed. Balacava and Inkerman brought the same sickening doubt, and the Meades wrote letters which seemed ghastly in the light of that uncertainty to one who might be lying dead on those battle-fields.

The wound which Philip received at Inkerman, and his subsequent hospital troubles left them longer in doubt; but once satisfied that he was recovering, the winter hardships did not cause them so much anxiety, especially as the accounts of those hardships were to a certain extent discredited in England, and Philip made light of them in his letters, so that by the time the summer came his parents were sufficiently case-hardened to think of other things than the war, and were disposed rather to under-rate the perils and privations of the long siege of Sebastopol.

When the oaks were exchanging their tints of dull crimson, russet, and warm gold for the pure, fresh, pale green of full leafage at the meeting of May and June, the whole people rejoiced in the peace, the country echoed with clashing bells and booming guns; the larger towns blazed at night with such illuminations as the limited resources of those bygone days permitted, and even the sober burgesses of Cleeve filled their windows with candles, lit bonfires and otherwise recklessly comported themselves.

"Matt Meade's doing it handsome," said a portly citizen at shut of eve, on the feast day, as he passed the mill with a companion. "And he came down smartly for the town decorations. He's reckoned a warm man, is Matt, though they do say he's dipped pretty heavy in mines and other speculations."

"Not he. You may warrant Matt Meade knows what he's about," returned Mr. Cheeseman, now an alderman. "You'll

have to get up early to catch him asleep. He's warmer than anybody knows. Scrapes and hoards for young scapegrace. 'Tis rough on the girl, but she'll be a catch by and by after all, trust me if she isn't."

Holiday groups crossed and recrossed the bridge, glancing at the illuminated mill as they went; loungers leant on the parapet, where the lamp stanchions were twined with laurel, to criticise Miller Meade's patriotic lamps and candles, and the Chinese lanterns swinging from his trees; amongst these idlers was a fine young man, whose trim moustache, erect carriage, and short, well-brushed hair, stamped him in the eyes of bystanders as a military officer.

Little artificial light fell on the mill-pond between the broad masses of shadow cast over it by the trees, but it gleamed with some faint reflections of fading rose-light still lingering in the sky. Some cart-horses were taking their evening draught at the water's edge, and now and then indulging in clumsy gambols before trotting sedately back to their stables, unmoved by the unaccustomed light streaming from every aperture in the mill-front, and casting a mellow lustre on the broad leaves of the plane-tree, whence depended Chinese lanterns and colored oil lamps.

"You are gay here to-night," said the stranger, lounging at the end of the parapet, to the man in charge of the horses.

"We be gay, sir," replied the man; "there baint a man on this blessed place to-night, indoors or out, excepting me and Sarah, the seräng-ooman, and when I've racked up, there won't be only she left."

"The family gone out to see the sights?"

"Aye, they be all gone up top of down, to see em light the big bonfire. Terble fine doings, to be sure! They do say as London itself cain't beat Cleeve for lighting up and ginerall lyalty. I never see nothen like it afore in all my barn days. And I hreckon 'tis nothen but hright now we've done for Wold Nick and put an end to this yer Rooshian job."

"Had you any friends in the East?" the officer asked.

"Well there! there's my master, he'd a got a bwoy there; couldn't do nothen with en at home. But darnee they wild uns never comes to no harm. Then there was my brother Jim, he got hissself knocked on the head at Balaclava, the Roosians pretty soon done for he. A smartish chap a was."

"And the good-for-nothing escaped?" asked the officer.

"When I says good-for-nothing, I don't know as a was a bad un drough and drough," continued the serving-man, "I never had nothen to say agen en. He's coming home to-

morrow, hrose to be a officer, they say. I hreckon this yer town wun't be big enough to hold en."

"Conceited?"

"Well, there, 't was like this yer, he was rared above his vittles. He wouldn't bide nowhere. Master bound en to a lawyer. A wouldn't bide long with he. Then a bound to wold Dr. Maule, and darned if a didn't knock the wold chap down one night. Then a goes out in street and knocks the parson down and gets hissself penned up in station. Master he thinks he med so well knock Rooshians down while he's about it, so a sends en off to the war. Misable wild chap! Good night, sir, and thankee."

"Miserable wild chap!" laughed the officer to himself, as he strolled up and down and looked thoughtfully at the homely mill and house so strangely transformed by the festal lights. He looked at the sleepy little town sparkling out into midsummer midnight madness, the very church tower a pillar of light, now blue, now red, and now lilac, and the red flame of bonfires on the hills, leaping into the pale summer sky; until among the sparse slowly moving figures on the hill-road his quick eye detected an elderly man and woman and a slender girl whose golden hair gleaming in the lights made his heart beat.

He knew so well which way they would come in, not by the front door, but round by the lilac bushes to the kitchen, at the door of which stood Sarah looking up at the rain of rockets in the sky. Swift as a thought he glided round, unobserved by the servant, and then as they approached, stepped tranquilly forth to meet them.

"Sir," exclaimed the miller, stopping short when he saw him with something between defiance and welcome, "what might you be pleased to want?"

"Don't you—don't you know me?" faltered Philip with a hot pain in his eyes.

Jessie gave a little cry of delighted surprise, and Mrs. Meade rushed forward and clasped the stranger in her arms.

"Lord ha mercy!" exclaimed her husband at intervals, "this can't be Philip. Why, bless the boy," he added when his mother and sister had duly welcomed him, "Sir Arthur Medway could not have bred up a finer gentleman than he's made of himself."

There was little sleep at the mill that night, so much had to be related on both sides, but especially on Philip's; the dawn stole in through the parlor window and made the candle-light pale, before anyone thought of going to bed.

"If you had but been a cavalry-soldier, Philip," Jessie said, "you might have been one of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, like Mr. Medway."

"Aye, and finely cockered up is young Mr. Medway," said Matthew, "enough to turn any young fellow's head."

"Lucky fellow! to be in that," Philip said. "Jessie, I have brought you a pet and one for father."

Mr. Meade's pet was a Russian poodle, a mass of black wool, with little beady eyes invisible beneath the long fell falling over its face. Jessie's an iron-gray cat on three legs, with one eye missing, a scarred body, and the worst temper ever known in a cat.

Sebastopol, as this unprepossessing animal was called, had belonged in her kittenhood to a young boy-bugler, who had done a very gallant thing. All the officers commanding a detachment of his regiment had been killed in a night skirmish, Philip told them, and the men, without leaders, were firing upon one another in the darkness, when this brave lad ran into a field out of range of the ambushed enemy, sounded the assembly, and so collected and saved the scattered remnants of the band. One morning during the terrible winter before Sebastopol the brave little bugler was found dead of cold and privation, with the kitten clasped to his breast and mewling piteously. The kitten had been cherished for the boy's sake, and had seen so much active service with her regiment that eight of her nine lives and all of her sweet temper had been lost in battle.

Jessie's eyes sparkled at the recital of Sebastopol's history, no pet could have been more to her mind than this cross-grained scarred creature, whom she took at once to her heart, heedless of growls and scratches, and cherished forever.

She would have liked Philip to relate his Crimean adventures from morning till night, they never tired her.

Sometimes of an evening in the garden while Mr. Meade smoked, Mrs. Meade and Jessie were busy with their needles, and perhaps a neighbor had dropped in, and Philip was gradually beguiled into Crimean reminiscences, he was startled by the intensity of Jessie's absorbed blue eyes upon him, as she sat motionless in the background, her work lying forgotten in her lap, her slender hands clasped, her thoughts far away on battle-fields or among the hazards and horrors of the icy winter siege. There was a magnetism in the intent dream-hazed face which insensibly stole Philip's memories from him until he too forgot himself and wandered mentally

among those past scenes, reproducing them almost involuntarily like one in a magnetic sleep. Balaclava was Jessie's favorite battle. Philip had seen something of the charge of the six hundred, and heard more of Claude Medway's gallant deed in entering the deadly defile a second time to rescue a wounded trooper under the fierce fire. The grand charge of the heavy brigade appealed less to her imagination, and Philip had not seen anything of the Russian cavalry charge and its splendid repulse by the Ninety-third Highlanders, the redoubtable "thin red line."

"I don't know, Mr. Randal," observed Mr. Cheeseman, the corn-dealer, during one of these social evenings, "that I should care myself to go into battle. Shouldn't like the feel of cold steel in my inside. And when my time comes, I should like it all done proper on my bed, doctors and nurses and clergymen, and a respectable funeral at the end. I can't abide being hurried; never could. Somehow it don't seem decent to go out of the world in such a deuce of a hurry. Our family always died respectable in their beds and left everything regular down to the last farthing and the hatbands. Now I dare say you went into Alma as bold as a lion and took no more notice of cannon-balls flying about than if they'd been snowflakes. I should a turned as white as the stem of this pipe."

"I don't know what color I turned, Mr. Cheeseman," replied Philip, "but I do know that I felt awfully queer that day when we crossed the Alma. I had never been under fire before, and it is a precious queer feeling, I can tell you. When the enemy opened fire from the heights we began to advance. My knees shook, and there was a sound like the sea in my ears. I seemed to see them all at home and know what they were doing at the moment, and I remembered everything I had ever done. We marched into a confusion of roaring cannon, rattling musketry, galloping *aides*, clouds of smoke and dust with flashes of fire and gleams of steel between; we had a general sense of moving masses, like the moving of the sea. While we were advancing I was all right, quite happy. Then we halted and I felt queer and shivery again. There we stood for a good hour, and the battle came surging gradually upon us like a great sea-wave. A laughing Irishman next me was twitting me with being afraid, when he fell-shot dead at my feet, the smile still on his face and his blood splashing over me. Soon the fire was so hot that we shifted out of range. Just then our colonel rode down the ranks, pale, and with his bridle-hand quivering, brave

man as he was and proved himself there. He bid us stand firm a little longer; while he was speaking, a shot rolled him and his charger together in the dust. He was soon on his feet and finished his speech, only the horse was killed. Then at last we advanced under fire of a battery, holding our own fire. The movement was like a drink of wine to us, it gave us new life. By this time I knew all the different sounds of the different kinds of shot and shell, and started at nothing. At last the order to fire came and we went mad I suppose, for I remember nothing after the first splendid excitement but a hurly-hurly of smoke and shot and the gleam of bayonets, sabres, and men's eyes. Then gradually through the thunder of guns and quick crack of muskets pierced bugle calls, words of command, shrieks of horses, groans of men unheard before. Then English cheers and French shouts became more frequent, battery after battery was silenced, and before evening we were firing at the Russians' backs, and stumbling over the arms they threw away as they ran."

"And so the battle of the Alma was won after four hours' fighting," added Mr. Meade. "'Twas a September 26, 1854, a fine sunny autumn day. Jessie was out blackberrying."

"Dear heart, yes," added Mrs. Meade; "and toward night it thundered and made me think of Russian guns. Balaclava day was later. There's elderberry wine now, I made that day; walnuts were turning ripe, and there was a dahlia show in Marwell Park. Mr. Ingleby was there, and his brother lying dead on the field and Mr. Medway badly wounded."

"Victory's a fine thing," said Mr. Cheeseman, settling himself cosily in his chair in the sunshine, "though I'd as soon lose as win, I reckon, if I'd run my head agen a cannon-ball. I'll warrant you slept well after Alma, Mr. Randal."

"We did, Mr. Cheeseman. But you wouldn't sleep to-night, Jessie, if I told you what the field looked like. We lost three officers that day, our whole force only lost twenty-six, and our ranks were terribly cut up. After all, the roll-call is the worst part of an engagement. It turns you sick to hear name after name and no answer."

"And were you as frightened at Balaclava, Philip?" Jessie asked with some disdain.

"No, Miss Fire-Eater," he replied with a grave smile; "but I never have and never shall go into action without horror and dread, though one feels a terrible joy in the thick of it. Wait till you hear a wounded horse cry, Jessie. And that is a small part of the horror of war."

"Why not sell out and settle to business, young sir, if you don't like war?" suggested Mr. Cheeseman.

"The very reason not to sell out, Mr. Cheeseman; why a soldier's chief duty is to promote peace."

"Well now, Phil, that's a queer notion," objected Mr. Meade.

"Besides, my dear," added Mrs. Meade, bewildered, "how can you love your enemies when you shoot them?"

"Why, that makes us love them all the better, mother. You always like a fellow you've licked. And you only care to fight good fellows. Those Russians are splendid fellows, much finer soldiers than the French. Well worth licking they are."

"Well! I don't know but I'd as soon you didn't take a fancy to me, if that's how you show it," commented Mr. Cheeseman.

"But it was our duty to fight the Russians and theirs to defend their country," contended Philip; "so how could there be bad blood between us. Why, mother, one day in some public gardens, I heard a Russian cavalry officer on crutches with a bandaged head, ask an Englishman in plain clothes to what regiment some Highlanders belonged. 'To the Ninety-third Highlanders, my own,' he replied. 'Then, sir,' said the wounded Russian, 'permit me the honor of shaking hands with you. I belonged to the brigade of cavalry whose charge you repulsed so grandly at Balaclava. I had the honor of being wounded in that charge. I at once recognized the uniform.' Now, mother, if that isn't loving an enemy, I don't know what is."

Philip's cheek glowed as he spoke, he looked at Jessie, who turned away, her eyes full of tears, a sense of the chivalry of war and the grandeur of human emotion rushing over her like a billow.

Mr. Cheeseman left; and Philip was moved by the electric glance of Jessie's tear-bright eyes; his heart went out to her. What could this helpless creature, pathetic in her childish beauty, know of the stern realities of life? Surely this fragile thing was made to know only its joys and graces, to be cherished and guarded; tears should never cloud the innocent blue eyes, or sorrow bow the bright golden head. He could not take Jessie seriously; she was a sublimated kind of toy to him, a thing akin to kittens, flowers, and sunbeams. He drew her on to his knee and passed his hand through the waves of her bright falling hair, and her beauty, which he had hitherto enjoyed without considering, like sunshine and field-

flowers, suddenly became apparent to him as something distinctive, full of promise for the future.

"And pray, miss, what do you learn at Miss Blushford's," he asked, "besides spelling and needlework?"

"Manners," Jessie returned, demurely, and tossing back her golden mane into his face, she sprang to the rescue of the maimed veteran cat, who was drawn up on a flower-bed in two arches of bristling fur, supported on three indignantly quivering legs, and swearing lustily at the impertinent personalities of the Russian poodle, whose tail was wagging mischievously.

"She will be a woman soon," he said, half to himself, while his thoughts vainly strove to fashion some future for her.

"Turned fifteen," added Mr. Meade, with tranquil contentment, "knows French and most things."

The sun had long set, but the evening was so balmy that they still lingered in the garden among the scents of sweet-briar, roses, and honeysuckles, and Mr. Meade, after some consideration, filled another pipe and watched the flight of a bat with a look of unutterable enjoyment.

It was a time of intense happiness and pride to him, the happiest time he had ever known; though, on the whole, as he had told his wife, he had had a happy life.

His heart swelled with love and pride whenever his eyes rested on Philip and Jessie; such a pair, he thought, could not be matched. He had reared the boy to be a gentleman, and there he stood, tall, straight, and strong, looking so distinguished in comparison with the simple burghers of Cleeve, not only an "officer and gentleman," but a full-blown hero with medalled breast and a halo of glory, a little lion to Cleeve, fêted and made much of. This lionizing, together with Mr. Meade's undisguised pride and desire to show him off, would have been a trial to any youth not wholly destitute of modesty, or of that keen dislike to make one's self ridiculous which so often does duty for that gracious quality, and was sometimes little short of an affliction to Philip, who, as his adopted father dimly perceived, had inherited fine instincts.

Jessie, too, had been bred for a position far above her parents', and was beginning to develop certain dainty ways and airy-graces that filled the simple old man with delighted admiration, and did not trouble him with any fear as to the incongruities and embarrassments such upbringing might produce in her future life, as it did Philip, whose eyes were now widely opened to much in this adopted home that he had earlier taken for granted.

Something, a jarring unlovely note in the harmony of thought or deed, had stirred such feelings in Philip on this very evening ; he strolled beneath the apple-trees with Jessie in the tender summer dusk, followed and enfolded by the old man's loving, proud gaze, with a vague pain at his heart. He stopped while Jessie bent toward the tall white lilies, shining in their virgin splendor through the pale dusk, beneath shadowy branches, and leant against a gnarled apple-tree, looking from Jessie's slender graceful figure to that of Matthew Meade, who was sitting in his shirt-sleeves and battered floury hat, just outside the best parlor window, through which Philip had heard his momentous dialogue with Sir Arthur Medway, with such strong heart-beats, years ago. A vision of Marwell Court with all its refined beauty and subdued splendor floated through his brain, the surroundings and companionships of such a home seemed more congenial, even more native to him than these with the inevitable jars. Was it fair to give such a choice to a child so young? Had he, perhaps, foolishly flung away his birthright, or bartered it for the pottage of a child's familiar associations? Certain ways, certain modes of speech peculiar to Stillbrooke Mill returned with irritating keenness to his mind ; he recalled bitterly certain social annoyances connected with his uncertain origin, as well as with his passage through the ranks. He was of age, the time of enlightenment was come ; perhaps when he knew his parentage he might claim a different rank.

These thoughts flashed swiftly along his mind and flushed his cheek as he stood, but when he looked into the kind, worn face of his friend of friends, and remembered the workhouse, from which he had rescued him, and when his eyes rested on the homely figure of the woman who had so fenced his childhood with love and care, his heart smote him and a rush of shame and self-loathing crimsoned his face. "Miserable snob that I am!" he murmured, his native loyalty rising up in arms.

Then taking Jessie's hand he strolled up the turf path and resumed his seat on the bench by his parents' side and joined in their homely talk, till Jessie and her mother went in-doors and Matthew rose in the warm light that now fell from the cloudless summer moon, and stretched himself with an air of content, meaning to follow them. But Philip, who had been silent and pensive for a while, detained him. "Father," he said hurriedly, "I am of age. I ought to know now who and what I am."

"You're a officer in Her Majesty's army, a gentleman born, a gentleman by profession, and a gentleman by act, and a

credit to them that reared you," replied Mr. Meade. "If I was you I wouldn't ask no more."

"You told me to wait till I came of age and I waited," Philip persisted.

"Look here, Phil," said Mr. Meade. "It's like this. Everything is pleasant now; your mother and me is glad to have you home safe and sound after the war; 'tis like one of them warm spells in the fall; it can't last. Let's enjoy ourselves while the Lord gives us the chance."

"Then it is very bad?"

Mr. Meade paused awhile, his unwonted flow of speech deserting him, then replied, slowly: "Family things is like this, they stir folk up in their feelings—and there's bygones—let sleeping dogs lie, say I."

"I ought to know my true position, it may influence my actions," urged Philip.

"It won't do that, Phil, I can answer for that. I'm bound to tell ye, my boy, I knows that well enough. But wait a bit longer, say six months. It's nothing but right you should know somewhen. There's happy times for most of us," he added, earnestly, his gray eyes deepening and his homely figure taking on dignity, "but they're none too plentiful. We mustn't look for them. We've had trouble and care, Heaven knows, and it do seem ungrateful when the Almighty as plain as tells us to be quiet and comfortable for we to go and stir up things has been laid by for years and years and no harm done. Who knows but trouble may be nigh."

Philip was silent; he felt that he must respect this mood, but he wished to be reassured on one subject. He had recently been informed by a local banker that a small capital of several hundred pounds had been placed to his account by an anonymous person, and he required of Mr. Meade to tell him if he knew whence this came.

Mr. Meade thought he could give a pretty shrewd guess, he replied, with a twinkle in his eye, and on being further questioned, assured him that in taking the money he was taking the due of no one else and in no way injuring another; that the source of the money was strictly honorable and such as he would in nowise ever regret or wish under any circumstances to repudiate.

With these assurances Philip was content, and the remainder of his leave sped in untroubled happiness. There were boating excursions and hay-makings. Cousin Jane and her family came to Stillbrooke, and the miller's family passed long sunny afternoons at Redwood's Farm. There were pleasant,

long-drawn twilights in the garden when the day's work was done, long chats between whiles while the miller leant over his half-door at the mill and Philip lounged outside with his pipe and the throb of the wheel and hushing rustle of the water made soft music. There was pride and pleasure at seeing the lad made much of. Perhaps there was a little jealous fear in Mr. Meade's anxiety to hear how Philip had fared at Marwell, where he dined and slept; Claude Medway, who had renewed the boyish acquaintance in the Crimea, being at the court just then. Jessie, too, showed great interest in this visit, and liked to hear Philip's generous boyish enthusiasm for the older Claude, who had displayed a dashing almost reckless bravery on many occasions, a gay and thoughtless daring on which the more imaginative and therefore sensitive Philip loved to dwell.

"Yes, Medway is a fine officer, and a good fellow," he said one day, "fast, but then those hussars do go the pace."

"What is fast, Philip?" asked Jessie, and Philip only pinched her delicate ear and laughed. He was very sorry when the time came to bid good-by, and the way in which she clung to him with little cries of "Ippie, Ippie," at parting haunted him for days.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE BALL.

By the time the days were beginning to lengthen again in 1857 people had almost ceased to think of the Crimea and all its terrible lessons to the nation, no one dreamed of the more dreadful storm now lowering on the far East, and in part occasioned by eastern misconception of England's strength in the Crimea. Even in India, where the first low mutterings of thunder had already been heard, some strange madness lulled the English to a perilous sense of security and blinded them to the handwriting blazing on the wall before them.

At home people went on their usual comfortable half-hearted way, thinking, in spite of their recent rude awakening from dreams of universal peace, that the mad race for wealth was not again to be interrupted, but that every man was to sit in the shadow of his own shop-front and eat the fruit of pale factory-hands' drudgery, untroubled. People grumbled impartially at everything over their breakfast newspapers, reconstructing or destroying the British Constitution or propping up the venerable fabric according to the several mandates of their several journals, but not dreaming of more war.

One night at the end of January, Philip Randal, now a fine, well-set up lad, with bright, keen eyes and a healthy brown face, found himself, very smart in his ball uniform, at a large military ball, trying very hard to look bored, but in reality full of enjoyment. He liked dancing and ladies' society, and was fresh to gayeties of this kind. He wished the deficiency in ladies had been on the other side, but then, as so many of those gold laced, stalwart warriors lounging languidly against walls were too vain, too lazy, or too clumsy to dance, it did not matter much, since no lady is ever too tired, too bored, or too vain to dance, so he might have his share of partners, ineligible as he was.

He thought of his little sister at home, when he saw so many fresh girl-faces in the brilliant whirl of dancers, bright as rolling sunset-clouds turning before him to the accompaniment of love-laden waltz music on a fine string band.

There are people who despise waltz-music; have they ever been young? ever danced? ever flung themselves like swimmers upon those bright waves of melody, and stayed only by the pressure of one young hand upon another young waist, floated far away into ideal regions, rising and falling in spirit with the ebb and flow of the music? Besides that poetry of motion which quivers so strongly through waltz music that it is pain to sit still at its sound, it has all the tenderness, the sadness, the infinite unconscious longing, the ethereal exaltation of youthful love. Young people listen to waltz music with yearning, looking into the vague rich future; old people listen with yearning and recall the golden past.

"I am never merry when I hear sweet music," might be said of Strauss's or Gungl's waltzes. But the sadness seems pleasanter than mirth.

Philip listened, a pensive delight irradiating and refining his features, which inclined to a square solidity, and, leaning against his door-jamb, imagined Jessie one of that bright crowd of flower-decked, bejewelled ladies, whose filmy draperies floated mistily about them and merged into one broad mass of color with gold-laced scarlet and blue officers, with the varied facings and decoration distinguishing hussars and lancers, artillery and engineers, cavalry and infantry, the brilliance toned down here and there by the black-blot of a civilian dress. What a different blending of color some of those present had seen at Balaclava, when the heavy brigade wedged themselves through the gray mass of Russian troops! Some of the dancers present had then starred the Russian gray with English scarlet.

Philip had left a two-days' old letter on his mantelpiece.

"DEAR OLD IPPIE," it began, "do write oftener. Four of Miss Blushfords are still in love with you, five with the new curate (not a quarter as nice as Mr. Ingleby), and two with the drawing-master. They are such sillies, they steal his pencil-chips, and even his pencils, for keepsakes. He is always pleased with my drawings, so I mean to be a famous painter. What geese those officers must be! How glad I am that you pretended to think the donkey they put in your cot was Captain Hare, and took possession of his room instead. Father and mother are quite well; so is Sebastopol. I leave school this half. Your affectionate sister,

"JESSIE MEADE."

"They want me to be confirmed this spring, but I don't want to be good yet. I should like some fun first."

What a baby the sweet child was! Yet she would soon be a woman, though always a tender, slight creature, a thing to be protected. And what was to become of her socially? The more he thought of it the more impossible her position seemed. How could that dainty blossom-like creature dance with such rough fellows as her cousin, Roger Plummer, even if dancing were in vogue in that set? and by what possible door could she be admitted to more refined circles? It had been better, he sometimes thought, if the child had been taught dairy and housework in place of Mangnall's Questions, French, and piano-playing; her hands would in that case have been rougher, her susceptibilities blunter, her face not less sweet, and her heart as pure; Roger Plummer and young editions of Mr. Cheeseman would not then have jarred upon her, she would then have no more thought of quarrelling with her place in life than a flower does.

“A violet by a mossy stone half hidden from the eye.”

She would have blossomed sweetly, and as sweetly faded, untroubled and unnoticed, in her place. It never struck him that Jessie's exquisite grace and refinement were as native to her as the perfume to the violet, and widely different from Miss Blushford's thin and spurious veneer of history and arithmetic, her feeble pencil drawings, piano-strummings, and petty proprieties of speech and manner. When he took stock of the pretty young faces present and observed the ways of their owners, he felt that Jessie would do herself no discredit among them, he was not sure that many could surpass her.

That one of those young faces surpassed not only Jessie's but every other in the room, he was perfectly sure. He watched the slight young figure belonging to that flower-face, as it glided through the mazes of the waltz, with a deepening glow in his dark gray eyes, and a strange new fearful joy thrilled him when her soft floating drapery swept him in a sudden surge of the dance. A friend spoke to him, unheard, smiled at his absorbed earnest gaze, and passed on.

“How are you, Randal?” said a hussar captain, sauntering up to him later on, but Philip continued to gaze at the surging tide of waltzers, grave, rapt, unconscious, until the question was repeated, and the hussar, languidly smiling, laid a hand on the lad's shoulder.

“Eh? oh? How are you, Medway?” he exclaimed, starting and flushing. “I didn't hear you come up.”

"Or see me, too hard hit," he returned, his beautiful blue eyes full of mirth. "What is her name?"

"Legion," he returned, quickly. "Look, Medway, there's not a really plain or ill-dressed woman in the room to-night."

Captain Medway smiled benevolently and lifted his eyebrows. "Youthful enthusiasm, fine thing, refreshing," he said. "Awfully hot to-night, frightful crush, eh? Don't you dance?"

"Rather."

"Want a partner? Know my cousin, Miss Maynard? Girl in white over there?"

Philip tried to look indifferent and not blush; "I—ah think I *have* met Miss Maynard," he stammered, "I daresay she's forgotten; besides—ah—her card will be full by this time."

"Oh, come along, look, she's sitting down, introduce you again," replied Captain Medway, amused at the subdued eagerness on the lad's honest brown face.

"Oh! Mr. Randal is an old acquaintance," said the pretty dark-eyed girl, in a low voice with a subdued warble in it, on his introduction. "I am so sorry," she added with genuine regret, "not one dance left. Unless—" she paused, looking at her cousin.

"Unless for once I'm magnanimous and give up. No—let me see," taking her card. "I'm down for eleven, shall I substitute Mr. Randal's name, Ada?"

"Thank you." Two gray eyes and two dark ones rested gratefully upon Claude Medway's face, Ada Maynard floated away with her partner, and Medway's well-built, well-carried figure passed slowly on with a certain princely grace, leaving Philip full of young gratitude and admiration.

When the band struck up the first plaintive chords of No. 11, Philip was already at Miss Maynard's side, eager to claim her promise at the first moment possible.

Two gliding steps and a turn, and they were off, borne away and away far from the prose of life, lost upon the fairy sea of that enchanted music, rising and falling upon the bright waves of its yearning melody, unconscious of physical being and motion, because of their very intensity and perfection, isolated in a common beatitude, they two alone, each revolving round the other as a sole centre and source of motion, as two stars cast into space free of any solar system, might do. At last, as if by common consent, they paused, breathless, flushed, radiant, and Philip guided his partner to a seat beneath a trophy of arms and flags, into which she sank smiling, while he leant

against a Union Jack above her, and, opening her fan, used it gently on her behalf.

"I sometimes wonder if there will be dancing in Heaven," sighed Miss Maynard, who was still in her teens.

"You dance so well, no wonder that you enjoy it," he replied, wondering at the glory of the rich dark eyes, and the curled mazes of the deep black hair and the sweet curving of the warm red lips, "I suppose you dance a great deal?"

"Oh! no. I am only just out. This is only my second ball. And it will be the last, I am afraid."

"Surely not. Why should it be so?"

"My last at home, I mean. We go out to India, mother and I, next week," she sighed.

Philip sighed too. "I am sorry," he said, after a pause, "no more chance for me of another dance with you." He left off using the fan and looked dreamily at the bright moving crowd with a sudden disenchantment. "Poor little butterfly," he thought, "you will be snapped up the moment you land." Then she would be a flower-hovering butterfly no more; but a gentle little hearth cricket, guarded and sheltered by some strong man. Cherished or crushed, he wondered, with a sudden fear, as he turned and looked at the slight fragile form and delicate face. Could sorrow or suffering touch a thing so fair and tender? The thought was as preposterous as painful. Why, she would fade at the first touch of pain as a rose-leaf shrivels at the first breath of frost. Sunshine and soft airs should be hers through life.

The waltz music was still rising and falling in golden wavelets, Philip and his charming partner were resting after another turn in a palm-shaded alcove talking the light nothings to which young voices and mutually charmed eyes lend enchanted meaning, when a dark shadow fell upon them from an approaching figure, and the repeated utterance of his name at last aroused Philip's attention. He took a paper handed to him by a mysterious figure which glided swiftly away and was lost in the crowd. Miss Maynard turned her head, seeing his attention was thus claimed and looked at the brilliant figures fitfully seen dancing between the palm-leaves for a long space.

When at length she turned her face toward Philip, his head was resting against the draped flags, his face had a bluish tint and his eyes the amazed stare of a wounded animal.

"You are ill!" she exclaimed; "what can I do?"

"No, no," he said, recollecting himself at the sound of her voice. "But it should have come before, hours before. Too late now, too late."

She read on the paper he showed her, "Your mother is dying. Come."

"And I cannot go till to-morrow!" he said.

"You can go at once. A mail train passes through at two. It is not much past one now. If you are quick you can get leave and catch it. My brother has often caught it."

He started up at once and pushed through the whirling crowd. The music was all discords now, the people seemed spectres, bright eyes mocking phantoms, the flowers poisonous, the lights burned blue and baleful. He had been dancing and fooling while his mother lay dying.

His partner gazed after his retreating figure until it was lost in a maze of floating draperies and brilliant colors, and the tears gradually filled her eyes. "Poor fellow!" she murmured, "poor boy! Has he a sister? or any one to care for him? I wish he had just said good-night."

Philip was able to obtain leave at once, and before long he had torn off his gay ball uniform, put on plain clothes, sprung into the mail train and was rushing swiftly through the darkness, a dreadful terror tearing at his heart.

The train moved too slowly for him, flying past fields and woods, farms and hamlets, and park-girdled mansions, all covered up and hidden beneath the mirk as the future is hidden beneath the shadows of uncertainty, the throb-throb of the engine beating time in his brain to the melody of that last waltz.

It was a cold night, he was glad to draw his coat-collar round his ears, and shivered in spite of his thick rug. It was not so pleasant to look out into the blank depths of surrounding night as into Ada Maynard's eyes.

"All the spirit deeply dawning in the dark of hazel eyes,"

was the line that came to his memory and sung itself to the dance music.

And amid all the thoughts crowding upon him at this first shock of bereaval, in the thousand memories, tender, happy, and sad, he still saw the bright face uplifted and heard the clear voice speaking, saw the white muslin and blush-roses, the rounded arms, rich dark hair, and hazel eyes lit up by the

dawning spirit, and was glad in a way, though his heart bled and his conscience reproached him, as he thought of things he had done and left undone, and wondered why he had not been more tender and dutiful to her who had been more than mother to him and had never been harsh even in reproof.

It was too late now ; it always is too late when we think of these things with vain regret sharpened by the keen-edged pain of loss.

The engine throbbed on to the melody of that last love-burdened waltz, stars passed in solemn shining procession over the heavens, until the gray wintry dawn paled them and the chill earth showed ghostly and desolate in the cold light.

The sun had dispersed the mists and was shining with cold radiance, like a smile which conceals a sorrow, and the forenoon was well advanced when he reached Cleeve, and took a fly in his haste to reach the Mill. It looked peaceful and pleasant when he drove up, the mill-wheel was turning with its familiar sound, scattering the diamond spray over the still sun-lit pool, the pigeons were wheeling about with clanging wings and iridescent breasts, the dogs barked cheerfully, a hen loudly announced that she had laid an egg, snow-drops gleamed white in the garden-borders, the window-panes sparkled in the sunshine, and Philip's heart gave a joyful leap ; for the blinds were not down ; his mother lived.

In a moment he was in the parlor, where Jessie was dozing by the fire after a long night of watching. She sprang up with a stifled cry to meet him, her eyes and mouth marked with purple shadows and her face pale as the snow-drops in the garden.

"My kitten ! My poor kitten !" cried Philip, using his pet name for her. Then he sat down, drawing her on to his knee and rocking her softly to and fro as if she were again the baby he had so often hushed to sleep, and Jessie cried as any baby might have done.

Cousin Jane had opened the door softly and shut it again. "Poor things !" she said, "let them have their cry out, 'twill do them a power of good."

"But you must go to her. She has been wanting you all night," said Jessie, suddenly starting up.

Then Dr. Maule and Cousin Jane came in, the latter with red eyes and haggard face, the former vigorously taking snuff and swearing beneath his breath.

"Is there no hope, doctor?" Philip asked ; "can nothing be done?"

“Nothing, nothing, I tell you,” he replied, testily, “keep quiet and don’t make a row. Not that anything matters to her, poor soul. Confound you, Philip,” he added, “I ain’t a man of science, though I know more than you think; but all the doctors in the world can’t help her now!”

At this Mrs. Plummer began to cry again and unnecessarily besought Philip and Jessie to calm themselves, though they were both unmoved in their crushing sorrow.

“Now ma’am, stop that!” growled the doctor, who was himself shedding copious tears, “and take care of that girl. Let her cry, but make her eat.” And he bustled off, promising to look in again. “As if there weren’t plenty of tiresome old women to spare in the town, without taking Mrs. Meade,” he grumbled as he went.

“She slipped on an apple-paring on the stone steps and hurt her spine, poor dear,” explained Mrs. Plummer, when he was gone. “I said to her only last Tuesday week, ‘Martha,’ I said, ‘that untidy hussy ’ll be the death of you some day.’ And so she was,” she added with a satisfied air. “But her mind is clear, my dear. And she wants you. Keep up before her, there’s a good lad, do.”

When Philip reached his mother’s room, there was no more need to admonish him to be calm, for the sight before him effectually quieted him, and the memory of that day always lived in his mind as a solemn, sweet time of rest and peace.

The spring sunshine poured itself unhindered into the room; Jessie had placed a bunch of snow-drops, “fair maids of February,” she called them, in her mother’s sight; Sebastopol winked comfortably with her only eye before the fire; and Mrs. Meade herself, the centre of all the sorrow, smiled peacefully from her pillow. It was so strange, so solemn to Philip to find his mother idle; it seemed impossible that the household wheels could run without her aid. But for this unnatural stillness, she did not differ from her usual self, and talked calmly of many little things she wished done when she should have started on her long journey.

She was content and thankful to be spared a long illness. “Where there’s sickness,” she said, “it upsets a house. And all’s ready. My wedding sheets, Jane, you can lay your hand on. One for me and one to be kept against Meade’s burying. Yon’ve been a good husband, Matt,” she added later; “we’ve seen trouble together and we’ve had mercies. I’ve been over sharp at times, my dear; I set too much store on having things clean and tidy about me and men do make such a litter in a house. But you was always careful for a man, my

dear, and shut doors after ye, and I wish my tongue had been softer."

At the close of the short sunshiny day she fell asleep, and when she woke, wandered a little.

"Mansions, many mansions," she murmured, "but I could do with the littlest house, so I could keep it clean and fresh for the angels to go in and out of and the four we lost."

Then she slept again, and Philip with gentle violence drew Jessie from the room.

CHAPTER III.

A CRUEL BLAST.

The bright late-winter sunshine continued, but its softness wore away, there was a cold fierce unrelenting brilliance in the blank breadth of light pouring from the cloudless sky, it was that treacherous radiance through which the east wind stings with unsuspected sharpness ; icicles made fine filigree work round the mill-pond and depended from the bridge arches and the mill-wheel, the roads were like iron, the great willow on the bank shuddered in the keen wind, and complained audibly as if against some conscious cruelty ; all the little eager buds, which had been pushing too hastily forward in the genial air, stopped in their sheltering cases, rebuked and silent, and many little birds whose courtship had already made considerable progress, were obliged sorrowfully to postpone the wedding day, and drooped, disappointed and songless bunches of feathers, upon the dry, crackling boughs.

This keen cruel wind raved exultingly over the open and exposed cemetery ; it lifted the pall from Mrs. Meade's coffin and tossed the clergyman's surplice irreverently about him and fluttered the leaves of his book ; it played with Philip Randal's thick curly hair, and whistled derisively through the gray thin locks on Mr. Meade's uncovered head. But neither Philip nor his father heeded the cold wind in the bitter blast of bereaval that beat upon them, as they stood by the yawning grave, which swallowed up Philip's childhood, and buried Matthew Meade's youth and early manhood, the struggles of life's noon and the soft sunbeams of declining years, making a dead silence of more than half his memories. He shivered while they drove slowly home, and scarcely took any notice when Jessie led him to an arm-chair by the blazing fire she had made and gave him some hot spiced drink. He continued to shiver, and refused food ; it was too evident that the bitter wind had struck home. Cousin Jane, in whose hands he was now the gentlest of lambs, had him put into a warm bed at dusk and dosed him with various homely remedies of her own.

“Dear heart,” she said after her last visit to him that night, “I never thought to feel that loving to Matt Meade; many a spar we’ve had together, to be sure. But to see him lying there, poor lamb, and taken’ whatever you give en, as meek as a babe, ’tis enough to melt the heart of a stone. And I’m sure I freely forgive him all—not that I didn’t give him as good as he sent. Dear, dear, I do think I never done your poor father justice, Jessie. It isn’t every man would take on like that for a wife, and it’s not a many I seen took so bad with a chill all of a sudden,” here Mrs. Plummer paused to cry with a cheerful sense of the value of her physic and nursing, and of Mr. Meade’s double virtue both in falling ill and in appreciating it.

“I never yet could be called a croaker,” she added, “but I’ve seen that in Matthew Meade’s face to-day is only seen once.”

“Mrs. Plummer,” cried Philip, “don’t talk nonsense. Is this a proper way to speak before Jessie?”

“It shan’t be said that I didn’t prepare his family beforehand,” continued Mrs. Plummer, dolorously.

“I shall go for Maule at once,” said Philip, freeing Jessie’s slight and drooping form from the clasp in which he had taken it when he saw her stagger under her cousin’s words. “My poor Kitten, Father is upset, but there is nothing to fear.”

Philip’s words were too true, there was nothing either to fear or hope for Mr. Meade; the cold had struck to his vitals, and broken down as he was by the shock of his sudden sorrow he had not strength to throw it off, but succumbed at once.

Four days after Mrs. Meade’s funeral, Philip and Jessie were watching by his bed in silence, as the evening was closing in.

Mr. Meade had passed from delirium to stupor, and had lain unconscious for many hours; but now it seemed to Philip, as the firelight played on the sick man’s features, that a light of intelligence was also playing fitfully upon them, and that the eyes gazed wistfully with a gleam of recognition and showed a mental struggle passing within.

“Do you know me father?” he asked, bending down and speaking softly.

“Philip,” he replied, with a faint smile; the effort of speaking overcame him and for a moment or two he relapsed into his stupor. Philip’s heart throbbed; he made a sign to Jessie, but she did not heed it. She was reclining in an arm-chair on the other side of the hearth, her head

drooped on her shoulder and her eyes closed. He could not bear to break her slumber, even with words of hope. So the silence throbbed on fitfully, marked by the light, thin crackling of flames, the faint fall of little cinders, and the tapping of a rose-spray on the window-pane.

Philip had laid his strong pink hand on the brown purple-veined one lying on the coverlet, and felt his father's ebbing life-beats more strongly beneath the welcome touch, while the death-hazed eyes continued to gaze with dumb appeal into his.

"Dear father, do you want anything?" he asked. "Jessie is here, asleep in the chair."

"Money," the sick man murmured faintly. "All for you. Speculations—losses—sell the mill."

"I understand," Philip replied, in a soothing voice; "but you will be well again soon and set the mill going. Listen; it is going now." But even as Philip spoke the familiar throb, throb of the mill ceased, the wheel stood still and the men went home for their Sunday rest.

In the meantime the Miller spoke brokenly of mortgages, of his will, of which Philip was joint executor with Mr. Cheeseman, of Jessie, who was to be under their guardianship and that of Mrs. Plummer; he seemed to gather strength as he spoke, and, having taken some restorative and asked Philip to raise him to a sitting posture, recovered his faculties in a brief flare-up of his flickering life.

The precious moments flew; but Philip could not bring himself to rouse Jessie from the sleep so long denied her. He had so much to hear in that gleam of consciousness for Jessie's sake and must still keep back the burning long-repressed desire to learn the secret of his birth which would otherwise die with Matthew Meade. He wished that on his return from the Crimea his father had not persuaded him to wait a little and consider whether it was worth while to know a secret his young mother had taken such precautions to keep and which a curious chance alone had revealed to his adopted father.

In the stirring days of the war the question of his birth had troubled him little, but the long months of garrison life at home had brought it strongly before him and he had lately decided that he must know it at the first opportunity. And now the last opportunity was slipping away with every beat of the ebbing pulse in his hand.

"Poor little Jessie!" her father sighed. "It's hard leaving her. And no mother. But you'll be good to her. It troub-

les me that I was not the husband I might have been. I didn't consider how she was set on having things clean and straight, poor soul. I was rough at times—yes; I was rough." His eyes closed and Philip feared that the golden sands were run out. But the faint pulse beat on and suddenly quickened when Matthew Meade opened his eyes with a wide appealing gaze. "She set her heart on it, poor soul," he continued, "though she never thought you was to be left alone and not relations enough to live together. Many a time we talked of it. Philip, you must marry Jessie," he concluded, in tones so strong and urgent as almost to exhaust his ebbing breath, which came gaspingly and then seemed to stop. At the word "marry," which opened an entirely new world of thought and feeling to him, Philip started so violently and suddenly that he almost dropped the hand clinging to his, shook a table by the bedside so that the bottles upon it rattled and a glass fell against them with a faint crash that recalled the intelligence to the dying eyes fixed on Philip's face. The crystalline tinkle broke through Jessie's light slumber, she started up and came forward just as Philip, with a half dazed look, replied in the affirmative.

"My maid," said Mr. Meade, taking her tremulous hand as she touched his in bending to kiss him with some broken words of joy that he was himself again. "I am going fast. But Philip will care for you. Look to him now—Jessie—you must marry Philip."

She could not speak, but she suffered her hand to be placed in Philip's, which closed warmly upon it. Her father held the joined hands in his tremulous clasp with silent content awhile, then he whispered "Promise."

They promised; the old man's fingers tightened on the two young hands; his eyes grew hazy; they saw nothing earthly in their blank gaze.

"Father!" cried Philip, "who am I? Tell me before you go."

The haze of death once more cleared away, the eyes once more brightened with intelligence and rested lovingly on the young man's face. "Philip," Mr. Meade replied with an effort. "Philip!"

The voice failed, the eyes clouded and remained fixed, the hand closed convulsively over those of the two young people. Just then the door opened softly and Mrs. Plummer stole noiselessly in, followed by Dr. Maule. They stood still arrested by the sight. Mrs. Plummer with uplifted hands and startled gaze, the doctor hastily taking a pinch of snuff. The fire blazed up with

sudden lustre—on Matthew Meade's unconscious features, Jessie's tumbled gold hair and tearful face, Philip's look of agony, and the two young living hands clasped in the stiffening fingers. Then it sank and left the group by the bed in shadow.

CHAPTER IV.

LEAVING THE OLD HOME.

The next few weeks left upon Jessie's mind a lasting impression of Philip, hollow-eyed and desperate, sitting before piles of papers and books, and sometimes breaking off to lean back in his chair, push his hands wildly through his hair until it literally stood on end, and gaze distractedly before him.

"Let me help you. I believe that I could at least do those things as well as you," she said once; "you are not made for business."

"You poor dear kitten," he replied with a tender smile, "I wonder what *you* are made for, except to be taken care of."

Then he plunged into the papers again, troubled not so much by his supposed incapacity for business, as by the unpleasing revelations the papers yielded, and wondering what demon had tempted Mr. Meade to speculate so madly.

By the time he rejoined his regiment his labors were so far rewarded that he knew how Mr. Meade's affairs stood, and found that when all was arranged and the mill sold, they might still hope to rescue a small residuum for Jessie, as they eventually did.

But those things were not so quickly effected, and when he bid Jessie good-by it was with the assurance that he should constantly be running down to Cleeve to consult with Mr. Cheeseman and transact business.

As he left Cleeve farther and farther behind a great weight rolled from Philip's breast. The few weeks that had passed since that night of music and mirth when he had been so rudely awakened to the homely tragedy of life, had been too full of sorrow and care; his youth rebelled against them. When he drove toward the barracks and the familiar cheerful notes of a bugle rang out upon the clear air, all the suffering and care and death of the last weeks faded away like a bad dream. How cheery the smart step of a firing-party returning to barracks sounded. How pleasant it was to see the sentries pacing up and down, how gay were the red-coated

soldiers strolling to and from the barracks in thicker clusters near the gates, thinner farther off, like bees about the entrance of a hive.

A few days later he was searching for something he mislaid, rummaging among clothes and making confusion worse confounded, after the petulant fashion of male creatures under small discomforts, when he took the uniform worn at the ball and dashed it angrily on the floor. As it fell a small hard substance dropped from a pocket and rolled into a patch of sunlight with a ruddy scintillation from the sparkling facets of a jewel. He looked blankly at the glowing stone for a second, its rosy hue reflected in his face, and then picked it up remembering how it had flashed at the white throat of his pretty partner Miss Maynard. It was then set in a locket; it had fallen from its setting during the dance, and at her request he had searched for and found it and put it in his pocket for safety. He did not know much about jewels, but this one struck him as being large for a ruby, and Miss Maynard had expressed some concern about it. The thing was vexatious; the Maynards had sailed for India, he had no means of finding their address. By this time they were probably rounding the Cape, and by this time the intimate social relations on shipboard had no doubt done their work and Miss Ada had doubtless promised her butterfly affections to some fellow-passenger—some long-legged idiot with a sabre clanking at his heels, Philip reflected. He could do nothing but place the stone in safety and seize the first opportunity of restoring it to its owner. It lay in the palm of his hand, the brilliance flashing from its deep crimson heart, like a live thing. Dark rose red like joy and love, sparkling with the sparkle of wine and mirth, the shining gem seemed to disclose a new world to him. His hand thrilled so with vague desire that the jewel, lightly and imperceptibly quivering, shook back the sun-rays in a thousand sharp, bright flashes. Some dim recollections of magic in jewels, of fascination exercised upon men and women, by these fiery-hearted things came to him; was there not enchantment in this? Though he did not know it, blood had been shed for that stone's sake, it had flashed from the dim shrine of an Indian Temple upon dusky worshippers and strange heathen rites, had glowed in the turban of an Indian prince, had been stolen, swallowed, bought and sold, set and reset, given in love, given in tribute, before it came to deck the throat of a thoughtless girl, who lost it.

He held it long in his open palm, absorbed in a kind of

dream, then he closed his fingers over the red radiance and shut it away in a dark safe place.

“Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong,”

he said to himself, and his face was sad until he went out into the bright spring sunshine and thought of other things.

Jessie remained at the mill, clinging to the old empty nest, poor forlorn bird that she was. Bills announcing the sale of the furniture were pasted on the garden wall and the mill-front, but while the chairs and tables still remained, Jessie begged not to be moved.

It was now early April, the almond-tree by the gate spread a mass of pink blossom against the pale blue sky, violets and hyacinths were sweet in the borders, the flowering currant made a pungent fragrance in the sunshine and attracted the bees from the hives at the top of the garden—even the bees were to be sold. Jessie strolled over the little domain of which she had all her life been queen with an overflowing heart, bidding a mute farewell to her life-long friends, animate and inanimate. The garden, the arbor, in which her father had smoked on summer evenings, the strawberry-beds, the garden-plots she and Philip had called their own, the little house he had built in the wood-yard, the swing in the orchard, the flowers her mother had cultivated and loved, the pigeons and poultry, the row of bee-hives, all were beloved, all twined with life-long associations, they were part of herself, without them she would not longer be Jessie. She looked in at the grated dairy window and pictured her mother busy among the pans of thick creamed milk, or turning and working great golden masses of butter with a quick, deft hand; she would never see her any more; a stranger would stand there and desecrate the place with an alien touch. Jessie's throat swelled chokingly and she turned away, passing the mill, over the half-door of which she would never more see her father leaning, as she half expected to see him lean now. Past the mill, whence the soothing home-like throb, throb, still issued, though he was not there to set the familiar pulse going, she strolled into the meadow, full now of young innocent-faced daisies, where the stately willow drooped leafless above the clear water and the white swan glided over it, her pure plumage dazzling in the spring sunbeams. How often she had played or dreamed there, careless and happy in the willow's shade, watching the water striving with perpetual baffling to climb the wheel's always

turning stair, wasting and scattering itself in crystal spray in its fruitless endeavor. She used to be sorry for the baffled water till Philip laughed at her and showed her how the endeavor was not indeed fruitless, but set all the wheels and cogs going to grind the corn into meal for men's food. Others would watch the turning wheel, and pity the water's weary baffling, and she would be away and lonely among strangers; but Philip, dear Philip, was left—she was not all desolate. Then the singing of birds fell pleasantly on her ears, and she went back to the house, thinking that perhaps it was well she was to leave the old home, after all. She went in through the kitchen, where she sat awhile to talk to Sarah and to be comforted and companioned a little.

"I can't give up this yer dresser, Miss Jessie," Sarah said, "the years and years I've a scoured en kep en white. I be gwine to bid for he. You go on in and hev tea now, I've a made ye some scones, and there's a letter from Master Philip."

Jessie went into the parlor with something more of a dance in her step than it had had for a long time, and eagerly opened Philip's letter.

Poor Jessie! the letter was dropped on the table, the golden head was upon it, and she was crying bitterly. Philip was ordered to India!

He had kept it from her as long as he could, but he was coming down on the morrow and could not bear the telling by word of mouth, so broke it in the letter. He would remain in England as long as possible, not sailing in the troopship, but starting later, taking the short overland route and joining his regiment on its arrival at Calcutta.

He arrived in Cleeve on the day the mill was given over to the auctioneer, and saw Jessie in Miss Blushford's drawing room, feeling half guilty at leaving her.

"How well you are looking, child," he said with forced gayety; "why, I do believe you are grown."

He held her at arm's length, as if to get a better view of her, but his glance travelled no higher than her shoulders and she saw that there was a faint quiver on his lip.

"I am grown," she replied, "I have grown very fast this spring," Jessie's lip quivered too; neither of them knew what to say, the subject of the parting was too painful, they sat side by side on Miss Blushford's ample old-fashioned sofa which was covered with needle-work from past and present pupils, and looked sorrowfully at the well-saved carpet for some minutes.

"Jessie," said Philip at last, "it breaks my heart to think

of leaving you just now, but—I will not go if you tell me to stay.”

“But how can you help it?” she asked, surprised.

“I can sell out,” he replied.

“But if you sold out, Philip, what could you do?” Jessie asked, simply.

“Heaven knows. I might learn farming or some trade,” he answered; “anything would be better than to leave you if you felt it would be too lonely.”

“You must not sell out,” she said, gently. “You forget that you are going to be a great soldier. Why, you always hoped for India, Phil.”

“Yes,” he replied, still looking at the neat carpet, so seldom profaned by the steps of men, “if only I could be sure you were happy here, that no harm would come to you.” He paused and sighed, his heart was riven asunder by the two duties, one calling him abroad, one bidding him stay with Jessie. While away from her it had seemed comparatively easy to leave her, but now, in her presence and touched by the added sorrow he felt rather than saw in the child’s thin face, it seemed impossible. “If you could say that you didn’t much care—that you could make yourself happy for this year until you could come out to me—whatever we may wish—they refuse their consent to your marriage till you are eighteen.”

“I should think so,” she interrupted, a faint rose tingeing her transparent face. “It is no use to fret. You have to go to India, I have to stay here. After all, you may as well be in India as at Plymouth or Aldershot. You can’t very well live at Miss Blushford’s, you see. And I can’t very well live in barracks. Miss Blushford says it will improve my style to write to you by every mail. And you will be able to describe your tiger hunts and—oh! all the wonderful things you will do and see——”

Jessie’s eyes were full of tears though she was laughing, her voice broke into a little sob; but Philip’s heart grew light as he listened, grateful to her for taking it so easily and sparing him the lamentations that would have made things so much worse. Yet he wondered that she was so slightly constituted and could take things so lightly.

“I am glad at least to be able to see you settled at Miss Blushford’s,” he said; “she is a kind old woman and must of course be prim in her position, and that will be all the better, it would be impossible to place you in safer hands. Shall you like it, Jessie?”

It was a crime even to look out of the window in that house,

while to say one hated anything was shocking and unladylike ; she wondered if prisons could be more cramping ; but it was better than living altogether with Cousin Jane, her only alternative.

“I shall do very well here,” she replied ; “but you don’t know what it is to be a girl and be taken care of. If I were but a boy and could knock about as I liked !”

“You little rebel !” he exclaimed. “A precious pickle you would be as a boy ; you would want a thrashing a day at least.”

Before he left England, and resigned Jessie to the temporary care of her other guardians, they went together to the graves of their father and mother, which Jessie had made pleasant with flowers and greenery. As he stood there, Philip thought of all that they had done for him. But for Matthew Meade’s beautiful charity to an orphaned child-waif, what might his lot have been ? A workhouse boy, a nameless, homeless unit in that mass of shipwrecked humanity, untaught and unloved, what chance of even a decent life would have been his ?

He was glad now that he had chosen the lowly home at Stillbrooke rather than Marwell ; what would the more brilliant-seeming life have profited him if he had remained a comparative stranger to those two kind hearts, now stilled forever ?

Yet he must now be a nameless, kinless man ; his last forlorn hope that he might discover his own origin in looking through Mr. Meade’s papers was gone. He decided once for all to think no more of his dubious origin, from the knowledge of which, in spite of his efforts to learn it, he shrank, fearing dishonor. He felt that he ought to know, but since he had failed to find out from Matthew Meade, he would remain henceforth ignorant. But for the Medways, the secret would have died with Mr. Meade. Something more than pride or fear restrained him from consulting Sir Arthur Medway, who would probably conclude that Matthew Meade had told him all there was to know on his coming to man’s estate. And, after all, if there were any profit in knowing, they would surely have told him before.

All who had cared for him and his orphan sister lay there beneath the turf ; he must carve out a place in life of his own.

“My loss was greater than yours, Jessie,” he said, after a long silence ; “I owed them more.”

“Yes,” she replied, looking up from her flowers with a faint smile. “And I often thought they cared most for you. Especially father. They were so proud of you.”

“And I such a beast,” he thought.

Then he asked Jessie to renew the death-bed promise, and they clasped hands solemnly over the graves, and he put a ring on her finger.

“Oh! Philip,” she exclaimed, when they turned to leave the spot, “it is an opal ring.”

“Don’t you like opals?” he asked. “I thought you did; that is why I chose them.”

“Ah! but the bad luck!”

“Foolish child,” he said, tenderly, his heart going out to her in a rush of pitying love, “how can a true-love gift be unlucky?”

They sat alone together in Mrs. Plummer’s house till late that night, counting the minutes. Next morning they drove together to Cleeve station, whence Philip started for Dover, on his way to India.

Jessie stood on the platform by the carriage-door with him till the last moment; every tick of the station clock seemed to beat some life out of their throbbing hearts; they held each other’s hands, and when the last bell clanged and their hands were forced apart, the jangling strokes crashed on the two bruised young hearts. The pitiless engine panted away, Philip looked back till the bend of the road swallowed him up and he could no longer see Jessie, and the yearning gaze of each was met by vacancy.

Then Cousin Jane, who had been standing at a bookstall showering tears upon the monthly magazines, came bustling forward and bid Jessie make haste home to Miss Blushford’s.

“He’ll write from Dover to-night,” she said, “and that you’ll hev to-morrow. Then at Calais he’s to write, and at Paris. Dear, dear, what expense he’ll be at with postage, to be sure. Look up, Jessie, look up, ’t isn’t many of our sort can be engaged to a fine young officer like Philip.”

Jessie did not heed, she saw nothing but Philip’s vanishing face; it seemed as if her life had been violently wrenched from its place.

As for Philip, he felt that all that was most vital in him was left behind with Jessie, while he rushed on aimlessly into a blank, homeless void.

Yet one thought throbbed glowingly in his breast; this agony of yearning, this tenacious clinging of the heart, meant nothing less than love. He was quite sure now he should love her and no other to the end of his life.

CHAPTER V.

MISS BLUSHFORD'S ESTABLISHMENT FOR YOUNG LADIES.

In retrospect this year of Jessie Meade's life seemed five. She shot up several inches in height and her mental and moral growth kept pace with the physical. The utter destruction of her early associations, the loss of home, the sudden and repeated irruption of death, gave her the emotional experience of years. The sorrow of her triple bereaval—for she was bereft, if only for a time, of Philip—was too great, she dared not think of it. Occupation was her great panacea. She had always done her school-tasks easily if unwillingly, she now manifested a hunger for knowledge, a hunger that Miss Blushford was unable to appease by the genteel fringes of knowledge and the flimsy “accomplishments” which composed her school bill of fare. Happily Cleeve boasted of a fair public library to which Mr. Cheeseman was a subscriber, and in that library, which was little troubled by the corn-dealer himself, Jessie pastured at will.

She had never dreamed that the universe was so wide, so wonderful, so teeming with interest—life seemed worth living in spite of the shadows darkening it. One happy day she lighted on the “Fairy Queene;” then she discovered Chaucer; Shakespeare, duly Bowdlerized, had been presented to her in dribblets in the school course, and was now commended to her in seven expurgated, calf-bound, musty volumes by Miss Blushford, who was in blissful ignorance of Chaucer's infinitely direr need of a Bowdler.

Miss Blushford had been too much edified at finding her pupil reading anything more solid than a story-book, to look for rocks ahead in books that bore the respectable word history on their backs; the ologies and onomies inspired her

with confidence ; it was not until the sad day when she found Jessie poring over a large volume inscribed with the alarming name of Byron, that she awoke to the duty of tasting the child's mental food. Byron, carefully shrouded in brown paper, lest respectable citizens should be scandalized by seeing him borne openly through their streets, was promptly returned to the dusty shelf on which he had long mouldered by Miss Blushford's own correct hands, and the works of Cowper were given to Jessie in compensation ; she was further bidden to devote more time to her "accomplishments," and in particular to paint a group of flowers on velvet, and do some wool-work for the sofa.

Poor Miss Blushford ! The evening following the procession of Byron to his dusty seclusion was not a happy one for her.

The girls were gone to bed, the assistant teacher was spending an evening out, and she was alone with her parlor boarder, who was apparently taking the opportunity of improving her mind by instructive conversation. Miss Blushford had conversed with fluent urbanity about an hour in reply to Jessie's timid questions on history, literature, science, and art, under the impression that she was filling her listener's mind from her own superabundant stores of knowledge, when all of a sudden it flashed upon her that she was playing the part, not of philosopher to disciple, but of pupil to examiner. Miss Blushford quickly turned the conversation to lighter themes, and Jessie stitched thoughtfully at the abhorred wool-work, wondering if Miss Blushford's colossal ignorance were normal in school-mistresses.

Miss Blushford was a good woman and loved Jessie, who loved her in return. She was about fifty, upright, thin, exact, self-denying, timid, and rigid. What intellect she ever possessed had been worn away in mill-horse drudgery and petty anxieties, what little knowledge she ever acquired frittered away in constant mechanical repetition to her pupils. Her school had a good reputation, it was select. Jessie had with great difficulty and much heart-searching been admitted to it ; it was expensive, and yet Miss Blushford was poor. And she had nothing put by for old age or sickness. She was a lonely woman, yet she had many to support.

In most families there is one helpless member dependent on the rest, it was so with the Blushfords ; one daughter was imbecile, Miss Blushford supported her in a private house. One male Blushford had failed early in business and passed his

prime in hunting for odd jobs, looking for commissions, and hovering on the verge of bankruptcy, whence Miss Blushford perpetually plucked him; she educated his nine children and set them out in life. Her father's second family she also educated and set out in life, and supported her stepmother till her death. No wonder Miss Blushford was poor. Her elder brothers were men of substance, it is true, but they had families whom they could not rob. Her elder sister "kept her carriage," and was ashamed to own poor Bessie, but no help was forthcoming from her; it was preposterous to suppose that her husband would rob his children to support his wife's relations! So Bessie, upon whose youth one golden beam of romance had fallen, renounced the husband and children and carriage that she might have had, and drudged on, in most prosaic, unrecognized heroism, to maintain the helpless members, winning little but the contempt of all in return.

"I wonder what poor Bessie will do now?" the family said, when anybody came to grief.

But Jessie knew of Miss Blushford only that she was ignorant, narrow, prim, and frugal—painfully frugal—so she chafed against her yoke, as her own nature expanded. After the Byron episode, Miss Blushford began telling her pupil that it was unfeminine as well as unladylike to read much; it was particularly unladylike to have strong feelings; more unladylike still to wish to be independent and work for bread (which Jessie began to hint she should like to do).

"May I never do anything because *I* like it? Must I only do what *men* like me to do?" Jessie asked.

"Certainly, my dear," Miss Blushford replied, with her little didactic air; "it is unfeminine to have strong likings. Gentlemen always know what is truly feminine and ladylike. Sweetness, submission, unselfishness are the chief qualities required of females. Mr. Philip Randal justly observed in his last epistle to me: 'I wish Miss Meade to read less and give more time to strictly feminine pursuits, such as needlework, dancing, housekeeping, and accomplishments'"—such was Miss Blushford's translation of Philip's request that Jessie should not be made to learn too much. "Gentlemen dislike blue-stockings. Ladies of superior attainments should always endeavor to conceal them, lest they should be deemed unfeminine."

"I suppose, Miss Blushford," said Jessie, "that it matters nothing what women think, the great point is what people think of them." *no, not always.*

"Quite so, my love."

"Their conduct should be entirely ruled by public opinion?" continued Jessie, with a curious glitter of her eyes.

"In everything, my sweet girl," returned Miss Blushford, pleased at signs of grace in her charge.

After this Jessie read with more ardor, but less candor. She did not hesitate to deceive Miss Blushford by false covers to her books, most of which she kept in a hiding-place she had discovered under the roof-tiles opening from her bedroom. Here also she kept a store of smuggled candles and matches, which she used to light her studies after her candle had been removed from her room. Was it not lawful to conceal things from children? Jessie argued; why, then, should a grown-up baby like Miss Blushford, however amiable, know all that she did?

The pupils came little in contact with Jessie, and when they did, regarded her with no sense of fellowship. As a parlor-boarder and grown-up young lady, they looked up to her, while the fact of her being engaged, and especially engaged to a fine young officer, invested her with all the glamour of romance. A letter from Philip created a flutter of pleasant excitement in the house; unlike the pupils' letters, it was inviolate; Miss Blushford actually *dared* not open it. The letters came fast and thick at first, Philip dotted them all along his route, whenever he found a post-office. "My own Jessie—My precious child—My darling," they began, and were all heart-break and tenderness, but slightly relieved with sketches of travel as far as Calcutta, where they settled down into "Dearest Jessie," and so continued at that affectionate level.

Jessie's letters were of necessity fewer, since she could not dot them along Philip's route; they too were at first tender and full of heart-break, but resigned and meek; they lacked the stormy revolt of Philip's; gradually the tenderness and heart-break faded out of them, and the letters on both sides became chronicles of what befell each, mingled with requests on Jessie's part and good advice by way of answer from Philip. Almost immediately after he started for India, the news of the Meerut and Delhi outbreaks thundered through England, to be followed by still more tragic tidings throughout the summer and autumn.

As each tragic episode in the drama of the Mutiny unfolded itself and was told in England with all the exaggerations of fear, mystery, pity, and indignation, a sort of madness seized

upon the people, to whom the knowledge that Christian women and children of their own race were slaughtered and tortured by that inferior and subject heathen race they had been accustomed to hold so cheaply, was a horror beyond endurance. War, which to other nations means invasion and the suffering, if not the slaying, of women and children, the breaking up of homes, with famine, fire, and pestilence, has a milder face for inviolate England, whose soldiers alone taste its immediate horrors. All the prejudices and antipathies of religion, race, and caste were stung into fierce vitality by the suffering and degradation of helpless English in India, whose countrymen at home were powerless to succor them. A wave of passionate vindictiveness swept over men's hearts, an unsuspected trait in the national character was brought to light. Not only in India, where their position was so desperate, but at home, where people were maddened by their impotence, there were loud cries for vengeance—vengeance alone in its naked ferocity. Pious clergymen, peaceful laymen, gentle, kindly people, did not hesitate to say that no reprisals could be too severe for those monsters of iniquity, and much that was only said with impotent passion in England was done with steadier vindictiveness in India.

It was a ghastly satire on our boasted progress and civilization; it might have been still more ghastly but for a few brave and noble men, who turned a deaf ear to popular clamor and public obloquy, and did justly, and loved mercy even in that awful tempest.

Jessie, in the conventual seclusion of her school, where newspapers were rare, heard little of these things; she did not realize the awfulness of the crisis; she had grown accustomed to war in the Crimean days, and feared comparatively little for Philip, even when she knew him to be in the thick of the fighting. Had he not already tried the fortune of war?

But in those rare occasions when she mingled with the outside world, she was horror-struck at the way in which people talked of "those black devils," and one or two passionate expressions in Philip's letters made her shiver and hope they were but momentary ebullitions, caused by righteous indignation at the first hearing of such cruelties as will forever throw a mournful horror upon the word Cawnpore. She did not inquire too closely into Indian details; she dared not let her thoughts dwell upon Philip's danger, any more than upon her parents' death; she deliberately lulled the emotional side

of her nature to sleep, by continuous strenuous mental occupation. Instinct told her that madness lay in feeling.

She sat in the Redwoods' pew at Marwell Church, on Christmas Day, with an aching heart, and heard the angels' message of peace on earth with an awful sense of incongruity; reminded that Philip, who had not written for months and was supposed to be shut up in Lucknow, if alive, was one of a small band beleaguered by innumerable foes reputed demons of cruelty; when the familiar sentence which had so early struck her imagination, "for every battle of the warrior is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood," rang through the church, she turned sick at the endless battle scenes it suggested, scenes in which Philip was ever present, dimly seen through fire-cloven clouds of smoke. "While shepherds watched their flocks," she sang, her eyes clouded with tears, and, looking up, she became aware of the intent gaze of a lady in the Marwell Court pew—a gaze which was repeated and interrupted by the raising of Jessie's eyes several times during the sermon.

"Whatever made Miss Lonsdale look our way like that?" Cousin Jane asked, at dinner. "There was nothing wrong with my bonnet, Jessie, was there? I am sure yourn was as neat as a new pin. And if Plummer did go to sleep with his mouth wide open, as though he expected the sermon to jump down his throat, it's nothing but what she've been accustomed to ever since she was as high as the table. And I'm sure my mourning is deep enough for a sister."

Miss Lonsdale was at the same moment asking Lady Gertrude who "that charming girl in mourning" with the Plummers was, and how a creature so graceful came among such rustics.

"Charming girl? Graceful creature? Pathetic? Refined?" murmured Lady Gertrude, bewildered. "I saw no stranger, Clara, and I usually look round the church; one owes it to the people."

"Clara has discovered another prodigy," said her cousin, Hugh Medway. "Be merciful, Clara. Leave the rose to wither on its stem."

"You probably mean little Jessie Meade, the miller's daughter," Sir Arthur added. "You must often have seen her before, Clara. She is certainly growing into a very nice-looking girl. But the refinement soon wears off in that class."

This speech put Miss Lonsdale on her mettle. "Do not imagine," she replied, "that our class has the monopoly of

everything, Uncle Arthur. That sweet girl at no age could be anything but refined. She has a history, too, I saw it in her face. She moved among the rustics in coming out of church like a stray princess. These ridiculous aristocratic class prejudices ! ”

“ Clara waves the red flag—*À bas les aristocrates ! Vive le peuple souverain ?* ” commented Hugh teasingly. “ My dear girl, I do so admire that little sweep of the hand ; it brushes the whole upper ten in a mass to perdition. It really is a pity that ladies cannot enter parliament.”

“ It is,” she replied, with unabated majesty. “ Jessie,” she added, musingly, “ a caressing sort of name, soft but not sufficiently dignified for her.”

