



QUEEN

COPHETUA

By

R. FRANCILLON.



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BY

R. E. FRANCILLON

AUTHOR OF 'OLYMPIA' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY

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QUEEN COPHETUA.

CHAPTER I.

A word was born in the dark grey light
Beneath the tall green firs ;
It hung midway in the waveless night
Between his heart and hers.

A wind danced down through the tall grey trees
As a child may dance in play :
It was only the luck of an idle breeze—
And it blew the word away.

ONE !—boomed the steeple clock.

‘Two o’clock, by Judi—!’ began Alan Reid, before the second boom : and he would have finished his not very terrible oath had it not been for the quick whisper of a ‘Hush!’ and the sight of a slender forefinger laid upon a delicate lip, as if to push away a smile. ‘Hush !—we’re in church, after all !’

‘Are we?’ asked Alan, looking round him with a mock recovery of wandering wits ; ‘by

Jupi—so we are. By your namesake Saint Bertha, then—and if there's no such saint in the calendar, there ought to be—it's two o'clock and lunch-time, and I've sworn to finish these fixings before I break bread or swallow wine. If you don't want me to starve on the spot, hand me up three nails.'

Alan was on an uncomfortably high rung of a ladder, of which the foot rested insecurely upon a hassock, and the end crookedly against the wall on which he was trying to fasten a garland of camellias. He had to balance himself cunningly for fear of swaying round and over, ladder and all—a catastrophe that appeared so imminent to Bertha Meyrick, that, even while laying the finger of one hand on her lip, she did not let the other leave the pole of the ladder. Not that there was the least use in her hold; rather the contrary, for it added to the chance of a lurch on his part the risk of an unconscious push or pull on hers. She managed with her free hand to pick three nails from a little brown-paper packet of tacks that lay open on the edge of a pew. But her eyes were all the while so nervously fascinated

by the crazy situation of the amateur carpenter, that she could not help giving a little push, and down fell—the packet of nails.

The young man, who was trying to hold up the garland against the wall with his eyes as well as with his hands, looked down as steadily as he could, and reached as far as he could stretch for the nails he wanted. Another and smaller hand held them up—and then, all at once he felt a sudden thrill from his farthest finger-tips to his inmost heart, and down slipped the garland after the paper of nails. There was a tremble among the finger-tips before they parted again; and, after they had parted, two brown eyes still held his, very softly.

I suppose I need hardly say that Alan Reid and Bertha Meyrick were young. It seems to me that I have said so already. At any rate, there is no mystery about it—she was twenty and he was twenty-four, and they had known one another for just a month this Easter Eve. Moreover, it is solely for the benefit of those who have never been in the little town of Hillswick that I need describe the only son of

old Harry Reid of Copleston farther than by name and age. I think that the hearts of many fellows for forty miles round Hillswick and Copleston will still thrill a little at the name of Old Harry, who, despite his ominous nickname, was the friend of many men and the enemy of none. Something, for the son's sake, must be said of the father: for few sons resemble their fathers so closely as Alan Reid resembled old Harry. And happily, as the world goes, nobody who knew him had anything to say except in his praise. At the time of this Easter Eve, when his son was climbing up a ladder more insecure than any made by mortal carpenter after heaven knows what sort of a sweet or bitter garland, the Squire of Copleston by Hillswick was about as well off, in all imaginable ways, as a man may dream of being. He was rich, and he had never lost a minute of life by being poor. He was generous, high-spirited, and had the enviable reputation of being able to be and do anything he pleased—if he pleased. Nothing is so delightful to any man's vanity as to have this sort of repute without ever having felt

called upon to test whether it be false or true ; nor in old Harry Reid's case did the repute seem so ill founded as usual. He used to speak so well at frequent public dinners and occasional public meetings, and was so rich and so popular besides, that his innumerable friends could, and would, have sent him into Parliament for the county, in the firm belief that he would have made more than a common figure there ; but he invariably, in the most downright way, refused, and gave no reason for refusing. Perhaps he did not himself know how much there lay in the need, for him, to meet the living Spring again every year in his country home and hers. For he was something of a poet at heart, and had even written scraps of verse and hunting songs, which made his uncritical neighbours think he might have been—had he pleased—a poet indeed ; and he carried half the silent poetry that never came out of him into the hunting field, and among the stubble, and along the trout stream, in all of which he revelled as neither mere poet nor mere sportsman may.

He was called Old simply because he was named Harry, for he was but sixty years old, and looked barely more than forty. He had always been a fine-looking man, and, like most men who live active and careless lives in the open air, grew handsomer as he grew older. He had hardly known a day's illness since he was born: and, to add the crowning triumph of circumstance to his life, he had made a love-match which had turned out well. It is true that Mrs. Reid of Copleston—born Miss Marion Hoel, of Pontargraig—had never been looked upon as her husband's better half in any sense of the word; but she was a great lady every inch of her, and had been a great beauty twenty years ago: she was still handsome for her middle age, and there was no question but that the lovers of five-and-twenty years ago were lovers still. For a last word, no place round Hillswick was fitter to live in—which means more than merely to dwell in—than Copleston: and, for a very last word, its master was prouder of his son and daughter than of anything, save his wife and his steady hand, in the world. And, in describing him,

his history is told. The events of his life were the events of every day—and the commonest things of every common day were of all-sufficient interest for him.

I have said that Alan was like his father: and if old Harry Reid had been made four-and-twenty again, it would have been hard to tell one from the other. There would have been seen the same frank, careless, fearless grey eyes, the same fresh complexion telling of joy in wind and rain, the same combination of grace and strength, the same broad forehead, firm and honest lips, and general manliness of face and form. At present, in spite of his greater age, the father would have been called the handsomer of the two: but the son promised to overtake him, in this matter as in all others, in due time. It matters little enough that he wore a brown moustache, drooping at the ends, and of the silkiness that comes of never having been shorn. But it must be taken to matter something, at least, that the very own son of old Harry Reid should be trying to nail up a nosegay on a wall when the trout were in full leap along Copleston

brook, and old Harry himself was at play with them.

And maybe old Harry himself was thinking, between casts, of some spring morning when Marion Reid was Marion Hoel, and when, while the trout were leaping, it was he and not they who were caught on the rise. Bertha Meyrick, Alan's only sister's bosom friend, was assuredly pretty enough to bring about a yet greater likeness in the fortunes of father and son. How is it truest to see a girl—with a woman's eyes, or with a man's, or with a critic's, or with a lover's, or with all four? No doubt, to be in the fashion, it should be with a painter's; but Bertha was much too pretty to be a painter's beauty—too tamely and commonly pretty, many would say. So be it—and thank nature for making prettiness at twenty so common that High Art is driven to fly to ugliness in order to be thought beautiful. And how can one give the effect of a girl's prettiness by describing her points of colour and feature one by one—what does it matter a single straw whether her eyes be blue, brown, black, or grey, her face oval or

round? A sound taste will accept all, all at once, and be thankful. As it happened, Bertha's eyes were brown, and her hair also; her complexion verged towards the brunette's, her face, features, and figure were graceful, delicate, and small. Had she been tall and fair, she would surely have had the same soft sweetness in her look and the same smile, at once bright and shy, which are no monopoly of any colour or stature. And if she had them not, but some other sort of magnetism, then almost as surely her chance touch would have sent the same thrill and her eyes have had the same charm to the one man to whom she had become neither blonde nor brunette, tall nor small, but simply—She.

She was certainly not the less pretty for being dressed plainly, as if with a view to her present dusty work, and darkly, as became one who was working for to-morrow in a spirit of reverence, which, it is to be feared, was hardly enough shared by him who, more for her sake than for the morrow's, was risking a broken neck and leaving the trout in Copleston brook to his father. After all, as she had said,

they were in church, though there was the echoing clatter of many voices, not without laughter, round them, and though their separate occupation of a whole aisle unquestionably rendered them liable to a charge of flirtation—at least according to country views of such things. Indeed, it felt like a great deal more than a mere common flirtation with a sister's friend to Alan Reid, as he came down from his perch with the disappointed hammer still in his hand, to pick up the fallen nails. He might have let them lie there for a little, but his feet moved downwards of themselves, until he was down to her level—or up to it, whichever it might prove. Then, feeling that he had a great deal to say, he said nothing, but stooped lower still, and set himself to gather up the nails.

Most people in these days would speak slightingly of the interior of Hillswick church, even if they did not go so far as to call it nothing better than a huge barn. Bertha Meyrick certainly did call it so. But, for all his want of conscious and active interest in such matters, it was a great deal more than a

church to Alan—so much more, that a jest there, out of service-time, was no more out of place than if he had made it in any other part of his home. He had sat every Sunday morning in the same high square pew covered with the same old red baize ever since he could remember anything, and had gone through the form of listening to old Mr. Skull, who had been curate in charge time out of mind, while lazily watching the doings of the daylight as it travelled from one unstained lattice pane to another, or reading for the seven hundredth time the list of benefactors to the parish painted on the face of the west gallery, or the catalogue of virtues ascribed by some ancient undertaker to Admiral Sir John Waldron who died before Queen Anne. So familiar was he with every least point about the place, and his associations with them were at once so few and cut so deeply, that this new association, new for the first time to-day, seemed to strike deeper all at once than if the whole history and atmosphere of Hillswick church had not been part of his life from the beginning. Bertha's presence, as she stood

there, was not merely the entrance of something new into the old, but felt like a magic under which the old itself became new. All at once he seemed no longer to recognise the familiarity of the place, and those things that were most familiar the least of all. The daylight itself took to streaming through the diamond panes in a new fashion, and he knew in his heart that, if the old and decrepit organ should suddenly pant out into sound, it would for the first time make music in his ears. The dumb poetry that coloured his father's life was beginning its song in the son's heart, and making the commonest things seem to sing.

Having gathered up the nails, he replaced them on the edge of the pew on which he leaned, looking round everywhere except at Bertha, and yet seeing nothing but her. His silence became eloquent, and her ears also lost the sound of the hammering and laughing round them. If she could not hear what was in his heart, she must have been impossibly deaf indeed. The silence must be broken somehow, and soon, if only to escape from the

many eyes that would be very soon drawn to the sight of Alan Reid and Bertha Meyrick standing opposite to one another, doing nothing, saying no word, and looking as if they were alone. But he, at least, dreaded and put off the commonplace word with which he would have to break this charm of silence, and she made no effort to break it at all. But then silence came much more naturally to Bertha, and she had a sort of instinct that in a sacred place one ought not to be ashamed of sacred things.

Why should he, when silence, however sweet, became no longer able to bear itself, seek for a word of commonplace wherewith to break it, when the most commonplace of all words on earth was ripe for his tongue? The heart and soul of Bertha were waiting, in quiet and willing faith, for the commonest of all words—'I love you'—and he knew that they were waiting so. Except with the voice, they had been spoken, and each might feel that they had been answered besides. Alan and Bertha were more One at that moment than most people who are two are able to be. It

only needed that the plain words should find voice, and they were quite alone enough for words that take the least of moments to say and for an instant's meeting of hands.

'Bertha——' began Alan, forgetting that he had never yet called Miss Meyrick to her face by her christian name.

'I'm sorry to interrupt,' said Miss Bolt, the doctor's sister, with a broad, both-embracing smile that seemed to Alan to blur out the sunshine, 'but would you, Mr. Reid, oblige me with one of your nails?—I'm afraid they're feeling a little idle just where they are. And that wreath's not up yet, I declare!'

There was not a grain of natural malice, not even of good-natured malice, about Miss Bolt, but she had lived long enough in Hills-wick to have caught its belief that a flirtation is without salt, even for those concerned in it, if not made as important as it ought to be by public attention. Indeed, she was simply doing as she would be done by, for she had passed the age when people prefer to hide such passages, and would scarcely have said Thank you to a man for speaking to her unless

all the neighbours knew. So far from having turned sour with over-ripeness, she took an honest pleasure, less rare than is commonly thought, in flirting by deputy, and most certainly would have done nothing to vex Alan, towards whom she felt like an aunt, for the world. But the good intentions of good-natured people are doubly unlucky things. This time they had turned the deepest and fullest feeling Alan had ever known into a thing for stares and gossip, for he knew his neighbours well enough to hear beforehand the destined news of that afternoon—Did you see how that Meyrick girl was going on with young Reid? There was nothing Miss Bolt would have liked better than to be the heroine of such a romance in a nutshell, and she would have been bewildered had she known herself the object of a mental speech a great deal more profane than that half-spoken ‘by Jupiter’ which had begun the whole affair. Where it would have ended, but for Miss Bolt, Jupiter alone knows.

As it was, before he had sent poor Miss Bolt more than half-way to Jove’s under-

ground brother, the rose-light that, without the help of stained glass, had been streaming in, and the unplayed music, all went out, and left the plain old barn just the plain old barn that it was before. I think, for my own part, that the light and the music only seemed to go out because, in sober truth, they found a very deep hiding-place indeed. Such half-minutes as Alan had just lived are only cowards until they learn their own strength, which is far too great to let them die. Nevertheless, to his own fancy, he became once more nothing better than the Alan Reid whom he thought he knew as well as Hills-wich church ; and, being as incapable of ill-temper, especially with a woman, as old Harry himself, he covered up the music and the light with a frank smile.

‘ No, Miss Bolt, the wreath isn’t up yet, but it will be in a minute, and then you shall be welcome to every nail I’ve got about me. There—if that’s being idle, then we’re all idle together.’

He ran up the ladder again, glad of the chance of hitting something very hard, and

struck so smartly that the camellias must have thought themselves in the hands of a personal enemy. Miss Bolt held the ladder for him this time: Bertha occupied herself with gathering up the remaining nails from the floor. Meanwhile the church clock struck half-past two—a half-hour wherein nothing had happened, but which had nevertheless been the turning-point in the life of a man, and perhaps of a woman besides.

Ever since the clock had boomed Two the church had been growing emptier: for others, as well as Alan, had also begun to feel themselves growing empty. The zeal for hard work in the service of the church, which had been at boiling-point an hour after breakfast, had gradually cooled, till, although next to nothing had been done, there was a general feeling that the morning had been sufficiently well spent in planning, discussing, and settling capabilities, but that the real time for hard, silent work was the afternoon, after all. I have not thought it needful to make an Homeric catalogue of those whom a liking for

the process, as well as for the effect, of church-dressing, had gathered together. It is not that the ladies of Hillswick were not interesting people—quite the contrary. One advantage of living in that compact little town was that even the most commonplace person, from Mrs. Mixon of the Old Bank to old Widow Hopkins of the Alms-house, became by right of township of the most intense interest to everybody else, from Widow Hopkins up to Mrs. Mixon. It is simply from an embarrassment of riches that, one by one or two by two, the wives and daughters of the town, and such few stray young men as could be attracted to do curate's work for want of a more suitable curate than old Mr. Skull, must be suffered to go out like the sparks in a piece of burned paper. Each had his or her present romance or past history—and who can tell them all?

It must be owned that the amateur curates were the first to show symptoms of a move. Pleasant as it may be for a time to be one of two or three male creatures in the midst of two or three dozen ladies more or less young

and beautiful, and set off by wreaths and crosses of flowers so held and carried as to make the donors look doubly generous for parting with what became them so well, nevertheless three or four hours of it resemble most other pleasures—they feel long. To say the same things, to make the same jokes, to pay the same compliments, and to receive the same answers eighteen times over in one forenoon, is like an eternity of partridges even to the most contented mind, and suggests luncheon and a pipe to follow as welcome novelties. It was all very well for Alan Reid and Bertha Meyrick to hold a little aloof, for they were from Copleston, and belonged to the county much more than to the town; and a real, white-throated curate would no doubt have made nothing of keeping the ball rolling among twice the number. But no other young man was there of a position that entitled him to escape his full share of general duty by what was called in Hillswick ‘making himself particular,’ and not one among them all wore a white tie. Whatever his private feelings might be, each had all at

once to be at the beck and call of at least a dozen task-mistresses at once, without being able to feel how much he had been a master of the situation until a gradual gathering of black coats at the church-door—the better to observe the general effect of what had not been done—drew the remaining majority towards that metropolis of the great majority of all—the churchyard. It is likely enough that the church would have been emptied yet sooner, had it not been that many of the town ladies preferred to let their midday joints grow cold or burn rather than let any eyes from Copleston perceive, by their over-punctuality to any marked note of the clock, that they dined early. It is true that two pairs of eyes from Copleston were otherwise, if not better, employed than in taking stock of their neighbours' dinner-bells; but it was gratifying to meet, on equal ground, people who notoriously dined at six or seven, and to act as if nobody in the parish felt hungry before then.

So it happened that the company in Hills-wick church came to be divided into two groups, one great and one small. In and

about the porch was the main body of waverers between the dictates of masculine weariness and of feminine propriety, more and more rapidly dwindling: in the aisle, all by themselves, were Alan Reid fixing the wreath, Miss Bolt holding the ladder steady, and Bertha Meyrick, seated on a hassock, and a little absently returning the nails into their brown-paper bag, one by one. But had a stranger entered the church at that moment, it is not by the group at the porch that his eye would have been caught, nor yet by the shy, tender beauty that was seemingly wasting its very gravest and sweetest looks upon a bag of nails. If he had eyes at all, they would have been caught, and kept, by a girl who stood, graceful and upright, alone in the centre of the church, with nobody near her, and with the brightest, happiest smile of amusement lighting up her whole face as she watched Alan hammering on the side aisle. She must have been well known indeed about Hillswick for nobody to be taking any special heed of her, and the young men must be wearied indeed to keep so near the porch

while she stood all alone so far away. In fact, she was as well known as the church itself: and not a young man there was of standing good enough to say more to her than 'Good morning, Miss Reid.'

CHAPTER II.

Wanda.—Magic, quoth she? She says there's magic here? Why, where's the magic? Widow, wife, and maid, I've lived here eighty years fall Whitsuntide, And never saw a mote, nor heard a jar More than an honest body may, that goes To Mass, and nails a horseshoe to her door. And now there comes a wench with mouth on gape, And ears pricked needle-ways, and moonstruck eyes, To prate that horseshoes keep no glamour out More than they keep the flies from buzzing in; That old tom-cat, who pranks himself and purrs, Is some bedevilled Prince: and dreams she hears Mad music in the whistle of the wind, And fairies tread corantoës on the floor. She'll say, mayhap, when next upon my crutch I hobble off to light a rushlight up, I'm flying on a broomstick round the moon. Magic, forsooth! If there's a witch, 'tis she— Magic! 'Tis she that makes it: Hide can find.

ALAN'S only sister, Helen, was some few years younger than he: and though she was in many striking ways plainly enough his sister, there were many more in which she by no means so closely took after old Harry. Both,

it will be remembered, had for a mother a lady of very decided Welsh extraction : and the Celtic strain in the Saxon stock of the Reids appeared to have avoided coming out in the son only that it might all the more strongly affect the daughter. Not that there was any sort of marked nationality about Helen : one of her most pronounced traits was her unlikeness to any type that could be found, probably in Pontargraig, certainly in Hillswick. The mixture of race might mean nothing, after all : but the caprices of blood are strange, and often, in an underhand, invisible way, account for the otherwise unaccountable. I hardly know whether to call her beautiful. And yet Bertha Meyrick, who was beyond all question, and not only beyond Alan's, beautiful, must have faded out beside her like the loveliest of lamplights in the dullest of sunshine. There was a look of sunlight all over her, even when in repose. Nobody could call her blonde or brunette ; and yet she was very far indeed from being wanting in colour, with her all-reflecting, all-embracing grey eyes, giving back every light

they received, with an added sparkle of mischief from themselves. Her features were very far indeed from being faultlessly regular. But the mouth was not less warm and winning in its curves for being over-large, especially for so young a girl. The lips were as honest as her brother's eyes, and made up in all ways for the something in her own eyes that was hidden under their light—call it reticence, reserve, irony, humour: anything which it might possibly be save insincerity. The hair was thrown back from her face in thick brown waves, showing the whole of a full and broad but rather low forehead and a pair of perfectly made little ears, set to her head in the close fashion from which a phrenologist would argue plenty of courage and no music. She was rather pale, but it was with the purity of health; and even as she stood there and smiled in that odd fashion, as if she saw a good jest somewhere at large in the air, her colour now shadowed and now brightened as if it needed no cause save that of living and being. She was no taller than her neighbours, and more slenderly

fashioned than most of her own age ; but her freedom and erectness of carriage, the fulness of her parted lips, the quickness of her blood, and the brightness of her eyes, combined to make up what would have even more distinguished her in a much wider world than this of Hillswick—a full joy in all the life she had only intensified, as yet, by an unlimited readiness for more. And this alone, without the help of beauty, was amply enough to earn for her the title of beautiful.

‘ I do like watching other people’s blunders—especially when they work so hard to make them ! You have put up that wreath beautifully, Alan. You’ve only made one little mistake, that’s all.’

‘ Hullo, Nell ! why, where did you spring from ? I didn’t know the forewoman was here. I suppose I’ve hung it too much to the right, or something ? Well, never mind.—if I’ve gone a little too far in the right way——’

‘ Oh, it’s beautifully straight ; you were taking such pains about your inches, that I

hadn't the heart to disturb you. It isn't that—and it isn't that you've hung it upside down. That would have been it, only the real fault keeps that from mattering. So that's what comes of getting up at five in the morning when I'd been up with Bertha till past one—and of my getting into I don't know what trouble by stealing the gardener's best flowers—and of my going with half a breakfast to make something up to beat everything—and of trusting my own brother—all to have it hung upside down in a dark corner, which may be very delightful in itself, but where my wreath is simply thrown away. It's enough to make one never get up at five in the morning any more.'

'Upside down, is it?' asked Alan, capping her mood with the manner of a critic who justifies all blunders by making them his own. 'How can a round thing have an up-side or a down-side? You should square your circles, Nell, or you mustn't complain if you're treated like a Painter of the future when he falls among Carpenters. And as to the place—why, Bertha herself chose it; and as to not

getting up at five, who would, before the first of September?’

‘So that’s the last new chivalry, is it—to get rid of your sins as soon as they’re found out by putting them on a girl’s shoulders? You want me to think that Bertha wanted to hang me up in a dark corner, so that I mightn’t be seen? I’ll lay all my old gloves to all her new ones that you haven’t treated her as you’ve treated me; and, if you have, it shall be worse for you still. You are in a conspiracy, all three of you, and Miss Bolt is ringleader.’

‘Oh, Miss Reid!’ remonstrated the Doctor’s sister as she dusted and smoothed herself before she joined the now almost invisible group at the door—not knowing exactly whether Helen was laughing or scolding, or only hungry—‘I am sure that everything is perfectly lovely as far as we’ve gone, thanks to you, and Mr. Reid, and Miss Meyrick, and everybody; and it will be sweetly pretty by tea-time. But if you keep such hours, I must tell my brother, indeed.’

‘Ah, but you see, Miss Bolt, I shan’t be

here again after I once go home, and I shan't be able to eat or sleep if that wreath is not properly fixed up—let me see—wherever it ought to be, before eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. And everybody that can climb a ladder is gone, and—No, Alan, I won't trust *you* any more. I'll wait for old Grimes. He's sure to be back when he's smoked his pipe out, to see if we've left any mischief behind us, and he'll find—me. Take Bertha home to lunch, Alan—you've neither of you done any work, so you must both be starving. Only, don't eat up everything, for I had but half a breakfast, and I shall be back as soon as I've seen old Grimes—I dare say it won't be long after you. There, be off with you all.'

After all, little excuse is needed for leaving one's own sister to walk home by herself if she likes, in order to see another man's sister home—if one likes her. Alan wondered a little at his sister's personal interest in this year's church dressing, seeing that her sharing in it at all was almost a piece of condescension, and for once, like Miss Bolt, he could hardly make out whether she was more than half

jesting. But the two miles' walk to Copleston alone with Bertha in the out-of-door sunshine, free from all eyes and ears, had now become too sweet a chance to be lost by not taking such a jest, if it were one, to the letter. Bertha, also, wondered : but then, Helen was her heroine ; and then, Alan was already more than half her hero. She lingered a little, either from feeling that she ought to stay with Helen, or from a sort of shy foresight that the word lost in Hillswick church might be found again among the daisies on the road to Copleston. But Helen made no answer, even by a look, to their passing wonder. She sat down as comfortably as she could in one of the pews, and as they passed her fixed her eyes on the roof as if altogether lost in the great and awful question it suggested of how few years would pass before it fell in. Whatever else she meant, if she meant anything, it was clear that she meant to stay. So they let her stay. People generally let Helen do as she chose, without asking why.

No ghost of a shadow fell over Helen's face when she was left alone. That cannot

be said of many faces; but brightness, with her, did not depend upon company. ‘Yes,’ she thought, in such fashion as words must do duty for: ‘yes, Alan must marry Bertha. He’s the only man I’d choose for her, and she’s the only girl I’d choose for him: and I shan’t lose either my brother or my friend. Poor Bertha—she’s born to marry somebody, and if not one then another, and I shouldn’t like her to go out to India, as that sort of girl mostly does if she doesn’t marry at home. And Alan’s born to be in love with somebody—and I should hate a girl that came between him and me. I think I shall go into business as a match-maker—it’s rather good fun, and I shan’t make a mess of the business by being one of my own customers. I don’t think I’ve managed badly for a beginning, anyhow. Well, men are odd beings, to be so fond of bothering themselves about girls when there are so many more interesting creatures all round them—at least, I should think so if I were a man—except Bertha. Yes; I *would* marry *her*: so I must do it by deputy, since it’s got to be done. One would think all girls

but me must have very unhappy homes, or else be amazingly bored in them, to be so eager to get away into a new one of which they can't guess much, with a man of whom they can know nothing. But then it's true it isn't everybody who has a father like mine and a brother like mine, and—and—a mother like mine. I think I would marry into Copleston if I were single. Well, thank the prayer-book, one can't marry one's own brother, or I wouldn't give much to-day for *your* marrying into Copleston, Miss Bertha! All I've got to do is never to marry out of it—and all the better, as that means never marrying at all. I'll be such a model old maid that they won't find it in their hearts to get rid of me, and—and—I must hang up that wreath somewhere, if it's only for the look of the thing. Where shall it go?'

The ladder was still left against the wall in the side aisle; she climbed up it rather rashly, considering the unsafety of its footing, but she was light and knew how to balance herself, so she rather enjoyed the excitement of feeling that she was conquering difficulties

by pulling the wreath away from its nails. But a ladder has a fascination of its own, and is apt to excite ambition where there is none already. She looked about for the most conspicuous as well as for the most unlikely place for a girl's hands to manage such a matter, and found it at last in the very middle of the west gallery where the singers sat—not only a position that commanded the whole church, but one not to be reached without a certain amount of daring by an amateur decorator. People who like to find character in trifles must judge as they please—but in any case boys have no monopoly of the spirit which forbids them to see a particularly high and difficult tree without trying to go up it as high as they can, and higher. The purpose was not particularly high, but the gallery was ; and, in fact, she could not sit all by herself in a pew doing nothing, while there was nothing between sleep and mischief for her to do. She got the ladder down by the simple process of dragging away the hassock on which it stood from under it, and letting it fall its length with a crash in the aisle ; and then

dragged it along till she brought it under the place she had chosen. Before she had got it there its weight and her exertions made her repent of the trouble she was taking for glory's sake, but her repentance only obliged her to finish for honour's sake what she had begun only for glory's. Arrived at last, she stopped for breath, and then used all the strength and skill she had to raise it and fix it for climbing. At last she succeeded. After having nearly managed to break her head three or four times, and to sprain both her wrists four or five, the foot of the ladder rested firmly on a flag-stone that covered, according to its half-trodden-out inscription, the dust of one of the extinct Waldrons of Copleston, and its head against the edge of the front gallery pew. Now that it was fixed, the climb looked uncomfortable for the nerves; but she had not taken all this trouble for nothing, so she began to climb. After all, nerves were no trouble of hers, and by the time her feet were on a level with the projecting cornice of the gallery, she felt only one drawback to the excitement of her elevation—that there was

nobody there to see it, not even old Grimes the sexton.

Alas! she had miscalculated the proper angle of the ladder by just a shade. She was opposite the exact spot she had aimed at, the wreath was round her neck, her hammer and nails at hand in her pocket—she had nothing to do but to lie forwards against the ladder, to pass her arms round it, bring her hands together with the wreath in one and the hammer in the other, give a tap or two, and all would be done. This was what she tried to do, but with all her reaching she could not bring the wreath nearer the woodwork than an inch and a half from it. It was sadly disappointing: for she knew that if she once returned to firm earth to make the ladder more upright by shifting its angle, not even honour would tempt her up again. She had just managed it, as things were: but the new ascent up an incline at least ten degrees steeper would be what the Matterhorn is to one who has already found Mont Blanc quite enough for him. Still, not going up for a second time was a very different thing from

yielding to the difficulties of a first time. She could not go up, but she would not go down. It was only a whim, but if a fairy had appeared that moment and had offered her the fulfilment of her heart's desire, she would have answered, 'Then, make my fingers just two inches longer, if you please!'

She took her hammer between her teeth, and tried again. Suddenly—she must have stretched ever so little too much sideways—the ladder gave the slightest possible lurch: she recovered her balance instantly and instinctively, but that instant was enough to make her blood run cold. For the first time since she had climbed she felt afraid to look down through the space that now seemed to have doubled itself between her neck and the flagstones. She felt no longer simply hanging in air, but as if she were rising upwards towards the roof, or else as if the ground were descending deeper and deeper. She had never felt panic in her life before: but then she had never in her life before tried to climb a high ladder from the floor to the gallery of a church, and she felt it now—and there is

many a brave enough man, unused to ladders, who would feel the same. Of course drowning people, even if they know better, throw up their arms; of course Helen, though she felt beforehand what the effect would be, looked down.

But the result was not altogether what might have been looked for.

The fall of her eyes was broken by the bird's-eye view of a tall black hat, and of a tall figure in a black frock-coat—figure, coat, and hat being alike unknown to her. If it had only been old Grimes the sexton! But there was no such luck: a stranger was in Hillswick church, and she—Helen Reid of Copleston—was on the top of a ladder, with a hammer in her mouth and a garland in her hands, afraid to come down, unable to speak, afraid to move. If he looked up, as surely he soon must, what would be the effect, in church, and upon a stranger, of a girl on the top of a ladder, for no imaginable purpose, doing nothing, and trying to balance herself by holding to the roof with her eyes? How could she bring herself to call out, 'If you

please, sir, come up here and help me down !' Stranger or no stranger, the adventure would be all over Hillswick, in some magnified and distorted shape, in half an hour : and, for aught she could tell, the stranger might be old, or lame, or—anything. The panic, or giddiness, was still too much upon her for her head to be quite clear, or she might have been able to treat the presence of a stranger as coolly, or at least as reasonably, as if she were on firm ground. As things were, she followed the only course that mere flurried instinct could find to save her. But for her first panic, she would have had no need to take it ; but for her second, she would not have dared. Before the stranger had time to take off his hat, much more before he could look up or round, she had clambered up the few remaining rungs between her feet and the upper edge of the gallery pew, and had scrambled over into it, she knew not how, except that hammer, ladder, wreath, and nails were dropped and spurned, and went over and down, fluttering, rattling, and crashing wildly to the floor, with a clatter and a bang

that must almost have brought the whole church down after them.

She almost thought that the church had really fallen. But as soon as she had gathered herself together :

‘What an extraordinary thing it is,’ she thought, ‘that I never can be left alone for a minute together without getting into some piece of mischief or other. One would think one couldn’t possibly get into mischief all alone in a church, and yet—There! No doubt I’ve smashed the ladder and half a dozen gas-lamps, and three or four pews, and if I haven’t broken my neck, it’s no fault of my own. No—I won’t look over and see. It might be too dreadful—and then there’s that wretched man who was the cause of it all—really, when people come into a church, they ought to see if there isn’t anybody on the top of a ladder whom they might startle. Thank mercy it wasn’t old Grimes, though, after all. I should have to run away from home and hide somewhere where I could never be found. And the poor wreath, after all I have gone through for it ever since five in the

morning—that's done for. Well, I must get home now as scon as I can—I wish I could be by when they all come back again and see what they'll see! They'll think the Yew Goblin has been playing his pranks among the Easter flowers—and I certainly won't say no, except to Alan—and Bertha—and—oh, dear, what shall I do now! If that miserable old Grimes hasn't locked the gallery door outside! And the ladder's gone, and I couldn't get down again, even if there was nobody here! If anybody comes back and finds me, and wants to know how I came up here, I shall have to say that I've flown!

Why did she not boldly advance to the front of the gallery, stand up where the clerk stood when he gave out the number of the hymn, and call out loudly to the stranger, 'If you please, sir, kindly oblige me by going at once to Mr. Grimes, the sexton of this parish, and tell him to come with his keys and let out Miss Reid, who is shut up in the west gallery and can't get out again'? I can only say that Helen, if over-daring in some things, was as shy in others as a girl can be, and was

as unlike as possible to any girl who could have done so.

So she retired behind the organ, which was at the back of the gallery, to wait patiently for the return of old Grimes, or for whatever chance of quiet escape better luck might offer her. Nobody had yet come back to finish the church dressing, and, since the way from the church to the gallery was locked, nobody who came would find her. On the whole it might be a little amusing, if she could not get out sooner, to overhear the comments and theories about the wreck they would be sure to find when they did come. Meanwhile she heard the strange boots moving slowly about the church, from the porch to the altar rails, and almost wondered at herself for having so little curiosity about their owner. Perhaps, had she been born half a mile nearer Hillswick than Copleston was, curiosity would have got the better of shyness, and she would have found some means of seeing without being seen. But presently the sound of the boots faded into silence; no doubt the visitor, having found

nothing, not even the quarter-finished decorations, to interest him, had gone away again, and had left the porch free for her escape—if she could only have spread a pair of wings and flown down.

Having nothing to do but wait, she opened the organ and pressed the keys, but no sound came—naturally enough, seeing that there was no wind in the bellows. And if there had been, the result would have been worse than silence—for Helen was no musician, in spite of her Welsh strain. She might move her fingers over the voiceless keys at pleasure, and imagine herself Saint Cecilia, without bringing out a single discord to disprove her fancy. Active-minded and -fingered prisoners must amuse themselves, not as they will, but as they can; and, oddly enough, there was a singular sort of pleasure in playing this silent *capriccio*. The sunlight streamed in at the west window behind her, and warmed her shoulders luxuriously; hunger, fatigue, and reaction from fright took a healthy turn, and left her mind open to the very slightest and idlest fancies that might

find their way in with the sun. The faintest perfume from the flowers and foliage that had as yet been hung rose up round her, and was the stronger because of its faintness. She had never been in such complete and inevitable solitude; nothing was easier than to fancy herself lost to and forgotten by the world. She had not yet quite escaped from the not wholly childish instinct, from which some few never wholly escape all their days, of using every chance hint and suggestion as a help in the great art of Making Believe—and what art is greater or happier than one which turns the commonest and most insignificant things into talismans for making us, whenever we please, be what we will? That is an art which gives the goddess of silence a place among the musicians above Beethoven, and may concentrate a world in a whim. The course of Helen's idle fingers would have made woful work if written down—just as all such fancies do. She drew out some of the stops for mere idleness' sake, and because it was about the only piece of mischief, short of breaking a window, that was near her hand

‘I wonder if I’m playing Bertha’s Wedding March!’ she thought, and, with all her personal contempt for love and marriage, she began to think that, if all were going well, a two miles’ walk home to Copleston, with the sun full in one’s heart as well as upon one’s shoulders, would not be so bad a thing in its way—better, at any rate, than being locked up in an organ-loft all alone.

Perhaps it might, as she thought, have looked rather odd to see, on entering a church, a girl perched up on the top of a tall ladder. But if she had taken her dive into the gallery merely in order to escape from seeming eccentric, she had failed lamentably. She was not well enough up in the geography of the church to be aware of a dark little door in a corner that led from the organ-loft straight to the corkscrew staircase in the tower, and surely the very last thing that the young man who now passed from the twilight of the stone stairs into the full daylight of the gallery could have expected to find there was a young woman diligently engaged in playing an organ from which not a

sound came. Compared with such bits of seeming lunacy, girls at the tops of tall ladders in unlikely places are sights of every day. Of course the young man might suspect himself of sudden deafness as he watched her pull out one stop after another while she gravely passed her fingers over the keys. But the first creak he heard in the empty church would reassure him on this point, and no doubt he was soon reassured; but still she played on.

It was far too much a mystery for him to break it off in the middle. He might even get at its meaning if he stood quite still and made no noise, and meanwhile the girl was not the less pleasant to look at for being possibly insane. He was in the place of the stranger whose presence we only imagined while she was watching Alan and Bertha, and, being no more blind than he was really deaf, he could not fail to see in her at least something of what there was to be seen. So he looked on, and she played on, little thinking that she was performing for the benefit of an exceedingly attentive listener. It is by no

means always impossible for silence to be heard as well as seen.

But in due time—how could she help it?—she stopped playing and indulged in a long, luxurious yawn. ‘One!—Two!—Three!’—boomed the steeple clock just over her head—‘Four!’ Four o’clock already, and nobody had come back to the church—and—

She turned round, without rising, and found herself face to face with the stranger at the steeple-door—‘And he has been watching me all this while!’ was all she could think in her dismay.

And yet, apart from his having been both stranger and listener, he was nothing very alarming. Even while she had only room in her consciousness for herself, her eyes were quick enough to take a very fairly complete and accurate portrait of the stranger without the help of her brain. He should have been the Yew Goblin who haunted Hillswick churchyard, considering the tricks he played upon her, first by nearly making her break her neck, and now by watching her while

behaving like a child whose nurse has left it alone for a little while. But if he were the Yew Goblin, then the reported appearance of the Yew Goblin very much belied him.

Taller than her brother Alan, broader shouldered, wider chested, he looked as manly as a man may in a girl's eyes. He was leaning against the side of the door, but rather stiffly, as if at some time in his life he had been overdrilled without having been long enough at the work to make a soldier's bearing second nature to him; and this air of stiffness was rather increased by the black frock-coat he wore buttoned breast-high. He can only be described shortly by a word which I fear Helen herself would not have scrupled to use, and which is, a 'swell.' Though in Hillswick, which is very far indeed in more matters than miles from the Row or the Boulevards, his tightly-fitting coat was finished off by a lily-of-the-valley over the heart: he wore patent-leather boots and a light-coloured scarf fastened by a gold and jewelled pin, and the hands that held his hat of elaborate gloss were covered by lavender

gloves, fitting them as if they had been born on them. Had it not been so late in the day, she would have taken him for a bridegroom who had come to meet his bride at the altar, and had made a mistake in the church : and it was almost disappointing to find that his face matched his manliness of figure much better than his out-of-place elaboration of costume. He looked about thirty years old : his features were firm and pronounced, and his eyes grave to a point that was either sad or severe, with a sort of slow, inward look in them which allowed him to regard intently without seeming to stare. They were rather fine eyes, of a dark grey, that seemed to have heat without light in them. His complexion was of pale but clear and healthy brown : his hair also brown, rather too dark to match the eyes, and arranged as if he considered his *coiffeur* as of equal importance with his tailor. His nose was good and straight : his chin slightly cleft and projecting : his mouth was nearly hidden by a long, thick brown moustache, with long ends, in the Austrian fashion—the rest of his face was closely shaved with

the best of razors. His general air was of grave and melancholy dignity compelled to submit to orthodox fashions and making up its mind that, being in for a penny of fashion, the most philosophical thing was to consider itself in for a pound. Yet one would wager that the man had brains: and one would be certain that, whatever brains he had, he gave himself credit for more.

Helen, after the one quick glance that took in the general effect of all these clothes and of the man who could not quite succeed in hiding himself among them, looked at her watch as if she had suddenly remembered an appointment, closed the organ, left her seat, and went, as quickly as it was possible to go without seeming frightened, to take advantage of the door which the stranger had discovered for her. But she knew all the while that she was colouring with vexation at having been caught at a fool's play, and that he saw her blush as clearly as she could feel it, which only made her show her vexation ten times more in the same way. He stood aside po-

lately to let her pass, but said, while she was passing,

‘Pardon me—I am a stranger in this country—can you tell me what is the meaning of all this flower-show?’

She was afraid he was going to ask her if she generally played the organ without the bellows. But his question, which would have been commonplace but for its ignorance, was relieved still more by the grave courtesy and the gentle deference which he managed to throw into such trifling words. The voice also, without being deep or full, was very soft and pleasant, and struck her by a slight peculiarity of tone and accent, especially in the words ‘a stranger.’ He showed no sign of having hunted up a commonplace question on the spur of the moment for the sake of trapping an attractive-looking girl into a word or two.

‘To-morrow is Easter Sunday,’ said she. ‘And we always remember Easter here.’

‘I see. But you don’t seem to have got on very far, considering that the sun’s an early bird just now. And it has struck me, while

looking around, that this church wants a brick-layer more than a gardener.'

'It is a very old church, this at Hillswick,' said Helen, 'and old churches seldom look new—those who know them generally like them the better for looking their age.' She bent herself slightly by way of a good-morning, and passed out of the gallery upon the dark stairs. 'I wish to goodness I had known of these stairs before,' thought she. 'I don't think the man thought any impertinence—except to the church; but if he ever goes to India he won't want a punkah to keep him cool. I wonder who he can be, here in Hillswick, where nobody ever comes? Well, thank heaven, I shall soon be at home now—and never, never will I get into mischief again, if I can help it, till next time. Ah, here's the door at last, and—Oh!'

Her 'Oh!' was a half-uttered exclamation of impatient despair. She was still in her prison—the door from the tower into the church, as well as that into the churchyard, was locked on the outside; at any rate, if it was locked on the inside, the key was gone.

But how? Could the stranger have ventured to walk into the tower and to lock the door behind him? And, if so, why? He could not wish to carry off the bells. He could not be intending to fortify himself in Hillswick church to stand a siege—and yet, what else could he have meant to do? She began to feel really alarmed, and that she must do anything to escape now. Perhaps some of her strangely lazy fellow-workers of the morning might have returned at last; so she thumped with her fist against the door. She hurt her hand a little against the jagged, rusty lock-plate, but nobody answered—and nobody answered, though she knocked again, and hurt her hand a little more.

Nobody could be there. It was only too clear that she was still in gaol, and that this stranger was her gaoler.

That made her a great deal too angry even to remember that she had felt shy. She went fast up the stairs into the gallery, and—the stranger was gone.

Could he, in spite of his tailor, be the Yew Goblin after all? And what had become of

all her friends? She was getting bewildered. He could not have passed her on the stairs, which were almost too narrow for one; he could not, any more than she, have escaped from the gallery by any other road without the help of wings or suicide. Again she went to the stairs.

Of course! The stairs led up as well as down. That would not help her to escape, but it would help her to find the key. So she went up the dark, twisted, narrowing flight towards the belfry, till the steps became so narrow as scarcely to give her half a foothold, until she found herself in a sort of room, or rather upon a kind of platform, with bells swinging above her head from which the ropes descended through a space in the middle of the platform to a lower floor. Plenty of light was admitted through four unglazed loop windows, one on each side of the square loft; and by the light she found the stranger again, absorbed in the contemplation of some old chests that had no doubt been stowed away as lumber.

‘You will oblige me,’ said Helen, ‘by

giving me back the key of the steeple door. I want to leave the church ; and if you have any right to the key, you can take it again when I am gone.'

'I wish I had it, mademoiselle, that I might have the pleasure of giving it to you ---and I want to leave the church too ; for there seems no way of getting any higher. Do you know if there is any way of getting to the top of the tower? There ought to be a fine prospect---

'You have not got the key?'