A few days later Sir Arthur lamented in her hearing that, what with one thing and another, he had not a horse fit to ride that morning, and supposed he must walk. Redwoods was not so very far, but he wished also to call at Ferndale and Little Marwell.

“ Why not let me drive you ? ” Clara said ; “ the ponies want exercise, and I like an object for a drive.”

“ Thank you, my dear, I shall be too glad to avail myself of the honor, if you do not mind pottering about with an old fellow,” he replied ; so the ponies were brought round, and they started, Sir Arthur half buried in furs like a Russian prince, his niece fully occupied with her ponies, who sniffed up the frosty air as they tossed their pretty manes and made believe to take every bush and stone for an enemy.

They drove through the park, where the noble oaks and beeches bore fairy-like foliage of hoar-frost instead of green summer leaves on the fine tracery of their boughs, which sparkled with delicate jewel-flashes against the pale blue sky ; through the village, where the rime-crystals glittered on thatched roofs, and women at cottage doors dropped courtesies ; past the inn with its swinging sign, the school-house with its hive-like hum, thence along the high road. They soon came to a comfortable farm-house standing a little way back from the road in a trim flower-garden, fenced by a low stone wall over which the dainty little “ roving sailor ” spread its shining trails, and yellow stone-crop and patches of green and gold moss crept. The house was of gray stone, half hidden by creepers, which in summer made a very bower of bloom ; the tiled roof was richly embroidered by yellow lichen, that caught and kept the sunshine in reserve so as to throw a golden glow over gloomy days ; the warm brown

tiles roofed the barns and other buildings in the yard, and were similarly embroidered by nature's hand; the pale yellow stacks beneath a group of elms in the rick-yard glowed in the frosty sunbeams and sent out a rich odor of corn together with a pleasant radiance; it was a sunny place, suggestive of summer and warm comfort. So Miss Lonsdale thought when she stopped the ponies at the garden gate, by an old-fashioned flight of stone steps in the wall.

CHAPTER VI.

REDWOODS.

The sound of wheels on the frost-bound road and the apparition of Miss Lonsdale's bright-plumed hat above the hedge-row, occasioned a certain excitement within Redwoods Farm.

"Patience alive!" exclaimed Mrs. Plummer, "Sir Arthur and Miss Lonsdale! and me in a cap I wouldn't be seen out of my own family with for five pounds. Dear! dear! to think that I must be brushing the cheese in my oldest dairy gown this morning of all others."

"Never mind, cousin," said Jessie, "people can't expect you to be in full dress at this hour."

"Full dress! Well, there, Jessie, I never did come across your equal for want of feeling," complained Mrs. Plummer, in a tearful voice, "and not so much as a clean collar or curls brushed out have I got to my name, and the sun showing every speck of dust. Well, to be sure; you must run out, I suppose, and say I'll be down in a minute, and Plummer's only just gone out round. Only let me get clear off before they come in," she concluded, brushing past Jessie and bustling upstairs as fast as her round and comfortable figure could go.

You cannot brush and turn mity cheeses with clean hands or clean garments, and Mrs. Plummer's appearance was certainly far from magnificent. Her gown had seen hard service, her sleeves were rolled half-way up her plump, firm arms, a very dingy old shawl was pinned over her shoulders, her cap had reached the lowest rank in the cap scale, of which Jessie believed there were ten grades, each grade fitted for some special time and occupation; the bunches of curls which adorned either side of her face at more ceremonial hours, were now rolled up in one solid curl on each temple, giving her round, apple-cheeked face a severity more suitable for awing serving-maids than for welcoming distinguished guests; to crown all she wore, tied high up over the ends of the crossed shawl, a large, coarse apron, the strings of which

refused to do anything but tie themselves in knots while she was shouting complaints and directions to Jessie.

"Well, if ever I was in a pickle for visitors!" she might well exclaim, on surveying herself in the glass.

Jessie was soon opening the door to receive the guests; visitors very rarely had occasion to ring at Redwoods. It was deemed inhospitable not to go out to welcome them as soon as they appeared in sight. The sight of her caused Sir Arthur to remove his hat from his head and himself from the low pony chaise, and confirmed Miss Lonsdale in her admiration. The touch of the ungallant frost, which does not hesitate to nip the nose of rarest beauty, only brought a delicate rose to Jessie's cheeks, the sunshine fell full in her face, causing her to lift one slender hand to shade her beautiful eyes, while with the other she held a light blue wrapper, one end of which was thrown over her head, beneath her chin; her bright hair, the true "*chiome d'or all'aura sparse*" so dear to Tasso, glittered in tiny ruffled rings about her temples, as if each separate hair were a beam of light. Appearing thus, tall and slim, in her plain black dress, while some white pigeons, startled by the wheels, flew up with clanging wings and settled on the lichen-bordered brown roof above her, she was a delightful vision. She stepped lightly down the garden-walk, unconscious of the admiration she evoked, to ask Sir Arthur if he would walk in while she sent a boy to fetch Mr. Plummer, who was somewhere about the farm.

Sir Arthur preferred to go in search of Mr. Plummer himself, and when he was gone Jessie went out to ask Miss Lonsdale to come in.

She assented with a smile, and laying the reins aside, alighted. Tall, well made, warmly clad in rich furs, with the jewel-like breast of a bird glowing iridescent in her hat, with that indefinable air of one daily used to polished human intercourse and the constant homage due to an absolute grace of speech and movement—Clara Lonsdale seemed to Jessie, who rarely saw any but homely, often uncouth people, a being from a more gracious sphere, and her clear glance fell with a becoming deference before the penetrating gaze of the lady's golden-brown eyes.

"Not Mrs. Plummer's daughter, I am sure," she said, in a voice naturally musical, but the more so because of a softer accent than that to which Jessie was used.

"No," she replied, opening the door for Miss Lonsdale to pass in, "I am Mrs. Plummer's cousin, Jessie Meade,"

She led her into a large, low room with heavy furniture, and two fair-sized casement windows with deep cushioned seats. Some sporting prints adorned the walls, two guns were on a rack over the chimney piece, massive silver tankards, gleamed upon a side-table, a bright fire blazed in a large grate with hobs to it, here stood a high-backed wooden arm-chair which Jessie placed for her guest. The battered form of Sebastopol reposed in a tight tabby coil near the fire; just in front of a window stood a small easel holding a canvas on which a landscape in oil was beginning to show; palettes, brushes, and tubes of color scattered near showed that the artist had but just left work. An old bureau with its sloping desk-top closed, stood against one wall, and a sofa, wide enough to serve for a bed at a pinch, was against another; a few pots of growing flowers were in the window, and a dish of russet-red apples on the top of the bureau. All these details Miss Lonsdale took in at one rapid glance. The interior was cosy, yet there was a lack of something—which she soon discovered to be books. These were few but not select. One leather broken-backed tome with an illegible title served to raise a flower-pot into the light, another made a press for Mrs. Plummer's cap laces and ribbons. Jessie went straight to a cupboard by the fire-place and took out a dish of round golden-brown cakes and some decanters and wine-glasses, which she placed on the table, in accordance with the unwritten custom that supposed all guests to be hungry.

"Mrs. Plummer's dough-nuts are irresistible," Miss Lonsdale said, accepting one with a smile that went straight to Jessie's fresh heart; a rare smile that came slowly and made her seem beautiful, though not really so.

Jessie smiled brightly back, the smile of a grateful child. "It would be no use," she said, "for my cousin to make dough-nuts, if no one came to appreciate them."

"There is reason in that," Miss Lonsdale returned; "there are in art two essential factors, the artist and the amateur or admirer."

"Yes," Jessie rejoined, "it would be futile to write even an 'Iliad,' if there were no readers."

This, Miss Lonsdale reflected, was not what one might expect from a miller's daughter of eighteen, and wondered to what extent the young lady was conscious of her superiority. But Jessie, who sat on the other side of the hearth sideways to the window, in such a manner that the sunshine lighted her face and kindled the gold of her hair, looked perfectly unconscious of self.

“You must be very lonely,” Miss Lonsdale said, with an abruptness that brought the color to Jessie’s face, yet with an accent that bespoke such a sympathy and accurate reading as she had not expected; “forgive me,” she added, “but your face interested me when I saw you at church. I speak so plainly because I feel distinctly drawn to you.”

“This is too kind,” Jessie faltered, “but you will be disappointed. I am not at all interesting, especially to myself. I would rather forget that I am alive.”

“Poor child!” said Clara, in a rich, caressing voice; “poor, dear child!”

Jessie rose quickly and knelt before the fire, very busy at mending it, with her face averted from the lady. Clara smiled a peculiar little smile that Jessie could not see, and with ready tact went over to the easel.

“From nature?” she asked, with some surprise, when she saw the distant park with the village and church in the foreground all firmly and truly sketched. “From nature in winter, too! You have a good deal of feeling for landscape, Miss Meade.”

Jessie had persuaded Philip, who recognized her decided talent, to let her exchange Miss Blushford’s fine pencil drawings and water-color flowers and fruit for lessons from a broken-down artist, whose constant potations had not been able to quench a spark of genius which might have brought him to the front rank, and under this man she had made some progress and learnt to cherish great hopes. Had she seen many of the great masters? Who was her teacher? Did she know the Claude Lorraine at Marwell Court? Had she seen the De Wints and Constables? She could scarcely believe that Miss Meade had seen nothing and yet painted so charmingly.

While they were standing thus at the easel, Cousin Jane, her curls beautifully arranged in glossy bunches on either cheek, with a cap five grades higher than that of the cheese-brushing, and her afternoon gown and apron on, came in and was complimented upon her dough-nuts. Almost at the same moment Sir Arthur was seen returning to the carriage, so Miss Lonsdale took leave and went out to join him, accompanied by Jessie, who stood until the pony-phaëton with its smart groom, Russian prince Sir Arthur, and bright-plumed lady driver had vanished like some ethereal vision.

Then she turned, delicately flushed with a pleasant excitement and ran with a springing step in from the frosty air, singing some snatch of song in the glow kindled by this pass-

ing glimpse of another kind of life. A long dormant something woke within her under the spell of the lady's gracious presence ; her voice, her face, her smile set many currents astir in her half-petrified, half-crushed nature. It was wonderful to Jessie that she should at once have detected her loneliness, not the loneliness natural to a young creature bereft of kindred and friends, but that more invincible loneliness of one who lives among uncongenial and unsympathetic natures. Even Philip had never seen this ; Philip, with all his tenderness, held her but a slight, mindless, colorless creature.

"And to think," mourned Mrs. Plummer, "that the parlor should have been all littered up with your painting messes—and the smell too, as if the house was being done up—for company to see."

"Miss Lonsdale paints herself, cousin," Jessie replied, gently. "I don't think she minded it. Please let me do a little more now the light is good. I will make all tidy by dinner-time."

"To be sure, Jessie, I'm not one to go against my own flesh and blood," continued Mrs. Plummer, in a resigned voice ; "and if you are to be an officer's lady, tidy ways of plain folk can't be expected of you. But 'tis a pity. Many a time I've spoke to your poor mother against the way you was bred up, never to soil a hand. And I always told your poor father the day would come he'd repent it. But I might as well have talked to that cat."

Sebastopol, whom Mrs. Plummer equally disliked and feared, was not the only waif from the mill that found refuge beneath her hospitable roof. It chanced that she needed both a dairy woman and a cow-man soon after Mr. Meade's death, and set her heart upon Sarah, the maid, and Abraham Bush, the miller's man. One obstacle prevented her from engaging them ; they were not married, and the Redwood's cow-man and dairy-woman had always hitherto been man and wife. After some reflection, she commanded her husband to open negotiations with Abraham, and at a certain stage to inform him that his bachelor condition was a bar to the office. At the same time she broke ground with Sarah and lamented that it was impossible to come to terms with a woman who had no husband.

"You never gave a thought to marrying, I suppose, Sarah," she said at this stage.

"I never encouraged nobody while poor Missus was alive," Sarah replied ; "but to be sure, a lorn ooman is lonesome when getting in years. It's like this, Miss Plummer, I've had

my own way this vive and forty year, and that's pretty nigh so much as anybody hev a right to."

"To be sure, Sarah," assented Mrs. Plummer, "you've had more liberty than a woman ought to, and it is time you began to think of doing for some man going to rack and ruin for want of a wife; you don't know any steady widower-man who might be looking after you now, do you?"

"I knows two or dree looking after the bit of wage I've a put by," Sarah replied, thoughtfully; "ain't a gwine to hev they, not as I know on."

"Abraham Bush has money of his own," suggested Mrs. Plummer, cautiously.

"Very like; he's a near one is Abram. Vine weather for gairdens, Miss Plummer, ain't it?"

Mrs. Plummer then put a similar question to Abraham.

"Ay, I've thought o' matrimony many a time," Abraham replied. "I've always a thought better of it."

"You'll be getting in years, Abraham," Mrs. Plummer urged, "and you'll find the want of a wife."

"I've a vound it this vifty year," returned Abraham, "and I've vound the best sart of a want. It's like this yer, mam. Materimony is terble easy to vall into, but t's terble hard to vall out of."

"A nice, steady, hard-working woman with a bit of money put by, Abraham, would be the making of a man like you."

"I dunno as anybody'd hae me," Abraham replied, in a relenting way; "but there, I need so well look round, Miss Plummer."

"Look at Sarah," suggested Mrs. Plummer.

"Many's the time I've looked at she," said Abraham; "a near one is Sarow."

"And such a dairy-woman!" sighed Mrs. Plummer. "Well, good evening, Bush, and if you should hear of a married couple without encumbrance, you'll let us know."

"Yes, I'll let ye know, mam."

The consequence was that one evening Abraham lounged into the Stillbrooke Mill kitchen, just before the auction took place, and sat thoughtfully staring at the fire in silence for some moments. Sarah sat at the other side of the hearth near the window with some needlework and wondered, as she had wondered for the last ten years, if Abraham was coming to the point. Abraham wondered on his part, as he had wondered for the last ten years on similar occasions, if he should succeed in coming to the point. At last, with a mighty

effort which made his very bones ache, he uttered the following pregnant words :

“I reckon I bain’t much of a one for marryen.”

“More bain’t I, Abram,” returned Sarah, promptly.

He was foiled, and began to wonder how many more years would pass by before he would again be able to open a parallel of such importance. The clock ticked on for some minutes, making a sort of rhythm with Sarah’s clicking needle; Abraham scratched his head and moved uneasily in his chair, till at last he came out with, “There aint no particular harm in materimony as I knows on, Sarow.”

“’Tis well enough for some volk,” Sarah admitted, guardedly.

“’Tis hwrote in the Bible that two is better than one,” contended Abraham, after another perplexed five minutes of silence.

“Sure enough,” she replied, “I’d sooner hae two cows than one if they was giv’ me.”

“Lord ha massy!” groaned Abraham, within himself, “I shan’t get drough with this in a week o’ Sundays. Who’d a thought the ooman was that dunch, and had such a power of words inside her?”

“I’ve always a said,” he continued, “when I marries I shall hae a ooman by the name o’ Sarow to go long with Abram like the Bible.”

“Hev ye now? Well there’s a plenty of Sarows to hev.”

“Sure enough, there’s a many Sairows, but they baint all up to dairy-work,” continued Abraham.

“I ’lows they baint, Abram,” returned Sarah, with an air of grim abstraction. “Sarow Cooke now, she caint so much as skim a pan o’ milk, no sense. Poor missus used to hev her when I had that fever, you minds. Pretty nigh drove her crazy, Sarow did.”

“I med so well go drough with ’t, now I’ve began,” thought Abraham to himself, “but darned if I ever asks another ooman to marry me, after this yer.” He cudgelled his brains in silence for some minutes, with his hands thrust into his pockets, his legs stretched out straight toward the fire, and his eyes contemplating his boots, which were powdered with fine meal like all his garments, his hair, and his face, over which his hat was firmly rammed for the double purpose of concealing his blushes and giving him a resolute air.

Sarah, a wholesome, pleasant-faced woman with ruddy cheeks and strong, black hair tinged with gray, stitched diligently on with an imperturbable face.

“Massy me!” she thought to herself, “anybody med newst so well be made love to by a owl. Why caint the wold dun-derhead up and say ‘Will ye hae me, Sarow?’ and ha’ done wi’ ’t?”

“Sarow,” continued Abraham, solemnly, “me and you’s kep company together this vifteen year.”

“Anybody must hae somebody to walk with,” returned Sarah, as if to exculpate herself from the charge. “You baint much to look at, to be sure.”

“I’ve a hundred and vivty pound in bank!” he added, doggedly.

“Hev ye?”

“Darn it all, Sarow,” cried Abraham, goaded to desperation. “Whatever’s the good o’ wiverin about like this yer? Well ye hae me or wunt ye?”

“Now you talk sense, Abram,” replied Sarah, judicially. “I dunno as I’m one fur marren, though. A man do make such a litter stabbling about house, smoking and wanting vittles all day long. I’ve kep clear o’ the men this vive and vorty year, and I done well enough.”

“Well, there! if you wont hae me, Miss Plummer wunt hae you. I dunno as you’re man enough fur the plaace after all, Sarow. Whoever takes on wuld master’s mill must hae a man I reckon,” he added, reflectively. “I never was much fur materimony meself. I’ve a tried zingleness this vivty year, and I never had no vault to vind wi’t. You can get out o’ single-ness, but once into materimony there you must bide.”

“Sure enough, Abram, there you must bide,” commented Sarah, thoughtfully.

“Well, be ye gwine to hitch on to me or baint ye?” growled Abraham, wrenching himself from his chair with a view to taking his departure.

“Well, there!” slowly and deliberately replied Sarah, upon whom this significant gesture was not lost. “I ’lows I med so well hitch on, Abram. Miss Plummer do want me bad for the dairy. She’ve got a tongue, to be sure, but Lord, what’s a tongue when you knows the worst of it?”

Thus it came to pass, to the great satisfaction of Jessie, that Sarah Fry and Abraham Bush were made one, and soon afterward installed at Redwoods, where their kind, familiar faces made the large kitchen a home-like place, to which she often resorted for a pleasant chat, Abraham’s part of which consisted chiefly of a series of grunts, and which kept Jessie’s heart warm and human in her petrifying isolation.

CHAPTER VII.

MARWELL COURT.

Jessie was mistaken in her surmise that she was not again to see Miss Lonsdale, for the next morning the bright plume flashed above the low garden wall, the pretty ponies stopped at the wicket, and the sitting-room was again brightened by the lady's presence.

She came to see how the sketch was progressing, she wanted to take a hint from Miss Meade; for, fond as she was of sketching from nature, she had never yet been very successful in it. She had ventured to bring a portfolio of water-colors and prints, also a book that Jessie might like, a lovely book, which opened a new world to Jessie, it was called "The Seven Lamps of Architecture."

Before long Clara Lonsdale could not walk, or sketch, or read a new book without Jessie, and the days in which Jessie was not commanded to the Court were blanks to the lonely girl. The Plummers saw the growing intimacy with no concern, they held it an honor to Jessie and by reflection to themselves; they considered her position too far beneath Miss Lonsdale's for any thought of equality to enter the child's head.

At Marwell Court there was more concern on Jessie's account. Even Lady Gertrude was sufficiently interested to say that it was a pity, while Sir Arthur one day remonstrated with Clara.

"It is a very pretty head," he said, "and you might find something better to do than turn it for your amusement. I've half a mind to warn the Plummers."

So Clara immediately found something better to do. She took Jessie in to amuse the invalid girl, Ethel Medway, one day. Ethel at once took to a face so sweet and so near her own age, and Sir Arthur, over-glad to find any means of brightening his daughter's sad life, said no more.

Jessie left Miss Blushford's at Easter when the Medways were again at Marwell, and Clara was again interested in her new friend, with whom she had maintained a brisk correspondence in the interval, and with whose brief and uneventful history she was soon fully acquainted.

The news of the final capture of Lucknow by Sir Colin Campbell had been received, and though the great revolt was now virtually quelled, Philip still had sterner work than marrying cut out for him for months to come yet. In his letters he now only alluded to their union as a distant possibility; as to Jessie's letters he seldom alluded to them at all. Many never reached him, those he did receive came out of their proper order and with such gaps and want of sequence that they were difficult to understand. On his part he had things of such deadly interest to relate during the prolonged sieges that he confined himself to the baldest statement of facts, and this he often repeated, knowing how many chances there were that his letters would never reach their destination. Thus the two young people were spiritually as well as physically separated.

The wearing, wasting pain of vainly waiting for the post, of fearing the postman's knock and yet being blankly disappointed when he brings nothing to fill up the emptiness of the weary day, such, the frequent portion of women, who weep while men work, wait while they are absent, watch while they enjoy, was Jessie's portion in her secluded isolation. She ate her heart out while watching for Indian letters, and when the rare, long-expected missive did arrive—and sometimes the same mail brought two—was always, after the first thankfulness that Philip was still alive and well, miserably disappointed and sat down to write her answer feeling that she might as well seek counsel and comprehension of a stone wall. Yet there was only Philip to speak to, and Miss Lonsdale, who read the child's inmost heart as she read the last new novel, because it was something new and therefore interesting to a world-worn mind.

In the genial spring weather they could sketch in the open air, and made appointments to meet at selected points of vantage, so that Clara might take hints and examples from Jessie's greater skill and talent, she said, but really for the companionship.

How happy Jessie was in this, to her, rare and cultivated companionship! How charming, clever, and accomplished as well as kind and friendly the woman of the world appeared to the simple girl! Her grace seemed beauty, her polish courtesy, her superficial cleverness and information genius and learning, her tact heart-sympathy. Indian letters, Redwoods homespun, Miss Blushford's fettering pettiness, her own idle aimless life; all were forgotten with Clara.

One lovely forenoon they met by a thick grove of old oaks

descending a moderate slope to a fair-sized sheet of water, the banks of which, except that opposite the sketchers, rose steep, crowned with trees. From this level bank the rich sward, dotted by clumps of fine trees, rolled away up to the terrace in front of Marwell Court, the long and imposing front of which rose clear in the April sunlight and traced itself on a background of wooded upland. On one side of the fine pile a long vista of level landscape stretched away to some distant blue hills, on the other a hanging wood clothed a steep ascent, in the foreground some deer were grouped, as if for the express purpose of composing a picture; over all was the sweet, deep, April sky of magical pale blue opalescence, from the mysterious depths of which clouds seemed to issue in vague soft outlines, which melted and mingled imperceptibly into its far lavender-blue recesses. The first swallows of the year flashed dark against that lovely sky, white pigeons and blue flew with clanging wings beneath it, larks shot up in spires of eddying song and were lost in it, the fresh half-opened foliage of beech, elm, and larch, flushed translucent on the wood beneath it. The sunshine was tender and even fresher than the light soft airs stirring the budded woods; one seemed to bathe in it, and gather renewed life and health from its pure radiance, it threw a glory over everything, steeping the turf and young leafage, and calling forth such warm and acute touches of color from tree-trunks, the red broken banks and the still lake through which a stream loitered slowly, as no pencil could reproduce.

Russet and gold leafage was just beginning to break forth here and there in the gray masses of oak tops over their heads. Looking back into the living roof you saw only silvery mazes of thickly interwoven boughs, relieved by some burst of fresh leafage or some green under-growth. The pale net-work made a hoary gloom about the strong low arches of those stout gray pillars; solemn, mysterious, and suggestive. All sorts of dreams rise and embody themselves in such dim woodland haze; dryads, nymphs, and fauns spring to life; fairies disport themselves about the mossy roots. And when the sunshine loses itself in those close-woven branches, or shoots through some aperture in the oaken roof, lighting up clusters of pale, sweet primroses, delicate lightly-swaying wind-flowers, beds of wood-violets, spires of early blue-bells piercing the moss and the red relics of last year's leaves, the effect is truly magical.

But if the oak coppice behind them spoke of hoary legend and gray antiquity, all that lay before their eyes breathed

of youth and morning in its fresh and tender beauty. The still lake, of a deeper azure than the lavender-blue sky, reflected the delicate tints of youngest green and gave back the pensive gaze of primroses, most youthful and maidenly of flowers, and mirrored the pale golden glory of blossoming willows, already thronged with inebriate bees. Nests were hidden down by the water where the sedge rustled drily, little dark moor-hens darted out with their wild, plaintive cry; an emerald flash lighted on a willow bough, its double in the water beneath proclaiming it a kingfisher; pigeons murmured contentedly, the little stream gurgled musically in its rocky descent to the lake, the spring-like fragrance of young leaves filled the air.

Jessie, seeing and feeling all this fresh, live beauty as she stood by the easel near her worshipped friend, felt depths upon depths opening within her, whether of pain or joy she did not rightly know; all was vague and undeveloped, like the blind stirrings of the spring in the world around; last year's nestlings cannot tell what wonders may happen as the spring days go by with fresh miracles, so it is with young, unstirred hearts, ignorant of the advancing pageant of life.

"How beautiful, how very beautiful!" she murmured dreamily, as she gazed before her.

"Passable," commented her companion, "subdued scale of coloring."

"And how pleasant to be with you, dear Miss Lonsdale," continued Jessie. "I think I never quite lived before. I shall never," she added, "be happier than I am to-day."

Clara looked at the young, sweet, rapt face with a mixture of envy and pity, scorn and tenderness, wonder and amusement. "Foolish child," she said, caressingly; "how long is it since you wished to forget your own existence? Come and sketch in these trees for me."

She smiled a glad assent and bent over the easel. She did not know that even now the shadow of advancing fate was falling upon her, stealing from the mysterious maze of oak-boughs in the heart of the wood, and that she would never again be the same fresh-hearted girl that flitted lightly over the daisied sward in that morning's sunshine. She was only conscious of the blithe wood-notes warbling in the spring air, the crackling of boughs and dead leaves beneath a firm quick step, the sound of a mellow human voice, as the smoke of a cigar overpowered the wood-scents, and turning round, she looked straight into the face of a young and handsome man whose eyes were alight with a fire such as she had never seen before and never could forget.

Her gaze grew wide and brilliant as it met and mingled for one electric moment with the new-comer's, then fell, and she turned again to her work.

"Unearthed you at last, Clara," the mellow voice was saying.

"Is that you, Claude?" Clara replied, without turning her head. "I certainly pity you at this time of year in the country with nothing to kill."

"Is time nothing?" he asked, rather reluctantly throwing his cigar away.

"Oh, smoke if you like," Miss Lonsdale said; "no one here dislikes tobacco."

Which filled Jessie with surprise.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

“Are you sure?” asked the new-comer, turning to Jessie with the blank gaze of civil indifference, “that you don’t mind my smoking?”

He scarcely waited for an answer, letting himself down on one elbow on the grass in the immediate foreground, whence he could look up in Miss Lonsdale’s face, before he took out and lighted a fresh cigar.

“Pray smoke, pray don’t hesitate,” Jessie stammered with a rising color.

He turned with a sudden surprised look at her, and threw the cigar cleverly over his shoulder into the water, to the surprise and almost indignation of his cousin.

“What nonsense, Claude!” she exclaimed, “when you have twice been told you may smoke. Why, Jessie,” she added, with asperity, “you must surely be thoroughly used to tobacco by this time. Don’t all your men smoke every evening?”

They certainly did, though that did not lessen Jessie’s dislike of tobacco, but she made no reply, because Captain Medway immediately said that it was a sin to spoil the primrose scents with smoke. “Fact is, one smokes when one is alone from force of habit;” he added. “I couldn’t find you, Clara, and instinctively turned to a weed for comfort, like the Goth I am.”

Jessie’s color deepened to the deepest wild-rose tint, she bent over her painting in distressed embarrassment, hurt by Clara’s unwonted tone and of her own awkwardness in betraying her dislike, but grateful for a courtesy to which she was little accustomed, and which she therefore more keenly appreciated. This gratitude was not lost on Captain Medway, unobservant as he appeared in his languid posture on the grass, his whole attention claimed by Miss Lonsdale, with whom he was soon deep in a conversation that did not include Jessie.

“This then,” she thought, with a thrill of enthusiasm, “was

Claude Medway, the hitherto unknown hero of so many martial adventures, the central figure of so many romantic speculations." From the day when the handsome boy helped pull her out of the pond, he had occupied a large space in her imagination. Philip had depicted him under various aspects and in glowing colors, until his very name diffused an atmosphere of chivalrous romance. Accustomed as she was to the dangers and vicissitudes of war through the medium of Philip, who was even now on most active service, the fact that this beautiful and princely looking man lying on the grass before her, and displaying a courtesy foreign to her experience, had actually taken part in what is perhaps the most chivalrous if not most brilliant episode in modern war, made her heart beat with a glorious thrill. Philip had often been in great danger, he must often have performed a heroic deed; but that famous charge had fired her imagination as no other incident could. Philip, who had actually seen as much of it as was possible to a soldier in the ranks on that field, and who had heard it described in detail and discussed by other eyewitnesses, and studied the whole battle scientifically afterward, had narrated it over and over again to her, not forgetting Medway's special heroism in plunging back under hot fire to rescue a wounded man. She had only to close her eyes and the charge of the Six Hundred passed with vivid accuracy before her, the knightly form of Claude, wearing the picturesque hussar uniform in which she had once seen him, being the central figure of the picture.

Instead of looking at Marwell Court, towering stately in the sunshine beyond the deer in the foreground, she more than once diverted her gaze to the recumbent figure in the immediate foreground, a deep and reverent admiration expressed in every feature of her pure, sweet face. Thus innocent Jessie did inward homage to this brave soldier, not knowing that she was herself fated to begin a warfare infinitely more perilous and requiring courage of an infinitely higher order. Perhaps it was some shadow of oncoming Fate that made her say, ten minutes before, that she would never again be so happy.

So strongly impressed was she by this knightly figure, so deeply touched by the charm of the mellow voice, that she forgot herself and the incongruity of her own silent presence at this intimate conversation between the cousins, until some request from Clara concerning her sketch woke her from her dreamy fantasy and recalled her to herself. Then she began to be ill at ease and to find herself in her own way; she doubted if she ought to remain where she was so evidently superfluous.

The cousins talked of people she did not know, and places she had never seen ; till some reference to Clara's sketch set them upon art and artists. They spoke of famous pictures, talked of Italy, of "Modern Painters," of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, skimmed recent literature, drifted on to the mutiny and Lucknow, glanced thence to lighter themes, operas, theatres, declined finally to social celebrities, gossip. Their conversation opened a new and interesting world to Jessie, who had never listened to cultured talk before. She did not know that much they said was commonplace, much second hand, little original and nothing profound ; she had not enough social experience to question the good-breeding of totally ignoring her presence, though it revolted her fine instincts and made her wretchedly uncomfortable ; but she listened with absorbed interest and could have listened longer.

Claude's Medway's appearance had illuminated Clara's face and changed her whole bearing ; she became animated, smiling, gracious. To Jessie's admiring gaze she was really beautiful under this inspiring influence. Was it strange that she should totally forget her dearest Jessie in the presence of this fascinating man, the simple child wondered ? and then it suddenly struck sharply through her how well matched the two were, and how absorbed in each other. A strange feeling frightened the muscles of her throat. Was she sorry ? Surely not.

"Well, Claude," said Clara, when the painting materials had been gathered together and the sketchers had gone their several ways, "what do you think of my little friend ? Could you imagine anything so dainty in these Boeotian wastes ?"

"Little ? I thought her a fair-sized girl," he returned, indifferently. "So this is the newest pet, Clara, eh ? Some village girl, some female genius you have unearthed ?"

"But isn't she pretty, now, and charming and refined ?" she persisted.

"I dare say she is well enough," he returned, "but I never cared much for that blonde, pink and white innocence. Bad taste ? Well, you know, men are supposed to have bad taste in these matters."

"Fair or dark, she has distinction and beauty such as would be remarkable in any rank," continued Clara ; "this is no mere pretty girl whose '*beauté du diable*' will fade in a few years. Then her manner, her accent, her refinement of thought——"

"Say a paragon at once, Clara. You see I have not your

opportunity of studying the young person's character. And men are not expected to gush."

"Gush! Really, Claude, you are quite rude. That odious affectation of admiring nothing, constantly puts you out of sympathy with other people. One is perpetually jarred by want of appreciation, one is tempted to exclude you altogether from one's interests."

"Now, my dear Clara," he replied, observant of a tearful quiver of the usually proud lip, "this is cruelly unjust. Don't I try to share your enthusiasms? Didn't I admire the Persian cat? Didn't I stick to the crippled tailor with a genius for metaphysics long after you had forgotten him?"

"Forgotten? You *know* how ungratefully he behaved."

"Then the poetess, Eliza——"

"It is not kind of you to name that treacherous woman."

"I must say you have frightful luck with your *protégés*. But that makes it awfully hard lines on a fellow, a plain and practical chap like me, to be expected to begin a fresh *schwärmerei* once a month, especially at second hand."

"I wonder that you see any point in a sarcasm so banal, so very second-hand, Claude. Jest as you will, this sweet child and her innocent affection make a deep and lasting interest in my life."

"Well, Clara, you weren't over civil to your friend. I thought she must be a sort of maid from the way in which you ignored her."

"Oh! a girl in her position! There was no alternative. I must have sent you off if I had not ignored her."

"I bow to superior wisdom. Thank goodness there's the luncheon bell. Arcadian bliss makes one so hungry."

Marwell Court was not sketched in one day. Many trysts were made at that pleasant spot between the oaks and the water, and it became usual for Claude Medway to be in attendance on his cousin, carrying her easel and camp-stool, and criticising and watching the progress of the painting.

One morning, while that lovely spring weather lasted, Jessie repaired to the appointed spot a little before the appointed hour, and setting up her easel and getting out her color-tubes, began to compare her sketch with the prospect before her, looking at it from this point and that with an artist's dissatisfaction. At last, laying her palette aside in disgust, she seated herself on her camp-stool beneath an oak and gave herself up to a silent absorption of the pure and harmonious coloring of the April day.

Her shawl had slipped from her shoulders and hung grace-

fully about her, enhancing the slender grace of her figure, the lovely lines of which were well shown by the simple close-fitting black gown she wore, her small, neat bonnet set off the glory of her hair, sunbeams trembling through the budding oak-boughs played softly over the slim, white hands loosely clasped in her lap, her pensive face, so delicate in coloring and feature, and her bright rich hair. The gnarled branches and sturdy gray trunk of the oak made a good setting for this tender beauty, the primroses clustering at her feet were in harmony with her, and the bunch of delicate anemones, the sole ornament she wore, akin to her.

Of what was Jessie dreaming, in that rapt, thoughtful posture, her deep eyes shadowed by the long, dark lashes which made such a contrast to her fair hair and rose-leaf complexion? Did the clear eyes see more than the fair prospect spread before her in the April lights? What would she have thought had she been conscious of the keen, intent gaze even now bent upon her from the thick covert of the dim silvery oak coppice? Oh! the charm of the mystery and the mystery of the charm to that intent gazer! "After all," he thought, "she is but a woman, simple, untutored, ignorant of the world, and ah! how innocent! And Gretchen was innocent," he added, and smiled. That smile was to his face as the appearance of a snake in some paradise of fresh herbage and bright flowers; it made him unconsciously avert his gaze from the pensive young face on which no one could look while thus smiling.

Then he pushed through the brushwood, the crackling of which broke into Jessie's dream and made her turn to see the handsome face beneath the soft felt hat which had now become so familiar to her.

"Good-morning," he said, with an air of faint surprise at meeting her. "Sketching again, Miss Meade? How very industrious you are."

"I fear not," she replied, in her literal simplicity. "It is such a slow business, a morning's work seems nothing."

He went to the easel and stood for some time discussing and commending the picture, while the pale rose deepened in Jessie's face and her eyes kindled. "Your atmosphere is so good," he said. "I envy you your facility. We've all tried our hands on the dear old place, my brothers and sisters as well as Miss Lonsdale. It defies us all. Redwoods was another good subject for a sketch," he suggested; "wasn't it to be Jessie's home? Was not his friend, Captain Randal of the 190th, some connection of hers? Her adopted brother?"

Then she must be the little girl he once helped pull out of the mill-pond. Did she really remember it? He was highly honored, indeed."

So they chatted, Jessie never reflecting that his manner, which had hitherto been one of civil indifference, had now changed to a mingled deference and friendliness. She was quite unconscious of a charm that as yet no one had discovered in her, consisting of a certain guileless transparency of diction and thought that made her speech flow like some pure, cool stream, limpid, refreshing, only the more musical for some slight interruption; an innate, uncomprehended desire for self-expression giving her a childlike unreserve that was most pathetic.

"You must be very lonely," he said, abruptly, looking thoughtfully down on her from his higher elevation as he leant against an oak-trunk.

Jessie's lip quivered and her eyes filled; she turned and looked away over the shining prospect, the blue water and green woodland, eloquently silent.

"Poor child," he added, in a low, full voice, rich to her ear with the manifold music of repressed feeling. From his position he could see, unnoticed himself, the changing, struggling emotions passing over her face like cloud shadows over woodland and sea. Both features and color were subtly responsive to the slightest feeling; it was a deeply interesting study, fraught with a fresh and stimulating charm even to one versed in the study of women's faces.

After a while Jessie swallowed something down with an effort and turned her head slightly. "Oh, it is only for a time," she said, cheerfully. "India will soon be quiet, and then I shall go out to Philip."

"To Randal?" he exclaimed. "But he is not really your brother?" he added.

"Oh, no," she replied, with her accustomed simplicity, "but we are engaged."

"Engaged! brother and sister!" he cried in tones of surprise. "Pardon me," he added, "I—ah! the relationship is unusual and confusing, that's all."

A sudden, complicated pain dyed Jessie's face with crimson, which quickly gave place to deathly paleness. She said nothing, but the situation was revealed to her in a flash. Philip was her brother, though not of her blood.

"Randal is a lucky fellow all round," he added, with a change of voice. "What would most of us give to be in his place at Lucknow? He gets all the innings."

“But you had your innings at Balaclava,” she replied, quickly. “One of the Six Hundred!”

The tone in which she spoke contained the sum and quintessence of all that ever had been or could be expressed to the honor of the Six Hundred. Medway’s cheek flushed, he was carried out of himself, and before long was answering Jessie’s eager questions touching that famous charge like any boy. Did he think when they charged that any of them would return? Was he sorry when the order was received?

“Sorry? Oh, Miss Meade, soldiers can never be sorry in an engagement. Why, the first burst when the hounds give tongue is nothing to it. The very sounds, the firing, the noise of hoofs, the rattle of steel and iron stir one up and make one feel all alive; nothing like a sharp action to steady the nerves. Of course I thought I was in for it. You don’t know what a lot one thinks in a minute at such times. I saw the old place there, with sunshine on it like now, and thought—well, Marwell will be Hugh’s, so much the better for the old fellow, and wondered if my people would care—especially my sister—you know how she is afflicted, poor child. And I—well, I wished I had been a better fellow. And, do you know, it was a queer feeling that we should never know what they said of it in England. Then one couldn’t help feeling glad of getting such an innings, and making such a finish. And, by Jove, Miss Meade, you must really practice witchcraft, you turn a fellow inside out! One never talks of these things, you know,” he concluded.

“That is unkind,” said Jessie, “when people are dying to know, and have so much pleasure in hearing.”

“One would do a great deal to please some people.”

Jessie could not see the look that accompanied this, but the voice was almost as expressive as one full-charged glance. She trembled, she knew not why.

“Women can only hear things, they may never do them,” she said, sighingly.

“That hearing would make it worth while to do anything.

“‘How sweet are looks that ladies bend,
On whom their favors fall,’”

he quoted with the same low-voiced fervor.

“‘For them I battle to the end,
To save from shame and thrall,’”

added Jessie, with deep feeling. "Ah! Sir Galahads are not needed in these happier days, except in spirit, are they?"

He shrank from the innocent gaze of the blue eyes uplifted to his as if it had stung him; he turned away and took a careful aim with his stick at a white butterfly hovering about a bush. Neither of them perceived the deep significance of the action, or remembered that the butterfly symbolizes the soul, but Jessie was strangely jarred and she was glad when the winged creature fluttered lightly away unhurt into azure freedom.

"Yet it must be so hard to die and leave this lovely, lovely world," she added, "even for God and the right, England's motto, to ride like that, straight to death, to fall into darkness and wake, where? Brave men might well tremble before the hereafter. Were you so sure of heaven, Captain Medway?"

He looked at her with dilating eyes, for the moment taking the sarcasm as intentional.

"Oh!" he returned in a tone of relief, "I never thought much of those things, you know. Men don't, at least men of the world. Of course, one had a sort of a feeling that one couldn't expect to go to the good place; but funking was no good. 'Take your licking and don't squeal,' we used to say at Eton. Besides, many better fellows had to go there, for we were all in for it together."

"I don't think," continued Jessie with sudden warmth, "that I should care to go to a heaven you were shut out of. I mean," she added with glowing confusion in her swiftly flushing face, "a man who did *that*—turned back, wounded, bleeding, weak, into that fire to save another more helpless than himself. That is real religion—saving others."

At these burning words a deep emotion seized the young man, or rather a tumult of mingled emotions; his heart beat with deep and strong pulsations, his eyes fell, he looked at the flower-sprinkled grass at his feet, silent, though the word "darling" formed itself with inaudible intensity on his lips. He raised his eyes, glanced once at Jessie with a look that caressed her from head to foot, then looked down again. Jessie's heart beat too, with fiery rapidity, her confused gaze also sought the ground, she was troubled, wondering into what quicksand her enthusiasm had betrayed her, wondering, but scarcely fearing; she possessed the amazing audacity of perfect innocence, besides she trusted the living embodiment of chivalry at her side as she would have trusted the warrior archangel himself, the beautiful young Michael

with his burning suit of bright armor. The moment was impressive, the silence seemed to quiver with intensity.

"I am afraid," faltered Jessie at last, "that my tongue runs away with me. I don't often talk to people."

"So much the worse for people," he returned, drawing in his breath with an air of relief, while Jessie bent forward and made some most unlucky additions to her picture. "Do you know, Miss Meade, it is very refreshing to talk to a lady who has not been spoilt by the world."

He left his station by the oak-trunk and came forward, insensibly changing his position in the endeavor to change the current of his thoughts, and pressing the flowers beneath his step he strolled forward and let himself down, as of old, full length on the grass, in front of her, reclining on one arm and looking up and facing her while he made some trivial observation.

But Jessie did not heed what he was saying, her eyes dilated with sudden terror, her cheek paled. "Don't move," she cried, "don't stir an inch," and as she spoke, she darted toward him, snatched something from the grass, and hurled it away.

Quite close to the spot on which he reclined she had seen a thing like the long, brown, leather lash of a cart-whip stretched on the turf, and when his arm touched the ground the thick end of the lash suddenly erected itself, showing a long, flat head with two small, glittering eyes, and a forked tongue darting itself viciously at his unprotected face, which it would have struck in another instant. He sprang to his feet, saw what had happened, caught the thing a blow on the head with his stick, and then flung the limp dead body into the water.

"A viper, and a large one. Thank you," he said, turning tranquilly again to Jessie, who was sitting with her face hid in her hands, sobbing bitterly.

CHAPTER IX.

ENGAGED.

In a moment Claude was kneeling by her side, half-surrounding her with his arm, scarcely knowing what he did, for he was one of those men who are wax to a woman's tears. "Jessie, Jessie! Are you hurt? Heavens! Did the beast bite you?" he added, taking and examining her ungloved hands, and remembering that they had grasped the viper's head.

"Your face!" she sobbed. "It almost——"

"But it didn't, thanks to you! How you tremble. Look up, dear Jessie, look up—I am all right."

Jessie continued to tremble, though she recovered herself sufficiently to withdraw her hands from the kisses pressed upon them—kisses she was too agitated to heed—kisses more dangerous than adders' bites. Afterwards she was vaguely conscious that her hands had been kissed, but she never remembered what actually passed.

"Come, Jessie, look up, what is there to cry about?" he said, releasing her hands, "the beast is stone dead."

"It—was so—slippery," she said, childishly, "I—I was so frightened."

She possessed the rare art of crying gracefully, her flushed face only looked sweeter through tears, her features kept their dainty curves, her eyes were all the brighter, like forget-me-nots in the dew, her eyelids did not redden, the quiver of her lips went straight to people's hearts. Some of her golden hair had fallen about her neck and glittered in the sunshine; he could not help touching it lightly, caressingly, unseen.

"Did you think it would kill me?" he asked with quiet gravity, as they each recovered from their dissimilar agitation. "Then it might have killed you? and you don't like slippery things," he added, with a tender smile.

"I don't like snakes. They make me ill. A snake," she added, now calm and ashamed of her agitation, "is the symbol of sin. Even to be near a sin is like touching a cold snake."

He turned away, a heavy frown disguising the beauty of his face.

Jessie now began to express some wonder at Miss Lonsdale's delay, and looking at her watch, found to her intense surprise that the morning was gone, it was time to go home to dinner.

"By the way, I quite forgot the note," Captain Medway said, forgetting also that he had been surprised to meet Jessie, and handing her a little cocked-hat of Clara's inditing, which briefly told her that she was not able to keep her tryst that morning. Jessie did not wonder at the lady's choice of a messenger, her simplicity was too absolute; and he did not think it necessary to explain that he had intercepted the note on its way to her by the hands of a servant. She wished him good-morning, and taking her easel and painting things, vanished in the depths of the wood. He remained leaning against a tree with folded arms, gazing at the spot left vacant by her!

"She is too good!" he reflected. "This is no mere milk and water innocence, half ignorance, half want of temptation, no light, slight village beauty. It is sterling. A new type of woman. And I am not to be shut out of her heaven! But she is a woman, after all—and women are—women—My cousin Clara—hm! I have her authority. My mother—well! my mother ought to know, but she does not think highly of the sex. Everybody, man or woman, especially woman, has his price, according to Lady Gertrude. That Balaclava business! by Jove? who wouldn't have bragged?—The viper!—sweet child! She could face death, but cried at the slipperiness! Engaged, and to Philip?—is Philip mad, or what?" He unfolded his arms and took a turn beneath the dappled shadows. "I wish I had never seen her!" he sighed, "I wish to Heaven I had never seen her!" he repeated.

Luncheon was in full progress when he reached the Court, cheerful and good-tempered as usual.

"Been sketching this morning, Clara?" he asked his cousin. "No? Is the picture finished, then?" Clara did not reply; she was angry with him for not making himself acquainted with her movements earlier, in which case he could have driven to Cleve with her. Being Sir Arthur's ward, and having from early childhood passed half the year with him, Clara had naturally fallen into fraternal relations with her cousin. This was all very well in one's teens, but a woman of four-and-twenty, possessing large property, expects more deference. So Miss Lonsdale told her cousin later, when explaining the cause of her anger to him. But Claude knew the true cause far too well.

"If you have nothing to do this afternoon, Claude," Sir Arthur said, "do try to amuse poor little Ethie; she is frightfully low to-day."

"I was thinking I might wheel her out in the sun, perhaps, this bright day," he replied readily. And he passed the long

afternoon by the side of the fretful little cripple, who rewarded her brother's patience by pouts and reproaches, but would not let him go.

"I really wonder," Lady Gertrude said, "that Claude bears with Ethel as he does. The truth is, he spoils her. She is more peevish than ever after he has been with us."

"Claude feels for the child; he is certainly kind," Sir Arthur returned. "But it would be hard indeed if a strong man, who never had an ache in his life, lost his patience with a sick girl."

"My dear uncle, it is precisely those strong men knowing nothing of pain who are most impatient of other people's suffering," Clara interposed; "Hugh would never devote an afternoon to Ethel; he says that she gives him the blues."

"Or Jim," his mother added; "as Jim says, he wouldn't so much mind amusing her if she would be amused, but she is so ungrateful."

"Poor child! poor dear child!" moaned her father, thinking how different a lot he had expected for his only daughter in her spring-tide of womanhood.

"And Claude knows what it is to suffer, Aunt Gertrude," added Clara; "think of the Balaclava wound, and the winter cold, and starvation. Remember the story of the goose he and young Randal stole together in the Crimea."

"To be sure! the goose!" laughed Sir Arthur; "Claude and Randal stole the goose and hid it, and another man asked them to dine upon it, his servant having seen and snatched it. The villain made a merit of feasting them on their own goose."

Jessie sped breathlessly homeward, shocked at the lateness of the hour; but when she reached Redwoods, where a pungent fragrance of wood-smoke and bacon made all healthily hungry people still more hungry by anticipation, was relieved to find that her delay was unnoticed, dinner not being yet on the table.

One glance round the room was sufficient to show to her practised eye that tempest was lowering upon the domestic horizon. Cousin Jane was laying the cloth with her own hands, a wholly unnecessary thing pointing to storm on the Redwoods barometer. "To be sure, anybody can but be wore out," she was saying mournfully, when Jessie came in with the soft freshness of a spring breeze, "and the sooner the better in a world like this. I don't know as there's anybody to care when I'm gone—without 'ts the funeral expenses," she added, showering the knives and forks with a clatter upon the table,

Jessie knew better than to make any remark or offer to help ; she looked inquiringly at Mr. Plummer, who stood in the English householder's commanding position on the hearth-rug, trying to appear at his ease. Beauty was not Mr. Plummer's strong point, his complexion, with the sun and storm, the frost and fog of sixty years, together with the hearty meals and festive glasses incidental to the ploughing and reaping and riding and shooting of that long period, was of a deep rich plum color, his face was angular and beardless, his mouth a straight line at right angles to his nose. His small, gray-blue eyes were rather deep-set and overhung by tufted sandy eyebrows ; they reminded Jessie of bright little leaded cottage windows beneath thatched eaves ; his sandy hair, perfectly straight, parted on one side, brushed smooth on the top and brushed out at the ends, was strikingly like a thatched roof ; the whole face, homely in feature, genial and kindly in expression, had exactly the physiognomy of a cosy thatched red brick cottage. This face surmounting a burly form and wearing an air of ill-feigned indifference covering decided perturbation, with the straight line of his mouth screwed into an incipient whistle, was droll enough to Jessie's mind ; but when Mr. Plummer, wishing still to appear at his ease and yet to convey to Jessie a hint of what was going on, tried to twist one eye slowly into a solemn wink, it was too droll, and a slight titter escaped her.

"Seeing anybody's own flesh and blood wore out may be amusing to some," continued Cousin Jane, severely, "but 't isn't what I expected of poor Martha's own child."

"I was thinking of something funny," Jessie hastily explained.

"I am sure I wonder at you, Jessie," Mrs. Plummer lamented, placing the mustard on the table with an air of resignation, "and I wonder your poor mother don't turn in her grave to hear you. I don't expect much from them that isn't Woods. And to be sure, Wood as you are, poor Matthew reared you up as I always said he'd live to repent. Men folks may laugh and whistle while their married wives are drove into their graves, it's only what anybody's used to, but I did think better of Wood blood, that I did."

"I beg your pardon, cousin," Jessie said, meekly.

"And you may be thankful if you don't live to beg your bread, miss, brought up as you was. I suppose, Plummer, if I was to ask you to sharpen the knives on my bended knees, you wouldn't do it," she added, mournfully.

"Well, there, my dear, I don't know but I might sharpen

them better on your tongue," he replied, goaded for once to a retort.

"Some thinks it fine to jeer at married wives," said Mrs. Plummer, but her words were drowned in the brisk obligato Mr. Plummer executed with knife and steel.

"Ho, ho, ho, her nose doth show,
How oft to the cupboard doth Margery go,"

he sang with reckless joviality, to the accompaniment of the steel on the knives, casting a half desperate, half deprecating wink toward Jessie at the same time. Cousin Jane sank in a chair and put her hands to her ears. "There's no knowing when I may drop," she said, when the steel music died away, "our family always goes off sudden."

"You can't drop fur in that chair, mother," retorted Mr. Plummer, dryly.

"Not but what I'd as soon be took off as not," she continued, not heeding this interruption, which alarmed Jessie, accustomed as she was to a masterly passivity in domestic broils on the part of Mr. Plummer; "I never was one to run up a doctor's bill if I could help it. And as for a funeral, I shouldn't wish to put people out; walking would do for me. It wouldn't be hardly worth while to hev mourning coaches just for Plummer and Toger. They could walk. I dare say their feelings would be equal to it. There's isn't anybody else to follow, without it's Eliza's husband. And I shouldn't like to put him to the expense and trouble with the hay season coming on and Eliza going upstairs. I suppose you can eat cold pie, Jessie?" she added, taking the head of the now covered table with melancholy resignation, "taffety as you've been bred; for what we're going to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful. 'Twould have been hotted up if I'd had a husband a respectable woman might look to, her with money of her own and a family looked up to."

"Thank ye, Jane, I don't care if I do have a cut of that ham," said Mr. Plummer, as if in response to an invitation, after handing Jessie her plate of pie.

"You mayn't have the chance long," she sighed, beginning to carve; "for I will say this, there ain't a many can match my hams. Not that I was ever one to boast. The many hams I've cured, and no thanks. It's in Wood blood."

"There ain't a many can match your tongue," added Mr. Plummer hastily, bending his jovial face over his foam-topped mug of ale, and receiving a hearty kick under the table from

Roger, who had just pounded into the room, all blowed and ruddy from the thorough scrubbing that always preceded his dinner. "You was always good at tongue," he added, evidently reckless of consequences and altogether demoralized and defiant.

"But what," continued Cousin Jane, fortunately missing the innuendo and mollified by the compliment, "is the best-cured tongue in a world like this?"

Another contraction of Mr. Plummer's features here nearly produced another titter from Jessie, whom these amenities sometimes made hysterical; but Cousin Jane went on with placid plaintiveness, "Roger, my dear, do try some more pie. Keep yourself up, for you may need it; there's no knowing when trouble may come. We may all be gone by this time to-morrow."

Roger manfully responded to this appeal by finishing the beefsteak pie in his most heroic fashion, entreating his mother between whiles to "pick a bit" herself, which she steadily declined to do.

"Only last night I dreamt of bride-cake," she sighed, "and the feelings I have in my inside nobody knows. But I ain't one to complain."

"Jessie," said Mr. Plummer, when Cousin Jane had left the room wafted by her own sighs, "don't you ever give Philip the tongue-pie for dinner, my dear;" and she crimsoned with inexplicable pain at this indirect allusion to her engagement. "The Lord only knows," he continued, "how I came to forget to say I'd asked four or five to drop into tea and supper to-night till this morning; entirely forgot."

"Well, Cousin Plummer, you deserved a scolding," Jessie replied, laughing. "I don't know what I shouldn't do to you if I were Cousin Jane."

"She'll be all right," he averred, cheerfully, "now she've giv out we may all be gone by this time to-morrow." Then Jessie went to offer her services in the complicated preparations that she knew must be made for the reception of guests, services that after many gibes at her fine breeding and general incompetence, were finally grumblingly accepted.

She was glad to escape her own thoughts in this household bustle, and put on an apron and tucked up her sleeves, and found her shaken nerves and feverish heart-beats calmed and quieted, especially when she went into the clean, cool, fresh dairy to skim the milk. Dairy-work always went to Jessie's heart, it recalled her mother, whose butter and cheese making she had so often watched and admired. She liked the

absolute cleanliness and dainty scrupulosity necessary to dairy work. Why had she not been brought up to these things? She sighed, as the thick yellow cream wrinkled up in rich leathery folds over her skimmer; had her mother really destined her for Philip and for that reason wished her to live differently? Philip had always been considered a born gentleman, she did not know why; she had heard of his proposed adoption by the Medways. Was he connected with that family? If so, why was the connection ignored? How could she ever marry Philip, the brother Ippie of childhood? No wonder Captain Medway was startled at hearing it. Then she paused, having emptied the skimmer daintily into the wooden bowl she held in her left hand, and fell into a train of reverie, her cheeks flushing and her heart throbbing, as the morning's history repeated itself and she thought of looks and tones that could never be forgotten. Oh! that Miss Lonsdale had never known her! that she had never seen anyone at Marwell Court! And yet—and yet! She turned to the milk-pans again, drawing her fore-finger daintily round the inside of the pan she had just skimmed so as to remove the ring of cream adhering to it, remembering her mother's instructions on the subject. Thriftless dairy-maids left the ring on the pan, careless ones forgot to wash and cool the fore-finger, untidy ones used the whole hand and so messed the cream over the handle of the skimmer; a whole code of ethics seemed to be involved in skimming milk. And she had no mother to teach her the ethics of more important things. "Oh! mother, come back, come back, to your child. For one little hour!"

The skimmer and bowl had to be set down more than once because of the tears, but all the pans were skimmed at last, the milk poured from them, and fresh, well-scrubbed ones set in their place ready for the afternoon's milk, that Abraham brought in in foaming pails suspended from a yoke on his shoulders.

"It do seem natural to zee Miss in dairy!" he said, when he clattered in over the wet flags, and Jessie's mind and heart were in a much calmer and healthier condition when all was done, the waiting and watching Sebastopol regaled with a saucer of milk, and she went out to the orchard with a plate of curds and new cheese-parings to give the young chickens, cheeping and fluttering there about their imprisoned anxious mothers, each in her coop with her head thrust between the bars. If Mrs. Plummer would but let her do these things regularly!

“To be sure Jessie’s arnamental if she ain’t useful when there’s company,” Mrs. Plummer confided that evening to one of her guests. “Goodness knows her father hev spent money enough on learning her music, and she’s a fairish singer.”

Jessie was at the piano singing in a fresh and artless voice,

“Sweet is true love though given in vain, in vain,
And sweet is death that puts an end to pain.”

“So it’s to be a match,” she heard one lady say, when her song was over and the accompaniment was lingering itself out beneath her fingers.

“Well! to be sure they’ve been off and on again this two years past; the captain he likes his pleasure, as is natural to a young man, but he’ll hev to settle down and marry some-when, and Miss Lonsdale isn’t so young as she was. Their property joins too, the Suffolk property that is. And so they say they’re engaged at last.”

The color rushed into Jessie’s face and she heard a hoarse murmur like the sea in her ears. All the evening a voice seemed to be saying over and over again, “Engaged! engaged!”

PART II.

“And there is no knight living that ought to give unto God so great thanks as ye ; for he hath given unto you beauty, seemliness, and great strength above all other knights, and therefore ye are more beholding unto God than any other man for to love Him.”—SIR T. MALORY.

CHAPTER I.

LUCKNOW.

The 25th September, 1857, is a day that Englishmen will not forget. For eighty-eight days the heroic little English garrison of Lucknow had defended their position against a leaguer of overwhelming numbers, having arms, provisions, a strong position in their native land, and all the resources of military training and skill ; they had maintained their frail, unfortified, unsheltered position with a courage and constancy rarely equalled, though perhaps surpassed by the heroic defence of Cawnpore ; and even that of Arah.

Cawnpore was more heroic, because conducted under still more desperate and, as it proved, fatal, conditions, behind even frailer intrenchments than those of Lucknow. For at Cawnpore the women had no roof but the sky, under incessant fire, and no couch but the bare earth ; the garrison were only upheld by the noble hope of saving Lucknow by their prolonged resistance.

Stimulated, paradoxically as it may appear, equally by hope and despair—hope of being relieved by a force they knew to be in the neighborhood, despair of meeting more mercy at the hands of their enemies, should they yield, than the tragedy of Seetapore led them to expect ; for an ominous silence was the sole intimation they had ever had of the fate of Cawnpore ; the defenders of Lucknow rose on the 25th, to go through one more day of terrible, tragic monotony, and saw the sun once more turn westward over their wearied force diminished now by one-third, while the awful iron tem-

pest still crashed mercilessly upon their riddled and half-ruined buildings, and filled every open spot with dust.

Night and day those devoted men had fought and toiled in their unsheltered intrenchments, scorched by the fierce summer sun of India, drenched by its tropical rains; they buried their daily tale of dead, they nursed their sick and wounded, they did all the offices of daily life under an incessant fire of musketry, shot, and shell, varied by stink-pots and carcasses, and only slackening a while from time to time to be renewed with fiercer rigor. The sick, crowded on the lowest floor of the hospital, were not secure from the occasional round shots; the only really safe places were damp, dark cellars, in which some of the ladies and children were crowded day and night among rats and mice, and where children rapidly sickened and died, and other children were born. All the long, hot day, officers and men, more or less weakened by fever and dysentery, and covered with boils, fought, rushing from battery to battery, because they were too few to man all at once; and at night the exhausted combatants, officers and men without distinction, save that officers worked the hardest, toiled at burying the untended and famished beasts, the carcasses of which bred pestilence. They could not furnish fatigue parties strong enough to repair breaches and make countermines; they had to grind their own corn by hand; they had not strength to bury their uncoffined dead deep enough to quench the foulness of decomposition; the native followers and servants had deserted; ladies, unaccustomed to stir a finger in that enervating climate, had to perform the most menial offices at the most trying season, on bad and scanty food, and in crowded, unwholesome dens; all to the never-ceasing thunder of cannon and rattle of musketry. It was then that Englishwomen, seeing their husbands slain and their helpless children sicken and die before them, sharing the men's hardships, tending the sick, and braving the tempest of death, showed that they too came of heroic strain and knew how to endure.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the wasted garrison manning those battered defences was their excessive weariness, for, except at Arah and Cawnpore, never did fighting men have to toil like these foreigners, the meanest of whom had hitherto been accustomed to be tended like princes by the subject race now besieging them.

The sun still lay bright upon the gilded domes and graceful minarets springing from the rich foliage of the beautiful city, when the monotony of the stern siege music was broken

by continuous firing from the direction of Cawnpore ; it grew ever nearer and louder, till the hearts of the brave and weary garrison were thrilled to their depths by the actual sight of English soldiers hewing their way through the streets. Those who saw broke into a cheer that was taken up and echoed from end to end of the intrenchment, till the very sick joined in it, and some even mustered strength to crawl forth to see the blessed, long-expected sight. Welcome indeed was that sight, but terrible, for the enemy's fire enflaming the narrow street was very heavy, and the English fell at every step. Now the battle was at its fiercest, the relieving force had been fighting all the long day, and had to cut their way step by step in ever-diminishing numbers through the besiegers, whom they could not dislodge.

Amongst the European infantry was Philip Randal, hardly to be recognized as the smart, inanely smiling young officer of Jessie's daguerreotype ; his face was blackened by smoke and stained with his own blood, his sword ran with that of the enemy, his right hand was red and his sleeve soaked with it, his breath came in short gasps, a burning thirst consumed him, his limbs trembled, and a red mist swam before his failing eyes ; with his parched lips compressed and his teeth clenched, his one hope was that he might not fall till he reached the Residency, if indeed it might be reached after so terrible a struggle. He had the good fortune to serve under that brave and beautiful soul, who, "in gratitude for and in admiration of the brilliant deeds of arms achieved by General Havelock, cheerfully waived his rank in favor of that officer" —tendering his military services to Brigadier-General Havelock as a volunteer, though officially appointed to the command of both Havelock and the expedition. Philip felt that it was indeed an honor to serve under two such rare and chivalrous soldiers, in an operation so fraught with peril and honor.

Outram's force never forgot Cawnpore, that word so over-weighted with agony and infamy, with heroism and cruelty, with pity and horror. They had not, like Havelock's Highlanders, been maddened by the sight of the tragic Beebeegurh, ankle deep in the blood of Christian women and children, and the yet more tragic well, over the ghastly contents of which they had cried aloud ; but the whole relieving force, as they hewed their way through the living wall of dark-faced, white-dressed foes under the concentrated fire of the street, trusted that they were saving the Lucknow garrison from the fate of Cawnpore.

Philip carried Jessie's daguerreotype, taken at the same

time as his own and the cause of as much laughter, in his breast pocket; early in the day a musket ball struck and shattered the outer half of the case, starring the likeness out of all recognition and saving his life; later on he received a flesh-wound in the leg and a ball grazed his forehead; else he was unhurt, though nearly exhausted. Suddenly, in the midst of all the fury and agony, a sweet vision of Jessie, safe in green and peaceful England, flashed before him, and he heard her voice above the thunder of the guns, the shouts, the moans, the awful tumult. Was she praying for him? Poor child, he thought, she would soon have no brother to pray for, though her picture had saved his life once that day.

The sun sank and the swift-coming darkness fell over the city, its domes and minarets, its dark groves and terraced roofs, over the placid waters of the Goomtee winding through the rich corn plain; over the battered but unconquered Residency; and then through all the tumult of the battle, rose the triumphant skirl of bag-pipes and a cheer, a deep-chested English cheer, low, hoarse, continuous, thunderous as the long incessant roar of the ground swell on a ragged coast, and like that, growing and deepening in volume and majesty. Many a dying ear heard it and was content, a company of wan and wasted women and children emerging from their damp vaults to snatch one breath of air in the slackening of fire after sunset, and wondering among themselves when would the relieving force come, heard it with an incredulous, delirious joy, soon changed to certainty by the irruption of the Highland soldiers among them, and the snatching up of the children by their heroic deliverers, to be kissed and cried over in their noble joy at having saved them from the fate of Cawnpore; it rolled along the ranks, and heartened up those still struggling without; it struck terror to the souls of the dusky foe, and brought new life and energy to the exhausted garrison, who took it up and prolonged the grand note till it hushed every other sound. In the rapid failing of his pulses, Philip heard it and rejoiced, knowing that his life, the life so sweet and precious to his youth, was not given in vain; he, too, uttered one exultant cheer with his last strength, something crashed on his head, he fell, and the battle raged over and away from his prostrate body.

Lucknow was relieved at last, with the loss of over a quarter of the relieving force; and though after the first wild and rapturous emotion of the relieved garrison had subsided, the relief was found to be but a reinforcement, food

and quarters for which could with difficulty be provided, the sequel proved that the deed was worth the terrible cost.

How long Philip lay among the slain he did not know; he was probably protected from further injury by falling into one of the trenches cut across the road to impede the progress of the troops; when he regained consciousness he found himself a prisoner, deprived of his sword, but furnished with the water for which he craved with delirious agony; food was given him and he slept a long sleep, and on waking found himself not much the worse for his wounds, which were not deep, though their copious bleeding had helped to exhaust him. As for the crack on the head from a clubbed musket, that had left only a surface tenderness and a certain mental dulness behind; and as he looked round the dark chamber in which he lay on a *purdah*, a sort of thin mattress, he knew that the honor of death on the battle-field had been denied him, and that he was probably destined to insult and ignominy, and the horrors of death by torture. The cold drops stood on his brow; on searching his clothes he found that no weapon, not even a pen-knife, had been left him. His money was gone, but the ruby fastened into a portion of his dress had not been discovered; Jessie's shattered picture still remained.

The poor lad rose and fell on his knees, echoing the prayer which he afterward found written upon a wall in Cawnpore—"Have mercy upon us, and deliver us not into the hands of our enemies"—a prayer so pitiful in the light of after-events. Many Englishmen and women in that awful year turned in extremity to the sure and certain refuge of souls, and turned not in vain. Frail women bore witness during the siege of Lucknow to the strength procured from that unfailing source; brave men grew braver. Philip had often stood at handcrips with Death; he had volunteered in many a desperate deed before Sebastopol; he had earned, though never won, the Victoria Cross, but he was too imaginative to go under fire without a full sense of peril such as had made him tremble and turn pale on his first experience at the Alma; and now, with the memory of Cawnpore, Shahjehanpore, and other places of horror fresh in his mind, his joints seemed loosened and his bones melted like wax within him. Yet women and children had borne worse. Outside his dark prison-house the infernal siege-symphony, with the addition of a terrific explosion, crashed on; he heard the sound of elephants drawing guns. Jessie alone would mourn him; he could not fulfil the trust her dying father had laid on him. He had

taken care to make a will leaving his small fortune to her. Perhaps after all, she would be better without him ; she was so young she would easily form fresh ties, and they had already been separated so long. All was at an end ; the strong, beautiful life, the perils and chances he loved so well ; nameless as he was, he must sink nameless and unnamed from the sight of living men, from darkness he must pass to darkness, like a spark seen a moment in a night sky and then forever quenched, like the white spray cresting a wave and dissipated in the waters, like a moonbeam shot through a breaking cloud and engulfed again in the night. How different was the going of Henry Lawrence but three months since ; how different would it be with Havelock and Outram if they fell, as, for all he knew, they might already have done, each leaving the memory of a noble life and stainless name. Thus Philip lamented his youth.

Soon he was led before commanding officers and questioned, though on most points the rebels knew far more than he. Insults and threats of torture were sometimes his portion ; twice or thrice he was returned to his prison and left in that awful suspense, which was not the least among the trials Englishmen endured during the rebellion. His prison was changed, he was transported aimlessly from place to place, led out to execution and covered with muskets, which after all were not fired, or fired in the air.

Often he felt that the bitterness of death was past, but again and again the agony was prolonged, and he expected no mercy in the end. His first acquaintance with the Indian people was made at an unfortunate time ; in all those dark, fierce, turbaned faces round him, he saw only fiends of cruelty, heathen fanatics, bound by devilish rites to all iniquity. As tragedy after tragedy had reached his tingling ears, his horror of those alien Asiatics had grown, till he said things of them and the treatment due to them which shocked Jessie then, and himself, in after-years. He did not reflect that the revolt was, after all, but a military and partial outbreak ; he had seen nothing of the intelligence, the culture, the graceful manners of these interesting and picturesque peoples ; had heard nothing of the magnificent fidelity and noble generosity of which many of them gave proof during the Mutiny. He did not remember that even the worst deeds of cruelty wrought upon conquerors of an alien race, a hated religion, and a different civilization, were equalled by what the "most polished people" in Christendom did to their own

countrymen and fellow-Christians in the French Revolution ; nor did he know how dreadful some of the English reprisals had been.