'No. You mean of the door at the bottom of these break-neck things that I suppose you call stairs in this country? I did observe a key when I came into the steeple, but it was outside the door—I had to unlock the door to get in here.'

'But—the door is locked *now* !'

'Well—I have always observed that, when a door is found locked, it has been locked by somebody ; and as the key was outside, it has not been locked by you or me. I shouldn't wonder if that old gentleman could tell us something about it who was going about as if

he belonged to the church or else the church to him—only we haven't got him here to ask him, and if we had, I would not engage to make him hear the question. I tried him once, and I did not succeed well enough to try again.'

'What—old Grimes has been here—and locking the doors?'

'I don't know if his name is Grimes, but he hadn't much look of owning a better.'

'Oh, what does it all mean? I *must* leave the church—I *must* go home. He cannot have been locking up till all the work was finished—and now it must be nearly five, and not a soul has been near the place since half-past two.'

'There does seem something uncanny about this church,' he said, looking round him a little absently. 'I thought so myself, as soon as I came in. I think we will both go down, and you can show me the way by which *you* got into the steeple, as there seems to be more than one. I suppose you are not bound to get out my way? And even if the whole place is locked up, I never found much difficulty in

getting out on level ground. If a door's too tough, one can always break a window.'

Her anxiety did not prevent her noticing that, the more the young man spoke, the more his manner, and even his expression, seemed to gain—and not only in attractiveness, but in power. His manner, a little self-conscious at first, fell into a simple self-possession which even took the raw edge off his clothes, and was evidently natural to him; he had not yet wholly smiled, but every now and then the light of a grave half-smile came into his eyes, and was the more winning and trustworthy for being confined to his eyes only. He had, too, a way as if he were one of a company of three instead of two, speaking to himself as well as to her in his slow, rather long-drawn accent which became more strongly marked as he went on, and which seemed to give an aroma of possible humour to his simplest words.

'*My way?*' asked Helen. 'Through the gallery door——'

'Then we will go through the gallery door. Mr. Grimes has not locked that——'

‘But the door from the gallery was locked long and long ago—if I could have got out that way would I have troubled you for the key of the tower? The gallery door has been locked all day——’

‘On the outside?’

‘Of course on the outside,’ she said impatiently. ‘*I* have not the key.’

‘This seems a circumstance to be thought over,’ he said, playing with one of the bell-ropes, and looking, half gravely, half curiously, through her with those eyes of his that seemed more than ever to have the faculty of being able to look their fill without even a suggestion of offence or a tinge of discourtesy. Perhaps it was because they seemed to be always seeing more than eyes can see. They were not eyes of the mesmeric sort—far from it; they implied no sort of conscious or unconscious power; they were eyes that any woman can feel she may trust as surely as a man believes he may trust a man’s hand. ‘Yes,’ he went on; ‘I have known thinking bring one somewhere now and then—and even the wrong place is always somewhere. I come quietly

into a church. No sooner am I in it than a garland of flowers falls from the roof at my feet, a hammer on the top of my head—hard ; and a long ladder, from Heaven—no, not Heaven—knows where nearly crushes me, as if I were Samson making sport for the Philistines. I look round, and find wreaths and crosses and nosegays stuck about all over a sober old church without rhyme or reason, and nobody to put them there but a deaf old man. Afraid that the fall of another nosegay may bring down another hammer or ladder on my head—as it seems to rain such things here, and that is why I observed that this church wants a bricklayer—I turn into the steeple. I find my way into a gallery where I find a young lady playing the Music of the Spheres on an organ. It is the peculiarity of the Music of the Spheres that nobody can hear it without a special philosophical training, including silence on one's part for seven years, and a long abstinence from peas and beans. I have had no such training, am not a silent man, and like green peas above all things : the effect is, that I find myself in the case of Mr.

Grimes. Then I find myself locked into the steeple. And then I discover that the young lady who plays the symphony of the seven stars did not reach the organ-loft by the steeple, but through a door which has not been unlocked all day. Mademoiselle—since I know not what else to call you—I can quite understand that one who performs the music of the spheres in a church that rains roses and hammers and locks its own doors, should be able to transport herself from the floor to the gallery without stairs, elevators, or wings. The thing that does puzzle me is, that she should find any difficulty in getting down again.

He spoke more and more gravely as he went on; but as his gravity grew, so did the smile within his eyes. Helen was as ready to rise at a joke as a trout at one of her father's flies; and at any rate the stranger was not going to eat her. He seemed exceedingly human, in his own style, and his clothes provided the weak point which a woman needs in a man in order to feel at ease with him. He was at any rate a gentleman—so certainly, in

spite of his foibles, that she did not trouble to ask herself whether he was one or no. She could not help colouring when he spoke of her silent music—all the more because it had been in its way real music to her—but, even with the blush, her laugh came back to her.

‘And I,’ said she, ‘have had my adventures too—but I am glad your hat was off when the hammer fell; it might have been hurt badly. You must have thought it all very strange! But it is not so strange as to see a stranger in Hillswick church, after all.’

‘Well, yes. I suppose Hillswick is not much on the straight road to anywhere. But I doubt if I’m much more a stranger than you. You are the organist, I conclude? or the school-teacher?’

Helen had been taught, when a little girl, that it is rude to ask questions, and though she had never consistently followed the precept, it seemed to her that it was a good one, and that the stranger’s education could not have been wholly that of a gentleman. It is true that he asked the question in as simply a courteous a manner as such a question allowed;

but surely, if a thirst for information worthy of Hillswick itself compelled him to put it, he might at any rate have supposed Mis Reid of Copleston to be at least a vicar's daughter. But perhaps, after all, the man, young as he was, claimed the privileges of a professed character; in that case he had exposed another weak point, which enabled her to deal with him from a still higher level than before.

‘Oh,’ said she, ‘I don't think your few minutes in the steeple can make you much less of a stranger than I am, though I have not been here longer than since I was born.’

‘Here—in the belfry? I see—that accounts for your having come here without having to trouble a door that has been locked since yesterday—since last Sunday, for aught I know. But—you cannot have been born—not even in the belfry—so very long ago; while I—I have belonged to Hillswick for nearly four hundred years.’

She could not help making a curtsy. ‘I ask you a thousand pardons—I did not know I had the honour of speaking with a Ghost,’ said she.

‘And I,’ he said, answering her with a low bow, ‘have only just found out that I have the pleasure of speaking with a *Glockendame*, as the Germans say—that is to say, the Lady, or Spirit, of the Bells. As you are aware, she is a good spirit, who shares all human joys and sorrows—births, marriages, deaths—all of them, and blesses them all with sympathy. She is a sweet, true, and lovely spirit, and happy is the ghost who meets with her.’

His speech might be taken for one of those monstrous compliments which, when paid by a stranger to a stranger, have to hide their heads under a jest or a myth in order to reach their aim. To amuse himself at the expense of a village schoolmistress with whom he found himself locked up in a steeple, might possibly be esteemed befitting a gentleman in some world to which she did not belong ; and what made her a little more suspicious was, that she knew a good deal of German folk-lore, but had never heard of the *Glockendame*, whose name, besides, had rather an impromptu flavour. But any such suspicion died before it was more than a shadow. His words were

accompanied by no change of look or tone ; voice and eyes alike became graver ; he spoke as if stating the simplest of facts or indulging aloud in the simplest of passing fancies ; indeed, he scarcely looked at her as he came to the end of his legend, and went on playing with the bell-rope and speaking as if he had said nothing at all.

‘ And so,’ he said, looking at her again with the half-light in his eyes, ‘ I look to you for as much sympathy as is due to a ghost from a *Glockendame*. You are surprised to hear of my belonging to Hillswick for nearly four hundred years ?’

‘ Not at all,’ said Helen. ‘ The world is nearly six thousand years old.’

‘ True ; but I can’t pretend to a Welsh pedigree, which classes Noah’s Ark among such modern inventions as cigar ships and monitors. Did you, in your bell-tower, ever hear of the Waldrons of Copleston ?’

‘ The Waldrons ? Of Copleston ? Why——’

‘ Of course you have : you must have rung at the births, christenings, marriages, comings of age, and deaths of generations of them.

We've been talking of strange things; but I can't tell you how strange it is to find myself here, at Hillswick, in England; a foreigner, from a far-off country, but just as truly at home among the graves of my fathers, or, I should say, of my ^ggrandfathers and great-grandfathers, as if—no, more truly than if I were in any other place in all the world. One can't help talking at such times, and in this dilapidated old barn, where it rains hammers and nails, I feel like—like—a Jew out of Houndsditch suddenly pitchforked into Jerusalem. I do think he'd feel something more than sixty per cent. then. That's why I wanted to get on the top of the steeple—I wanted to see the whole old place all at once, all round. I do believe, to-day, that I was here not far from a hundred years ago, and that I know every old stick and stone, with the names that the hobnails of country yokels haven't been able to wear away out of mind, better than old Grimes, and he looks as if he ought to remember most things.'

'Do you mean that *your* name is Waldron?' asked Helen, who could hardly connect this

sudden burst of enthusiasm with her previous ideas of this exceedingly self-possessed young man. 'And you are not an Englishman?'

'I am an American, and my name is Victor Waldron,' he said simply. 'I was born in New York, and my father and mother in Baltimore; and I've never been in England till three weeks ago. But there's something in the air of this tumble-down old place that makes me feel an Englishman to the backbone.'

'I thought—I thought the Waldrons were all dead and gone long ago,' said Helen. But—well, I'm glad they're not, all of them; for indeed, though we're strangers and I'm no *Glockendame*, I *do* understand. Yes—it must indeed be strange for you to be in Hillswick—you, an American Waldron!—and I suppose you will want to see Copleston too?'

'Ah, yes, Copleston! Who lives at Copleston now?'

'Mr. Reid—my father; and I am Miss Helen Reid, of Copleston.' His more than touch of enthusiasm, quite ill enough expressed to be spontaneous and genuine, touched a very

sympathetic chord in Helen, and made her forget even his boots, gloves, and hair. There was romance, too, in the notion of one of the dead and forgotten Waldrons coming all the way from the other side of the world to see the old home and the old graves, and in her happening to meet with him. It was not a case for mere politeness; it was a case for the frankest hospitable impulse, if ever there was one. No shyness could keep her from holding out a hand of the welcome that was due from a Reid to a Waldron. She held out hers with a warm smile, and said:

‘Welcome to Hillswick, now—you must let us say to Copleston very soon. There is not much there to interest anybody else, but of course it will interest you, and my father and mother too will be glad to see you. You must not pass by the old house without taking away some recollection of the people who live there now; and if there is anything my father or my brother can do for you, I am sure they will. They are great fishermen; are you one? And where are you staying, and how long do you stay?’

He took her hand, in as frank and friendly a fashion as she had given it, and held it a moment. ‘I certainly shall not pass by Copleston without knocking at the door. You are right, Miss Reid; your house interests me as much as Shakespeare’s, which I have seen. Perhaps you think it odd in an American to take so much interest in his pedigree; but it’s a fact, and perhaps it isn’t so odd after all. I don’t know that I’m much of a fisherman, but I’m a good hand at other sorts of loafing when I’m on a holiday, as I am now, and don’t want much looking after. I don’t know how long I shall be about here—just long enough, I suppose, to make myself wish it were longer. I’m staying with my friend Skull—Gideon Skull. Do you know him?’

‘Skull is the name of our clergyman; but I never heard of a Gideon Skull.’

‘Ah, I’ve sometimes fancied there was something about my friend Gideon that made him shy of his relations, and that might make his relations shy of him. But he’s a right-down good fellow, is Gideon Skull; and when I heard he was coming to London on

business, and that he would take the chance of looking up his uncle the minister, and that that uncle lived at Hillswick—our family Mecca, you know, Miss Reid—I didn't think twice about it, but took passage with him, and here I am. Always act on impulse, Miss Reid; you won't often regret it, and if you do, you may be sure you'd have regretted not acting on it still more. All I can say is, if you don't know Gideon Skull you don't know the finest product of your own country. Yes—I like Gideon. I can't say I make much account of your minister, and I expect the less I hear of his sermons the better pleased with him I shall be. But the question is——'

'I know of only one question just now, Mr. Waldron, and that is, how we are to get out again?'

'Ah; I had forgotten that; I have hardly had time to realise that you are Miss Reid and not the *Glockendame*. Yes: we must both of us get out, I suppose. And, as you say, the question is, how are we to get through locked doors without keys or through windows without wings. . . . Let me see . . . Ah, I

have it! What's the use of being in a belfry with a rope in one's very fingers if one doesn't——'

'Oh—please—pray, No!—You don't know Hillswick, and I do——'

All Hillswick knew she had contrived to stay in church all alone; what would all Hillswick say if summoned by a bell to find the wreath, her pretext, unhung, and herself locked up in the steeple with a stranger? One did not need innocence, one needed downright idiocy, at Hillswick, not to know and dread the wagging of the public tongue. But before she could finish her last word the deepest bell had tolled. 'Oh, Mr. Waldron,' she cried out, 'what *have* you done now!'

'Upon my soul, I do believe this church *is* enchanted!' said he. 'I *was* going to pull that bell—but, on my honour, the rope drew itself down through my fingers before I had time to tighten them.' He took his fingers away from the rope altogether, and stood looking from it to her in real surprise. 'You may not be the *Glockendame*, but she must be here, all the same.'

‘But you must have done it without knowing it,’ said she, beginning to be impressed in the darkening twilight with a strange sort of awe. ‘Bells don’t toll themselves without hands.’

‘Why not—when hammers can fall on one’s head without being thrown? And when young ladies can unlock doors without keys? And play the organ without wind? On my honour, I did not stir the bell. And—there!’

And, sure enough, though his hands were far enough from the rope this time, the same deep bell tolled again.

‘That is the way they toll here when somebody is dead or dying!’ said she.

‘You mean the Passing Bell? Yes—I have heard of that,’ said Victor Waldron. ‘Then—somebody must be dead or dying, I suppose. Look here, Miss Reid—down through the floor. There is somebody pulling below—and there, it sounds again! Is that old Grimes? Then do at once as I bid you—he can’t have come in here to toll the bell without unlocking the steeple-door and

the church-door too. Run down as quick as you can, and then run out and run home. Whoever's dead has chosen a good time. I'd offer to see you safe, but I know what was in your mind when you asked me not to ring, and one hasn't to come to the old country to find out what gossip means. I'll call at Copleston, and I do hope we shall meet again. Meantime, I'll stay here and make friends with Mr. Grimes. Good-night, Miss Reid—my welcome to the old home has been a pleasant one.'

'Thank you—yes, I will go,' said Helen. 'Good-night—no doubt we shall meet again.'

Off she went, too thankful for her chance of freedom, whatever the cause, to delay seizing it by another word.

CHAPTER III.

What is the best and the fairest thing
Hearts may have for their welcoming ?

Is it sound of trump as we leap on land,
Or the kindly clasp of a brother's hand ?

Is it all that our home-brought wealth can buy,
Or the alms we take from saint charity ?

Is it the joy of the bells that ring,
Or the knell that tolls for our welcoming ?

It was sunset when Helen at last left the church behind her, and breathed freely. She was adventurous enough, but she had had adventures enough crowded into a single afternoon to last her for a week, small as most of them had been. But then she lived far too strongly for anything, even the merest trifle, to seem small to her: a great deal less would have been a great deal.

‘Who can be dying in Hillswick?’ she wondered, as she passed through the churchyard. ‘Nobody has been ill—and yet it must

be Somebody—can that be why nobody came to the church in the afternoon, and why the church has been left unfinished, and why old Grimes locked all the doors? I feel as if I had been out of the world for years—as if something must have gone wrong with it while I have been away. No—I will never get into mischief again: not even next time!’

Hillswick church was a far finer building without than within; indeed, its size and architectural pretensions were out of all common proportion to so insignificant a townlet as Hillswick was in all eyes but its own. And now, in her new mood, it felt doubly imposing while throwing the dying day’s last and longest shadow over that part of the churchyard through which she was passing homeward. For she was on its dark side: and every now and then the air about the steeple thrilled with the tidings that some one of its god-children was dead or dying. Helen had often enough heard the same bell tell the same news, but she had never felt the voice of the *Glockendame* as now.

The church lay on an outer edge of the

town, through which she had no occasion to pass in order to reach Copleston, about two miles away. It was not likely she would meet a single acquaintance, except some homeward-bound labourer to drop her a passing good-night, country-wise; but she had not walked the first quick half-mile, when a young man vaulted over a gate in the hedge, and her whole heart sighed with a deep laugh as she found herself in the real, common, good world again, with her brother beside her.

‘Well, Nell, have you finished off the church?’ asked he.

‘Well, no—not exactly. Have you heard any news in the town, or of it?’

‘Not a word. Why?’

‘Because I’ve been waiting in the church all the afternoon, and nobody came till I left—which isn’t ten minutes ago—and old Grimes is tolling the dead-bell.’

‘Indeed? No—I haven’t heard a word. But do you mean to say, Nell, that you’ve been working all the afternoon all alone? I shouldn’t have thought that much in your line.’

‘Well, Alan, not exactly, either. But I’ll

tell you all my adventures later—only, did you ever know that there are Waldrons in America, and that one of them's in Hillswick now ?'

'Indeed ? Yes, I know there was a Waldron—he was some sort of a great-uncle of our own, by the way—who went to America, and became some sort of a general, or a colonel, or a judge under Washington ; everybody gets made a colonel or a judge out there, you know. But I never could make much head or tail of the family pedigree.'

'Then, any Waldrons that there are would be our cousins ?'

'Well, I suppose they would be—in some tenth-removed sort of a way, I suppose. But we represent the Waldrons now, you know, through our grandmother. I know so much, any way. But what makes you all of a sudden so interested in the Waldrons ?'

'I'll tell you presently ; and it really *is* interesting. I've been learning all sorts of things since I saw you. Who's Gideon Skull ?'

'Gideon Skull ? What the deuce, Nell,

do you know about Gideon Skull? Yes, I've heard of him. He's old Skull's nephew; and, from all I've heard, about as bad a lot as you could easily find. Old Skull never mentions him, and the people about here have pretty well forgotten him; but those that remember him say——'

'Everything that's bad, of course. That's Hillswick all over. Does papa know him? And what does *he* say?'

'My dear Nell, what a question! Did you ever know the governor say a hard word of man, woman, or child?'

'Well—no. But, Alan——'

'Well, Nelly?'

'My adventures will keep; but yours won't, you know.'

'Mine?'

'Don't look up at the moon like that,' said Helen, putting her arm lovingly through his. '*She* isn't there! Oh, Alan, do tell me that Bertha is to be my real, very own sister! You know I love her better than anybody in the world but you and papa—and of course mamma.'

He looked down at her face almost as tenderly as if it were Bertha's. 'Yes, Nell,' he said, 'I do love Bertha—better than anybody in the world—better than you.'

'Of course you do. And you have told her what you have told me?'

'She knows it, anyhow. No, I haven't told her in words, not yet; but she does know it, and I'm not afraid of what she will say when I tell her a great deal more than I have told you.'

'Alan! Do you mean to tell me that you have walked all the way with Bertha from Hillswick to Copleston, and have said no more to her than if you were a milk-maid and her young man arm-in-arm on Sunday? Oh, Alan! for what else did I save you from Miss Bolt's clutches?'

'You're so awfully quick, Nell. I wish it had been my luck to see Bertha home. I've not been home at all.'

'You've not even seen her home?'

'No. We'd all of us clean forgotten that confounded annual lunch at the Skulls'. You know what that means. And, as luck would

have it, we hadn't got clear of the churchyard before we were in the clutches of Mrs. Skull, and Miss Skull, and Miss Sarah Skull. There was no help for it, Nell. They carried off Bertha, and I—well, I lost my temper, I suppose, and said I'd promised to meet the governor at three.'

'That was stupid,' said Helen. 'You should have said that we all of us had to be home by three. You should never tell fibs, Alan; you don't tell good ones.'

They said they would send to the church for you. Didn't they?'

'If they did, they didn't find me. Perhaps they thought I had gone home. Oh, dear! I will never plan anything again. And where have you been?'

'I did what I could to make my excuse a true one, and went up the brook; but I didn't find father. However, I walked off my temper, and that's something. I was going to the Vicarage, when I met young Walters, who told me that he'd just met Bolt and Miss Meyrick on the road. I suppose the doctor was at the Skulls' too, and was driving her home.'

‘Alan, tell me one thing; do you love Bertha Meyrick with all your heart and soul?’

‘God knows I do, Nell—with all my heart and soul.’

‘And you will tell her so?’

‘To-morrow can’t pass without my trying to tell her how much I love her.’

‘I am so glad, dear! And—but never tell her I told you—I saw a “yes” in her eyes to-day as plainly as I see that star.’

For the first stars were in the sky as they reached home.

What need had the butler to unchain and unbolt the door before he let them in? Why did he let them in so slowly? What strange look was in his face as he led the young master aside? and what was he half whispering? and what made his voice break at every other word?

Alan turned to Helen with a face that had suddenly become as pale and as hard as a stone.

‘What has happened, Alan? For God’s

sake, tell me ; what you can bear, I can. Is it Bertha, Alan ?'

'Our father is dead !' said he.

So Helen knew why there were to be no flowers that Easter-tide, and why the dead-bell had tolled.

CHAPTER IV.

Will the great gods take naught of all they gave—
Not even such back-cast as one little ring?
Shall Ocean be for souls a sateless grave,
Yet find no nook to hide so mean a thing?
What rede hath Fate, when thus the winds and seas
Fear to share fortunes with Polycrates?

‘I’VE heard a skunk called a mean beast,’ was Victor Waldron’s first reflection as soon as Helen had left him alone in the belfry. ‘Perhaps he may be—but if he is, he can’t help his attributes—so any way he’s not so mean as those who can. I know one biped that has no business to call a skunk names—and his name’s Victor Waldron. What would that girl call me if she knew me to be a traitor and a spy? I have a pretty fair notion that she wouldn’t think twice before calling me what she thought me. I should say that girl has more devil in her than most girls;

and it's a good, honest, downright devil that couldn't be mean or small if it tried. I didn't know there was a girl in the case, anyhow. I wish I *had* known. It would have saved me from feeling like a skunk, and like a fool for feeling like a skunk, and like an ass for feeling like a fool. Well—no harm's done so far, and not much seems like to be. I always did think my friend Gideon a man with more gas in him than ballast—the sort of man that would climb a tree to look for an oyster if he was lost in the woods at lunch-time; and I'm more sure of it than ever now I've seen that girl. Yes; Gideon Skull is a hopeful man. Well! Let him be. He's a good fellow, and hope's a good thing. I hope I'm not a bad fellow, way deep down, and content's not a bad thing. I've seen the old place, and the old tombstones: and I couldn't do more than see them if they were my own. I believe I told that girl more truth than I've ever told myself when she struck it out of me that I'd crossed the Atlantic only to look around. I suppose it takes a woman to make a man own up to being sentimental. I suppose it takes

the dusty society of one's great-great-great-grandfathers and grandmothers to make one feel that, when one's going to join them for good and all, it will be good to feel that it wasn't among their dust that one grubbed for the gold one won't be able to carry away. I dare say all these Waldrons weren't fine fellows. There are too many, for a knave or two not to be among them. But I should like to be in with the best of them. And somehow I can't fancy the worst of them coming from America or the Crusades, or wherever it might be, and being received just for his name's and his country's sake, by the first far-off cousin he meets, with free and open welcome, and then saying to her, "Excuse me, mademoiselle. Don't ask me to *your* house. Don't shake hands with *me*. It's true I want to see the old place and the home which has become sort of sacred with me. That's why I've come, and that's why I would have come, sooner or later, if there was no other why. And, if there'd been no other why, I'd have taken your hand as the best thing I've found. But there is another why. I've always had a

dream of being Waldron of Copleston again, as I ought to be, and as my father and grandfather ought to have been before me: and I've found reason to think that the dream may be more than a dream—so I've come to investigate how much more than a dream it may be—and so that's why I'm here—sentiment deep down at the root, but by no means without very practical fruit, mademoiselle.” Or if I can fancy not quite the worst of them saying that, I can't fancy the very worst and meanest of them taking the hand, and accepting the unsuspecting welcome, and saying nothing but just the mere core of the truth, and still going on. If my own great-great-great-grandfather did that, I'd disown him for an ancestor. Let me see what I've learned already. There's a father—a mother—a son—and a girl. Suppose there's anything to be found in this ancestral dust-heap—which, now I've seen it, looks improbable—of course the father, if he's an honest man, wouldn't want to keep what isn't his own, and if he's not an honest one, he oughtn't to be allowed. As to the son—if he's got a grain of grit, he won't mind being

thrown on his own feet to make himself with his own hands, like a man. But—for sentiment's sake—to break up a couple of women's homes? Haven't I got legs and hands too? No—the more I think of it, the more I realise the sanguine nature of the temperament of Gideon Skull. I must investigate, if its only to convince myself there's nothing in it, and to make things clear to Gideon. I'll do it now. If in five minutes I'm convinced that I'm Victor Waldron of Copleston, I write to Mr. Reid, and regret that circumstance as politely as I can. But if I'm convinced I'm not—why, then, I'll call at Copleston to-morrow, and feel myself a better Waldron than if I were of twenty Coplestons. No—five minutes is *not* short allowance—when one knows beforehand that one would find out no more in five years. And then I shall be clear to make a holiday what it ought to be—and to call at Copleston to-morrow. I'll spend five minutes and five shillings on old Grimes. If in his capacity of clerk, sexton, and old inhabitant *he* knows nothing, one may take it as certain that nobody else will.'

The bell and Victor Waldron's reflections went on together: and when the bell stopped, these stopped with it, as if the toll had been their support and had fixed them into words. Some people always think in words when their thoughts are accompanied by a regular and continuous sound, such as the roar of the streets, the tick of a loud clock, or the rattle of a railway-train. But when old Grimes, having finished his work, came into the upper loft, the stranger had lapsed into a mere brown study, so forgetful of place and circumstance that he was instinctively lighting a cigar.

Old Grimes jingled his keys. 'I'm going to shut up, master,' said he.

'Oh—it's you? Wait five minutes—I want to ask you a question or two.'

'Sir?' asked Grimes, with his hand at his ear.

'I want you to take this,' said Victor, raising his rather naturally high-pitched and incisive voice a tone and a half higher, as he held out a half-sovereign. 'And I want to ask you some questions.'

‘Oh!’ said old Grimes, taking the piece of gold, without any questioning—probably, in the half-dark, he thought it a sixpence: for why should a stranger give half-a-sovereign to old Grimes?

‘Did you ever hear,’ shouted Victor, ‘of George Waldron?’

‘Did I ever hear? P’raps *you* didn’t hear when I said I’d come to shut up?’ said old Grimes.

‘Of George Waldron.’

‘Out of the churchyard, turn to the right and follow your nose—that’s the “George.”’

‘George—Waldron?’

‘Yes, master, there’s a sight of Waldrons here—a sight of ’em. They keep a mazin’ good brew at the “George.”’

‘I must try another tack,’ thought Victor. ‘How long—have you been pulling—that bell?’

‘That bell? Thirty minutes—that’s the rule for a dead ’un.’

‘How many years, I mean? You’ve been clerk and sexton half your time?’

‘I’ve been parish clerk of Hillswick long

time enough to know when to shut up—and that's now. And it's against my rule to have strangers after dark up in my belfry. I've got to go my rounds and sweep up arter the ladies—wasted litter it's been to-day, to be sure! If you want to see this church, you can come to morning service to-morrow and hear me and Mr. Skull.' He took an old horn lantern from a peg, fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for a minute, and struck a lucifer on the bell-rope. But the hands which had tolled so many dead men and women out of this world had grown slow and clumsy, and the coin which had been fixed between the left fore and middle fingers interfered with them; the five minutes that Victor Waldron had given himself were well over before the glimmer of the lantern transformed the loft from the bower of the romantic *Glockendame* into the likeness of one of the tombs he had come to find, with old Grimes for its ghostly denizen. 'I feel like a Ghoul, come to pick my own great-grandfather's bones!' thought he, with something in him that was not a laugh at the fact, though with a laugh to him-

self at the fancy. He was thinking that he had already done more than enough to satisfy himself, if not enough to content a jury, that further investigation into the lawful possession of the Reids—especially of Miss Helen Reid—would be thrown away, when—

‘Holloa!’ exclaimed old Grimes, with a start that almost infected Victor.

The sexton was staring hard at the despised coin between his fingers—the light of the lantern had performed a trick of magic for him also, by transmuting one silver sixpence into twenty golden ones. ‘Begging your pardon—you was asking about somebody?’ asked he.

Victor was quick-brained enough; but a true-born Briton, without half his quickness, would have been far less puzzled by this sudden effect of a lighted lantern upon hearing, memory, and manners. Victor would have been more puzzled than he was, but for a habit, strengthened by the events of that afternoon, of being surprised at nothing. And, after all, what is there left to surprise or startle any sane man who has once grasped

and realised that arch-marvel of marvels—that he is Alive?

‘Only after one George Waldron, who died some fifty years ago. I thought you might have heard of him—that’s all—before he left Hillswick—when you were a boy. He was my grandfather—old Blundel Waldron’s son, of Copleston.’

‘Ah, sir!’ said old Grimes, with a sympathetic screw of the face and with the merest pretence of raising the half-sovereign to his ear. This church is your regular family vault, sir! And those old boxes, there—they’re the old registers, and accounts, and nobody knows what not, as full of Waldrons’ names as the ground is of their bodies. If you’re a pedigrestian, sir, or an antiquity, you’ll find lots there, what the rats have left of ’em, to last you weeks to come. And you do seem to me, sir, to be the sort of gentleman that would make himself heartily welcome. You wouldn’t believe it, sir, but there was a gentleman of the antiquated sort that enjoyed himself over those old boxes a whole afternoon, and never gave me a half-crown over

my fees. He was writing a County History, he said. And p'raps it paid *him*.'

Victor looked at the old lumber. Why had the sexton been so perverse as to suggest to him the very search that he had been inventing reasons for avoiding and ignoring? It would certainly interest him to spend a good many hours over the mouldy records of his family history; but then it must be for sentiment's sake and with an honest mind; not in the hope of unearthing from among those boxes a skeleton who should give him Copleston and—forbid him to call there.

So he fell back upon personal inquiry once more. The sexton's sudden lapse out of deafness disappointed him; but he resolved to give him no more half-sovereigns. He thought, 'It's as mean to buy as to spy;' he felt, 'He'll remember too much unless I give him too little.' And the thought and the feeling, though starting from different ends, met half-way. Why should a chance meeting with a strange girl have almost piqued a grown man into rejecting every chance of finding what he had crossed the Atlantic to

find, as if it were a point of honour? He could not answer the question because he never asked it—but he knew, without any question, that he could never again think of himself with any comfort unless he could look as straight into that girl's eyes and take her hand as frankly to-morrow as to-day.

‘Perhaps,’ he said, ‘I will have a time with the rats—some other day. And, when I do, I won't forget that dust means thirst, and that, as you inform me, the beer at the “George” is 'mazin fine. So you don't remember my grandfather?’ He took out his watch—ten minutes had gone, and the conscience which confuses rights with duties might be at ease and trouble him no more.

But the motion of his hand to his waistcoat pocket was suggestive.

‘Wait a bit, sir! Your grandfather! I remember things farrer off than him. I remember Boney—and old Mr. Skull reading himself in. I remember when King George was king. I remember when wheat was a hundred and twenty-six shilling a quarter, and when the farmers was happy—and that's

a long time ago. Mr. George! He was a fine young gentleman I've heard tell, like him that's been cut down to-day. I mind his wedding too: leastwise I mind them that used to mind.'

'Ah!' said Victor Waldron, his face brightening. 'He did marry, then—in England? And that's so?'

'If he didn't, then my father, that married him in this very church, was liar too, as well as clerk and sexton, afore me. And if he were, then I, that says he weren't, be one too.'

'Mr. Grimes! I *am* what you call a pedigrestian—or an antiquity. I believe your father, and I believe you. If you can make it as clear as daylight to me that George Waldron married, anywhere on earth—mind, I say, *married*—any woman before he left Great Britain, I'll give you a fifty-dollar bill, and—call at Copleston!' he added to himself.

It'll be a blow to Gideon—but he didn't know there was a *Miss Reid* of Copleston.'

'Fifty how much, sir, if you please?'

'Fifty dollars—ten pounds.'

Old Grimes meditated. 'Ten pounds be a

goodish bit of money,' said he. 'Gentlefolk don't give ten pound for nothing. They may chuck away a loose sovereign, but I never knew one to chuck away ten—none but one, and he'll chuck no more where *he's* gone. *You* aren't writing no County History, sir.'

Victor Waldron was beginning to know his man. 'The information I require,' he said, 'happens to be worth exactly ten pounds. And I have them here.'

'Aren't what's worth ten pound worth ten pound ten?'

'It is not worth ten pounds one, Mr. Grimes. In the country I come from, we name our prices down; and if people don't like them, we don't trade.'

'Then, sir—you come along of me.'

Victor followed the sexton from the loft, and waited on the steeple-flight while the door was being locked after them. Then, following old Grimes's lantern, he groped his way down the dark corkscrew, and was led through a short passage into a small square room with one table, one chair, and a clean white surplice hanging against the wall. Old Grimes unlocked

and opened a large wooden box in the corner, and took out a long-shaped, half-bound volume, which he laid before Victor, without any farther motion towards helping him. He was clearly not going to do one pennyworth of work beyond his undertaking, or to throw one unpurchased word into the bargain.

Victor opened the volume, and found it to be a register of the marriages solemnised in Hillswick parish church from the year 1754 to the year 1769. He knew the dates of the family history well enough to begin his search from the end: and his search did not take long. There, the very last entry on the very last page of the volume, stood that which, not many hours ago, he would have given nearly all he possessed in the world *not* to have found. Nothing could be clearer, even by the quarter-light of old Grimes's lantern, than that register of a marriage, on the 10th of October, 1769, between George Waldron, son of Blundel Waldron, of Copleston, Esquire, and Hannah Rich, of Hillswick, spinster.

‘ Well, that's clear enough,’ thought Victor.
‘ A fancy that one's got a right and a claim to

a landed estate isn't wholesome food—and there it goes. Sour grapes? Not at all. If they'd hung down to my fingers, and if I'd taken them—then they'd have been sour. If a man wants sweet grapes, he must grow his own, and not in a churchyard. But I guess Jove must have had a good time, laughing at my grandfather when he was courting my grandmother—the old villain! And he'd have saved his grandson a voyage, if he hadn't been so dark about a Mrs. George Waldron number one. Why, he may have left a first family for aught I know, and I mayn't be even his heir-at-law—not that that's of much account, since it turns out that there is nothing to be heir of. So now I'm shot of that rubbish, and a free man.—Mr. Grimes, I thank you, sir. Here are your ten sovereigns. Count them, if you please. While you are counting them, I will make an extract of this register. Gideon must have proof. Gideon will be vexed—but——'

'You're a gentleman, sir. And *to* a gentleman my charge is One Shilling per extract,' said old Grimes, dropping his sovereigns into

his pocket with one hand, and holding out the other.

Victor had needed no directions to the 'George,' for he was lodging there ; he was more in title than in fact a guest of the Curate-in-charge, who had neither house-room nor purse-room to be hospitable to the casual acquaintances of a long-lost and by no means over-welcome nephew. Hearing that his friend and travelling companion had not yet returned from his uncle's, he sat down, alone in the coffee-room, to a joint of cold roast beef, and did not find his appetite a whit lessened by the presence in his pocket-book of the evidence that his half-sentimental, half-ambitious dream of being the owner as well as the lover of the home of his fathers was at an end. He even, as the beef lessened before him, recognised in himself a school-boy's pleasure in having with his own hands destroyed at a blow what he had been at such long pains to build. And one minute he liked to think he had done it all himself, because to walk in dead men's shoes was unbecoming to his notions of the

proper attire for an American citizen, and because Helen Reid's face looked at him approvingly from out the ruins of his house of cards another minute, he was glad to tell himself that his escape was due to accident and old Grimes, because that relieved him from the alternative responsibility of meanness if he had taken Copleston and of folly if he had thrown it away. He preferred folly to meanness in his heart, but was still too young to be quite indifferent to the charge of being a fool—and a fool's cap was, in his opinion, as little fitting for an American head as, for American feet, were his great-grandfather's shoes. So luck and good management had for once leaped together, and made him feel, by the time he had finished his cheese, that each of them was the other.

He had half noticed, as he entered the inn, that a great deal of gossip was going on at the bar, and, while feeding, that the waiter wore a curiously funereal air, and hung about as if waiting for a question. At any other time Victor would have questioned the waiter to his heart's content, and have been at the

bottom of all the gossip in Hillswick in no time ; but he had other things to think of, or at least to think that he thought of, and old Grimes had rather exhausted his turn for investigation. The waiter was doomed to be disappointed. For the arrival of the time for sweeping off the bread crumbs, and an order for a pint of port, had barely given him a chance of beginning on his own motion the talk with which he was bursting and burning, when it was caught from his tongue by another gentleman who just then came into the coffee-room.

‘Gideon!’ called out Victor cheerfully. ‘Just like you—just too late for the beef, and just in time for the wine! Have you had a good time with your aunts and cousins? I have with mine.’

Gideon Skull, the curate’s and the curate’s sisters’ nephew, did not look as if he had been having a good time. He pulled a chair to the table sharply and roughly, and called out, ‘Waiter — whisky! Ah, Waldron, family affection is a nice thing, an exceedingly nice thing, as long as you don’t cut the doll in two. Then out comes the sawdust.’

‘What! weren’t they glad to see you?’

‘Glad? Isn’t my uncle a parson, and aren’t my aunts parson’s sisters? And isn’t there more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth——? You know? Well, there’s been more joy over me because I’m come back with a decent coat and a good yellow lining to it than if I had never gone away in a bad one with no lining at all. Much joy there’d have been over me, I can tell you, if I’d come back as I went away. It’s a world of humbug, Waldron; and you’ll find it out when you’re half as old as I.’

Gideon Skull was as strong a contrast to his friend from head to foot as one can easily find; more so than is common even between friends, who choose by contrast hardly less than lovers. He was big and broad, with the face of a thorough-bred Englishman; fresh-complexioned, short-featured, brown-bearded, and grey-eyed. And it was better still—it was full of the sort of honesty of which we English plume ourselves on having the lion’s share; a rugged, somewhat sullen sort, taking refuge in cynical speech when it is too honest to ac-

quit itself of being touched by sentiment deeper than the outermost skin. The more prominent features were rather broad and blunt—the lion's and not the eagle's: the mouth, though rather large and heavy, was appropriate to the sort of face, and handsomely formed, at least so far as could be seen through a full brown moustache that nearly hid the upper lip and fell naturally into the full brown beard. 'I mayn't be a saint; who is? But I hate humbug,' the whole face seemed to say for itself; more especially the well-opened, out-looking grey eyes—those features which, we are told, are alone incapable of a lie. Victor Waldron's elaborate and obtrusive dandyism became downright effeminacy now that it was opposed to one who was so much of a natural man—natural and manly, not only in his broad build and British-lion-like aspect, but in a carelessness in dress that no man can afford unless he be either a peer or a millionaire, or else too honestly unaffected and indifferent to appearances, whether in himself or in others, to think of coats and hats save when he is compelled. His easy shooting-jacket,

crumpled felt hat, absence of ornament, and boots careless of shape, were in themselves honest and sensible protests against the principles of one who dressed for Hillswick more than most men would for the whole world in mid-season. But when I use the word 'sullen' as an epithet of Gideon Skull's style, it must not be taken to go beyond its precise bearing. He might—out of a sort of shame at being accused of the possibility of entertaining domestic emotions—prefer to pull up the hood of cynical ill-temper for a blind; but neither his eyes nor his lips were those of an ill-natured or ill-tempered man, however much they might be those of a reserved and stubborn one. For the rest, he had grossly exaggerated his forty years or so when speaking of his friend's reaching half his age; and, to sum him up, the man, woman, or child lived not who would not put implicit trust in the good sound sense, as well as in the pluck and honesty, of Gideon Skull. If he was really of the sanguine and gaseous nature for which his friend had given him credit, then appearances were liars indeed.

‘Not a bit of it, old friend,’ Victor answered him as he lighted a cigar—for the port of the ‘George’ was not of a vintage to be kept sacred from tobacco. ‘You’re the biggest humbug of them all. I have no sympathy with your “British phlegm;” a man who has got it by nature can’t have any room in him for a soul, and even then a good tough sign-post will beat him at his own game; and if he only pretends to have it, why then he’s a humbug—like you. Offer me Tartuffe and Timon, and of the two hypocrites and humbugs I’ll take Tartuffe; I’d rather have him round than Timon. Come—light your pipe and own up like a man—I don’t mean like an Englishman—that you were very glad to see your people at home, and they to see you.’

‘You may take it that one’s people at home are always glad enough to see the back of a bad coat and the front of a good one. That’s fair enough; and I didn’t make the world. I didn’t stop long. They’d got some confounded sort of a feed on—and I know my reverend uncle’s best wine too well—at least, I used to; and then all the old maids of Hillswick! We’re

both in for dining there to-morrow, after church. So I got clear for one day. I found you weren't here, so I took a tramp over the hill, with a pencil. There *was* a sunset, Waldron, as good as anything out West; *that* was no humbug, any way. Where the deuce have you been all this afternoon? Don't drink that blacking, Waldron. You boys have no notion of the fitness of things. Drink port when you dine with the Bishop; but—at the "George"! It's almost as bad as my uncle's.'

'What have I been doing? I have been meditating among the tombs. I didn't see any sunset—and I got locked in: and I've been listening, with my eyes, to a pretty girl playing the organ; and I've been interviewing the parish Character—being a character, I needn't tell you a thoroughpaced humbug. You're unjust to the "George" port, Gideon: I've drunk worse. But, by the way, talking of humbug, I've not been wasting my time, and I've got no more claim on Copleston than you have on Queen Victoria's crown. That's so. You'll be sorry to hear it, old friend, but—losing somebody else's land isn't like losing

one's own temper. So that's settled and done with, that's one good thing.'

'Will you allow me to ask you what the deuce you mean? And if that's your first pint—'

'My first—unfinished still. You shall see if I'm not clear-headed enough for a lawyer. Blundel Waldron disinherits George Waldron if he marries Hannah Rich. George Waldron, being a grandfather after my own heart, and a predestined rebel against tyranny whether of kings or fathers, makes a point of marrying Hannah Rich, publicly, in Hillswick Church, just to show off the free-born Briton he fancied himself and the free American he was going to be. I'm proud of my grandfather, George Waldron—it does him credit; and if he did it more out of love than out of liberty, I'm prouder of him still. You may say what you like, Gideon, as a misogynist; but there are girls it's worth pitching all California to the dogs for, let alone a few beggarly square feet of grass like Copleston. I guess Hannah Rich was that sort of girl. Only I must say my grandfather, George Waldron, would have

behaved more to my liking, and saved a pile of trouble, if, instead of leaving it to his grandson to pry it out, he'd let my grandmother know he was a widower when he came courting her. A cottage beauty, no doubt, was Hannah Rich; courting her turned out pleasanter than marrying her, I presume, and General George Waldron, when he'd cut off all his other connections with the old country, wasn't sorry to drop the tightest of them all as soon as he was free. My grandmother was a Hudson, one of the first families in Maryland. She wasn't the sort of woman for a man to tell that she'd have to play second wife to the sort of girl my grandfather had with him when he came out—and whom my father, from all he heard of her from others, no more believed was his wife than—but it seems she was, though; and—why, there may be dozens of Waldrons besides myself, for aught I know. So there's the case. George Waldron *did* marry Hannah Rich. So Copleston went to his sister by will, and then to the Reids by marriage. I've seen the register—and there's the copy—as clear as a horn lantern would

let me write by. Waldron of Copleston—Waldron of América! I guess I've got the biggest place, after all.'