One day he found himself unbound in an abandoned house on the outskirts of the city, by the river, guarded slightly and carelessly. Presently he discerned from his window a great tumult : natives, both sépoys and civilians, rushing headlong in wildest panic, amid the thunder of a furious cannonade and crash of the explosion of an English mine beneath a large building held by the rebels ; and taking advantage of the tumult and confusion and flight of his guards, effected his escape through unlocked doors. He caught up a tulwar among the arms the soldiers had thrown away in their panic and made for the river, unheeded in the general flight. Seeing a boat, he sprang into it, pushed off and floated down stream, for he had no oars. He saw the English flag waving still above the battered Residency, which was as fiercely bombarded as ever, though the besiegers had been beaten back from the immediate vicinity of the position. He felt himself borne farther and farther from them, until the caprice of the current sent him ashore some miles away from the city, beneath a grove of mangoes, into the shade and shelter of which he was glad to crawl.

The half-closed wound had burst open again during his flight, he had been unable to bind it properly ; every moment he grew fainter with loss of blood beneath the scorching sun, until he sank at last, unconscious, just within the grove.

When he returned to consciousness, dark, turbaned faces were bending over him, restoratives were given him, his wound was bound up, he was lifted gently into a palanquin well sheltered from the sun, and borne away, he knew not whither.

Some time after darkness had fallen, they reached a small town ; the bearers set down the palanquin before an arched door which opened to admit them, and Philip presently found himself in a courtyard surrounded by buildings ; outside of which was a verandah lighted by lamps from within, and partially illumined by the slant rays of the moon from without.

A Hindoo lady dressed in bright silks, with gold anklets and bangles, came out to welcome and receive a tall and dignified man in the prime of life, whom Philip recognized as having bound up his wound ; men servants salaamed, there was much talking in an unknown tongue, and many and strange ceremonies confusing to Philip. The tall Hindoo having entered the house, soon came back with ashes taken from the altar

upon his brow ; and turning to Philip, bowed himself to him, touched his feet in token of respect, and bid him welcome in the name of God to the house of Gossamjee Bhose.

Philip, wondering and half dazed, could only speak some words of thanks as he was taken from the litter and led into the house, through which the sound of a female voice, softly singing, was heard. He was conducted to a room containing a low bedstead of strange fashion, and furnished with all that was necessary for air and coolness. Ruksbhai Ghose, Gossamjee's wife, then appeared with some pleasant drink, and bid him welcome in words of which he could only distinguish a few.

Dishes of curiously cooked food were then brought, with warm water, a native dress, including a turban, in which Philip arrayed himself with a sort of dreamy incredulity. Having washed, dressed, and eaten, he lay down upon his charpoy much refreshed, and half fearful lest a clap of hands should be heard and this strange Arabian Nights vision should vanish. Instead of which, his kind host entered, surveyed him with benevolent satisfaction, saw to his bandages, and bid him rest, saying that he would come and talk to him on the morrow—which he did, bringing a native doctor, who examined and dressed the wound and departed.

“All that you now require, sir,” Gossamjee said, “is a few days perfect rest and freedom from anxiety. The doctor thinks your wound will then be quite healed.”

“Why are you so kind to me, a stranger and foreigner fighting against your fellow-countrymen?” Philip asked of this veritable Good Samaritan, when he had told him his name and military rank, and briefly narrated his adventures of the last few days.

Gossamjee Bhose sat on a cushion on the ground, with his arms clasped round his knees, before Philip, who was sitting on the bedstead. He observed that it was a duty to succor the unfortunate and to exercise hospitality, and further that he loved the Feringhees. The English *Rah*, he said, was just and merciful, and beneath it merchants, like himself, could carry on their trades in peace without molestation. He trusted before long to see this outbreak subdued, and the English rule restored ; for the natives had suffered much from anarchy in some places, and despotism in others. Sir Henry Lawrence was a just man, and a lover of the native races ; his name was mentioned by many at the lighting of lamps, his death was a calamity to all who had known the beneficence of his sway ; for his sake, all English were welcome to whatever aid Gossamjee Bhose could give them. Outram was a good

man, he had charged his people to "spare the holy places." The Mohammedan rule was very different, as the people of Oude found to their cost. It must not be known that Gossamjee had an English officer in his house. Beelampore, the name of the town in which he lived, was groaning under the oppression of a fanatical and intolerant moulvie, who had defiled the temple with the abomination of cow's flesh. Gos-samjee had taken the liberty of destroying Randal Sahib's dress, in which he had found a valuable jewel; he begged that his highness would wear his turban when at the window, or on the house-top; and conform, so far as his religion permitted him, to Hindoo customs, in some of which he at once instructed him. He then left him, sending his son, Chunia, a lad of sixteen, who taught him the mysteries of the luxurious hubble-bubble and several useful Hindostanee phrases.

CHAPTER II.

THE HINDOO LADY.

Philip sat smoking his hubble-bubble by lamp-light that evening, pondering ways and means of returning to Lucknow when he should be well enough, and penetrating the rebel lines to the relieving force, which, as he now learned, was closely besieged and in its turn awaiting relief, he wondered what Jessie would think if she could but peep through the latticed window upon him. This amused him so much that he laughed and swallowed some of the rose-water through the tube, half choking himself, this reminded him that the art of smoking the native pipe was not to be learnt in a moment, any more than the native fashion of sitting which he was practising, with his turban on, his slippers off, and an expression of profound gravity upon his face. Jessie would not recognize her brother in this dignified young Hindoo. How amused Campbell would be! Ah, no, he remembered, Campbell, the bright boy ensign who had joined a few weeks before they came out, and whom Philip had taken into his heart of hearts, would never more be amusing or amused. Tears filled his eyes and he laid the pipe aside, recalling his last sight of Charlie Campbell, cut almost in two by a round shot, as they passed the deadly Kaiser Bagh. Then he thought mournfully of others, officers and men, whom he had seen fall in the fierce rush to the Residency.

As he was thus sadly musing and listening to a subdued chanting, which sounded pleasantly through the house, a low knock was heard at his door.

"Come in," he said, in the faltering Hindostanee, of which he had of course picked up a few words before his arrival at Beelampore.

The door opened quickly and softly, and as quickly and softly closed again behind a vision that struck him dumb with amazement. It was the figure of a tall, slim Hindoo girl, dressed in gay hued silk, with a brilliant silken sari thrown gracefully over her head and shoulders, and with golden ornaments upon her round, brown arms, and slender ankles.

Gossamjee's lesson on Hindoo manners not having included the etiquette proper to the reception of an uninvited lady in his private apartments, Philip was embarrassed as to what he ought to do. He had only time, in his first startled gaze at her, to observe that dark as she was her features were refined and intelligent, and that something in her sorrowful dark eyes not only entranced him, but evoked a tumult of memory and feeling, before he rose, and making his newly learnt salaam, stood with folded arms and bent head, as if awaiting commands. This was indeed an unexpected and agreeable excitement in the monotony of his honorable captivity. A strange combination of feelings thrilled him, and made him wonder that the sight of a pretty Hindoo woman should so stir him.

"Mr. Randal," said the lady, in a low, thrilling voice which set his heart beating; "you do not, of course, remember me?"

The English accent was perfect, and Philip, in bewilderment, raised his downcast head and looked earnestly into the dark, beautiful face.

"Gossamjee Bhowe is watching lest the servants should know I am here," she said, in her low, clear voice; "speak softly, we have but a few minutes. I danced with you last winter at a ball given by the ——th Dragoons. You had a telegram——"

"I danced with Miss Maynard," he faltered.

"I am now called Malwai Bhowe, Gossamjee's orphan niece. He is hiding me. I am the only survivor of Jellapore," she replied, "my brother was deputy commissioner there, he and his wife and children—no European was spared. My ayah concealed me in a stack of firewood, she had persuaded me first to stain myself and masquerade in native dress——Ah! Mr. Randal, I cannot speak of it—that time of suspense—my brother would have sent us away, but that might have precipitated things and the country was not safe. I did not think it was so near when I first put on the ayah's dress. But I must make haste. You come from Lucknow. My brother Arthur, Captain Arthur Maynard, is there, have you seen him?"

"I never reached the position, Miss Maynard. I fell in the last rush and was taken prisoner," he replied; "but when my wound is healed I must get there somehow, when I may see your brother."

He said *may* advisedly, for he knew that the loss during the siege must have been great.

“You will tell him my story, Mr. Randal,” she continued, “it was for this I wished to speak with you, and prevailed upon Ruksbhai to persuade Gossamjee to permit this hurried visit. He—and indeed my poor mother and all my people—will have heard of the disaster at Jellapore, and suppose me to have perished.”

Philip listened to this recital, his heart torn by pity, admiration, surprise, fear, he knew not what. He could scarcely identify the pretty, light-hearted girl with whom he had danced but a few months before, and whom he had half despised, in spite of the spell she had cast upon him, with this stately Hindoo in her picturesque dress, with the look of tragic endurance stamped upon her face, and depths of thought and suffering in her eyes. The lamp-light shone directly upon her, playing upon the dark hair half concealed by the crimson and gold *sari*, and on the mournful dignity of the face, which looked as if the light of mirth could never move it from its deep sorrowful repose. She had developed rapidly during the last few months; experiences that would have crushed some natures, had ripened hers. She had been called upon to endure physically and mentally; mind and body had equally responded to the sudden strain; her stature had increased, and the girlish outlines of her figure had rounded themselves to noble proportions. Her air and gestures were carefully studied and formed in the Hindoo mould; she dared not be herself one moment in the house of Gossamjee Bhowe, where her assumed character needed most careful preservation, for his sake as well as her own. But though Ada Maynard was so changed and developed, and partially disguised, there was a nameless something, the spell of an ineffable charm, which identified her with the gay hearted girl of the ball-room, and thrilled Philip's heart to its depths. Some idea of the difficulty and desolation of her position amongst this strange heathen people, with their complicated caste prejudices, and their iron code of female subjection and restriction flashed upon him as he questioned her rapidly and incoherently, with exclamations of wonder, sympathy, and desire to help, scarcely knowing what he said in the tumult of his feelings, and half maddened by his impotence to help her, wounded, honorably imprisoned, and alone among unknown enemies and doubtful friends as he was.

“Tell my brother that I am here, alive and *safe*,” she said, at the close of the hurried, half-whispered interview. “Tell him I never part with this,” she added, quietly drawing a keen, quaintly fashioned dagger from her clothing, and letting

the light flash upon the damascened blade, before she again concealed it. "I know exactly where to strike fatally." She paused, listened, and then bidding him a hasty good-night and drawing the silken *sari* more closely about her, vanished as suddenly and silently as she had appeared, leaving Philip gazing with a dazed, incredulous look on the space she had just occupied, before he sank on the edge of the low bedstead and buried his face in his hands, striving to shut out from his vision the baleful flash of the dagger which haunted him long after, most eloquently speaking of the perils women have to face in times of anarchy and tumult, and recalling the many terrible and sometimes untrue stories he had heard of the horrors of the last few months. She knew where to strike fatally! How calmly she had spoken, as if assuring him of the most ordinary fact. And he was powerless to help her. The hubble-bubble and the Hindoo posture were alike forgotten, the turban was pushed farther back from the brow damp with horror, and Philip sat, a very European picture of trouble and dismay, feeling the full tragedy of the mutiny as he had never done before. He had heard of Jellapore, where Ada Maynard's own sister-in-law had been flung alive into the flames of a burning building before her husband's eyes, and thrust back with bayonets till she died. Was it all a dream? He rose and looked round the little room with its swinging lamp and scanty foreign furniture; he looked out of the open bay window shaded by its sun-lattice, and saw the moonlight sleeping peacefully on the housetops, and scarcely penetrating the narrow streets, touching a gilded cupola with burning silver, shining upon gracefully swaying palms and dark masses of unfamiliar foliage in the distance, and bringing out the bastioned walls and turrets of a castle upon a hill—the architecture of which was like a confused dream of feudalism and Gothic Middle Ages blended fantastically with oriental splendor and despotism, the whole touched with the peculiar glamour of the East and the deep enchantment of the days of chivalry.

The magic of that rich and splendid Eastern land had scarcely affected him in the constant succession of adventures and dangers; he could even look unmoved upon the grace of the slender symbolic palms, the very name of which has a charm, calling up a thousand associations. He had first seen these "palms and temples of the south" through a medium of bloodshed and horror, but to-night the domes of burning silver, the light soaring grace of the minarets rising above them, the dark, rich, foreign foliage, and the castle on the

hillside, all sleeping in the clear moonlight, woke in him a feeling of beauty and romance to be remembered forever.

Chunia had told him the name of the owner of that castle, a native nobleman, neutral in the present strife. What if he should prove a friend, as more than one rajah had been to fugitive English that summer.

Gossamjee Bhowe soon dissipated that illusion ; he held up a bamboo, split and tied together at the ends. "Do you see this, Randal Sahib?" he asked, "whoever leans upon the aid of the Rajah Mohun Singh, leans upon this bamboo ;" here he cut the binding string, while placing his hand on the top of the cane, which gave way in half a dozen directions and fell on the floor. "Mohun Singh would give you fair words and lodge you in his castle one day, and the next he would betray you. As the reeds by the river side, so is he, blown this way and that by all the winds of heaven."

This description of the rajah tallied only too well with Philip's conceptions of the native character as formed by the experiences of fugitive English and public report, and when he looked into the keen, mobile face of his host and benefactor, and listened to his smooth and honeyed words, and observed the obsequious politeness of his manner, being yet new to Asiatic ways, he wondered if it were wise to trust Gossamjee any further than he could see him. He thought not, and yet he and Ada Maynard were completely at his mercy.

Philip guarded his words and narrowly watched Gossamjee Bhowe whenever they were together, and sometimes at chess, which the hospitable Hindoo played to beguile the time for his wounded guest, fancied that he detected double meanings in the remarks he made on the game, which always terminated in victory for the Hindoo. Nor did Gossamjee's frequent observation, as he left the apartment, to the effect that Philip was his father, and that his house and all he possessed belonged absolutely and exclusively to Randal Sahib, reassure him in the least degree. Therefore he did not entrust Ada's precious ruby to him, forgetting that Gossamjee had already resisted one favorable opportunity of keeping it ; nor did he tell him of the treasure Ada Maynard had left with him on her hurried visit. This was a tracing on tissue paper, so small that it could be concealed in a quill, of a plan of Lucknow, its environs and the various roads leading to it ; which she herself had made from a plan found among one of the murdered European officer's effects by the friendly ayah, to whose husband the spoil had fallen. This Philip pondered over until it was traced upon the yet finer tissue of his brain.

His wounds were healing rapidly, and the repose after the tremendous exertions of the last few weeks before Lucknow was most welcome and refreshing. Gossamjee remarked on his improvement, but besought him not to leave him until he was quite recovered; reminding him that sick and wounded are more hindrance than help in the field; until Philip began to wonder if he had some sinister purpose in retaining him beneath his roof. It was true that he need not have succored him in the first instance, much less have taken him to his house as he had done; but the actions of natives during the rebellion had shown such a want of consistency, and such a purposeless tortuousness, they had been so unsteady alike in their loyalty and their hostility in many cases, that it was no wonder if plain Englishmen feared to trust any dark faces in those days.

The weather was still very hot, and he had found much refreshment in sleeping in the veranda after the first few nights. Perhaps he had some vague notion that he would be better able to penetrate to the women's apartments to help Ada, perhaps, also, he felt freer and more capable of self-defence in the open court than shut up in his room.

He had passed three or four days beneath Gossamjee's roof; it was now October, he little knew what magnificent chances of distinction he was losing in the first terrible week after the storming of the English position. He slept tranquilly on his mat, dreaming of the great willow by the mill stream, the pleasant, cool sound of the turning mill-wheel, the familiar faces in the firelight, his father and mother given back to him, as the dead so often are in dreams, and Jessie a child again, light-hearted, spoilt, and happy. Perhaps Jessie, safe beneath Miss Blushford's prim guardianship, was even then dreaming the same dream, on her white curtained, lavender-scented pillow, seeing Philip again with his manhood and his Crimean laurels fresh upon him. Perhaps she started from her tranquil sleep, thought of her poor boy fighting in distant India, and said a prayer for him before turning again to her rest.

Philip's dream suddenly changed to the dim and tumult of battle, he was before Sebastopol again, volunteering to replace some shattered gabions under heavy fire, when a musket ball again struck him in the shoulder; again he clenched his teeth with pain, and went on adjusting the gabions with the uninjured arm; but the pain of the wound grew and grew beyond all bearing till with, what he thought, a loud cry he awoke.

The moonlight lay upon the courtyard, a palm-tree stand-

ing motionless in the centre traced its plumed crown blackly against the deep sky, and cast its elongated shadow right athwart the court toward him ; another, a human shadow, fell across his recumbent form ; instead of a gun-shot wound a dark, light hand was grasping his shoulder, a dark turbaned face came between him and the moonlight, a Hindoo youth was bending over him, dimly seen against the strong moonlight.

“ Chunia ! ” he exclaimed, starting up.

“ Hush ! ” whispered the lad, in a voice which stirred him, “ keep in the shadow and follow me.”

He rose without hesitation or question and catching up such clothes as he had laid aside, followed the slim and graceful figure, wondering if this might be some fresh scene from dreamland, or the sweet madness of a fairy tale, and filled with a vague delight in the mystery, romance, and probable danger of following his fugitive countrywoman in her fresh disguise. He was bound to be her knight, his life was at her service ; as she explained nothing she had doubtless good reason for her silence. Noiselessly gliding into the shadow, she flitted round the veranda, passing close to the sleeping forms of Gossamjee and Chunia, each on his purdah, till she reached a door, in the lock of which she placed a key which turned without sound.

She relocked the door while Philip waited, silent and almost breathless in the absolute darkness ; then with a whispered “ Come,” led him along a dark passage until they emerged into the narrow street of Beelampore ; Ada softly locking the last door behind her. Then she paused a moment, pushing him back into the shadow, from which he had incautiously escaped, placed a parcel in his hands, and after listening intently and looking, as if in doubt, this way and that, started again, still barefoot and noiseless, as was Philip.

They passed the bazaar, which he had been able to watch from his window when it was filled with busy, chaffering trade people, then an amusing and picturesque scene, but now silent as a tomb ; they passed the Hindoo temple, recently defiled by order of the despotic moulvie, and unmolested, save by a growl or snap from the curs prowling the town for offal, left the houses behind them. Ada then stopped a moment to put on her shoes, and Philip was too glad to follow her example, for their feet were already wounded by stones, and then, silent and ghost-like in their white dresses, by which each could faintly distinguish the other even in the darkness, they sped onward and now upward till the road led them beneath the embattled walls of Mohun Singh’s castle.

The moonlight smiled broadly upon the castle walls, showing a beautiful arcade of pointed arches and slender pillars fashioned in the wall above, from which, for all they knew, a sentry might be watching; they crept along past the lofty wall on the opposite side in the shadow cast by some trees, Philip all the time keeping one hand on the long, sharp, dagger-like knife that Gossamjee had given him with his native dress, and remembering the dagger Ada flashed in the lamp-light on the night of her visit to him. No sound came from the sleeping castle, nothing molested them, they reached the crest of the hill and looked back upon Beelampore lying far below them in the magical light. Then his guide slackened her hitherto rapid pace, and at last broke silence.

CHAPTER III.

THE TWO COMRADES.

“We are going to Lucknow, Mr. Randal,” Ada said; “where does it lie?”

He did not know; Beelampore was not in the plan she had given him. His guide then told him that she was not sure of the locality herself, but was certain that it was considerably north of Beelampore.

This information was most depressing, especially when a sudden twinge reminded Philip of his recent wound. He looked with dismay at his companion's slender form, conspicuous in the white boy's dress, and tried to calculate the distance from Lucknow by the time it had taken the bearers to convey him in his palanquin to Beelampore. Alas! these bearers, besides being swift and practiced runners, knew the way and were not obliged to hide themselves. The adventure was a desperate one.

“We must make the best of the darkness,” Ada said, tranquilly at this juncture. “It will be well to lie quiet during the day. You have been very good and given me no trouble with questions and hesitations.”

“I am at your service,” he replied, simply; “I know that you would not have left your refuge but for good reason.”

“Good reason indeed,” she said. “You have heard Gossamjee Bhowe speak of the tyrannical moulvie who caused the Hindoo temple to be defiled. This man has sworn that there shall be no more English, and for that reason Gossamjee was so anxious to pass us both off as Hindoos. With me he succeeded fairly well. I was in India until eleven years old. Hindostanee is my second language. I know much of native ways, besides, women do not attract much attention, their lives are passed in such seclusion. But you arrived in English uniform, and wounded, and this somehow got wind. Gossamjee suspects that one of the servants turned traitor. These people are always intriguing, and some friendly traitor warned Gossamjee of the moulvie's plan, which was to search his house—probably this very

night. He told Ruksbhai also that he would defend us to the death. Poor Ruksbhai herself proposed our flight; she had the locks oiled, and gave me a master key and a suit of Chunia's clothes, and furnished me with food and a little money. Dear Ruksbhai, she is a good actor, and I hope that she will be able to persuade Gossamjee that she knows nothing of our disappearance. She had to take old Toru into her confidence. Toru dare not betray her mistress. Gossamjee would certainly beat her for her part in it. And for such a breach of hospitality he would beat Ruksbhai severely. Dear Gossamjee, I wish I might have bid him good-bye and thanked him. He is such a noble-minded man. Even Ruksbhai loves him, though he is her husband. How I shall miss them all. You did not see Rajmahli, of course? But you may have heard a girl's voice singing hymns. It was Rajmahli. She is sixteen, and a widow. I taught her many things, and we studied Sanscrit together. And little Sata, a child of six. Poor baby! It is bad enough to be a woman in any case, but to be a Hindoo woman; there is nothing more terrible, except to be a Mohammedan woman."

"They are used to it," he replied, his mind busy with more personal matters.

"And I am used to being a woman," she returned, with a scornful smile, "but I find the more I am used to it the less I like it."

"You surely would not wish to be a man?" Philip remonstrated. Perhaps salmon, mackerel, and such lucky fish as are not skinned alive, consider that discipline excellent for eels, who, like Mohammedan women, are used to it.

"At all events," she returned, "I must look as much like a boy as I can till this little excursion is at an end. My name is Carendra Lal, you are Bassenjee Lal, my brother, and we are returning from some pilgrimage to Lucknow, where our parents live. An impediment in your speech obliges me to be spokesman on all occasions."

The moon set and clouds arose, gradually blotting out the stars. They travelled along in the darkness, listening to the cries of wild beasts from the jungle they were approaching, and talking but little; Philip regretting that he had left Gossamjee's hospitable roof without a word of thanks or farewell, and speculating on the trouble that might befall the honest merchant on their account. It was well that Ada had explained nothing beforehand, as in that case he would have felt himself bound to tell his good host of his intended flitting.

“Gossamjee will surely think me ungrateful,” he said.

“No,” his companion replied; “he will think that we found a favorable opportunity for flight, and will be glad that we did it before getting him into trouble. It was agreed between us that I was to seize any chance that offered without telling him, so that he might be unable to furnish any clue in case of pursuit. There are some very fierce fanatics at Beelampore who think English blood the most dainty offering for their gods. Oh, Mr. Randal, how beautiful it is to be free. Yours is the first English voice I have heard since—for three months,” she said, her breath catching at the memory of the last English voice she had heard; “and I have not had so much as an English Bible to read, and have only spoken English when teaching Rajmahli, and sometimes her father and her brother.”

“Poor child!” Philip replied, touched at the thought of her desolation, “I wish I were ten men for your sake.”

The dawn was breaking now, not the sudden splendor of the tropics, but a much less gradual dawn than we know in these latitudes. The air grew sharp, the darkness seemed deeper, and then the clouds cleared off, the east glimmered grayly and turned to white and gold, the great sun leapt up from the horizon into a sky of deep glowing orange; the warm autumn day was near.

Ada's spirits had been rising with the sense of freedom, and the stimulus of action, the terrible sorrow and suspense of the last few months was succeeded by a natural reaction. She could have sung in the lightness of her heart.

“How beautiful the world is!” she exclaimed, as she watched the glory of the sunrise with tears in her eyes, “and how beautiful it is only just to be alive. I am sure that we shall get through the lines, Mr. Randal. I think that God means to deal more gently now—I have suffered so much, and you have suffered, too. And how shall I ever be able to thank you?”

“If I can help you I shall need no other thanks,” he replied; “but it strikes me that if I get into Lucknow alive I shall owe it to you.”

They went into a grove of mangoes for concealment rather than shade, to rest awhile, and eat some of the food Ada had brought with her; and a more paradisaic breakfast perhaps had never been taken. The world lying before them in the beauty of the morning was so fresh, so young, and so bright; the experience was so new and so romantic.

Philip scarcely knew Ada in her fresh disguise; the merry

Hindoo lad with the sparkling eyes differed as much from the dignified, deep-voiced Indian lady telling him her sad story, as the latter contrasted with the light-hearted girl in the ball-room. His spirits rose with the glory of the fresh morning, and the infection of Ada's, but he could not forget the extreme peril of their position and his own heavy responsibility, and ate the chupatties and fruit he found in his bundle with an undercurrent of serious thought.

"Brother Bassamjee," Ada said hurriedly, after a time, "I wonder in which direction Lucknow lies."

Then it struck Philip that, having walked for so many hours, they ought by this time to be within hearing of the siege guns. He looked over the prospect before him, a rich plain dotted with villages among corn-fields, groves, and paddy fields, with the eternal palm springing here and there; he could see no sign of a large city, or large river. Beelampore was left far behind out of sight. He had no idea where he was.

"We shall soon find the road," he said in a reassuring voice. "Only keep up your heart, Miss Maynard."

Their frugal meal finished, and their feet washed in a stream, the travellers went refreshed upon their way toward a village, where Ada's inquiries procured the disquieting information that they had been diligently walking away from Lucknow all night, and must now retrace their steps, though they were not obliged to pass Beelampore again.

The sun waxed warmer as they walked, and both began to flag, Philip even limping, as the effort told upon his wounded leg.

"It would have been nothing without an adventure," Ada commented joyously; "you didn't suppose we were going to walk across to Lucknow as one walks across the fields to church at home, Mr. Randal?" And he certainly did not.

They had now reached a ravine formed by a cascade dashing from a height; the steep sides were partly clothed with wood, and as it was evident that both were tired out, they rested in this cool and pleasant retreat till the sun's worst force should be expended. Here Philip prepared a couch with leaves and undergrowth, but before he had made much way with it Ada, who had thrown herself at the foot of a tree and begun to discuss their plans, suddenly became silent, her head drooping on her breast. She had fallen asleep, dead beat. She scarcely stirred when he lifted her gently from the earth and placed her on the greenwood couch, himself sitting near and fanning the insects off with a green bough. He

sat thus for many hours, battling with the drowsiness that threatened to overcome him, and pondering their situation and plans, a perfect passion of pity and tenderness sweeping over him whenever his eyes rested upon the sleeping girl, and he thought of her courage and patience, her utter desolation and dependence upon him.

They had decided to sleep by turns in the day, and travel again at night ; but Ada, who had taken no exercise for many months, was so exhausted that the day wore on and nearly away while she slept, and Philip could only keep himself awake by pacing to and fro, to the discomfort of his wounded leg. But at last the sleep faded from her face, she sighed, stirred, and woke, springing to her feet when her eyes opened upon Philip's haggard face, and reproaching him for letting her sleep on—for they did not think it safe to sleep without a watch, a temple above the cascade giving evidence of human habitation near.

Then Philip took her place for an hour, and she watched and fanned in turn, and her heart in turn melted with pity when she looked upon the bronzed tired face and the strong limbs relaxed in the helplessness of sleep.

If wild beasts cease to harm each other, and unite to face a common danger, how much more binding is the tie of endurance and peril when shared by human beings? And these had for each other the subtle charms of youth and sex, together with diversity of character and beauty ; they were alone together in the wide world, surrounded by cruel and treacherous enemies, at the mercy of elemental forces, hot noons, chill nights, beasts of prey and venomous reptiles, malaria, hunger, and the pestilence that slays and wastes at that season in those climates. Each felt something of the tremendous forces drawing them together, but their youth and the exigencies of the moment hindered them from seeing how deep and subtle those forces were.

Another night's walking, they hoped, would bring them to the rebel lines ; but it was not so. What with sickness and other mischances, it was days later when two young English-speaking Hindoos were suffered to pass the English outposts in the evening, and brought guarded into the entrenchments.

Foot-sore and weary, thin and haggard, their white clothing stained and torn, they were led before Europeans almost as tattered, soiled, and wasted as themselves ; when the younger lad, who was half supported by the elder, suddenly

uttered a cry and ran toward a tall man clad in a ragged, dirty flannel shirt, shabby trousers and slippers, but accoutred as a private soldier, and wearing an officer's sword.

"Arthur, don't you know me?" sobbed the boy, throwing himself upon the astonished officer.

"She escaped from Jelloypore in disguise," the other fugitive explained. "You may be sure of your sister by this token, Captain Maynard," he added, producing a large ruby from his clothing. "Miss Maynard dropped this while dancing with me, Philip Randal, of the 190th, last winter, and I took it in charge for her until now."

Then ensued a scene in which recognition, doubt, fear and hope, sorrow and joy, were tumultuously mingled, one of many similar scenes enacted in Lucknow that year, when the supposed dead suddenly reappeared after long wanderings, and those reputed living were as suddenly discovered to have been long dead; when reunited friends met with terror, framing questions their lips almost refused to utter, and their ears dreaded to hear answered.

"Is father alive? And mother?—Where is your wife? Algernon was killed and Ethel and all the children—None were saved, civilians or soldiers—My children are gone—My wife still lives—Her baby is a month old—There is still food in the garrison—We have lost all we possessed—We left cantonments in the clothes we stood in—You are ill—I am starved—Ah, poor child, and worn out—And Havelock is ill—Sir Colin is coming—A little patience—Thank God how sad—How sweet—" and such like mingled questions and answers amid tears and smiles, and ejaculations of sorrow and wonder, to the crashing of the grim siege-symphony overhead.

The fugitives separated without farewell; Ada was taken to her brother's wife, and Philip, with a keen pang at a parting he felt to be final, at least as far as the close and pleasant companionship in the last days of suffering and danger was concerned, went to the quarters assigned to his regiment, where another equally ghastly but less emotional scene of recognition, inquiry, sad response, and half sorrowful welcome occurred, in the midst of which the diabolical war music rose in a deafening fortissimo; the wall of the temporary mess room crashed in, admitting a heavy exploding body, men fell in various directions like so many ninepins, the sound of smashing crockery and shattering furniture was mingled with groans, and followed by silence and darkness.

Philip, stunned by the noise, and blinded by the thick dust-

cloud, wondered that he was still alive, and supposed himself the only survivor of the explosion ; when the cloud began to dissipate itself, a light was struck, and a voice quietly remarked :

“ Their practice is improving. The last only ploughed the compound a bit.”

“ What I hate is their confounded stink-pots,” said another voice, and the whole assembly, the officers being then at dinner, was soon on its feet, and making use of such furniture as was not smashed, adapting broken things and continuing the repast, as far as circumstances permitted, which was not very far. The body of a poor native servant, the only victim of the exploding shell, was quietly removed without comment a few minutes later.

Then Philip heard of the terrific loss on September 25th, and during the following week, when amputated limbs lay in heaps in the hospital, of the continued fury of the siege and apparently undiminished numbers of the enemy, who had rolled back for a short distance round the original entrenched position as the sea would roll back from cliffs rising out of the water, but who invested the reinforced garrison as closely as ever. Outram had not yet heard of Sir Colin Campbell's approach, and thanks to Lawrence's providence there were still provisions for a month. An English paper, smuggled in by a servant, proclaimed the interest and sympathy of England, and the starting of large bodies of troops overland.

Two or three days in hospital, where a round shot killed a man sitting on his bed, and several of duty of most active description, followed, and Philip saw and heard nothing of the comrade of his late adventures. He contrived to send out a note for Jessie, concealed in a quill, saying that he was alive and well, and then one evening when he had an hour to spare, he made his way to the Maynards' quarters, telling himself that, little as conventionalities could be observed by people whose scanty leisure was spent in dodging round shots and musket balls, it was absolutely incumbent on him to ask how Miss Maynard fared after her adventurous journey.

He found a quiet circle of ladies in shabby clothes, sitting in a veranda to breathe a little air in the comparative lull of the iron tempest, which usually occurred after sunset. Faded, haggard, and languid these ladies were ; one wore a bit of crape at her neck, the nearest approach to widow's weeds that she could procure ; one was hushing a young fretful baby. This lady received him very cordially, and thanked him

for his care of her sister-in-law, while Captain Maynard took the young child and looked at it with a wistful tenderness.

"This little chap began life boldly," he observed, petting the tiniest of arms.

"He ought to grow into a distinguished soldier," Philip replied, glancing with a sort of awed pity at the frail creature, who had chosen such a perilous time for his first entrance upon the world's stage, and doubting if he would grow into anything.

Then he heard the low clear voice which had of late become so familiar, though not less thrilling to him, and almost feared to look up to the face he had seen in such varied aspects when Ada came on to the veranda.

"I am so glad to see you," she said. "I was afraid you would not have time to come. You were in hospital; I was so sorry. I hear you have been on duty, I hope not too soon."

The young widow's eyes clouded when she saw Philip rise from the block of wood he was sitting on to shake his former comrade's hand; she had heard the story of their wandering with a sort of tender envy, and the expression Ada's appearance brought to Philip's face gave him a momentary resemblance to her own soldier slain during the siege. It happened that Philip was clad in a shabby, stained uniform that she recognized too well; she had refused to sell it, but placed it at the disposal of any officer who might need it.

Ada had now recovered her natural hue, and though unsuitably clad in a rich colored silk gown given her by a lady who lived in the Residency, and therefore had all her wardrobe with her when the flight thither took place, she made a graceful and feminine figure in the dim light. Her dark hair was coiled about her head like that of a Greek statue, her eyes were bright with pleasant welcome; she carried a sleeping child in her arms, a wasted, ailing creature, yet no light burden, being at least three years old.

"Ada," her sister-in-law said, "can't you put Willie to bed now? He has been in your arms the whole long day. He will wear you out."

"The moment I lay him down he cries," she replied, gathering him closer in her arms; "he is so good, he lets me work and wash the china and do all sorts of things!"

Philip wondered what "all sorts of things" might mean; without asking he took the child from her, and quickly hushed the feeble moan it made on being moved; then he learnt that its mother was too weak to tend it, and trusted it entirely to Ada.

Just then a slight sibilant noise, followed by a crack, was heard, and a small object bounded from the chair on which Miss Maynard was sitting and struck her on the side.

"Spent, fortunately," she said, with a slight start, while a small leaden ball rolled harmlessly to the ground, whence Philip took it as a souvenir.

"The chair is none the worse," Captain Maynard said, tranquilly examining it; "it was evidently a chance shot."

Philip, whose low seat was one of those wooden blocks fired from mortars at a high elevation into the garrison, keenly realized the brief and precarious tenure on which they all held their lives; was it worth while to think of the future in the near face of death? Why not snatch a little joy from these fleeting moments of peril? Therefore he looked into Ada's deep eyes, and listened to the music of her voice, while the young widow watched them with a sorrowful sympathy, and enjoyed a brief hour of Paradise.

When he returned to his post he felt very low, and fell to regretting that he had no tidings of Jessie; he would give the world for a home letter. And tired as he was by the long day's duty, and weakened by poor food and hardships, he did not sleep that night, but lay looking through the darkness at a face which seemed to reproach him, the face that of all faces had looked most kindly upon him all his life, the lined, worn face of Matthew Meade, and remembered that good man's constant and surpassing love and kindness, and the perfect trust he had seen in his dying eyes.

In the meantime the guns boomed on; a ball might at any moment crash into his room, ending all responsibility.

His visit was repeated once or twice before the position was evacuated a few weeks later, in November, when Ada was one of the crowd of ladies who took shelter in his regiment's quarters, while a passage was being cleared for their carriages on their way to the Dilkoosha Palace. The child was still in her arms; she begged a little milk for it, and Philip was happy and proud to be able to furnish some.

A few days later, when the sick and wounded and women and children were conveyed to Allahabad, he was one of their escort, and thus saw her frequently during the fortnight's slow and difficult march, which was necessarily one of great hardship. A great crowd of sick and feeble people and their necessary baggage in bullock wagons and palanquins, with camels, elephants, pedestrians, and vehicles all mixed up together in the hot sun and stifling dust, involved much suffering and unspeakable confusion. With scanty and hastily organized com-

missariat, the Maynards were frequently without food or tents for the night ; and, like others, were dependent upon the sometimes lawless proceedings of male friends.

“ Brother Bassamjee,” Ada said one night, when after long and weary waiting at their encampment he brought them some loaves filched from a commissariat wagon, “ if you were in merry England I strongly suspect you would see more of the inside of a prison than you liked.”

“ Well, I begged this milk for Willie,” he replied, producing some.

“ After all,” Ada said, when she had thanked him, “ it is only a long picnic, but Mrs. Maynard won't see it in that light.”

“ It would be more amusing,” poor Mrs. Maynard observed, “ if we could be quite sure the enemy would not attack us.”

Philip was more than sorry when this novel picnic came to an end, and the Lucknow people were safely packed in trains to Allahabad. Both Ada and Mrs. Maynard said a tearful farewell, but Ada smiled through her tears.

“ What can it matter ?” he said to himself in the march back to the Alumbagh, “ I shall never see her again, whether I go through the campaign or not.”

And when he reached the camp and found several home letters, he almost trembled at the prospect of opening them.

The time moved heavily on that winter in spite of the constant peril and excitement culminating in the final capture of Lucknow in March ; Jessie's strange discontent and constant desire to leave the neighborhood of Cleeve and obtain some employment, expressed in the letters which reached him fitfully, seemed to him, in face of the grim realities of his own life, but as the murmurs of a spoilt child, wanting something and knowing not what.

“ Dear little Jessie ! I will do all I can to make her happy when the campaign is over,” he used to say on reading her letters.

CHAPTER IV.

IN ARCADIA.

Marwell Rectory was a comfortable little country house which assumed a pleasant coquettish pretence of being a cottage. It wore a rustic crown of neat clean thatch, the projecting eaves of which threw the rain well off the stone walls and sheltered them from the frost; the latticed bay windows and the picturesque porch were roofed with this same neat thatch; the twinkling windows, gabled roofs, and twisted chimneys were so clasped, smothered, and twined about with creeping greenery and richness of blossom that they seemed to emerge from all the bloom only by a strong and continuous effort.

Just now in the heart of summer, a Gloire de Dijon, a red-hearted cabbage-rose, and a pink-flushed bunch rose threw their blooming sprays all over and among its myrtles and honeysuckles, so that people on the gravel drive in front literally walked upon rose-leaves as the petals floated down on the summer air faster than they could be swept up by the strictest of gardeners.

And the head-gardener, the Adam of this paradise, was not strict; he even liked what more professional gardeners term a litter, especially when sweet as this. He, that is, Mr. Ingleby, was standing on this sunny afternoon beneath a broad-armed linden-tree, which was sweet with bee-haunted blossom, with his black straw hat tilted over his face—a handsome face with kind blue eyes and clean-shaven mouth of benignant curve, framed by blue-black hair of graceful wave and blue-black whiskers of fashionable cut—with a heath broom in his hand and a heap of short mown grass at his feet. But instead of sweeping, he was looking dreamily over the cottage in the foreground at the sweep of park land spreading away to the blue hills, and the village to the left backed by pastures, farmstead, and corn-land, and ending in a distant promise of shining sea.

A lady in a broad garden-hat, about his own age, which

was some thirty odd summers—and these odd summers are often very oddly reckoned by her sex—a plain likeness of himself, was tying up some carnations, not without a critical glance at the idle rector, who she observed, though he had taken off his coat, looked, in his white tie and white shirt-sleeves with stainless cuffs, as spick and span as if prepared to walk down Piccadilly on a fine May afternoon.

“Do you hold that broom for effect or with some distant hope of making use of it, William?” she asked in her sharp, staccato way.

“For a little of both, Susie,” he replied, with his sweet smile. “I fancy the broom conveys some faint idea that I might be useful, which enhances my other charms, and I am not entirely without some hope of getting the lawn swept in the course of time.”

“What you want is a good strict wife, with a tongue like Mrs. Plummer’s,” grumbled Miss Ingleby.

“What I lack but don’t need, my dear,” he returned. “Besides, while I enjoy the privilege of your conversation, can I hope for anything sharper?”

“Or more acid?” she added, laughing. “Just fancy, the Medways call us honey and vinegar.”

“Good for sore throats. Raspberry vinegar would be better, Sue. There’s a little tartness in both of us. Miss Lonsdale is our sponsor, if I am not mistaken. Poor girl!”

“Poor indeed! Why she is as rich as Midas.”

“And as miserable. And the reeds tell little whispering tales of her. Midas has nothing to do and gets into mischief. Midas is a coquette, and the Nemesis of coquettes has overtaken her.”

“What in the world is that?” interrupted Miss Ingleby, with a look of stony amazement. “Surely the man is cracked,” she added aside to the carnations.

“To fall in love with the man she can’t have.”

“You, I suppose. But pity is akin to love. When did she tell you? Is it a confessional secret?”

“I think I see the fair Clara in a country vicarage.”

“Well! so you might have done last Easter, if you’d been at home when she called.”

“Wasting her sweetness upon a desert parson——”

“Say a deserted parson.”

“In my mind’s eye, Susanna,” he continued, with imper- turbable sweetness; “but I wish to goodness she had let that nice little Jessie Meade alone.”

“Stuff! *She* can’t flirt with Jessie. Nothing can be bet-

ter for the girl than to have the *entrée* of a house like Marwell Court. Clara Lonsdale will form her manner and give her the *chic* the little rustic could never have developed at her boarding-school."

"Heaven forbid!" said Mr. Ingleby, with fervor. "But Jessie is too true a lady to be spoiled by Miss Lonsdale."

"Now saints pity me," murmured Miss Ingleby aside, "for this man is evidently on the road to Bedlam. The Meades' daughter and the Plummers' cousin, born in a mill, brought up at a missish boarding-school, and finished at Redwoods Farm!"

"Nature said of Jessie at her birth, 'I will make a lady of mine own.'"

"The man is raving!"

"Meade was ungrammatical, but not ungentle. There were no people at Cleeve I liked so much and found so congenial as the Meades. Dear old people!"

"And it is thus that the pet curate of Cleeve slights his old parishioners *en masse*!"

"Whatever Phil Randal's origin may be, he has the making of a gentleman in him."

"Wasn't he the son of a drunken Old Clo' man!"

"I saw a good deal of the lad at one time. Impulsive, good-hearted, tender-mouthed; needed a light hand; a tight curb made him kick. I believe I am responsible for his being in the army. The advice I gave Matthew Meade on the subject is one of the few things I never repented of. If you come to think of it, Sue, it isn't a bad thing to rise by pure merit from a private to captain, in an army where promotion is purchased, and influence is necessary to advancement."

"It was a clever stroke of yours, Will. Especially your prevision of the Crimea and the Mutiny," she commented with a meek air.

"I'll sell you to a Turkish Bashaw, Miss, if you don't take some of the edge off that tongue of yours," he replied with a more radiant smile than ever, as he began to apply his broom to the long-neglected sward. "Phil Randal is a good fellow, let me tell you, and a fine soldier; and I wish to goodness his charming little sweetheart had been left alone by the Marwell Court people. It is enough to spoil even her. The girl is in an entirely false position there. They make use of her as a sort of nurse to that poor little sick Ethel, whose fretfulness wears everybody else out. Miss Lonsdale treats her as something between a lap-dog and a slave. She meets fast men there; why even Claude——"

"Poor Claude, the most harmless and good-hearted of human beings. He can't help being an Apollo, disguised as a hussar."

"Dear me," returned Mr. Ingleby, resting on his broom and smiling sweetly upon his sister with his sunny blue eyes. "An Apollo! So that is the feminine notion of an Apollo? In what respect does he resemble that elegant and accomplished god? I never heard of his writing verses or even holding forth at public dinners."

"Why, in his beauty to be sure."

"Beauty! Do you really think Medway beautiful, Sue?" he asked benignantly, regarding his sister's labors; "what odd taste women have! Claude Medway! He is not deformed, certainly, his legs are straight, so is his back. I believe that his nose is properly fixed on, and he doesn't squint, but to call that great hulking fellow beautiful! It is the tailoring, my dear, the tailoring of Bond Street.

"With his cruel dart did Cupid nail her,
The shaft was winged by a Bond Street tailor!"

My first impromptu, Sue, and your epitaph; not bad, is it?"

"And then people talk of women's jealousy!" observed Miss Ingleby, dropping into a rustic seat, and fanning herself with her hat. "There's something I like in that young fellow, William. It is beautiful to see him with Ethel. When I called the other day, Jessie was reading aloud to her, and Claude was sitting by her couch, handing eau de Cologne, arranging pillows, drawing blinds up and down according to her whims. It was one of Ethel's fractious days. The nurse had been twice reduced to tears. Sir Arthur confided to me that he would gladly give a year of his life to give Ethel one hour's ease, but that she had ordered him out of her room in irritation, and he had sent for Jessie as a last resource. And then to see that handsome, distinguished looking man, who is expected to do nothing but enjoy himself, pent up in a close darkened room, humoring all that peevish child's whims and ill-temper, and waiting on her like the tenderest nurse."

"Most affecting," added Mr. Ingleby, "a healthy young man sacrificing an hour's idleness to a sick sister! And Jessie was reading aloud, was she? Dear me!"

Mr. Ingleby repeated this exclamation with a preoccupied air, and applied himself with great energy to the broom for a few seconds.

"I wonder what brings Medway here at this time of year, Sue," he added, relapsing into idleness again.

"The train probably, and his own sweet will. I can't imagine, William, what you have against that poor young man."

"Why nothing, he's a very good sort of fellow, but it isn't well for a man of his stamp to be kicking his heels about in this quiet place with nothing to keep him out of mischief. And it is a pity for Jessie to be constantly meeting him."

"Really, William, one would think poor Captain Medway was a vulgar Don Juan to hear you."

"Nonsense, Sue. He's all right," returned Mr. Ingleby, coloring, "but, you see—when a man is young and rich and well-born, and in a crack cavalry regiment, though he may be ever such a good fellow—well! a hussar is a hussar and not a practised exponent of ethics—look here, why don't you have Jessie Meade here oftener; and make a companion of her? Ask her to tea."

"She's asked for to-night," replied Miss Ingleby, gazing with a quietly ironical expression upon her brother's face. "As it is your cricket night, I thought it a good opportunity. I know how strongly you disapprove of bachelor society for her. Why, there she is," she exclaimed, catching sight of a light summer dress fluttering among the shrubs by the gate, and rising to meet Jessie with a cordial smile.

Mr. Ingleby put on his coat and followed his sister, thinking, not without satisfaction, that the cricket was postponed, and that all bachelor society was not baneful to Jessie.

Jessie always felt at home in that house; she liked the Inglebys, none the less because Mr. Ingleby had been accustomed to drop in at Stillbrooke Mill for a chat and sometimes a pipe, which it had been her proud office as a child to fill. She came smiling up the drive with a sort of wild-rose grace, with her hair gleaming fitfully as the sunshine and leaf-shadows changed upon it. She was, as usual, very simply dressed, without ornament, yet the lines of her figure were so subtly graceful, and her bearing had so modest a dignity, that her plain, fresh, well-fitting dress had an elegant distinction far beyond that of fashion and richness of fabric.

She carried a small basket containing a gift from Cousin Jane's dairy and garden, a common basket, about which as she came along she had entwined some sprays of wild-rose so as to make it a beautiful object.

"What an artist you are, child!" Miss Ingleby said, taking the basket; "you can touch nothing without making it

beautiful. Come in and sit in the cool, you have had a broiling walk."

Jessie was not sorry to find herself in a low chair in the pretty little drawing-room, which looked upon the lawn and the blue distance beyond, and Miss Ingleby derived a half spiteful amusement from seeing her brother follow them to that feminine retreat and supply Jessie's lack of adornment by a cluster of rose-buds, which repeated the delicate tinting of her face, and were plucked from his favorite *Devoniensis* tree.

"If a young woman can look more charming than as God made her, Jessie, it is when wearing rosebuds," he said on presenting them.

"Thank you, Mr. Ingleby," she replied, with a child's simple pleasure, as she rose to arrange the flowers before a glass.

"And this before my very eyes!" reflected Miss Ingleby. "No wonder he is afraid of cavalry officers if middle-aged parsons go on like this."

"I really must break myself of calling you Jessie," he added, sitting before her with his arms on the back of his chair, and contemplating the effect of his roses with profound admiration, "I never can remember that you are grown up and engaged."

"I hope you never will," she replied, with the faint blush any allusion to her engagement now always called forth; "it is so pleasant to hear you say Jessie; it makes me feel young again, and reminds me of home."

Her voice quivered a little at the last word, and there was a responsive tremor in Mr. Ingleby's kind face. He laid his hand gently on her shoulder as he passed her on leaving the room. "Poor child," he said, "you are still new to trouble, and you don't even know how young you are. Take care of her, Sue, and pet her as much as you can."

"He evidently thinks little of my petting powers, Jessie," commented his sister when he was gone. "Truly I never met such a man as my brother. There is not a child in this parish that he does not spoil. I am obliged to be a very dragon to make up for his deficiencies."

"Don't be a dragon to me, dear Miss Ingleby," said Jessie, drawing her chair to her side and taking her hand in the caressing way that no one, not even Miss Ingleby, could resist, "I like to be spoilt."

"I dare say you do, miss," was her inward reflection, "an artful young puss! Take care that you are not really spoilt, my dear," she added, aloud; "such a pretty face as yours

often proves a dangerous gift; it leads people, especially men, stupid creatures, to value you far beyond your merits."

"But I can't help being pretty," she replied, with total absence of vanity, "and I really don't think I am—very—at least not prettier than most girls."

Miss Ingleby looked at her with a searching directness that would have put most people out of countenance. "If you are not very deep, my lady," she thought, "you are certainly the most refreshing young person I ever met." "Well," she replied, seeing that Jessie did not blench, "perhaps you are not so very good looking after all. But, as you say, most young girls are pretty enough to attract nonsensical admiration, especially from men, who are all absolute fools with regard to our sex, and will insist upon thinking women made on purpose to be looked at. If that had been the purpose of the Almighty, my dear, he would have made us all handsome."

"Of course. And men would not have been made more beautiful than woman," was the reply which astounded Miss Ingleby, who had only recently taken an interest in Jessie, though she had known her slightly for the last three years, during which her brother had been rector of Marwell.

The latter, no longer distracted by his sister's conversation, applied himself diligently to his broom, and had just finished sweeping his lawn and heaping the short math in a barrow when, to his surprise, Captain Medway appeared within the gate, an infrequent visitor, and he went forward to receive him with a dazed look which was not unperceived by Captain Medway.

"I am fortunate in finding you at home," the latter said, "though my visit is to Miss Ingleby, for whom I have an errand from my sister."

Mr. Ingleby hoped that the invalid was better, apparently not hearing that Captain Medway wished to see the mistress of the house.

"Better," he replied with a sort of impatient catch in his breath. "Oh, yes, better, I suppose."

Mr. Ingleby looked gravely, steadily at the young man's troubled face, while uttering some commonplaces about time, hope, and patience, which he knew to be futile. He had seen that expression upon so many faces when visiting the sick, and he had produced those futile commonplaces so often, because they seemed to mean more than hopeless silence. Medway's voice and face said "she will never be better," and they implied a pained self-reproach of which the

rector had the key ; for it was while in her brother's charge that Ethel Medway had received the injury which darkened her youth.

"Not without heart," he reflected.

"I wanted to see you about the cricket club," Captain Medway continued, in his usual voice. "I shall be knocking about here for a few weeks. I suppose your eleven is made up, but if I can be of any use——"

"I do want someone to show them what bowling means," Mr. Ingleby quickly interrupted, plunging headlong into the subject, on which he was eager as a school boy, having, as Captain Medway knew, a profound conviction that cricket was the basis of all manly virtue, if not of every Christian grace, and conceiving it to be hopeless to try to improve the morals and manners of the village youths until he had imbued them with a love and knowledge of that national game.

They walked up and down beneath the trees for a good ten minutes, discussing and arranging, Mr. Ingleby happily oblivious of everything but the grand pastime which was to soften the hearts and purify the souls of the Marwell youth until he was brought face to face with unwelcome facts by his guest's sudden question if Miss Ingleby were at home. He would have replied that she was engaged, had not the drawing-room window furnished a full-length portrait of his sister reclining in a low chair talking to Jessie, who was invisible from without. Some mad notion of carrying Jessie off into safe hiding crossed his mind and was dismissed before he reluctantly admitted the wolf into the very presence of the pet lamb, who appeared no whit dismayed or surprised at the invasion.

Miss Ingleby had been watching her young guest with an interest on which her brother's recent observation had put a keen edge. Jessie's remarkable beauty struck her more forcibly than it had done before, perhaps because her attention was turned to it, and the idea that beauty of such distinction amounted to a misfortune in a girl so strangely situated entered her mind.

Jessie was a little pale, which was natural after her hot walk, but the graceful languor of her attitude in the low chair she had taken betokened something more than physical weariness ; there was, to a keen observer, a subdued passion in it and in the half-wearied, half-strained set of her features, but, sharp as Miss Ingleby was, she could not see far below that wonderful combination of mask and mirror, a human face.

She was a little startled by the sudden radiance which transfigured the young girl's face in the midst of their quiet chat, an electric flash, which gave depth and fire to her eyes and made her form and features instinct with spiritual life. A deathly pallor succeeded this lightning brilliance; Jessie moved, as if uneasy from bodily pain, her heart beat in thick pulsations so that she pressed her hand a moment to her side, her movement apparently gave her relief, her color returned in rich purity, she spoke with animation and held herself almost proudly, all her beauty seemed aglow with some spiritual fire as she glanced through the open window, past Miss Ingleby, whose face was turned to her.

Surely, Miss Ingleby thought, the number of broods Cousin Jane's hens had hatched that spring was not a question calculated to make a girl's heart beat too fast and her color come and go in that remarkable way; and what was there in the announcement that twenty-four cows were now in milk at Redwoods, and yielding so many pounds of butter a week to make her glow like a young Pythoness? Yet those were the unexciting topics under discussion, and there was nothing but the sunny green linden-tree before Jessie's eyes—so Miss Ingleby thought, her own face being turned from the window.

The strange fire was still in Jessie's eyes when Mr. Ingleby brought in Captain Medway, whose visit, unaccustomed as it was, in nowise surprised Miss Ingleby, so naturally and gracefully did he communicate his mission from his sister.

Having explained his wants, he turned and apparently became aware of Jessie's presence for the first time.

"How do you do, Miss Meade?" he said, with the exact shade of surprise that unexpectedly meeting an indifferent person produces, expressed in his face. "I have just seen your cousin, he hopes to finish carting by sunset. People need not be very anxious about their hay to-day, Miss Ingleby, need they?"

"People need be anxious about nothing, unless they are geese," she returned; "just as if anxiety could keep the rain from coming down."

"You are a philosopher," he commented, with the charming smile expressed more by the eyes than by any other feature that few people could resist, much less Miss Ingleby, who had now reached an age when young and fascinating men are regarded with maternal tenderness, and who openly avowed that she loved a chat with a fine, bright-eyed young fellow who had won his spurs in actual battle.

Mr. Ingleby had narrowly watched the demeanor of both

his guests on their meeting, and the result of his scrutiny was eminently satisfactory. He asked Jessie to come to a table at the other end of the room that he might show her a portfolio of engravings, over which they chatted happily, while Captain Medway, taking a seat by Miss Ingleby, engaged her in a conversational tournament, in which, though he broke many a stout lance, he was of course vanquished.

When tea was announced, Miss Ingleby supposed that Captain Medway would not care to join them, and heard with surprise that he had a special devotion for the hybrid repast known as high tea, an evidence of simply domestic tastes and a guarantee of all human virtue which she often produced subsequently in his favor.

A party of four at table is perfect, and if the four people gathered round Miss Ingleby's teapot that evening did not enjoy themselves in a quiet way, their faces belied them.

Fowls may have been carved more scientifically than those placed before Captain Medway, hosts may have been more genial than Mr. Ingleby, conversation may have been more brilliant, though not often more caustic, than that of Miss Ingleby, and young beauties may have been more bewitching than Jessie, who sat facing Captain Medway with a quiet glow in her face like the glow in the heart of a blush-rose, for the most part silent, yet occasionally contributing an appropriate observation, and smiling with gentle self-containment at the mirthful sallies between the brother and sister; but no one present thought it possible to improve these things. Nor in the disposition of the four at table and afterward, did it appear strange to the Inglebys that Captain Medway and Miss Meade never once addressed each other, never that is, with one exception, when Mr. Ingleby having been called out of the room on some parish business, Miss Ingleby had, at Captain Medway's request, played straight through the "Waldenstein" sonata, declining his offer to turn her leaves. Then, Jessie being in her old place commanding a view of the lawn, Captain Medway stood near her, and during the allegro movement spoke to her in a low voice which she heard through all the storm of music. Jessie looked up and replied also in a low tone.

No one could have heard what they were saying, or divined from their faces what the tenor of their words might be; Jessie's eyes were very soft and her blush-rose face was expressive of a happy calm; there was a subdued fire in Captain Medway's eyes and a suppressed excitement in the set of his features, even a faint quiver of the lip half concealed

by the heavy mustache, which might mean a quick response to the passionate flow of the sonata Miss Ingleby was playing so well, or something else.

The fiery music poured on, Jessie gazed out silently into the green heart of the linden with an intense consciousness of a living human soul near her, a soul whose wild pulsations were in some way mingled with hers; she was keenly aware of a magnetic gaze upon her averted face, keenly sensitive to the throbbing of that strong music so like the wild beating of a human heart; she turned the opal ring round and round her slender finger as if working some occult charm by the movement, till she could bear it no longer, and with a sudden slight turn of the head met the clouded fire of Medway's gaze, which fell before hers. Then he spoke again, Jessie replied tranquilly, and he turned away with a slight frown; the quick movement ended and Miss Ingleby paused a moment before beginning the beautiful long-drawn chords of the adagio, when she found Captain Medway by her side murmuring some words of appreciation that she was too absorbed in her music to heed.

CHAPTER V.

JESSIE'S CONFESSOR.

"Been to tea at the parson's!" exclaimed Jimmy Medway with a prolonged stare of astonishment at the unmoved face of his elder brother. "Well, I am ——"

"I had no idea that Ingleby was such a good fellow," his brother said, tranquilly. "I wish I had looked him up before."

"What was there to do, Claude?" Lady Gertrude asked, from the depths of her chair, with her usual air of unwilling interest.

"Nothing. There lay the charm. Miss Ingleby is a crack pianist and can talk. One listens. Ingleby is keen on cricket, wants me to set the village boys on to play—one must, I suppose."

"Certainly," Sir Arthur added, looking up from his *Morning Post*, "that kind of thing is expected of one. And the Inglebys are very good people. You may rely upon it that I should never give the living to a man whom I could not see at my table with pleasure."

"But, Claude, just fancy Claude going to tea with the parson," continued Jimmy, who was sixteen and looked up to his eldest brother as a prince of fast men.

"I always said," murmured Lady Gertrude, suppressing a yawn, "that Claude would develop into a model squire in time. He will soon be *au fait* in top-dressings and short-horns—excited by turnips and depressed by cattle disease. You know the kind of man—stout and beefy."

"There is no knowing to what heights we may reach by dint of energy and lofty aspiration," replied Claude, looking before him with a curious little smile, "even Jim, now, Jim might become a bishop—or a judge. Come, Jim, you are the last, and one of us ought to be in the Church."

All of a sudden a light seemed to flash upon Jim and he began to chuckle quietly to himself.

"Is Jessie Meade a crack piano player?" he asked, demurely, "or is she keen on cricket?"

Claude looked up with an angry frown that only half subdued Jim, who had passed Jessie at the rectory gate that afternoon.

"Jessie Meade, what about Jessie Meade?" asked Sir Arthur, who had lost the thread of the conversation in his paper.

"A very quiet well-conducted young person," Lady Gertrude remarked, "I really think her quite a godsend for poor dear Ethel."

"I don't know what poor Miss Meade has done to be called a young person," exclaimed Claude with sudden heat.

"Claude is right, my lady," said his father, "it is very dreadful to be called a person, especially a young person unless one is a young person."

"But what on earth is Jessie Meade?" cried Jim. "Isn't a rough farmer's daughter a young person?"

"No, Jim," replied Sir Arthur, "Miss Meade, though a miller's daughter, is not a mere young person. She has every qualification for ascending the social scale. Beauty such as that young lady's is a distinction in itself, even without such a manner as hers."

"Surely, sir," objected Jim, "a woman takes her father's rank?"

"Her husband's," interrupted Claude.

"And Miss Meade is as good as married to a gentleman," added Sir Arthur.

"Oh! an officer and a gentleman! I daresay! But Randal is only a ranker," Jim urged.

"He is a gentleman by birth," his father replied, with emphasis, and as he spoke he caught Claude's eye on him with a look of surprise and caution.

"Oh, I thought he was a foundling, brought up by some farmer, and rose from the ranks," returned Jim; "well, he is engaged to a confoundedly good-looking girl, that's all."

"After all, what is birth to a woman?" Claude added with a sententiousness that highly amused his mother, "rank and name descend by the male side. The son of a duke's daughter may be only Mr. Smith."

"Mr. Smith with a difference, a duke's grandson," Sir Arthur interjected.

"Still plain Smith, or Smith-Swellington at most, sir. But as you said, beauty and manner are the only needful things for a woman, her name and rank come from her husband."

Sir Arthur was not sufficiently interested in the question to point out that this was not precisely the purport of his words,

“Did I say so?” he returned with a gentle smile, retiring into the seclusion of his *Morning Post*.

“I hope you will go to no more tea parties, Claude,” his mother said, plaintively, “they make you ponderous. I wish Clara would come, one does get so bored at Marwell. Didn’t somebody say something about having a letter from her, by the way?”

“I heard from her to-day, here is the letter,” Claude replied, “you don’t care to read it, mother? Well, it’s all about nothing. Stupid dinner parties, very slow balls. Garden party at Chiswick, royalties gracious and boring. Love to Aunt Gertrude and Uncle Arthur, weather melting, season over, nothing more.”

“I believe,” Claude reflected when he was alone, “that the governor is half in love with her himself. Who could have fancied him solemnly giving out that her beauty was distinction, of admiring the manner of a girl so born? But who could imagine that I—Ah! Jessie! What princess ever moved with so sweet a dignity? Philip Randal, indeed! A clown by her! By Jove, I’ve lost my head. That I should live to be so hard hit! It seemed so easy at first. The old story, rustic beauty, vanity, ignorance of life, and so on. I wonder if any man knows how great a fool he can make of himself for a woman’s sake. I never thought there were such women. If my mother had been such a woman—or Clara, or if I had had such a sister—I might have been a better fellow; I might at least—Heaven only knows—” A hard, heavy sigh, almost a groan, broke from him; his face settled into a frowning rigidity, his eyes darkened, his mouth lost its genial curve. He turned to the open window, gazing over the star-lit summer night.

“I must lay my parallels with caution,” he thought, a slight smile twitching his lips. “How in the world can I keep Clara in town? If she brings her heavy artillery to bear upon me, what is the good of all these gradual saps and well-laid trains? Why won’t she marry Bardexter and help me to marry Jessie. I know she would like to be a duchess. She winds the governor round her finger and my mother sees with her eyes. She is clever. Her knowledge of life is extensive and peculiar.”

“I am so utterly alone,” Jessie mused as she passed along in the sunny morning, through the fields next day “and so absolutely helpless. I cannot be sure of what is right. I can only try to do what I think is right—if they would but let me! If I could see Philip face to face I might make him understand, poor boy; but he is so far away and letters are so

different. He thinks himself so wise about me—in his man's arrogance. He—a man—is a human being; I—a woman—am a sort of weak attempt at one. If a man could once look into a woman's heart how surprised he would be."

She had reached the edge of a hay field which was divided from the next by a tiny wooded gorge, at the bottom of which gurgled and rippled a bright brown thread of a stream crossed by a wooden foot-bridge. She descended the slope with easy light-foot grace, and pausing at the bridge and leaning against the slight hand-rail looked down, arrested by the fascination of flowing water, into the brown, shallow stream, dappled by leaf shadows and sunlight.

She had not waited long before she heard a firm, quick step descending from the opposite field, and looked up into the handsome, good-tempered face of Mr. Ingleby, at which her own brightened, and she said, with a pretty eagerness, as he approached her :

"I am so glad, Mr. Ingleby. I hope you are not in a hurry, I was on my way to see you."

"Hurry! My dear Jess—Miss Meade, is anybody or anything ever in a hurry in the country? Look at this lazy, loitering stream; it seems as if it would never get to the sea."

"But it will," replied Jessie, looking thoughtfully down into it, "it keeps on, you see, it does the best it can."

"'Books in the running brooks.' What little sermon are you extracting from the water, Miss Meade?"

She looked up with a smile, and he noticed the strained serious set of her face, the faint blue shadows beneath her eyes, the general fatigued aspect which emphasized both her youth and her beauty.

"I have so few friends," she said, "and such confidence in you. And I wanted——"

"You were going to consult me?" he added, gently. "I only hope I shall prove worthy of the trust. And if I am too stupid, perhaps my sister——"

"No," returned Jessie, "I don't think Miss Ingleby would understand. Oh! Mr. Ingleby," she added, "it is so hard to know what to do—so very hard——"

"I should have thought, my dear child," he replied gravely, "that your life was marked out so clearly before you that you had no need to consider that question."

"That is the trouble of it. Others mark out my life for me; I am not a free agent. I am obliged to do what I know to be wrong."

"Surely not. No one who has charge of you would wish

you to do what you know to be wrong," he replied, with gentle rebuke. "I know them all, Jessie, they are all upright, true people. Have you spoken to them? But of course you would do so before turning to a comparative stranger like myself."

"Yes," she replied with a wearied air, "I have spoken to them, each and all. They all treat me as a child, an irresponsible being. Philip forgets what a difference nearly two years makes in a girl: besides, he has been through such stirring scenes that he can scarcely be expected to give much thought to my small concerns—my life is not in perpetual peril, you see."

"She is going to break with that poor fellow," Mr. Ingleby thought. "Hard lines for Philip; but what could he expect of such a babe? And yet she cannot have asked to be set free. No man would bind a girl against her will."

"Jessie," he said aloud, "we can none of us take our lives in our hands and say we will do this and that with them. Our lines are cast for us, often before we are born: human beings are so linked and intertwined by ties of kinship, duty, and mutual service that no man can say I will go this way regardless of others—how much less a woman!"

"How much less indeed!" she broke out with a bitterness which startled him, "we wonder at Turks who keep their women in cages, and at Chinese who deliberately cripple them, but Englishmen are quite as bad; though they do leave their bodies comparatively free, they cage and cripple their souls."

"Tell me all about it," he said, after a brief pause of astonishment, "let us rest upon this felled timber in the shade and not excite ourselves, and you shall tell me, if you can or will, all about this caging and crippling, what you wish to do and what your good friends think of it. I am an old friend; I knew you as a very little girl—a good little girl though spoilt. I am the parson of the parish, and an old man in comparison with you. I ought to know more of life and its duties than Miss Jessie Meade, and few things would give me greater pleasure than to do her service."

"Yes," replied Jessie, as she took the place he indicated on the prostrate tree-trunk in the wood shadow, and speaking with a seriousness that rather took him aback, "it is not like speaking to a young man; if people are not wise at your age they never will be." Mr. Ingleby ruefully passed his hand over his crisp black hair, wondering if he had suddenly turned gray and if crow's feet had gathered round his eyes since the

morning. "Wisdom and gray hairs," he muttered, seating himself at her side.

"And yet," she pursued, "you are but a man after all."

"True ; I was never taken for a demi-god, to my knowledge, or a bear, even in youth."

"Mr. Ingleby," she continued, raising her serious, sweet eyes searchingly to his, "is not idleness a sin? Then why must I live in idleness? I have talents. Ought I to bury them in a napkin?"

"Good gracious, I hope she isn't stage-struck," he thought. "You need never be idle," he replied, with books, your needle, your pencil, and household tasks ; all these things will prepare you for your approaching marriage. My sister will tell you better than I can what a busy, useful life you may lead.

"The old story," returned Jessie, sadly. "No one wants my needle or my pencil at Redwoods. There are no books, no means of improving one's self. As to household tasks, my cousin has not enough for herself ; if she had she could have extra maids. I cannot live at Redwoods ; I am fretting myself away there and doing no one any good—ah, perhaps—perhaps I am doing harm—at least to myself."

So she spoke, unfolding her plans to him, her wish to support herself by some suitable occupation, or at least add so much to her very slender income, which she sadly feared, as she confessed, was partly made up by Philip, as would enable her to procure first-class instruction, particularly in painting, for which, she was assured, she had talent. Her marriage could not take place yet for some time. That marriage would place her in a position above that in which she was born ; she needed some education for it. She wished Mr. Ingleby to persuade her guardians that Redwoods was no place for her, and that it was only fitting for her to go out into the world in some honest capacity. To teach in a good school for instance, and receive lessons at the same time. "You know, Mr. Ingleby," she said in conclusion, "that people always get into mischief if they have nothing to do."

"And I know that people never need be idle unless they choose," he returned, "especially women. What have you to do with art—the only great artists are men—or learning? Your duty, Jessie, is to be a wife and mother."

"Oh!" cried Jessie, with a little impatient, scornful turn of her head, for she was sick of the wife and mother cant, "is it absolutely necessary for wives and mothers to be idle and dunces? Men are not told to loaf about in idleness because

they are to be husbands and fathers some day. Philip was not kept from the war on that account."

Mr. Ingleby smiled indulgently, as one smiles at the mischief of a pretty pet kitten, and gently patted her hand. "You shall have plenty to do," he said, "you know how glad I should be if you would teach in the Sunday School. Then I want to start a lending library, and a host of parish things in which help like yours would be half the battle. If you like I will suggest to your cousin that you should help in the household work and have more drawing lessons as well."

"Thank you," she replied, with an air so faultlessly inexpressive that he could not detect the sarcasm, "you mean well."

She sat with her hands, on one of which Mr. Ingleby had laid his own caressingly, clasped on her knee, looking before her at the brown flowing stream, in a sort of hopeless silence for some moments, revolving things in her mind, and wondering if she dared trust him with the truth, and if, even in that case, he would help her to what she knew to be her only safe course. He, in the meantime, was thinking seriously of her, and pondering what the key to her discontent might be. How account for the fatigued, worn look in the sweet young face? Had he not seen her only the night before at his own table, as happy, and pleasant, and unconscious of self as any well-conditioned young girl could hope to be? And those irrational fears of his respecting the danger of her frequent contact with Claude Medway had all been laid to rest. There was neither coquetry nor vanity in Jessie; it was evident that she and Medway were able to meet, however frequently, on such distant terms as excluded any possibility of touching each other's hearts; her position was high enough to insure respect, and too low to admit of intimacy. But there was a depth of sorrowful meaning in Jessie's face, and a gentle, patient endurance in the slightly drooping attitude that went to his heart. Redwoods must be, after all, a most uncongenial home for such a girl. Philip's distance and danger must be a heavy sorrow. And then Mrs. Plummer's tongue! Philip had been alluded to in a manner which indicated that he was not held the most faultless of lovers; perhaps there was some lovers' quarrel hard to bear at such a distance, and by the girl who was left behind. There was an evident desire to leave Redwoods at the bottom of it all, a desire due, perhaps, partly to the restlessness of a long engagement. Perhaps it was only a temporary rebellion against circumstances, brought on by a fit of temper, an unsatisfac-

tory letter from India, Cousin Jane's tongue, or some sudden disgust at the men Plummer's rough ways, mingled with the discontent of a spoiled child. But the look in Jessie's face touched him deeply, reason as he would, during the long silence in which he studied it; a silence emphasized by the murmur of the stream upon its mossy stones, the gentle sigh of the summer wind through the leafy boughs, the twitter and persistent chirp of chaffinch and starling, the hum of insects, and the rustle of small creatures among dead leaves and twigs. They were so quiet that a butterfly poised on a beech-spray almost touching Jessie's head, and a bee hummed about a spike of wood-betony which rustled against her skirts.

She was trying to gather resolution to tell all. "Dare I say that I want to flee temptation?" she asked herself again and again, and the pathos of her face deepened under Mr. Ingleby's kind and questioning gaze, until it suddenly overcame him.

"Poor child," he exclaimed, almost before he knew that he was speaking.

There was such a concentrated tenderness and compassion in his voice, that Jessie's overwrought feelings reached a climax, and she burst into tears. She was about to tell him all, when the sound of a heavy iron step on the wooden foot-bridge made her start, while Mr. Ingleby, with a sudden, half-guilty air, sprang to his feet, dropping her hand, when he caught the full, indignant, sullen gaze of Roger Plummer's eyes, and crimsoned beneath it.

The bridge was a stone's throw from the fallen trunk, which was partly screened from it by hazel bushes, and Roger, with a savage touch of his hat, and final scowl, was out of sight again in a moment, leaving Jessie uneasy and half-abashed, she knew not why.

Mr. Ingleby did not again take her hand or suffer his voice to betray too fully the tender compassion he felt for the lonely, lovely child he had seen grow toward womanhood. He stood before her with a grave air, and preached her a nice little sermon on the sin of discontent, to which she listened with becoming meekness, though not without a little reproach in her large pathetic gaze. He recommended her some devotional and other reading, and chalked out various duties for her, and bid her come oftener to the rectory and take counsel of his sister.

"I know," he said in conclusion, "that your position is a very trying one, but heaven will reward you as you bear it

patiently. Be of good cheer, Jessie, India will soon be tranquil, and you and Philip will be united and live happy ever after, like a story book. But, I am sadly afraid that your connection with Marwell Court has done you harm. Forgive my plain speech if I say that Miss Lonsdale is not a fit friend for you. Such friendships produce heart-burnings and mortifications, and engender discontent, though you may not be able to trace the feeling. Go less to the Court."

She had turned very red during this exhortation ; she was very white as she replied :

"How can I give up the Court while I am at Redwoods? It would be cruel to desert Miss Medway when I am near and have no other duties."

"The whim will pass with her ; don't make yourself indispensable there," he repeated, utterly blind to the real danger. "Go less frequently."

"You may be sure, Mr. Ingleby, that I shall not go there more frequently than I can help," she replied, with despairing emphasis as they parted, and she went home with her secret still locked in her breast.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PICTURE GALLERY.

To Philip, Mr. Cheeseman, and Mrs. Plummer, Jessie had appealed in vain for permission to fare forth into a world of honorable toil. But Mr. Ingleby was a man of finer sensibilities, and of wider and fuller knowledge of life than either of her guardians; she had thought he would understand what she dared not put into words, and what she scarcely acknowledged even to her own heart, until that sudden rush of feeling in the Inglebys' drawing-room frightened her. Finding that she must remain at Redwoods, she decided to make the best of it, and was even half ashamed of her own cowardice in trying to flee the temptation that she knew she ought to resist. Was she so poor a creature, that she could not conquer a passing and unlawful fancy? surely not. Philip acknowledged that he was horribly frightened at Alma, but he did not run away, neither would she. She thought of Philip's favorite lines:

“Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong.”

She followed Mr. Ingleby's counsels, and listened to volumes of good advice from his sister, who took her in hand as desired, and petted and scolded her with zest; she became a Sunday School teacher, and spent many hot Sunday afternoons in turmoil, dust, and noise, before a row of stolid, mischievous urchins; vainly trying to explain to them things she did not understand herself, and to keep her temper under maddening provocation, until the day, mis-called “of rest,” became the most exhausting and unpleasant of the seven.

Miss Ingleby liked her brother to tease her about her grand flirtation with Claude Medway, and she did not hesitate to say that his visits, and the quips and sallies which passed between them, made her feel at least six years younger.

“Nice goings on in your old age, Miss Sue! And then poor

Sally is scolded for having a soldier sweetheart, a quiet fellow in the line. Pray when am I to ask the captain his intentions? I have no doubt the whole parish is ringing with the affair. Well! I hope you will remember your poor relations. I ought at least to get a deanery."

"A pretty dean you would make! Very Reverend, indeed! Rather Reverend would overstate the case."

"I was always fond of a cathedral town, and with a good library and historic buildings near me, could almost fancy myself learned. I wonder if anybody knows what deans are expected to do——"

"Die, and make way for others."

"Then the cathedral music! By the way, how I wish I had your hussar's voice in Marwell choir! Roger Plummer's bass is of the most exasperating quality for a merely human voice, one can fancy fiends, if fiends ever sing, possessed of such voices. So strong, too, it dominates the whole choir. Jessie's sweet little pipe scarcely atones for it. By the way, Sue, it was rather too much of a good thing to call out the military to cut up the children's cake for you."

"I didn't. I had set Jessie to cut it in the school house. Captain Medway happened to be passing by and just looked in. When he saw poor little Jessie slaving away at the slabs of cake with a great carving-knife, the good-natured fellow quietly took the knife out of her hands. Jessie made no demur, but abdicated her post with her little princess air. I believe that if the Prince of Wales were to rush headlong to pick up her handkerchief, she would accept it as a natural and proper attention. Unless heredity is humbug, that child is the changeling and not Philip Randal."

"She is a dear, good, little soul; and *she* doesn't hack expensive plum cake about and waste it, as if it were Russians or Sepoys."

"No, not a stroke more work did I get out of her that night. Finding slaves ready to do her work, she immediately went home with some cock and bull story about helping Cousin Jane pick fruit."

"Sensible girl; she knew that three is an awkward number when one is beau sabreur. Of course you heard of Randal's wound. I told her I thought he might manage to get himself invalided home. She said he would not wish it; he seems to be a regular fire-eater."

"Well, they can wait, they are young enough."

"But Jessie's position is so peculiar, Sue."

"Peculiarly pleasant, I should think. Happily engaged,

young and pretty, with no cares, petted by everybody, even middle-aged parsons. What can the girl want more?"

About a week after Jessie's confession by the stream a message came from Ethel Medway entreating her to come up and spend the day with her. Everybody was out, even the nurse wanted the afternoon; it was too rainy for Ethel to venture out of doors. So in half an hour's time Jessie was standing by Ethel's couch, a fresh and hope-inspiring vision, with rain-drops sparkling upon her bright hair; and her color heightened by the damp, soft air; ready to do anything to while away the tedium of the sick girl, for whom she had a tenderness. The pale, pinched face brightened at the sight of her, and Ethel raised her arms and drew Jessie down to kiss her, the latter submitting to the caress with the princess air Miss Ingleby had observed.

"Everybody is so cross and disagreeable this morning," she said, in a querulous tone, "I suppose the rain spoils their tempers. Do you feel cross, Jessie?"

"Not in the least, dear Miss Medway," she replied, with a gentle smile; "it is a treat to come and see you."

She soon chased away the gloom and peevishness, and in a few minutes had her patient in a wheel-chair traversing the North Gallery, in which there were a few good pictures, among many family portraits and others of mediocre worth. To Jessie it was *the* picture gallery, and a source of great inspiration, since she had seen no other, and it was a real pleasure, as she said, to linger through it and hear all that Ethel could tell her about the pictures. Indeed Marwell Court, really a fine building full of artistic and interesting things, was the most interesting place Jessie had ever seen, though she had discovered that refined and beautiful surroundings do not make people perfect.

At the end of the long gallery was a large, deep bay window, and in this, at Jessie's suggestion, luncheon was served on a large oak table. Here, besides the long vista of the gallery, they had an extensive view of the park with its beautifully grouped oaks and beeches, so that they seemed to be in the moist, green world outside, being protected and divided from the rain-swathed park only by the window-panes.

"It is like a picnic in the rain," they said, and the time, instead of dragging by with leaden weight, flew, and the rare sound of Ethel's voice echoed through the gallery.

It fell pleasantly upon the ear of someone approaching the bay window unseen, by a side corridor, so pleasantly, that he paused a moment to listen to the girls' mirth. Jessie was

showing some Indian toys and knick-knacks that she had just received from Philip; she had thrown a richly colored silken sari around her, and was playing with an ivory cup and ball, laughing and making little jests with the happy abandonment of a child; while Ethel hung upon every word and gesture of her entertainer like a little kitten enjoying the gambols of an older "kit."

It seemed such a pity to interrupt this innocent pastime, that the new-comer, whose footfall was unheard upon the thick, soft carpeting, slipped behind the heavy curtain of the deep window, and watched it.

The silken sari glided gradually from the slim figure as its poise altered with Jessie's efforts to catch the ball, until it lay at her feet and she paused, flushed and radiant, with one bright braid of hair loose on her shoulder, to hand the cup to Ethel, that she might essay her skill. Then turning aside to arrange her disordered hair in the mirror formed by a glazed picture near the curtain, she uttered a little startled cry.

"I beg your pardon. I didn't like to spoil your game," Captain Medway said, coming forward, and bending over Ethel, holding a bouquet of white moss-roses to her face, his foot catching in the sari as he did so.

Jessie, after the first crimson of wide-eyed surprise, became very pale, and hastily adjusting her hair and dress, stood apart. How like the brother and sister were, and how very patient and gentle the former was with the slight, maimed creature, to whom he was so devoted.

He was not too graciously received; his sister poutingly reminded him that he was supposed to be absent for the day. It was true that he went off with the others, he replied, but he could not bear her to be all alone on that dismal day, and she so low and depressed; and see, he had brought her the rare white roses she was longing for, and gone almost on purpose for them, ridden home ten miles in the rain and mud for them; was he not a good brother?

"No," was the ungracious response, she and Jessie had been perfectly happy together, she wanted no one else; and then began a catalogue of Jessie's virtues, which the latter interrupted by making an attempt to go. But Ethel dissolved in tears at the very thought, and assured her that she had promised to stay and have tea.

"It would be a pity to spoil a good action by curtailing it," Claude said in a tone that implied a sort of resigned reproach; and Jessie saw that she could not go away without making a fuss over nothing.

“Besides,” Ethel added, “you have not read me Captain Randal’s Lucknow letter as you promised.”

Jessie hesitated, but the word “Lucknow” was a cue that Captain Medway did not fail to seize. Everybody had a right to be interested in Lucknow.

“Oh, but that was all in the papers long ago,” Jessie objected; “this is stale news, the letter was delayed, and it is only Captain Randal’s personal experience, which might, I thought, interest Miss Medway.”

“Only! Lucky fellow!” he exclaimed, and she found that she must read the letter.

Would a girl under any circumstances read a love-letter, he asked himself, while attentively studying her movements, and pulling his lovely bouquet to pieces at his sister’s desire.

“Dear me!” said Jessie, looking about and searching among the toys scattered on the table; “where is the letter? Oh! here it is at last!” and she picked a large foreign-looking packet from the floor, where it had fallen entangled in the sweeping sari.

Captain Medway smiled behind his roses; it was not thus, he had been led to believe, that lovers’ letters were usually treated, tossed about and mislaid.

“Let me see,” she continued, opening it. “Dear Jessie—I was very glad to find your letter—yes—Cousin Jane—hum. Abraham. I beg your pardon, Miss Medway. Oh! here is the interesting part at last!—Sir Colin is a fine old fellow, we learnt his value in the Crimea——”

“That we did,” commented Captain Medway, who had carefully noted the significance, or rather, insignificance, of the little staccato quotations.

“It is very badly written,” Jessie interpolated, laughingly; “but I have read it aloud twice already, and know it pretty well. It is understood that I am to save him the trouble of writing to others in this way.”

“I think,” said Ethel, when they drew breath after the final capture of Lucknow, “that it must be rather unpleasant to have to read one’s love letters aloud.”

Jessie laughed without embarrassment, Claude appeared to be interested in a little mechanical puzzle which lay on the table. “Oh! Miss Medway,” she replied; “they are not love-letters. You see, we are not like other people—” here she broke off and colored, as Claude looked up. She would have turned the subject, feeling that she had already said more than was becoming of her own concerns, but that something

in that swift, electric glance was like a challenge and aroused her. "We are more like married people," she continued, with gravity; "but why should I weary you with my affairs, Miss Medway?"

"Oh, I like to hear, please go on," was the inevitable girlish rejoinder.

"We were brought up together like brother and sister," she continued; "we were not like people who find each other out bit by bit, and are unread romances to each other."

"Then how did you become engaged?" asked Ethel.

"My parents had always wished it, and when my dear father was dying he joined our hands; and that," she added, looking up after a long, breathless pause and meeting Claude Medway's dilated gaze with a sort of defiance, "makes it so very solemn and binding."

"I don't think so," returned Ethel, disgusted at the want of romantic interest in the narrative; "people ought to fall in love and be proposed to, and refuse a little at first just to bring the other one on, before they are married. If papa told me to marry anybody I should instantly hate him, and run away with somebody else. Why, people never fall in love with the people they are told to, do they Claude?"

"Not such naughty girls as you," he replied, touched by the thought that there could be none of these youthful experiences for that poor child, and willing to turn a subject which had become embarrassing to Jessie; "we shall know how to deal with you when an ineligible makes his appearance, just order you to have him, Miss Wilful."

He knew when the father died, he knew when Philip went out to India, he knew Jessie's age, the whole story was clear to him, and particularly her intention in proclaiming the special solemnity of her engagement; his eyes grew softly brilliant, a smile played over his face, which seemed instinct with triumph and happiness; even Ethel wondered at the unusual beauty of her handsome brother.

Jessie was thankful for the timely interruption of tea. She had lived among simple, out-spoken people, and was herself of a noble simplicity of thought and speech, but she had the instinctive lady's dower of reticence, and shrank from the publicity she had thought it necessary to give to her relations with Philip. "So very solemn and binding," she repeated to herself while busy with the tea-cups. She lived in thought again in that death-bed scene, felt the clasp of the tremulous, dying hands tighten and then slacken upon hers and Philip's; as her father's hands grew cold and nerveless, she remembered

Philip's grasp growing warmer and firmer, and she felt herself pass from the keeping of one to that of the other.

There was a solemn, prayerful look on her face, that gave a deeper charm to her beauty, when she handed Captain Medway his tea, avoiding his gaze; a feeling of victorious strength lifted her above the thrill which the chance touching of their fingers sent through them.

The rain gradually ceased, and a flood of blinding glory poured in through the bay window at the other end of the gallery, and streamed slantly through the long gallery, touching them with a softened radiance as it reached them. The upper portion of the window was filled with stained glass, chiefly showing armorial bearings, the Medway quarterings shed rays of gules, or, and azure upon Jessie's dress and moved upon her hands. Outside, the park was a living emerald of sun-steeped verdure, birds were singing in the fragrance of the rain-awakened earth, all seemed pure, beautiful, and joyous within and without in the lovely summer evening. Joy so pure as well as deep had never before been Claude's, the memory of his past life and especially his first thoughts of Jessie, whose beauty and purity had so changed and elevated him, filled him with remorse; what did he not owe to that gentle and gracious creature who had discovered his soul to him, and who would give him a life of purest happiness? The precious moments flew while he sat in Elysium alone with the two beings most dear to him, watching Jessie's tender ways with Ethel and the girl's affectionate though selfish clinging to her; it seemed that a deeper tenderness came into Jessie's voice and eyes when she spoke to Ethel, the thrilling thought came to him that she must love her, as indeed she did with a pure love made up of pity and an association of which perhaps she was unconscious.

Sitting there in the beautiful evening glory, beneath his own ancestral roof, looking upon the fine full-leaved trees glowing in the fresh sunshine, listening to the pure tones of Jessie's voice and entranced by her youthful and touching beauty, he wondered at himself. What different pleasures and interests would now be his in the simple yet full and dignified life he would hereafter lead. How stale and unprofitable all previous pleasures and dissipation seemed; there were incidents in his life for which he blushed for the first time; present associates the thought of which filled him with disgust. All that poets said of love was true. He thought with a sort of self-pity how little pure human affection there had been in his lot till now. It was with the selfish love of the

utterly helpless that Ethel clung to him, another sister had died in childhood, leaving a sorrowful memory; Lady Gertrude had fondled him over much in infancy, and when he ceased to be a baby, repulsed him. He might not throw his arms around her neck because he ruffled her hair; he must not come too near, she didn't like boys treading on her dress and pulling her about, their hands were never clean. And when he grew up, a curled darling, an ornamental as well as useful social appendage, he knew too well what value to put upon his mother's appreciation of him. There was instinctive affection between himself and his father and brothers, but no tenderness. Yet but a month or so since he would have laughed at the idea that he needed tenderness; married bliss was a thing to smile at; conjugal virtue, though respectable, a thing too rare, at least on the one side, to enter seriously into an estimate of life.

Once Jessie caught his rapt gaze as he thought these thoughts, and it flashed upon her that he had a look of Philip, something less than the moulding of a feature, something more than a passing expression. She glanced from him to a picture on the wall of a young cavalier with plumed hat and flowing curls, who had fallen in the Civil War. He turned, following her gaze.

"You are interested in Sir Philip?" he asked; "you often look at him."

"He reminds me a little of my broth—of Captain Randal," she replied.

"It is curious; but we have thought so, too."

"But he is considered much more like you, Claude," Ethel added; "my brother was dressed as Sir Philip for a fancy ball, Jessie."

After tea Jessie read aloud from the grand romance which has set so many hearts beating and charmed so many minds in such different ages; those who first dreamed it are dust, and so are those who earliest felt its glamour; all the successive moulders and compilers have been ashes for centuries, and yet to-day its charm is fresh and irresistible as ever.

Ethel soon slept, lulled by the sweet voice.

The golden glory, with its crown of armorial jewels, fell full upon Jessie, sitting sidewise close to the sleeping girl; it fell upon Claude, who was facing her on the other side of his sister, on an antique, cross-legged oaken seat, his head slightly bowed against the hand which shaded his eyes, his elbow resting on his knee, in a negligent attitude, suited to a suppliant or courtier. But shadowed as his eyes were, there was no mistaking his look; and he was so absorbed that he did not

perceive the approach of an onlooker, whose light footsteps were unheard on the thick-piled carpet.

The new-comer stood and silently studied the scene; the sleeping girl, the reader and the listener, her face was touched with scorn and fear, hatred and love, she was breathless and motionless; while Jessie, conscious of Claude's furtively adoring gaze and fearing to pause or lift her eyes lest she should meet it, read in a thrilling voice, "And there is no knight living that ought to give unto God so great thanks as ye; for he hath given unto you beauty, seemliness, and great strength, above all other knights——"

"How very appropriate!" broke in the new-comer, with clear and cutting emphasis, and Jessie, looking up, saw Clara Lonsdale standing dark against the flood of dazzling light, with a curling lip, and a fire of dark passion in her eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

CONFIDENCES.

Claude, thrown off his balance for the moment, uttered a faint exclamation, then he rose and turned to receive his cousin with a grave smile.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said, offering his hand, which she did not take. "Have you only just arrived?"

"I ought to apologize," she replied, with infinite scorn, "for breaking in upon so delightful a moment. But I was told you were *alone* with your sister."

He met her gaze with a level direct glance that was like the cutting of a sword.

It was but a moment, during which the long sunbeams slanted away, leaving that part of the gallery in chill grayness, before Miss Lonsdale turned with the faintest droop of the eyelids, and Captain Medway's features lost their stern rigidity in something like a grim satisfaction.

Jessie's only memory of that scene was the glance Clara had thrown upon her, after those few words between the cousins, a glance of blended fear, hatred, and scorn, and of the emotion in Claude's face.

She understood too well what it all meant; one of the white moss-roses was in her dress; he had handed it to her at his sister's desire; she took it out when she reached home, and looked at it long. She carried it into the kitchen, where a wood-fire was burning low on the hearth, and placing it in the heart of the red embers, watched till it was consumed. It seemed like killing a child.

There Sarah found her drooping some minutes after when the dusk was falling.

A few days after Miss Lonsdale's unexpected arrival, Jessie received a note, bidding her come to the Court, an honor which she declined, upon which Clara appeared at Redwoods. Jessie was in the garden gathering fruit for those endless pots of jam which Cousin Jane delighted to make, and thither Miss Lonsdale penetrated without invitation, to Jessie's secret indignation.

“Miss Meade,” she said, “will you have the goodness to walk through the plantations with me? I cannot tell you my errand here.”

She could say “will you have the goodness?” so as to convey the impression of “you will refuse on your peril;” the fascination which she had exercised upon Jessie, lessened though it was since she had discovered that Clara Lonsdale was not only capricious but rude, had always contained an element of fear, and between this fear and the tenderness she still felt for the lonely woman, she yielded and followed her.

“Jessie,” Miss Lonsdale said when they had crossed the intervening fields and reached the plantation, “you know that you have been dear to me, that I have treated you as a friend.”

“You have been very kind,” she replied, “and I shall always be grateful. But you are tired of me, and have often been both unkind and rude of late. I was a toy to amuse you when you were dull, and now that the paint has worn off me——”

“Nonsense, why, if tired of you, have I taken all this trouble to see you? Come, sit on these faggots and talk rationally. You expect too much. You ought to know that I have your best interests at heart,” she said, drawing the slender figure caressingly toward her.

Jessie took a seat as desired, and after various allusions which she declined to understand, Clara said, with more plainness, “Lords of Burleigh are all very well in poetry, but in real life they simply don’t exist.”

“Probably not; one does not expect everyday life to be a poem,” Jessie replied, with quiet indifference, as she rose. “And now, dear Miss Lonsdale, I must really say good-by——”

“Nonsense, child, sit down,” Clara returned, a flash of green light coming to her eyes as she detained her with no gentle hand. “You either do not or will not see your danger. As you say, it was I who brought you to that house and I should indeed be grieved if harm came to you there.”

“Pray don’t distress yourself,” she said, with burning cheeks, “no harm has ever come to me at Marwell. Why should it? No one in that house but yourself has ever shown me anything but kindness——”

“Kindness!” echoed Clara in an accent that burned into Jessie like corrosive acid, “kindness from a man like Claude Medway to a girl like you! Why, he is one of the fastest men

of his set! Jessie, such men have no mercy on girls in your position. We who live in the world *know* these things."

"Then I am sorry for you," cried Jessie, rising once more and drawing her shawl round her; "and I am sorry if such things are true. And I do not believe any ill of the gentleman to whom you allude. And it is not of the smallest consequence whether I do or not. He has never said a word to me that the whole world might not hear. I must really go; it is late."

"I hate her," Clara said, stopping at the plantation fence, on her homeward way, resting her arm upon the rail while she looked with a sightless glance over the beautiful Marwell woods. "I think I never hated any one so much. I hate her beauty, her intelligence, her graceful ways. What right have such as she to graceful ways, ensnaring men's hearts? But he has said nothing; thank Heaven for that, oh, thank Heaven! That girl cannot lie. Her face cannot lie. And she loves him, the baby-faced fool. And Heaven only knows what folly a man so infatuated may commit. He might even marry her. She must be got away from this place. One of them must be removed."

Jessie believed no harm of Claude Medway, and was indignant at the aspersion cast upon him. To her he was a heroic, chivalrous figure, as different from the real Claude Medway as the latter was from the heartless rake Clara had suggested. To figure perfectly as a hero it is necessary to be slandered a little.

Though he was not angelic, or even heroic, there were good thoughts in Claude Medway's heart on the day of Clara's arrival. These thoughts made him happy; they gave him courage to do what he had long been nerving himself to do—make a confession, one that must come sooner or later, to his father.

So the very next day Sir Arthur heard with tribulation and dismay, not the mournful words, "Father, I have sinned," but those still more dreadful to some paternal ears, "Father, I am in debt."

It was the first time that the offence had been of such magnitude, and with what Sir Arthur deemed so little excuse, for this was no debt incurred by indulging his own pleasures.

"I must live quietly for some time," he added, to his father's intense surprise, since he had never before manifested any such intention. "I must sell the hunters—a pity, too; those two young ones at the trainers' are turning out so well, no end of money in them. I don't want to sell out if I can possibly pull through without."

“Far better sell out than give up hunting. Do you suppose all these small squires and farmers will vote for a man who doesn't hunt, or otherwise make himself pleasant and popular?” cried Sir Arthur. “Upon my soul, sir, this is pleasing intelligence, with my affairs in such a condition. At your age to put your name to bills for such a fellow. You must have known that he could never meet them.”

“The poor beggar was so confoundedly hard up.”

“Beggar, indeed! Such men are indeed beggars. They are always hard up. How can a man be otherwise if he lives at the rate of three thousand a year, when he has but three hundred.”

Claude murmured something about expectations.

“Which he throws to the winds by marrying a barmaid and making his uncle cut him off with a shilling.”

“Not a barmaid, sir, a governess, a lady by birth, a very pretty and charming girl——”

“Barmaid or governess, it is all the same; the girl had not a penny,” cried Sir Arthur, with irritation; “neither beauty nor charm pay butcher's bills, much less wine merchants and Bond Street tailors. “What I cannot conceive is that you should have done the thing twice,” continued Sir Arthur, indignantly. “A man may make a fool of himself once—but this second bill seems a deliberate act—a—upon my soul, Claude, it is too much.”

“Of course it was foolish, but, by George! sir, I think you would have done the same,” he replied. “You see the poor devil was to be sold up and utterly done for, and his pretty wife came and cried to me, and—and brought her baby, and,—and—well! what *can* a man do in such a case?”

“I know what a soft-hearted fool can do,” he returned, half laughing; “every time a pretty woman cries, or has a baby, I suppose my timber is to be cut down, and my land mortgaged. I had hoped you would settle down and marry, and take your proper position in the county. And here I am with Jim to send to Oxford, and Jack's commission to buy, and with Hugh vowing that an attaché must live beyond his present allowance, and what with bad times, the state of the country, losses here and losses there—perhaps it is well that this place is not entailed like the Suffolk property, though I should be sorry to sell Marwell——”

“Sell Marwell!” cried Claude; “surely you cannot be serious.” His last chance of breaking the subject of marrying Jessie was gone now.

“I am sorry to say,” continued his father, “that I am in

but too sad earnest"—he paused, and reflected awhile, and then in turn made his confession, one that, like his son, he had long brooded over, but feared to make; a story of growing expenses and diminished income, of bad times, remitted rents and unfortunate investments, culminating in large purchase of shares in a phantom company, the promoters of which had recently vanished with the spoil.

"There is but one hope," Sir Arthur said at the conclusion of this melancholy narrative, "a most natural and pleasing hope, and one that I had expected you would yourself before this have realized, and that is your marriage."

"My marriage!" repeated the unfortunate young man while all the lovely aurora hues of his new and beautiful hopes faded away from the horizon of his life, "my marriage!"

"You know your own affairs best," Sir Arthur continued, "but to me it seems that the thing has been too long about. No doubt there is a private understanding between you, it should now be made public. It is not fair to Clara, that sort of thing puts a woman in a false position; it looks as if you were hanging back, which, of course, you cannot do, you have gone too far. She will make you a good wife, Claude; she is a thorough woman of the world, and though not beautiful, has an air of distinction that is beyond beauty. It is true that she has had several rather serious flirtations, but through them all she has always been devoted to you. She has her peculiarities, but her heart is sound at the core, while her property——"

He paused, and both men sighed deeply.

A few days later urgent business called Captain Medway away from Marwell.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COMET.

“Well, there! Darned if this yer ain’t the rummest star I ever see!” cried Abraham Bush, staring at the sky one warm, still September evening. “There’s a many queer things I’ve a seen. Zeen a whale and walked atop of en, terble slippy and squashy ’twas, to be sure.”

“I ’lows I’ve seen some queerish things, Abram,” rejoined the carter, Jim Dore. “Zeen you and Sarow married, I did.”

“Go on!” growled Abraham, amid a chorus of chuckles from the little group of laborers gathered by the low stone garden wall to look at the wonderful portent in the sky. “You’d get married fast enough, I’ll war’nt if so be as you could get ar a ooman to hev ye.”

“Didn’t take you no more than a matter of vifty year to get anybody to hae ye,” retorted Jim, scornfully.

“Abram give a power o’ thought to materimony avore he took to’t,” chimed in a second carter. “Terble vine thing t’es to think about, ain’t it, Abram?”

“Materimony,” returned Abraham, “is a deep thing. Terble deep, ’tis; there’s a many inns and outs in materimony; the more you think on’t the better vor ’ee, so long as you don’t do ’t.”

“I ’lows ’tis what mankind is give to,” observed the second carter thoughtfully, “let alone the women. There ain’t no putten a stop to ’t so long as there’s any o’ they left about. ’Tain’t what I ever giv my mind to. So soon as I got a man’s wage I went to church long with Meary Ann, never thought nothin’ about it. Aye, I mind the day; the apples was in bloom and wold Parson Stone’s cow died. Wold chap kep us waiting. ’Twas a pretty nigh too late when a come.” The second carter sighed, whether because the clergyman did not come too late he did not say.

The spectacle they were gathered’ together to wonder at and discuss was, as Mrs. Plummer was then observing to her husband, “enough to make the very cat talk.” Though the sun had sunk some degrees below the purple horizon the sky

was all aglow as if from some vast conflagration, and in the heart of this glow, the warmth of which could almost be felt, like that of the sun, sailed a majestic star, enveloped in and followed by a broad and fiery train.

All the lined and furrowed faces were turned toward the glow, the general expression was anxious and bewildered, the eyes of one elderly man with down-drawn mouth and harsh features glittered with an unearthly light as he watched the sky.

“That there ’ll putt a end to marryen and aten and drink-en, mates,” he said. “Aye, the vlaame is a come, veeld of it, the hett of ’t, avore long the yearth ’ll ketch vire and the wicked be burned up like straa.”

“Lord lov’ee, Simon Black,” exclaimed Sarah, “if you doan’t make my vlesh creep. It do get terble warm, to be sure, and the tail of ’n do get longer and longer. Whatever shall us do?”

“Don’t ye mind he, Sarow,” said Jim Dore, who was a man of cheerful views and broad features. “Simon ain’t nothen but a Methody. They be always vor burnen of us up.”

“Methodys is too thirt over vur enjyment theirselves, so they cain’t abide to see other volks enjyen of theirselves,” continued Jim, “they be all vur burnen of em up so as they med hae summat to groan vor. They wants everybody to groan like they.”

Simon Black retorted something about the hard heart of unbelief, and compared himself to Noah.

“Noah never went to chapel, I’ll warn’t,” replied Jim, confidently. “Reckon he went to church like a christened man and never groaned at everythink comfortable.”

“’Tis a proper big vire,” interposed the second carter, dubiously, “and ’tis terble warm vor the time o’ year.”

“Some says ’tis trouble vor the nation,” Abraham interposed.

“Some says ’tis vamine and pest,” added Sarah, anxiously; “some says wars. ’Tis zent vor our zins, I hreckon.”

So Cousin Jane, watching the glorious portent from another part of the garden with her husband and son, averred.

“I thought it would come to this, what with drinking and wastefulness,” she moaned. “Look at the wars and taxes we’ve had. I do wonder, Plummer, you don’t repent—that I do.”

“I do repent, missus,” he replied with an immovable face. “There’s a many things I repent since the day you and me went to church together.”

"How you and Roger can go on smoke, smoke, in the very eyes of that comet, Heaven only knows," she complained, finishing eating a large and luscious plum with evident relish.

"The comet isn't only a star with a tail, mother," replied Roger, "and the Almighty made all the stars, so there can't be any harm in it."

"It isn't likely Old Nick would be let put a tail of his own making on to the Almighty's stars, to be sure," added Mrs. Plummer.

"I only hope it mayn't mean harm to Jessie," continued Mrs. Plummer, "the girl's properly weared away. Fretting for Philip, I expect."

"D'ye think it's only fretting for Philip?" asked Roger, after a pause.

"Why, whatever should the girl fret about if it isn't that?" asked his mother.

"She ought to be home by this time of night," Roger added, after another pause.

"The time is no matter; Mr. Ingleby always sees her home after dark," said Mr. Plummer.

"Mr. Ingleby!" repeated Roger, angrily; "does Philip know Mr. Ingleby is always seeing her home?"

"Why should Philip not know?" his parents both asked in amazement, while Roger, with a few discontented grunts, let the subject drop, and fell again to silently ruminating upon the something which he imagined to be upon Jessie's mind, and the hints and whispers that had of late reached him concerning her.

Mr. Ingleby did not see Jessie home that night; she left the Rectory alone, soon after sunset. The unusual beauty of the warm, still evening soothed her, she trod the pleasant field paths with a lingering, listless step, listening to the chirp of grasshoppers, the drowsy drone of chaffers, and the low gurgle of hidden waters, listening and yet not heeding, her heart too crushed. The dusk air was warm and dewless, as it rarely is in England, the trees stood motionless, the foliage like carved bronze, the leaves were turning early this year, but in sheltered woods still wore their summer hues; stubble fields glimmered with soft golden suggestions on sloping uplands beneath the clear bright sky; it was pleasant to press the dry grass beneath the feet, pleasant to linger beneath the solemn wood-shadows, pleasant to gather the large ripe blackberries for which Jessie still had a childish liking, and picked from force of habit. All was pleasant, but not to her.

She went lingeringly through the plantation, where the shadows were dark and the way devious, until the path turned abruptly and brought her to a gate in the fences which parted woodland from meadow, and there, framed by over-arching tress, glowed the magnificent star with its trailing fiery tresses. She leaned upon the gate, thinking of the brilliant meteor which had flashed into the quiet heaven of her girlhood, filling all with troubled splendor and then vanished forever, as she was told this glorious thing would vanish in its strange parabolic curve, whether darting with irresistible impulse into the heart of some glowing sun, its tomb and home, or continuing unchecked upon its immeasurable path, thus vanishing and leaving no trace of its glory behind. Unless indeed one of those silvery stars, drawn by the overwhelming attraction should leave its ordered path and be swept away into the flaming train, thus marring the accurate poise of some vast and complex system. Some astronomers thought this possible, she had heard at the Inglebys that afternoon.

“Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,” she thought. She no longer wore Philip’s opal ring, she had written to offer him his release, telling him that his love was a brother’s, that she could not in conscience hold him to his forced hasty promise, and that their marriage would be against the spirit of their father’s dying request. She wrote this after the meeting in the picture gallery, since when she had not seen Claude Medway.

She understood it all, the sudden disappearance after the sudden revelation, and though her heart ached and her life crept as wearily as a wounded thing, she knew it was right. Even without her warning that afternoon in the North Gallery, how should he stoop to such as she? He had conquered his feelings, she honored him for doing so.

In these days Jessie no longer wished to leave Redwoods, she had no motive at heart for anything. Her books interested her no more, her brushes were put aside, her needle idle; she spoke little and ate less, morning, noon, and night were the same to her, the mainspring of her life was broken.

“Wo ich ihn nicht hab,
Ist mir das Grab—.”

Even Roger’s blunt perceptions were sharpened by her spiritless aspect, and the honest fellow went so far as to beg her to confide her troubles to him, but in vain. Yet she tried to

shape herself for her fate, and at the sight of this unusual splendor in the sky made an effort to rouse herself from her brooding apathy. She fixed her thoughts on the perfect order and harmonious movements of those innumerable flocks of stars, and on the immutable laws followed even by that splendid wanderer glowing in the sky before her, hoping thus to strengthen her mind and uplift her drooping spirits. But the effort only brought slow and silent tears, which fell upon the wooden bar of the gate over which she leant until her reverie was broken by the quick crashing of brushwood near, and a deep and penetrating voice at her ear said, "Jessie!"

Her fate was sealed. She turned with a little cry; there flashed over her face a radiance that could not be mistaken, least of all by the man who loved her.

"I could not bear it, Jessie," he cried in a deep, moved voice. "I tried, Heaven knows how I tried, through all these weeks! I could not forget you; every day, every hour you are dearer. I cannot live without you. I am here. Take me. I loved you, even on that first day by the lake. And the snake, you sweet, sweet child. I knew that you loved me long before you knew it yourself. I knew that you had never loved *him*. What should part us, Jessie? Are we not one in the sight of Heaven?"

What could innocent Jessie answer to these words, spoken with quick, strong heart-beats and eyes of fire, eloquent words but still more eloquent pauses, beneath the stars in the enchanted woodland stillness?

"Why should we care what the world says?" he continued, in the same moved and moving tones. "We are all in all to each other. Your sweetness is heaven to me, Jessie, and your beauty beyond all riches. Are you not my treasure, and my very own?"

Homeless, friendless, heart-broken Jessie listened, and her soul passed from her keeping in the long kiss which followed, in the sight of the glowing comet in the quiet balmy evening.

The night descended wholly, and folded round them like a mantle, and fresh and ever fresh stars looked out of the sky. Roger Plummer was just setting forth in search of his cousin, when a light white-robed figure flitted across the meadow, over the palely glimmering stubble fields, through the orchard and into the wide kitchen, the front door being locked for the night.

"Thank you, Roger, I found my way alone this lovely

night," she replied to his anxious questions, "I stopped to look at the comet," she said, going into the parlor, where the candles made two dim little islands of light in the gloom, and where no one noticed the change in her face.

Claude remained by the plantation gate in the wood shadows till the light figure was lost in the shades beyond, watching and thinking in a deep agitation, in which regret, awe, and exultation were mingled.

"Heaven forgive me," he murmured. Why do people ask forgiveness for what they fully intend to do? Is heaven so complaisant to sinners as to grant plenary indulgences in advance? "It must be gently broken," he added.

What was to be broken? Was it Jessie's heart, her innocent, happy heart?

She was glad to be alone in her fresh, white-draped chamber, alone with her unutterable happiness. Yet she felt very desolate in her vain longing for some one to share this great joy. She opened the case containing Philip's simpering daguerreotype, glad that it resembled him ever so little. Only to tell Philip, whose sympathy rounded off and completed every pleasure! But he was so far away. She looked earnestly on the picture, thinking, thinking of Philip; why should she not by some supreme effort of will bring herself before his mind? She had heard of such things.

"Star to star vibrates light, may soul to soul
Strike through a finer element of her own,"

she thought, though not in those then unwritten words.

As she gazed and gazed with strong yearning by her dim and solitary light, alone in her hushed white room, something thrilled her every fibre; she trembled; the portrait seemed to take life and meaning. The eyes flashed responsive to her own. She knew that he heard her, and pressed the picture to her face, frightened at her own daring; in another moment she must have heard his voice, had her courage held out.

She turned to the open lattice to seek companionship and reassurance in the stars. All without was hushed and calm, trees made a dark mass which concealed the comet, the air was rich with the almond scent of clematis from the porch below, and balmy with myrtle bloom, late flowering roses, stocks, and mignonette. There was no sound but the flutter of a solitary bird, and when the noise of wheels issued from the far distance, growing louder and dying away into stillness again, she was glad. A bat flitted by the window, and a

gray moth fluttered ghost-like in, and nearly put out her candle in its dying struggles.

“Poor moth, poor foolish thing!” she sighed. She turned and let her gown rustle to the floor, where the sound of a hard thing falling made her look in her pocket.

What magic and mystery was here? Had fairies been at work? She drew forth a small morocco-covered box, in the dim light, and trying with unaccustomed fingers to open it, made the spring fly open the wrong way, and let fall from the purple velvet lining, with a faint fairy-like clink and an unearthly lustre, a string of pearls. She stood entranced of admiration and wonder when she saw the soft, milky lustre of the jewels in the direct ray of her candle; and picking them up wound them round her neck and fastened the gold clasp with a little quick snap. Then she clasped her hands and looked in the small dim mirror before her and felt that curious fascination which has made jewels the typical price of women’s souls. The soft dreamy radiance of those pure and perfect spheres, a single row of them, large in front and gradually diminishing on each side toward the clasp, their harmony with the satiny gleam of the round, white neck! She gazed and dreamed, dreamed and gazed, spell-bound, while strange, dazzling visions swept forth from the shadowy depths of the mirror, thrilling with fear and delight, half shrinking, half challenging, like Britomartis interrogating Merlin’s enchanted crystal. Never till then had she given a thought to her lover’s wealth and wordly state. And not till then had she known the power of her own beauty. Her arms and neck were bare, her clothing white, her hair braided classically to her head, nothing interrupted the graceful flow of those lovely lines which pillar the head, beautifully poised as Jessie’s was, in an attitude of childlike admiration and pleasure; her eyes, sapphire in their shadowed intensity, were brilliant, her hair shining, her lips slightly parted, her cheeks delicately flushed; all was set off by the soft lustre of the pearls.

“How beautiful!” was her involuntary exclamation under the dreamy charm of the glimmering pearls.

The fiery fascination of diamonds, the glowing enchantment of rubies she had felt; but these pearls were her own, and so fitly chosen for her. What new thoughts and desires stirred her as she stood watching her own sweet image shine out from the shadowed depths of the old-fashioned mirror! What thoughts! It was time for her guardian angel to spread his sheltering wing above her.

Perhaps some pure protecting presence did overshadow her, for she passed her trembling hand before her eyes to shut out the tempting vision, and then unclasped and put away the necklace sorrowfully ; she knew well whence these enchantments had come. It was the first love gift, for there in the lid was a paper inscribed in a hand she knew, "For my darling, C. M." He had slipped it into her pocket in the dark, and she had been too much occupied with the giver to remember the gift.

She closed the case with a quick snap ; the candle, already flickering in its socket, flared suddenly up and then went out, and she sat down by the open lattice, pale and quivering in the gray shadows.

Unsophisticated as she was, some deep instinct warned her that he had no right to give her anything so costly ; she was glad the necklace was hidden out of sight in its velvet bed ; at the first opportunity she would return it.

She undressed in the dark, knelt awhile in the dark, and then laid herself to rest, dreaming of Claude, who was always twining strings of pearls, which kept changing to strangling snakes, round her neck, until she was glad of the dawn, with its welcome singing of birds.

That night Philip was sitting alone, reading intently, when he was startled by a soft voice saying "Philip," in a low, distinct, yet far-off tone. He looked quickly up, and there at the other end of the large, bare Indian room, her drapery unstirred by the punkah wind, was Jessie, all in white, with outstretched arms, and overshadowing her—*something*—that froze his blood and made his heart knock loudly against his ribs. He sprang up, they rushed together, he clasped a shadow which melted away from his eager embrace.

He told the doctor, who listened without surprise. Anglo-Indians, as he knew, when separated from home and friends, have had strange mental experiences, caused by repressed homesickness and the brooding incident to long periods of inaction and comparative solitude. So he told Philip, assuring him that there was no disease, only an overstrained imagination. But Philip was very uneasy about Jessie for some time, and in the first heat of the feeling he wrote her a long and most affectionate letter, which she never saw.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BREAKING.

It had been "gently broken" at last, and Claude Medway was standing alone in the woodland shadows with the pearls broken and strewn on the mossy path at his feet, whither Jessie had cast them in scorn when she turned and fled. His face was set in stern lines, in his heart there beat the strongest feeling he had yet had, even for Jessie, to whom it had been given to stir the deepest currents of his unawakened nature.

When Sir Arthur's revelation of embarrassments and losses had stopped his son's avowal of his intended marriage with Jessie, and shown him that such a marriage could not be contemplated, the better man that had sprung up in him had received, as he thought, his death-blow. For him there could now be no pure and lovely domestic life, he must sink back to his old, stale amusements and interests, and gradually develop into the world-worn cynic who is the middle-aged result of a youth of pleasure. But he would not harm Jessie; he would never see her again, and so gradually she would forget him. He would marry Clara, as his father wished, and so mend the family fortunes.

But not yet, while his heart was still throbbing with the one strong and pure passion of his life.

Good manners and obedience was all that Lady Gertrude had required of her sons; they were left to the care of nurses and tutors until they were thrown, defenceless, into the fiery furnace of public-school life in which the boys are supposed to educate each other. Here they learned a certain hardness, misnamed manliness, a curiously one-sided code of honor and a scorn of some kinds of lying, besides many bodily accomplishments and some heathen learning. Other things, by no means Christian, are taught and learned necessarily wherever masses of boys, without wholesome home restraints or feminine intercourse, are herded together. And because gentlemen and Christians often pass unscathed through the furnace,

people think public-school life a fine thing. Piety and morality are not the leading characteristics of cavalry regiments, selected for their social standing; it cannot be said they are the best schools for acquiring such virtues as self-restraint or self-denial, because vigorous young men with much money and little to do, require strong principles to keep them from making enjoyment and luxury the aim of their lives. Thus, it must be acknowledged, it would be foolish to expect the loftiest religion and purest ethics from Claude Medway, in spite of his genial nature and wholesome intellect.

“For your strength and your manhood will little avail you an’ God be against you,” was the end of the sentence Jessie was reading when Clara Lonsdale appeared in the picture gallery. He thought often upon it in those days.

He had not foreseen how hard a struggle it would be to give up Jessie. Yet he might have battled through but for an unfortunate sentence in a letter from Ethel—“Jessie was looking so ill,” she said, “so pale and spiritless.” Was Jessie’s sweet life to be marred for a punctilio? As for Clara he had neither asked nor wished her to care for him. He had paid her attentions that she seemed to expect; no doubt he had taken advantage of her evident inclination for him. His conscience was not sensitive on this point. Women must take care of themselves, particularly women of the world like Clara. She was not like Jessie, the unexpectedness and mystery of whose character made a part of the deep charm by which she had so completely mastered him.

Jessie had thought no harm of the secrecy of their engagement. She was accustomed to live a life so totally apart from that of the Plummers, to have interests and affections so alien to anything they could share, that it did not even occur to her that her friends should be told, any more than it occurs to people to tell their aims and interests to their young children. Her whole inward life was necessarily clandestine, as far as they were concerned; and from the days when she studied secretly at night at Miss Blushford’s till now, she had been accustomed to keep silence on the things nearest her heart.

To Claude’s intense surprise and relief she suggested keeping the engagement secret until Philip could be communicated with. The *naïveté* of her supposition that Philip’s consent could easily be procured amazed him.

As for Sir Arthur’s wishes, they seemed natural to her. Parents usually had these unpleasant views about their children’s marriages; in the meantime a silent patience must be

observed until opportunity was ripe and the parental will gave way.

And in the meantime what happiness, what a pure and perfect idyl of high-souled love in those golden autumn days! Was ever lover so chivalrous, so considerate, so perfect as Claude? Was ever intercourse so sweet, so full of intellect as theirs? Sure, she thought, to love him was a liberal education. He really had average brains and was fairly well read, besides having travelled and seen much of interest, and possessing the art of presenting his intellectual wares with charm and elegance. To Jessie, who had never before held intimate discourse with a man of culture and taste, he was an Apollo as well as a Bayard. Mr. Ingleby's conversation consisted chiefly of Paris matters and good-humored banter of his sister; he had avoided being alone with Jessie since the inopportune appearance of Roger on the bridge, and he shone with faint lustre by the side of Claude. Besides, is not Love "as sweet and musical as bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair?"

Surely the very mosses on the tree-trunks in those wide-spreading Marwell woods must have been full of the finest essence of poetic love! The meetings were seldom in the same spot, or at the same hour, they were planned with a perfect art which concealed itself. In the hot, drowsy noons of that lovely autumn weather, in the warm gloamings by the light of the flaming comet, even in the fresh dawn when Jessie had risen and gone out to paint some sunrise effect, the meetings, which were not too frequent, took place.

"Oh!" cried Jessie one day, "why are you a rich man? If you were but poor, how happy we might be! How I would try to make your home comfortable and pleasant. The hardest work would be a pleasure, done for you. I would like to make some sacrifice for you—love is not perfect without sacrifice."

"Jessie," he replied, rapidly, "I shall need sacrifice from you—a great sacrifice."

She turned toward him with a sweet expectancy, placing her hands in those held toward her.

"I am not rich, dearest," he replied, gravely, "but very poor." She smiled as if poverty were an agreeable trifle, scarcely worth mentioning, and he told her more fully of those losses and embarrassments which he and his father had recently disclosed to each other. He told her how this had prevented his speaking to his father of their marriage. He further told her that he must save Marwell Court from

sale by his marriage with an heiress ; lastly, that Sir Arthur would never consent to any other marriage. "And so, dearest," he said in conclusion, looking earnestly into the guileless face he had taken in his hands, and pausing for a word——

"And so," she concluded for him with a tender smile on her upturned face, "you wish it to be a secret marriage?"

"Secret," he replied, his face darkening.

"Oh! Claude," cried Jessie, averting her gaze, "you frighten me when you look like that."

"And this is the sacrifice?" she asked, through tears, when he had soothed and reassured her. "Ah! dearest, I would do more than that for you, I who have neither father nor mother, or——" she paused, thinking of Philip. "Surely it is not a question of sacrifice," she added, "but of duty. Dearest Claude, *can* it be right?"

He could not trust himself to meet the child-like gaze of those limpid eyes any longer ; with a slight shudder he drew the face to his breast and covered it with the shadow of his own bent over it. "My child," he said, gently, "you are not quite eighteen, and have never been twenty miles from this spot. Which of us two knows most of life? which is the most capable of knowing what is conventionally and what is really right?"

"Oh! Claude," she faltered, "to disobey parents!"

"I am a son, but not a child, Jessie," he said, with an indulgent smile ; "surely a grown man may choose his wife."

"But deceit?"

"My sweet child, it would be nonsense to expect you to understand business ; but don't you see, if it were known, not only to my people, but to the world, there would be a smash, our creditors would sell us out. While they think there is a chance of my marrying my cousin we can keep our heads above water. People don't live on money, but on credit. You heard of the run on that bank that failed the other day? There's not a bank going that could stand a run upon it. They've not got the cash, they live upon credit."

Jessie's mind was not convinced by this brilliant reasoning on facts beyond her ken, but she was sure that Claude was wisdom itself.

"Ah! Jessie, I see how it is," he added, moving away a pace or two beneath the beech-tree's sun-flecked shade and fetching a heart-broken sigh, "you don't love me, after all."

"Not love you? Oh! Claude."

"If you loved me," he returned, in accents of tenderest reproach, "you would trust me."

Then he stood, pale and handsome, beneath the trembling gold green lights, his arms folded in resigned misery upon his chest, the picture of an injured lover. The touch of Jessie's light hands was powerless to unclasp the folded arms, the caressing tones of her voice, and her assurances of perfect love and trust availed nothing to heal the wounded heart or chase the gloom from his face for at least three minutes, when he accepted consolation and she was forgiven, with the proverbial result, and with the further result that Jessie went home convinced of the propriety of a secret marriage.

She did not know what a warfare she was waging, or dream what terrible odds were against her. What chance has an innocent girl, ignorant of life and of the evils to which she is most exposed, against a grown man, much less a man ten years her senior, a man who had seen so much of the world as Claude Medway? Against her unarmed simplicity and desire to do right were arraigned age, sex, rank, education, and knowledge of life; against the self-sacrificing devotion of a young, pure-hearted woman's first love, the strong, selfish passion of a man who had never learned to deny himself; against the reverence with which women are taught to bow to man's mental powers, the sturdy self-confidence with which men are (quite unnecessarily) taught to regard their own.

Never once in their subsequent meetings did Jessie dream that those interesting speculations as to what constituted a real, as opposed to a conventional marriage, had any bearing on her own case. She became very bewildered when she learnt how various are the notions of civilized nations on what constitutes legal marriage, a ceremony of which she had hitherto conceived as merely going to the parish church and having the familiar service read. She now learned that what one person held as true marriage was no marriage to another; that Roman Catholics do not hold marriages true except by their own church rites; that a Roman Catholic marriage is nothing in England or France without civil rites; that in Scotland the declaration of marriage before two witnesses is a valid and legal bond, until she readily assented to the grand inference that true marriage consisted not in conventional contracts, which are valuable merely as conferring rights in property and making a fair show to the world, but in the union of two congenial hearts made entirely one by perfect love and sympathy. She heard much of the perfect love and trust with which sweet and spotless Mary Godwin gave herself to the gentle, high-souled Shelley, and of the lasting happiness of that most congenial union; and she was furnished

with many instances of morganatic marriages, and quickly convinced of the tyranny and cruelty to women of existing marriage laws ; and in all these discussions she saw Claude stand manfully forth as the champion of her oppressed sex.

But easily convinced as she was of the truth of this modern Plato's reasonings, she was by no means prepared to act upon them. When at last the ugly fact stood revealed in native blackness that she was required, herself, to dispense with the conventional form of marriage, and trust her honor and happiness unreservedly to the constancy and honor of the man in whose love and honor she fully believed, her indignation broke forth all the more strongly because she could not reason about it, had no power, and, alas ! no desire to resist Claude's sophistry. Those pearls had always disquieted her ; she had asked him to take them back many times, but had been over-persuaded. She brought them with her on that critical day of revelation, and dashed them to the earth in the first heat of her indignation, when she told him that she could never listen to proposals so unworthy, and that they must never meet again.

"You do not love me, then," he reproached her, in a heart-broken voice ; "you care only for what the world thinks."

"Oh ! Claude," she sobbed, "I cannot reason, I can only feel. Wrong can never, never be right."

"You cannot give up a mere conventional form for my sake, Jessie. And I am prepared to give up the whole world for you," he continued, with sorrowful reproach. "No one need ever know. We would live abroad, where you please. As you know, a public marriage with you would mean ruin to my family, and my father would never consent to it or forgive me. He has suffered too much already from one unfortunate marriage in our family."

"I know, I know," she returned, "we should never have met. Our marriage would ruin you. Your father would disinherit you. It can never be. We must never see each other again, never. It has all been wrong, and I am punished. Ah ! you too ! I see it all too late."

"Stop, Jessie, stop !" he cried, persuading her as she turned and left him ; but Jessie fled so swiftly down the woody path toward the keeper's house that he did not follow her.

"After all," he reflected, when his own agitation began to subside, and he picked up the scattered pearls from among the leaves and mosses at his feet, "I know her, the sweet, fiery little soul. This childish fury will bring a reaction, and a little calm reflection will result in a more reasonable frame

of mind. I like that pretty rage. But she will soon yield to reason."

A little later he appeared upon the terraced lawn on one side of Marwell Court, where a large party was assembled in the sunshine, near a dusky, wide-spreading cedar, occupied with such inferior garden sports as existed before the advent of tennis.

Nearly all the people there were staying in the house. The problem of entertaining these guests, many of whom, like himself, were there for partridge shooting, and planning and keeping secret assignations, which enhanced their sweetness and exercised his ingenuity in no small degree. It was now high time to devote himself to social duties, and more especially to the service of his cousin, who was, as usual, the centre of a little circle of men, to whom she was more or less fascinating according to her mood, this afternoon a gracious one, which imparted to her an adventitious sparkle that suggested, and almost was, beauty. He joined so easily and naturally in the pastime of the moment that no one observed his absence since luncheon—some two hours past—no one but Clara Lonsdale, whose eyes emitted a dark flash when he appeared. "I hope, Claude," she said, dryly, in passing him, "that you had a pleasant walk."

"It is pleasant under these cedars," he replied, affecting to misunderstand her; "such a relief after grinding at letter-writing."

"Letters, indeed!" Clara murmured bitterly, to herself; "and he thinks I don't know."

"I wonder what Cecil Bendor, and all those grinning idiots near her, would give for the chance of marrying my cousin and her acres?" Claude reflected. "After all, I never knew a woman who dresses better or has more go in her. But—to be tied for life!"

He had secured one convert to his doctrine on the iniquity of marriage, as preachers so frequently do, namely—himself.

CHAPTER X.

WHISPERING REEDS.

Jessie did so far experience a reaction after breaking the necklace as to pay a visit to the secret ivy-veiled post-office on the hedge-bank in the field. She did not relax in her determination not to see Claude any more, but she wished to say some gentle word at parting, and she was not without an unconscious hope that he would see the iniquity of the step he had proposed.

Her heart throbbed with a swift rush of joy, when after removing the stone at the mouth of the tiny cave she saw the well-known gleam of a white packet in the green shadow of the ivy curtain which covered her, and quickly hiding the precious missive in her dress, she went into the depths of the plantation nearest the farm to read it.

The letter was rather tender than passionate; sorrowfully pleading, soberly reasoning, the writer placed himself and his happiness at her feet. He implored her not to ruin his life for a narrow conventional punctilio. Then came the old arguments. Then a supplication for one more meeting, if only as farewell. The letter seemed to be written with tears for ink.

“Think, dearest, think what it is to save a man’s soul,” it said in conclusion; “your love alone can save mine, and redeem me from the ignoble life I dragged along until the sight of your sweet face revealed the possibility and hope of a better life, even for me. Believe me, dear, a holy love like ours can alone purify a man’s heart and lift him from the mire. Such is the true sanctity of marriage, not the degraded conventional, but the true soul marriage. Will you, for the sake of your own fair-seeming before a false and brutal world, destroy the soul and body of the man who loves you so devotedly?”

Her heart shook as she read. It was well for her that he was not there, to add the charm of his presence, the deep thrilling tones of his voice, the magnetism of his glance, to

the already overwhelming forces of his written words. Not only her heart but all her slender frame shook with the strife within her. Why, after all, should she think of herself, even her honor, in comparison with his happiness? Was she selfish, cruel to him, to this adored man? What would she not sacrifice for him? She would be content to forego Heaven, she would brave Hell; but how could she do wrong?

She could not reason upon it, but in her innocent heart there thundered a stern, deep, "Thou shalt not," with a heavy boom that from time to time stilled the wildest storm of passion. She had a deep but unconscious feeling that a sin is a wound to all that is good and elevating; that something above and beyond self is hurt by it; that it can bring happiness to none; that to sin for a man is to sin against him; but she could not put this into words; she could only feel that wrong must not be done.

But Claude made wrong seem right, and that rendered him so terrible. This letter convinced her; and then, after yielding to the conviction, that voice of thunder once more sounded through her soul, and she was again rent asunder by doubt and conflict.

It was a long, long wrestle that she had under the beech-tree, the boughs of which had rustled softly over embraces she had never dreamed of refusing in those days of Eve-like innocence, embraces of which she was now ashamed, since the serpent of suggested sin had entered and darkened this sweet Eden.

Late that night Jessie, pale from her long conflict, held the precious letter firmly in the flame of her candle until it was a black ash fluttering in defiling flakes about her white-draped room. She felt once more as if she had destroyed a living creature. Then she cried herself to sleep and dreamed a fairy dream from her childhood. She heard the mill's drowsy familiar hum, she saw the baffled water perpetually trying to climb the unresting wheel and perpetually slipping discomfited away; then Philip, clasping her small, weak hand in his strong one, told her that it was, after all, the defeated water which turned the remorseless wheel and set all the machinery going; and then she seemed to see the water as a part of the great wave that girdles the earth, rises in vapors to the sun, and descends in snow and hail to encircle the great globe once more, thus permeating the atmosphere in an eternal round. The diamond spray dashed from the turning wheel, circled the white feet of angels always ascending the moving stair and streaming upward, always upward, in

steady unceasing flight till her mind lost itself in the vast dim spaces of sleep, and she awoke refreshed and comforted, with the pleasant sound of the mill-wheel and the climbing water mingling with heavenly music in her ears all day long.

"You are quite a stranger," Miss Ingleby said to her one day on her appearance at the Rectory.

"Is it so long since I was here?" she asked, coloring, confused and suddenly conscious of the icy chill in Miss Ingleby as well as of a grave and pained expression in her brother's always kind gaze.

"You have doubtless been more pleasantly engaged," continued Miss Ingleby, intently considering the colors of some silks she was arranging on her embroidery.

"I have been busy," she faltered, "sketching."

"Sketching," echoed Miss Ingleby, thoughtfully selecting the color she wanted and beginning to thread her needle, without looking up. "Hm! Sketching plans? Making designs? Some people are clever at designing, I think."

"No; sketching from nature," she replied, with a quivering lip, while Miss Ingleby obstinately refused to look up and meet the fiery indignation in her brother's eyes.

"I am afraid sketching is rather lonely work for you, Jessie," he said, with his accustomed kindness. "Nothing more fascinating than sketching—unless it is fishing—it makes one waste all one's time out-of-doors. But alone as you are, it is scarcely suitable—especially—hm—ah, being so young, and—ah, in short, for a young lady it is decidedly lonely—yes, *lonely*," he concluded with unwonted confusion and hesitation.

"No, Mr. Ingleby," said Jessie, looking down at the dog, which had run up to receive the pats she always bestowed upon it, "though it is very pleasant to be out-of-doors; I don't find it lonely."

"I don't suppose you do," commented Miss Ingleby, with a sarcasm so awful in its dryness that Jessie was ready to sink through the floor.

"Susan!" exclaimed her brother.

"Did you speak, William?" she asked, looking up with an air of utter vacuity. "How I wish you would learn to shut the door when you come into the room; there is Spot again, pawing Miss Meade's dress; you know that he always follows you."

That "Miss Meade" transfixed Jessie as with an icy spear. She was accustomed to "Jessie," "child," and other fondling appellations; but that freezing address banished her to the North Pole. As for all the pleasant pretty ways she had with

Miss Ingleby—kneeling by her side to look at her work and talk to her, pressing her cheek against her arm—they were now utterly impossible. She wondered if it could be true that she had ever dared to kiss that flinty-faced woman, much less had been kissed by those cruel, dangerously smiling lips.

She was silent and pale for some minutes, no longer fearful of bursting into tears as at first, being wounded beneath that source; while Mr. Ingleby, in a manner totally unlike his usual easy cheerfulness, bustled about the room, bringing her things to look at, among others a photograph by an ardent amateur, one of those horribly ghastly blotches which were admired in the infancy of that now familiar art, and represented his pet cricket club grouped about the tall and commanding figure of Claude Medway, with his own in the background. In the old days Jessie would have gone about the room and ferreted out fresh and interesting things herself.

“It—ah—it is not very flattering,” she gasped, looking at this truly dreadful thing.

“No,” returned Mr. Ingleby, suddenly conscious of his mistake, “photography cannot flatter, it tells the truth;” which indeed it does, after the fashion of a Swift, a Hogarth, or an exceedingly spiteful old woman of either sex who prides herself upon uttering especially unpleasant truths, but not after the fashion of a Raphael and a Shakespeare.

Miss Ingleby continued to be consumed by an unwonted spirit of industry, and her needle made little, swift, and most exasperating clicks against her thimble, until Jessie longed to snatch both from her hand, instead of which she rose and said something about going. She knew that Miss Ingleby knew that she had come over on purpose for tea; but instead of being asked to prolong her visit, she received two cold fingers and a distant farewell.

“May I see you home, Jessie, if you are going that way?” her gentle-hearted host asked, in spite of an admonitory frown from his sister.

“By Jove, Sue,” he said afterward, “it takes a woman to be really cruel to a woman. I’ve known you a good many years, but I didn’t know half the venom that is in you. Hit a woman when she’s down, never give her a chance of getting up again, especially if she has no friends. That’s your truly damnable motto.” Which, as his sister tartly observed, was pretty language for a clergyman.

He did see Jessie home, remarking with great originality upon the weather, the comet, the conduct of “Clemency” Canning, who actually weighed the misery of “those black

devils," the Hindoos, against his countrymen's lust of vengeance, until her agitation had somewhat subsided, and they had reached the bridge which spanned the stream running through the tiny wooded glen in which she had vainly sought to make her confession.

"Let us look down the stream," he said; "how it gives back the rich colors of the autumnal trees! What a sketch for you!"

"Too evanescent, the colors change before one's eyes," she replied.

"Forgive an old fellow's advice," he added, rather confusedly, "and sketch no more this autumn; it is too cold for you."

"It is growing colder, certainly."

"Jessie," he continued, inconsequently, "I have known you since you were—so high."

"Yes, Mr. Ingleby."

"And I am your parish priest."

"Certainly."

"I knew your father and mother—I was always fond of you."

"Always most kind."

"You are looking very tired, my dear. I would rather not worry you, but—are you engaged to Claude Medway?" he blurted out.

The blood leapt to her face, she gave a start, but she turned and looked unflinchingly into Mr. Ingleby's grieved, kind face as she replied, quietly,

"No, I am not."

"Oh, my child, forgive me," he said, very earnestly; "but people say that you ought to be, they do, indeed."

"Then they are wrong," she commented, sighing, as she looked down into the brown stream, which was now darkening in the evening shadows; "I am no match for him. Nothing could be more unsuitable for him or for me."

They both kept silence for some moments, she looking thoughtfully at the stream, every curve in her features indicative of settled, hopeless sorrow, he studying her face with deep pity and tenderness.

"It is quite true," he said at last. "But, dear Jessie, you do not know the world's ways, and there are so few to teach you, and I fear you have made a mistake."

"Yes?"

"Do you know what people say when a girl in your position and a man in his are seen walking alone together?"

They say that that girl does not know what is due to herself, has no self-respect."

"It is time to go home," said Jessie, moving away with crimson indignation.

He followed her with confused words of apology.

"You ought to know it, indeed you ought," he said; "what sort of a friend should I be if I did not tell; you are young, you don't even know what is thought correct."

"Perhaps so."

"My dear Jessie," he continued, earnestly, "I have a painful duty to perform, I must ask your promise that there shall be no more—no more occasions for babbling tongues."

"Oh, Mr. Ingleby," returned Jessie, with a little scorn, "you need not alarm yourself, now that you have told me what is correct."

"You don't know how all this has pained me," he continued, "and how glad I am to hear from you that there is now no more fear of—of conduct that gossips may misinterpret. I was your father's friend and Phil Randal's—and—and I should have had to speak to your cousins unless——"

"Oh! Mr. Ingleby!" cried Jessie, in agonized tones, "pray don't do that. You don't know that they would—my cousins are not—not—they are plain people and they say things—for heaven's sake don't let them hear this miserable scandal. Left alone, it will die out, but—with all your age and wisdom and knowledge of the world, don't you know how things grow by being talked of? They would vex Philip too."

"Now that I have your distinct assurance that there is no engagement of *any kind*, nothing between you and Captain Medway, and that you will not again be seen with him," he replied, very slowly and distinctly, "there is no occasion for me to call their attention to this unfortunate scandal. But, my dear, you will have to be very careful to silence people's tongues. Could you not have some school-friend to stay with you? You had better not be seen anywhere alone just now."

"I should like to go away altogether, as—I have told you before——"

"Oh! that would never do. You would be still more friendless and unprotected where you are not known. The only thing is to be very quiet and busy yourself a good deal with household affairs just now. We all have to buy our experience, Jessie, and it is a most expensive thing; costs one's very heart-blood sometimes. You will have to pay for this with a little discomfort and dulness, my poor child; don't shrink from it, and it will soon blow over. Jessie, I, for one, am per-

fectly sure that ignorance of conventionalities is the worst charge against you. I am and always shall be your friend. I would give anything to serve you, I am not a fair-weather friend. You may trust me."

She went home heart-struck and despairing. The very trees seemed to mock at her as their sere leaves rustled together in the evening wind. Every word of Mr. Ingleby's had scorched her like the touch of fire. She could not look in Sarah's kind face when she crept by instinct to the kitchen for comfort; she had fancied that some farm-laborers grouped about an out-house in the dusk, looked at her and then whispered together as she passed; when she heard Abraham's heavy familiar step on the court-yard cobble stones, she rose from her nook by the kitchen hearth and fled away to the dim parlor, where the first fire of the season made a pleasant glow in the gloom, but she could not look her cousins in the face. She sat palpitating and wondering if any whisper had reached them. When Roger came in, she shuddered and dared not look up; what if he had heard?

"Where's Jess?" he asked in his bluff, cheerful voice. "Hullo, Jess, been out to tea? Fire looks pleasant. There'll be a smartish frost to-night, I'll warrant, father."

He would not speak like that if he knew, she thought. How glad she was when she could go to her room and be alone with her misery. She was wiser to-night than in the morning. She knew the taste of shame. But from Mr. Ingleby; had it been anyone but he!