Gideon Skull might be a sanguine man, but he did not seem an excitable or hasty one. He examined the piece of paper slowly, and then lighted his pipe with it, without a word. He blew six circles of smoke before speaking.

'How did you get hold of that rubbish?' asked he.

Victor shrugged his shoulders. 'There's Gideon all over,' meant the shrug. 'He's after oysters in a wood, and sees a brown leaf at the top of a tree—and up he goes! I purchased it,' he said, 'from an old gentleman named Grimes, for the sum of ten pounds one. He is a Character, is Mr. Grimes; so, being a character, I needn't say that he makes character pay. He has been ringing curfews and dead bells till he has become feudalised—which means ossification only to be vitalised by tipping. You may travel throughout the United States, and you will not meet with a Grimes. Why, for twice the money, the old scamp would have let me take out the entry

and burn it in his lantern. I believe I could have burned myself into Copleston for a hundred dollars, if I'd pleased.'

For one infinitesimal instant, the oddest look, half questioning, half—it was impossible to guess what, crossed the table from under the brows of Gideon Skull. Most decidedly Victor Waldron was not thinking of King Henry the Second just then, though there were Waldrons in that reign also. But if his eye had happened to catch sight at that moment of a sprig of broom, and if that had suggested far-off history, and if he had suddenly imagined to himself the first look between Fitzurse and Tracy when the king said, 'Will nobody rid me?'—then the oddness of Gideon Skull's look would certainly not have injured the illusion of fancy. Perhaps the 'George' port was playing tricks with him, after all. Probably it was making him a little sleepy. At any rate, he was wide awake now, and the glance must have belonged to the twilight of a moment's dream.

Gideon took a big sip of his grog and laughed. 'Yes,' he said, 'felony's no doubt

as purchasable as any other truck, but not for twenty pounds, as a rule. That's too much or too little. I believe in Walpole—he knew the world. There are two sorts of felons for money. There's the sort that cries halves, and there's the sort that wouldn't understand what ten pounds meant, but would go to the gallows for a pot of beer.'

'Timon was a philanthropist to you, Gideon. It's the one thing I don't like in you. To listen to you, one would think there wasn't an honest man or an honest woman in the world. If I didn't know you, I'd pass you the bottle flying—as hard and as quick as you would at Walpole, if he'd offered *you* a pot of beer. Perhaps you think I have a price—or you—or—'

'Of course I do.'

'Well, have your dog's fit out. What's yours?'

'It depends. If I were starving, I suppose a crust of bread. If I were dying of thirst, a glass of water. There was a time when I'd have done most things for a pretty girl.'

'And now?'

‘ Ah, my boy! that’s where the statesman comes in. It’s for the buyer to find that out; the seller never knows. Do you think any man knows his own weak spot? or that, if he did, he’d be more open than Midas was about his long ears? If you want to know that, you must hide among the reeds.’

‘ Well, then, what’s mine?’

‘ Your price? If I wanted to buy you, I should go to work with the pretty girl—say, playing on an organ.’

Victor smiled, no more touched than if he was not, in spirit at least, fresh from selling Copleston for the right to look into the eyes of Helen Reid. ‘ Then, that’s just the very last thing!’ said he. ‘ Say a good cigar.’

Gideon smiled too. He had a broad, daylight smile, not without grave sweetness in it, that made up for an air of superior wisdom which—perhaps rightly enough—also had part therein. ‘ If you want to know a man’s soft places,’ said he, ‘ ask him which are his hard ones, and hit him there. But we’re talking nonsense, and nonsense won’t help us to Copleston. The story you’ve been patching

together is just absurd. Think a minute—you, a New Yorker and half a lawyer. George Waldron married Hannah Rich? Maybe. But how do we know there wasn't a later will? What do we know of the title of these Reids, except the reputed marriage of George Waldron's sister? Do we even know that Copleston wasn't entailed? You've come to England to look into lots of things besides an old parish register that may be right or may be—wrong. And there might be a flaw, even there.'

'I was afraid you'd be vexed, old fellow. But—— No; there's no flaw. George Waldron didn't trick a girl into a false marriage, you may be sure. He was a soldier and a Waldron. And—well, I'm satisfied. Don't think I haven't inquired. I've been a regular detective. After all, it was only a fancy that I never believed in. Let it go.'

'You call me a cynic, Waldron. You expect me to respect humanity in the abstract, when my own friend—Where's your purpose? Where's your strength of it? Was it a dream that you were going to set right the grossest

piece of tyranny and injustice that even a testator ever committed?—that you were going to make the example of one American-taught man a shining light to all the land-owners of the Old World?—that you would be a missionary to your mother country?—that you would be a social leaven at work among us and our prejudices and conventions? I thought it a noble scheme, cynic as I am. Don Quixote was a hero. He's waited three centuries to be understood, but he's being understood now. What the world wants is more madmen. I'm not mad—but I hoped you were, and was content to be your Sancho. And now you tell me that all this was a mere—dream; and that a pretty girl can't turn you round her little finger. Cynicism! Common sense, I call it—common knowledge of the world, where Don Quixote's dead and buried. You're not even his fetch, Waldron. I've not seen Helen Reid since she was a baby; but I suppose, being a girl, she's grown up good-looking enough to catch a man's first sight if he's inclined that way, and if the tombs of his fathers have given him a senti-

mental turn. You needn't tell me the pretty organ girl's name. Perhaps you think to get Copleston that way. But unluckily there's a brother; and old Harry, as they call him, isn't the man to take up with what he'd call a somethinged Yankee — especially when he came to know your notions. I won't say, Don't be a fool. I might as well say to a man five feet ten tall, Don't be five feet ten. But I'll tell you this, Waldron—if a woman puts her finger in this pie, I won't leave in it so much as a little-finger-nail. Well, it's your own affair. As you say, let it slide. Only, you mustn't ask me to say I'm not disappointed. I *am* disappointed. There goes *my* dream.'

'I knew you'd be vexed—for you *are* a good fellow, deep down. But Miss Reid—caught at first sight! Bah! How can you talk such rubbish, Gideon? I left college ten years ago—and it was never less than third sight with me, even then. And I tell you, if I knew Copleston was mine, in a clear, open-handed, straight-faced way—as I came over to find—'

‘You’d take your clear right? In spite of Miss Reid?’

‘You’d see!’ The boast had been stung out of him; but he might make it safely, and think he made it truly, knowing that honest ways were as much closed to him by law as dishonest ways by nature. ‘Yes—’

‘Good evening, gentlemen!’ said Dr. Bolt, who strode with a sort of dignified haste into the coffee-room, followed, close at his heels, by the waiter with a steaming tumbler. ‘Ah—Mr. Gideon Skull? I heard you were here. I’m glad to see you—you must dine with us before you leave. But you have come on a sad day—a sad day indeed. It’s a sad house I’ve just been leaving. Of course you’ve heard?’

‘No,’ said Gideon Skull indifferently. ‘I never was much of a hand at hearing news. Won’t you sit down?’

‘No—I must swallow this dose down, and be off again. It’s a physical necessity—after a day like this, and with six miles more to drive out and back after another patient before I can turn in. Do you mean to say you haven’t heard?’

‘I’ve heard nothing. What is it?’ asked Gideon. ‘I’ve been taking a stretch out over the hill, and my friend here is a stranger—so far. Allow me—Dr. Bolt : Mr. Waldron.’

Victor rose to bow, but the doctor was in the middle of a hot gulp, so that at any rate the second part of the introduction missed fire.

‘You’ve not heard that Reid of Copleston is dead?’ asked he, half amazed that such a piece of news should need telling—half pleased that it should be left for him to tell.

‘Dead!’ exclaimed Gideon, startled into a voice as strange and unlike his own as that passing look had been.

‘Found by Copleston Brook, with his rod in his hand. Dead, when they sent for me. Dilatation of the heart, I expect ; unquestionably heart-disease. The sort of man who lived so healthily and with so few worries that mischief might be going on for years, and never be suspected till *post mortem*. He was a bad patient—but, as a man, and as a friend, one in a hundred—one in ten thousand. Young Reid’s a fine young fellow, but his

father he'll never be. You remember him—you'll understand what we shall feel at Hillswick, where he was about most days; and when there was good to be done, all days. I could better have spared a better patient, Mr. Skull. There hasn't been a dry eye in the place since the news; the church dressing was stopped, and I took up Miss Meyrick at your uncle's on my way to Copleston. There's no good that isn't being said of old Harry—and what that means in Hillswick perhaps you *don't* remember; but if they said twice as much, it wouldn't be half what he deserves. Everybody's friend, and no man's enemy—no, not even his own. I should like to have that epitaph—it would be worth living to earn. Good-night; I've twelve miles, and a new fellow-creature to bring into the world before bed-time. Yes, one out; another in.'

'Dead!—to-day!' said Gideon Skull.

'And how little he looked for it you may judge from the positive fact that he made no will—everything left to the law! Evans, the lawyer, told me he'd talked of it twenty times a year, but it was always to be "in plenty of

time." It's strange that a place like Copleston should go without a will. But luckily, Evans tells me, it won't make any difference—Alan Reid's heir at law, and he's not the man to turn his mother out of doors or let his sister marry without a penny; and of all that isn't real estate, Mrs. Reid and Miss Helen will each have her third. The young lady must take care not to marry a spendthrift—that's all. Good-night, Mr. Skull; good-night, Mr. —; when we next meet, I trust it will be a better day.'

It was Victor, this time, who forgot to return the Doctor's parting bow. His cousins were still strangers to him—but he could only think of that poor girl, all light and life, going home in high spirits to find her father dead; talking nonsense and laughing at idle nothings even while her own father was lying dead by the brook-side—even while her own father's death-bell was tolling in her ears! He turned aside from his own thoughts—it was too cruel to face or to follow.

'Waldron!' exclaimed Gideon, abruptly and suddenly, as soon as the Doctor had gone.

‘Well?’

‘I’ll tell you something that I never yet told you, and for this reason—it concerned nobody then. But now—are you listening to one word I say?’

‘Go on.’

‘Have you ever studied hereditary influence? Of course you haven’t. But I have, though. It’s the whole principle of family likeness—family propensity—family disease. Why are you You? Because your father represented a line of old English country Tories, and your mother one of American traders; mix the two, and dash in a spice of your grandfather, George Waldron—and there you are. But don’t forget the spice of George Waldron. He was He by inheritance too—rebel blood came out in him; democratic blood; a need to go down hill for love—a gipsiness, if I may make a word. Why did he marry Hannah Rich—if he married her? Why else did he give up Copleston for her, if he did not marry her? But whatever he was by inheritance his sister must have been, at bottom, too; his blood was hers, the same in

kind, the same in the mixing. And if it didn't come out in her woman's life, it was bound to come out double in her son. Who *was* her son? Old Harry Reid, of Copleston. If you want to know the bottom of old Harry, don't listen to Dr. Bolt. Look at his uncle, George Waldron—look at him, though the uncle was an American rebel general, and the nephew an easy-going English country squire. I dare say if George Waldron had been let do as he liked with Hannah Rich, and not kept from her by will, he'd have settled down, too, into a Squire of Copleston, and not left a dry pocket-handkerchief in Hillswick when he died. I dare say if old Harry Reid had found things made hard for him, he too would have become a general or a prize-fighter. But things *were* made easy for him, you see. And that's why his uncle's blood in him never made any show. But, all the same, it's why his uncle's blood had its way. Before he was one-and-twenty—when he was at Oxford—he took up with a woman too, like his uncle before him. And he *did* marry her. He liked to think himself a gentleman—did

Harry Reid. Unluckily, she wasn't a lady. Unluckily, or luckily, he found himself obliged to pay her off; she was the skeleton in his cupboard for many a long day. She went out at last—as she never troubled him any more, of course she'd died. When he was sure she was dead, old Harry married a Miss Hoel, of Pont-something in Wales. She had no money, but she was a lady. Her ancestors were in the Ark with Noah. What manner of beast they were I don't know, or how far she takes after them. Pretty fair, I fancy. And there was an end of his troubles. But, all the same, Mrs. Henry Reid the first is as alive as you or I. I met her in Broadway six months ago, and I talked with her too about old college days. She was a pretty girl then—she isn't now. Do you see?'

'I see that—he—once made a fool of himself, when he was a young man. It's a stupid story, Gideon, and not worth telling. Good-night—I've had enough of to-day. If there's anything not quite straight about his children's birth, who's to tell them—or the poor

widow, their mother? Not you, and not I. Good-night, Gideon.'

'Talk of Don Quixote! He was Solomon to you. What was I to see if Copleston came to you "in a clear, open-handed, straight-faced way"?''

'But it doesn't. What are that poor old fellow's wild oats to me? Good——'

'Heavenly Powers! Didn't you hear five minutes ago that he died without a will? Then who's his heir at law? A son born out of wedlock? No. Copleston is now the law's. We—you, take it from the law—open-handed, straight-faced, and clear. You can laugh at registers, and laugh at wills, and may don Mambrino's helmet once more, without wronging even a girl—not even a man. Hail to thee, Waldron of Copleston!'

'Good-night, Gideon,' said Victor.

CHAPTER V.

'Tis good to walk the garden through
Where bees are hunting honey—
To lift the lily from the dew,
And kiss the rose so bonny ;
And when the stars are in the sky
And shining o'er the meadow,
'Tis good to sleep, and dream good-bye
To lily, rose, and shadow.
Ah, if the lily looked not wrath,
And if the rose could pardon
The steps that leave the mountain path
To loiter through the garden !

THE morrow came and passed—that Easter Sunday on which, according to his promise, which was the promise of his whole heart, Alan Reid was to ask Bertha Meyrick to marry him, and when her lips would say the yes which her eyes had already spoken yesterday. It passed as silently as it came. Bertha would have remained to share in the sorrow of those whom she loved and who loved her,

her sister and her more than brother; but she was sent for by her own people, and she felt that even her presence, for all its sympathy, was an intrusion upon grief too deep and sacred for any eyes to see save those to whom it belonged. It would pass in time, and joy would come back again; but meanwhile old Harry's epitaph had to be wept out—and it was like to take long.

To Alan it was not the loss of a father only. Old Harry had been so young in spirit—and in body to boot, despite all hidden mischief—that his son had lost a father, brother, comrade, and friend, all in one. They had shared the same life, the same duties, the same tastes, the same pleasures; and if this had led to their treatment of one another almost too much as if they had been equals in age, old Harry had always, not by force of authority, but by force of doing everything best, kept over his son the influence of a comrade whom one looks up to as one's better—which is stronger than a father's. In spite of youth, Bertha, and one of the more than enough life to which he looked forward, he

almost felt as if all firm earth had been removed ; what had happened felt impossible to be true, then impossible to bear. A veil hung over the vision of the time—not so very far away—when he would ride to hounds or whip the brook with a heart as glad as ever, and much more strong, because every sound he heard and every step he made would be a link to bind him closer to what he would find most hope as well as pride in remembering ; when he would daily feel more and more that his father's spirit was living more and more strongly in his own. Now, when he looked forward to these things, he could only perceive the dead voice and the lost hand ; love was left, but how could joy come to life again ? He did his best to speak of courage to Helen ; but, in truth, it was he who needed courage more than she.

She hardly knew what to make of herself, when the first hard blow had been struck, when Bertha had gone, and when she also had to realise her special share in the first real sorrow, great or small, that had ever come to

Copleston. Her grief for loss, great as it was, seemed scarcely to be wholly her own. She loved her father dearly, but she was in such sympathy with her brother that his more complete loss seemed to absorb and take the place of hers. Alan lived, and would live; and the place that their father held in Alan's life, Alan himself held in hers. There was something in her that seemed incapable of seizing the idea of death, even though it had come. When she felt how Alan felt, she could hardly help fancying herself heartless or imbecile. What had gone out that could not be relighted? what place had been made empty that could not be refilled? She asked no such questions; but the sun of those glorious spring days still shone on as brightly as on Easter Eve; and the thought that he who would most have lived in it was now deaf and blind to it all was too self-conscious a piece of mere sentiment to find its way to her before grief had had time to turn poet—which means, to be cured. The awe and dread of sudden death felt ashamed of their heathenism when she saw her father's face, and how little its dead peace spoke of

dying. It was desperately hard to conceive that any sort of force could be stronger than life as she had known it ever since she was born. She felt as strong as ever; even while sorrowing with her true heart, something below her heart seemed rebelling against sorrow, and leaping forward to the days to come which were veiled to Alan. She was walking in a valley, and felt all its darkness and chill; but the sun was shining as brightly upon the mountain-tops before her as upon those she had left behind.

But to hear the Hillswick people talk, one would think that Mrs. Reid of Copleston was a nobody all this while—a mere appendage to her husband, daughter, and son. And it was certain that even Alan and Helen, whether they thought or talked, put their father first and let their mother follow. But such her husband himself had never done; nor would any stranger who saw her for the first time.

So, most assuredly, did not the Reverend Christopher Skull—that old Mr. Skull who was Curate-in-charge of Hillswick—think of

her, though he had seen her a great many times. It was the day after the funeral; and they sat together in Mrs. Reid's own private room. To a certain extent, the curate carried out the theories of inheritance on which his nephew had insisted so strongly at the 'George.' He also was a tall man, made with a view to breadth and thickness; but circumstance had prevailed over nature in his case, and had left him a sketch in outline. The nephew's features were short and blunt; the uncle's exaggerated this peculiarity into a breadth and flatness suggesting that the stuff of which he was made, though fairly economised save in the matter of length, had run out just when it became needful to give him a nose and chin. He was wanting in colour, also; so that his general air of sketchiness was borne out thoroughly. It was carried out yet further. The rare but winning smile of Gideon was chronic with Christopher—at least, such a travestie of it as to make one think it the earliest experiment towards the production of Gideon's. Gideon's expressed a lofty bonhomie; Christopher's a conceited sort of sympathy, as if perpetually

saying, ' Ah—what proper feelings yours are ! They must be, for they are precisely my own.' He was esteemed a deep scholar in Hillswick, and had never done anything to disprove the esteem : he was charitable, according to his narrow means, and was labelled a shrewd man of business by all who knew him—very poor preachers are safe to be accounted shrewd, sound, practical men. Perhaps he would have preached better but for his voice, which was weak, dyspeptic, and the most sketchy part of him. And his nephew's lion-look of honesty was also outlined in him, in spite of his smile. He was dressed in loosely fitting and loosely worn black of what was beginning to be looked upon as of insufficiently clerical cut, and wore a large white bow that must have been among the very last of its kind.

Mrs. Reid was sitting with her back towards the window, dressed in the deepest mourning, but with no exaggeration of weeds. She must have been at least something of a beauty when she was Miss Hoel of Pontargraig, and there were still notes of Helen about her which might have interested Gideon Skull.

She was by no means an old lady—not even in years. Her husband was barely more than sixty when he died, and must have been the elder by ten. With her back to the light and her well-kept figure she looked even young. Very grave she was, of course; but, apart from grief, the lines of her face were grave. She was of that rare dark Welsh type, which sometimes in Caernarvonshire reminds us strangely of Rome beyond the Tiber, and has nothing to do with the common Celtic pattern. It was not hard, tracing those lines backward, to surmise how and why a careless, easy-going man of the woods and fields like Harry Reid had been drawn to his born contrast—a quiet, dark girl, with proud lips and thoughtful eyes. Most surely no stranger, then or now, would have taken Mrs. Reid to be the person of least account in Copleston. Even her way of sitting was distinctive—Nature or habit, or an instinct for what became her best, had given her just one graceful pose, from which she never stirred, even when she spoke, by so much as moving a hand. And yet it had no look of stiffness, or study, or want of ease.

‘Thank you,’ she said, ‘for coming.’ Her full, yet easy and untroubled life, so full of youth everywhere, had left her voice well-nigh as young as Helen’s; but it was very unlike Helen’s in other ways. Helen’s made one think of the ring of the rising lark’s; her mother’s must always have suggested the blackbird’s in the fewness of its notes, as well as in their clearness and purity, and in being so slow and soft, as well as so quiet and clear.

‘It is very good of you to say so, I’m sure,’ said Mr. Skull.

‘I’m not sure you’ll say so presently—but—’

‘It is my most treasured memory, dear Mrs. Reid, that my dear, good friend never failed to send for me when he wanted me, and that I never failed to come—except once, when I was really too unwell.’

‘He trusted your judgment, in some things, more than most men’s.’

‘Ah, dear Mrs. Reid—he did, indeed! Comfort, under these afflictions, especially when they are premature as well as sudden, is indeed hard to find. But you know where it is to be

found ; and if any mere mundane reflection can console us when those who are dear to us are called upon to submit to the common lot, it is that they died regretted and respected by all who knew them. Yes, dear Mrs. Reid—even by old Grimes. It is touching indeed when such sentiments are shared in by all alike ; when the peer and the peasant mingle their tears over the grave of one who is gone. The poor old man has been unfit for work ever since last Saturday afternoon ; he has been behaving quite strangely ; I feared he would be incapable of officiating at the melancholy ceremony yesterday. And as with him, dear Mrs. Reid, so with all. In him we have lost more than a friend. We have lost a poet—an orator—a steward of ten talents—one who might have been member for the county, even a baronet, if he pleased—ah, dear Mrs. Reid, it is more than commonly gratifying to think of all he might have been, now that he is gone.’

‘ Might have been ! ’ echoed Mrs. Reid—but not to Mr. Skull. It was not likely that there was a single chord in her that his hands were capable of touching, even by chance ;

but just one there was, and his sermon had gone to it straighter than many better sermons go. Why had she sent for him but to help her mend the skeleton in *her* closet—that very ‘might have been’?