She thought of the old days when he would come in the summer evenings and sit in the garden chatting, and sometimes smoking, with her father. He would beckon her to his side and she would lean, clasped by his arm against his shoulder, pleased and proud to be noticed. Sometimes he would blow tobacco-smoke at her to tease her, then he would make her laugh by some droll remark or tell her funny stories, and she would rifle his pockets for sweets. He would take her with Philip for a row on the river. How she used to run to open the gate when she saw him coming, a handsome young curate, with sunny eyes, calling her his little sweetheart, or pretending to be very cross and gruff and threatening to have her whipped. She seemed to hear the pleasant sound of the mill-wheel, to smell the lavender and roses, and see the familiar garden and familiar lost faces again. She could hear him asking her to spell Constantinople, and puzzling her with catch questions in arithmetic. And he had thought shame of her, pityingly and lovingly according to his sweet

nature ; still he had thought shame, her only friend besides distant Philip.

Then a hot rush of crimson dyed her face, when she remembered how nearly he had been justified in so thinking.

Many little things showed themselves in a new light to Jessie on that sorrowful night, as she sat sobbing in her shadowy room. She knew now why Mrs. Blackley, of Fairfields Farm, had driven past her with her face so firmly set in an unconscious, straight-ahead look—Mrs. Blackley, who talked about “horses,” and disliked sitting in a “carner.” And why Ellen Dale, the daughter of another farmer, a girl whom she greatly liked for her kind heart and friendly, unaffected ways, had been so confused and hurried when they met in the village. Jessie, it must be confessed, had patronized Ellen as a homely, untaught girl, who once observed that she thought all poets were “lards,” like Byron, and added that she liked stories without rhymes best, because they were easy to make out, and hadn’t got so much flummery to make anybody’s head run round. She shivered when she imagined Cousin Jane’s sharp tongue and plain truths upon the subject ; she thought of Mr. Plummer’s broad comments, of Mr. Cheeseman’s unvarnished observations, and probably coarse reproofs. She pictured Miss Blushford’s speechless horror, and saw her gathering her skirts around her in fear of contamination ; she fancied she heard Dr. Maule swearing about it. Then Sir Arthur’s polished contempt, Lady Gertrude’s stony-annihilating glance, Miss Lonsdale’s disdainful sneer, Ethel’s perplexed dismay—she saw them all in imagination, and remembered, with sickening terror, the sudden insolent familiarity of Adèle, Miss Medway’s French maid, the last time she went to the Court. If this scandal got wind she felt that it would kill her.

And she had no friend to whom she might flee in this tempest of misery, she thought, casting herself, sobbing, by her bedside—no friend but Claude, the Tempter whispered ; Claude would never scorn her. She heard a faint rustle and a familiar sound—something between a growl and a purr, then a warm furry thing brushed her face and hands, and she looked up into the one brilliant remaining eye of Sebastopol, who was limping to and fro on her three legs with erect tail and the tenderest wink of her one eye, striving with all her limited and crippled powers to express sympathy. Jessie clasped the scarred and maimed Crimean veteran to her heart and wept more comfortably over the disreputable iron-gray fur.

“Dear, dear Sebastopol!” she murmured, in her childish way, “you would never blame me, would you? Neither would dear Phil,” she added, after a little while, wonderfully quieted and comforted by the cross old creature’s sympathy.

Poor Miss Ingleby also became a wiser woman on that day; for the first time in the thirty and odd years during which she had known her brother, she saw him really angry, and heard him say things that hurt her.

“It is such women as you,” he cried, on his return, “who cause more than half the vice and misery in the world. Your hateful Pharisaic ways drive other women to despair. (Does a woman commit the slightest error, whether in innocence or in frailty, no matter to your stony-hearted, arrogant virtue, you stop up every avenue of return to her. You do more—you deliberately push her into the mire, and then you go smirking to church and call yourself miserable sinners, which you are, and insult the Almighty by asking forgiveness, which you need not suppose for a moment you’ll get——”)

“William! upon my word!” she interrupted, recovering from the speechlessness of utter dismay.

“You will not get it,” he repeated, emphatically. “Look here, Susan, at the work you’ve done to-day. You’ve made me cut an innocent, high-minded girl’s heart in two; a poor child who knows no more of conventionalities than an angel in heaven.”

“How does the man know that they don’t know?” his sister murmured.

“You’ve shut my house upon a young lady you had promised and were bound to befriend. You’ve insulted a friendless, motherless girl; a girl in a peculiar social position, who had no woman but you to teach her the ways proper to that position. For a blundering beast of a man to have to tell her! Why, it cut her to the soul! Of course you will apologize, but Jessie will, of course, be unable to come again. You might have managed to show her what was right without letting her know anything at all of this wretched gossip, instead of leaving me to blurt it all out. Women know women.”

“They do,” returned Miss Ingleby, with an acid smile.

“Horrid little wretch!” she said to herself, when her brother had stormed out of the room; “the impudence of casting her spells upon poor old Will! Why, he is head over ears in love. Not that it takes much,” she mused, “for a woman to make a fool of a man.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE STORM GATHERS.

“What’s the meaning of all this, Abraham?” asked Roger Plummer, “all this” indicating a black eye which adorned the otherwise plain countenance of Abraham Bush, who was sitting on the floor of the barn with his legs spread out in front of him, while he wielded an implement soon destined to vanish from rural life, an implement consisting of two sticks loosely jointed together, one, the hanel held in the hand, and the other jointed to it, the swingel descending with a dull thud upon the wheat-ears before him, a sound that used to make pleasant music the winter long upon barn floors, and an occupation that warmed laborer’s bodies in the cold winter days when no other work was to be found.

“I knacked en down,” growled Abraham, bringing the flail music to an end.

“Knocked who down?” asked Roger, “and why?”

“Job Ash! A zaid zummant about Miss—you knows what a zaid—Iss. I knacked en down. Job he got up and a knacked me down. Then I gets up and I knacks en down agin, and Job he ups and cuts and hruns. I lows he hrunned pretty smart. Aye, that’s how’t was, I hreckon.”

Thud, thud went the flail, and the chaff fluttered and whirled in the wind raised by the energetic strokes for a minute or two, then Abraham paused again. “Iss,” he repeated, “I knacked en down, zure enough.”

“You done hright, Abraham,” said Roger, who had been standing scowling with his hands in his pockets, whence he withdrew one with half a crown, which he offered to Abraham.

“What be ye gwine at with he?” growled Abraham, glaring with mingled vindictiveness and longing at the comfortable-looking coin.

“Take it, Abram.”

“You putt that there in yure packet, Mr. Roger,” he replied, growing more and more surly under the witchery of the shining silver and the depressing consciousness that Mr.

Roger was a "near one," and might not offer him another half-crown that side of Christmas. "Anybody'd think I caint knack nobody down athout being paid vor 't."

"Trust you for that. Why, you've known her from a baby," Roger returned, pitching the half-crown neatly between Abraham's outspread legs. "But you've no call to look so sure at a good half-crown. Chuck it away if you don't want it. I shan't hev it. So you knacked en down?"

"Wasn't I mad!" continued Abraham. "Shouldn't a ben sa mad if it hadn't a ben true."

"You don't think it, Abraham?" groaned Roger.

"Zeen 'em in copse together, two or dree times, never thought nothen at the time. She's always up Court. Out painten long with Miss Lonsdale, long with t'other one that's laame. But a young maid din't ought to be out long with he."

Roger growled an execration on the unnamed.

"Wish I had the Capen under this yer zwingel!" added Abraham, bringing his flail down with both hands.

"Wish you'd a told me first time you saw them," said Roger.

"You tell your vather, Mr. Roger; tell en to pen her up in garret, if she wunt bide at home nohow else."

"No, Abraham, 't is best to keep a still tongue if you can. I know and you know, and between us we can keep her in sight whenever she goes out. If there's anything more between them I expect he won't have a whole bone left in his body. But she's going to Cleeve to-morrow for a week, so she'll be out of harm's way for a time."

"Let her bide in Cleeve long with school-missus, that's the best plaace vur she. A young maid is like a heifer, zure to fall in trench, or go droo vence, or zummat, athout you looks pretty sharp after her. One heifer is more tarment than twenty wold cows."

Thud, thud, thud went the flail, while Abraham's face, the lips and chin of which bristled with a week's spiky growth, was drawn into such grim and vicious lines as would lead one to suppose that he was wreaking vengeance on the corn before him.

Roger took up a wooden shovel and made the winnowed corn into a neat heap ready for a sack to the tune of the flail strokes, then he turned back through a cloud of floating chaff to Abraham, whose face was more viciously set and his strokes fiercer than ever.

"No, no, Abraham," he said, "keep a still tongue; don't even tell your wife."

Abraham paused and wiped his brow. "No call to tell she," he returned, with a sort of surly grin, "Trust Sarow to find out. Darned if that ar ooman caint zee better droo a stone wall and hround a carner then you and me zees what's straight avore our noses. Aye, she's a deep 'un, is Sarow."

Roger went away with a hopeless air. "Knack em all down, Abram," was his final injunction as he crossed the farm yard. Seeing Jessie coming in from the garden with a basket of filberts,

"Hullo, Jess," he cried, "so you're off to-morrow. Wish you'd wait till next day, and I could drive you in."

"Thank you, Roger," she returned, "the carrier's cart will really be more convenient with my luggage."

"Look here, Jess," continued Roger, taking off his hat to thrust his hand through his thick tangle of curls, "I suppose you don't want a friend?"

"A friend, Roger?" asked Jessie, smiling and stopping by the low stone wall, on which she set her basket. "Why?"

"Only if you want anybody knocked down or anything," he continued, turning very red, "I'm your man."

Jessie turned red too, and something came up in her throat, half choking her.

"There's nothing I wouldn't do for ye," he went on, his blue eyes brilliant with earnestness. "I was always set on ye, but I never said anything—because of poor Phil, what's away. If you hadn't been promised to him. But there, you never have looked at the likes of me, I'm hrough and dunch. Shouldn't ha' named it, only I thought, as Phil can't do nothing—if you wanted anything done, no matter what, I'm your man. Oh! I say, Jessie, Jessie!"

She was crying in a way that went to the honest fellow's heart, crying quietly but sadly.

"You were always good to me, Roger," she replied at last, "far better than I deserved. You used to let me pull your hair as a boy. But I wish you wouldn't talk like that."

"It was only if you wanted anything done," he murmured. "I'd never 'a spoke else. If there'd been a chance, I wouldn't have been so mean with poor Phil away."

"Forget me, Roger," she said, drying her eyes, "but I will never forget you and your kindness." She gave him her hand and left him, stabbed by his words and touched by his friendliness, and thinking of the way in which she had undervalued this sterling fellow because of his rough exterior and intolerable ways. And yet to be pitied and extenuated by Roger! Well, it would not be for long.

She had not left Redwoods since her visit to the Inglebys. It was evident to Jessie that Mrs. Plummer had heard nothing of that terrible gossip—which was not surprising, since scandal usually reaches all ears but those most concerned in it.

In the afternoon Mrs. Plummer wanted to send a message to a woman, whose cottage was about a mile and a half distant.

“Do you run over, my dear,” she said to Jessie, “the day’s fine, though dull, and ’twill be a nice walk. Why, you haven’t been out this three days.”

Jessie did not know how to refuse this small request; she suggested sending the young maid-servant, or a letter, and even broached the immense heresy of her cousin’s faring forth with her.

“It’s not much you’ll hev at my death, Jessie,” moaned Mrs. Plummer, in response, “so I can’t think why you want me to be gallied into my grave so quick, I’m sure. Not that ’twill be long, anyhow. And I’m the last to want to live on, a burden to my own flesh and blood. Plummer’d find a difference in the housekeeping, not to speak of the dairy, and as for the poultry, I never was one to boast, but I should wish you to put out finer broods of turkeys than what I’ve reared this summer. Night and day did I wait on them turkeys, I don’t know what more I could a done for them short of sleeping outside their coops and not closing an eye all night, I’m sure. If anybody’d tell me what I could a done more, trapezing through the archard grass wet days, and wearing away to a shadow, I’d a done it and thankful.”

Jessie hastened to reassure her cousin, while Mrs. Plummer, whose curls were in their full-dress condition and would not bear rough treatment from damp pocket-handkerchiefs, very carefully wiped her round, plump, apple-like cheeks.

“Not that I ever look to you to do anything, Jessie,” continued Cousin Jane, with a mournful sigh from the depths of her broad and wholesome chest; “many a time your poor mother hev said to me, ‘I’ve a ben useful myself, cousin, and I should wish the little un to be arnamental.’ I was always against it myself, but there was never anybody forerighter than your mother without ’twas your poor father. The times I warned poor Martha against having him; but hev him she would and cart-ropes wouldn’t hold her. You’d a been easier to manage if she’d a married a more persuadabler man, Jessie, though I don’t cast it up agen you that your mother would marry Mat Meade. As for asking of you to spile your hands, I wouldn’t do it to save anybody’s life. And I’m sure

I never shut an eye last night with pig-killing and Roger's shirts on my mind, and you going in to Miss Blushford's to-morrow; not that I wanted you to help pickle walnuts, which do black the hands terrible. But ready to drop as I am, going over to Mrs. Woodford's is no matter; after all, when anybody's worn out a mile or two's nothing. What if it do take me off a week or so sooner? I may as well die and a done with it, I suppose."

So Jessie thought, but she did not say so.

"You mustn't be cross on my last day, cousin," she said, after receiving Mrs. Plummer's final directions on the doorstep at starting, "and please try and think as gently as you can of me, whatever happens."

Her words and something unusual in her manner struck Cousin Jane with an uneasy sensation. "Whatever have come over the child of late?" she wondered. "Dear, dear, how I wish Philip would come home or else have her out! She finds the time long, poor thing, she's lonesome and she frets. It was just like poor Mat Meade to tie her up with Philip, and him going out to the Mutiny. But there, what is anybody to do with a girl that's neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring? She can't be happy with plain folk, that's sure. Poor Mat meant well, I will give him credit for that."

The day had clouded heavily since the morning, the weather was breathless and oppressive, though of late the air had had the strong, sharp bite which tells of coming winter, warms young blood, and inspirits drooping nerves. The heavy languor weighed upon Jessie's overburdened heart and depressed her, body and soul; yet she walked with a quick, alert air and there was a tense, strained look on her face.

Her shortest, most direct way lay straight across the Marwell woods, but she chose to go the long way by the high-road and through the village. There she encountered Miss Ingleby and Ellen Dale, respectively, and it was these ladies who blushed and seemed conscious of neglect, while the infinitesimal bow and utterly neutral expression with which Jessie passed on would have done credit to any woman of the world.

"As bold as brass," murmured Miss Ingleby to herself; "I should like William to have seen my lady sweep by with her princess air. Innocent child, indeed! Artful young minx! Well, I am glad they have given up having her with Ethel Medway!"

It was Jessie who had given up going to Marwell Court, to Ethel's great and freely expressed indignation.

"I really think the ingratitude of that class of people is beyond everything," was Lady Gertrude's comment upon Jessie's written excuse for refusing Ethel's request, "and after the manner in which you took her up, Clara."

"I am not in the least surprised, Aunt Gertrude," her niece replied; "I am too much accustomed to ingratitude to expect anything else in a world like this," she added, with a plaintive sigh which suggested acquaintance with infinitely superior worlds.

"Your pets always round upon you, Clara, don't they?" interposed Claude, with an indifferent air.

"I really don't know what we are coming to," moaned Lady Gertrude; "Pauline had but just learnt a really becoming way of dressing my hair, and she must needs give warning to-day because her mother is paralyzed; as if her mother could not go to a hospital. I suppose there are hospitals in France. The world is really becoming too material for me."

Jessie had done her errand that sultry afternoon, the woman of the house then begged her to sit down and rest after her walk. "It's a good step from Redwoods, miss," she said, looking her over with a curiosity that Jessie felt in every fibre, keenly sensitive to the fact that Mrs. Woodford had never before regarded her with such interest. "It's gwine to thunder afore long. Wun't ye bide till the starm's blowed over?"

"Thunder!" echoed Jessie. "Oh, I hope not. I must hurry home then. I'll run quick the short way, Mrs. Woodford; thank you."

She left the cottage, and struck across a piece of common toward the wood, scarcely turning her head when Mrs. Woodford called after her to offer an umbrella. The heavens were now dark with gathering storm, the cottage fire glowed redly from the open door, lighting up the tall oak-cased clock and throwing into strong relief the figure of the cottager in the door-way crying, "You'd better bide, you'd better bide."

Swiftly she sped over the soundless turf. She felt the hot glow from the lurid wall of purple storm advancing against the wind before her, and quivered with the indescribable nervous trouble thunder always caused her. It did not exactly terrify her, it was simply intolerable to her nerves. Lightning and thunder, together with the oppression of air over-charged with electricity, distressed and prostrated her; her only thought now was to get home, where she would throw herself into Sarah's arms and bury her face. As a child she had passed through many storms with her head

covered by Philip's jacket and her face pressed against him; her great horror was to be alone in these nervous crises, when the touch of some familiar and loving hand alone soothed her.

She plunged into the woodland, the warning, "You'd better bide, you'd better bide," of the hospitable cottager echoing in her ear. The sky was iron-hued where it was not lurid with swift-gathering tempest, the brooding expectancy of the gray still afternoon had changed to one disquiet of imminent trouble; the long grasses shuddered, the dry leaves rustled anxiously and complained upon the trees which groaned as if foreboding pain; cows and sheep moved restlessly about the pastures, birds fluttered with anxious cries from the sere foliage, all the woods shivered before the impending terror. The day was like Jessie's life.

She was too late to outrun the storm, she felt herself drawn beneath the dark wings of it, the hot breath of it lifted her hair and came in fitful gusts through the creaking trees, whirling clouds of sere leaves hither and thither. Suddenly, with a crack and a crash and a long booming roar, the awful thing burst right above her head. How frail she was before this iron blast, and how futile her speed against the rapid stride of the tempest!

Some large scattered drops fell on the dry yellow leaves she pressed on, panting and shrinking. She went blindly, closing her eyes to the dazzle of the lightning, and saw nothing till the rustle of a quick step through the dead leaves and the sound of a voice through the storm made her look up with an involuntary cry of joy into Claude Medway's face.

"Claude!" she cried, knowing and remembering nothing but that she was safe and calm and happy after all the tumults and trouble.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORM BREAKS.

The rain was now rushing in torrents straight from the torn clouds above, there was no time to lose; Claude took her hand and bid her run with him, and turning up a side-path from the main road, they reached a large shed, half-full of bark and faggots, where they were sheltered from the rain, though from the open front they could still see the tempest raging over the great space of sky which the slight downward slope of the woodland from the shed made visible. Jessie turned shuddering from it.

Seeing the cause of her distress, he drew her back among the bundles of bark, where, by displacing some and piling others, he made a screened recess and arranged a seat for her. Her thick, irregular heart-beats became quiet and rhythmic, and a delicious calm stole upon her. He sat by her and took her hand; she did not withdraw it, his touch was too healing. The storm crashed furiously on, the rain rushed with a hissing splash on the leaves all round the shed, the air was still like the heavy vapor of molten brass; yet Jessie was undisturbed, her delicate cheek was tinged like an infant's, and her breath came with the soft ease of a sleeping child's, she could not see the distracting dazzle of the lightnings in the pleasant dusk among the bark-bundles which emitted a wholesome forest odor. She leant against the bark in happy silence, it would be heaven to sit thus forever.

He feared to break the blissful silence or mar the exquisite peace of the sweet face so near him.

They were completely isolated, fenced round for the next hour at least by that blessed storm; there was plenty of time, without spoiling that perfect moment, "to look before and after, to pine for what is not." Besides, what could express her love and confidence more than that silent surrender of herself with the instant solace that his touch so evidently gave. "My bird will never escape me now," he thought, "she has fluttered home for good and all."

The tumult and tension of the last few days, with the cli-

max of nervous agony wrought by the storm, had exhausted her ; she only cared to be still now in the utter peace of Claude's presence. In the pauses of the thunder, they could hear each other breathe above the prolonged hiss of the rushing rain. The fragrant nest among the bark-bundles seemed like a sanctuary whither no unhallowed thing could penetrate.

Rush on, blessed rain ; flash on, fierce kind lightnings ; crack, rumble, and roar, majestic, deep-voiced thunder, tear the clouds and break up the heavens in your wild exultant strength ; only let us be together.

That stern resolve never again to see him, all the struggles and mental conflicts, the thousand reasons for avoiding him, fell from Jessie like a garment, and when she began to let some cloudlet of thought drift across the happy heaven of her peace, she asked herself, more moved by Claude's eloquent silence than she had ever been by his words, why, after all, they should be parted ? Could either have any happiness apart from the other ? His very touch healed her. Surely God had brought them together and made them one. Excessive weariness is a narcotic, conscience falls asleep, the Furies of thought sink to rest under spells of Orphean melody, and the tired soul refuses to heave the stone of Sisyphus any more up the steep : this is the Tempter's hour.

All the sophisms Claude had uttered and she had combated about marriage, the falsity and cruelty of conventions, the purity of a soul union such as theirs must be, came stealing back, unchallenged, unresisted, with tenfold force, in that beautiful calm. To Claude they came also with renewed force, the offspring of his own brain returning no longer children to be moulded and controlled, but armed men to conquer and subdue.

"You are calm now," he said, at last, breaking the golden silence with reluctance, and she smiled in reply.

"You were ill with fright, poor child," he added ; and then Jessie spoke of the nervous trouble thunder had always caused her.

"I never before was calm in a thunder-storm," she said ; "what a coward I am !" she added, with a low, tranquil laugh.

A terrific crack of thunder, as if the storm, after growling sullenly away in the distance, had returned in renewed fury, drowned her laugh.

"No coward," he replied. "Oh ! Jessie, do you remember the viper ?"

"Ah! I was frightened then," she returned; "I thought people died of adder's bites."

"And you offered your life for mine. And you gave me something better than life, all that makes life sweet."

She withdrew her hand, reality broke in upon the blissful waking dream in which they seemed to be in some higher, nobler state, disembodied spirits, anything but mere mortals bound by strict conventions and stern moral obligations. "No," she said, "I brought you trouble. But we part friends."

Claude laughed, it seemed more like meeting than parting. "Whither are you flying?" he asked, gayly.

"To my old school for a time to-morrow."

"Who goes with you?"

"No one. I go alone by the carrier."

"Jessie," he said, with emphasis, "this is a heaven-sent opportunity. You go with old Winstone as far as Wellow Cross, there you get out to pick flowers, what you will. Instead of following the cart, you turn up the Blackwell road, where you find me with a closed carriage. We catch the evening boat and are in France the day after to-morrow morning."

"Oh! this is madness!" cried Jessie; "you must not say such things, indeed, indeed!"

"I must," he replied, taking her hands and speaking earnestly; "you have given me the right, you must not trifle with me. Child, do you think you can take a man's heart in your hands and play with it, and throw it away when you have done with it? No. We belong to each other, Jessie; we love each other with heart and soul. No power can part us. Trust to me, wholly; no love is perfect without trust. Leave all these ethical and conventional subtleties to me. I am responsible to Heaven for both of us. Was not the woman made for the man, and only the man for God? 'He for God only, she for God in him?' There is no wrong in such a union as ours, only the purest, holiest happiness. Besides, the last barrier is broken down. That miserable terror of Mrs. Grundy cannot come between us any more. You need never again be afraid of what people will think."

"What do you mean?" gasped Jessie.

"We have been seen. Don't you know what they say of people in our—in your—in short——"

"Oh! I know now too well and too late, but I did not know till Mr. Ingleby told me."

"Ingleby told you, did he?" he said, darkly; "it was like his confounded——"

“It was like the kind, wise friend he is,” she rejoined.

“A reputation is easily lost—it only means being seen with the wrong man——”

All at once his meaning flashed upon her; she said nothing, for sheer anguish.

“We will go to Switzerland,” he added, “marriage laws are easy there.”

“We cannot marry, you have given your father your word of honor,” she said, in smothered tones.

He explained that such a marriage would probably not be valid in England, and was only intended as a concession to her scruples. “It is not only my word of honor to marry no one but my cousin,” he added, “but it is Marwell Court and all that goes with it; these jolly old woods in which we have been so happy. And it is not for myself—ah! Jessie, as if I would not give up fifty Marwell Courts for you—but think of my people. It would kill my father—and as for the others—To be born and brought up in a place like this, a place belonging to history, with all sorts of family traditions and associations—such places don’t belong to the man who actually owns them, but to the whole family, for whom he holds them in trust. One can’t play the game of life for one’s own hand—especially if one is an eldest son; you see?”

“I understand—oh! I understand so well,” said Jessie, brokenly, her face buried in her hands, while her arms were supported on her knees. I was not born for things like that—I should shame you. Oh! Claude, you must marry Miss Lonsdale—you must forget me.”

“Forget you!”

As he spoke he bent over her bowed head and hidden face. She listened and quivered, and the old arguments came back with fresh and ever fresh force, while the thunder rolled fitfully in the distance and she did not heed it.

All she heard or heeded was the low musical voice, the unutterable charm of the unseen presence, the immense need they had of each other, the supreme importance of his happiness, the impossibility of either living apart from the other.

What was anything in comparison with his happiness? what was honor, peace of mind, heaven itself? There was no heaven without him, to lose him was hell. She was his, she lived for him alone, had no life apart from him. What if her life was laid waste and spoiled for *him*? As she thought thus, she suddenly lifted her head and looked at him.

He saw his advantage and followed it up by eloquence glowing with suppressed passion; it seemed to Jessie that

they were already one and could not be parted without sacrilege. She thought of Shelley and Mary.

He drew a wedding-ring from his pocket and would have placed it upon her trembling hand. Were they not in the temple of nature, he said, with the rushing rains as choristers, the swift lightnings as witnesses, the deep organ-notes of the thunder sounding their wedding symphony? What moment could be fitter for their espousals? She must promise now and forever.

The word struck a deep chord in her breast; the supreme moment of her life had arrived. She listened to the wild storm-music so solemnly invoked, the rain trickling from the shed-roof into a pool formed by its own violence, with a sound that recalled the quiet music of the baffled water striving to climb the mill-wheel at home. Again she heard that the perpetually defeated water conquered by its persistence; she saw it grind corn for men's food and circle round the world in a wondrous, endless succession of transformation; she saw the white feet of winged angels pass up the turning stair, as the heavenly beings floated upward; she heard soft strains of spherical harmony mingled with the mill-music as in her childish dream, while in the actual far-off roll of the passing thunder boomed the everlasting "Thou shalt not," against the grand simplicity of which all argument is mute.

She rose and left the dim recess, she would have gone but that he detained her with gentle force. Her slight figure was outlined on the storm-rent sky which had now no more terrors for her.

"Foolish child! What has frightened you?" he said, with infinite tenderness; "dearest Jessie, think for a moment, don't be reckless. Don't ruin my happiness, don't throw away my last hope. You are virtually bound to me, you have given me your love, you have broken with conventions, you are mine; in different ways we have compromised each other. The storm unnerves you, it makes you morbid. You know that ours is no common bond, that we are already one in heart and soul——"

"Claude, Claude, let me go!"

"You cannot, you cannot go in this storm. Stay, Jessie, stay, I will leave you, only stay in the shelter;" but she was off through the tangle of wet undergrowth and into the main road; he followed, then stopped, knowing that further pursuit would only distress her.

Just then the rain, which had died nearly away, changed to a fierce crackle of hail-stones rebounding from branch to

branch and denting the bare earth where they struck ; the storm gathered its dying energies for a final outburst. A blue sheet of light revealed towering cloud-masses above, colored the white hail-storm for a moment, and showed him the last glimpse of Jessie's dress before she was engulfed in the double darkness of storm and forest ; and by the time he removed his hand from his dazzled eyes a fierce white zig-zag darted from heaven to earth, accompanied by a peal of reverberating thunder which seemed as if it would never end. And Jessie was under trees in the very heart of the storm !

He went back to the shed and leant against the bark stacks, intently gazing in the direction which she had taken ; he was pale and had a solemn, resolute look.

"Whatever happens," he said aloud, and as if calling unseen presences to witness, "Jessie must now be my lawful wife."

The long unequal duel was at an end, but the battle was not to the strong.

When the storm had at last rolled away, and he had left his shelter, the figure of a woman issued from among the piles of bark not far from the refuge he had made for Jessie, and leant upon the rough bar which ran from pillar to pillar in front of the shed.

"You will *not* marry Jessie," she said, with fierce emphasis ; "and you will not save Marwell Court, if it can only be done by marrying me, my good cousin."

The life-time of torture she had suffered in the last hour had exhausted her, there were dark shadows beneath her deep lustrous eyes, and her lips were firmly set.

"How can I hurt her?" she continued. "After all death is a feeble vengeance. Who would have imagined that this baby-face could play her cards so skilfully? Where did she learn how to fool men? Who gave her this insight, this intuitive knowledge of their weak points? Afraid of the storm, indeed! I said she was no ordinary girl. I was right!"

PART III.

“Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong.”

CHAPTER I.

THE LAST CAMPAIGN.

The large, airy Indian room was very still within, scarcely a sound reached it from without; the bright clothing of a native servant was visible on the verandah, and beyond that trees were seen waving in the garden and the perfume of flowers floated in. An elderly lady in mourning, like most of the Feringhees in that year, reclined languidly in a long cane chair, doing nothing whatever, with the air of a proficient in the art. She was pale and slender, her hands seemed made of transparent ivory, if one can imagine perfectly limp ivory. A novel lay on a small table by her side in case she should be able to rouse herself to the effort of reading.

A girl with dark hair and eyes and a rich English bloom on her face, yet bearing some likeness to the limp, faded, dried-up lady on the lounge, sat erect at a table, writing quickly and sometimes pausing to think, now with a deepened color brought by a happy passing thought, now with a smile as at some pleasant remembrance, sometimes even with a passing shudder as if at some horror. Her mother occasionally directed an irritated glance toward her and made a peevish movement.

“I really wish, Ada,” she said, presently, “that somebody would call. There is nothing to do.”

“You don’t get on with the novel, mamma? I must try to find another.”

“I can’t think how you can get through so much writing,” continued Mrs. Maynard, querulously; “I am sure I write home as much as people write out to me, but I am not always

scribbling. It is just like girls when first they come out. They think they can do as they do at home."

"Oh, I am quite an old hand now," her daughter replied, "though, to be sure, this time last year I was at home. Oh! that delicious dance, mamma, I little thought I should not have another for so long."

"You are always raving about that dance, Ada, I thought it stupid; I am quite tired of it. Didn't you pick up young Randal there, by the way?"

"Oh! yes," she returned, indifferently, "it was rather lucky for me that I danced with Mr. Randal. You see, I remembered his face well, because he got a telegram to say his mother was dying, and I thought he was going to faint, poor fellow! So that I recognized him in Gossamjee Bhowse's house and was able to claim acquaintance with him. With a totally strange officer it would have been difficult; not knowing me, he might have suspected treachery."

"Of course," replied Mrs. Maynard, suppressing a yawn and much bored by this long and unnecessary explanation; "most romantic. I wonder how poor Arthur is getting on? Your father says that Lucknow must fall before many days. Sir Colin has received all his reinforcements by this time and must begin the siege. Rose's account of Havelock's arrival was terrible enough. I cannot imagine what Sir Colin's relief will be like. If two thirds of *his* force fall nobody will be out of mourning."

Ada's eyes darkened and her warm color paled; her father and brother and Philip Randal were all before Lucknow.

"But Havelock's force was so small, mamma," she said, "he and Outram were many times outnumbered. Two-thirds of that brave little army did not make a great number."

"Nonsense, my dear. You don't imagine the sepoys are less savage now than they were last September. It is ridiculous to suppose that they will kill fewer English now than they did then. I do wish Lucknow would fall," she added peevishly, as if the city held out merely to cause her personal inconvenience. "Rose," she said, as young Mrs. Maynard entered the room, bringing a scent of orange-blossom to add to that of the heavy white tuberose in Ada's dress; "here is Ada declaring that Sir Colin will take the whole of Lucknow with less loss than Havelock did the Residency."

"Less in proportion to the whole, mamma."

"Oh, dear! dear! You confuse my brain talking like a question in a sum-book."

"We shall know the proportion soon enough, perhaps too

soon," said Rose, sinking into a lounging-chair, playing with her spray of orange-blossom, and reflecting that they might both be widows by that time.

"They are such splendid troops," broke in Ada, cheerfully, "and so fresh. Not like our poor Lucknow garrison. He said that the Ninety-third——"

"Who said?"

Ada colored and Rose smiled. "You mean Arthur, Ada, I suppose?"

"I mean Mr. Randal," she replied, with a little defiance.

"I am sick and tired of that everlasting young man; I wish I might never hear his name again," observed Mrs. Maynard.

"Then, mamma, it is of no use asking if you have any message for him, as I was about to do," said Ada, drawing little pictures on her blotting-paper.

"Surely you have not been writing to that young Randal in this heat ever since tiffin?" cried Mrs. Maynard, startled into faint animation at last; "Ada, I will not permit it. Such a correspondence is most improper, quite out of the question."

Ada meekly represented that she had only written once before, so that it could scarcely be called a correspondence. Common civility required that she should write to thank Mr. Randal for his help and protection during the march from the Dilkoosha, not to speak of his assistance in bringing her from Beelampore and through the rebel lines to Lucknow. And if Mr. Randal had been so very kind as to write and tell her how things were going on at the Alumbagh, and all about the Cawnpore battles, and why Sir Colin did not begin the actual siege till now, and report upon the health of her father and brother, surely it was only what might be permitted to a gentleman who had accidentally been on such intimate terms as their dangerous flight necessitated.

"I think it great impertinence of him to presume upon the accidental intimacy," said her mother; "all sorts of strange adventures have happened during the Mutiny, everything has been topsy-turvy; proprieties have been neglected, sadly neglected."

"We certainly were not over-ceremonious at Lucknow," Rose broke in. "I washed Mr. Randal's shirt—he had but one, which was more than poor Arthur had at one time—and he fetched water for me; and Ada made a jumper for an officer of engineers, who was killed in it——"

"The engineer officer, I am certain," interrupted Mrs.

Maynard, not catching the last phrase, "will never presume upon what Ada did. But this young Randal must fully understand that the intimacy is never to be resumed. And what is it to you whether the chief is waiting for Jung Bahadur and his Goorkhas or not? Military matters are for your papa and brothers—ladies should know nothing about them. You will of course bow to Mr. Randal if you should meet him, as I hope you will not. If," she added, plaintively, "there should ever be any dances or picnics or anything proper any more, you will neither dance with or even speak more than is necessary to him."

"While I live," replied Ada, very quietly and gently, "I shall be grateful to Mr. Randal; I shall show my gratitude whenever I can. I am his friend for life."

"Rose!" cried Mrs. Maynard, appealing to her daughter-in-law in helpless dismay, "what does she mean?"

"She only means," replied Rose, "that she is very grateful, as I am, to Mr. Randal, for his kindness to us and the children, and that she is not yet old or experienced enough to express herself in a becoming manner about it. She is romantic, as girls are, and exaggerates what, after all, was only to be expected from any gentleman to people in such circumstances as ours. At her age, every pleasant new acquaintance is a friend for life—until another comes. Pray give my kind remembrance to Mr. Randal, if you really think it necessary to write to him, Ada. Tell him that I do not forget his kindness to us, and that little Emmie still talks of him."

"There is no occasion whatever to write; tear up your letter, this instant, Ada," said her mother, with unusual energy; "what possible reason can you have for writing?"

"He is in danger," she replied, with a slight catch in her voice. "They all like to get letters, you know, ever such a stupid thing brightens them up. Besides, Sir Colin says that it is of the highest importance that the troops should be kept in good spirits," she added, with a demure countenance which belied a certain wicked sparkle in her eyes.

"Danger, indeed, and pray what business is that of yours?" returned Mrs. Maynard. "What have you to do with the spirits of the troops? Rose, what *are* you laughing at? I should have thought, with your husband at the front and your children so recently lost, and Lucknow about to fall, you had little cause to laugh."

"It is unreason that makes people laugh, mamma," returned Ada. "Surely you won't grudge poor Mr. Randal such a small thing as a letter just before the storming of

Lucknow? I am now writing to wish him good luck," she added, coaxingly.

"It is not worth a fuss," said Rose to her mother-in-law; "in the first place, it is uncertain if the letter will ever be delivered; and in the second, we don't know who may fall before Lucknow——" she paused, and tears came into the eyes of all three women; "and Ada only means, as I said——"

"I meant what I say," Ada replied, with her quiet manner and distinct intonation. "They have only been holding the Alumbagh and the lines during the last three months except when they took Cawnpore, and have not lost many men, but the assault of Lucknow will be no child's play. How can I let my friend go into such an action without a word of kindness, and he with no friend nearer than England?"

So saying, Ada deliberately folded and sealed her letter, and with a quivering lip and eyes like two stars in a frosty night, rose and walked slowly from the room with an air of proud determination that Mrs. Maynard feared.

"Rose, is it true that this wretched boy rose from the ranks?" she asked, when Ada and her letter were gone with the tuberose scent, "and you think Ada cares for him?"

"It is quite true, and he has no relations and doesn't even know his father's name. But he is gentlemanly and steady, and is considered a promising officer. As for Ada caring for him, you know what nonsensical ideas she has about men friends. She would insist upon kissing that poor lad whose legs were shot off at Lucknow, and wrote to tell his mother of it."

"That was of no consequence, for no one could marry a man with no legs, even if he hadn't died, my dear."

"True, but this young fellow is to Ada's mind in much the same case, though his legs have proved of the greatest service both to her and me. But Ada is wilful and makes the more of her friendship the more you go against her. Then she has such a horror of anything underhand that she always makes the worst of everything she does."

"I feel," sighed Mrs. Maynard, "that she is too eccentric for any man. If I could but get her safely married. Though even marriage is of little use in these dreadful days, since both Emily and Mabel are coming back widows, married to civilians though they were, and such trousseaux!"

Mrs. Maynard paused and thought what a fine opportunity was here for Providence to dispose of ineligible and superfluous men like Philip Randal and her sons' senior officers,

while carefully guarding eligibles and her immediate family circle. But Providence did not seem to see things from Mrs. Maynard's point of view.

"It was not worth while to tell Ada," said young Mrs. Maynard, "but as Mr. Randal's company has already left the Alumbagh, and the Dilkoosha is actually taken, it is most improbable that he will ever get this wonderful letter, or have time to read it if he does."

But Philip did receive the letter, and read it in all the tumult of the grand assault upon Lucknow, or rather series of assaults, for the city was taken piece-meal, stronghold after stronghold.

When he returned from escorting the Lucknow fugitives to Allahabad in November and took up his quarters in the camp at the Alumbagh, all the charm of military life and the excitement of the great enterprise seemed to have evaporated. The monotony of camp routine seemed as profitless as unendurable, contributing nothing to the grand final result. There was no more fun in the hardships and vicissitudes now; making forays upon friendly but timid natives; seizing their cart-loads of provisions with a pretence of force, and smuggling payment into their hands so that their hostile compatriots should not detect them, was a stale joke. There was good fighting to be had from time to time when Ahmed Oollah tried to force their lines and cut off their communications, but even that was inspiriting only for a time, and made the camp monotony only seem heavier afterward. Philip was rallied upon his low spirits and accused of homesickness by secret sufferers from the same malady.

But though he sometimes persuaded himself that he was yearning for the gray cool skies, wind-swept downs and green meadows of England, and truly would have been heartily glad for a glimpse of Jessie's sweet face and the cool touch of her lips on his cheek; he knew too well that India held the romance and poetry of his life, and that he was pining for a glance from Ada Maynard's dark velvety eyes and the thrilling music of her voice and laugh—such a laugh: low, rich, heart-easing, and such a voice; pure and flexible, with a certain *timbre* that woke indefinable feelings.

The Hindoo songs she sang in their wanderings ran in his head, and the soft crooning lullaby with which she hushed the ailing child could not be forgotten. Her face in her various disguises was always rising unbidden before him, but especially her face as he had seen it at the end of the march from Lucknow at the railway station, with little Willie's face

just beneath it, with her star-like eyes shining through tears in a long, earnest, wistful gaze.

How could he ever forget that face, or cease to long for a sight of it? Yet he knew that he must forget that face, or cease to long for a sight of it. Yet he knew that he must forget. There was no need to fly from her since it was so improbable that he would ever see her again. This very improbability gave him a sort of plenary indulgence to think a little of her sometimes, and recall their adventures more than he would have done had there been any hope. It is not only lawful but right to mourn over a new-made grave and muse a little upon what can never be again, and the Alumbagh was so dull, and offered such temptations to long brooding memories.

Yet when Miss Maynard's graceful and friendly letter of thanks and pleasant reminiscences arrived, he was not so very much surprised; the camp routine seemed cheerful, and the well-worn jokes of his surviving brother officers (for a comrade's death was a too common incident) fresh and amusing, though, as one cheery young fellow said, if they did not make their jokes see a good deal of service they would have to do without any. This letter had the curious effect of making him add a couple of closely-written pages to a letter he had already written to Jessie, whose continually repeated desire to leave the neighborhood of Cleeve and seek remunerative employment elsewhere, seemed to him, compared to the grim realities surrounding him, but as the vague discontent of a spoiled child, and like that to be caressed and teased away.

"I can never be too thankful," he wrote in that very letter, which was dated Christmas, "that you are surrounded by people who know all about us, and are with Mrs. Plummer, your nearest relation. I don't think I could stay in India if I thought you were alone among strangers."

Nothing could be more correct and impersonal than Philip's acknowledgment of Ada's letter. It was the more kind of her to write, he said, because she knew what a boon a letter was in camp, and how excessively hard up they were for amusement. He thought she might like to hear from an outsider how her people were faring, together with the experiences of his detachment of the 190th, and as much as he could hear or see of the progress of military affairs in general. Therefore, he ventured to write, and remained, very truly, hers.

Considering it was such a short letter, it was amazing that so proficient a scribe as Philip should have taken so many

days to write it and wasted so much precious paper in rough copies of it.

The second letter reached him on the eve of the great decisive day, when so many strongholds fell, and a part of his regiment, with some Sikhs, having turned the second line of defence, insisted, in the heat of victory, in rushing on to the citadel and turning the third and last line, after which they broke out, regardless of their officers, into wild license, and sacked the rich houses and palaces near, burning and destroying whatever they could lay hands on in their madness.

He found time to read it, and all through the long day of fierce, often hand-to-hand, fight, the thought of it hovered about him, and Ada's face, sometimes as he saw it at the ball, sometimes as it appeared in his room in Gossamjee Bhose's house, as the Hindoo boy companion of the flight to Lucknow, sometimes as it smiled on him at the Residency, when she spent ball, after breaking her chair, touched her, or as it looked from the window of the railway carriage when they parted, kept tracing itself upon the background of dark-faced, white-dressed foes, upon flame, smoke, and blood, for there was no time for reflection on that grim day, and if these visions did not "give the battle to his hands," they yet inspired him to do gallantly.

But Lucknow was not finally taken till a week later, March 21, when the last stronghold fell and the English flag waved over the whole conquered city, a city of empty houses, deserted streets, silent bazaars, sacked and battered palaces, with shattered temples, wasted and trampled gardens, where pleasant orange-groves shed their blossoms over broken furniture, rich stuffs torn and soiled, and blood-stained corpses, and where marble fountains made a musical plashing in the ears of prowling thieves and beggars propped by blood-splashed statues. It was upon that awful background and by contrast with the dreadful work Philip had to do that Ada Maynard's haunting face appeared so transcendently charming, and amid such scenes of horror that it was so sweet and comfortable to remember her letter.

CHAPTER II.

PARADISE.

It was the day on which the Queen's proclamation transferring the company's government and army to the crown was read in every station in India, November 1, 1858. Philip Randal, no longer a mere lieutenant of infantry, now ranked as captain, while holding a staff appointment, and had recently arrived at the large station of Myserabad.

He had been wounded at the end of the Rohilcunde campaign in May, passed many weeks in hospital and many more at the hills at Nynee Tal, to recover his sorely shattered health before he was fit for duty. He had received Jessie's letter offering to release him from their engagement, and he had replied that he had no desire for the freedom she offered, but that he hoped very soon to be able to send for her. He had also had that curious visionary experience which the doctor had ascribed to home-sickness acting upon nervous depression. He reproached himself often for the lack of enthusiasm with which he regarded the pending happy consummation of his engagement, but hoped that proper enthusiasm would be forthcoming on the fitting occasion when he should look once more upon the pretty childish face, now so dim in his memory, and of the probable changes in which he did not think. Her face had naturally become dimmer in his memory since her picture was shattered at the relief of Lucknow. He was in no position to marry, even without the professional ambition to which his marriage, especially his marriage with Jessie, would be a serious hindrance. It had even been hinted to him by some who knew, that he should, and with his already gained distinction could, marry into a family

having high military influence. But he doubted this, for every day the stigma of his unknown origin became harder to bear. The mysterious little fortune which came to him after the Crimea could not, as he at first thought, possibly have come from the broken-down Matthew Meade, who was unable even to provide for his own daughter; it must have come from some kinsman of his own. There must be some thing unusually painful in connection with his birth; though, after all, the most painful thing for him was the mystery. Could he but say, "My father was a rat-catcher of nomadic habits, a day laborer, or a rich but honest tradesman," he would have something firm to stand upon.

After the Rohilcunde campaign Mr. Cheeseman had sent him out a parcel which surprised and touched him greatly. It was a box recently discovered in a disused attic by the miller who succeeded Matthew Meade at Stillbrooke, and was ticketed in the latter's peculiar unformed writing, "For Philip Randal at my death."

It contained the clothing of a child of three, and some faded age-yellowed papers. One packet was labelled, "Philip, aged two years," and enclosed a soft, short curl and an ivory miniature of a plump, laughing, baby boy. The papers and relics were labelled in Matthew Meade's faded handwriting, "Given as the late Mary Randal's property, by her landlady Mrs. Roberts, 24 Brook Street, Chichester, September, 1838."

They were contained partly in a small leather desk, partly in a handsome morocco-bound diary. In the desk was a wedding-ring. With it was a keeper set with brilliants and engraved with the initials M. & A. M. One or two shabby books with the name torn out, or obliterated so as to only leave "Mary," were among the relics, also a once costly housewife with gold thimble and scissors.

The diary contained no names, only initials. Many leaves had been torn out. "Many people," one passage ran, "would think my strong desire for concealing my darling's identity if not morbid, over-strained, since I have at present so little prospect of finding him bread. But God will surely pity our misery and protect my innocent and deeply wronged child. I will work my fingers to the bone before I will risk his discovering his infamous parentage, and I am so young and strong that I must get work." "The money will soon be gone and no work."

Other passages ran thus: "This terrible isolation would turn my brain but for my precious boy."—"To-day Philip

gave me pain, he had a look of his father. I would rather see the sweet little roguish face dead than bearing any trace of that black soul."—"If my boy is but an artisan or day laborer he may still be a gentleman at heart and an honest man."—"I fear I am ill, but I *must* and *will* get better. I cannot die and leave my treasure alone."—"Sold the ruby and diamond bracelet."—"F. sent £5 ; grumbled at my false name and at having only P. O. address, I dare not trust him further."—"That love such as mine should turn to hate is scarcely credible, but the cause, oh ! the cause is beyond credibility."—"Has not my wretched beauty brought me enough misery? Yet it seems against me in getting employment."—"Poems returned with thanks. Last hope gone."—"Fear my drenching will prove more expensive than taking a fly."—"Seriously ill, but hope for—" This was the last entry, and the unfinished sentence and blotched blackness on the otherwise daintily written and clean MS. suggested the pen's dropping from dying fingers.

Among the papers not in the delicate Italian hand that was evidently Mary Randal's, was one beginning "Darling Mary" and ending "your own most loving A. M." It was dated M. C., April, 1834, and spoke regretfully of the obstacles in the way of marriage with the writer, who appeared to be in a higher position than the evidently dowerless Mary, and whose father wished him to "look higher." It counselled "patience for the present" and a "stolen match" at the worst in the future. It was evident that poor, broken-hearted Mary, in spite of the horror with which she had come to regard her child's father, who seemed to have wronged her beyond the common measure of man's iniquity, could not bring herself to part with this, perhaps, her first love-letter, which, in spite of some duplicity, had real feeling.

Did "M. C." mean Marwell Court? Was it *he* then who broke her heart and crushed her youth? If Matthew Meade had not died so unexpectedly, Philip would have known all. If he had been well born, would Matthew Meade have asked him to marry Jessie? Sometimes he was tempted to think it hard that his adopted father should have laid this burden upon him, but his heart reproached him when he remembered that good man's constant love and kindness to the nameless waif he had rescued from the workhouse. It was a love beyond all the ties of kindred, a loyal and lasting friendship that nothing could ever daunt ; no man was ever bound to another by such bonds of gratitude as bound him to Matthew Meade.

His dying glance of appeal and trust when he placed Jessie's hand in his, haunted him with the biting reproach of a wounded conscience. Jessie was Matthew's sole treasure, and it was in striving to enrich Philip that he had made her almost penniless.

Philip had grace enough to see that Stillbrooke Mill was a wholesomer home to be reared in than Marwell Court. What if Mr. Meade dined in his shirt-sleeves and the family ate with their knives? These things are but conventions; great Indian nobles use neither knife nor fork.

What if Mrs. Meade's days and nights were passed in keeping her house in the very poetry of cleanliness and order and bringing her dairy to an ideally perfect standard? Are such occupations more debasing than those of Lady Gertrude—idling from dawn to midnight, dancing from midnight till dawn, travelling from place to place in search of change, and caring for nothing but social pleasure and display?

If the Meades' accent was provincial, their meaning was polite; their vocabulary, if limited, contained good strong English that has slipped out of literature and higher social circles. Is there less vulgarity in the faulty language of people who know better, than in that of people who use the English of their parents in all innocence?

(And who shall say that their simple, industrious, God-fearing life, and warm if silent affection, provided worse training for a boy's moral nature than the combined license, tyranny, and temptation of a public school?) Philip, thinking of these things, felt that he would indeed be a traitor if he disappointed Meade's dying trust.

The Mutiny was at an end, and with it that strange brief vision of romance which had flashed as suddenly into his life as this terrible revolt into that of the nation. Philip gave one brief, regretful thought to that sweet flower of poetry and ideal love which had blossomed with such beauty upon the dark background of war, amid scenes of such horror and anguish. The cruelty and carnage had passed, like a bad dream, the terrible time was better forgotten; the one sweet vision, the brief bright moment snatched from days so dark, had passed away with it and must not be recalled.

The last day of bloodshed, the day when he fell, severely wounded, seemed very far off; though really little over five months ago—the months were like years. His health had been shattered both by the long campaign and his final wound. This long illness, the knowledge of India acquired during convalescence, and the subsequent promotion, all

helped to widen the gap between that time and this, and threw those romantic memories farther back into the past.

As he was walking along in the cooling evening, thinking of these things and cherishing a not ignoble hope of doing something worth doing in that great arena, the Indian Empire, he heard the merry shout of an English child among the trees surrounding a bungalow, and out from the enclosure darted a little sunny-headed boy, while at the same time a rose struck Philip in the face and sprinkled him with its crimson leaves.

"Harry, Harry," called a voice which thrilled him to the heart. Then a lady ran out after the truant boy who had cannoned against him, with her dark hair shining in the sun, and her face full of laughter. "You naughty boy!" she was saying.

She stopped at the sight of Philip, whose dark face, though roughly browned by two Indian summers, paled in the warm sunshine.

"I beg your pardon, Captain Randal," she said, perceiving the rose-leaves with which she had sprinkled him. "I was thinking of you only to-day when I had a letter that you may like to see from Gossamjee Bhowse, our old friend. This is a little nephew. Not Willie? oh, no, Willie went home to his friends in the spring. It was a hard parting; when one has been through so much for and with a child, you don't know how one's heart clings to him. We are all so glad of your promotion. My father says you have such opportunities before you on the staff of such a man. He is in the veranda, and will be so glad to see you."

Philip scarcely knew what he said or did in the strange vertigo that the light blow of the rose and the sound of Ada's voice brought upon him. He gathered that his coming was known and had been expected, and that to renew his acquaintance with the Maynards was looked upon as a matter of course, and, like a man in a dream, followed Ada through an orange-grove, and past beds of sweet mignonette, white tuberoses and other pleasant flowers, whose odors floated on the balmy air, and enhanced the magic of Ada's voice and the glamour of her presence, till he reached the veranda, where Colonel Maynard was lying on a chair, reading, and Mrs. Maynard's faded graces were reposing on a cane lounge. The sun was sinking toward the horizon in a wide blaze of many-colored splendor; its purple and gold were reflected in the broad waters of a river flowing at the bottom of the garden, and glowed on a castle-crowned hill in the near distance.

Far off, beyond a wide rich plain, was a range of amethystine hills seeming comparatively near in the clear sunny air.

"Yes, we were talking of you this morning," Colonel Maynard said when Ada had explained his presence, and he had been introduced to the widowed daughter, Mrs. Ross, one or two children, the young ensign son, Wilmot, a tame mongoose, and a young pet bear rolling about in the sunshine.

"You will show Gossamjee Bhose's letter, Ada, my dear. Ada does not forget her perilous flight," he added, when she was gone for the letter, "though indeed—" he broke off abruptly.

Philip understood that he was thinking, like so many others, that the less those dark days were remembered the better, especially for Ada, whom the flight placed in an awkward position. When Ada returned with the letter she handed him a white rose with it; "to make up for my rough salute," she said, graciously. He looked up at the slim yet stately figure and caught the smile of conscious condescension which seemed so fit for her sex and youth and beauty, and his heart grew faint at the distance between them. She had grown even taller, and her beauty had rapidly matured in that warm climate, though he could not know that her moral development under the stimulus of so much trouble and danger had kept pace with the physical. Nearly a year had elapsed since the flight to Allahabad, yet he felt that a whole age lay between the comradeship of those perilous days and the stately cordiality of these more conventional times.

He had not been five minutes with the Maynards before an indescribable something in their manner, and especially in Mrs. Maynard's, told him that he had risen very considerably in the world since his first acquaintance with them; nor did the visit end without some slight but well-timed allusions to the bloody field of Bareilly, on which he had so greatly distinguished himself, and to his deed of successful daring at the final siege of Lucknow, just enough to deepen the color on his face, which had now the true Indian tint and the spare, almost dried appearance of the Anglo-Indian, but not enough to embarrass. He was no longer "that wretched boy" of Mrs. Maynard's apprehension. Setting apart his promotion and distinction, he now looked older than his age, appeared taller from his loss of flesh, and his grave demeanor. The provincial accent and the solecisms incidental to his home-spun breeding and passage through the ranks, had long since disappeared; he was made of the metal that takes a fine

polish ; his dark gray eyes glowed with the fire of a richer intellect, his square forehead had a firmer set, a heavy mustache concealed a stronger mouth. When he was gone, Colonel Maynard pronounced him a soldierly looking man, Mrs. Ross said that he had an air of distinction, Mrs. Maynard prophesied that he would be a social success. Ada said nothing, but looked down at the gambols of the pet bear at her feet, with a happy quiver about the corners of her mouth and a happy glow deepening her veiled eyes.

Some weeks of dreamlike enchantment flew by. Philip met Ada at various station gayeties, and also found himself a welcome guest at the Maynards'. He was there discovered to have a good but untrained baritone voice, which was too great an acquisition in the limited station society not to be brought out and pressed into service by the daughters of the house. Wilmot wanted help in his Hindustanee and Sanskrit studies, in which Philip had made great progress during his long convalescence, and which he now still further prosecuted with Ada and her brother.

There was, of course, no allusion to the flight to Lucknow ; that incident, even though it did occur amid so many of a similar character, and at a time when bare life at most could be preserved, was still too compromising to Ada to be a pleasant topic. The Bhowe family were indeed often discussed, but always with a tacit reserve touching their connection with them ; a reserve that, being mutual, constituted a secret bond between Philip and Ada, the consciousness of which when their glances met sometimes sent a keen thrill through Philip and caused Ada's sensitive mouth to quiver so faintly that he only saw it.

The rose that struck his face so suddenly that afternoon was like a magician's wand, changing all his life ; admission to that sacred enclosure, with its palm-groves, its scents of lime and orange flowers, the enchantment of its tuberose perfumes, its tranquil coolness, and the glowing splendors of sunset over all, was like a sudden admission to Paradise. Think what it must be when treading some dusty highway after a hot and tiring pilgrimage with a mind revolving the prose of every-day duties, all of a sudden to see the shining portals of Paradise rolled back, to be led in by the magic of an angel melody, to see the great river roll its splendor between the blossomed banks, to breathe the odors, to hear the music, to taste the golden fruit. Surely all the noises of the excluded world would die away, and even the thunders of

conscience might roll unheeded in the dark forgotten distance.

So it was with Philip ; for a while he was dazed and spell-bound. He could not help meeting her in that limited society, and going to the house often seemed to be a safeguard against keener, more ethereal emotions. And when the distant thunder-roll of conscience did make itself faintly heard, he took refuge in the distance between them, and especially in her changed bearing toward him. The impulsiveness of the frank girl in the ball-room, the friendly candor of the days of peril, had given way to the dignified condescension he remarked when she conferred the white rose upon him, as a princess might confer some order of knighthood. In the reading and singing at home, and in the dancing or talking in society, the princess manner was never dropped ; she was sweet and genial, but always condescending.

The fascination of the East had taken Philip's imagination as it had taken Ada's ; and more than this fascination, the deep interest which both had in those dusky, graceful people with their ancient civilization and religions, their venerable literature, picturesque histories and customs, bound them together, and many an earnest conversation did the quartet, Ada, her father and brother and Philip, hold upon Indian history, tradition, and literature, and upon the destiny and duty of England in the peninsula during those brief paradisaic weeks.

"I cannot imagine what your father can see in those horrid natives," Mrs. Maynard frequently said to her daughter Mabel ; "especially after they have shown themselves such fiends. As for Ada, it is positively unwomanly of her to mix in such conversation. She is nearly twenty, and will never marry anybody else, I suppose." By which else Mrs. Ross understood her mother to signify Captain Randal, who was at least good enough for a girl who had reached years so mature without so much as an engagement. "She has overstood her market," her mother elegantly observed.

"Ada might do worse than take Randal," Colonel Maynard said to his wife in a moment of confidence. "You see, my dear, if it got wind, that Beelampore business would be awkward. As you say, twenty is a great age in India. Ada has snubbed so many men ; besides, this young fellow will rise. He has not only talent and character, but has been lucky enough to get himself recognized in the right quarter. Lord Blank has taken him up and means to make use of him. As

for birth, Ada has that ; besides, grandfathers have gone out of fashion."

"But people at least have fathers still," urged Mrs. Maynard, whose own father was a nineteenth baronet.

"Not necessarily ; with talent and luck the want of a father rather enhances a man's personal distinction."

"But he has neither family, interest, nor money," sighed Mrs. Maynard.

"He has at least no family hindrances, and Lord Blank's interest is omnipotent. As for money, enough will come. Besides, my dear, Ada will never marry at all, unless she has her own way about it."

"True ; and to be an old maid in India is too terrible a disgrace," Mrs. Maynard sorrowfully agreed.

Philip knew very well that Lieutenant-Colonel the Hon. Lionel Maynard, R. A., was an earl's son and brother, and he knew all about the nineteenth baronet, but he did not know how little money in proportion to his numerous children the colonel had, and what an article of faith it had become with both parents to get their numerous daughters married. He thought himself too unsuitable to be considered dangerous, and supposed that the Maynards deemed him as harmless a companion for their daughter as the pet bear ; nor did it ever occur to him that Princess Ada, whose repute in the station was that of a most high and mighty damsel, would ever condescend from her high estate to him, even if he dared lay siege to her heart, so far even as to try to carry the outworks of that lofty and impregnable maiden citadel.

In the meantime he did not write to bid Jessie come out ; he felt that he must first shake off this poetic fascination. That kind of love was doubtless inevitable, but its indulgence was not for one so bound in honor and duty as was he. He refused to sing love songs, would rather not hear them, and disparaged all love lyrics and idyls. Someone had lent him "Maud" during his early convalescence, and he could not put it down. For Maud always had Ada's eyes and voice and manner. It was Ada who came out "in gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls" to the waiting lover in the rose garden ; Ada who was "made my Maud from her first sweet breath ;" Ada "made my Maud with that long lover's kiss ;" Ada, whose beautiful voice was heard "singing of love and of honor that cannot die." So it was with Romeo and Juliet. Ada came out on the balcony instead of Juliet and feared the lark. "The Song of Songs" expressed his own ethereal pain of yearnings that must be conquered. "My Pretty Jane" was

Ada, so was the "Maid of Athens." So with all love songs, love lyrics and tales, they brought Ada before him and must be renounced. Only the tranquil affection that comes of duty and long association could ever be his. So he reasoned until the gates of Paradise suddenly flashed open and caught him in on that early November evening.

CHAPTER III.

A LETTER FROM HOME.

Philip was riding slowly home one evening after a duty visit to a distant village, his horse was tired, so he rode with a loose rein absorbed in such thoughts as that kind of motion favors. He was expecting, even dreading, though he did not like to own it, a letter from home ; this mad dream must end then. He had just received a hint that he might be intrusted with a mission taking him from Myserabad for weeks or months. Besides the prospect of advancement this afforded him, it would take him from temptations which daily and hourly became more powerful ; so he was both sorry and glad. Suddenly the sound of clattering hoofs and the startled cries of some native attendants roused him from his reverie, and turning, he saw a runaway horse, ridden by a lady, thundering along the road toward him. The horse's mane and the lady's hair streamed on the wind of their furious speed, the rider sat well and was pulling with all her might. He had but time to recognize in the pale face, flashing eye, and firm-set mouth, the features so seldom absent from his mind, when the clashing of elephant bells was heard, and the richly caparisoned elephant of a native nobleman, preceded by servants and carrying a gay howdah on its mountain of a back, issued from the shadow of some tall trees concealing a bend of the road and caused Miss Maynard's mare, which was new to India and terrified at these walking castles, to swerve violently and leap a low stone wall by the roadside.

Philip, who had stopped petrified at first sight of the runaway and was close by at the swerve and leap, could hear the mare's hoofs strike on the wall and the heavy double crash of her fall as her hind-quarters rose to the jump.

He turned in his saddle with sick apprehension, then sprang down and cleared the wall, on the other side of which the ground sloped steeply, and saw the mare struggling to her feet at the bottom of the little declivity, to which she had slid in her struggles after her tumble.

Ada lay at the foot of a tree ; he supposed her head must

have struck it in the fall. A red mist came before his eyes, he hastened blindly to her side. Her hat had fallen off, her face was quite white, her head slightly drooping to one shoulder, her arms were flung helplessly, one above her head the other abroad downward, the wild hair mingled with them; she did not stir a limb, she seemed not to breathe; he thought she was dead.

He knelt down and raised her in his trembling arms, feeling her pulse and vaguely observing that there was no blood on her, nor any sign of broken bones. He called her by her name and kissed her, and it seemed to him that some time must have elapsed before there was a little sign, a faint quiver, then he saw the dark eyes open.

She raised her head and made an effort to rise, his firm clasp relaxed, and with a little help she stood on her feet and moved and felt her arms.

“Oh! there is nothing the matter,” she said, with a smile and a gradual return of color. “But you, you look so pale and strange. I am so confused and giddy. My head.”

“Sit down, you *are* hurt,” he cried. Then he placed her gently on the ground with her back against the tree, and knelt by her side and fanned her with his cap.

Their servants had in the meantime come up, water was fetched, the runaway horse caught and brought back, and Ada, who had been exhausted by her long struggle with the mare, and stunned by a blow which raised a small swelling on her head, gradually became herself again.

“I do think I must be a kind of cat,” she said, laughing, and looking up with a sort of shy confidence that he had never seen before. “I always come to life again, whatever happens!”

“Why will you ride that beast,” he complained, “she is not fit to carry a lady.”

“She is a darling. A Hindoo procession frightened her and the elephant drove her distracted. Colleen Bawn is afraid of elephants.”

He took care to have the saddle transferred from the darling's back to that of his own tired horse, when he found that Ada intended to ride home, and himself mounted the Colleen Bawn, who was too much blown for any more cantrips. Ada made no objection to this arrangement, allowed him to lift her into the saddle and adjust her habit, which he did without looking up, and when this was done, and he was on the runaway, they started homeward at a walk, in the last rays of the sinking sun.

They rode about a mile and a half in silence, broken only once or twice by Philip's inquiries if she was warm enough, for the air was sharpening; if the motion hurt her, all of which he did with a certain air of compunction, as if he had been the cause of the accident; and to which Ada replied in a low tone, as if confiding secrets that must reach no other ear.

The ride seemed unending, and yet the dark trees of the Maynards' compound became visible with too cruel quickness; when he heard her low replies it was like heaven, and yet he hesitated to speak from a terror of hearing her voice.

The swift-coming Indian night had already fallen when they drew rein before the veranda, so that they could scarcely see each other.

"I must lift you," he said, when she would have taken his hand to spring; "you must not risk any jar."

Then she passed in without any good-night, and while the syces were again changing the saddles, Philip explained to Colonel Maynard why he had been riding the Colleen, and then rode off on his own horse.

He sat still in his room for some time, not even trying to shake off the intoxication of the last hour. Why should he? It would have to be got rid of soon enough, and it was something to have lived that hour.

Home letters had arrived; he was in no hurry to open them; was there not a life-time to consider them in, and only this one brief hour to taste the exhilarating sparkles of that one draught of deepest happiness in? Why, he had held her like a child, in his arms, had kissed her unrebuked—but one hour since, and must the chill, hard agony of duty come so soon between them? His hands still thrilled with the anguished pleasure of touching the thick tresses of dark hair, when helping her to gather the disordered mass together, and his heart still ached with the reproachful memory this soft touch called up of the day of his father's funeral, when Jessie covered his face with the golden mantle of her own curling hair, and comforted him in his need. And Jessie and he were alone in the world, together, now as then, bound forever by a solemn promise to dying ears.

The unopened letters lay on the table before him, their white faces offering a perpetual mute reproach; but the low rich sounds of Ada's voice were still in his ears, and he still felt the throb of her returning life beneath his hand; he buried his face in his hands and saw the long eyelashes slowly parting and the wonder of the dark eyes in the sudden flash of returning consciousness. She looked so happy. He would

give the whole world that Ada should not love him, and yet it would be like death to know she did not. At last he plucked his hot face from his hands, pushed back his ruffled hair and stood up. The letters were few, there was none from Jessie, and he was glad, he would feel like a traitor if he read a letter of hers just then. They were business letters, some on Jessie's account, one on his own, he read them studiously, hoping to cool the fever that consumed him. The last was from a friend, it had the Marwell post-mark, and was in Mr. Ingleby's handwriting.

"Old Ingleby," he cried, "if he were but here for one half-hour!"

Yet what would Mr. Ingleby think if he could see into his heart? Many a time he had asked his advice, both as boy and man, from the days when he went to tea in Mr. Ingleby's rooms and wondered to see a grown man eat so many slices of bread and jam, until the landlady one day told him it was because he had given his dinner away to some poor man or woman, and grumbled that there was no pleasure in looking after the comforts of such a discomfortable gentleman. He opened the letter, foreboding no evil, and read :

"DEAR RANDAL : You will wonder why in the world I am writing to you, and when you have discovered the reason perhaps will wonder why I did not write before, unless, indeed, you rate me a meddler in other men's concerns."

He read on and turned red, still on and turned pale, and when he had finished, his face was gray and contracted in lines of pain.

His blood throbbed in his ears with a dull sound like the old familiar throb, throb of the mill, he saw the dark water break to diamond-dust in the slow wheel, smelt the homely scent of corn and meal, saw the kind faces in the sunshine and firelight, and remembered all the pleasant peace of his youth. The yearning, unspoken tenderness, as of some dumb animal, in Matthew Meade's eyes, seemed to follow him everywhere through all those boyish scenes, the mingled appeal and trust in his dying eyes stabbed him to the heart with perpetual poignancy ; again he felt the tremulous fingers relax their hold on the clasped hands of Jessie and himself, and chill his marrow with their icy touch. How young, how utterly alone and defenceless Jessie was ! And he had not understood the half-articulate cry in her letters. He would read that last letter offering release again. But he could not ; he had torn it up.

Yet he had not torn up Ada Maynard's last letter before Lucknow, though it was quite illegible, darkly-stained as it was with blood.

There was no sleep for him that night, a great part of which he spent in writing letters and arranging papers and things of value.

Nor did Ada Maynard sleep much ; she was too happy, and the necessity of living over the day's events was too imperious. Philip's face bending over her, the gray eyes wide with terror and alight with love, painted itself perpetually on the dark curtain of the night. She had seemed to pass, with the shock of her fall, out of the limits of life into the illimitable shadow of nothingness ; whence she was called back by the stormy expression of a strong, deep love, to find herself cradled like an infant in loving arms, enfolded and supported in utter helplessness and peace in the power and tenderness of a great and enduring passion. It seemed to her fancy that life would never have returned to her but for the magnetic potency of that other strong young life upon it ; the deep pulsations of the heart on which she rested seemed to have set her own arrested pulses beating afresh, the charm of the fairy prince's kiss had awakened her from the sleep of death.

"Young Randal seems to be Ada's good genius," her father said ; "he is always on the spot in the nick of time."

"There is evidently a fate in it, Ada," Mrs. Ross added ; and even Mrs. Maynard murmured something about romance, mingled with an interdict on Ada's riding any more without her father's brother—which she had only done that day in consequence of Wilmot's failing to turn up at the appointed hour.