‘Mr. Skull,’ she said gently, ‘I have not asked you here to give me comfort, God knows. I hope I know where to gain some, as you say; and for what I can find nowhere, well, I have lived too happy and too dear a life, thank God, for nearly thirty years, to cry out even if it were all over. It was only too happy, too dear more than most women have spread over fifty years. No; I don’t want comforting. And I have Alan, and I have Helen. Forgive me if you find me hard to understand. I have asked you here to make a request of you. You will think it a strange one when you first hear it; but you will grant it, for it is right—absolutely right—though there may be difficulties to remove, and for that I *must* look to you. I have been thinking, night and day of Alan. And——’

‘His own father’s own son—every inch of him.’

Once more Mrs. Reid winced a little ; but so little—so little that a much keener observer than the curate, and one far less satisfied with the tact and propriety of his own speeches, would have taken it for no more than a natural movement of weakened nerves.

‘ Every inch of him, dear Mrs. Reid. Paternity is a great responsibility ; but I must confess to some regret that, when I myself have to submit to the common lot, I shall leave no image of myself behind. But there is no loss without compensation. I have a nephew, who is all that I would wish my own son to be. When the great healer, Time, has done a little of his work, I must crave leave to introduce you to my nephew Gideon. He has returned from America a wealthy, I may even say a prosperous, man. When we consider the extent of America, we cannot but admit that it is a remarkable nation ; and when we consider, moreover——’

‘ I am glad to hear that your nephew has done so well. And so——’

‘ Nay—he has done even splendidly—my nephew Gideon, dear Mrs. Reid ! If I were

twenty years younger, and less unfortunately dyspeptic, and not in orders, I should think three times before deciding not to follow his example. He has done splendidly—my nephew Gideon! He went out with nothing; in hardly twenty years he returns with I don't know how many thousands of dollars—a dollar is about four shillings, dear Mrs. Reid. He is a self-made man. And though, I need not say, by conviction as well as by sentiment, education, and association, I have a right and natural preference for those whom Providence has thought fit to make—for it were unchristian to hold any other views—still, I am very far from being so narrow-minded as not to perceive, though all men do not, that it is better to be self-made than not to be made at all. That may sound a somewhat bold, even advanced opinion, but one cannot be blind to the facts of the age; and my nephew Gideon is a Fact, dear Mrs. Reid. I trust you do not wholly disagree with me?’

‘So far from that. . . . You tell me,’ she said suddenly, with an almost eager interest in her voice—a strange interest, for one in

the first days of her widowhood, in the fortunes of the nephew of the Reverend Christopher Skull—‘you tell me that a man like Gideon Skull, like even Gideon Skull, simply by being thrown upon himself and on his own resources, has conquered the world—even a little?—a man who, if he had been born rich, would have—excuse me, but you have interested me; and if he has answered to the spur——’

The speech was not complimentary to Gideon, and its manner of reference to his early youth was not very far from insulting—except on the assumption that its character was too notorious to need a pretence of veiling. But Mr. Skull simply waved it away.

‘Not a little, dear Mrs. Reid. Cæsar said *Veni, vidi, vici*, which means, I came, I saw, I conquered. My nephew Gideon may say the same.’

‘I should like to see him. What is he—by profession, I mean?’

‘What is he? You have asked me a question that I must admit my present inability to answer. But I have long been of

the opinion that no calling is *per se*—which means in itself—dishonourable if it be honourably pursued. Many people have a prejudice against lawyers, for example. I have none; always with the proviso that they be worthy. I think that old Grimes, for example, may be just as respectable as——’

‘ Mr. Skull—in spite of all I have lost—if my boy could only lose Copleston this day, I should be the happiest mother in all the land !

CHAPTER VI.

Conrad.—Nay,

I did not serve for pardon. If my death
Be right reward for lifting up my hand,
Ay, with a sword in't—smiting at a blow
Into its proper dust her serpent head
Whose hairs were chains to hold thee from a crown,
Then give me death, sire—give me death, and pride!
No pardon! When full days of high renown
And kingly joys have blossomed forth in fruit
From roots thy tears turn bitter, sovereign thanks
Will be *my* pardon. And if after-time
Brings from her grave some sweet, empoisoned sin
To melt thy strength to weakness, thou wilt cry,
'Oh for the blade that flamed in Conrad's hand
To stab my heart again, and save my soul!'

MR. SKULL was so amazed that if he had only had presence of mind enough, he would have ceased to smile. Had her husband's sudden death sent her out of her mind? He could not help looking round to see if the bell-rope was anywhere near.

'You have been making excuses for your nephew,' she said, 'and for your belief in a man strong enough to make himself and

conquer fortune, as if you thought excuses were needed—to me. I am glad you think as you do ; it will make you the readier to help us, and make what I have to say so much the easier. Thinking as you do, you will not think my request so strange as I feared. Alan's likeness to his father simply terrifies me, Mr. Skull.'

' My *dear* Mrs. Reid ! '

' Terrifies is all too weak a word—and it grows stronger day by day. And there was such sympathy between them ! Alan will think it his duty to follow in the same footsteps, and they will bring him—where ? '

' To a happy and useful life, dear Mrs. Reid ; and to an honoured and respected grave.'

' To a useless life, Mr. Skull—to a useless end ! To the sentence upon him who hid the talent in a napkin. Don't misunderstand me, for God's sake ; I loved my husband with all my heart and all my life ; . . . but what folly it is to say that love is blind ! And he had excuses that could never be Alan's. He was brought up in a bad old school. He was

taught to think killing foxes and fishes the only pursuit worthy of a reasonable man. He had genius, Mr. Skull—and I know that, for I knew *him*. I was his wife, I *am* his wife, but I am too jealous in my judgments of those I love to be deceived. Genius is not an ambitious thing. You said, “Might have been!” Had he been born poor, Hillswick might never have heard of him—but the world would have known him. Do you think me hard? I tell you that all his neighbours’ praise is blame before my fault-finding. What do they know of him? That he was a great sportsman and a good neighbour, who could speak well when he had dined, and make rhymes when the frost kept him at home. It is all false—he was a great man, whom the curse of ease threw back on dogs, and those who serve them. God will excuse him—but if Alan throws away *his* life, and I stand by and look on, who will excuse *me*? And—so like his father! I can see his life, if he is left to himself, every year, every day of it, before my eyes. “He had no enemy but his mother.” How will that epitaph read?’

‘ My dear Mrs. Reid ! ’ said Mr. Skull, with breath scarcely yet recovered. ‘ My nephew—Gideon— ! ’

‘ One minute, if you please. It was hard to begin, but what I have to say is soon said when once begun. Alan has not his father’s genius. That has been thrown away—for ever. But he is strong, he has good talents, he has high principles ; he has courage, perseverance and energy ; he has every quality that a man need have to live the life of a man. As owner of Copleston, and living here, he will be content to fritter all his gifts away in doing rather better than others what is not worth doing at all, and in doing a few useful trifles no better than a hundred of his neighbours could do them. He will lose his energies ; he will lose all account of life ; he will learn to choose ease before all things—perhaps even before honour itself, if he came to be tried. On the other hand, with all things to be conquered before they were enjoyed, am I unjust—forgive me if I am—in placing Alan Reid before Gideon Skull ? The need of work would bring love of work ; love

of work would bring ambition ; ambition, with *his* qualities, would bring more than its own end. I should be the mother of a great and noble man. I cannot sit by and see his life murdered by sloth and ease. I have tried to inspire him with enthusiasm for a career a hundred times ; and a hundred times I have failed. He worships his father, and his father's life is his ideal. In honour and goodness, yes—but even a woman might live such a life as he plans. He must be spurred, and that hard.'

'You wish him to enter a profession? He will do that to please you I should say. Many of our best families have sons in the church, or in the army, of course, or at the bar. I would not advise the church, though,' said the curate hastily ; for the absentee Rector of Hillswick was older than he by full six months, and a worse life, and a Reverend Alan Reid's claims to a vacant living might sadly interfere with the life-dream of the Reverend Christopher Skull. 'The church should be more than a profession, dear Mrs. Reid. But he might be a captain in the

Guards, and experience at the bar gives importance at Quarter Sessions.'

'You misunderstand me utterly. I would sooner be in my grave than see my boy a family rector, or a sham soldier, or a make-believe lawyer. Can't you understand me when I say that I want him to work as if he believed every hope he had in life, even his daily bread, depended on himself alone? He would be driven to use his talents then! And how can he do this with the weight of the millstone of Copleston? Simply, what Gideon has done, Alan must do. He must be a man.'

'Your sentiments are always noble,' said Mr. Skull, but very feebly.

'Do you understand me now?'

'Thoroughly, dear Mrs. Reid.' But, nevertheless, he felt himself completely at sea.

'And so I send for you——'

'To ask my poor advice? Well, dear Mrs. Reid——'

'I need no counsel. And you have already given me, without knowing it, more than I need. I have to carry out a plan—

and I cannot, without you. My husband always placed trust in you. He has named you co-executor with myself of his will.'

'Of his will!—me!'

'It was too simple to need a lawyer's help; everything is Alan's. My plan is this—to keep my boy from his inheritance for at least seven years of apprenticeship to life—to life as it is, not a mere game at play. For at least seven years he must be a poor man, that he may learn how to *use* Copleston. In the first place, you will keep my confidence; it is necessary somebody should be acquainted with the truth, in case I die before the end of seven years. Secondly, you must help me with a colourable excuse to keep gossip from meddling. I know how to deal with my son. I need no help there. But Copleston must for seven years, at least, be in some hands that will hold the estate as a trustee, be content to be repaid by the income for the time, and surrender faithfully when the time comes. I have heard of such arrangements in the case of livings and other offices; I believe they may be made by deed. Lastly,

you will not contradict public opinion that there is no will. A will would compel inquiries, and——’

‘ Mrs. Reid !’

‘ Well ?’

‘ I may be right or I may be wrong. But it seems to me as if I was being asked to help you to conceal a will, and to hire somebody to rob your son for seven years. Let me implore you to reflect, madam. I am not competent to give counsel. I don’t know if there isn’t a law against concealing wills. Go to a lawyer—go to Evans, dear Mrs. Reid.’

‘ Do you think a mother would ask you to rob her son? But do you think there is anything she would not do to save him from a life of ruin? But there is no crime here. Even if the will were destroyed, there would be no fraud—Alan would still be his father’s heir. Thank God, Alan will understand me, and thank me with his whole heart, in seven years——’

‘ But yourself—but Miss Reid——’

‘ Oh, Helen is a child—a girl. I have to think of Alan.’

‘ But who, in the name of goodness, madam, would consent to be the owner, the ostensible owner, of Copleston for seven years? My poor friend was accustomed to think somewhat highly of my poor capacities for business, and by making me his executor he has given expression to his opinion. I presume it is partly in that capacity you request my counsel. In that capacity—— ’

‘ Excuse me—your aid, not your counsel, Mr. Skull.’

‘ Advice is a form of assistance, dear Mrs. Reid. Your plan, I need not say, does your heart honour. But I must confess myself as yet unacquainted—deeply as my calling has obliged me to sound the depths of human nature—with one who would consent to accept such a trust without a full understanding of circumstances which are not wholly intelligible even to me.’

‘ You have found a woman to contradict your experiences of human nature. Why may there not be a man to contradict them still further? What is to prevent your nephew, for example, being appointed steward and re-

ceiver to the estate for a term, on the understanding that he shall not be called upon to account for his stewardship? He need not live at Copleston unless he pleases; he can let the place for a term, in a good hunting country. It will be no more than a nine days' wonder in Hillswick that a young man should wish to travel for a time, or otherwise see the world, if you, my good friend, my husband's trusted friend, will only confirm my opinion of your right to the great trust of the living of Hillswick by keeping my confidence in a matter of such small account to the world, but of such infinite moment to me and my boy. Alan will consent to the appointment—of that there is no fear; and as to his ignorance of ownership afterwards, in that I need neither counsel nor aid.'

'My nephew—Gideon! Irresponsible steward of Copleston for seven years?'

'Within limits, irresponsible. I must trust some one largely, and yet that some one must not be so excessively scrupulous as to make it needless to compensate him largely: and nothing would in itself seem so natural in Hills-

wick as that the near relation of its clergyman, its future rector, should be appointed steward of Copleston. It will not be as if Mr. Gideon Skull had not earned a right of his own to be trusted. He is, you tell me, a prosperous and successful man.'

The future rector of Copleston—it was the first time those welcome words had ever fallen upon his outward ears—felt all firm ground slipping away from under him. The text about the rich man and the camel fought hard with his over forty years' experience of the difficulties of a poor one; that about not doing evil that good may come fought yet harder with its inherent want of application to such a benefit to the whole parish as having a man like Christopher Skull for its rector; his secret distrust of his label of worldly wisdom contended against an incapacity to make his great lady's humour square with common sanity. 'My nephew—Gideon!' was all he could say. Gideon was the only fragment of firm ground left him.

'That is settled, then,' said Mrs. Reid. 'Kindly offer Mr. Gideon Skull, in Alan's

name, the appointment in the terms I have mentioned. He will not refuse. For all explanations, refer him, if you please, to me. I trust wholly to your absolute silence on all else I have said to you. You need say nothing to your nephew but that the offer is made. It is natural it should come through you. Before leaving Copleston I shall see you again, and give you all the further instructions you will need. You will excuse my asking you to leave me now. I have to speak to my boy.

Mr. Skull could not determine whether he had been convinced, persuaded, bought, or ordered, or all four together. Convinced, he trusted—for certainly some of Mrs. Reid's arguments had been very weighty. But ordered, he half feared, when his last attempt at a protest was cut short by her rising to ring the bell. 'Gideon knows the world—I must consult Gideon,' thought he; and then he remembered that his silence implied a promise only to make an offer to Gideon—not to consult him. It was needful to speak one word more. 'My nephew Gideon,' he began.

But the bell rang. 'Good-bye,' said Mrs.

Reid. 'I thank you, Mr. Skull, with all my soul. Thanks to you, my boy will be a Man.'

'I hope it's right—I hope with all my heart it's right—and I hope it's impossible!' he was able to bring out at last. But there was nobody to hear him; for by the time words had come to him, Copleston was a full mile and a half behind.

'I know I am right!' was all Mrs. Reid could find to tell herself as, after no more than a minute's pause, she went downstairs to the little room where Helen used to sit and read, or write letters, or otherwise amuse herself whenever she happened to be indoors, which was seldom, with nothing in particular to do—which was pretty often. Since her father's death, she had spent most of her days there, whenever she happened not to be with Alan or her mother. She was there now, as her mother entered, apparently reading, but really building castles, which, in spite of their foundation, were by no means wholly sad ones. The months would pass, and

the cloud that hung over the house would not prove thick enough to keep the sun from shining through. Life would be the deeper and fuller for the shadow they had all passed through, hand in hand, and joy would be all the deeper and fuller too. The father's life would have been indeed thrown away if the good of his presence could be turned even by death into evil. If they had really loved him in the way he would have chosen, his children would learn to remember him as the cause of their happiness, and in no wise of pain. Perhaps, thinking or rather feeling thus, there was more of sympathy with the dead father's living spirit in her unquenchable hope than in Alan's grief, which as yet could not look beyond the gloom of the day. She read in her book, held upside down, how, in due course, all things would go on as of old, only growing better with their fuller lives—how her Alan would marry her Bertha, and bring all sorts of new love and life into the old ways—how the mother would learn comfort and content, and perhaps a little more softness, thought Helen, in time, when all sorts of new and sweet

things came—and how she herself would rejoice, even for the rest of her days, in absorbing and sending out again all the sunshine round her. Perhaps something else, also, might come to her ; if it did, it would be in the way of some wonderful double joy, and, if not, things were more than good enough as they were going to be.

‘Helen,’ said Mrs. Reid, ‘where is Alan? I thought he might be here. I have something to say to him—to both of you—that——’

‘Mamma, what has happened? What is wrong?’

‘Did I say anything was wrong!’ She was speaking in her natural voice, and seated herself opposite Helen in her natural manner ; yet Helen felt that there was a shadow round her. ‘Where *is* Alan?’

‘He is seeing somebody in the library.’

‘Seeing somebody? Who? Surely Mr. Skull is gone?’

‘Doctor Bolt, perhaps—or Mr. Evans—I don’t know. I don’t suppose he will be long now. Mamma, what is it you have to say to Alan and me?’

‘ You love Alan more than most sisters love their brothers. Is there anything you could not do for him?’

‘ I think—I *know*, nothing. Why do you ask me, mamma?’

‘ Is there anything you would not give up, Helen? Would you do anything less for him, or give up less, than I? We live for him, both of us—don’t we? *Only* for him, now?’

‘ Mamma, there is nothing I would not do for Alan; nothing I would not give up for him. But, mamma, tell me What am I to give up for him? What am I to do for him?’

‘ I believe you, Helen. I know how you love him, and I don’t think even I love him more than you do Hark! Isn’t that the front door? . . . Yes; whoever it is, he is gone.’

Helen went to the window, which had a view of the terrace, to see who the departing visitor might be; but she caught no more than a glimpse of a tall stranger just disappearing into the avenue. What was she to give up for Alan? Not her whole dream?

But, short of the whole, anything in the world —as concerned herself, all. But what could it be?

Alan entered the room before she turned back from the window. And, when she did turn, remembering her mother's words, her heart sank in her.

Her brother must have expected to find her, but he started when he saw his mother. The young man, so gently grave even in the depth of his great sorrow, was changed; he looked as if just startled out of a terrible dream. His eyes were bloodshot, and his skin fearfully pale; and there was a set hardness about his mouth which frightened her. But his mother's eyes seemed to be looking far off, and to observe nothing.

But when the first start was over he went straight to his mother, lifted her hand to his lips, and kissed it reverently and tenderly. It was natural enough greeting to a widowed mother, but it was a new and strange caress in that most English of households, where no feelings had ever until these days been deeply stirred. It was especially new in Alan. Mrs.

Reid looked up for a moment half in wonder, and her voice was broken, though ever so little, when she first spoke to him.

‘Alan,’ said she, ‘who was that who was with you just now, and is just gone?’

‘Gideon Skull.’ Helen wondered why Alan’s eyes—so unlike *his* eyes—remained fixed on the floor.

‘Gideon Skull?’

‘He came over with his uncle. He stayed to speak to me.’

‘I was never told. . . . Alan, you are like your father; and he was a Man. Can you—you *can* bear to be told you are poor. That we are all poor. That—that, Alan—wait, before you speak—that, except for immediate needs, and perhaps a very little more, we have nothing but one another to call our own. Look me in the face, Alan, and show me, who say this to my son, that he can bear it bravely! I—Alan—things have happened—things have failed—have gone wrong—you will have to appoint some one—’

It was turning harder than she had looked for to lie, for his good, to her son. But her

sense of a right purpose must have been terribly strong not to break down once for all and wholly, in the atmosphere of Helen's little room, into which the sun, that even death had left so bright and fair, was still shining. It did not break down. 'Alan,' she said, 'I need not tell you that there is no disgrace, no shame. There is none—absolutely none. But there may be sudden misfortunes; there may be secrets; in short, Alan, *you* will believe *me* when I tell my son that he must accept a life of labour without asking why; content to know, till the time comes for his knowing all, that there is nothing to lessen his pride. Look in my face, Alan, and let him tell me, not that he must—for that is not for him to say—but that he *will*.'

'Mother!' cried Helen, 'Alan! I do not understand. What is happening? How can Alan lose our father's land?—how can he lose it without knowing why? Who has a single right to it but he? What have you been hearing? Alan is a man; he will know what is right and what is wrong. Is that what you meant when you asked *me* what I can give

up—what I can do? Have *I* to give up anything that Alan may keep his own? Alan, you *must* know why!’

‘Hush, Helen!’ said Alan. They were his first words. He raised his eyes at last, and looked his mother in the face, as she had bidden. ‘Say no more, mother. Never speak of it again. Whatever you say, I believe. Never think for one instant that I should dream of shame to—us, in how it has gone. Dearest mother, since you are brave, you shall see how brave *I* can be.’

Helen turned towards him amazed. Was it possible that a human being should let himself be told in this fashion, on some unknown authority, that he, and his sister, and his mother, had been suddenly reduced to poverty for no imaginable cause, and submit as calmly and unquestioningly as if he had been a well-behaved baby who had been ordered to give up an unvalued toy? Mrs. Reid herself appeared for a moment bewildered by an obedience so implicit and so sudden. The need of giving circumstance to her lie had been its hardest part, and the need was gone. She

had almost gained time enough to repent and stay her hand. Had he not been tested enough when he had proved himself capable at starting of the courage that was to be his apprenticeship's chief end? But then—his very submission to her, without question or effort, was far too much a child's instead of a man's, and it hardened her again. She only sighed to think of the inheritance of weakness that had been bequeathed to him, and which would find a terribly fruitful soil in Copleston unless the root were torn out and the soil left fallow for years.

She rose and placed her hands on his shoulders. 'Don't fear for us,' she said. 'With you and for you we can bear all. Win for yourself—you will best know how—and we shall be glad and proud. There! we may sl here one more night, and to-morrow we will talk of what must be done. We trust in you, Alan, and we believe in you; we will. Alan, not one of us will ever regret this day.'

'Mamma!' cried Helen; but her mother was gone. 'Alan!' she cried; but she held out no hand to him. 'It is terrible! what

can it mean? And you—you looked so strange, even before she spoke to you!’

‘Yes, Nelly. It means that you must be the bravest girl alive. It means that our poor mother and you will have to depend on what I can find to do to keep the wolf away. I wouldn’t mind for myself—not a scrap, Nelly. I should make a first-rate gamekeeper, if I was alone—better than our Tom Basset, by a long way.’ It was the lightest thing he could find to say; but it helped him to find a sort of smile. ‘But we’ll do better than that, Nell dear, God helping.’

‘Oh, don’t smile like that, Alan! *What* has happened to us all?’

‘Nelly, it is true. You thought it strange that I never asked a question. Nelly, *I* know what mother means. And she knows I know—and we understand one another, through and through. Any word I could have spoken more than I did would have given her pain. And now, my dear, brave, true Nelly, don’t ask me to tell you one word more.’

‘Alan! *You* won’t tell *me*?’

‘I can’t. Don’t ask me, Nell.’

‘There *is* disgrace, Alan?’

‘No.’

She held out both her hands. ‘You know what is right—you will do what is best; I will try to help you. I will never question you. But . . . Bertha!’

He turned away his face, and his chest heaved. Then he drew her towards him by the hands she had held out to him, stooped down, and kissed her on the brow.

‘I have a sister,’ said he, ‘and she must help me this minute by leaving me for ten minutes while I write a letter or two. Come back in ten minutes, Nell, and we’ll——’

But what they were to do together she did not hear. She escaped to some hidden corner of the house of all her nights and days, where she might weep her heart out over Alan. ‘I have a sister?’ Then all was true—all was lost indeed! What ruin could Death have brought that Love was not strong enough to overcome?

Victor Waldron had not yet left Hillswick. Exactly what it was that kept him there he

did not trouble himself to inquire. Of course his call at Copleston had been knocked on the head by the sudden death of its master, and Hillswick, though it might be the tomb of his ancestors, was hardly the place for the holiday of an American who had as yet seen neither Rome, which is his national duty, nor Paris, which is his national reward. Still, he had found plenty of occupation. Not another word had been spoken between himself and his friend Gideon on the subject of Copleston—much to Victor's relief, as it seemed evidence that Gideon, like a right-minded fellow and a sympathetic friend, had come round to his way of thinking. So, with a mind at ease, he amused himself with investigations into the fascinating subject of family history, though more to the profit of old Grimes than to his own. And family history led on to public history. He found out, for example, among the churchwardens' accounts, exactly how many pints of beer were drunk by the ringers when some small Waldron was christened in 1592, and could tell to a fraction the average price of ducking-stools. He smoked a good

many cigars in the belfry, and occasionally helped Old Grimes and his fellows with the bells—and plenty of time may pass very pleasantly in that way. Was it quite impossible that, before he left Hillswick, he might have another glimpse of the *Glockendame*—if only he did not hurry away?

Gideon and he were capital comrades, for the simple reason that each followed his own pursuits during the day, so that they had plenty to talk of between dinner-time and about two in the morning. But it was not nearly so late as that when, on the eve of a glorious spring day, which Gideon, who was a great pedestrian, had spent out-of-doors, and Victor, who never walked for pleasure, had passed more or less in the steeple, the waiter brought the latter an unstamped letter with a black border.

Surely it must be from Copleston? Perhaps, since the funeral was well over, the presence in the place of a far-off cousin might be held to claim recognition. He opened it with affected deliberation; he read—and pre-

sently a frown drew his brows tightly together as he read on. It *was* from Copleston.

‘Sir,—I have this morning seen your representative, Mr. Gideon Skull. He has laid before me evidence that Copleston belongs to you and not to me. As he has doubtless informed you, I told him that I should take legal advice. Since then, I have learned by the strongest proof that what he asserts is most unquestionably true. I shall not contest your claim, and you may enter as soon as you please. Mrs. Reid and Miss Reid will require a day or two for preparation, but that shall not take a day longer than is necessary. I will not occupy a house that is not mine a single unnecessary day. On all business matters I refer you to Mr. Evans, of Hillswick. You will understand that it is too painful for me to meet you, especially as by employing a representative you showed your own unwillingness to meet me. You will also understand that my reason for giving up Copleston to you in this informal manner is to avoid taking even a lawyer into confidence

concerning the circumstance on which you found your claim. You will understand, moreover, that I thus surrender Copleston to you because it is my duty to yield to you your lawful right, and not because I do not maintain that my mother was my father's wife in truth as well as before the world. That I do maintain, and always shall, in all ways, as well as by signing myself, with regrets that my occupation should have deprived you of the enjoyment of your rights for a single day,

‘ALAN REID.’

‘Read that!’ exclaimed Victor, starting from his seat and throwing the letter across the table to Gideon.

Gideon read it. ‘He is a reasonable young man,’ said he, ‘and an honest one—as the world goes.’

Victor swore roundly. ‘What the hell do you mean by meddling with what concerns me?’

Gideon opened his eyes and stared. ‘What sort of a friend should I think you if you stood by and saw me fooled out of my birth-

right by a girl? Is that what you'd do by me?'

'Gideon Skull, I will never forgive you this day's work—no, not if I live a thousand years!'

CHAPTER VII.

I rede that once in Affrica
A princely wight did raine,
Who had to name Cophetua,
As ye shall hear men sayn :
From nature's lawès he declined,
And had in this a stedfast mind
To go not after womenkinde,
But them did all disdain.

A Song of a Beggar and a King.

NEITHER her mind nor her heart could give Helen the faintest gleam of light on what had happened since her father died. Night in the tropics could not be more sudden or more complete, or a tropical forest more pathless. And it was all such a mystery: everybody as well as everything about her was so utterly changed. Her mother she had never thought of understanding—but Alan! It was a new thing that her brother should have a secret: incredible that, having one, he should share it

with his mother, and not with her. She was to share in the ruin—what right had they to forbid her sharing its mystery? There was no disgrace, since Alan had said so: and, indeed, that such a thing as disgrace should touch her or hers was more than impossible. But then this only deepened the darkness. They might have fancied it right to hide disgrace from her—but what else should they dream of hiding?

Alan, when she asked him once more to tell her the meaning of it all, only answered as before, ‘You must not ask, Nell—you must never ask again. We must wipe out everything that has ever been, and live from a new beginning, and forget everything—forget even why.’

‘Everything? Wipe out and forget everything that has ever been? What — even Bertha? Alan!’

‘Even Bertha. Bertha,’ he said with the hard strength that is never to be gained but from a hard struggle, ‘most of all.’ He seemed, she thought, to make a point of naming her defiantly: and this alone was

enough to tell her what the struggle must have been, and how hard. It was more than enough to tell her how hopeless it was to question one who had proved himself to own ten thousand times more strength than was needful for holding fast to a No.

‘And you would have married her, if——’

‘Nelly!—do me a kindness. I need one. “If” means everything. Don’t name—Bertha—to me again till I name her to you: and never ask me why. Try and help me, Nell.’

‘How can I help you, when I am such a baby that I am simply told, You must do as you are bid: you must give up your home: you must see it go to strangers: and you must take it all as it comes, and not even wonder why? I am not a baby. I can see things . . . I can see that you are giving up a million times more than Copleston: more than when . . . Alan—don’t take away your whole trust from me! If what you say is true, we have nobody but one another—and, of course, mamma—now: if you don’t tell me all you think and feel, just as you did yesterday, I shall lose more than you—yes, a

million times more. I won't ask you why we are going to leave Copleston and be poor. But why you are going to give up Bertha—I will !'

'What would you think of a man, any man, who asked her—any girl, any woman—to marry him—she rich, and with all life and happiness before her, God bless her!—and he as I am : with no prospect of being able to give her even the wretchedest home for years—a mere beggar, Nell? What would you think of a man who waited till he was a beggar before he asked for you?'

'What should *I* say? Ask Bertha, if you know her, and you will see! I would not wait for him to ask me. If I loved him, and if he loved me, *I* would ask *him*—I would be Queen Cophetua!'

It was a spark of her old spirit flashing out from her darkness. 'Queen Cophetua!' he echoed, but without heart or meaning. 'No . . . Cophetua was not a queen.'

'Then, I would make him one. Please God, I'll never love any man but you; but if I did, would I let my money stand in my

way? What's money made for but to live with? I suppose we shall learn that well enough when we're poor. I'll tell you what *I* should say—that the man who didn't love me well enough to want me, whatever happened and whatever we were, didn't love me at all! And if you ask her now, and she doesn't say Yes ten times more gladly than if she had nothing but herself to give you—why, then—*she* doesn't love *you*!

'No, Nell. If I went to her now, I should be called a cad——'

'By whom?'

'By myself. If I took advantage of her feeling—as you say—I should be one. I want to save her—and I will. Thank God, I did not tell her that I—before my father died! She's safe, any way. If she thinks I don't care for her, all the better now. I can't even give her so much as a name. Nell, if you were in her place, and any man in mine were to ask you to marry him, I'd horsewhip such a blackguard.'

'Alan—what do you mean by not giving her even a name?'

‘Did I say——?’

‘Yes. You said you cannot give her even a name. What do you mean?’

‘None worth having. A man with nothing must make his own. That’s all I mean. No——’

‘Perhaps this is our last walk together at home. Do you remember our last—when we came home together, that evening when—do you remember what you told me: that you love Bertha with your whole heart and soul, more than all the world? Is it true—still? Trust me in that—that is no mystery. Is it true?’

‘Good God, Nell! Should I be making myself give her up—if I did not love her more than my own soul? Why do you try to make things so hard to bear? I must bear it——’

‘But I will not bear it, Alan. Who cares for being poor? Not I. But I will not have my brother and my friend sacrificed to pride. Thank you for your trust, Alan. You have given me something to live for, and to save out of the fire. It will do to think about

while I'm finding out how to get my own living. Yes, thank you, Alan. Now I know that you really do love Bertha, you are my own brother again, even though you won't tell me anything, and treat me like a child. Say, like a mouse—mice have helped lions before now: mice have no pride: they are wise.'

Alan stopped walking, and took a long look round, over house, park, and hill. It was not at Helen that he looked as he said, 'We must all say good-bye to our dreams. My dream-book is shut—don't try to open it, Nell. It was hard enough to shut it once: don't make me go through that twice over. Thank God, no harm has come to Bertha, nor will. I love her too much, Nell, to drag her down There So that's over. If you want to do something for your living, come home and help me pack my portmanteau. You'll have enough to do to look after me, I can tell you, and after mother, without any more work of your own. Don't shame me by trying to rob me of any part of the bread-winning, there's a good girl. That

won't help me at all. But you will help me a great deal if you'll help me to catch the train.'

Helen said nothing — she had scarcely listened, for she was thinking hard. Still she could not understand. But she knew, or thought she knew, through what a struggle with himself Alan must have passed, and passed alone, to give up what she knew was more to him than anything on earth was or could be to her. When he tried to speak of it lightly, he only transferred the worst part of the pain from his heart to hers. And was it not hard to feel that everything, even his feelings of honour, should be weights to drag him down? That was the worst part of it all. If he had only spoken to Bertha on Easter Eve! 'Oh,' she thought, 'if only I were Bertha, and he my lover instead of hers, I would have no pride! If there were anything on earth I could do now, no pride should stand in *my* way! I would make things right for them, were it right or wrong for me. Why are there no witches nowadays? I'd sell myself and be a witch for them, and

welcome. What else am I good for? And I'm not good even for that—nobody buys souls now; and if they did, who'd buy mine?' His conquest over hope for himself was nothing to her rebellious despair for him; she took his whole heart into hers and multiplied it by her own. She could give him no more comfort—she needed it all for herself, for him and through him.

'I shall have to talk to the mother when we get back to the house,' said he, 'so I'll say all I have to say to you now. For the first thing, I'll find the best lodgings in town to fit our purse that I can: you two must be ready to follow me the day after to-morrow. You'll get a letter by the first post in the morning, and you mustn't stay here one single needless hour. The mother says she'd rather settle with the servants—I wish I were as brave as she. She's a pattern to us both, Nell. Poor mother! It's terrible to feel almost glad that father died before this came . . . Then I shan't let the grass grow before I find something to do. If reading, writing, and arithmetic are drugs in the market, I'll

see if arms and legs are. The mother has a fancy that if I could get into a lawyer's office I might work my way to the bar—she seems to have a sort of idea that all Lord Chancellors have been barbers' boys. She seems to think——'

'She thinks you fit to be the first and highest everywhere, and so you are.'

'You are a pair of dear, good, foolish women who have enough sense, when you've got a goose, to make a swan of him. I'll tell you what I *am* fit for, Nell. I should make the best gamekeeper in the county, and if it wasn't for the mother, that's what I'd be. And next to that, I'm fit to be squire of Copleston,' he said, acting all the light-heartedness he could, as he looked round him for the last time upon the house and lands where his father had lived and died, and where he had looked forward to live and die—and old Harry Reid's son and likeness was not a man to think as lightly as he might speak of all that it meant to be squire of Copleston. He would have carried his duties easily and happily, but would have been blind to none

of them, and have failed in none. He would not have done the less good by being spared the pains of having to force an obtrusive self upon a world that can afford to dispense excellently well with the greatest and wisest man who was ever compelled to coin pounds, shillings, and pence out of his greatness and wisdom. Alan, with his father's example before him, may be more than pardoned for seeing in the woolsack itself no better chances for being happy, or making others happy, than are owned by a country squire. It was in this spirit that he had made his boast, and in this that he looked round. Even Bertha, at that moment, could not be all, though she was more than all. There, within sight, ran and laughed the brook that had been his friend and playfellow ever since his first memory. He had never seemed to notice how it ran and how it laughed till now that the sun shone on it for the last time—for him. From this last hour forth, it would run and laugh for a stranger, who would see it with strange eyes; and that felt bitterly strange. And there were the beeches, bronze-leaved

and green : and who knows not what friends trees may be? They are the homes of the homeliest spirits of all, who are not like the running water, and keep their sympathies for those who know them long. Almost every blade of grass and every pebble in the path seemed to take life and meaning at this last hour. That sympathy with all the things of home and nature that needed no will for his father to leave him suddenly swelled up in Alan ; he had steeled his heart as best he might against Bertha, but not against the brook and the trees. The scent of the air turned new in the excess of a familiar sweetness, always felt, but now first recognised and known ; and then he knew, as never till now, that though Bertha was not all, she had indeed become more than all.

Helen watched his face ; but, with all her love, she failed to read him wholly. Life with her meant one's own life, and not the sharing of life with stocks and stones. 'We know what we know!' said she. 'We know that you will be rich and great ; and *I* know that you will——'

‘We will try to be good—and I shall be content enough if I win our daily bread somehow. Everybody’s fit enough for that, I suppose. Come and help me with my portmanteau, Nell.’

The portmanteau was packed ; Alan had a long talk with his mother ; then ate his last meal in Copleston ; and was gone. Not a word more of confidential talk passed between him and Helen. Not only was his last hour hurried, but, since his last words, he made her feel that he had not contented himself with closing the book of Copleston and Bertha, but had locked it and thrown away the key. He affected no more lightness of speech or heart, even before his mother ; but on the other hand, there was nothing in his quiet gravity that did not become any man whose life had changed all at once, and who found himself on the threshold of the world with new cares and new duties, and with nothing but his own shoulders whereon to carry them. It was Helen who had the last sight of Alan at the door : for when he was fairly off, and she looked round for her mother, Mrs. Reid had

left the hall. Well, it was natural that a mother who had borne up with such astounding courage in her son's presence should break down for a little while in solitude now that he was gone. Helen did not seek her. She felt—though she had never guessed it hitherto—that her mother must be one of those people who need tears more than others but cannot let a tear fall if there is a chance of its being shared, or even seen.

‘We will try to be good?’ thought Helen, his last words that had any special meaning in them coming back to her ears now that he was gone. ‘Ah, it isn't being good that's hard. What else have any of us ever been? Any how, it isn't he that needs to try. I suppose by “we,” he means me. Is it so desperately wicked to think it hard and cruel for two people like Alan and Bertha, who are just made for one another, and who would make one another happy if they really had to beg their bread together, to be parted for no fault of their own—just because they are good: too good and too proud to be happy? It can't be wicked to think what's true. It *is*

hard. It *is* cruel. Submitting, and thinking it right, can't make it anything but unjust, and cruel, and hard. It makes one hate goodness, if that's what goodness means. Submit to wrong and injustice? If that comes of being in love—then if I ever let myself fall in love, I'll submit to them too! Oh, my poor boy! As if I didn't see how beaten down and broken-hearted you are, through all your pretence of bravery! What can I do? Oh, how I wish some rich, rich man would ask me to marry him, without wanting me to love him, and then leave me all his money, and die in a year. I am going to be the beggar—where is the king? We are not told that she loved him. I think she had a brother to help; and that kept her from pride. She loved nobody but him My poor boy! Nor will I.'

However much Mrs. Reid might have broken down in private, she showed no sign of it when, later in the evening, she and Helen met again. Her quietness was not to be suspected of pretence, even though it became quite hopeful, and almost cheerful. She said

little of any affairs except those which their immediate journey to London brought close to hand ; but, when she did, it was with an air which seemed to Helen to belong to one who was throwing off a burden instead of losing all things but her children at one blow. The main talk of both was of Alan—how Helen wished her mother could know all of him that she herself knew ; but it was no time for saying a word of him that might make things harder for her mother, when the courage with which she was bearing all things was in itself a proof of how hard they were to bear. When courage is in such excess, we may fairly judge that there has been need to use every atom of it and to leave none wherewith to meet the smallest new trouble. So, at least, judged Helen, knowing no more than she could see. As to Alan, he was to do wonderful things. Mrs. Reid seemed to have all the precedents of ladder-climbing at her fingers' ends. Had not lord chancellors been the sons of country barbers, bishops of country innkeepers, admirals of peasants, and dukes of nobodies ? Was it only in trade that the apprentice, when

pushed hard enough, becomes lord mayor? Of course there is not room on the very highest twig of a tree for all. Somebody must be highest, and it might not be Alan. Still, with health, strength, youth, energy, fair talent, and the utmost need of the hardest work to aid him, he could not fail to climb high—so argued Mrs. Reid. Why, in the family history there had been a case in point. Alan's own great-uncle, George Waldron, so Mrs. Reid remembered hearing, had left England a penniless spendthrift, and had become a general, though, it was true, only an American one. It was all due to the spur that the poor have grown rich, that the mild have become strong, and that men have not hidden their talents in napkins.

‘And only two days ago I heard a more extraordinary case still,’ said she. ‘I think it must have been made expressly to confirm my plan—my faith : my faith in Alan.’

‘What was that, mamma?’ asked Helen, but half hearing ; for she was thinking how little woolsacks or mitres or cocked hats would make up to Alan for a broken fishing-rod—

not to speak of more. ‘How little anybody knows him,’ she thought, ‘but me!’

‘I will tell you. When I first—when I first came here, Mr. Skull had a nephew living with him—he was named Gideon: a lad of about fifteen, I should say. As you may suppose, Mr. Skull must have found an extra mouth in his house more than a common burden; it was a kinder thing to keep the boy than I should ever have looked for in him, and has always given me a sort of respect for him. Perhaps, if things had gone as he wished, he would not have been what he is now. He meant the boy to go into the Church, and sent him to Oxford to get a fellowship. Gideon Skull turned out the most hateful young man I ever knew. What he did at Oxford, of course nobody knows exactly, though it seems he spent nearly half his time in London; but, when he was at home, he did more harm to the place, young as he was, than your father could ever undo again. There was hardly a girl—but such stories are not for you. I don’t know how he managed to blind his uncle, but he did somehow—even when there was one

great scandal that was certainly not a case of sowing wild oats, Helen. It came home to me very much, for the poor girl was my own maid. Of course he failed in all his examinations, and of course he drained poor Mr. Skull of every spare penny. At last—I never cared to understand all the rights of it: it was when he was twenty-one, and was leaving Oxford—it came out that, there and in London, he had been throwing away all his uncle's money at cards, and even worse ways than that, and that his debts of honour—as debts of that sort are called—would have ruined a rich man.'

'And did Mr. Skull pay them for him? Is that why he is so poor? Oh, he *must* be the next Vicar! He—but please forgive me, mamma: I forgot; it won't be Alan's to give—that's all. Everybody that does right seems to lose—everything.'

'No, Helen. He would have done it if he could—at least, as much as he could—but then he would *not* have done right: he did what *was* right: what your father made him do.'

'What was that?'

‘He refused to give him another penny, and turned him out of doors. And now, see what has happened. So long as Gideon Skull was kept in idleness by those who ought to have known better, he became the worst that was in him to be. So soon as he was obliged to shift for himself, he became the best that was in *him*. In *him*, Helen—for at his very best I should never bring myself to like Gideon Skull. He is not a gentleman, Helen: that is what no man can ever learn to be unless born one,’ said she who had been Miss Hoel of Pontargraig. ‘But he has come back to his home a prosperous and respectable man of business—a rich man. And for the Gideon Skull of twenty to become the Gideon Skull of forty, that is more than for a workhouse boy to become an archbishop, Helen.’

‘Mamma! how can you compare Alan, who never did a wrong thing since he was born, who couldn’t do a wrong thing to save his life—no, not even what he fancied a wrong thing, to save more than his life—who *is* a gentleman, with a gambler who has turned into a—respectable gentleman?’

‘In this way I compare them. If a man who began as Gideon Skull did can climb to any height at all, only because he is obliged, where may not a young man like Alan reach to—who will not climb only because he is obliged? I look for no miracles; but after Mr. Skull’s nephew there are no miracles. Helen, will it make you very unhappy to be poor?’

‘Mamma, if it would only make Alan rich and happy, Alan and you, I would beg my bread from door to door, and be happier than you and he.’

‘Thank you, my dear. But don’t say “if it would make Allan rich”—say “if it would make him happy,” if you please. You are a good girl, Helen. I think you will make a good wife when your time comes. And to be poor will be good for you, too. The man who wants you must take you for yourself; yes, my dear, as your father took me.’

‘I am *not* good, mamma! It is Alan and you who are good—not I. And I shall not make a good wife, for I shall make no wife at all. I am going to be Alan’s sister—nothing

more. I am never going to fall in love. I have seen what it means. It means doing all one can to make oneself unhappy, and everybody else unhappy too. I will never fall in love—no, not even with King Cophetua!’