Would Philip appear at the ruined temple to which they were to make a party that day ? was Ada's first thought on waking and rising with the earliest peep of dawn. He had been asked to join them and had promised to ride over in the afternoon, if not on duty, as he knew he would be in the early part of the day. She hoped he would not come, and yet she knew that she would be grievously disappointed if he did not.

They set forth in the beautiful cool morning, intending to reach their destination before the midday heat, although at this season it might well be borne, and by salamanders like Philip Randal, enjoyed. Ada's ayah had never known her mistress so concerned about her dress before ; first one gown was tried and then another, this ribbon was taken and that

discarded, flowers were chosen and then thrown away, because they would be faded before noon. But when these ceremonies were at last ended and Ada hastened, a little late, through the garden to the water side, where their little yacht was awaiting them, it was not the neat fresh morning costume just received from home that caused Mrs. Maynard to exclaim :

“ Really, Ada, I had no idea that hat and dress were so becoming ! ” but some spiritual cause, which at once fired and etherealized her face.

She received the attentions of attendant cavaliers with rather more of the accustomed hauteur which at once charmed and provoked them, and caused more spiteful things to be said of her than of anybody in Myserabad, especially by a certain young civilian who was considered the most eligible bachelor at the station ; she grew more and more preoccupied as the day wore on. Tiffin was served and eaten, and wise and elderly people rested in the shade to admire the prospect and smoke ; the foolish young ones went off in twos and threes to explore the ruins or stroll by the water.

“ He is not coming, ” she said to herself, declining to join any of these small parties and taking a chair by the side of her mother, who was made up in a comfortable lounge for a graceful, and as she trusted imperceptible, siesta inside one of the tents that had been erected by servants sent on before. But she listened still, and soon the color flashed over her face, her heart began the rapid drum music young hearts make at such times, and she drew a little closer to her now sleeping mother, as she heard the quick canter of a horse echo from the road and over the turf, and wished he had not come, and wondered why she had been so stupid as not to wander away with the others.

And yet when Philip had dismounted, given his horse to a servant, and walked to the encampment, speaking to the wise and sometimes drowsy lingerers in the shade as he passed them, Miss Maynard chanced, singularly enough, to be just issuing from the tent with that calm and unembarrassed air which is expected of ladies on social occasions, and he of course stopped to speak to her.

“ I was staying with mamma, but she is gone to sleep, ” she said, in the low liquid tones which so charmed him ; “ the rest are exploring the temple. ”

“ Come with me, ” he replied, “ I came on the chance of seeing you alone. Let us find some place where we shall not be interrupted. ”

The princess air became apparent in the glance Miss Maynard directed upon Philip's haggard face and down-bent, preoccupied eyes, when it softened into a gentle smile and she reflected that a soldier—a really great soldier—as Captain Randal was one day to be, might be brusque even on such an occasion as this.

“Have you seen the waterfall?” she returned. “It would be pleasant there to-day. I don't want to climb over all the ruins after yesterday's bruising and jolting. I feel as if I had had a good beating.”

“Ah! yes,” he returned, abstractedly, “it was a nasty fall; yes.”

“The *fall* was unpleasant,” she said, with a demure air, reflecting upon the agreeable manner in which she had been picked up, and they walked silently on, skirting the rocky eminences on which the ancient temple was built and passing beneath some trees which grew down to the water's edge, where their yacht lay at anchor, passed and repassed by native boats plying up and down the broad river in the bright sunshine. The rich level country spreading beyond the further bank was now only caught in glimpses through tree-trunks and beneath canopies of leaves, a flock of green paroquets fluttered out above their heads, other “strange bright birds” of that unfamiliar land flew by, and a strange lizard, with a brilliant throat, flashed across their path; the dark masonry of the old temple was lost sight of, though the feeling of this decayed witness of a hoary creed, its gloom and grandeur, and the majesty with which it traced itself upon the cloudless sky, remained with them.

Their path now rose a little, and soon they found themselves by a tumbling, plashing cascade, which swept with many a light wreath of spray down the rocks into a dark pool overhung with graceful bamboos, beyond which the river came in sight again; and they saw some buildings on the farther bank, sentinelled by palms, those trees so typical of the languid, graceful East. Surely, all their lives long they would remember those drooping palms beneath the broad, bright Indian sky.

“I don't know how to tell you,” Philip began at last, when they stopped, Ada sitting on a rock past which the water rushed with a white flash and a sound like the mill-water many times doubled, and he leaning against the rocky wall a little lower down. “It is bad news from home.”

She looked up; the light died out of her face at what she saw in his.

“Oh!” she replied gaspingly, remembering the bad news he had received on that night of their first meeting at the ball, “but there is only Jessie left.”

“Only Jessie,” he echoed, looking gloomily down at the swirling waters.

“I am so sorry,” she said, in a voice so charged with sympathy and tenderness that it cut him to the heart; “she is not—ill?”

“No. Oh, no!—Ada, I have done wrong, very wrong, I never told you—or anyone—all about Jessie. It never occurred to me that it mattered. Still, I think I should have told *you*, if we had been a little longer together, because—you were—you seemed interested in my life, and—it is so pleasant to have sympathy from you. Not that I ever dreamed that it could in any way affect *you*.”

“Surely what affects my friend affects me,” she said, accentuating the word friend.

“That is why I told you nothing; we were sworn friends,” he replied. And then, in a few words, he narrated the story of the death-bed betrothal and of the purposed marriage deferred by the Mutiny. His relations with Matthew Meade and all the rest of his story, even his guardianship of Jessie, she knew already, but something had always kept him from speaking of his engagement; perhaps the subject was too distasteful. And when he did speak of Jessie, his manner was always that of an affectionate elder brother. Ada was under the impression that she was still a child. So probably was Philip; for him, she was always the little playmate of his boyhood, the undeveloped slip of a girl who had bid him farewell nearly two years ago.

CHAPTER IV.

BY THE WATERFALL.

Ada watched the water flash down to the pool, and heard the story of the death-bed betrothal to the accompaniment of its manifold murmuring, without interruption or comment till the end, then she turned her face from the water to Philip with a little sigh.

"Yes, you ought to have told me," she said, in low and gentle tones unalloyed by reproach.

He could not speak or trust himself to look at her for a moment; yet, in spite of the keen unspoken reproach those gentle words contained, his heart throbbed with triumphant joy.

"If I had ever dreamed—" he began, "but I never ventured," he added after a long pause, "I thought you so far above my reach. We were on such friendly terms from the first. I knew that your people would never hear of anything of the sort. You seemed so safe. I did not think that I—a rough-hewn sort of fellow—could ever touch you like that—until——"

"Until yesterday?" she asked, in the same low, gentle voice.

"How could I help it?" he cried, "how could I? I heard the mare's hoofs strike the wall, I heard the crash—ah! And when I saw you lying there you were so white, so still! I shall never forget it. I was mad, dearest, I can only ask to be forgiven." He put his hand before his face as if to exclude something from his sight. Ada had turned again toward the rushing waters, her breast was shaken by a little sob and her eyes were full of tears. He brushed away the intruding vision and looked at her quivering face outlined against the rocky fall with mingled feelings.

"But you wished," she said, turning her face once more toward him so that he saw the tears shining in her eyes, "to tell me of your trouble. Never mind yesterday. May I see the letter?"

They read it together, he explaining here and there what seemed necessary. It was written immediately after Jessie's

last visit to Marwell Rectory, when Miss Ingleby had received her with such marked coldness ; it related the scandal as it was buzzed about the place, also Mr. Ingleby's view of the actual facts, his conviction of Jessie's perfect integrity and child-like ignorance of conventionalities. It spoke of Mrs. Plummer's practical neglect of Jessie in suffering her to go about unattended, and of the total impossibility of making either the Plummers or Mr. Cheeseman comprehend the kind of guardianship a girl like Jessie required, and of the impossibility of keeping a young woman of her breeding and tastes chained to the homely occupations and companionship of one so uncultivated as Mrs. Plummer. Jessie's previous foiled attempts at confidence to himself were recapitulated, her mental and moral loneliness, her great beauty and charm, her talents, her dangerous visit to Marwell Court and false position there ; all were dwelt upon affectionately, even lovingly. His sister's line of conduct toward Jessie was regretted, and the conversation he had had with her on her way from the Rectory was related. But, bravely as Jessie had accepted the consequences of her error, Mr. Ingleby said, in conclusion, he did not think she could possibly remain in the neighborhood after such a scandal, and great as was his confidence in her integrity and high principle, one never knew what unadvised steps a girl might take in despair. There was no doubt, he added in a post-script, that this fascinating man of the world had to a certain extent attracted and influenced Jessie ; he trusted it was no more than the influence of a strong nature over a weak one, and would pass away. But in the circumstances he thought it unwise to have her out to India just yet.

"There is but one course," Ada said, after carefully reading the letter, "and I know that you have already decided upon it."

"Yes," he replied, "yes, that seemed the only right course, but I wanted your opinion first."

"You know," she continued, as if pleading against some objection upon his part, "this is no ordinary engagement ; it is not merely a question of keeping faith with a—*fiancée*—but keeping faith with the dead, and with all your past life. Perhaps this engagement with one so young was not well done—but, Philip—it is done."

"It would be a scoundrelly desertion, though she did offer to release me from it," he replied.

"Release you ?"

"Yes, she offered that," he said, and told her as much as he could remember of the letter and his reply. She turned

away and looked at the foaming water for some time, and then she turned and looked straight in his face with an earnest, candid gaze that went through him. "Philip," she said, "do you think that she loves you?"

"I never thought about it," he replied, with the utmost simplicity; "I took it for granted."

"How like a man!" she commented, with a strange little half-smile playing over her face, as she turned again to consider the rushing waters.

"If she does not, I cannot force her to marry me," he said, rather wistfully.

"But if she does not, she may be won," she urged, turning again with the same earnest gaze. "You may think it strange," she added, with a vivid flush, "but girls expect to be courted. It is a homage that ought not to be withheld."

"And yet—" he paused, remembering that he had said no word of love to Ada, though every time he looked at her his eyes told the tale.

"Do you remember Andromache's parting from Hector?" she continued. "Father, thou art to me and mother dear, and brother too, kind husband of my heart." That is the relationship between you and Jessie, my *friend*."

"She has no one else," he asserted, awed by the pathetic tenderness which Ada's beautiful voice gave to these words.

"And is six thousand miles away, in grave peril, alone and unprotected," she continued, looking down upon him through eyes brilliant with tears. She had grown rather pale during the interview; she was now bending slightly toward him, her face partially shaded by one hand, her attitude, as she sat inclining toward the cascade with one knee on which her arm rested, higher than the other, singularly sweet and graceful, and expressive beyond all words.

"There is no one like you!" he cried. "No one. Who could help loving you?"

"There is no one," she continued, suffering two bright tears to fall unheeded, "like Philip Randal in honor and truth. Philip, which would you rather have, a disloyal lover or a staunch friend?"

"But I must leave you and never see you again," he murmured, huskily, "never see you, never!"

"You will get over this, you will conquer yourself," she replied, with the same sweet gentleness and the same earnest gaze. "Some day you will show me your Jessie, and all the trouble will be forgotten. Life has great things in it, and pleasing one's self, even in the way of marriage, where choice

is usually duty, does not bring blessing. You have talent and energy, a great future is before you, though you must now miss one of the best opportunities possible to one so young, as my father says. It is hard, Philip, very hard, but after all, true prosperity and promotion only come through duty. I shall hear of you, Philip, and be glad and proud.

‘Not once nor twice in our rough island story
The path of duty was the way to glory,’”

she added.

He moved toward her, his eyes kindled with holy fire and a half articulate cry on his lips, but something in the very tenderness of her sorrowful gaze made him pause, overawed, and draw back again.

“And you, Ada? What will you do?” he asked, in half smothered tones.

A sudden burst of tears was the unexpected and disquieting reply. He stood with his back to the rock, and his arms folded across his chest, and looked at her with a white face and gleaming eyes.

“Anything but this,” he groaned. “I cannot bear this.”

She checked herself, quietly dried her eyes, and summoned a sweet, tender smile to her face.

“I hope I shall do well,” she replied, resuming her former attitude; “I have a thousand plans and projects, all for the good and welfare of mankind,” she added, with a little dainty sarcasm.

“I could not help it, I did not mean it. I tried so hard,” he said, heavily. “I tried after the ball to forget you, and then, that ruby! it seemed enchanted. Chance took me to Gossamjee’s house, and I could not avoid you. But I ought not to have seen you again at Lucknow. And then, when your rose struck my face that day I lost my head, but I never dreamed of hurting you.”

“Do not reproach yourself,” she replied. “It would not be otherwise, and even if you had not told me, I am afraid—Oh! it began at the ball! I never thought of anyone else in that way. It was my own fault. There was never a word from you till yesterday.”

“Ah, yesterday!”

“I did not know till yesterday,” she said, bringing the shadow of her hand more completely over her face and speaking in those low golden, clear tones of deep feeling, “but it must have been in my heart always. We must go. See how the shadows slant. They will be looking for us.”

"One minute more. I may never see you again," he cried, trying to prevent her from leaving her rocky seat, "and I must never even think of you again."

"Not yet," she replied, taking the hand extended to help her down from her niche by the water, "not till things are right at home. And then I think we shall always be glad to have known each other, Philip," she added, with an infinitely tender and sorrowful smile.

"If I might die for you!" he cried.

"Live instead; live well, live nobly," she rejoined. "Oh, Philip, dying is easy enough, living is the hard part."

He turned away.

"Philip!" she exclaimed, "Philip!"

He turned, extended his arms and would have embraced her, but that she drew back gently and repelled him.

"Never again," she said, and he fell back a pace, but pleading that it was their last moment together.

"We *must* go now," she added, hurriedly. "You know," she added, with the old tenderness, "most people would blame me——"

"Blame you!" he echoed, indignantly.

"Not such as you," she replied, with a smile of perfect trust, "you are too chivalrous. But the world, conventional people, if they knew what I have let you know. So, Philip, never let me blame myself, never let me regret, never let me be anything but proud of you."

She moved from the waterfall as she spoke, the hoarse murmur of the waters became fainter and fainter, the shadows of the trees deepened above their heads, the river faded once more into blue glimpses beneath leafy canopies. Philip made some fervid, half-articulate rejoinder as he walked by her side full of sudden perfect peace, and lifted up in heart as he had never been before.

They separated before appearing at the river side, where the yacht was about to set sail; the young people supposed Ada to have remained with her mother, who imagined her to have been with the party exploring the temple. The eligible civilian reproved her for her desertion, and she told him how stiff and aching her yesterday's tumble had made her, and was more gracious to him than he remembered to have seen her. Philip devoted himself to Mrs. Maynard, whom he helped on board; then he had a brief chat with the colonel, telling him that family affairs called him suddenly home, and that he was obliged to give up his staff appointment and ask for leave, at which Colonel Maynard was greatly concerned.

He plainly told Philip that such an opportunity as he had now fell to the lot of few, and might never occur again, and implored him to consider before he threw it away. Afterward, he told his wife that he verily believed "that little flirt Ada" had refused him, and that, on the whole, perhaps it was as well that she should not have taken a nameless adventurer like Randal, even though old maidhood must now be her doom.

Philip had sent his horse back and made one of the party on board the yacht. The wind was not fair for them, they had to tack and delay their course, while the sun burned away in the west and went down in great pomp of crimson and gold, its glory reflected and redoubled in the river.

Though Ada and Philip did not speak during the voyage, it was a secret and sweet memory for their future lives. Each could see the other, each was blessedly conscious of the other's presence, each would have liked to sail on forever over the broad river, which was steeped in the splendid ardors of that glowing sunset. On and on forever over those richly hued waters, in the peace of the cooling evening, in the exquisite hush which follows the dying sun, they would have liked to glide, enjoying the picturesque features of that foreign shore, its waving palms and mango groves, its dark groves of unfamiliar trees, its oriental houses, the domes and minarets of the little towns, the dusky, brightly clad people passing in native boats and moving by the river side—on and on, their keel cleaving now a wave of molten gold, now a sea of liquid rose, now of amethyst, violet, amber, primrose, now floods of dissolved rubies.

But the glowing radiance burned too swiftly away, the last stain left the waters, the sudden night fell long before they reached their landing place. They saw great stars orb themselves in the dark sky and tremble upon the river's breast, and when they landed, a broad moon was just peeping above the horizon, its mellow light was gilding the dark and glossy leaves of the orange-trees, and lending a new witchery to the slender palms and delicate acacias in the garden.

Philip and Ada lingered behind, unnoticed in the darkness, and walked together in the shadow of those beautiful trees, touched now and again by the mystical glory of the rising moon. Here they clasped hands for the last time, and bid each other farewell with over-full hearts. Then Ada mingled with the others on the verandah, people wished each other good-night there, she shivering in the chill air, though Philip had wrapped her in a warm shawl.

She heard his quick firm steps as he passed beneath the orange-trees and out of the compound into the road, on which he had been walking when her rose struck his face. Then they died away, and she owned, on being questioned, that she was very tired.

A week or two later Philip stood on the deck of a steamer and watched the Indian shore, with the gilded domes and light minarets of its brooding city lessen and fade in the distance. Not quite two years before he had landed in the unknown, marvel-teeming Asian country, a stranger and an exile, with a deep yearning for pale English skies and pale misty English shores; he had found it drenched with blood and clouded with terror; out of the dark heart of the horror and strife of those days he had plucked the beautiful flower he might never wear, he had fought and suffered, and won himself a name that he must now bury in obscurity; he was bidding good-by to everything he cared for. Farewell now to the blazing suns, the broad rich plains, the mighty mountain ranges, the beautiful cities rich with unfamiliar architecture and dense dark groves, the palm-circled temples, the dark picturesque people of many creeds, races, and tongues, the castle-crested hills, the thick forests haunted by fierce beautiful beasts and fierce beautiful reptiles, the brief but glowing dawns and sunsets, and the sudden star-lit nights. Farewell to the dignified politeness of the grave, brightly clad, jewelled nobles, the sound of the rich southern languages, the mystery surrounding beings so alien to European habits and thoughts. All was fascination to him in that land of marvel. Even the stately tramp of elephants, those huge sagacious creatures with more than human intelligence, even the jolting swaying pace of a camel, had a sort of charm when one was not riding it. But how much greater was the charm of rose gardens, orange and lime groves, and above all of that rocky waterfall, shadowed by its slender bamboos and drooping palms! The sound of those falling waters would always haunt him, blended with the sweeter sound of Ada's voice. Farewell now to those memories; he must never dwell upon them again. Yet that hour by the waterfall nerved him to his duty, and his love then entered upon a higher phase. It had till then been so hard to give up, now it seemed simply right and inevitable; loyalty was no more divided; in being loyal to earlier claims he would best keep faith with Ada.

The shores faded into the general blueness, and he turned away from the charmed scenes of romance, love, and glory, forgetful of the horror and suffering through which these

had been won, and set his face toward chill gray England and the chill prose of duty.

Deeply as he pitied Jessie, and strongly as he felt his responsibility toward her, he was extremely angry with her, angry with the cold disapproving anger that only a man can feel, and only toward a woman who belongs to him, and who has, however slightly, compromised herself. He did not think Jessie capable of a wrong thought, but he did think that through folly or ignorance, or both, she had got into a very serious scrape ; and such folly, or such ignorance, in women is unpardonable in male eyes. Their womenkind, however foolish and ignorant in other respects, are expected not only to be faultless in deed and thought, but also in circumspection, tact, and knowledge. Every man is Cæsar to his wife and sister. Cæsar's wife must be not only above suspicion, but beyond misconception.

Such is the arrogance of this frail and erring atom, man, to the woman he deigns to love and respect. A more thoroughly and unconsciously foolish biped does not exist upon earth, doomed as it is to bear the tread of so many foolish things. My womenkind, says this little autocrat, though silly, ignorant, and weak, dwell upon heights of unapproachable purity, cased in armor of invulnerable virtue ; women in general, on the contrary, are—well, we all know what women are ! He has no mercy on the errors of his own sister, however tempted, but is ever tender to the failings of other men.

Philip was not particularly angry with Claude Medway. How could he blame him for amusing himself after the manner of his kind ? He would of course think that girls must take care of themselves, and that if girls are ignorant of what is due to themselves, so much the worse for them. Woe to the weak ! Are gilded youth responsible for the misery of those who fall in their way ? Is not the world the world ? Yes, my good Philip, and the devil is the devil, and a strong one to boot ; but that is no reason why we should knock under to him.

Once or twice it crossed Philip's mind that irretrievable disaster might have befallen Jessie, but he dismissed it as insulting to her. But Ada had fully faced this ghastly possibility. She could also conceive redemption and healing for a woman, as for a man ; if, as she heard, a good woman could lead a husband from a dark past to a holy future, surely a good man might lead a wife. But Ada was only a woman, she had not had the advantage of hearing men of the world instruct each other upon the different code of ethics proper

to each sex, as Philip had ; and having early discovered that conventional morality is for the most part a hybrid between real morality and the expediency invented by ages of male selfishness, resolved to accept none not based upon justice and truth. Therefore she expected Philip to save to the uttermost the one human being dependent upon him.

Philip's heart beat strongly when, after having taken the quick overland route, he saw the gray Dover cliffs rising from the pale sea. In less than twenty-four hours he would look again upon Jessie's sweet, pathetic child face. He would be very gentle with her, would appear to know nothing of those ill-judged rambles ; would place her under some suitable lady guardian, far from the scenes of those idle tales, and gently and gradually win her heart. Never till then had he felt how closely Jessie's life was entwined with his, or how strong and ineradicable are the affections that begin with life itself. He little suspected the calamity that had long since fallen upon him.

CHAPTER V.

PHILIP'S WELCOME HOME.

Philip lost no time after landing in setting his face homeward, as he called it. He stepped out upon the platform at Cleeve railway station in the afternoon of a cold, clear January day, and was surprised not to see a face he recognized in the familiar place. The flyman, on being told to drive to Redwoods, asked where it was.

"Sir Arthur Medway's place, Marwell Court? Yes, knows that. 'Tis a good nine mile ride and the roads heavy," he said.

"Marwell village, farm on the right. Drive as fast as you can."

The streets were silent with the dull and ghostly silence of snow, silent but not white, snowy but not picturesque; town, snow is a sorry spectacle, chill, depressing, suggestive of all the soils and stains incident to poor humanity. Yet there was no sludge, no muddy deliquescence penetrating to the very marrow with its chill; the sun was shining, the white topped roofs were outlined upon a clear pale sky, the iced eaves sparkled as the long spikes melted and froze and melted and froze again; the snow was trampled into yellow-brown powder in the roads, on which the horse's feet struck now and then with a muffled thud.

The grammar school alone looked more venerable and picturesque than usual, its gray walls tufted with feathery drifts of unstained snow, its gabled roof, mullions, and drip stones traced in white snow-lines, its leafless lime-trees showing a tracery of mingled pink and white branches against the freezing sky. Philip thought of his early battles in the playground, and of that "big brute Brown," now a peaceful and substantial young tradesman, a good deal hen-pecked by a fierce little scrap of a wife. Matthew Meade had pinched to send him there at first.

It was scarcely two years since the death of Matthew and Martha; he almost expected to see the former leaning over the half-door of the mill when he passed. The wheel was

still, adorned with jewelry and lace-work of icicles sparkling against its black steps; ice sheets spread from the banks half over the water, swans floated in the centre, pigeons wheeled in the sunshine, but a strange face looked from the open half-door, leaning there as Matthew had leant. There was no gold-haired child clinging to his hand. The great willow, under whose leafy boughs he had lain and longed to be a man, dropped its bare yellow branches over the snow-covered grass.

The town passed, the country spread pure and stainless beneath the pale blue sky, into which the rose of sunset was softly stealing. This white, soft, soundless robe is a bridal vesture or a shroud, according to the gazer's mood; to Philip driving too slowly over the noiseless road, it was a wedding garment. With every hushed fall of the horse's feet he drew nearer to Jessie, to the one being who shared the memories of youth and the affections of home with him. How glad she would be! Perhaps, after all, he ought to have written to announce his arrival, but there is something so attractive in the thought of coming unexpectedly upon long absent friends, and surprising the warmth of their hearts. A dream of Jessie's joyous surprise and warm welcome had floated before him for weeks—another and brighter dream, belonging to the warm country of mystery and marvel he had left behind, was resolutely banished to a deep recess of memory. Some day Jessie must hear of it, but not yet. Perhaps they would each have something to forgive, but Jessie's shrift would be short and easy, he was sure.

They drove but slowly, for the snow was deep and drifted in places; the horse's feet balled from time to time; after all he might almost as well have walked and so warmed his blood in the pure keen air. What a charm the dazzling white country with its blue shadows, its peeping roofs and trees, had for one fresh from India! how truly English it was! He had almost forgotten the deep ineradicable dearness of England to a true Englishman in the fascination of India, and almost forgotten in another more powerful fascination the strength of family ties. But now he remembered that Jessie was all he had in the world—father and mother, home and country, duty and domestic affection, all met and were symbolized in Jessie. Hitherto he had thought of her as depending on and needing him, but now in the strong and sudden inrush of long dormant feelings, caused by the sight of home and country, he realized his own dependence on and need of Jessie. She was to know nothing of his reasons for throwing

up his appointment and coming home so suddenly, she would doubtless be pleased that he should come for her rather than have her sent out to him; it would appear in the light of a chivalrous deference that could not fail to charm a girl.

The snowy fields were stained in pure hues of rose and crimson, orange and amber, as the sun dropped down in the west; then they paled to violet and dead white; a ghostly gleam was reflected upward on the cold dusk air. There is nothing so desolate as the white gleam of snow after sunset, before the stars sparkle out and the darkness broods over the corpse-like pallor. Body and mind alike yield to the gray and lonely chill of the moment. Philip's heart sank with an indescribable foreboding, and he was glad to see the red gleam of cottage windows as they reached the village and saw the boys sliding and snow-balling on the green. He jumped down and walked swiftly on, telling the flyman to follow to the farm, the chimneys of which were now visible in the distance. The woman of the village shop and post-office looked after the tall-grown, foreign-looking man and wondered who he was.

"Somebody for the Court, I reckon," she said, turning away to sell bullseyes to a ruddy lad, as she had often served them to Philip, who had passed many a holiday week at Redwoods.

Here was the great elm to the top of which he had once dared Roger to climb, and from a limb of which Roger had fallen with an appalling thud, but quite unharmed, to the ground. He hastened on, thinking that this rough, bluff Roger was after all a strange housemate for so dainty a creature as Jessie. His pace quickened to a run, hurrah! There was the red light of the sitting-room fire, suddenly leaping up and streaming over the shining snow-laden evergreens without, like a beacon light to guide him home; Jessie's hand perhaps had stirred the fire to that leaping blaze.

His hand was on the wicket and he was about to open it, when the red glow vanished, strangely daunting him, a hand closed the shutters, he felt himself shut out in the chill gray snow-light, and instead of entering by the front door went round through the farm-yard, where the cows were pulling hay from racks, and so in by the kitchen.

"Hullo!" sang out Abraham, who was stumping heavily in with a pitchfork in his hand, on feeling Philip's strong grasp on his shoulder, "who be you? What be ye up to?"

They were just in the red glow of the outer kitchen doorway. Sarah was busy at the hearth, breaking and piling up

faggots of furze to boil a swinging kettle, the dark smoke-browned walls were lit up by the dancing blaze. "Lord a mercy!" Abraham cried, recognizing Philip on turning, "here's Master Philip! Whatever be us to do, Sarow?"

"Master Philip!" cried Sarah, dropping the billhook with which she was chopping her faggots and coming forward. "Why ever couldn't you bide out in India? Whatever be ye come here for?"

"For Jessie, to be sure," he replied, giving her a hearty kiss. "How are they all? You look as sound as a bell, Sarah."

"There, sit down by the fire, do," she replied, hysterically, at the same time pushing him into a wooden chair. "I 'lows you be pretty nigh shrammed with the coold. Shet the door, ye girt zote, do," she added, falling foul of the unlucky Abraham, who had remained in the doorway as if transfixed, with the fork held trident-wise in one hand and his mouth and eyes wide open. "And Missus 'll be that mad," she added.

Just then Roger came in by another door, and Philip rose to shake hands with him, scarcely noticing that Roger's once ruddy face was pale, and that he walked with a stick.

"Glad to see you," Roger said, from habit and courtesy, "but whatever's the good of shutting the door when the steed's stolen!" he added.

Philip scarcely heeded this enigmatical speech, but followed Roger to the sitting-room, where Cousin Jane was seated by the fire opposite her husband.

They looked tranquil enough; all surely was well, and yet an uneasy foreboding checked the words upon his lips when, his eyes having swiftly and vainly sought the gleam of Jessie's golden hair in the ruddy light, he would fain have asked for her.

"Merciful Powers!" exclaimed Mrs. Plummer, lifting her hands in dismay, "if it isn't Philip!"

"Philip!" echoed Mr. Plummer, rising, "Lord help the boy, whatever brought you here?"

Philip stopped, looking at them silently, with a nightmare dryness in his throat. Mrs. Plummer's round face had a pinched look, the corners of her mouth had a more settled downward tendency than formerly, her gown was black. Nat Plummer had a bewildered air, the set of Roger's once jovial face was tragic, he pushed his tangled curls off his strong white forehead, and his blue eyes gazed at Philip's boding face with a wistful pity. Old Sebastopol, the maimed cat, rose and limped up to the new-comer on her three legs, purring and rubbing affectionately against him, the only creature who had

a welcome for him. Philip stood very squarely in the midst of them, his bronzed face growing bloodless, his heart beating with low hurried throbs.

"Where," he said at last, in a strained, unnatural voice, "where is Jessie?"

"Jessie!" the three echoed in differing tones of dismay. "Why, you don't seem quite right, somehow, Philip," cried Mr. Plummer.

"Trouble hev turned his brain" added Mrs. Plummer, dismally.

"Can this be a bad dream?" asked Philip, his eyes dilating. "Where is my sister?" he repeated.

"Haven't you heard?" asked Roger. "Why, mother," he added, "Philip don't know. There wasn't time for him to get the letter, come to think of it."

"Sure enough, more there was," echoed Mrs. Plummer. "You don't mean to say, Philip, you've a come all the way home not knowing? Dear heart, what trouble, what trouble!"

The walls seemed to be rushing round him, his lips were so dry and stiff; he caught at a chair to steady himself, and stammered: "Is she—is she—dead?" the last word in a raised voice.

"Hullo!" cried Roger, stepping forward and catching him while he pushed a chair under him. "Drink, mother, give him drink."

Mrs. Plummer bustled quickly to the cupboard by the fireplace, whence she brought a spirit decanter and a tumbler, and pouring out a good draught of raw brandy, gave it to Philip.

Then the dark-red mist cleared from his eyes, he looked at Mrs. Plummer's black dress, thence to her tearful face, and thence to the troubled faces of Nat and Roger.

"She was so young," he said, "they were so devoted to her."

"She had grown up fine and slim, poor maid," added Nat Plummer; "you'd scarcely have known her again, Philip."

"How was it?" he asked, choking something down and speaking steadily; "how did it happen? She was always so healthy, never ailed that I heard of. Tell me all."

He looked straight before him; they looked at each other mutely.

"All's a good deal when all's said," Mrs. Plummer replied at last, oracularly; "you've come off a journey and had a shock, hadn't you better wait till you've taken something?"

"No, no," he replied, quickly, "nothing can matter if she is dead."

"There's worse than death, Philip——"

"Mother!" cried Roger, starting up.

"If you must have the worst, Philip," said Mrs. Plummer, "the best we can hope is she's dead."

"She is dead," muttered Roger through his clenched teeth.

"There is a doubt? There was an accident?" asked Philip, trembling with he knew not what sickening horror and remembering his vision of Jessie months back.

"She's gone, poor child, and we hope she may be dead," continued Mrs. Plummer, "for there's disgrace behind."

"No, no," cried Roger, "it is talk, Philip, vile talk, and it drove her beside herself. If any man uses that word of her," he added, excitedly, "I knock him down. As sure as fate I knock him down."

"So do I," echoed Philip.

"Lord save us!" exclaimed Mrs. Plummer. "For pity's sake take Roger away, Plummer."

"Go on out, Roger, and leave it to mother and me," said his father, laying his hand on the young giant's shoulder and pushing him to the door, which he closed and locked upon him.

"Tell me all," Philip said when he was gone.

"To be sure 'tis a hard hearing for ye, Philip, and a hard telling for me," Mrs. Plummer replied, "and sorry I am for her, heaven knows. I acted for the best, I'm sure, and I never had any fault to find with her, and never knew but all was right the very day she went off——"

"Went off——" echoed Philip, staring blindly before him.

"We thought she was gone to Miss Blushford's," added Nat. "We heard nothing of him."

"And all the country talking," continued Mrs. Plummer, "and even Abram and Sarah knew it; there wasn't a creature in the place that didn't know. I wouldn't speak against her, and she, poor child, gone, but I must say there was deception in her, such as never was."

"Yes, she kept it close, poor lass, poor lass!" added Mr. Plummer, with agitation; "'tis always like that with girls when led away."

Philip's head sank into his hands; he thought of Matthew's and Martha's pride in the child, and the care he had taken to fence her from the very knowledge of evil, the thought of his own reverence for her. Jessie had been the very symbol of purity to him, and he had to sit still and listen while she was

pitied and partially excused, to see her honor trailed in the dust in the sight of all the world, to hear her name in the mouth of drunkards and at the mercy of all evil thoughts and venomous imaginations. Little Jessie, his own sister! Matthew's innocent child!

"Go on, tell me all," he said, heavily.

And so gradually the whole pitiful story came out, the stolen meetings in the wood, the talk, the secret distress that was wearing the unhappy girl's life out, the supposed visit to the old school mistress and the disappearance discovered so late. Then all the fruitless efforts to discover Jessie, the interview with Sir Arthur, the written disclaimer of Claude Medway, which was shown him, as well as Jessie's own farewell to her cousin, lastly the discovery of the handkerchief by the riverside and Roger's surmises based upon it.

He did not interrupt the narrative, discursive and often irrelevant as it was; he sat still in a kind of stony patience, while the story poured upon his tingling ears like molten metal. And when the tale was done he sat on silent in the same posture.

"I am afraid," he said, "I am afraid she is still alive. And yet—if she had died—in her despair——"

"Well, there, we can't alter it, whatever 'tis," said Mr. Plummer. "We did all we could to find her. But that box staggers me. Whatever went with that box?"

"And her paints and things she was so set on," added his wife. "Roger he will have it the box was stolen."

"But why should she pack it?" asked Philip.

"Roger thinks 'twas for a blind. Roger would have found her dead or alive, if anybody could a done it; he'd a pulled the moon out of the sky before he'd give in. But there he fell off a wagon loaded with straw and broke his thigh soon after, and I often think it was a mercy in disguise, heavy as it come upon me, and my daughter Eliza confined and her husband with no more sense than a addled egg. There we had him on his back for a couple of months as helpless as a babe, else he'd a been all over the country looking for her and stirring up talk upon talk."

Philip listened as one who hears nothing, mechanically stroking his old Crimean comrade, who sat purring on his knee the while, until he touched a tender place in her scarred body and made her swear.

"Poor Sebastopol," he said, stroking her with more circumspection, "poor old puss!" Then he burst into tears.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RIVERSIDE ARK.

The next afternoon, about the falling of dusk, saw Philip walking through snowy lanes and across field-paths toward the river's bank. He had pulled his coat-collar up about his face and crushed his hat over his eyes, and with a burning fear of being recognized by passengers as he strode swiftly along in the pale snow-gleam.

Ashamed of Jessie. That was indeed a strange experience, and yet it was the strongest in all the wild medley of agonized feelings that surged within him. He pitied her much, but he condemned her more. Nothing, he thought, with the stern Pharisaism of male kindred, could palliate, much less excuse conduct such as hers; those secret meetings augured deception as well as a frailty that made him shudder; piteous as the idea of a self-sought death of despair was, it was still the one sign of grace to be hoped for. But he did not think that she had taken her life; the country talk, the cold looks and averted heads of her acquaintances would not provide a motive strong enough for so desperate a measure, and no more pressing motive could be argued. He did not know what Jessie had known too well that, guilty or not guilty, Mrs. Plummer would never receive a disgraced girl beneath her roof. "She might die on the road first," was her expression.

In the long watches of the night, as he tossed uneasily upon Mrs. Plummer's lavender-scented pillows he had thought much of Jessie's disharmony with her surroundings. Redwoods, the scene of pleasant holidays in childhood, had been taken without criticism, but now that he came fresh to it after so long an interval and habitual experience of more polished modes of life, it struck him that "Wood ways" could scarcely have been congenial to Jessie, the more so as she saw home-spun roughness in contrast with the refined elegance, almost splendor, of Marwell Court. A vague remorse mingled with these thoughts; he asked himself again and again what he could have done better for her, and the answer always was, nothing. The fault seemed to lie in circumstance; she had

been trained out of harmony with her position in life, she had no social status, she had risen from one class but not reached another. If he had taken her to India, her isolation would have been frightful ; he would have had to leave her while he marched to the first Relief of Lucknow, and went through the Rohilcunde campaign. And if he had married her in England and left her behind, it would have been far worse. Then Jessie's sweet, sorrowful face would rise before him with gentle reproach. No evil could be attributed to that sweet and guileless child. But he remembered that nearly every woman has once been innocent. He had passed the morning, not without some feeling of sacrilege, in the small white-draped room that had been hers, looking over her papers and things in search of some clue to her disappearance. His own letters were all there, neatly packeted and endorsed ; how cold and hard they seemed to be ! One had arrived after her disappearance and had never been opened ; there was something inexpressibly ghastly in opening and reading it. Her favorite books were there, a scanty stock ; her *Thomas à Kempis*, the *Tennyson* he had given her on her fifteenth birthday, well-worn and much underlined—

Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all the chords with might ;
Smote the chord of Self, which, trembling, passed in music out of sight.

This was dated, September, 1858, and doubly scored.

There were long and most affectionate letters from Miss Lonsdale ; she appeared to have kept every scrap of her writing ; one or two pencilled notes from Ethel Medway—not a line of writing in the hand he expected and feared to see. There was a commonplace book, dainty and neat, into which she had copied passages from books that pleased her ; he was surprised at the extent and judgment of her reading. Some household recipes, work-patterns, and half a dozen enigmas and charades completed Jessie's stock of papers. A few trinkets, old-fashioned things of Mrs. Meade's, were left in the little rosewood dressing-case, among them, wrapped in silver paper and inscribed, " For Philip," was the ring he had given her at their parents' grave, the opal ring, which she said was unlucky.

" But whatever is this ? " Mrs. Plummer exclaimed, while exploring a drawer of clothing at his desire. His heart sank at the sight ; for it was a morocco, velvet-lined jewel-case, fresh and new, bearing the name of a well-known firm of London jewellers in gold letters, and it had evidently been

put into the far corner of the drawer for concealment. He wrapped it in paper and set it aside for future use.

“Dear heart!” exclaimed Mrs. Plummer, soon after, as something rolled over the bare, white boards from the folds of a dress she was vigorously shaking before replacing in the drawer, “how did she come by pearls?”

“How, indeed!” he echoed, picking it up and examining it with heavy fear. It was large, of beautiful lustre, and pierced. It must have been worn with that dress and dropped from a string; it was no cheap imitation, but a pearl of price, a thing she could not possibly have bought. He did not like Mrs. Plummer to see it; and put it quickly away, wondering, with an awed wonder, that women should sell their souls for stones, and be tricked by so poor a thing as the flash of a jewel.

The last gleam of sunset was gone when he reached the riverside, and stood upon the bank at the spot where the handkerchief had been found. The place had been a playground for them as children. Here heavy timbers, chained roughly together to prevent their being washed away, were laid raft-like, along the river's edge to be seasoned; the shore ends half bedded in mud, the others lifted and floated by the full tide. To stand on the end of a timber-balk, and spring up and down, with the water splashing through the cracks when the great beams rebounded from the spring, had then been a heavenly pleasure. If one performed this dance upon a long balk stretching into the river far beyond the others, one had the additional happiness of the chance of missing one's footing and going splash into the water, a catastrophe that once befell poor little Jessie, whom he had fished out with some difficulty and much laughter on his part, and weeping on hers, and carried home, a piteous little object like a drowned kitten.

Near these timbers was a small grove of stunted oaks, some of which leaned over the water; there boys used to undress and, climbing into the trees, take headers from the over-hanging tops. Opposite was a meadow whence they bathed at full tide, drying themselves by the simple process of racing round the mead in the sun and wind, shouting and leaping like young colts, as innocent of clothes and as unconscious of their need as unfallen Adam.

The meadow was white now, the river was black in the dusk by contrast with its snowy banks; the edges of the timbers were scaled by great white flakes of ice, the tide was running up, flowing strongly beneath his feet as he stood on the edge of

the floating timbers slippery with snow ; the grove was heavy with shadows. About a foot beyond the timbers the channel was deep ; he knew it well, and so did Jessie ; a slight spring from the springy barks and one would be in mid-stream out of depth. No house was in sight but the ark, built on a boat at the water's edge, the grove would shelter one from the gaze of passers-by. Sally Samson, the old woman who lived there, had seen her from her door. Roger had found the handkerchief on the timbers ; but what motive had Jessie for self-destruction ? Roger maintained that the scandal had crazed her, but Philip thought it would take something stronger than mere talk to drive a girl who held secret meetings, received jewels, and was false to her absent lover and friend, to desperation. How false Jessie had been, to how solemn a troth-plight, to what sacred memories ! False to her dead father and all her youth. Yet he did not reproach himself for his own passionate swerve from loyalty ; he had conquered his heart's desire and sacrificed all his hopes of advancement to keep faith with this frail, slight creature. Besides, he was a man, and are not men's temptations heavier than women's ? are not their passions stronger ? Must not a man love when under the spell of beauty and fascination he does not seek ? Is it not criminal for a woman to love at all except at the word of command ? Do good women feel the beauty of men—slight as it is in the estimation of males—or yield to fascinations they have not encouraged ? So Philip thought in his instinctive male arrogance, drawing conclusions from arbitrarily fashioned premises, such as men lay down for women, blindly wondering when the latter spoil the syllogism by a false conclusion, and not dreaming that either premise can be false.

Musing thus, he went along the foot-path toward the black ark, whence one red glow from a little window gave comfortable assurance of warmth and humanity amidst the black and white desolation of the snow-wrapped fields and deserted, dark-flowing river. Thence another and broader glow streamed at his approach, as Sally opened her little door at the top of the railed gangway leading to her ark and stood in the keen open air, a quaint figure, familiar to him from early childhood, calling to her dog.

“Good evening, Sally,” he called out, stopping at the foot of the gangway which passed from the bank over the water at flood and over shingle at ebb tide ; “don't you remember Philip Randal, of Stillbrooke Mill ?”

“Meade's boy ? Yes, I minds 'en,” she replied, taking a pinch of snuff and surveying him with a critical air. “Grow-

ed," she added after a few seconds, when she dipped down into her ark beckoning to him to follow into the warm little nest.

It was an old tub of a boat some ten feet long, shored up by timbers firmly sunk in the river's bed, so that the tide could not float it off. A low plank wall rose from its sides some two feet or three feet high, this was topped by a slant wooden roof like an inverted boat. With its tiny windows, one shoreward and one riverward, its little door and its stove-pipe through the roof, it was exactly like the Noah's Ark the children used to play with, and it was a thrilling joy to them to go there of a summer afternoon, especially at full tide, when it seemed to float on the river, to draw in the gangway and have tea in the marvellous little house, every inch of space in which had been utilized for Sally's limited needs.

Philip felt like a giant as he descended two steps and sat on the chest by the little grate, which blazed cheerily with burning driftwood and bits of old boats; there was the little dresser with bits of shining crockery, the curtained bed-place, the geranium in the window, the few pots and pans, the candlestick, the seashells, lumps of coral, and other sea treasures, the Maltese doll once the desire of Jessie's eyes, and the full-rigged model frigate, long the desire of his own. How delicious Sally's milkless tea used to be in this fairy dwelling, and Sally herself, what a marvellous picturesque old sibyl she looked as she sat taking her snuff, the scent of which seemed to Philip like a memory of infancy, relating tale after tale, chiefly of the sea. So she sat to-day in the winter firelight as she used to sit in the summer sunglow, the same quaint figure, with the same brown expressionless face surrounded by the flapping white cap-frill of her cap, the same bare, brown arms, which, like the face, seemed carved in old oak; the same dingy crossover shawl, the same scanty dark skirt that he remembered in boyhood. Summer and winter, indoors and out, Sally's attire never varied, thus she rowed on the river in sun or wind, wet or cold.

He had brought her a packet of snuff, and some Indian figures to add to her curiosities. She received them with a grunt of satisfaction; then she rose, and opening a tiny cupboard above the little fireplace brought forth a black bottle containing some pale, clear cognac which she poured into one of the old china tea-cups and gave him, and which he knew well had never passed the custom-house. While she did this, he took rapid stock of the familiar objects in the cabin, and saw on a little shelf with the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress, a rail-

way time-table, which his quick eye made out to be of last year's date.

He talked of old times, and of the Crimea and the Mutiny, and then Sally began, as she always did after a taste from the black bottle, one of her stories. He listened silently till she became almost unconscious of his presence, and she rambled on, as she probably did in the long nights and summer days when she sat alone, her mind thrown back on the past.

Then, when she paused and fell to staring before her into the glowing wood-coals, he said, without preamble :

"Who was in the boat with you and Miss Jessie last October, Sally?"

"Never a soul," she replied, still gazing into the fire, her head slightly bowed forward and her hands resting on her knees.

"And how long were you rowing to Lynmouth, that fine, calm day?" he added, keeping his hand before his eyes while his elbow was on the table, lest she should turn and catch the eager, pained interest that he could keep out of his voice but not out of his face.

"Matter of a hour; tide agen us," she said, absently, being, for so practised a story-teller, short of speech, doubtless made her tales tell the more.

"And you had to pull well, wanting to catch the mid-day boat, no doubt?" he continued, vainly trying to speak carelessly.

But either some vibration in his voice or his persistent catechising, roused the old woman, and she turned and eyed him sharply.

"Who's talking of boats?" she growled.

"Look here, Sally," said Philip, "let all be square, fair, and above board. How much did she give you to put the Plummers off the scent?"

Sally looked at him and took more snuff, not unmoved by the apparently irrelevant fact that he sent his fingers into his waistcoat pocket and caused the mellow chink of coin to be heard.

"Pound," she said. "What's your'n?"

"One pound ten," he replied, producing the money.

"Taint enough," said Sally, promptly.

"That's a pity," he returned, "there's no more to be had. Thirty shillings are not picked up every day."

"Ah, dear, I be a lone ooman," moaned Sally, eying the bright gold wistfully.

"I am her guardian, in place of her father," continued

Philip. "She didn't know I was coming home yet and very likely wrote to tell me all about it. I daresay the letter reached India just as I stepped ashore."

"Not she, didn't want nobody to know," Sally said.

"For the first days, perhaps. But she may be wanting money now and I not able to send it" He took up the two gold pieces and tossed them on the table as he spoke.

"What'll ye do to her?" she asked, following the coins with her eyes.

"See that she wants nothing, poor child! and that—that nobody does her harm," he muttered, brokenly.

"Make it two, lad, ah, deary me! I be a lone lorn ooman. Make it two, dear," she said, coaxingly.

He clinked another half sovereign down on the little table and Sally covered the three bright coins with her hard, brown hand.

"Winter's hard, living's hard, 'tis hard to be a lone ooman," she muttered, clutching the gold, yet staring irresolutely into the fire.

"Still harder to be alone when young and beautiful and unprotected," added Philip. "It will be the best day's work you ever did in your life, Sally, if you just tell the whole truth."

"Ah, deary, dear! She begged and prayed and settled the day and hour and tide long afore. She fixed twice, but couldn't get down here. 'How'll you live away from your folk?' I asked. 'I shan't want, Sally,' she says. 'My fortune'll be made. I'm gwine where the ground is covered with gold,' she says."

"Did she come alone?" asked Philip, in his deepest voice.

"Alone, as lone as the dead. Once gone, no coming back, I tells her. No good. Go she must."

"What did she take with her? Boxes?"

"Box and a bag. Jim fetched it from Cleeve. She giv him five shillings. Just caught the boat at Lynmouth Pier."

"Who met her there?"

"Man carried her things aboard."

"How was he dressed? Like a gentleman's servant?" he continued in an agitated voice.

"Lord knows. A bit of brass tied on's arm. There was a lot more like 'en helping off boxes."

"Oh, a porter," he said with relief.

Further questioning elicited nothing more of importance, so enjoining reticence upon the old sibyl, Philip took his

leave of her, and stumbled out of the tiny nutshell into the night with his worst fears confirmed.

What duplicity, what a long course of intrigue on the part of this young, soft, tender thing. Who could blame him for having no suspicion of double dealing in that quarter? Why he would as soon have thought of suspecting one of Heaven's whitest angels.

Half way across the snowy field, which sloped somewhat steeply down to the river, he stopped and looked back at the solitary light in Sally's tiny window. He could just see the dark mass of the oak-grove, the black blot in which the one red eye of light glowed, and the darkness of the river flowing between its ghostly gleaming banks; it was a clear, moonless, still night, the black vault of sky blazed with the white fire of innumerable frosty stars, the light of which reflected from the snow was sufficient to walk by and discern objects in outline.

He took something from his pocket and hurled it with the widest sweep of his arm toward the dark river; it glittered in the pallid light, making a tiny trail as it flew like the tiniest of falling stars and vanished. It was the opal ring he had given Jessie at her parents' grave.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SEARCH.

The news that Jessie was undoubtedly still alive was too heavy to be broken at once at Redwoods. Philip was glad of the long, silent walk back over the snow, during which he could think it over and decide how much it would be desirable to reveal.

Before returning to the farm, he turned aside and called at the Rectory, the lights of which shone invitingly on the snowy lawn between the trees. Here he was received with a friendly warmth that gave him the only home-feeling he had had in England. Mr. Ingleby had heard of his unexpected return the night before, and came out into the hall to welcome him, silently pressing his hand and drawing him into his snug study, where a mundane odor of bird's-eye tobacco was distinctly recognizable; and where fishing rods and guns adorned the walls, along with shelves laden with ponderous theological tomes.

"I got your letter, and came at once," Philip said, when they were seated opposite each other before the fire.

"Too late," Mr. Ingleby returned, "if I hadn't been as big an ass as ever brayed in a pulpit, I should have written long before. As it is, I might have spared my meddling and left you out there in peace."

"Not at all, I can never be too grateful to you for writing," Philip rejoined, warmly.

"She was in the wrong place, Phil," continued Mr. Ingleby; "that is how it all happened. Poor dear child. She asked me to intercede with you and the other guardians to get her away from Redwoods, and I, like a fool, advised her to stay and make puddings for her cousin. I thought it mere girlish discontent and idleness, and never dreamed that the dear child wanted to fly from temptation. I see it all now. If I had been a woman, she might have told me—or a Catholic priest. By Jove, Phil, the confessional is a fine institution, let Protestants rant as they will."

"Do you think," asked Philip, turning very red with a sudden rush of thought, "surely you don't think *that* was why she was so anxious to leave the place?"

"Yes, yes," he replied, sighing heavily, "that was at the bottom of all; she was tempted, she knew her own weakness and saw that flight was the only thing. Think, Phil, of the mental and moral loneliness of that sweet child—of her innocence and ignorance, and remember the antagonist she was pitted against—the cool-headed, cold-hearted man of the world, versed in all its slippery ways, ten years her senior, with the serpent's own beguiling tongue, and—by heavens!"

He rose, trying to throw off his indignation by bodily movement, in the course of which he upset two chairs and brought down a set of fishing tackle with a crash; while Philip muttered some fierce anathema against the unnamed object of Mr. Ingleby's just anger.

"But the deceit," Philip said in a deep voice, shaken with anger, "innocence does not deceive and plot. Innocence does not make and keep secret assignations in woods."

"Innocence knows no harm in assignations," Mr. Ingleby rejoined, "I vow to you, Philip, upon my honor, that those meetings were guileless in intention on her part. Why, when I told her of the cackle on that day when my sister's virtue took the alarm and she froze the dear child with her Gorgon scowl, she couldn't see the harm, wanted to know why it was worse to be seen walking in woods with him than with me——"

"Absurd," Philip broke in with cruel candor, "at your age."

"H'm. Well, I believe I have some nine years the advantage of that fellow. "As a matter of fact," he added with some embarrassment, "she was seen walking with me—and—ah—well, I may as well say at once that there has been some attempt to put the blame on me."

"On you!" Philip laughed aloud. "And where and when, may I ask, did these romantic troubles take place?" he added with a certain savage mirth, whereupon Mr. Ingleby explained the occasions on which he and Jessie had been seen together, the one accidental meeting by the stream and the various times of escorting her home. "You see," he said in conclusion, "those other meetings have been equally accidental on her part."

"You are a staunch friend," said Philip, with a kind of gloomy satisfaction; "but how do you explain the disappearance? Suicide?"

Mr. Ingleby quivered. "God only knows," he replied, "what a sensitive, friendless girl may do in desperation."

"Not that," Philip rejoined in a harsh voice. "I can't lay that flattering unction to my soul." And he told his friend what he had just learned from Sally Samson, and was surprised to find that Mr. Ingleby, though viewing the intelligence with gravity, was not much startled. "And I could have killed the old woman for telling me," he almost sobbed in conclusion.

"Philip! Philip!" cried Mr. Ingleby, suddenly appreciating the depth of the young man's grief and laying his hand with gentle firmness on his shoulder. "Poor boy! A heavy burden is laid upon you. God help you, dear lad!"

"Matthew and Martha were so proud of her," he said brokenly, "and she was trusted to me. But what could I do? I had to go out. And then the mutiny."

"You could not do otherwise. But she was too young to be really won before you left. And with such rare beauty—there was temptation on every side."

"She was a pretty child," he assented, rather coldly.

"She was an unusually beautiful woman," returned Mr. Ingleby, with fervor. "She developed marvellously of late. You did not see her—as we did. She tried to be true. She struggled against temptation."

"A good girl does not allow herself to be tempted; she is true without trying."

Mr. Ingleby removed his caressing hand from Philip's shoulder; he thought him hard and unjust, but he considered the bitterness of an injured lover.

"What shall you do?" he asked after some minutes' silence.

"God knows," replied Philip, heavily. "Of course," he added after a gloomy pause, "I shall leave no stone unturned to effect a marriage. And I shall probably thrash him publicly."

"It would be tempting," said Mr. Ingleby, thoughtfully reflecting how he should enjoy doing it. "But I wouldn't do that, if I were you, certainly not yet, and most decidedly not till the thing is proved."

"Proved!" cried Philip with scorn.

"Certainly, proved beyond doubt. You are very ready to accept the worse conclusion, dear lad, and in your truly cruel position one cannot blame you."

"My good soul," returned Philip, desperately, "how in the name of all that is maddening is any other conclusion possible? What other can you even suggest?"

“Have patience and listen to a man much older than yourself, and at least more experienced if not wiser; venerate these gray hairs, Phil,” he added pointing to some silver threads which had appeared in his blue-black curly hair of late, together with some lines about the eyes and mouth and a haggard harassed look quite foreign to his sweet and sunny nature. “It is my impression, confirmed by what Sally Samson told you this morning, that poor dear Jessie went alone.”

“Yes, as far as London, where that scoundrel met her.”

“He went to London that day, so did I. We did not meet or catch a glimpse of one another.”

“He would take care of that. Besides, Mr. Ingleby, what possible motive could she have for going alone?” He did not like to add that he knew that she could have had no money for the journey.

“Two motives,” settling himself in a chair and crossing his legs with the air of an assured advocate, “first, to flee temptation; secondly, to fly disgrace.”

“Which she merely courted,” Philip objected.

“Look here, Phil,” Mr. Ingleby continued, earnestly. “I don’t think you quite realize what scurrilous talk may mean to a sensitive, high-spirited, pure-minded girl. You know that I told her, heaven only knows how clumsily and brutally, but there was no one else to do it. You know how my sister behaved, and you may imagine what Mrs. Plummer’s gentle spiriting would have been like, so I had to put my great blundering paw into the matter for the dear child’s sake—I wish to heaven I had left it alone—and yet she must have heard sooner or later. And I have since found that women had been cutting her right and left. *Con-found* these virtuous women, Philip! Why can’t they preserve their ferocious virtue without driving sweet and gentle creatures to desperation? By Jove! if I were a layman I could say some things! Well, I am warranted as it is in saying that many a poor, drunken, fool-mouthed outcast reeling along the streets to-day will pass into Heaven before these Pharisaic Plummers and people. I’ve preached and I’ll preach again—but, no I won’t, it only makes them worse, the moment they scent a personal application. But I tell you this,” he cried, bringing his fist down on the table so that the lamp clattered and the dog sleeping on the rug woke up and barked, “if that old harridan—I mean if that con—if Mrs. Plummer opened her door this night and saw that sweet child in the cold, she would shut it in her face—for the mere suspicion and scandal, guilty or not guilty. My sister would do the same. And

if she had erred and returned penitent, either of these bitterly righteous women would drive her forth with blows rather than receive her. And then those dam—those exec—those Pharisees would stalk grimly to church and expect me to give them the Sacrament. Philip, Jessie had a taste of my sister's Christian charity beneath this very roof, and she knew the coarse treatment Mrs. Plummer was likely to afford a tempted or compromised girl. She knew that in the eyes of the gossips she was compromised, for I told her—God forgive me—and the stony-faced Pharisees told her more by their silence and grim looks. To what rash acts such desperation might drive her I fear to think, but she might well have run away to hide from this storm of calumny, as I believe she did, she went off in the very heart of the storm. Poor child, poor dear child!" he added sitting down with thick-coming breath and covering his face.

Philip was comforted by this outburst, for we like sympathy, and the more our hearts and even tongues accuse those dear to us the better do we like others to defend them, but he was surprised as well as comforted, especially surprised at the heterodox fury with which Mr. Ingleby assailed the fierceness of female virtue as manifested in his own sister and Mrs. Plummer, who could scarcely be expected, he thought, to behave otherwise than Mr. Ingleby indicated. He ventured to make some observation to that effect, saying that female honor was of such vital importance to society, that no price was too high to pay for it, that the suffering, even if unmerited, of individuals, was as nothing in comparison with the virtue of the whole sex, and such like platitudes.

"Virtue!" cried Mr. Ingleby, passionately, "virtue be—by Heaven, Philip, it is enough to make a saint swear to see the cruelty perpetrated on women in the name of virtue. I tell you, man, that all this twaddle is in the interest of vice and not virtue. It is this that makes our cities sinks of foulness, it is this that drives tempted or misled innocence into the ranks of the outcast army, that army of oppressed misery that in its turn tempts and oppresses and preys on the vitals of society, it is this that shuts every door of hope upon her who has slipped but once and declares in a voice of thunder, 'henceforth thou shalt sin more and more,' in Satanic opposition to the gospel, 'sin no more.' This cruelty to the one sex, the weak and defenceless, in fiendish wedlock with total immunity to the other sex, the strong and aggressive—" He paused for want of words to his passion, and Philip broke in, horrified.

"Surely, surely you would not condone such wrong on the part of any woman? Why, it would be an insult and outrage to those we are bound to reverence to the utmost to permit the once fallen to mingle with them."

"I would condone nothing," he replied, more tranquilly, eased by this outburst; "but I cannot see why women are more injured by the society of sinful women than of sinful men, which the best of their sex are expected to endure daily. For instance, I doubt if Claude Medway's society would have been more baneful to that sweet girl if he had been a lady," he added, grimly smiling.

"Women think otherwise."

"It is the mystery of mysteries that women should be so hard on women. It must be owned that here their cruelty passes men's."

"For their honor's sake," Philip said; "and for this we honor women. But surely," he added, returning from theory to fact, "Jessie could not have run away from slander. She had better have taken her life at once. What should she do alone in the world? Where would she shelter? Who would befriend her? Why, a child of thirteen could do nothing more frantically foolish."

"Heaven only knows what she thought, in worldly matters she was such a child," Mr. Ingleby replied, with his eyes full of tears. "I have sometimes wondered if she thought she could support herself by painting. She did sell one or two of her pictures."

"She would have come back long ago in that case," Philip replied, thinking this theory too wild even for conjecture.

"Would she?" asked Mr. Ingleby with heart-stricken emphasis, and both were silent for some moments with fears they dared not express.

Then Mr. Ingleby told Philip of Claude Medway's strenuous denials of all knowledge of Jessie's whereabouts, and his expressed anxiety concerning her. He added the significant fact that the supposed engagement between Medway and his cousin was undoubtedly at an end, since Miss Lonsdale was engaged to and about to marry the Marquis of Bardexter, whose family was more remarkable for antiquity than wealth. Finally, at Philip's request he related all that he knew of Jessie's history during his absence in India and ended with a vivid depiction of her beauty and grace, her sweet manner, her modest bearing, her singular intelligence and taste.

"Upon my honor," Philip thought when he left, greatly heartened by his interview, "if the dear old fellow were ten

years younger I should think he was in love with her himself."

The next afternoon he called at Marwell Court. Sir Arthur took his visit as a matter of course, regretted that Lady Gertrude was not at home, spoke of the interest with which he had followed his movements in India and heard of his distinction, and talked of the Mutiny.

"Sir Arthur," Philip broke in at last, "you do not perhaps know that I am one of the guardians of Miss Jessie Meade, respecting whose—ah—connection with some members of your family I am anxious to know everything that can be known."

"Quite so," replied Sir Arthur, with a sudden change of manner. "It is a sad business. I have done all I could to get to the bottom of it, in vain. It has occasioned great distress in my family. My daughter, who is an invalid, as you may know, was attached to Miss Meade, whose society was the means of beguiling many weary hours for her. My niece, Miss Lonsdale, was first struck by Miss Meade's singular beauty and refinement and brought her to my house, where I was glad to receive her as your future wife as well as for her own sake. Miss Meade was not well placed at Redwoods. The Plummers are excellent people, for whom I have the highest respect, but they are strangely out of harmony with her."

"Miss Meade was born in that station," said Philip, stiffly, "and I was bred in it."

"Pardon me, Miss Meade was bred out of it, and had virtually left it in becoming engaged to you. Whatever your breeding may have been, Philip, *and you can choose it yourself, remember,* you have amply justified your gentle birth. In spite of my natural interest in a young lady of beauty so rare," he continued, "I tried to discourage my niece's intimacy with her. Miss Lonsdale is in the habit of forming sudden and ardent friendships and as suddenly getting tired of them. I considered Miss Meade too good for such treatment. But ladies sometimes have wills of their own. Miss Medway then became interested in Miss Meade, who was able to soothe my daughter's sufferings as no one else could. Seeing this, I offered her a home in this house. Had she accepted it, she would have had the advantage of Lady Gertrude's personal supervision and guidance, she would have been a privileged inmate and enjoyed every comfort and consideration as my daughter's companion. This, to my regret, she declined. She would have been as a daughter to me, for

the charm of her companionship is not less than that of her beauty. And when you returned to claim her I had pictured to myself a marriage from this house. She continued to be a welcome guest here until October; when we were pained by her refusal to visit my daughter, and soon after that startled by the news of her mysterious disappearance, to which, in spite of the absurd rumors circulating on such occasions, there has been not the slightest clue. My own opinion is that some accident befell her."

"Did you ever make her any present?" Philip asked, suddenly rousing himself from gloomy reflections.

"Nothing beyond fruit and flowers. She was not a girl with whom one would venture a liberty of that kind."

"Do you know if your daughter gave her a present?"

"You shall see Miss Medway herself, only let me beg of you not to distress her by any surmise of a—a—painful nature."

But Ethel had given Jessie no presents, they found on inquiry. Then Philip spoke of the share attributed to Claude in Jessie's disappearance.

"Surely," Sir Arthur replied, "you do your sister grievous wrong by crediting these reports. And as the world regards these things, you do not injure my son."

"Why injure him?" returned Philip, coldly. "But I shall do so unless he is able to explain his conduct to my satisfaction. No man has a right, whatever his intentions may be, to compromise a young girl, ignorant as she was of the ways of the world, by walking alone in woods with her as he undoubtedly did."

"If you take my advice," said Sir Arthur, "you will let Claude alone. He knows no more of the matter than you do. He scarcely knew her. I give you his address and warn you against rashly dragging your ward's name in the dust. I am sorry that this miserable scandal should have arisen, and will afford every possible help to clear it up; but I warn you that a young woman's name is best guarded by silence."

So Philip thought, but he was unshaken in his conviction as to the cause of Jessie's disappearance. In the event of any accident to Jessie her remains must sooner or later have been discovered, the coincidence of Claude's sudden journey on the day of her disappearance after a meeting between them on the previous evening was remarkable.

Before leaving the house, Philip was summoned to see Miss Lonsdale, whom he had once met when dining at Marwell Court after the Crimea.

She received him in a conservatory, a pleasant contrast to the snowy out-door world, with its palms, orange-trees, oleanders, and semi-tropical flowers which reminded him of his last meeting with Ada Maynard. "Never let me regret," he seemed to hear Ada say in her moving voice. "It is easy enough to die. Living is the hard part."

"Oh!" thought Clara, rising from the silk and gold oriental stuffs covering a low divan-like seat beneath a palm near a fountain, and seeing the strong, lance-straight figure, the bronzed face and straightforward gaze, "she might have been content. She might have left my darling to me."

Then she told Philip that, having introduced Jessie to that house, she felt in some degree responsible for her, and wished to explain to her guardian, as far as she knew, all that had occurred before the sudden disappearance. She described the intimacy which had so suddenly sprung up, in her own fashion, and dwelt upon Jessie's charm and intellect in a way that surprised Philip. "I had heard reports," she said, "that I did not believe. Jessie seemed so artless, spoke so openly of her engagement, showed me your portrait. Who could believe wrong of her?"

"Who indeed?" echoed Philip, gloomily.

Clara, whose agitation gave her a certain dark splendor well set off by the furs she had thrown back on coming in from an outdoor walk, together with the gold and crimson silken cushions of the couch and the oriental foliage near, looked keenly at Philip's downcast face and then smiled to herself. "It was not until July," she continued, "that my suspicions were aroused."

"So long ago?"

"Aroused and confirmed at once," she went on, her golden brown eyes sparkling with green lights. "Arriving unexpectedly at Marwell one evening, I surprised an interview in the gallery."

"Oh!" cried Philip, "why was I not told in time?"

"No one but Miss Medway was in the house at the time. The scene was painful in the extreme. Still, I hoped it might be nothing more than girlish vanity. I afterward spoke seriously to her, pointing out the—the danger of such an intimacy. It was then, Captain Randal, that I discovered how greatly I had been mistaken in a girl I had thought so sweet and guileless. I saw at once that it was he who needed protection from a consummate actress and schemer. She knew perfectly what she was about. But she over-reached herself—I am afraid I pain you, shall I stop? Well, it is best

you should know all—she will never now, as she intended, be mistress of Marwell Court.”

“How do you know? What do you know, Miss Lonsdale—let me know all, no matter what. Only speak out.”

“Listen, then,” she replied, passionately clasping her hands so strainingly together that the blood crimsoned to the finger tips, while a small jewel at her wrist flashed in the pale winter sunshine, and her breath came so quickly that she was obliged to pause before she could speak. “They met on the afternoon before her disappearance. I took shelter from a storm in a shed in the plantations not far from the keeper’s lodge. It was dark from the storm. I was invisible, probably. Two people came running in—my cousin and Jessie. They were too much preoccupied to observe that they were not alone. Their conversation appeared to be of absorbing interest. But afterward, when the storm abated, I could not help overhearing.”

“You did not betray your presence?”

She blushed. “What right had I to suppose that their meeting was secret?” she said.

“She is under age. I am her guardian. It is right and just to her that I should know,” he added.

“That is precisely why I am telling you,” she said, coldly, “I could not help hearing him explain why he could not marry her——”

“Oh!” cried Philip, “not that!”

“Could not marry her legally. He pointed out from what I could not help gathering—Captain Randal I am paining you, but I think it better that you should hear all, as I perceive you still have doubts——”

He assented with a silent gesture.

“He reminded her that it was too late to draw back——”

“No, no, oh, no!” he said; “but were there no details of this flight?”

“She was to go to Cleeve by the carrier, and leave him a mile from the town; then a carriage would be waiting, and he would join her.”

“And you knew this and did not prevent it? Oh, Miss Lonsdale!”

“How could I?” she replied, plaintively. “Do you think it a pleasant thing for me to have to tell you this? I had vainly warned her once. When I heard of her actual disappearance, I thought that the kindest thing I could do was to be silent, the mischief being done.”

“And yet you tell me.”

"Surely you have a right to know; I would have told you then had you been at hand."

"And you tell this out of consideration to me—a stranger."

"Certainly not. But you will, I know, seek to find her. Mrs. Plummer would shut her doors in her face. And I was deeply attached to poor Jessie, remember."

"Did you ever give her presents?" he asked.

"Yes, a few books."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing whatever."

A heavy, heavy sigh came from Philip. "I am afraid," he said, looking up after some seconds' silence, during which she regarded him with a singular expression, "that I have received your intelligence churlishly. The matter is too desperate for civility. But I do thank you."

"If it is pain for you to hear," she sighed, "for me to tell it is—ah!—Captain Randal," she added hastily in a calmer tone, "I have one request to make in return for my communication. What has just passed between us must go no further. On your honor."

"If I find it necessary to publish the facts, which you may be very sure I shall not do unnecessarily," he replied after some consideration, "I promise faithfully that your name shall not be mentioned." And with that she had to be content.

When he was gone she rose and paced up and down the marble pavement, pale, palpitating. To have let herself down in the eyes of this stranger was bitter indeed. He had cross-questioned her, seen the jealousy gnawing at her vitals, known that her love had been won and slighted, read her through and through. It was some balm to see him quiver beneath her tidings. Revenge is sweet, she mused, feeling that she had dealt something worse than death to Jessie, and she knew not what evil to Claude. Some sweets are chiefly delightful in anticipation, and turn to ashes within the lips; revenge is one of these—its ashes are acrid poison corroding the vitals.

Philip went over the old ground which had been already taken at Jessie's disappearance, questioned and cross-questioned old Winstone, the carrier, who took her on the first stage of her journey, interrogated the people at the Crown and Sceptre, Sally Samson's nephew, who carried the luggage thence to the ark, even poor Miss Blushford, who wept bitterly, knowing no more of Jessie's movements than a newborn babe. That same afternoon he called on Mr. Cheeseman, with whom he was closeted for some hours, and from whom he obtained no fresh light.

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE TO FACE.

No more time was wasted at Cleeve. Leaving Roger Plummer and even Mr. Ingleby in happy ignorance of the latest intelligence of Jessie, Philip appeared at Claude Medway's house in town the second morning after his visit to Marwell.

He was shown into a room near the door, opening into the small hall, while a servant took his card in. The door being left ajar, he could hear all that passed there.

"No use," a servant was saying to a pallid, disreputable, elderly man whom he had observed on entering, "Orders strict. As much as my place is worth. The captain won't see you, out or in. You'd better be off."

Here the man, who bore some strange, far-off traces of having been a gentleman, despite his shabby, unkempt appearance and hang-dog look, and who recalled some vague memories to Philip's mind, began to swear, an art in which he seemed to be a proficient.

"He must see me," he said, after relieving his mind by this discharge; "I have to meet a bill, and haven't a blessed shilling in the world."

"Walker," returned the servant impatiently. "Come, hook it, will you? He's said he'll see you Wednesday."

"Only a minute," the shabby suppliant whined with maudlin tears; "may you never know, young man, what it is to want——"

"Come, stow it and be off, and take and write what you want to the governor," cried the servant, losing patience and bundling him unceremoniously out of doors after a slight scuffle. "If there's much more of this, Charles, I give warning," he grumbled to the servant who had taken Philip's card and was returning to show him upstairs. "If the captain wants to have respectable servants, he must be more select in his acquaintance. Like his cheek to expect a man of my standing to open the door to half the blackguards in London."

Claude Medway was sitting at breakfast in a first floor room looking out over Hyde Park, which was illumined this morning by some gleams of wintry sunlight. His face brightened at the sight of Philip's card.

Philip, on the contrary, went up the stairs with a grim face, and a terrible apprehension lest he might be too near to one very dear to him, and was surprised at the warm, almost eager greeting he received.

He was even more surprised at the change in Claude. At least ten years seemed to have cast their shadow over Claude Medway's haggard face, his sunken eyes had a harassed gaze, his manner had not the old assurance, he looked like one who has passed through desperate mental anguish. And yet, as Philip had been told, things went well with him. Marwell Court was no longer in danger of being sold, since an aunt, the widow of a rich banker, had, to everyone's surprise and especially Claude's, who had been told that all her money was to go to founding a missionary college, quietly taken leave of this life, bequeathing the whole of her fine fortune, including the house near Hyde Park, to her "beloved nephew, Claude Medway." Owing to this, her beloved nephew, Claude, felt the sting of his cousin's desertion less keenly than he might otherwise have done, and Sir Arthur was relieved from his pecuniary embarrassments. The fortunate legatee had already sent in his papers when this unexpected windfall came to him. Philip had heard of his disappearance from club life as well as from the service, he had been living in seclusion, nobody knew where, ever since before the golden shower descended upon him.

Philip did not appear to see the hand offered him. "Yes," he replied, "my coming home was sudden and unpremeditated. I came at a moment's warning in consequence of what I heard concerning my ward and adopted sister, Miss Jessie Meade. Where is she?"

The momentary radiance died from Claude Medway's face. "Is it possible that you do not know?" he returned. "She did not tell *you*?"

"Certainly not. I am here to ask where she is. I am one of her guardians and she is under age. This is a very serious affair, Captain Medway. This young lady has been missing for nearly three months and her friends have been unable to find any trace of her."

"It is both sad and serious," Claude replied; "to me it is, and has been a subject for deep regret. But why, may I ask, do you come to me for information?"

“For the simple reason that you are the only person in a position to give it.”

“And what leads you to that supposition?” he asked quietly.

“I know perhaps more than you think. I have seen Sally Samson and heard all.”

“Who is Sally Samson?”

“This man is a good actor,” thought Philip, almost aghast at his tranquil way of putting the question.

“Do you expect me to believe, that you know nothing of the ark on the river’s bank?” he said, sternly.

“I know the ark well,” Claude replied; “an old woman lives there and ferries people across. Is that your Sally Samson? What of her?”

“Only that she told me the true story of the handkerchief.”

“The handkerchief—Ah!” his face quivered slightly. “And what of it?”

“It is unnecessary to tell what you know too well,” Philip said, impatiently. “Let us have no beating about the bush. Tell me at once where Jessie is. You cannot expect to blind me as you have blinded others. I have evidence, solid evidence, to justify legal proceedings. I have not yet consulted lawyers—I only landed three days since—but I shall do so at once unless you satisfy me by producing her. I don’t know much about law, but it strikes me that abduction is rather a serious affair. I am nearly sure that with or without consent, carrying off a minor is abduction.”

Claude looked at Philip with dumb surprise, then he turned from him and took a few turns in the room.

“Pray take a seat,” he said at last, but Philip preferred to stand, a vertical posture gives a certain firmness of mental poise and sense of power.

“It is not very easy,” said Claude, “to abduct a young lady fully grown, and in possession of all her faculties in a thickly populated country lined with railways,” and he smiled, as if amused at the extravagance of the supposition. “You cannot surely mean to insult your sister by supposing her capable of running away with me. You, who have known her all her life.”

“You do yourself injustice,” Philip returned; “to a young girl quite ignorant of the world, a secret marriage with a man like you, though not strictly right, would not appear so very great a degradation.”

“You think, then, that I have *married her*?” he asked with a peculiar emphasis.

“Heaven only knows what you have done. I know that you have taken her away, and I don't think she would have gone unless beguiled by at least a promised marriage.”

“You are right, if I may judge from my slight acquaintance with Miss Meade, whom to know was to respect,” he returned, gravely. “Look here, Randal,” he added, in a less formal manner, “I'm awfully sorry for you. You're hard hit and fling out against everybody; if you weren't you wouldn't dare say what you are saying. You have got it into your head, Heaven knows how, that I am at the bottom of this—” here there was a faint quiver in his voice, “this poor girl's disappearance. You are wrong. I will tell you, just to clear your mind, what I know of her. I met her at my father's house, as the friend and companion of my sister and my cousin, Miss Lonsdale. Of course I admired and liked her—why, I believe our people thought it a pleasure to open a door for her—my father, my sister, and my cousin were enthusiastic about her beauty, her talents, and her sweetness, she was very tender and kind to my invalid sister. The Inglebys were fond of her. I met her at their house once or twice. I have heard Miss Meade allude to her engagement to you. Once, she read bits of one of your letters to my sister—about the Fall of Lucknow. My father, too, had spoken of the engagement, and of course we are personally interested in all that concerns one—well! considering the—Ah! the family—but I need not touch up that——”

“You had *better* not,” thought Philip.

“I am no saint,” continued Claude, rather superfluously, Philip considered, “but I could not insult—in fact, if I ever saw a true lady and one whose presence commanded respect, it was Miss Meade.”

“Fine words! But this did not prevent you compromising her by walking alone in woods with her.”

“And you believe all that village wives' cackle? It is true that I have met Miss Meade walking in our own plantations. As she was in the habit of walking alone, having no chaperon, it was not remarkable. I have met her walking alone with Ingleby, too; I saw no harm in it.”

“Plausible, but it won't do. How do you account for the mysterious and complete disappearance?”

He turned away with a pained look.

“I have heard since,” he replied at last, “that she had much trouble for one so young. She was utterly alone, among people incapable of understanding her. She was high-spirited and sensitive. These miserable scandals had

come to her ears, she had been cruelly and unwarrantably insulted by coarse and stupid wretches unfit to—Whether her reason gave way, or whether it was an accident, we shall never know, but of this I am sure—you will see your sister no more on earth.”

There was a repressed sob in his voice, and he again turned away, as if to struggle with invincible emotion, while Philip was silent from very rage and indignation at his hypocrisy.

“That is a lie,” he cried at last; “you cannot hide her long in a country like this. Unless, indeed, you have taken her abroad.”

“You are mad,” Claude returned with cold contempt.

“Not mad enough to believe all this,” Philip flashed out. “I know that you met her and had a secret understanding with her from the first. That you took advantage of your sister’s infirmity to make love to her. That you were once surprised when your sister was asleep——”

“By my cousin; could she expect Miss Meade to leave off reading aloud and wake my sister, and me to stump heavily away in search of another chaperon than the sleeping child——”

“—— I know that you gave her jewels and money—I have evidence——”

“Then you know more than I do,” replied Claude, quietly. “Besides you insult her by the assumption.”

“That you were alone with her the day before her disappearance, that you distressed her exceedingly, telling her that it was too late to draw back, that you then arranged the details of her flight, her leaving the carrier within a mile of the town at Wellow Cross, and turning down toward the river, where the handkerchief farce was gone through——”

“If, as you say,” interrupted Claude, with a singular expression in his dilating eyes, “I met the lady *alone* in the storm, who but herself could have told you of the supposed conversation?”

“That remains to be seen,” returned Philip, observing that it was Claude, and not himself, who supplied the circumstance of the storm. “Sally Samson herself told me that she rowed Jessie with her luggage—by the way, even ladies don’t usually take luggage when committing suicide—to Lynmouth, and saw her on board the boat which catches the three o’clock express to Waterloo.”

“Did Miss Meade carry her luggage from the carrier’s cart to the ark?” he interrupted, with what Philip thought well-feigned interest.

“That part was well managed. Sally’s nephew fetched it from the inn where it was left to be called for. You cannot deny that on the same day you pretended to be called unexpectedly to London, that you drove to Cleeve station in a dog-cart with only a groom, whom you left behind at the station. That you caught the boat at Lynmouth—even the boat’s name is known, The Lord of the Isles—and that you travelled by the three o’clock express to Waterloo.”

“I drove to Cleeve and took the train ; I went in the Lord of the Isles and caught the three express to Waterloo, all that is true ; but I travelled alone. Ingleby went by the same express, the train was long, I did not see him, he did not see me, and unless he is an unusually powerful liar, he did not see Miss Meade.”

“You would, of course, have prevented that.”

“What was the price of Sally Samson’s valuable information? My dear fellow, you must be uncommonly green if you can swallow all that an old woman will yarn you for half a sovereign—uncommonly green.”

“If you did not think me very green you would not expect me to believe that you do not know where Jessie Meade is. You have done a very cruel and cowardly thing, Claude Medway. You have fatally injured one who had special claims on the consideration of every man with a spark of true manliness in him. One whose youth, innocence, orphanhood and utter defencelessness—I will not say sex, because that, which ought to constitute a claim to men’s protection, is but too often regarded as a bait to their lawlessness—one whose peculiar position, her nearest friend and natural protector being six thousand miles away—but I don’t speak of my own wrongs, although you knew of our relationship and of the impossibility of my attending to private duties at such a time, and although a soldier might be expected to feel that keenly—I tell you, I scorn to speak of my own wrong,” repeated Philip, quivering with indignation—“but *her* friendless and defenceless condition, not to mention her engagement to me, to whom you have always affected a friendliness, I have never sought or wished—should have made her sacred. Give back my sister, Claude Medway, give me back the defenceless creature her dying father trusted to me, and so make tardy reparation for an irreparable wrong.”

Claude’s face seemed cut in marble as he stood silent and almost breathless under Philip’s passionate appeal and more passionate accusing, only his tightly clasped hands and the occasional quiver of his closed lips betrayed that he felt any-

thing, though in fact he felt the truth of every word burn like fire into his heart.

“I have told you,” he said at last, in a dry, thin voice, “that I do not know where the lady is; I am not responsible for her. I can say no more.”

“Then take the consequences,” cried Philip, throwing his card on the table. “There is my address, if you should think better of your refusal upon reflection.”

“You mean to go to law,” returned Claude, with the same marble face and icy voice. “Think twice first. Do not hastily drag her name in the dust! The dead own nothing but name and memory, remember. Do not rob her of that one possession.”

“Living or dead,” Philip, said sternly, “she had but her name, and of that she has already been most basely robbed.”

The marble rigidity of the white face was touched into a faint quiver by this barbed truth. This may be the beginning of Hell merely to listen to the tale of the soul’s own iniquity and see something of the anguish consequent on it.

“You can do her no good,” he said at last, moistening his stiff, dry lips before he could speak; “a woman’s name and fame vanish before the breath of men’s lips.”

“That is for your consideration,” Philip replied, coldly. “I shall refrain from legal proceedings the moment I see her.”

So saying he left the room and the house, and Claude sat down at the table and gazed with a glassy stare straight before him.

“It is too much,” he murmured to himself, “that Jessie should suffer! And that poor fellow! She was all the world to him. He cared for her as I do for little Ethel. *She* was fond of him. Philip would consent to our marriage indeed. There is good stuff in this poor Philip. But he must not go to law, I must tell him all first.”

He turned Sally Samson’s story over and over in his mind and thought it was probable, especially in connection with the luggage. The Plummers and Philip no doubt knew exactly of what that luggage consisted. There had never been the slightest doubt but that the luggage disappeared, and now there was a clue to its destination. It had at least been traced to the Lynmouth boat; but how did Philip know of the meeting in the park shed? Had Jessie in her agitation unguardedly told something of that on reaching home in the storm? Philip’s imagination might have furnished the details, the outline given.

All of a sudden a thought struck like lightning through him. * Perhaps Sally Samson's tale was *true*.

He had so long mourned her as dead and reproached himself as her virtual murderer, that the alternative was too acute ; it made him dizzy and faint, the room swam. When the first shock passed off, he tried to map the supposition out in his mind and consider what it might mean. Jessie alone in London ! Surely that would be worse than death. And yet there was a ray of hope in it.

CHAPTER IX.

FANNY.

The desire of his eyes had been snatched from him, and the joy of his youth and the hope of his age quenched. The heavens were black above him, and the earth below bleak and barren, the wealth that would have made his wedded happiness possible was useless now ; all his possessions were but dust that is brushed away by a passing wind. His life lay blasted behind him and all his future stretched in blank desolation before him. So Claude Medway mourned in the bitterness of a bereaval still fresh and acute.

It was his own doing ; he could not complain of the sternness of heavenly decrees or accuse any blind Fate of cruelty ; with his own hand he had withered and destroyed a life dearer than his own, and murdered his young happiness. It was as if, a consecrated chalice bearing celestial wine having been offered him, he had taken it for an ordinary tap-room tankard, and, before he could degrade it to common uses, it had been snatched from his sacrilegious hand, leaving him to burn with unquenchable thirst.

On hearing of Jessie's disappearance he had caused inquiries to be made through his father, to whom the handkerchief story had been communicated in confidence by Mr. Plummer, and had at last accepted the theory of death in the river, whether by accident or design—by design, he too surely feared. If Jessie's passion and flight into the storm had touched his conscience and heart, the sharp stroke of bereaval had done more. A sorrow at once so irretrievable and so entwined with all the finest fibres of human nature, touches the spiritual part of man into keenly thrilling and active life ; it refines, softens, purifies like nothing else.

What he had seen in Jessie's face outlined upon the lurid sky, had swept away the intricate mazes of sophistry with which he had sought to deceive her and himself. All lay then in its naked hideousness before him ; he saw himself the unmanly persecutor of an innocent, high-minded girl, whose youth and defencelessness specially appealed to his chivalry. He saw the true nature of the unequal duel, in which he had used

weapons so deadly and so unfair against one whose only armor was innocence, an armor so easily pierced unless braced by strength of character and principle ; and knew himself utterly defeated.

“Woe to the weak. Let women take care of themselves,” was his axiom in April, but not now. He knew that Jessie had shown heroism beyond that of the deadly, deathless ride at Balaclava, which had so deeply impressed her imagination and so strongly kindled her enthusiasm. He remembered his own proud consciousness, while he rode down that awful valley in the tempest of death, that the noblest chord in his nature was vibrating at last ; his not ignoble self-reverence—springing from the thought that he and his comrades could die for a word’s sake.

Sometimes he had thought that it would be possible to live up to the Balaclava level ; when Jessie left him that day he was sure of it. What had pierced his conscience most deeply was the brutality of his assertion that her reputation was already gone. Love and grief now showed him after Jessie’s flight what terrible meaning the inexperienced girl, so ignorant of the world’s evil, so sensitive to feelings of honor, might attach to these cruel words. In one so sensitive they might work despair, and despair in one so young and friendless, of mental poise so nice, turns to madness—and then—He saw it all ; the rush of agony during the lonely field walk, the sudden loss of mental balance in the fever of suffering, the temptation of the swift flowing river, where the tide was coming up and the channel was deep. A plunge in the green water, a loss of sunshine reflected from the golden hair above, a total loss of sunshine to the blue eyes darkened below ; then silence ; the broken ripple circling quietly back to its even flow, and the robin piping his autumn song in the oak-grove on the bank.

Or it might have been an accident, a slip of the light foot on the timber’s green and slippery edge, as she stood to watch the tide running up. But it was most improbable that she would have walked to the edge of the timber bank ; there was no motive for doing so. To know that it was an accident seemed the only thing that could ever bring him peace of mind now.

Philip had left him for more than an hour, the interrupted breakfast lay untouched on the table, when he roused himself from that unending circle of agonizing thought which sometimes oversets the strongest minds, rose, took a turn in the room and looked out on the sunny park, whence the white rime was now melted. Then his eyes fell on some daily

papers, he unfolded one, and was about to try and divert the current of gloomy thought when his attention was caught by a once familiar but long-forgotten name—Fanny Wordnutt, aged twenty-six.

What is the good of reading those brief, pitiful paragraphs that daily appear under the heading of inquests on our cosy breakfast tables? Sensible people who value their cheerfulness, pass on to the record of gayer or larger doings, of Parliamentary squabbles at home and political intrigues across the Channel, of theatres and concerts, of Lord and Lady Roseleaf's exit from town and the arrival of the Duke of Bunkum at Flummery Castle, of the progress of Lord Chicory's gout and the successful courtship of Miss Angela Billing by the Hon. Squander Cashless. But the name of this poor Fanny, whose brief life had contained no such pleasant doings as befall the rich and great, together with the name of a certain cavalry depot, rivetted his attention and caused the hair to rise upon his flesh as he read the every-day tale of misery.

Poor Fanny, only twenty-six and too truly described as unfortunate, had sought the piteous refuge of the river from a world in which she was not allowed the chance of walking uprightly, having once gone wrong. But first she had written a letter, explaining why.

"Dear Mother," the letter ran, "I could not bear it no more, thinking it better for all I should go. Please forgive me that have been a trouble and will trouble no one no more. It was trouble did it. After that young officer went I had no heart for nothing; I couldn't look up to myself. There was no hope. I first took a glass to forget. I was forced to bad company, others gave me the go by. It was only in drink I could forget, and you was forced to turn me away. Dear Mother, there was no honest work, and me afraid to die. But hell can't be much worse than this. When you get this you won't have a child to bring you disgrace. Please give my love to all that was ever kind to your poor wicked Fanny. God forgive *him*."

Wicked indeed was this frail, despairing Fanny, all sound moralists will justly say. Had she been made of sterner stuff, with a heart less trustful and loving, with a keener eye for her own interests, this poor little tragedy had never been enacted. Or with firmer faith and a feeling of Heaven's infinite pity, she might have faced man's scorn and not died of it. With all the springs of earthly joy dried for her, she might have sat contrite in the dust, doing good works all the days of her life, a life which at eighteen seems an eternity of misery

to the heart-stricken. But all girls of eighteen are not saints or ascetics; young blood is warm, the youth hungry for happiness.

Perhaps Claude Medway was not a sound moralist, for it seemed to him that the young officer who "went" was the most to blame in the matter, as he perused this poor sinner's apology for her life, with a throbbing brain and heart. It was nearly nine years ago since the hussar officers used to call Fanny "the pretty Puritan," and lounge away many idle hours in the confectioner's shop where she served ices to these long-limbed loungers, pennyworths of sweets to little boys and girls, whose heads scarcely reached the counter, buns to pinched spinsters, and great plum cakes to severe matrons, all with the same engaging smile and cheerful alacrity. She used to sing in the church choir of Sundays and teach in the Sunday-school. And though she was inclined to be smart in dress, the greater part of her wage went to the family exchequer, and she was a comfort to her parents.

Then on summer evenings, when the bells were ringing, she used to stroll through pleasant field-paths outside the town, and one of those hussars, a light-hearted cornet, thinking no harm and at his wit's end for some fresh diversion, joined in those healthful walks and the end was sorrow for one of them.

Nothing could alter what had happened and cause Fanny's miserable life to be un-lived. That young cornet might repent, might have repented long since; he might be admitted to the companionship of saints in everlasting bliss, but even there surely he could not be happy remembering to what a fate he had sent Fanny. Claude Medway had not attained to that wide hope of everlasting mercy according to which the penitent's Heaven may consist in being allowed to undo the ill wrought on earth. He could only feel the black, blank misery of having driven a fellow-creature to a despair which led to worse than death, to one depth of degradation after another until "Hell cannot be much worse than this."

To all lighted-hearted triflers, one day in some world, as to Claude Medway in this, a voice of thunder will surely say, "Thy brother's or thy sister's blood crieth from the ground."

He could see the pretty Puritan, with rose-red mouth and clear guileless eyes, serving the sweets and singing in the choir, hear her joyous laugh and innocent prattle as she walked in the fields, a sweet picture. And he could see a haggard, wild-eyed woman, stupefied by degradation, a source of wide-spreading moral poison, mad with drink and misery, fly-

ing from self and memory to the spectre-haunted silence of death—a ghastly spectacle.

“How atone, Great God, for this which man has done?
And for the body and soul which by
Man’s pitiless doom must now comply
With life-long hell. What lullaby
Of sweet forgetful second birth
Remains? All dark —”

Then before his imagination there rose up that great and terrible army of whom she was but a feeble unit, that army whose headquarters are capital cities, who infest the streets of every town, and prey upon the vitals of society—an army in which no one ever grows old, or, having once entered, is ever young. Why, he asked, does that ghastly host exist? Who maintains it? And his conscience replied. Whence is it recruited? And conscience again told him, mainly by such as Fanny, from the ranks of youth, innocence, helplessness. His heart sickened at this mass of human misery and degradation. He knew something of the impressment practised for this awful service; of the traps and pitfalls laid for the unsuspecting and ignorant, the foreigner, the friendless; traps from which the purest virtue and firmest principle was not safe, traps and decoys by which such as Jessie are easily taken. Such as Jessie!—

“His daughter with his mother’s eyes.”

Until Jessie had taught him a new reverence for women, he had not felt the depth of this degradation.

What might actually be Jessie’s fate now, if, as Philip supposed, she was alone and homeless in London? He would have given his life many times over to know that she was indeed safe in the river Lynn, even if driven there by despair of his causing.

Such thoughts dry up the very fountains of youth and scorch the brain into serenity; he dared not harbor them;

“They make a goblin of the sun;”

but left the house, seeking by violent exercise to get rid of them for a time.

Then he decided on seeing Sally Samson and testing the story she had told Philip. But he must not do this openly now.

In the meantime he and Philip were like duellists, each watching and waiting for the other to approach. Claude thought that the threatened legal proceedings must fail for want of money. Philip consulted lawyers with the result of

getting his brain completely bewildered by legal subtleties and hair-splittings. If he had to pay costs (which he considered improbable) he decided to sell his commission and realize his little fortune. It was a combat *à outrance*.

When he left Claude Medway he was more firmly convinced than ever that he had the key to this distressing mystery. Claude's extreme forbearance seemed to bear witness against him; his letting him call him a liar and otherwise insult him, seemed to bear witness against him. The "mean hound," he called him in his indignation.

Walking moodily along that day after an interview with a lawyer to whom he had been recommended, he met a melancholy procession of sandwich men trailing aimlessly along with pinched faces and haggard looks, and in one of these ragged creatures he recognized a discharged soldier and old comrade with whom he had served in the Crimea. Hailing this unlucky fellow, he gave him a shilling and his address, and bade him come and talk over old times. Then, finding him open to a better employment, and knowing that his wits were keen and that he could keep sober for some time for a purpose, he engaged him, nominally as his servant, and really to help him watch Claude Medway's movements.

About a week after their encounter, Claude Medway went to Cleeve, dogged by Philip's spy.

On the following afternoon, about the gray dusk of a gray day, Philip was walking in Hyde Park, when the sound of his own name, issuing from the gloom beneath some trees near, reached his ear.

"Then I tell Philip Randal," a man's voice said in harsh, threatening tones.

"Nonsense," Claude Medway's voice replied. "Luckily he is out of your reach." •

"He is in England. He was at Marwell a fortnight ago. I can easily lay hands on him if I try."

"It will be the worse for you if you do, because in that case you will never get one farthing more from me or my father, and he has but his pay for you to prey upon."

"Give me fifty down and I'll be quiet for the sake of the family, for the fine old Medway name," said the other, sneeringly. And Philip lost the reply, for they were moving on, and their footsteps now fell upon gravel and now they were in the open road, so that he could not be near them without himself being seen.

Some further altercation followed, and then Claude put something into the hand of the man—who proved to be the

shabby fellow Philip had seen waiting in the hall, and shook himself free of him.

Philip followed the shabby man into an omnibus, in which he contrived to sit opposite him with his own face in shadow, so that he could watch him in the dim light of the quaking oil lamp as they clattered over the pavement. The man dozed a little, with his chin on his breast and his hands resting clasped tightly on the stick he held between his knees. Presently he roused himself with a low sound, half moan, half grunt, looked uneasily round like some startled wild animal, and Philip saw that his eyes glittered feverishly from deep-sunken sockets, and that his worn and wasted face was of a peculiar yellowish hue. Having glanced round at the passengers, the haunted look left him, and he took from his pocket some kind of sweetmeat or drug from which he cut pieces and ate and dozed again. This was repeated several times, and each time his hand became less tremulous, his dozing less heavy, and his eyes less keen. He got out in Oxford Street, followed at a distance by Philip, and ate some more of the sweetmeat. Then he sauntered slowly along, often stopping to look vacantly for some minutes at the moving stream of vehicles and passengers passing and repassing, jostling and hurrying in the gas-light. The haunted look recurred no more now, the eyes were quiet and hazy, the man's air was that of a half-conscious dreamer, there was a pleasant languor in his movements.

He turned the first corner he reached in the same aimless, sauntering way, with many a pause, as if in reverie; though surely, Philip thought, Oxford and the adjoining streets were strange places to dream in. But the opium-eater saw instead of London streets by gaslight, a series of magnificent pageants streaming by in ever-changing brilliance, in weird yet tranquil splendor. He saw the Greek charioteer with wind-blown hair and tense muscles, standing with a backward poise in his light car, and deftly guiding his flying coursers, anon giving a swift glance behind to see how far his rivals had gained on him in one louder thunder of their course. Now it was a Roman triumph glittering with golden spoil, now the advancing surge of victorious battle, now a succession of dancing nymphs and satyrs, a whirl of flying Naiads, now a fairy pageant, a radiant masque, a tournament, a battle of Titans, a rout of Centaurs and Lapithæ, a procession of lovely, laughing lute players, heaven knows what of fantastic spectacles, glowing colors, and beautiful forms developed on the foundation of a moving London crowd.

Street after street was passed in this manner ; Philip began to wonder if the battered, shabby object of his chase were a man or demon, if perchance he had lighted on the Wandering Jew, or some spirit compelled to revisit his old haunts. The thin, bearded figure stopped at last after a couple of hours' wandering before a house in a moderately quiet street, rang the bell and went in without parley when the door opened.

Philip soon followed, observed the number on the fan-light, and rang the bell himself.

"Is Mr. Johnson at home?" he asked the maid who answered the door.

"Some mistake. No Mr. Johnson here," she replied.

"No? But surely that was Mr. Johnson who went in a minute ago? An elderly man, thin and sickly-looking?"

"Why, you mean one of the lodgers, Mr. Ashwin. I just let him in."

"I am afraid I have made a mistake, I could have sworn it was Mr. Johnson," he returned, carefully describing him again and slipping a piece of silver in her hand. "The number I thought was 55, and the landlady, a Mrs.—well, I forget her name."

"This is Mrs. Smithson's, sir, and she's only three sets, Mr. Ashwin, the first-floor front, Mr. Jenkins, first-floor back, and Mr. Cramer, second-floor, back. No Mr. Johnson. 'Twas the first-floor front just stepped in."

"A commercial traveller?"

"No ; he lives independent. Sleeps all day, and is out all night sometimes. Drinky. Has horrors."

That was all Philip could learn of this gentleman, and he turned away content with his information for the present.

CHAPTER X.

PHILIP IS SURPRISED.

It was plainly lost labor to seek information of a man in an opium-trance, and as Philip drove back to his own quarters near Hyde Park, another plan occurred to him, he changed his destination and had himself set down at Claude Medway's house.

Finding him at home, he sent in his card with the word "urgent," pencilled on it, and was at once admitted, late as it was.

He was shown into a library, lighted faintly with shaded lamps, and soon joined by Claude Medway.

"I hope, Randal," the latter said, "that you have thought better of this intended lawsuit."

"I have thought that it will not be necessary," he replied. "You were with a man named Ashwin, this evening," he added. Claude moved away from the lamp he had turned up on entering.

"Is Mr. Ashwin a friend of yours?" he asked.

"I have no doubt he would become one for a consideration. I heard my name this evening in the park by accident. I heard that I was to be told *all* unless a good, round sum was forthcoming on the instant. I followed your agreeable friend and obtained his name, address, and occupation. He was not in a state for examination when I left him. He will keep. In the mean time, you may as well tell me all yourself."

"What do you suppose Ashwin threatened to tell you?" Claude asked.

"What you have done with my sister."

"You are mistaken. This man has never so much as heard her name," he replied.

"He may know her by another name."

"In that case, how would he know your name in connection with her? Randal, I swear to you on my honor, that I no more know where Jessie Meade is at this moment than you

do. And I warn you against this man, Ashwin. If you make yourself known to him, you will repent it all your life."

"That is my concern. I can look after myself and those who depend upon me. It is very plain that you don't wish me to know him, since you bought his silence a few hours since and told him that he would repent finding me out to the last day of his life. I have had enough of this, Medway, I am sick of playing the spy. You have just been to Cleeve, where your movements have been watched and will be reported to me. I overheard your interview with this man on your return. What have you done with her? It may as well come out now as in court."

"I have just sworn to you upon my honor——"

"Your honor," said Philip, savagely.

Claude sprung toward him and then suddenly drew back. "Fool!" he cried, "let it be on your own head! Ashwin is your *father!*"

"That—that—drunken beast—my—father——" stammered Philip.

Claude forgot his anger in amazement. "Good Heavens, Philip!" he cried, "is it possible that you don't know who you are?"

"I know nothing of my father," Philip said, "except that he made my mother wretched. But——It is no affair of yours; I am here only on *her* business," he returned, recovering himself.

"It is my affair; we are cousins. If you had your birth-right, you would probably be in my place, the heir of the baronetcy and property. I must tell you all in common justice now, having sprung this on you."

So Philip had to hear from the man who had wronged him the story of his own shame. He was the son of Algernon Medway, the Mr. Algernon of the last generation, a name too notorious to be forgotten in this. Many a tale of this bad man had Philip heard at Marwell as a boy, not dreaming that he was hearing of his own father's misdeeds.

"Mr. Algernon," was never mentioned at the Court, his name was an offence to his family and only whispered about with caution. Philip had vaguely supposed him to be dead, and yet he had some dim remembrance of sentence passed upon him in a criminal court.

Now he learned why Sir Arthur chancing to see him a boy at the grammar school on a prize-giving day, and struck by his likeness to the Medways, and by the coincidence of his age with that of his brother's son, concealed by his mother,

wished, after identifying him by the help of Matthew Meade, till then ignorant himself of his origin, to adopt him. Further, why Sir Arthur had always manifested some interest in his welfare, and kept himself informed of his progress at school, and afterward still further that he was the giver of the mysterious little fortune which came to him after the Crimea. Matthew's pathetic desire to be all in all to Philip and "make a gentleman of him" had been respected by Sir Arthur, who was ever ready to give material aid toward that end in case Matthew should fail. But some of this, together with his uncle's intention of buying him a commission after a little wholesome discipline in the ranks, he heard later—there was not time to listen to all that night.

Arthur and Algernon Medway were twins whose identity had been confused by careless nurses in their infancy. The children were then weighed and the heaviest henceforth distinguished as Arthur, the heir, but their father, Sir Claude, was always troubled by the fear that Algernon might have been wronged by the decision, and made up for the possible injustice by thoroughly spoiling Algernon, whom he made heir of the untailed Marwell property. Both twins had commissions in the army, but Algernon's was in the Guards, his allowance was larger than Arthur's, he was always in debt, his extravagances drained the family purse and encumbered the estates, yet whatever he did was right in his father's eyes; the steady Arthur, in his less expensive and fashionable regiment, being considered as lacking in spirit and dash. But at last the fast and fashionable guardsman committed a serious error; he secretly married pretty Mary Ashwin, an infantry officer's daughter, a penniless orphan whom he had known as governess of a friend's children.

When this came to light, Sir Claude was very angry, there was a period of storm and indignation, and stopping of supplies, highly inconvenient to a gentleman in Mr. Algernon Medway's position. The offence was at last condoned, and Mrs. Algernon Medway and her baby son were received by Lady Medway and young Lady Gertrude, Arthur's wife, with such cordiality as those ladies could muster for the occasion, which perhaps was not sufficient to make it very pleasant for poor Mary Medway to live among them, a dowerless intruder with nothing but her beauty and goodness to recommend her.

Soon after this, the baby son being about a year old, Algernon was tried and convicted of a crime that inspired his young wife with especial horror, for which he was transported for a long period.

Sir Claude, whose doting fondness quickly turned to extravagant hatred, then left all his property, with the exception of daughters' portions and such necessary provisions, to Arthur; he continued, however, to give a small allowance, dependent on his pleasure, to Algernon's unfortunate young wife.

For some years after this scandal, Arthur Medway lived with his wife and young children chiefly on the continent, while Sir Claude shut himself up in Marwell Court, saw no one, and gradually declined in health till he died, when Philip must have been about five years old, and Mary Medway two years in her unknown grave. As no one was permitted to mention Algernon, his wife or child, in the old baronet's presence, it was not until after his death, in winding up his affairs, that Sir Arthur discovered that Mrs. Algernon had ceased for some years to claim her allowance. The lawyers through whom the pittance was paid had had instructions from Sir Claude to make no inquiries for her if she chose to slip out of sight, as she did. Thus the new head of the family had no clew of her whereabouts, and searched in vain for some traces of her, until he chanced, four years after Sir Claude's death, to find Philip at his very gates. Then, being attracted by the boy's likeness to the Medways, and by some rumor of his unknown origin, he made inquiries of Matthew Meade, which, being followed up by both, left no reasonable doubt in the minds of either that Philip was the son of Algernon Medway. Mary Medway's handwriting alone, without the testimony of the entries in her diary, would have revealed her to Sir Arthur.

"We thought that you were told of your name and origin on coming of age," Claude said in conclusion. "Of course the thing made a great talk at the time. It is forgotten now, but a little would soon stir the old scandal. Men of our generation know nothing, but our fathers' contemporaries would remember."

The trial of Algernon Medway had brought to light many base circumstances in his life; the crime of which he was convicted, appropriation of regimental moneys, was, no doubt, but the repetition of a previous theft, for which the officer responsible for the money had been broken, though not prosecuted; he had vanished with his despair. This last theft had been accompanied by a well-planned attempt to fasten the robbery on Algernon's wife's brother, obnoxious to him from being a private, and who shot himself in consequence of what he endured while under suspicion.

"You need fear nothing from me," Philip replied, with

some scorn, and then, after a pause, he asked of what crime his father had been convicted. Claude replied in a word that made his ears tingle. He was looking straight before him with a strained gaze that saw nothing visible, but pictured Ada Maynard's face as when he saw her last beneath the moonlight sprinkled orange-trees, and saw a deep, black gulf yawning between them. He had kept loyal to the farewell then spoken, and never allowed his fancy to stray back to those renounced hopes, and yet he had never felt the parting in its full pain till now. A thousand other thoughts surged into his mind, his eyes darkened, his face grew sharp with pain, and he grasped the back of a chair, as if by mechanical action he could control the tumult within. Claude looked with a grave compunction at the silent agony dimly shadowed in the face before him.

"Better forgotten. Better you had never known," he said, at last. "He has had the grace to take another name."

"I ought to have known from the first," Philip replied at last. "And he wanted me."

"Yes," replied Claude, "that he might squeeze every penny out of you and then fling you aside, ruined. His allowance is more than your whole income. He spends his time between opium-dreaming and gambling. That man would rob a child. He has no heart; he is scarcely human. Don't fall into his clutches; he will never leave you till he has ruined you. Don't be misled by any weak sentiment in that direction."

"My affairs," replied Philip, "are my own."

Then upon further inquiry he learned that Algernon Medway's term of transportation had expired some years since. Land had been assigned him, of which he had made nothing. His brother sent him sums of money until his patience was exhausted, then he gave him a settled allowance, with the intimation that no more lump sums would be forthcoming.

Thereupon, the black sheep appeared one day, an unrecognizable wreck, at Marwell Court. He had seen Philip's name in newspapers and the Army List, and learnt all that was known of his origin from Cleeve people, drawing his own conclusions as to the identity of this Philip Randal with the son he had named. Then, finding that the Medways were anxious to keep him apart from Philip, he demanded and received blackmail, especially from Claude, whose guilty conscience made him tender of Philip's welfare.

Such was the story Philip heard, to his own most bitter chagrin, such was the father he found in searching for his lost sister. But he did not leave the house without pressing

on his inquiries for Jessie, insisting upon knowing the object of Claude's visit to the ark of that day.

"I went," Claude replied, "to see if Sally Samson's story was true. I believe that it is true. You see, Randal, I should not go to this old woman if I knew where to find Jessie."

"Heaven knows."

"You still refuse to believe me. That is not the way to find her. If we act together with this clue we may find Jessie. If you go to law, you will only smirch her name."

Philip looked at him searchingly, and yet with some hesitation. "You did not tell the truth about your relations with her," he said, at last.

"I did not tell the whole truth. While I thought her dead—I thought it better—can't you understand?"

Philip thought he could understand, and his heart sank.

"You did not love Jessie and she did not love you. I loved her. I lost her. I would give my life to find her. When she is found she must be my wife."

"Do you solemnly swear that?" Philip asked.

"I do most solemnly swear it."

"You should have sworn that before—before all this misery of your making—before it was too late."

"I think," he said, slowly, "that you should know all that ever passed between your sister and myself."

So Philip thought, and he listened with a sort of savage forbearance to the story of this long courtship and its climax in the storm, when Jessie vanished. Restraining his indignation, he thought it all over and considered the possibility of her going to London without money.

"She had sold some pictures," Claude explained.

"Sold pictures!" echoed Philip; "but what would a few shillings be?"

"That," said Claude, pointing to a framed water-color of Marwell Court on the wall, "fetched ten guineas."

He examined it in silent wonder and his eyes grew moist. "Poor Jessie," he murmured, turning away, "poor child!" And something of the truth began to dawn upon him. Jessie alone in cruel, wicked London; young, beautiful, and friendless as she was, for three weary winter months hoping to live by selling drawings. What could the upshot of this be?

The next day Philip burst into the house in great excitement.

"She did go to London," he cried, "and whatever harm comes to her is on your head."

"You have seen her?" faltered Claude, with white lips.

“I have two letters ; they have been to India and followed me home. One before her flight and one dated October, with no address, bearing the mark of the General Post-office. She speaks of flying from a temptation that she does not name. Of having been compromised by scandalous talk. Of hiding from her friends in consequence.”

“She hides from *you* ?” Claude asked, much agitated by the sight of Jessie’s delicate hand-writing on the travel-stained envelope. “I quite understand that she would hide from that coarse-tongued shrew of a cousin, but why from you ?”

“Heaven knows,” Randal returned, sadly ; “she is such a child at heart, so ignorant of life. She thinks herself disgraced—by mere talk.”

“What have I done ?” cried Claude. “Oh ! Jessie, poor Jessie, what have I done ?”

Philip had no comfort for him ; he read out such portions of Jessie’s last letter as he thought it well for Claude to hear, with merciless emphasis on words that made him wince. In the meantime he racked his brain, as he had been doing all that night, in the effort to recall Jessie’s spring and summer letters, thinking how much misery might have been spared if he had given more earnest heed to them at the time and considered her more in the light of a reasonable and reasoning being. For the Jessie painted by Claude Medway, Mr. Ingleby, and Sir Arthur, and shadowed forth by her last letter, was a revelation to him.

He had but just received the letter Jessie last wrote before her disappearance. It had missed a mail and gone to an old Indian address, whence it had travelled by a circuitous route to Myserabad, and thence back to England in company with her London letter. In this she told him that it must be clear to him as it was to her that they did not love each other in a way to make marriage desirable ; that her father, could he know all the circumstances, would be the last person to urge their marriage ; that he had not perhaps well considered it, until suddenly called upon to leave her alone in the world. Experience had taught her, as it would one day teach him, how different love was from the fraternal feeling that had bound them together, and would bind them, she knew, all their lives.

The London letter assured him of her well being, and bid him set his heart at rest concerning her. She would write from time to time and hear of him in the papers. She had acted foolishly ; not knowing what construction would be put upon

her actions. She had acted wrongly in keeping things, which they ought to have known, from her guardians, and now God had punished her by taking away her good name. "Dear Philip," she said, "do not think harshly of your little Jessie. I tried to do right, but it was so hard. My head was confused, wrong sometimes seemed right, and right wrong. And no one told me it was wrong to see friends alone out of doors. Some day, perhaps, you will be able to forget that I was foolish once and made people talk cruelly when young and quite alone. You *said so little* about the young lady who escaped to Lucknow with you, that I think you must care for her. Now you are free. I should always have been a dead weight on you——"

"We will go to Scotland Yard. You must get Cheeseman to act with you," Claude said, at last; "we may trace her by her drawings. She was acquainted with one well-known artist. She will have been to him."

He still had some hope of finding her but his heart sank when he thought of her helpless inexperience.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PICTURE.

Before many days Philip found himself on his way to the house whither he had tracked the opium eater. After a fruitless errand there he learnt from the friendly maid when Mr. Ashwin was likely to be visible, and, timing his next visit accordingly, appeared soon after noon one day.

This visit was not a thing likely to make Ada Maynard regret, he thought, with a thrill of deep and pure emotion. He could almost hear her bidding him go. And yet he was farther from her than ever.

Mr. Ashwin was at home, but could not receive visitors; yet he sent in his card, thinking he would not be denied, and was shown in a first floor room looking on the street.

“He must at least be human,” he thought, when the door opened and revealed the stooping figure, wrapped loosely in a dressing-gown, in an armchair between a blazing fire and a breakfast table, on which stood a decanter half full of a dark liquid that was not wine. He recalled old, half-forgotten stories heard in boyhood of “Mr. Algernon.” There was one story of a horse which he had punished in so shocking a manner that it was necessary to shoot it.

A young groom, a slim, small fellow, hearing the horse scream, had thrown himself upon the big guardsman and given him such a pounding as he had never before enjoyed, getting well punished himself in return. Mr. Algernon had to keep his bed for a day or two; the servant was dismissed by Sir Claude, and handsomely rewarded by Mr. Medway, who never lost sight of him, and whose coachman he was at this present day. Philip had often envied that young groom the opportunity of punishing such a scoundrel. “Yet he must be human,” he thought, looking earnestly at the leaden-eyed, broken creature with the full moist loose lips, the furtive glance, the pallid unwholesome face, and the traces of former long-ruined comeliness. He was certainly like Sir Arthur, and yet Sir Arthur was a vigorous

man, with fine presence and handsome, refined face. Could these be twin brothers? Could this stooping skeleton with the cadaverous face and evil eye be his father?

"Philip Randal, eh?" the man asked, not rising nor offering his hand. "To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit?" he added, sarcastically.

"Sir," he replied, "you are my father."

"Am I?" he returned, with an unpleasant jest. "Well, what then? There's nothing to be got out of me."

"I heard," Philip continued, "that you wished to find my address. I have brought it."

"So I did. But only to put the screw on those mean hounds, Arthur and Claude. You've done me out of a certain income, you young donkey," he grumbled, motioning him to a seat. "So you've been through the ranks, you young dog, and climbed up to the proud eminence of captain in a line regiment, all of your own bat, eh? Gad, it makes me sick to think of it; a self-made man is the beastliest thing on earth. To be sure, you ought to have done better with the Crimea and the Mutiny," he continued, with a vacuous air, as he reached with a shaking hand after the decanter and poured out some of its contents, which he drank off. "Half that, my young cockerel," he added, setting the glass down empty, "would stop your crowing for ever; the whole of it would settle five dragoons. Well, what do you want here?" he growled, in a hoarse, savage voice, as he suddenly turned and bent his now glittering eyes upon his visitor's face.

Philip had never known what it is to loathe a man until he set eyes on this battered hulk, yet he kept saying to himself, as he wondered what sort of a creature he might himself have become with this cruel and dissolute being's tutelage in place of Matthew Meade's, he must, at least, be human; besides he knew that his gentle young mother had once loved him. And when he thought of the bright promise of the man's youth, his fall and degradation, the long misery his life had been with no earthly hope before him, a spasm of awed pity caught his heart.

"I came," he replied, with this great pity in his face, "to see you."

"You'll get nothing out of me," his amiable parent growled, his evil eyes shrinking before his son's. "That beast, Arthur, doles me out two or three pitiful hundreds a year, and I've not a penny more, not a penny," he whined, with maudlin tears. "And that young cub, Claude, with a commission in the Hussars, while my poor boy was left to a pauper's charity,

and served in the ranks of a line regiment. And I am the real heir, I am Sir Arthur; he is only Algernon. The cursed woman mixed us up in our cradles, and my old fool of a father couldn't tell Dick from Harry. So he had us weighed, and because that beast, Arthur, was two ounces heavier, they swore he was me; and there he is enjoying my title and patrimony. This is an unjust world, Philip. If all had their rights you would have been brought up as the heir to a baronetcy and fine estates, and that nasty Arthur would have been transported, and flogged, and put in irons, and eaten his heart out as a convict in that brutal country, till he dragged his old worn-out, battered carcass home to live upon the niggardly doles of a brute. I can't last much longer," he added, with a calculating air, "and you ought to be Sir Philip by this day twelvemonth, at least."

"There is plenty of life in you yet," Philip rejoined. "I shall be in England for some time longer, and I hope you will let me do anything I can for you in the meantime."

"What can you do with your beggarly pay and the miserable dole these beasts let you have?" returned the delightful old gentleman, querulously. "I say, Philip," he added, "what an infernal fool you must be to mix yourself up with me! Now, what in the devil's name did you think you could get out of me?"

"Stillbrooke Mill," exclaimed Philip, starting up and going toward a side-table, where a mounted water-color stood on a miniature easel.

"Ah, your old diggings! Capital drawing. Picked it up in a print shop the other day. What the deuce is the matter with the boy?" he added, as Philip took up the water-color with a trembling hand and examined it closely, finding the monogram, J. M., and the date, May, 1858, in the corner.

It was the mill as seen from the bridge, faithfully and lovingly painted with finish and detail. There was warm sunshine, and light breezes stirred the plane-tree and the great willow; there was the black wheel spurning the white spray; the pigeons sunned themselves on the roof; two silver swans sat placidly on the still water, and, what greatly touched him, a man leant over the lower half of the door, looking out as Matthew used to do.

"I would give my life to find the person who painted this," he exclaimed, after a long and silent scrutiny of the picture.

"Say half a sovereign, you young idiot," rejoined his venerable parent; "the thing is good in its way. There's sunshine in it. Where did I get it? Gad, how can I tell? I

had drunk this bottled happiness—no bliss like opium, boy—I was back in the days when—before—when I was young, and then in a window I saw the very spot where I first met poor Mary, the very spot and the sunshine——” His head sank forward, a haze gathered over his eyes, his brain steeped in opium fumes; he maundered on about Mary Ashwin, blue skies, sunshine, and freedom. “Lilies in her hands and heart, roses on her lips. Sweet roses! sweet Mary!” he muttered, dreamily.

Philip roused him and insisted on his stirring his memory, and after some circumlocution and cross-examination, it came out that the shop was somewhere in the Strand, that it was a corner shop; the tradesman’s name was not forthcoming, but the particulars were quickly noted down by Philip.

The old man sat half dazed by Philip’s impetuosity, gazing out into the street, his lower lip hanging and an imbecile expression on his wasted face. “Can’t keep it out of Stillbrooke Mill,” he muttered, “can’t keep it out—it blots—it blots Mary’s face.”

“What can’t you keep out?” his son asked.

“Don’t ask, don’t ask, don’t let them tell you, Philip; don’t believe them if they do. I didn’t do it, I didn’t do it,” he whimpered, piteously.

“Drink some coffee,” Philip said, pouring out a cup and handing him, “that laudanum was too strong. Drink it off quick.”

He was easily persuaded, drank, and seemed after an effort to collect his bewildered wits. He regained his sneering air, gave Philip the water-color, and bade him go and trouble him no more. Philip put his card and address in a safe and conspicuous place, and asked him if he should change his mind, or be ill or lonely, to send for him. He had wished him good-by, when the old gentleman called him back with a mysterious and troubled look. “For God’s sake, Philip,” he said, in a low and terrified voice, “take care how you go downstairs, and when you do get to the bottom shut your eyes and run for your life. What do you think—the most horrible sight—there’s a dreadful, oh! such a dreadful great *washer-woman* in that corner!” He trembled like a leaf as he spoke, his face became clammy, and his eyes glittered wildly.

“Oh, it’s all right,” Philip returned, readily, “she shan’t do it any more. I’ll turn her out of the corner and drive her clean away.”

“Will you, though?” he asked wistfully, and he seemed relieved and spoke rationally again.

When Philip was gone he walked to and fro for some minutes, knowing that the unusually heavy dose of laudanum would overpower him if he sat still. "Little Philip," he muttered, "poor Mary's child, little Philip! No, no, I won't drag Mary's boy down. No, no, poor Mary! Her eyes and her look, her pretty sturdy boy."

Philip was right; the wretched criminal was human; there was one pure spot in his heart. Mary had given him the only real happiness in his wretched life, though he had broken her heart. And he had been proud of the boy in a rough way, liked to play with him, to toss him, and feel his fair limbs, to teach him to lisp bad words, and square his baby fists at his father. He was proud of him now. "Gad!" he said to himself, "blood always tells. I'm not ashamed to own him. And that beast Claude gets his title and estates, the brute!"

Philip soon reached the corner shop in the Strand, impatiently awaiting the print-seller's leisure and examining the few drawings and paintings with eager interest. The print-seller had at first no recollection either of the picture or artist, but after some consideration and a little jogging of his memory by his assistant, he recognized the one and recalled the other. A tall, plainly dressed girl, with fair hair, evidently fresh from the country. She was pale and very anxious. And very pretty, the assistant added. It was a long time ago, months ago, when first she came. She had sold only this one picture, though she had offered several. She used to call often at first, and seemed disappointed to find her pictures unsold. She was vexed at getting only ten shillings for the mill, and then took her drawings away lest they should spoil by exposure; but there was one left, Mr. Moore thought, and the assistant said it was still in the window; this was true, and someone was even looking at it with despairing eyes. They had seen nothing of Miss Miller for some time, she had given her address, but it had no doubt long since gone to the waste paper basket. Ladies were always worrying them to show drawings in their shop window. That was all he could learn in answer to his close inquiries.

He bought the remaining picture and left his name and address with the money, hoping that Jessie, if indeed it were she, would call again, and intending himself to call frequently on the chance of meeting her. Then he walked thoughtfully along the crowded pavement, feeling the vastness of the great town and the immensity of the hurrying, jostling tide of humanity pouring along in two contrary and intersecting currents, continuous, apparently aimless, and yet

having a bewildering intensity of purpose. He stopped near a shop out of the way, and listened to the endless roar of the mighty life-torrent thundering in perpetual reverberations along the Strand. That black moving mass was made up of human beings; hearts innumerable beat beneath the sombre clothing, and brains innumerable were throbbing and planning, calculating and scheming, each a little world of its own, and having its own separate mainspring. What aches and joys, what heroisms and villainies, what petty miseries and grand despairs, what nobility and meanness might be surging by, unknown! Yet all wore the same absorbed, preoccupied, unobservant look, each was apparently as unconscious of the others and as indifferent to them as is some blind natural force. The aspect of such a crowd is impressive, and one's own insignificance and unregardedness in the face of it is chilling. Its fierce onrush seems motiveless, or moved only by the blind brutal struggle for life. And here, Philip thought with a bleeding heart, friendless, defenceless Jessie had wandered, striving to cope in her weakness with that mass of pitiless strength. She might even now be near. How easy it would be to disappear in such a throng. He listened to the incessant trot-trot of hoofs and rumble of wheels, he reached the National Gallery, with some vague notion that it would be a likely place of resort for Jessie.

He leant on the balustrade beneath the portico and looked upon the finest site in Europe, with its broad open, sloping space and numerous monuments, which if unlovely in themselves, have at least a grandiose effect when grouped in the distance; on its fountains and buildings, the long-vistaed tower-shadowed streets opening away from it, the play of light on the leaping fountains, the mysterious softening of all outlines in the faint pervading mist. How wide the world seemed there! how stimulating yet bewildering the continuous thunder of human billows incessantly surging by the greatest city on earth. He thought of another great city in the far East, not dimmed by the mysterious haze which veils a London sky in the clearest weather, but glittering in fierce untempered sunlight, with gilded domes and shining minarets rising among palaces and dark groves, in place of the gray and smoke-stained towers and the one dark and solemn dome brooding above the chimneys and brick and mortar waste of London. He remembered the infinitely fiercer rush of contending multitudes through the blood-stained streets, when Havelock's men fought their way to the Residency between loopholed houses lined with shooters, where every stone

concealed an active enemy, and every avenue was thronged and every vantage point covered with them. He thought of the strange manner in which he had been snatched, apparently dead, from the very centre of that awful storm, and guided through devious paths to Ada, with whom, by such unexpected and winding ways, he had at last reached the beleaguered Residency. From the heart of that bloodshed and strife he had plucked and guarded her—might he not find and save Jessie from the thick of this tumult? He could not but remember the piteous records in his mother's diary, and think of the superhuman battle a woman alone in the world must fight. That poor young mother's heart was broken; she was hiding from shame; he feared that Jessie was equally despairing and equally flying from supposed disgrace, and the pitifulness of it weighed heavily on his heart. Yet Heaven had pity on Mary Randal's child; would Matthew Meade's be forsaken? Matthew Meade, who had shown such beautiful charity and love. In his gratitude there mingled a strong hope that it would be given to him to find Matthew's only child.

But not on that day or the next, or the next, did he find her, though he paced the Strand almost daily, and almost daily called at the corner shop. Claude Medway did the same, and both, acting in concert when needful, did all that could be done to trace her. Advertisements were carefully concocted and inserted in every newspaper, detectives employed, private inquiry agents consulted, likely and unlikely places searched. But the days went on; they lengthened and became sunny and warm, the parks were bright with spring foliage and spring crowds, gardens and windows were gay with blossom, and no further trace of Jessie was discovered.

Philip's leave expired, and he exchanged into a regiment stationed at Aldershot. Miss Clara Lonsdale had, with much pomp and circumstance of millinery and upholstery, become Marchioness of Bardexter; Algernon Medway had become half imbecile; and Claude Medway was gradually losing heart, when one day an unexpected adventure befel him.

CHAPTER XII.

FLIGHT.

On the clear and sunny afternoon following the great thunderstorm, Jessie, palpitating with fear and shame, passion and despair, found herself flying past unfamiliar fields, strange towns and villages steeped in golden light, in the afternoon express to London—that city of marvel and splendor, whither gravitate the greatest thinkers and workers, whose streets are paved with gold and canopied with fame; Jessie, who had never travelled express before, or been twenty miles from her native steeple, and whose fresh heart had once thrilled at the very name of London.

But she cared little to-day whither she was flying, as long as it was away from the magnetism that must soon overpower both reason and principle, and from the disgrace that smirched her fair name. From both of these she fled, with unreflecting fear, seeking only to hide herself, and instinctively choosing the vast chaos of London as the most secure place of concealment. She thought it the best field for the exercise of the art by which in her simplicity she intended to live; but the main purpose in her choice of destination was concealment. Every pant of the engine tore some life out of her heart, every throb robbed her of hope and strength, since every turn of those rushing wheels bore her farther and farther from the one being to whom all her nature tended with irresistible force. But this flight was her only chance of salvation, as she knew by every pang tearing her weak heart. Had she remained, there was now nothing to save her but the strength of that weary, passion-strained young heart, to which she dared not trust.

For Jessie seriously believed herself to be ruined in the sight of the world; she supposed herself to have sinned conventionally, and thus to have incurred indelible disgrace. Had not Claude said so? Yet was her frail young spirit strong enough to resolve not to sin in reality, and thus incur disgrace in the sight of Heaven and of her own accusing soul,

those severest, most awful of judges. Thus she rushed blindly into exile from all that could ever make life sweet.

But though she had now crossed her Rubicon and burned her boats, she was still perpetually urged by an inward prompter to return, to give up honor and duty, soul and body to him who was dearer than all besides, whose words were celestial symphonies, whose glance was heaven, to renounce all and cling only to that sheltering embrace; even now she had but to write one word and be happy, beloved, sheltered for life. And he was wanting her! Poor deserted Claude! How base to leave him! How could anything here or hereafter weigh against his happiness? What would she not do for him? Purity!—what was that but another name for selfishness? Hers, yes! but his? no selfishness *there*; that thought was ever victorious when her heart was most cruelly wrung. Disgraced in the eyes of men! How that pain ate into her heart as she sped through the golden afternoon, with every fibre still quivering freshly with the passion of yesterday's meeting; but the disgrace was hers alone, it could not touch him; she was glad—not blaming him—never considering that he was the author of it. Disgraced! yes, but innocent. Claude's voice, his beautiful, love-thrilled voice, still rang in her ears, still swayed the tumult within her, the magic of his presence still enfolded her, his spirit blended with hers as she was borne past the flying stubble-fields, the glowing woodlands, the sunny downs. She saw the rushing champain steeped in the tender lustre of the autumnal day, red-roofed villages, fading moorlands, soft green pastures, reddening fern and browning heather, distant hills, mist-softened, all tempered by amethystine shadows, with an unseeing eye; her mental vision was filled with Claude's face traced on the dark background of the storm, roaring through the drenched woods. Claude's face, always beautiful, and now eloquent with passion. His words kept echoing in her ears—the philosophic theories, the reproaches, the tenderness, the anger, the sorrow, the pleading! Yet above all, like the voice of God above the tumult of the storm, boomed in deep rolling thunders, "Thou shalt not," silencing all else.

How terrible was this new and untried ocean of feeling, this strong clinging of soul to soul, this invincible necessity of annihilating self and merging one's being in that of another. She had never thought that womanhood was to be entered through this fiery baptism, she would fain have remained a child. How strange to think of hard-faced, common-place matrons she knew having drunk of this intoxicating cup.

Even Mrs. Plummer in this light acquired an aureole of far-off romance, strangely suited with her homely activities and russet preoccupations; had not she, too, once waited with a beating heart for the sound of a young footstep, in the twilight?

But Mrs. Plummer, on being gently sounded on this point, gave out no tender vibrations in response, and Jessie, seeking sympathy, turned to Sarah on that last night, when her faithful old friend sat by her bedside to bear her company after the storm.

"Yours was a long engagement, Sarah?" she said, with a tentative wistfulness.

"Matter o' vifteen year," she replied.

"All that time!" sighed Jessie's pure young voice; "but then you knew that he cared for you, Sarah?"

"Bless you! Wold chap dedn't care a straa," she returned, scornfully.

"Then why were you engaged?"

"Well! there. Hreckon a thought a med sowell hae me as ar a ooman. I was handy a Zundays."

"But didn't *you* care?"

"Nar a mossel," she replied, with cheerful indifference.

"Then *why* did you marry Abraham?" she asked, in tones not without rebuke.

"Wanted to bide long wi you. That why I hitched on to en, I reckon."

"Sarah, dear Sarah! How good you have always been to me!" Jessie cried, embracing her; "dear old Sarah, I would never leave you if I could possibly help it, indeed I would not."

To which Sarah replied, with a push and a pleased growl of "Goo on wi ye," but which she never forgot.

Travelling, like the celebrated bishop, third-class because there was no fourth, Jessie did not see two men travelling by first, the sight of either of whom might have altered her fate. So she sped on to her doom, sitting all alone in the bare, uncushioned compartment, boarded off like a cattle stall from the other divisions, by a partition too high for sight but not for sound. She could hear two men quarrelling in foul language, a child wailing, a woman hushing it, and quite near her seat, the clink of hand-cuffs on a prisoner travelling to the county jail in charge of two policemen. She seemed to have been flying on for ages deep, deep into the wide and pitiless world. Over dark stretches of fading heather they rushed in the sunset, the crimson lustre of which was

mirrored in black tarns; then the day faded, and the country became tame and monotonous; here were market-gardens robbed of their summer spoil; here squalid streets—was this London? No. They thundered on with shrieking whistle and increasing speed, now a crash and darkness close to her face, followed by continuous rattling and cracking as if all was over, till daylight reappeared and she saw the long serpent of a passing train winding away behind them in the dusk. Then a bewildering network of iron roads, across which many trains careered with mad speed toward each other. What subtle brain arranged their course through that intricate maze?

But what is this, looming dim, solemn, and majestic in the gray and misty sky, a sky so strange to Jessie, with its thick veil, through which golden lustre seems ever on the point to stream, a sky full of romance and poetic suggestion? Slender, unsubstantial, and mist-like as are those towers piercing the mist, she knows them well. This is London at last; there are the houses of Parliament; everywhere is the sparkle of innumerable lights in the faint twilight.

The magic city, the great heart of the nation's life, with its churches, palaces, and theatres, its storied buildings and holy places, its miles upon miles of stone-hearted streets, its millions of living, rejoicing, suffering human beings, lay before her at last; but she was too crushed and troubled to heed what would otherwise have filled her with vivid interest. The train thundered into the grim, great, dirty echoing station, and the stimulating sense of vastness which for a moment touched her at the first sight of the greatest city on earth, faded in that dreary place, the smoke and grime of which suggested the sunless prisons of hell, and which was large without grandeur, and gloomy without majesty. The noises were irritating, the strange cries confused her, the bustle and hurry bewildered.

Dizzy with the unaccustomed motion and smell of smoke and oil, tired and over-wrought, she stood on the pavement, jostled by hurrying passengers and their luggage, half-frightened by the hoarse shouts of "Now, miss," and "By'r leave there!" of porters clattering past her with laden trucks—not knowing what to do. Parents anxiously gathering their broods about them, grave but eager business men, fine ladies with their trains of maids and footmen, middle-class ladies with numerous parcels, well-to-do gentlemen followed by serviceable porters, all sorts of people, hurried by, claiming luggage, calling cabs, meeting and parting from friends. Jostled hither and thither by the crowd, she drew

aside beneath the dull yellow gaslight, and waited, alone at nightfall, without one friend in all the millions of that great city. She watched the passing tide of passengers, timidly seeking some friendly and less self-centred face to ask advice. Presently she selected a prosperous, jovial-faced fellow carrying a bag, but on addressing him, was met by a look that made her shrink back trembling. She next tried a kind, comfortable-looking matron all bags and shawls, who measured her all over with a look of cold, hard disapproval, and passed on by the side of her husband, who regarded her for a moment with blank indifference. A sense of her own helpless isolation and of the wide world's stony cruelty, weighed upon her under those chilling looks and filled her with despair.

Yet some paces further off among the crowd were two men, each of whom was thinking of her, and each of whom would have given his life to save her from her impending fate.

"Keb, miss?" asked a porter, looking with wonder at her fair, troubled face, when at last she ventured to follow the crowd and claim her box.

"I—I don't know," she faltered, "I am a stranger. I don't know where to go. Would you be so kind as to tell me of a suitable place—quiet and respectable—to go to for the night?"

He looked at her with many shades of expression, all merging in amazement.

"What? Don't you know where yer friends live?" he asked, at last.

"I—I have no friends in London," she replied, guiltily.

"Something wrong here," he said; "you're from the country, never been in town before, I'll wager."

"No; I am quite alone in the world and I should be so much obliged if you would tell me where to ask for a respectable lodging for the night," she replied, earnestly and with pleading eyes; "I am come to town to find work. I have not much money."

He looked at her long in silence, then shouldering her light box and bidding her follow him, he went to a third-class waiting-room, where he stopped and told her to wait half an hour.

He returned punctually at the appointed time and led her up many stairs and across several platforms, a long way, till they reached a first-class waiting-room, where he stopped and told her that the woman who was in attendance was respectable and clean, and would be glad to let her have a room in

her house for a moderate sum, providing she kept herself honest and respectable.

Then he took her to a dingy, thin-faced woman, who was making herself some tea with a furtive air and eating thick bread and butter stealthily.

"This is the young lady, Mrs. Barker," he said. "I must hook it now. The keb and box 'll be all right."

"It isn't much of a 'ouse for the likes of you, miss," said the woman, anxiously, "but it's clean and respectable. There's only me and my daughter, who does dressmakin' for a firm. Five shillings a week paid in advance is my terms, and a week's notice when leavin'. We takes in single men and does for them generally, but no objections to a respectable young woman as pays regular."

Jessie thought herself fortunate. Her whole capital consisted of thirteen pounds five shillings and sixpence; it had been acquired by selling two or three pictures at home, and would no doubt speedily be doubled and trebled by the same means in London; in the meantime it behoved her to be careful. She had to wait until Mrs. Barker left for the night, when the cab and box were brought by the friendly porter, whom she cordially thanked and bid good-night, offering her hand instead of money. The porter, though a family man and poor, preferred the hand and looked after the departing cab with interest. "A screw loose somewhere," he said to himself; "I'll keep a good look-out on the advertisements for a week or so."

So Jessie awoke next morning in a dingy, stuffy room in a back street of Westminster, to the beautiful music of the clock chimes, feeling as if all her previous life lay a century behind her and she had been transported to another age.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOST IN LONDON.

A fortnight later, Jessie, wan, wasted, and forlorn, paused with weary feet before Westminster Abbey, a grand gray mass in the dim sunshine filtering through the canopy of golden mist. She turned in at Poet's Corner to read the great names with some vague and solemn feeling of companionship, and was comforted by the quietness, when the door closed behind her and the great wave of roaring traffic surged away in a low hushed murmur, rolling very softly and soothingly among the dim shadowy arches.

The stillness, the subdued lights and mysterious shadows, the unaccountable rumbling echoes like silence audible, the perfect symmetry of those slender columns ascending with such rapid precision till they merged in the narrow-pointed vaultings far overheard; the long dim vistas suggestive of endless continuance, the multiplicity and accuracy of the perpendicular lines in this kind of architecture, a multiplicity which stimulates rather than confuses, the great antiquity and sanctity of the place and its manifold associations, all combined to calm and elevate her thoughts and refresh her jaded nerves. She had never seen a cathedral before, and the fascination of old Gothic architecture was strong enough to overpower the effect of those huge and hideous monuments blocking fine vistas and marring beautiful combinations.

Here, in the presence of entombed kings and warriors, saints and sages, the bitter present dwindled to its proper insignificance; she felt the continuity of national life, and the conviction that to-day is the final result of innumerable yesterdays impressed her, when her eyes rested on stones seen by eyes which turned to dust centuries ago, and hallowed by the prayers of long dead generations. She was glad to sit in a shadowed nook and let these larger thoughts and nerve impressions sink quietly into her, and so forget herself for a little while.

All that day, and nearly every day since her flight, she had wandered wearily, vainly seeking work, with an ever-sinking heart and ever-shrinking purse. She had ventured into the

National Gallery, and there seen that it must be long before she could grasp the elements of art ; she saw it with a heavy apathy foreign to her, for what is art to one who has no desire or hope not fatally bruised ? She had met with rebuffs, sneers—worst of all, that dreadful form of admiration which is insult.

Not only was all hope gone, but every illusion had faded from her ruined youth ; men had stones for hearts, the fairy city was paved with mud for gold. Never in her life had she seen such grime and squalor ; the smoke and fog polluted her very breath ; she could not open her ill-fitting window-sash without letting in a swarm of smuts to soil the close, dingy room she had cleansed with her own hands. Of the moral filth she had as yet caught but a few lurid glimpses.

Never was woman's heart more sick for home than Jessie's when she stole into the Abbey in the chill of that autumn afternoon ; the mere thought of a home face brought tears to her eyes, how much more that of the one human being whose soul was the soul of hers, and whose life was the spring of her own ! And those Marwell woods, partly suggested by these gray vistas of clustering pillars, woods whose green arches had rustled above their blissful meetings and vibrated into their spoken words. The things discussed there were always echoing through her memory, and opening up fresh reaches of thought in her silent solitude ; she was continually framing questions that could never be answered. Truly strange and terrible was this clinging of heart to heart, this deep longing that wasted her strength and consumed her like wax in flame ; this battle was indeed with burning and fuel of fire, fiercer than that of the warrior with its confused noise and garments rolled in blood.

She had eaten nothing that day since a scanty early breakfast, had spoken only to hard strangers who looked upon her with stony eyes ; she saw actual starvation before her. Then, while she sat kindled by the solemn beauty of the Abbey, and consumed by the eating pain of her soul, a spirit from the nether darkness flitted unseen to her ear with bland whisperings, asking her why she suffered and strove so far beyond her strength. For a narrow prejudice, for a word's sake, as Claude had told her. For this shadow of a punctilio she had left him who loved and needed her, lonely, wretched, perhaps bitter and reckless ; for this she had renounced the very life of life, a lot so fair and noble, so bright with unusual promise. She thought of the world's beauty, of noble historic scenes, of music and art in fair and ancient foreign cities, of mountain grandeur, castle-bordered rivers, legend-haunted forests, lovely

scenes in which they two might wander braced and elevated by holy passion and noble sympathy, all in all to each other, living a life of pure intellectual and emotional happiness, each supplementing the deficiencies and enhancing the gifts of the other, harming none and unrebuked. Was he missing her now with the same sick and stormy yearning that wasted her life? How dared she leave him? That one face was never quite absent from her thoughts, now rose vividly before her, its beauty enhanced, its passion sublimated, invisible arms were silently folded about her; she heard the music of the unforgotten voice whose lightest tone stirred her to the depths, her lips glowed with a remembered kiss. She no more considered the beauty of the dim long-drawn aisles, her marble-white, anguished face was buried in her quivering hands, while the dark spirit marshalled vision after vision before her, gazed reproachfully on her with Claude's eyes, and spoke in his voice.

The time drew on to evensong. The low, mellow thunders of organ music boomed in upon her tumultuous thoughts, she trembled to the beauty of that great sea of sound; never before had she heard such music, the solid masonry seemed to quiver at the shock of those rolling billows of harmony; such music must spring from some diviner source than mortals can conceive.

Now it seemed to accuse her. "Jessie, Jessie," it thundered, "what thoughts are these?" and she shuddered. Then a sweet spring of melody rose swiftly and lightly from the depths of harmony. "Lift up your hearts," it sang, but her heart sank like lead in the deep waters of earthly pain. "Jessie, this is God's house," it boomed, in majestic menace, "and such thoughts are the devil's thoughts." Yet the thoughts poured in more swiftly, and beads of sweat stood cold on her troubled brow. The soul of one mortal man drew hers with irresistible force to itself, and the strength of mighty angels was vain to save her. The organ storm died away in silver peace, but that in her heart raged. From her hidden nook she heard a mellow voice soaring upward. "I will arise and go to my Father," it chanted; but she could not follow that divine forerunner, the path of heaven was too steep for her, she was not made of stuff strong enough to fashion saints.

The mellow, hushed, chanting of the unseen choir began, wings of unseen angels were fluttered by its breath, but the dark spirits would not take flight. All the tender and deep emotions of a full and dual life, the clinging of children's arms, the light of their eyes, all the beauty and glory of life

were revealed to her, and at last she saw the man whose life hung upon hers, deserted, desperate, reckless. "I will go home, I will go to him," she said. "What does my life matter? He shall be happy. Heaven is only where he breathes." She raised her head and rested it against the stone pillar, listlessly hearing the chanting of the evening Psalms; never had she heard such sweet and soothing singing as this.

"Hold thee still in the Lord and wait patiently for him—fret not thyself." How beautiful the familiar words rang in the rich restrained music! "I myself beheld the ungodly in great power and flourishing like a green bay tree. Yet a little while and the wicked shall not be—I sought him, and he was not found."

Yes, the richest earthly happiness was but for a day, and then? Jessie could not do deliberate wrong, however she might err through frailty or ignorance, and what would wrong profit the soul that was dearer than her own? The singing went on, now softer, now stronger, like sea waves. "Put thou thy trust in God and be doing good, and He shall bring it to pass," the clear boy-voices sang, and before they ceased the dark spirit folded his wings and sank into the depths of the everlasting storm, peace stole into Jessie's torn heart, crowned and winged presences seemed to draw near her. The evening prayers sank healingly into her soul, tears fell softly over her pale and wasted young face.

Once more the organ storm broke forth in splendid tumult and the voices of the full choir pealed majestically through it. "The Lord is King, be the people never so impatient; he sitteth above the water flood, be the people never so unquiet." Then a lonely golden tenor voice complained, "The sorrows of death encompassed me, the overflowings of ungodliness made me afraid—the pains of hell gat hold of me," until once more the tumult of the full choir broke in with the refrain, "He sitteth above the water-flood, be the people never so unquiet." Then from those stormy depths of harmony rose a pure and happy boy-voice, "I waited for the Lord and he inclined unto me"—"He hath set my feet upon the rock"—"He hath put a new song into my mouth, and ordered all my goings," it sang in lucid melody, falling like a shower of light and melting finally into the triumphant, jubilant, multitudinous shout of the full choir, "The Lord is King."

Awed, soothed, uplifted in heart, Jessie sat still and listened to holy words and holy song, till the benediction sank into her heart, and the final strains of music died away. She was resolute now to keep on in the only path that seemed safe to

her, to seek her bread by painful toil, and failing that to starve, but never, never, sin. She remained in her tranquil nook until vast winged shadows gathered heavily in the aisles and the arched roof became a brooding darkness, when a verger stumbled upon her and bid her go, as it was time to close.

The lamps were lighted, they glittered in myriad starry points beneath the faintly luminous sky, which must have been bright behind its dim veil of mist when Jessie came into the frosty air and bent her steps to the squalid street where she lodged.

Months rolled on and brought the warm, bright summer days, and hope was almost dead in Claude's heart. He had long since given up haunting the shop in the Strand; but he still wandered in many of the streets, and saw many a terrible phase of London life. On wild nights he stood outside workhouse doors and scanned the ghastly faces of the hunger-stricken crowd waiting for admittance. He went about with missionaries and clergymen and made inquiries at hospitals and refuges. All sorts of stories were told of him. He was writing a book and gathering material in the streets, he had been converted, become a lay reader, a Bible man, an Outside Evangelist. He was going to stand for the borough of Cleeve, had turned Radical, and was collecting matter for social reform. He had become a Roman Catholic, had left the country and was preparing for the priesthood. He had originated a new secular religion and was busy propagating it. He had fallen into a state of melancholy that obliged him to live in seclusion and threatened madness. He had become a philanthropist, a Mormon. He had certainly vanished from his world, some inhabitants of which were now and then startled by the appearance of his ghost in the streets.

When the summer came he began to reappear in club-land, at Lady Bardexter's receptions, which were very magnificent, and here and there in the world that no doubt is gay and often magnificent. Meeting him was like seeing a ghost, yet there was nothing uncanny in him. He had always been charming, he was now more so, the old tact, courtesy, and grace seemed now to spring from a deeper source. His conversation was perhaps more finely pointed and many faceted but less frequently sharpened by malice. He was firmly convinced now that he should see Jessie no more.

And yet in those winter wanderings he had been very near her, once her dress had actually touched him. The day was wet, the Strand was a sea of umbrellas, and he was leaving the

corner print shop, in the window of which Jessie, white and hollow-eyed, was gazing, her face, now always veiled since its beauty had attracted so much notice, was further concealed by her dripping umbrella.

"Remember then," she heard in the well-known voice, "ten pounds for the address. But she is on no account to know who bought the picture." So saying as he turned back a moment after having set forth, he walked quickly away, his umbrella striking against hers. She stood rooted to the ground, fearing to betray herself by so much as a breath, holding the shaken umbrella with all her strength between them, while he made a hurried apology and went on. She blessed the rain, but for that they must have come face to face. She went no more to the shop in the Strand.

Mr. Ingleby had been told of the slight clue they had found, as well as of the certainty that Jessie had gone away of her own free will, and he had put Philip and Claude in communication with charitable and missionary institutions and referred them to places where young women are employed. And once being in town for a few days Mr. Ingleby had gone with Claude Medway to look at the body of an unknown young woman who had been found dead of want, and who was described as having blue eyes and abundance of fair hair, and the same height and age as Jessie. Entering the mortuary they saw a slight, shrouded form lying in the stony stillness of death, the outlines of the face were faintly visible under the white sheet, from beneath which flowed one long fair tress of curling hair.

Mr. Ingleby, pale and quivering, advanced in all reverence to the shrouded head, but Claude clutched his arm and drew him back with a sharp cry. "Wait, wait, wait!" he repeated in harsh and increasingly strident tones, pointing to the long, fair curls which he knew to be Jessie's.

"It must be done," Mr. Ingleby said at last. "Let me do it. Stand back."

"No, no," he replied with a dissonant laugh. "What, man? Afraid of a face? of a dead girl's face?" Striking him off he rushed forward, then stopped and trembled. Mr. Ingleby was afraid he would fall upon the quiet form, the repose of which was the more awe-inspiring in contrast with the living man's emotion. Twice he touched and twice dropped the corner of the sheet, and then with clenched teeth and rigid face he lifted it, slowly, solemnly, steadily, and folded it back on the icy breast. Mr. Ingleby watching him, turned sick and covered his face, he could bear to look no more. A dull rus-

tle and thud roused him, he looked up and saw Claude lying on the ground by the unveiled face.

Sharp with want and worn with suffering the young dead face was piteous enough in its marble immobility and marred comeliness, and yet Mr. Ingleby's heart throbbed with thankfulness at the sight of the unfamiliar features, waiting vainly for the recognition of a friend or kinsman, and mutely suggesting who could tell what prolonged and unspeakable agony. He gently replaced the cover with a silent prayer for the unfriended dead, and then helped the attendants to remove Claude and place him in the open air.

"She had a look," Claude said, when he revived and gazed into Mr. Ingleby's kind blue eyes, which were wet with something that did him no discredit, "she had a look—of Fanny."

Fanny's face had followed him ever since he had seen the account of her death and read the share "that young officer" had in it. Fanny's face, young and full of a mute, piteous appeal he had never seen in her days of innocent joy, her face as he imagined it after the last desperate act; and with Fanny's face came the thought of the awful army for the ranks of which he had qualified her. Night and day he was haunted by the misery, degradation, and far-reaching infection of that ghastly host. Faces that formerly he would pass without notice now compelled his earnest attention, faces beneath whose assumed reckless defiance he read secretly gnawing misery, beneath whose exaggerated boldness he saw the stinging consciousness of shame, beneath whose artificial bloom and hard smiles he detected the ceaseless canker of remorse. And to what end was this outcast host enrolled? Was it, as some moralists aver, the heavy price at which social decorum is purchased, a price paid by scapegoats who do not benefit by it? If so nature and society must be equally and unutterably cruel. Christianity must be a lie, and the whole accepted code of ethics false. Demand creates supply, and yet all the want, despair, misery, betrayed innocence, and occasional vice of the one sex is insufficient to supply the demand made by the vice of the other. Hence the impressment service of which he now began to know something, the snares of false advertisements, the accredited agents waiting to beguile young foreigners stepping ashore on either side of the Channel, with offers of respectable lodgings, false directions and false introductions, the deliberate shipping of girls from one country to another under false pretences, the incredible network of complicated villany, by which youth, childhood, innocence, and ignorance are entangled and destroyed and by

which Jessie's footsteps were so likely to have been snared. Yet the agony of this haunting terror was surely a just retribution. What if Jessie rose thus ensnared to confront him at the last?

“For if, as blindfold fates are tossed,
Through some one man this life be lost,
Shall soul not somehow pay for soul?”

Yes; soul must and will pay for soul.—

“At Judgment one of his own race,
As frail and lost as you, shall rise,
His daughter with his mother's eyes.”

To suffer one's self is bad, but to suffer vicariously in the persons of those most dear is the real torture.

At night, when wandering, as he now so frequently did, through places in which these things were most evident, the agony of such reflections became intolerable, and again more intolerable the perpetual question—why this misery? The answer came from his heart. For want of the true manliness of self-control, the true chivalry that scorns to take advantage of weakness. That dead girl whom he had feared to be Jessie, had been very hungry for many weeks, and yet she had robbed no rich baker of the crumbs that would have kept her alive. She starved rather than steal.

Brooding is madness. He could no longer bear the strain of these thoughts, which for a time were a necessity, thoughts which “make a goblin of the sun,” and having begun to reappear in society and given up all hope of finding Jessie in the chaotic mass of London humanity, he decided to seek healing in travel somewhere far from civilization, to begin a fresh life, with fresh aims and interests. For what profit was there in madness?

One scorching afternoon in July, after a day and night of rain, Claude Medway had been to Waterloo Station to see his mother off for Marwell Court, and walked back in the heat, partly from the force of the street wandering habits he had formed in the vain search for Jessie. The sun scorched as it does after rain, the streets were malodorous, no cab was in sight; he walked listlessly on, what Lady Gertrude had just said of Ethel, whose feeble strength seemed rapidly waning, filling his mind. Ethel was the most precious thing left him; he always found time to run down to Marwell and try to brighten her up, and her associations with lost Jessie had

given a fresh tenderness to his affections for her. And she was going.

Cool as the river looked from Westminster Bridge, it flashed back the sheets of sunshine so blindingly into his eyes that he turned them away to the pavement.

A policeman, slowly pacing the hot flags, was laying his hand heavily on the shoulder of a slight young woman, sitting half crouched in a recess of the parapet. Claude heard the stern "Move on" twice repeated before the woman rose very slowly, and moved on, dragging her limbs painfully.

Just as she turned at last to go, the blazing sunlight caught a coil of golden hair beneath her shabby bonnet; a momentary darkness came before Claude's eyes, the Parliament Houses spun wildly round, everything seemed inverted. A moment more and he was at the woman's side, crying, in a thrilling voice, "Jessie!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WESTMINSTER BRIDGE.

Sounds reached Jessie's numbed mind but slowly, muffled, faint, and far-off as voices from the past winding through the labyrinthine mazes of changing dreams. They mingled with the misty visions that kept rising and fusing themselves one with another in a soft, vague phantasmagoria, veiling the external world, blocking the avenues of sense, confounding time and place, the present and the past, here and elsewhere, in the perpetually shifting cloudland they wove round about her consciousness in many-colored iris-woof.

She seemed to be sitting, not at the end of Westminster Bridge, but at the corner of the bridge by the mill at home; she saw, not Westminster Palace, but the homely, hoary front of Stillbrooke Mill, with its carven date above the half-door, over which her father leant, looking out as ever with kind eyes on the world. The pigeons preened themselves in the sunshine, the swans glided majestically above the mirrored reflections they were contemplating with enamored glances. The far-off hum and near roar of London traffic was changed to the soothing rush of the stream and soft throb of the mill, the baffled waves were spurned from the turning wheel and the white feet of angels passed up the moving stair, shining wings floated upward and mingled with bright pinions such as to her fancy were always hovering about the dim spaces of the Abbey. Now the organ-music rolled its mellow thunder, and beautiful awful faces full of wonder and worship clustered round her in gracious throngs. The faces of father and mother mingled with them, and Philip's and Claude's. Then came that cry of "Jessie," so thrilling with passion and tenderness, sorrow and agony, pity and wonder, from a far, far distance, piercing the web of vision, and revealing the actual hard blank world once more. The policeman's stern "Move on," had only reached some outer gate of sensation, had influenced her body without changing the poise of her thoughts, but this "Jessie" touched the vital core of her heart.

“Claude,” she replied in a faint and shadowy voice, as the reality of his face, moved as she had never known it, grew upon her and chased the visionary shadows farther and farther from her brain. “Claude, here?”

The time for shrinking from him was gone by, it was now a pleasant and peaceful thing to be near him; she had fought her battle to the deadly end and feared nothing; she had passed beyond and above temptation, in the fierce furnace of suffering, the fire of which was still upon her.

“Oh! Jessie,” he cried, “like this!—I drove you to this.” She was instinctively moving on, and Claude with her, a singular pair in the broad, bright glare of the July sun, in the thick of the daily traffic. Worn and weather-stained as her clothing was, and in spite of her utter exhaustion, she had still an air of grace and refinement; her sharpened, wan, and hollow face was alight with a supernatural beauty, her large, purple-ringed eyes shone with an intense and spiritual brilliance. To Claude she seemed an accusing angel, embodied in the sweet semblance of the woman he loved, whose youth and beauty had kindled a deathless fire in his heart and wasted in its flame.

The sight of the passing crowds recalled him to a full sense of the situation, and an empty cab coming in sight, he hailed it, placed Jessie in it and got in himself. “When did you eat last?” he asked when the cab moved on.

“I don’t—remember,” she replied with an effort, “one morning—” she had now lost count of the days—“yes, it was in the morning.”

He had seen something of starvation, especially in his recent wanderings, and when Jessie spoke thus, he noted the waxen wanness of her face with an awful, awful fear. Was it *too late*? He could not think for the moment what to do; with a blind impulse he had told the driver to go to Dean’s Yard, where he stopped. “Can you walk a little?” he then asked; “as far as the cloisters?”

She had been walking three days and three nights to the grim, monotonous music of the policemen’s “Move on,” and it seemed ridiculous to be asked if she could walk a few yards farther.

Yet she could not remember how she got there when she found herself sitting in a corner by an open archway through which the air came freshly into the cool cloisters. She seemed to be alone for awhile; then Claude was there, again bending over her, giving her restoratives. Then things became clearer,

reality fastened itself more firmly upon her, she remembered all that had befallen her since she ran away from temptation.

She had sold one picture, only one. Then she found the address of a Royal Academician and presented herself at his studio to ask advice. From him she learnt that she might procure employment as a model, that her drawings showed marked talent, but that she could do nothing without years of study. She sat to him.

Then she went as a model from studio to studio for some weeks, until she found that there were incidents in such a life that she was unfitted to cope with, undesirable companions and associations, and that here, too, her fatal beauty exposed her to annoyances, alone as she was. Lucy Barker, her landlady's humpbacked daughter, put her in the way of obtaining a little needlework from time to time, else she had no means of earning bread. By pawning her few possessions she kept alive, she scarcely knew how; she would have given up her humble lodging but that the Barkers entreated her to stay, in their charity, till another lodger came. Then she fell into such straits that she was minded to write to Philip; but she knew she must die before a letter could reach India and be answered. She might have written to her other guardians, but her knowledge of Cousin Jane's inflexible condemnation of girls in false positions was heightened by the sight of a local paper in which her disappearance was commented upon in words that made her ears tingle. Mrs. Barker had relations near Cleeve who sometimes sent her a local paper, and she had lent this to Jessie. After this she was more careful than ever not to say whence she came. An orphan from the country, leaving the house of distant relations to fight for herself in London, was by no means an extraordinary phenomenon to the Barkers. But when at last the room was let Jessie wandered forth rather than prey upon their hard-working poverty, her last penny being gone. Then followed a time that she did not clearly remember, of wandering in the streets, of resting on seats in public gardens and parks, under archways, on doorsteps, day and night, in pouring rain and hot sun, and being continually moved on. The workhouse was for her too dreadful an alternative to be seriously contemplated. Once during this wandering she went into the Abbey, which had become to her a home and sanctuary, the solemn beauty, the music, and the chanted prayers of which had so often strengthened and refreshed her. She thought it would be pleasant to creep into some corner and die there. But a verger stopped her on the threshold and warned her

away; she looked too shabby and poverty-stricken to be respectable, and had been there already for some hours.

The varied horrors of that wandering she never told. She remembered them now as she sat in the cool cloister, revived a little by the nourishment Claude had procured, and listening to the mellow chanting of the evensong, softened by distance and inexpressibly soothing.

All the agony was ended now, and death coming in gentle guise, like the full, calm wave of a sunset sea, bearing her softly from the shore into the illimitable glory in the track of the sunken sun. She was very contrite, conscious of having made some vital mistake in this lonely wandering through the wide world, and yet she felt that she could not have done otherwise. By the infinite mercy of God she had passed scatheless through the perils of the great and wicked city. She was dimly conscious of celestial presences, glowing faces crowned and haloed, mingling with the music, but more keenly conscious of Claude's face in the centre of all, attuned in its solemnity and thankfulness to the rising surge of psalmody now breaking upon the rock-like pillars.

"Dearest," he said, when he saw a more conscious look in her hazed eyes, "you must be my wife now, I must not lose sight of you any more."

"Oh, no," she replied, "you gave your word to your father!"

"That is all changed. *She* is married. I am free. I have fortune now."

"Too late! But I am glad, oh! so glad, to see you once more. And you will tell Philip."

"Philip is in London, looking for you."

This, too, seemed quite natural, and as pleasant as it was natural. It was so refreshing to rest in the cool cloister with her head against one of the slender stone pilasters, to hear no more of the dreaded "Move on." A sort of victorious calm fell upon her with a strange and infinitely peaceful uplifting of soul; her struggles were ended, her warfare accomplished, there was to be no more sorrow or pain, nor any doubt or terror; she was in heaven.

A magnificent strain of triumphant music now rose from organ and choir as the anthem pealed its victorious harmony from within the Abbey, bearing her soul heavenward on its mighty pinions. The words were vague to her, but she saw the white-winged multitude, who came out of great tribulations, sweeping softly by with aureoles and palms. Then she slept.

Claude was near her now and they were at last one in soul ; no distracting duty could ever tear them apart, though different worlds might hold them for awhile.

Presently she was aware of two figures with surprised compassionate faces standing by him. Evensong was over and the organist filled the Abbey with exulting music.

“Jessie,” Claude was saying very gently, as if to a sick person, “these are my cousins, Canon and Mrs. Maynard. They wish you to go to their house close by.”

Very soon after this she was in a cool, pretty room lying in fragrant fresh linen, her weary aching head pillowed softly and her limbs at rest for the first time for many days and nights.

Philip was now stationed at Aldershot. He had not lost all hope of finding Jessie, and in his frequent runs to London tried to follow the inquiries he had begun. His father had of late become almost imbecile, and helpless in body. Philip went to see him now and then, and brought him dainties to eat and pictures to look at. They would play games or range masses of toy soldiers in battle array. The firing of toy cannon was the old man’s greatest joy. He was by no means a pleasant old child ; his temper was bad and his language worse. Sometimes he asked Philip who he was, and seemed bewildered when informed. He generally called Philip “Papa,” and always cried when he went away. The visit usually began by a woful tale of injury from the miserable old child ; his attendants had always been cruel, taken away his playthings, given him physic, tried to poison him, and he had threatened to tell his papa.

This piteous recital had been gone through one afternoon, they were engaged in a game of draughts, the young papa being careful to let the old son win, when a servant came in to say that Captain Medway was below and must see Philip at once, an announcement that drew execrations from the wretched old draught-player.

Philip for once was deaf to his dismal howls and went down-stairs without delay. He found Claude standing by the window, with an expression in his face that half awed him. “Is it—Jessie?” Philip gasped.

“She is found,” he replied, with a calm solemnity that struck cold to Philip’s heart.

“Not dead, oh, not dead!” he pleaded.

“No,” he replied with the same calm solemn sadness ; “but, oh, God!—starving.”

At this his calmness deserted him and he gave way to his grief.

Philip sat down and passed his handkerchief over his damp forehead. "Starving," he repeated in a dull way, "little Jessie starving!" and he thought of Matthew Meade's charity to himself, his daily bread, and all his careful up-bringing. "Starving! Little Jessie!"

Presently Claude mastered himself and spoke again. "Wandering in the streets," he said, in a voice of dreary anguish; "all night wandering homeless, told to move on. I found her in the street an hour since."

"Where? Where?" cried Philip, starting up. "I must go to her. Why lose a moment?" He grudged Claude the finding of her. He had given up so much, and travelled so far to seek and save her, and all in vain. Yet not quite in vain, since he set Claude on the track; it was given to Claude, who had caused the misery, to discover her; it seemed unjust. But Jessie was found; there was unutterable joy in that.

"She is safe, now," Claude replied; "housed and fed, in good hands." And having briefly told him the story, they started together for Westminster.

"I told them all," Claude said, as they drove along. "I said I would telegraph for you, and came here on the off chance of finding you. The marriage, with special license and consent of guardians, can take place in a few days. In the meantime, even if it were prudent to move her, she cannot be better placed than with the Maynards; they are unworldly, kind people. Her face touched them."

"The Maynards!" Philip remembered that Ada had once said that the Maynards were related to the Medways of Marwell Court.

"Yes, that is their name. They seemed to know all about you. Didn't you meet some of their people at Lucknow?"

Jessie was not to be disturbed or excited; but, if possible, to sleep. Philip was only permitted to look through a chink of the door and see the faint outline of her recumbent form and her golden hair streaming in bright waves over the pillow, and the sight satisfied him for the time.

"We will take great care of your ward, Captain Randal," said a woman's voice behind him, as a hand was laid on his arm to draw him away and the door was softly closed. "Rest and nourishment are all she needs, our doctor says."

He turned and saw an elderly lady with bright gray hair, kind eyes, and a very gentle manner; it was the childless

wife of Canon Maynard. "It is refreshing to have anything so young and beautiful in our house," she added, "and romantically interesting," she thought. But Philip said they had no right to invade her house in this manner, and spoke of moving Jessie as soon as possible.

"We owe much to you," she replied. "You rescued one as young as this dear child and in even greater peril—our dear niece Ada. We were at Windsor when you were decorated, and took care to write and describe the ceremony to the Lionel Maynards. They had told us how you won the Cross. From what I hear I think that a nobler cross has been won by one now beneath our roof. Both of you are with friends, remember."

He silently bowed over the lady's hand and kissed it. Then he remembered that Ada Maynard had spoken of visits to relations in a pleasant house beneath the shadow of the Abbey.

Two days later he found himself there again, in an upper room, through the flower-garnished open window of which the street sounds came softened, mingled sometimes with the faint boom of organ music, and dominated by the sweet cadence of the palace chimes.

It was not long before the door opened, and there entered, not the little Jessie of his remembrance, the pale child who clung so tearfully to him at the station when they parted, but a tall figure, slender almost to emaciation, yet of a perfect grace. The shining masses of her sunny hair were gathered back in a ribbon, she was clad in white floating draperies, there was a light in her deep violet eyes and a radiance in her flushed though thin face, together with a dignity in her bearing quite new to him. Yet Jessie was quivering inwardly, half-awed by the brown-faced, dark-eyed man who seemed so much older, graver, and more imposing than the half-wayward lad who cried so bitterly at their parents' death. The memory of the storm he had passed through seemed graven on his face. She remembered, when she looked at him, that he had won the Victoria Cross.

Each had much to forgive and be forgiven, they called to mind in that first glance; but by the time the door had closed behind her, Jessie was once more the little sister he had loved and protected all his life, and Philip the strong kind brother she had looked up to and loved, and both felt the strength of the tie between them as one that neither time nor circumstances could ever break.

"Jessie, Jessie! my poor kitten!" Philip cried, taking the

thin face in his hands, after they had been together for a little while, "why didn't you tell me all from the first? This should never have happened. If I had but known."

She did not reply. Her golden head drooped upon his shoulder, where she rested like a tired child, her eyes veiled by their downward drooping fringes, her features calm with an ineffable repose. The bright momentary flush had faded from her cheek, leaving it marble pale, and there were violet shadows about her beautiful mouth that told a terrible tale and caused an icy fear to creep about his heart.

"You were so far away," sighed Jessie, after some time, "and I could not make you understand."

CHAPTER XV.

AT REST.

A week after the finding of Jessie there was a marriage in a London church, in the presence of Sir Arthur Medway, and Jim, and Canon and Mrs. Medway. No eloquence could prevail upon Cousin Jane to appear at her ward's marriage. The proceedings, she averred, were not in accordance with Woodways; her needful consent, with that of Mr. Cheeseman, was most reluctantly given. A tall, thickly-veiled lady saw the wedding from a gallery. As the ceremony went on the veil was incautiously raised, and the bridegroom, looking up at a very solemn moment, was startled to see in the passion-pale face the well-known features of the Marchioness of Bardexter. When the names were being signed in the vestry, Jessie turned to Mr. Ingleby, drew his face down, and kissed him. "Good-by," she said, "you have been a good friend. I shall never forget your kindness, or Miss Ingleby's; please give my love to her."

"And the unkindness, Jessie?" he asked, in a voice inaudible to others.

"I remember none," she replied, smiling, "dear Miss Ingleby was always good to me. And if she ever showed displeasure, it was just, very just and right." On hearing which afterward Miss Ingleby burst into tears, to her brother's infinite surprise and satisfaction.

Philip stood on the church steps and watched the carriage which bore Claude and Jessie roll away; he was now alone in the world, and yet he was nearer to Jessie now than he had ever been before.

He went back to the Maynards, chiefly that he might have the opportunity of looking at a chalk drawing, which was a fair, though he thought, very unflattering and inadequate likeness of their niece, Ada. He was clever in leading up to references to "our niece, Ada," though he never mentioned her. This Mrs. Maynard thought singular, since anecdotes of every other member of the family, including the mongoose and the bear, were frequent. Perhaps it was a sense of jus-

tice that led Mrs. Maynard to supply this deficiency by many allusions to the neglected niece and continual dwelling upon her virtues and attractions, to which Philip listened with a polite forbearance that did him credit, and afforded some diversion to the kind-hearted lady.

Having written to Miss Maynard to tell her of his fruitless search for Jessie, and unexpected finding of a father in the course of that search, he considered that he ought now to inform her of the marriage, a duty that was all the more easy, if not more pleasant, because of the impassable barrier that fatal father of his had placed between them. The world seemed less empty when his conscience had warned him of this duty, and he had resolved to perform it, and he by no means slighted the dishes upon the Maynard's luncheon table, or failed to laugh at the Canon's gentle jokes. He was thinking of some people sitting at tiffin under a punkah in a large Indian room, with windows and doors shut to keep out the blazing heat, and wondering if one of them was growing pale with the hot weather, and if she could muster appetite for anything more solid than a watermelon. That eligible civilian was not in the habit of dropping in for tiffin, he remembered with a certain pleasure.

"Oh, but I must go now, Mrs. Maynard," he said, more than an hour later, for about the fifth time, and using the name for pure love of its sound and associations, "I promised to meet Sir Arthur Medway on business at four."

This meeting was to take place at his father's chambers, whither he repaired quickly on leaving the Maynards'. On his way he drew a document from his pocket and read it carefully in the cab, taking notes as he read. It was no less an instrument than the last, the very last, will and testament of Sir Claude Medway, Baronet, properly drawn up in legal phraseology and handwriting and duly signed, sealed, and witnessed by competent witnesses. The existence of the will had of course been known, but as it was not forthcoming after Sir Claude's death it was supposed to have been repented of and destroyed by him. But during the legal arrangements consequent on Claude's marriage, a great rummaging of documents had taken place, and the missing will had turned up in the secret spring drawer of a desk that Sir Arthur had used almost daily at Marwell. On leaving the church after the marriage Sir Arthur handed it to Philip to read and return to him in the afternoon.

Philip found his father very low and fretful; nothing pleased him, the toy soldiers were thrown at people's heads,

the draught-board was flung aside with piteous howls, only the fruit he brought was tolerated. This was snatched and snarled over.

Philip sat down and looked on at this unlovely spectacle with a curious mixture of pity and disgust. How could this creature be his father? He felt no kinship with him; might there, after all, be some mistake? He could not trace the family likeness in the face before him, wherein the animal had effaced the spiritual, whence all fine lines and noble curves had disappeared. What had this face been in youth, he wondered, contrasting it with that of Sir Arthur. The twin brothers were scarcely sixty, younger than Matthew Meade at his death, but what a difference? Matthew's mind and Martha's, too, had wandered at the last, but how nobler! Their last words were never to be forgotten, though Jessie had now convinced him that the words of betrothal in her father's last joining of their hands ought never to have been taken literally. Never could he be grateful enough for Matthew and Martha Meade in place of this terrible parent.

It was a strange spectacle, he thought, a convicted criminal, one of society's failures. Yet what could society do more for any man than it had done for this one, a member of the criminal classes, but a favorite of fortune, bred in a refined home. Trained in the best schools of the country, breathing an atmosphere of culture from the cradle—whence came the moral taint?

Presently Sir Arthur arrived and stood beside his miserable brother, who did not recognize him, and only acknowledged his entrance by covering the fruit before him with his hand. Sir Arthur, a typical English gentleman, carrying his sixty years with easy grace, handsome, dignified, serene, though bearing the record of heavy sorrows on his face, was a striking contrast to the degraded husk of humanity beside him, whose identity had once been confused with his. The last action of the old man revolted Philip and his uncle to such an extent that each turned simultaneously from the sorry sight, and Philip rose and leant against the chimney-piece, beneath which a fire was burning, hot as the weather was, in deference to the old man's whim.

"What about this will?" Philip asked, abruptly, "is anyone but myself affected by it?"

Sir Arthur smiled pathetically. "The loss of Marwell Court and the lands pertaining to it in some slight measure affects myself and my children," he replied.

"I meant," Philip amended, "are the other provisions, lega-

cies, annuities, and so on, the same as in the earlier will which has been acted upon?"

"Quite the same, your grandfather's intention in this will was to restore you to your original position of heir of Marwell Court, nothing more."

"Marwell Court! Marwell!" muttered Algernon; "that's mine, I say, mine!"

"Have you shown this will to your lawyers?" Philip continued, not heeding the old man's babble.

"Not yet. I shall put it into their hands to-night. Claude has seen it, no one else, not even her ladyship!"

"And the executors are all dead, and the witnesses too?" continued, Philip, idly stirring the fire and making a great cavern in the heart of it.

"Yes, but there would be no difficulty in proving it. The lawyer who made it is still living. Give it into the hands of your own lawyers if you like."

"Who is the legal owner of a will?" he asked, enlarging his cavity in the fire.

"Upon my soul, Philip, that is a question that never occurred to me before," he replied. "I am no lawyer and cannot tell." He moved as he spoke and stood between Philip and his father, so that when Philip turned from the fire into which he had been gazing, he did not see the contortions of Algernon Medway's face in his vain attempts to speak.

"Possession is nine points of the law," he said, quickly drawing the paper from his pocket and plunging it into the burning cavity, where it was consumed almost immediately, being held down by the poker. "The will is therefore mine, Marwell Court yours in all justice. I was not bred to own property of this kind, and want it no more than I am fit for it. So that's done, we are as we were."

"How? What? Upon my honor!" exclaimed Sir Arthur. "Do you know what you have done?"

"Burnt the will," he replied, smiling at Sir Arthur's vain attempts to rescue the fluttering ash into which the paper had burnt.

"I think that you have committed a crime. I have some vague apprehension that this is felony," murmured his uncle, in a dazed way. "Marwell is yours by right. I always had some compunction about it, and now the will of heaven——"

"Has put an end to the doubt," returned Philip. "Uncle Arthur, I can claim no inheritance from *him*; it was as his son I was to have it. I will stand or fall on my own foundation."

He was interrupted by a sound, half groan, half cry. Sir Arthur started, turned, to see his brother, who was propped in a chair, fall forward upon the table in front of him. The conversation, touching as it did early memories, which are the last to die when mind dissolves, had roused him to thought to which he was unequal. When Philip lifted the sunken head he saw that his father was dead, and in the sudden rush of pain and pity that overcame him at the sight he knew that the miserable creature had been dear to him.

“Thank God!” gasped Sir Arthur; but he was moved too, seeing the old likeness to himself steal over the features as the stained soul’s impress left them and they settled into the calm majesty of death.

“I am not superstitious,” Claude said to Jessie, to whom he related the story afterward, “but I wish it had not happened on our wedding day!”

They were in Suffolk, in a very quiet out-of-the-way spot on the coast. Perfect quiet had been prescribed for Jessie, whose health was severely shaken by the long months of privation and mental suffering, and perfect quiet soon brought the color back to her face, and happiness filled her eyes with a soft radiance. Then they went up the Rhine to Switzerland, and here it became evident that she must rest to recover her lost strength. But she was not ill, Claude maintained, with pathetic insistence, she did not even suffer pain; all the doctors pronounced her free from organic disease, and suffering only from nervous exhaustion. Then she took a chill and was laid up with some lung trouble, from which she soon rallied. Still a warm climate was advised for the winter, and that gave a delightful opportunity of entering the Holy Land of art, the Italy for which Jessie longed, and which she could not enter till the autumn because of the storm of war then sweeping over it.

Even after Solferino Claude had not considered it safe to travel, but the peace of Zurich brought such a lull in the tempest that was to wake again later and purge Italy of foes and false friends, and set her up among the nations, that they went to the Riviera, meaning to go on to Africa in case of disquiet in Italy. So Jessie at last looked upon the Mediterranean, that beautiful sea whose waters are an inverted and intensified heaven, whose islands are paradises, whose shores are fragrant with the most precious associations of history and literature.

Here she might sit for long hours in the sunshine, breath-

ing balmiest air, sweet with flower scents, listening to the music of Claude's voice as he read or talked, or telling him the things she saw as she looked upon the tideless sea, gay with ruddy-brown lateen sails and crossed by great ships from many lands. She saw Phœnician traders and Roman galleys float upon the sunny sea westward, crusaders sailing eastward, rich merchant ships from Genoa and Venice, pirates and slavers from Africa, the bark wrecked upon the island of Melita, a strange and motley procession. She saw the heroes sailing to Troy, and Ulysses returning after many years to his island home, unhurt by sirens, sea monsters, sea perils, or barbarous outlandish peoples. Then she saw him finally sailing westward in the track of the sinking sun, away, away to the mystic, unknown, happy Islands. This vision had the greatest charm for her. Perhaps she loved those old Greek heroes so much because Claude had introduced them to her through well-chosen translations which he read aloud.

"Some day you might paint the last voyage of Ulysses," he said to her, but Jessie made no reply; she seemed too languid to paint, and only once roused herself to sketch the view from their windows, blue sea with a mountainous promontory running into it in the distance, a solemn olive-grove in the middle distance, a lofty stone pine in the foreground, its broad flat crest traced upon the dark blue sea.

There was much speculation in the neighborhood of Marwell as to whether Mrs. Medway would venture to appear at Marwell Court; if people would call upon her; how the awkwardness of the Redwoods connection would be got over, whether she would have the audacity to be presented next spring. Or rather, would Captain Medway be foolish enough to risk a refusal? For how could a runaway like Jessie be tolerated at an immaculate court? Thus the local mind was distracted by pleasing doubt.

But though Jessie had not been to Marwell, Lady Gertrude, with pious resignation to the inevitable, had visited her daughter-in-law, in whose face she had read something which in some measure consoled her for the irreparable disaster of the marriage, and the two ladies corresponded, and there was further some question of sending Ethel out to be near them for the winter.

But early in December, Jessie became very anxious for Philip to join them, and he accordingly got a month's leave and came.

The afternoon of his arrival was a very happy one. The sky was clear, the warm sunshine brought out the rich tints

of the mountain wall which sheltered them from the winter winds, and Jessie, who was sitting in a sunny nook of the garden, caught sight of him in the distance and came smiling down the vine-trellised walk to meet and welcome him. She moved with such grace, held herself so well, her color was so vivid, and her eyes so full of light, that Philip could not think of her as an invalid, and bantered her as a malingerer. She laughed like a child as she led him to her sunny nook, where the three sat and chatted till the early winter sunset was imminent, and they went in to a welcome wood fire. There they spoke of death incidentally, and Philip said how intensely he hated it and how much he longed to live and act. But Jessie thought it would be pleasant to "cease upon the midnight with no pain." "Life was so very tiring," she added.

"Oh, Jessie!" Claude cried with sudden sharpness; "how cruel! How could you leave me?"

She burst into tears. "I cannot," she replied, "I cannot. That makes it so hard."

"Jessie is a little morbid, Philip," her husband said, apologetically; "she has had a tiring day, else she would not talk like this. It is only hysteria," he added, with a quiver in his voice which went to Philip's heart.

Next morning Jessie did not leave her room; she had had a bad night and was tired. It was nothing unusual, Claude added, cheerfully. Philip was very much disturbed by the intelligence, and set out happily for a long mountain walk, returning early in the afternoon to find her up and ready to talk to him.

They sat by the sunny open window in the salon and talked again, Jessie in an easy chair, languid but cheerful. Claude walked up and down in the flower-garden outside to have a cigar, and looked in upon them from time to time, and smiled to hear them talking of their father and mother, and recalling long-forgotten incidents of their childhood.

"I am so glad you came, Phil," Jessie said, with a sigh of intense happiness, "I could never fully enjoy anything without you."

Then Claude finished his cigar and joined them, and they laughed over Sarah's refusal of the income that had been offered her and Abraham. She couldn't do without a dairy, and was sure Abraham would go silly with nothing to do but look forward to dinner time, she averred; besides she knew that no one else could do properly for Mrs. Plummer, or put up with her tongue. Then they talked of the Italian crisis,

of Garibaldi's attempts to stir up the cities, and of the great hopes that were throbbing at the nation's great heart. That led on to the war just ended, thence to the Mutiny and the Crimea, and war in the abstract, and finally to the hope of ultimate peace as the consummation to which all these tragic wars might be tending.

In the meantime the beautiful prospect with its accurate level line sharply dividing sky from sea, with its purple-shadowed mountain spur, its hoary olive and gleaming orange-gardens glowed in the warm light before them, dainty rose scents and heavier tuberose and narcissus perfumes stole in on the sunny air, bees hummed about the flowers, the voices and laughter of the people passing in the road sounded pleasantly, the low murmur of the sea went on in hushed moments when silence fell upon the three, and the sun went down in great glory, in a splendor that filled them with awe. The dusk, lighted by the hearth-light, was pleasant too. Claude drew closer to Jessie, who gradually became silent. A full moon rose and threw its silver glory upon the peaceful waves, the two men talked on in low voices on large, lofty subjects. Jessie's head slipped from the easy chair to Claude's shoulder; Philip saw it in the white moonlight. "She is asleep," he said, and stole softly away, noiselessly replenishing the sinking fire as he went.

He had just closed the door when a sharp, quick cry from within called him back, to see Claude bending over Jessie's drooping head and pale sweet face, with blank despair written on his own.

"She is gone," he said, with the tragic solemnity of a grief beyond expression.

Philip stood by him in the white moonlight, half dazed, incredible. But there was no mistaking the helpless droop of the lightly set head, or the unutterable peace of the beautiful face. The blue eyes would no more look tenderly in theirs, or the sweet lips smile upon them again.

One might have thought the clear moon was shining on a group of sculpture, the two men gazed so silently and immovably upon the figure that rested in such unbreaking repose before them.

CHAPTER XVI.

BEREAVAL.

It was not long before Philip found some relief in an outburst of grief, but Claude remained calm. He knew in that moment of exceeding anguish that he had long known hope to be dead, sudden and unexpected though the end was. The seeds of death, he well knew, as Jessie did, though neither of them dared confess it, and though the doctors only hinted at danger, had been sown in that winter of privation and mental pain, fostered by those final days and nights of wandering in London. He knew it and accepted the inevitable doom, with the awful, acquiescent grief which is "a solemn scorn of ills."

"I am glad that you came," he said, gently, even tenderly, as he led Philip from the chamber that had suddenly become a sanctuary; "she was so fond of you. She will hunger no more," he added, gliding unconsciously into Biblical phrase, "neither will she suffer any more pain."

He came with a bleeding heart to look upon the woman he had slain, when she was arrayed for the last chill, solemn bridals. He thought of what he had done to blast the sweet flower before him, and of what might have been for one so young, so lovely, and so highly gifted, if he had never crossed her path. Strange, very strange, and terrible, even incredible, it was that those beautiful lips did not part, as sometimes he felt they must, to answer the agonizing thoughts of his heart; that the fringed eyelids did not open when he was so near and so sorely needing the deep love-light darkened forever in the veiled blue eyes. That she should be wrapped in that shroud of chill, unbreaking silence was so awful, so intolerable—yes, and so *just*; for it was his own work.

When he entered the darkened salon, the room which but yesterday was bright with her living presence, and in which she now lay pale in her white draperies among white roses and orange-blossom, he placed a palm-leaf in the clasped white hands, not touching them. When he looked upon the soft repose of the sweet face, he could not believe that she

was really dead ; a slight droop of her golden head gave her such a life-like air ; she seemed to smile as if welcoming him : he was moved to kiss her. It was not so much that the lips gave no response to the passionate pressure, as it was the icy, soul-penetrating chill that startled him to a short, sharp cry and made him shudder away from the quiet, unheeding form. That indeed was the sharpness of death, the intolerable sting of it, that icy immovable indifference, that awful impenetrable calm in lips so lately warm with a young wife's passion and eloquent with pure deep feeling and noble thought. If she could but speak one word, one last word of forgiveness ! He could not remember the very last word she had spoken, he could only recall the gentle tenor of her conversation in those golden hours, and the occasional low, sweet, happy laughter, the delight in the beauty that "almost makes one afraid," as she said of the sunset. The still and solemn beauty of the once mobile features awed him ; the pity of it smote to his heart ; such high majesty was so unnatural in a face so young, a face made to be bright with love and laughter, radiant with health and joy. He thought he saw some trace of her mortal anguish beneath the serene peace she wore, a faint memory fraught with such pathos as belongs to instruments of martyrdom in pictures of beatified saints. Jessie had indeed won the palm lying green upon her breast.

She had fully forgiven, though she could never more tell him so. God had forgiven too. But that could not restore life and health to her, no penitence would bring the light back to her darkened eyes, no regrets could blot out the suffering of those lonely months in London. "If I could atone !" he groaned ; "Jessie, Jessie ! you know that I would have died for you !" But he could not ; nor could he atone for the waste of this sweet young life or that of another he never forgot ; all his life would be penance, the penance of blank desolation ; nothing could undo the past.

It is true that a sweet and awful sense of some divinely, eternally purposed atonement, bringing light out of all earth's darkness, brooded dove-like on the stormy waters of his conscience, but even that could not restore the beautiful hours of golden youth, the achievements of rare talent life held in store for her, till he came and shattered the crystal vase of promise which held them. "Jessie," he cried, "it was I who killed you." The orange-blossom was beginning to droop, some white leaves fell as if moved by his anguish from the roses in her white hands ; but the breast on which they fluttered was not grieved, the soft rise and fall of it was at an

end. Hard, hard it was that she should suffer for him ; his heart rose against the injustice, he did not feel that being one they must share both ill and good. Everywhere he saw the innocent suffering for the guilty ; he saw Fanny in her death agony—when did he not see Fanny ? he saw the martyred innocents entrapped to vice in great cities ; he saw Philip an outcast in his babyhood, rescued from beggary by a poor man's charity, branded with a life-long stigma, and abhorring his own gentle name ; and a faint vision of the oneness of the human race began to gleam upon him, with some feeling of the horrible fruitfulness of evil, and the ineffaceable nature of human conduct. Yet Jessie did not suffer ; one glance at the deep and awed repose in the sweet face rebuked such a thought.

“The wonder was not yet quite gone
From that still look of hers.”

Her soul was taking deep draughts of vital joy from the still waters of Paradise. She had been guarded that she should not take too much hurt from him ; mercy had been about her path. Yes, and about his path too. Those last few months, every moment of them more precious than water to the dying in the desert, had been permitted him ; he could never forget their most beautiful and intimate converse, their walking in the house of God together ; to have known her was alone a regeneration, much less to have loved her. And what had he been before he saw her ? He was no more the selfish, good-natured, low-thoughted man of the world who saw Jessie in her unshadowed youth and beauty beneath the oaken boughs on that bright April day not two years gone. She had given him a soul, restored him to his real, that is, his best self. What ought he to do to live a higher life ? What would she wish him to do ?

We have but one youth, one chance of keeping unspotted from the world, and thus making head against the powers of darkness banded against us ; we can never regain a spotless past, or undo the countless evil influences we spread about us in an ill-spent youth ; never unsay the cynicisms of other days, or uproot the seed that has sprung up and borne fruit in a thousand unknown fields. The mass of men can only fight negatively in the ranks of the children of light, by ruling their lives well ; Savonarolas, St. Francis, Isaias are very rare ; on the whole, the most valuable deeds of mankind are negative.

But his after-life was noble, though flowing in obscure channels, with silent beneficence, and health-diffusing purity. And who may measure the leavening power of one life attuned to high ideals?

"I can never be happy any more, dear," he said, addressing her, as if her pale and silent presence were still vital; "but I shall bless the day on which I first saw you, as long as I live."

A white rose-bud moved from her hair, borne down by its own weight; things she had said seemed to repeat themselves in the still air which had been so lately vibrant with the tones of her voice and the low music of her laughter. "Claude, Claude," he almost heard her say as she so often did on waking from fitful sleep, "are you really there? is it no dream?"

"Ma mie," he replied once, but his voice sounded hollow and strange, charged as it was with tender passion, and echoed dyingly through the silent room; where, oh! where was that which had once thrilled in response to his lightest whisper? "Can my love never reach you *there*?" It seemed impossible that the adored voice had no power to break the lofty calm of her stillness; "will they shut me out for ever from the holy place, *ma mie, ma mie*?"

Outside the house, the sunshine, which was to have healed her, lay with caressing warmth on the dark rich sea, the purple-shadowed mountains, the orange and lemon groves, the olives and aloes, the garden she had loved and made lovelier by her presence. The brief hours rolled by and the sun reached the zenith. Then Philip came and took him away for the final rites, surprised to find him calm and reasonable, and able to speak of her as if she were still with them.

"She was gifted, such an artist, Philip," he said that evening, when the earth had closed over her; "and no one could look in her face without being the better for it."

Then he showed him a paper in her handwriting, a list of small gifts of toys and souvenirs of the places she had seen in this first foreign tour, for each of her friends, including a porcelain pipe for Abraham, with a message to each friend, dated a week back, and showing that she knew how near her end was. There was also a sealed separate packet for Philip and one for her husband, to be opened a week after her death, as if she had pictured the increasing ache of bereavement that would come to each of them after the first shock had gone by, and thus tried to comfort them.

Then a very noble and tender friendship, which had already taken root, grew up and blossomed between Claude and

Philip in this common bereavement, which drew them together all the more because they shared the loss with no one in any great degree. Each could speak of Jessie to the other and to no one else, each had been loved by her and had known her as no one else had done, each had in a different degree wronged her and been forgiven. She was a life-long bond between them, cementing a friendship that never faltered in all the years to come.

When the death tidings reached Marwell Court they excited mixed feelings in different breasts: Lady Gertrude was sufficiently shocked by the suddenness, and touched by the pity of Jessie's early death, to be able to cry with the utmost propriety, though firmly convinced that nothing better could possibly have occurred. Sir Arthur in his secret heart felt that it was well, but Jessie's young pathetic beauty and singular charm had from the first cast a spell upon him; he could not forget her parting kiss or the clinging of her arms round his neck.

Even Jim Medway hurriedly left the room on hearing the telegram read, and when he appeared again, he said that it would make a great change in Hugh's prospects. "Claude will be awfully cut up, but won't say much," he added, "only you'll see that he'll never marry again," which was true.

"I never did hold with these here telegrams," Mr. Plummer said. "There's trouble enough with bad harvests and war taxes and low prices without making ill news fly faster than natural; which the Lord knows is too fast by long odds."

"I always did say that Matthew Meade would live to repent bringing her up as he did," Cousin Jane complained to her pocket handkerchief. "Nobody can't say I didn't warn him," she added with a sob.

"But he didn't live, you foolish woman!" growled her husband, grieved to the extent of contradicting.

"How ever anybody could expect him to live, with information in his chest and mustard poultices, and me sitting up all night with him?" she retorted.

"Ah, to be sure, I reckon that was enough to kill any man without any information in his chest," her husband returned, grimly. "Well, there! the best goes first!"

"Who'd ever have thought Nat would take on like that?" Cousin Jane thought to herself when he went out of the room, angrily banging the door, "and he without a drop of Wood blood in him. But Plummer always had a feeling heart; I've always said that for him, for all he's that aggravating to live with. And her ways was taking, and men never thinks a

pretty face can go wrong—without they marry one, and then they find out fast enough. Well! there! I was fullish over the child myself, and cried for her when she run away, as though she a been a sister's child at least. To be sure, it was providential I thought the plum-colored silk would fly and bought the black instead, and some say bugles are worn. She died a baronet's daughter-in-law, when all's said and done, and nobody can say I don't know what's right to wear for cousins. What are we but worms? The merino'll turn for work adays; it's a pity I can't give the crape another wear, but Sir Arthur might think it a liberty. The deaths I've seen! Plummer's of a full habit and hot-tempered, he may go off any day. There's a poor few left besides to wear crape for, dear, dear, and Jessie not nineteen! We mustn't run out again the ways of Providence. I'm sure there's mercies enough with me spared from day to day, that might go off any minute."

Roger said nothing; he went on into the empty cow stable, and leant against the loft ladder with his hands in his pockets and his eyes fixed on the straw-litter, which was touched by a bar of frosty sunshine, for an hour. Once or twice he drew the back of his hand across his eyes, but no one ever knew what his thoughts were.

Sarah sat down in the midst of her work by the kitchen fire with her apron over her head. After a while, she removed the apron and went into the dairy and scrubbed her pans and pails, pausing occasionally to dash away the tears which bedewed her labors. A cat lapped cream before her eyes, and on being discovered was quietly removed and turned out of doors without rebuke. Sarah would never more take such pride in the whiteness of her wooden pails and the lustre of their steel bands. There would be less pleasure in giving Mr. Plummer full change for her verbal coin, or detecting "the girl" in innumerable delinquencies; and when the pleasant spring days came again there would be less music in the singing of birds and a loss of sweetness in the flowers.

"Poor missie's gone, Abram," she sighed, when her husband came clattering heavily in over the flags, a pail of freezing water in each hand.

He set down the pails with a clash, "Gone dead?" he asked, after a time.

"Gone dead. 'Twas a hrapid decline."

He took up his pails again after another long and silent pause and set them in their place. Then he removed the yoke

from his shoulders and stumped heavily out of the dairy without a word to his wife.

“Wold master and missus was terble zet on she,” he muttered to himself.

He went into the barn, took up his flail and began to thresh. But he grasped the handsel in a half-hearted way and brought down the zwingel without his usual dash, thinking, in a dim sort of way, that sunshine would never again have the old pleasant warmth or a cup of mild ale the old savor and cheer.

“Terble set on she,” he repeated, after half-an-hour’s steady thud, thud of the flail.

So it was all over. And a few days after the funeral, Philip turned away from the new grave in the English cemetery and walked slowly out into the sunny road with a full heart and dim eyes. He leant on a low stone-wall, in the crannies of which sweet violets were blooming and near which bees hummed contentedly about a bush of white heather, and gazed out over the orange and olive groves and oriental aloes and carobs, upon the sunlit sea.

He was almost sorry and yet he was glad that Jessie had not known what he lost by coming home to her. She could never know now what now, he had not fully known till now, himself, how very dear she had been and what a terrible blank she left in his life. And how should he answer to Matthew Meade for that fresh, unturfed grave? He had been loyal to the letter of that dying charge, but not to its spirit. He ought to have given more heed to her letters and seen the true meaning of her discontent; it was partly stupidity, but more prejudice, the invincible prejudice of those cut and dried arbitrary conventions that men have invented concerning women. He had never thought of Jessie as a reasoning being with passions and spiritual needs, and a distinct mould of character of her own, but as a tender, unreasoning, clinging thing to be moulded to his own form at will. “And now my house was left unto him desolate,” he thought, looking over the sea with a deep intent gaze, as one who is questioning the hidden future.

He would be alone all his life; even if he could forget Ada, he would ask no woman to share the stigma on his birth. Ada, of course, would marry; and in the years to come he might know her and become her friend. Her children might even learn to cling about him; she would teach them to respect him as a man who stood or fell by his own strength, and scorned to climb by any ignoble way.

His heart was full of Ada, as indeed it always was ; his thoughts fluttered away from sad retrospect, as they were wont to rest in the unforgotten charm of her presence. If a peasant girl stepped gracefully down the hillside with her basket of olive-roots poised lightly upon her head, something in the proud carriage of the head, some lustre in the girl's dark eyes, a stray sunbeam on the rippling darkness of her hair, any touch of beauty was as an echo or reflection from Ada. He pictured her on the sea-ward slope beneath the solemn olives below, delighting in the soft sunny beauty of the Italian winter and loving the clear brilliance of the blue sea, till it would have been no surprise to hear her speak, a breathing reality and no dream.

The sun was sinking toward the vast breadth of soft blueness, rose-hued cloudlets were fluttering like winged angels in the glowing orange sky ; he turned, the better to see the splendor, and there, coming out of the sunset glory toward him, was Ada herself.

CHAPTER XVII.

SUNSET.

The sunset splendors glowed behind her, she appeared to be descending toward him out of the very heart of the western glory as she had come to him first from the heart of the war-storm ; she came with firm, light steps over a path of incandescent gold, with the accustomed proud poise of the head, her face shadowed by the contrast with the glow behind and around her, her dark eyes full of light ; his face was turned to the glory whence she came, it seemed made of light, doubly transfigured by the setting sun, and the vivid joy that flashed through him at the sweet apparition. In a moment he had met her, taken her hands and was standing speechless face to face with her. Both hearts beat quickly, but there was no surprise in Ada's face.

“ You did not expect to meet me ? ” she asked, after a little pause.

“ No ; I never expect to meet you ; but when things are bad, when the storm is at the worst, you always appear, an angel of comfort.”

“ A loyal friend, I hope,” she replied, gently ; “ the first time we were dancing, and the news of your mother's fatal illness came——”

“ Yes, but you were my comfort, even then. And now——”

“ I wish I could comfort you now. We arrived two days before. I am with an aunt whose lungs are weak. You know——perhaps you didn't know ? We came home in the autumn. Father has retired. Yes, we actually saw her—how lovely she was ! strolling in the garden. Oh ! it must have been such a shock, though, of course, you knew there was no hope.”

“ And now you are here, it is like a sudden glimpse of heaven in the darkness. This will be a memory for life,” he replied, at last leaving hold of her hands, and turning to walk slowly on her way with her, so that the sunset was all behind them, and the mountain spur curving out round the broad bay wore a garment of glory, its bare, time-worn summit was transmuted

to burning gold against the lucid sky. "But is it really your living self?" he added. "To come so suddenly, and at the very critical moment."

"And now tell me all you wish to tell about this sorrowful business, dear Philip. What of poor Captain Medway? and what are you meaning to do?"

"We go to England to-morrow. How well timed this meeting is! Yet, I ought not to see you, I suppose; though I know that you must have forgotten by this time any—kinder—any feelings——"

"Women, of course, have no constancy, no depth; they can turn on the feelings expected of them at any moment," she answered, with a kind of plaintive disdain. "No doubt it is very improper, but I have not forgotten, I never shall."

"Ah! but you must, you will," he cried; "you must help me to do my duty as once before."

"Did I help you?" she asked, in a very soft, low voice. "I think you did not need much helping."

"You made it easier," he returned. "It was hard."

She made no rejoinder, her lips were quivering. The soft deep lustre of her eyes was bent upon his averted head; she kept back her tears with an effort. The sun was lower now, its changing glory clothed both figures with a rosy radiance; in the silence the low caressing murmur of the quiet sea was heard from the beach below.

They had reached a clump of olive-trees, the gnarled gray roots of which made a favorite way-side seat, and the massive trunks of which, slightly shadowed by the thin dark foliage looked like rudely hewn stone pillars. Here Philip proposed that they should sit a while. "For we cannot part like this," he added. "No life must ever be mingled with mine. All my life I must be lonely."

"Why?" Ada asked. "Philip, you are morbid. You have suffered; your feeling for honor is keen; you are over-sensitive. I know all; surely it is for me to decide."

"You have a noble heart, a most princely nature. But I should indeed be a mean cur to take advantage of your generosity and unselfishness."

"No, not generosity, not unselfishness," she interposed, very softly, her eyes were blinded by swift-coming tears.

"Dearest," he added, "you are very young, you don't know what happiness may be in store for you." Then he laid his case before her and satisfactorily proved his unsuitability from every point of view, especially her father's. "It will be far easier to forget that you think," he said, in conclusion.

“Of course,” she returned, with the old princess air; “you needn’t marry me unless you like. I shall not force you into it, though you do seem to want a good deal of persuasion. I shan’t even break my heart, don’t expect that. But I shall be an old maid,” she sighed, looking demurely in his face with a quaint sparkle in her bright dark eyes, “and that is far worse than a broken heart, I am told. What comfort is it to be wretched, if one can’t talk about it and be cried over?”

“Ada!” he exclaimed.

“I am a most improper person, no doubt,” she replied, gravely. “I shock you, Captain Randal; I think I had better wish you good-evening,” she added, rising and making him a little bow before moving sedately away.

“Good gracious! Ada! What are you thinking of?” he cried, overtaking her in a state of utter bewilderment.

“Thinking of going home,” she replied, tranquilly.

“And I going to England to-morrow? For Heaven’s sake do stop a moment!”

“Well, but what is the use? You won’t have me, and there’s an end of it. I am not going to ask you any more, Maharaj Salaam!”

Then of course she was detained, and all kinds of vehement protestations, adjurations, and assurances of undying devotion poured into apparently indifferent ears. She was induced to resume her seat on the olive-roots, her bright face glowing like a splendid flower against the rugged, stony-looking trunks, her dark eyes half-veiled. “Yes,” she was thinking to herself, “it is about time you began. I do think I have a right, as a woman, to a little courtship.”

As for Philip he knew nothing but that Princess Ada was permitting her hands to be kissed.

“This is all very well,” she said at last. “Now perhaps I may be allowed to return to my poor sick aunt?”

“Ada, how can you jest? Do you believe in me?”

“I believe that you are a foolish boy, and don’t know what is good for you. From what you say, you can’t exist without me,” she returned. “And yet you won’t——” here she burst into a happy little laugh and did not finish her sentence. “Do you know,” she added with a sudden change of manner, “I look on you as a son. I think I adopted you on that first night at the ball. Poor boy,” I thought, “he has no mother perhaps by this time. Oh! I was so sorry for you! You are my father, and my mother, and my son, as the dear Hindoos say.”

"I am an outcast," he replied; gloomily, yet he remembered her words at the waterfall,

"Father thou art to me, and mother dear, and brother too,
Kind husband of my heart."

"Your people would never hear of it," he added.

"Do you know, Lord Blank is rather fond of me. He is a sweet old man, and my godpapa. And Philip, please don't be angry, he knows why you went home in such a hurry. You will hear of something soon." As she said this she looked down, a little tremor in her nervously clasped hands.

"Even at the very best it would have to be years, Ada!" he exclaimed, all his heart in his voice. "And to think of your wasting your youth and beauty——"

"Growing old and ugly, when of course, you wouldn't care for me any more."

"Ada!"

"I suppose you would die for me—they always say that," she added.

"Die? What would I not do?"

"Well, once you said you would even live for me——"

"And I did it, and I shall always, while I live at all."

"Yet you won't wait a little while?" she added, suddenly raising her eyes so that the light in them flowed into his face.

"I have done you wrong," he replied. "I did not think any woman's nature could be so constant, so strong. I felt that I ought to give you up."

"But I wouldn't be given up," she interrupted, her voice quivering. "You shall not be given up. Nothing shall come between us."

"Since you have chosen unworthy me," he added, his voice trembling into a key of infinite tenderness, "I will do my utmost to justify your choice. I am your knight, your vassal, what you will, only yours."

The sun had gone down by this time, its last rose-light dying away into the track of Ulysses and his companions, following them in that mysterious voyage to the unknown Happy Islands of which Jessie loved to dream; some stars were already trembling in the clear sky, a faint glow still crowned the bare mountain summits, the brightly colored, smokeless city at their base, which was a jewel in the sunset, had faded to common stone, specked with innumerable sparks of light; the keen chill of the winter night was in the air, it

was dangerous to linger beneath the olives. They rose and hurried away, parting at the gate of Ada's temporary home, not to meet again for years.

Stillbrooke Mill stands as of old beside its clear waters, on which silver swans glide among the green reflections of over-arching trees. But the garden is built over, and the plane tree gone, so that the mill seems to be a continuation of the street. A railway bridge draws a black horizontal bar across the tree-tops and strides over the bridge with long, black iron compass legs, stepping unconcernedly on green turf or in mid-stream, a symbol of the money-getting spirit of the age, a spirit that everywhere defaces beauty, ruthlessly on-rushing, borne on by the fever of its own mad desire.

One summer evening some years ago, a train roared out of Cleeve station and over this bridge at low speed, bearing in one of its carriages a general officer in full dress returning from a review, a beautiful dark-eyed woman with rich, black hair highly silvered, a lad of fifteen, and a girl of eleven. The latter, having tossed off her own gala hat, was crowning her brown curls with the white-plumed cocked hat that lay on the seat beside her, her brother had taken the unbuckled sword-belt and was drawing the sword slowly from its sheath, and feeling its edge.

"There is the mill, Ada," the general was saying, "see the man leaning over the half-door. One might think it was Matthew himself."

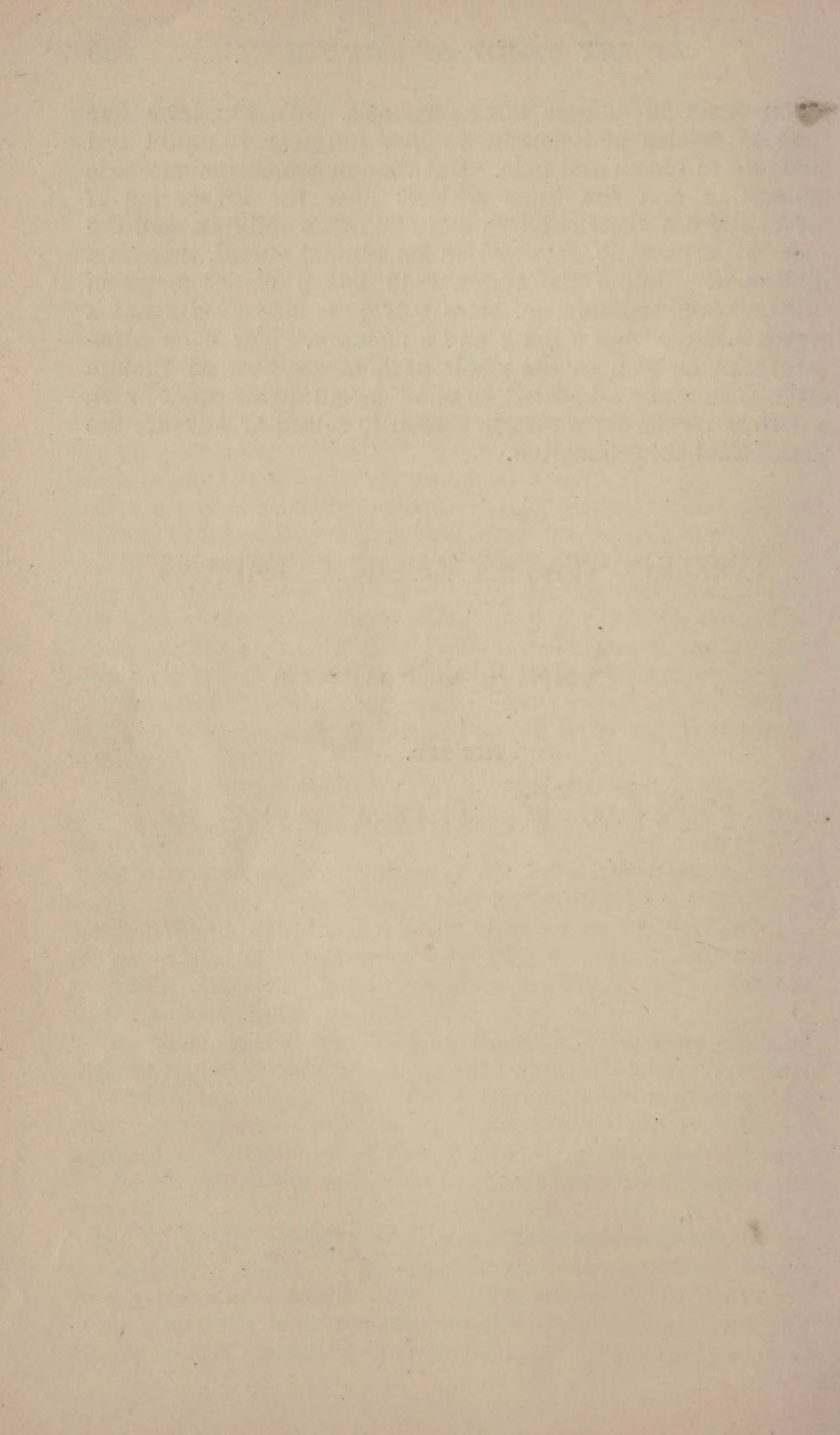
He saw it all as in the days of his happy, wholesome boyhood. Matthew and Martha and sunny-haired Jessie were moving about as of old. They were never long out of his thoughts, and at times were very near to him, living on beyond the bounds of sense and time in that eternity which is all round and about us.

The train passed into the blue distance, ruthlessly straight rushing as the democracy it typifies, the mill-wheel hummed on as of old, dashing the water in diamonds from its turning stair. Strangers dwelt in the mill-house, other children watched and wondered at the rolling wheel, and the mystery of the inexhaustible water, which flows on forever and never lessens.

So all things change and renew themselves, there is no death, only eternity. The water flows to the great sea which covers half the earth, it rises on the wings of the sunbeam, rides gloriously over the heavens in cloud masses colored by purple sunset, descends in rich rains and fragrant dews, and

so on again, in endless metamorphosis. We, too, have our time to rejoice and sorrow, to love and fear, to doubt and struggle, to bloom and fade. But though generation succeeds generation and the same willows hear the whispering of lovers and see their children and children's children, and the race is perpetually renewed in its eternal round, there is a difference. Unlike the water, man has a choice between blessing and cursing, he does not pass and "leave not a wrack behind" but a mark and a memory. For each separate man, as well as the whole race, moves onward, though often with many a backfall, to one "far-off divine event" with a certain power for a certain season to retard or advance the grand final consummation.

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