‘Helen! What are you talking about? What can you mean? What ideas have you been getting—and where?’

‘What ideas can I have when I know nothing, mother? I only mean that I never mean to fall in love, and never to marry—that’s all. And I never will.’

‘You must be a good deal older before you can say that, Helen. And then, Alan himself will not want you always.’

‘Yes, he will—always.—He is not my boy if he wants to change me for anybody but Bertha,’ she thought; ‘and King Cophetua’s beggar-girl was not as old as I shall be when that time comes.—Mamma, why am I kept in the dark about what has happened? What made Alan give up everything without a word?’

Certainly Alan’s docility had surprised his mother. ‘Has he said anything to you?’

‘Only that I must ask him nothing. But may I not ask you?’

‘No, my dear. Alan took my word, and asked me nothing. You must do the same. Some day you will both know all; but not now.’

‘But, mamma, Alan says he *does* know.’

‘And yet he cannot tell you, you see. Nor can I. You told me you would do everything for Alan. What you *can* do for him is to be patient—nothing more.’

‘Only the hardest thing of all! But—yes, I will do that even—I will be as patient as he—if you will only tell me one thing.’

‘It depends upon what it is, Helen.’

‘I remember that somebody was with him just before you spoke to him. You have reminded me of his name—it was Gideon Skull. Does that man know?’

‘Yes—I remember. He had come over with his uncle. No—what could he have known?’

‘I don’t know, mamma. But—if I am not to be trusted, I am driven to guess, you see. Gideon Skull—it is a hideous name. It doesn’t

seem to fit a good man. You have told me what he used to be ; and now you call him "respectable." I hate respectable people and respectable things. I like people to be good—not respectable. "Respectable" always seems to sound as if it meant envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness—the Hillswick people are all respectable—and a respectable Gideon Skull ! And you say he had no reason to love our father. Why has he come back to Hillswick ? Why should everything have happened just when he came ? Mamma, depend upon it that Gideon Skull hated my father : and therefore he hates Alan because he is my father's son.'

Mrs. Reid could hardly help a faint smile, knowing, or thinking she knew, so well how little any hands or minds or hearts had anything to do with anything that had happened, save her own. 'Why, you talk as though you knew as much about hate as you do about love !' said she. 'What has come to you ?'

Helen made no answer in words. If she had spoken out her thought, it would have been—'I know what love means because I

know Alan ; and I know what hate means too. Love means two broken lives ; and hate means what one feels for the man or woman who breaks them. It means what I feel for him who has done this ; and since I must hate someone, I hope with all my heart it *is* Gideon Skull.'

CHAPTER VIII.

So you think your thunders frighten ?
 Lightnings hurt, when eyes are blue ?
 Let it thunder, blow, and lighten,
 Welcome storm, if storm be you !
 Would your anger know me nearer ?
 Would you try your utmost spells ?
 Know, I hold your discords dearer,
 I, than common wedding-bells.
 Welcome lightning, wind, and thunder,
 Let it freeze or let it rain—
 Well I wot that you will wonder
 When 'tis over, Madeleine !

YESTERDAY had been Alan's last day at Copleston: to-day was to be Helen's last but one. Her own packing was soon over, at least as much as could be got over before to-morrow's post brought a summons from Alan, and she knew that her mother would wish to be left alone. At least, she fancied so: but she would most assuredly have felt otherwise had she known all. She would have known then that solitude,

on that last day for seven long years, was the hardest part of all that strange task which Mrs. Reid believed to have been set her by the first duty of a mother to her son—to make him a Man. Could she in truth have converted herself wholly into Providence, she would surely have blotted out that day, and have at least spared herself the solitary pain of tearing herself from a home round which the fibres of her heart had been twining themselves day by day for five-and-twenty years—tearing herself away with her own hand, out of that distorted love which gives no comfort, seeing that enthusiasm at full stretch is its breath, and that when that sleeps it dies. Helen, thinking to leave her mother alone to the mere simple and natural sorrow at parting from what had been her treasure-house of happiness, and from all the memories which a widow cannot share even with her own child, left the house on an errand which she had kept religiously to the end. It was to the only home of which neither chance nor wrong could rob the Reids, and which was built deep in Hillswick churchyard. She had not been

there since Easter Eve : and she could not say good-bye to all things without having seen her father's grave. Did not that good-bye include all good-byes ?

Alan, I think, never thought of bidding his father good-bye : or, if he did, it was not where the body was buried, but among the hills and streams and woods where the spirit of old Harry Reid, unless death indeed changes men's spirits all at once out of all knowledge, would live on for a long time yet, in spite of all other change. But Helen, though she had been the slowest and the last to learn it, had, since yesterday, learned the most thoroughly of them all that her father was dead indeed. The sun had gone out with him after all, and seemed as if it would never come back again : the light she had seen shining on those mountain-peaks before her had turned out to be only the reflection of the sunset beyond the hills that she was leaving behind.

She hardly thought of being thankful that the two miles between Copleston and Hillswick church passed through no part of the town : but she timed her visit early enough in the

forenoon to run no risk of being disturbed. She had robbed the greenhouse once more, no longer with any fear of the gardener's wrath before her : and she felt strangely as if she were about to leave the last sweet thing or deed in life behind her in laying her bunch of camellias on the grave. There was no reason why she should feel so. Whatever had happened or might happen, sweetness might follow her everywhere. But this great, mysterious, unimaginable wrong to Alan was folding her up in a thick black cloud, in which she could neither see nor hear nor breathe. The old fragrance of life might make a soft way through his armour, but not through her cloud. She had forgotten, when she chose her camellias, that these are scentless and therefore soulless flowers.

The tomb was not new : it was a railed block of veined marble, which had been built for himself and for as many of his descendants as might find room for their names, by her grandfather, the first Reid of Copleston, and the last but one. He and his wife took up one end between them : their son's was cut on

one of the longer sides, where it stood as yet alone. It was not a fit monument for old Harry, standing pretentiously out from among the surrounding green mounds, wooden boards, and upright slabs of freestone; but then no tomb would have been really fitting for him to go to sleep under but the top of a hill, where he might be fancied to feel the wind. There had been but little thought over the lettering. Alan had been left to follow his own feeling in the matter, even to the selection of the text from Scripture, to which his mother had taken no objection, though, with her views, it must have felt like a wound. Perhaps, had she disliked it less, she might have objected more strongly; as it was, objection to the highest praise a man can have, in the case of one she loved through all that she held to be his weakness, would have seemed to her to threaten self-betrayal. So she had let it go, and Helen read:—

‘ In Memory of Henry Alan Reid, Esq., of Copleston, only son of the before-named Henry and Isabella Reid : born October 11, 18—, died

April 10, 18—, in the sixty-third year of his age.—“*Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*”

Far too meagre it seemed to Helen. Was this all his son had found to say—that he had been born, and had died? And that he was an esquire, and had lived at Copleston? And that he had been good and faithful? That word ‘good’ was beginning to taste like wormwood to her. ‘Be good that you may be happy,’ she had always heard: ‘Be good that you may be unhappy,’ she seemed to find. Who was better than Alan, and who more unhappy? At least, so she thought, judging, as usual, his nature by her own. It should be, ‘Be happy that you may be good,’ thought she, as she put her bunch of flowers through the rails. ‘Yes, I could feel as good as any of them if Alan had married Bertha and kept Copleston. My father married my mother and lived as he loved to live all his life long; if he had not been good it would have been strange indeed But what am I thinking? Alan will be good, always,

though he loses all If somebody must turn wicked to make up for his goodness and get him his own, it must be me. What do I signify? Oh, if I only knew how! Some one has done this—oh, if I only knew whom to hate, and how to hate him, and how to conquer him.—If I only knew!

She turned away from the tomb to go homeward. Her visit had been a failure: as far as possible from what she had meant it to be. She was half-way between the tomb and the gate, when,

‘Good-morning, Miss,’ said old Grimes.

He was at work upon a new grave near the pathway, and had been half hidden behind one of the yews. She had not noticed him on her way through the churchyard; but now he pulled his cap, stopped work, and leaned on his spade. She would have merely nodded back his good-morning, but he stopped her.

‘Then it’s true, Miss, that the young Squire’s bound to leave Copleston?’ His combination of some eighty years with a character had given him the right to cross-examine all

Hillswick at his pleasure about everything, and, at the same pleasure, to be deaf or otherwise when he himself was questioned. ‘We shall be sorry to lose Mr. Alan and you; and I wish you the best of luck, Miss, wherever you go. Ah, it was something like odd, my tolling for the poor old Squire with the new one in the steeple, listening to every stroke of the clapper. It was mortal like new-year eve—ring the old ’un out and the new ’un in. That’s an odd notion, aren’t it, Miss? But when a man’s been clerk and sexton as long as I, things ’ll come into his head that another man ’ll have to go miles after. Ay, Miss—that was mortal queer.’

Helen had not lived all her life within two miles of Hillswick church not to know what was expected of her in the course of a last interview with old Grimes. With a recklessness of small silver that she would very soon have to unlearn, she took two half-crowns from her purse and put them into his free hand—one of old Grimes’s hands was nearly always free. He put them in his pocket without a word; he only passed the back of

his hand across his lips, as if his thoughts had run forward to anticipate their destiny.

‘But I mustn’t be ill-speaking the new squire,’ said old Grimes, now that the old line had performed its last act of loyalty, and, by the act of giving the sexton its last tip, had symbolised more eloquently than bells could the exit of the old and the entrance of the new. ‘It’s not as if we weren’t to have a gentleman that don’t count out *his* half-crownds—and he’s got stuff in him: when he came down he didn’t know a triplet from a bob-major, and now—well, he knows that much, anyhow. Yes, Miss, he’s took to the bells for pleasuring; but I thought it was more than pleasuring when a young gentleman spent all these fine days we’ve had in mazing himself over the old buryings and christenings. I’ve noticed that antiquities is mostly old. Well, Miss, as old Mr. Skull says, there’s never no knowing what aren’t going to happen next; and as I say, too, for there’s real truth in that saying; and people as old as me and him get to find out all sorts of things that other people get on to ninety without knowing. Who’d

have thought I'd have had the burying of the poor old Squire, that I might have been his father, and remember him when he weren't as high as that spade? When I think of all the folks I've christened, and married, and buried, and how nobody ever married nor buried me, it just makes me feel as if I was a chip off that steeple mogrified into a clerk and sexton. Why, Miss, I have to take off a pint at times, just to make sure I'm a mortal man.'

Was it possible that even old Grimes should know more of the secret history of Copleston than she? Yet why not, when everything had become possible? She was ashamed to question him, and to learn from his dregs of Hillswick gossip what even her mother, even her brother, had refused to tell her. But she lingered a little. After all, anything he could tell her could not possibly be what they had refused to tell, and even the commonest gossip might put her on the scent she was seeking. Oddly enough—no, not oddly at all—it had never struck her that Alan's loss of Copleston, though it must be to somebody's gain, would mean the presence of

a new master there, and surely *that* could not be Gideon Skull.

‘You know, then,’ she asked at last, ‘who is coming to live at Copleston?’ She put her question purposely in such a way that it might not betray her own ignorance, of which she was ashamed, even before old Grimes.

‘Lord love you, Miss! Why, all the town knows. And, talk of Old Harry—begging your pardon, Miss, only tongues will slip when they’re dry—there he is, Miss. There’s the new squire!’

Helen could not help starting, as the sexton struck his spade hard into the new grave, and fell to work again. She had no need of a second look to recognise the tall, over-tailored figure of the man with whom she had been shut up in the belfry on Easter Eve, and who had since been thrust out of her mind as utterly as if she had never set eyes on him. But she remembered him well enough now, and his name, Victor Waldron, the far-off cousin who had only made a sentimental pilgrimage to his family Mecca, and used his sentiment, Heaven knew how, to thrust Alan

out of life and land. Surely he must be the cleverest reptile that ever crawled and lied. She remembered all his sham romance, how he had taken her hand, how he professed interest in and friendship for her and hers; how he had looked and spoken until, in spite of his clothes and his twang, she had taken him for a gentleman. The man whom she had burned to hate and to conquer for Alan's love's sake was named, and was here.

That desire of her eager heart had been well-nigh consecrated into a vow by its presence with her at her father's grave. One never feels shyness before reptiles, and Helen felt no fear. If she could have done anything for Alan then and there, she would have done it; but there was nothing to do. Hate, however strong, does not spring from the heart fully armed; it has to be as patient as love before it can strike and conquer. She would have avoided him if possible, not out of fear to face him, but out of shame and anger at her own present helplessness. Unhappily, she could not help meeting him full in the pathway, unless she allowed him to see

her turn back, and her pride was stronger than her shame. So on she went, straight towards the churchyard gate, keeping her outlook far in front of her, and her course in the very middle of the gravel walk, as if she were a queen out of whose way it was his duty to stand aside. He should at least feel himself scorned, and be made to ask the nearest grave to open and cover him. But her heart beat so hotly and her bosom heaved so high that the air with which she carried her head was anger's more than pride's.

But, to her amaze, Victor Waldron by no means fell into her plan. He did not hang his head or lower his eyes. He did not even step aside out of her way. He came to a stand before her, full in the middle of the path, and looked her straight in the eyes as he raised his hat; the only sign of grace or shame he showed was that he did not put out his hand. She was obliged to come to a stand also; and she stood there, defying him with her eyes.

‘Miss Reid,’ he said, ‘I must speak to you.’

‘ Mr. Waldron, there is nothing you can have to say to me. Good-day.’

‘ Not till I have spoken with you. I have a right to make you hear me. You must not look for any forms of courtesy. I knew you were in this place ; and though your errand was sacred, I would not have let you go without a great many words, even if Grimes had not saved me from being the first to speak to you. If you are in haste to go home——’

‘ Home ? ’

‘ I will go your way, but speak to you I will.’

She could hardly identify her easy-mannered, somewhat languid, and, above all, courteous fellow-prisoner with the blunt decision of the man who stood before her and barred her way. She had never met with anything in her life but deference and gentleness. Could this be the first-fruits of poverty ? And yet the reptile comparison was driven to fall to nothing. Nobody could speak or look less like a serpent than Victor Waldron ; all the better, if there might be open battle ; if

her enemy would be more frank than her own kin. It was half his imperiousness, half the hope of gaining light, that changed her mind about refusing to hear a word ; and, in truth, whatever she might will, she knew within herself that she *must* hear him, since he willed it so.

‘ You mean, you command me,’ she said, ‘ because you are a strong man and I am only a girl ? Then speak to me here.’

‘ Miss Reid, I would have cut off my right hand sooner than this had been done !’

‘ Well ?’

‘ I have been to Copleston. Mr. Alan Reid, your brother, refuses to see me, and now I hear he has left for London, and left no address ; and I know what message I should have had sent down to me if I had come to your door and had asked to see Mrs. Reid or you. I am hounded into getting to speak to you this way. I don’t speak to you like this because you are a girl. I’m speaking to you as I should to a man—as you’d like best to be spoken to, if I’m not wrong—and in my country we don’t shoot a man without hearing him : at least, not always. Miss Reid——’

‘You have not said one word yet, Mr. Waldron,’ said Helen, fancying herself speaking with cold dignity, while all the while her eyes would have been annihilating him if eyes could kill. ‘What has happened has *not* cost you your right hand. Is it true that Copleston belongs to you?’

‘I’m afraid that is so. But if Mr. Alan Reid would only be a reasonable man——’

‘Is it true that you came from America on purpose to rob my brother of his birthright?’

‘I did. That is the bare truth. But——’

‘It was you asked for this interview, Mr. Waldron, not I. You have had your say,’ said Helen, beginning to feel that such a battle, even though barren, was going to have half the pleasure of a victory, and forgetting in her excitement that she had not allowed her adversary to say anything at all. ‘You have had your say, and now you must hear mine. Is it true that you have been bribing a man like Grimes, the sexton, to help you search for papers—evidence, I suppose it would be called. You see I know more than you think for. Is that true?’

She had built this surmise upon her knowledge of old Grimes, and upon the nature of his report of the character of the new squire. But she was hardly prepared for his answer.

‘That fellow has been telling truth for once, has he? Yes, Miss Reid. But he could not tell you more than he knew. I paid Mr. Grimes ten pounds sterling for evidence that——’

He could sooner have stopped an avalanche than Helen’s fire of questions just then.

‘You are at any rate frank enough now. Is it true that—no, I need not ask you if it is true—that you told me, when I saw you before, why it was that you had come here: when you would even have taken the welcome we should have given you then, the welcome of those whom you were planning to ruin—when you would have taken it to spy out more evidence, I suppose! I remember all you said—every word! You will tell me you were only trying to get your rights, I suppose. What kind of a right have you, in Heaven’s name, that could make my mother and brother

give up everything to you without even a word?’

‘Ah—you don’t know?’

‘And because I don’t know, I think it will not bear knowing—there! And I am not going to rest until this week’s work is undone. I won’t believe in your rights until I know them. And while I don’t believe in them, I won’t try to tell you what I think of you. If you had all the right in the world, it would not excuse you for suddenly springing a mine, like a traitor, upon a widow . . . her husband hardly in his grave . . . sending her homeless into the world . . . ruining the life of a man . . . I am only a girl, but we will see!’

‘Thank God, Miss Reid, that there’s one sane living being in Hillswick except myself—and that’s you!’

At last he had found words to silence her. That such a speech should come from him, with every note of sincerity, left her, for a moment, with nothing to say. He did not let the moment slip by.

‘Yes, Miss Reid, I mean what I say. That’s you. I do not know my cousin, Mr. Alan

Reid. But I conclude, from all that has passed between us, that he is a man I should be proud to know, and not think the worse of for being—how shall I put it?—not much a man of the world. I do unhappily find myself, by the law of this country, owner of Copleston. But it's so much against my own will, that I've quarrelled with my best friend for putting me there. I'd——'

'Gideon Skull?' said Helen, with a curl of the lip that was almost a smile, though a bitter one, half in scorn for what she must needs take for a string of hypocritical protests and excuses, half to think how right she had been looking for the clue in Gideon Skull, though, as it had turned out, he had been but the tool instead of the hand of the robber. Her mother's story did not lead her to think less ill of the friend and principal of that respectable trader, Gideon Skull. Treachery on the part of the master might fairly enough be inferred from probable malice on the part of the man.

'Yes, Gideon Skull. Not that he's to blame. But if I'd known what he was going

to do, I'd have strangled him! If Mr. Alan would take back Copleston for nothing, he should have it and welcome. If he wouldn't take it as his moral right, I'll sell it him for two cents; if he'll only make any sort of terms, I'll take them, whatever they are. I've made him two offers, by letter, before he left for London. I have proposed that he should continue to reside at Copleston, and buy me out by degrees at whatever his advisers thought a fair price, and the lower the better; or that I should take the place with a charge on it for Mrs. Reid and you, and leave it to him and his heirs by will in case he didn't buy me out sooner. He wouldn't take it back as a moral right, so I was bound to put things in that kind of roundabout way. In short, there's nothing on this wide earth, short of suicide, I wouldn't do to meet his views. And as he is just stupefied with notions of honour, there's no help for it. As we are the only two sane people in Hillswick, we must take matters into our own hands. You say, "this week's work must be undone." Yes, Miss Reid, and it shall. And then perhaps you will let me show you

how a hundred words may sound as true as they sound black, and yet be as false as——’

‘Take care, Mr. Waldron, that you do not find Alan’s sister as “stupefied with honour” as he. We both had the same father, and we are not likely to forget him. You do not know—I do—what losing Copleston means to my brother. More than the land. By any fair means he would have kept it, I know. How did *he* answer you?’

‘There is the last letter I had from him. It just made me mad. Yes, read it, please.’

Helen took the letter, almost eagerly. That Alan would not wish her to see it she felt sure, but the temptation was irresistible. It took her hardly more than a second to read, she took it in at a glance—the quicker because there was so little to learn. ‘Sir,’ she read, her eyes almost outrunning the words, ‘I will entertain no proposal. I am compelled to admit your legal claim, but beyond that I will neither do nor permit one least thing on the assumption that I am not my father’s heir. As no terms can be even proposed without assuming this, I will have none. I think you

will understand why, and if you do not, I cannot help you . . . Alan Reid.' That was all. But if the letter gave Helen little light, it told her what to do.

'Yes, that is Alan: that letter is not forged!' said she. 'He must have cause, indeed, to lose his all rather than even buy it back from your hand. I think Mr. Skull must have been more frank with him than you have been with me . . . or less so. Here is your letter, Mr. Waldron. I see what he has cause to think of you. Yes, I dare say he is "stupefied with honour." Alan is more like his father than I am, and *he* shall keep his likeness, whatever I may do . . . Alan will make no terms with *you*, nor will I make terms.'

'What will you make, then?' he asked; the question was struck from him by her last emphatic word.

'War!' said she, and passed on.

Not many days ago, Victor Waldron would have laughed at such a fit of tragedy; though there was nothing theatrical about Helen

Reid, as she swept away from him in scorn. Where was his presence of mind? He knew not whether to follow her or whether to let her go; and before he could recover his breath it was too late, and she was gone.

‘The devil take Gideon Skull for the most blundering brute that ever was born! And the devil take all the Reids for the most impracticable, crackbrained—I don’t know what to call them. I believe I’m the only sane man in all Great Britain: except the minister, who’s got a few dull wits, and the sexton, who knows *his* business, I’m the only one I’ve seen. What’s to be done now?’

He walked backwards and forwards up and down the path, absently reading the epitaphs on either side, thinking what he could possibly do. Old Grimes had gone off to dinner, so that he could pace up and down and think undisturbed.

‘I know what she thinks of me now,’ he thought very bitterly. ‘And I can’t blame her. That blundering brute, Gideon! Briton all over, through and through; an honest, true-hearted, stubborn, well-meaning, meddle-

some, thorough-going—fool ! . . . And it's come to her thinking that of me after all ; just as I knew it would be. Alan Reid is a fine fellow. Seems to me to be better cracked than most men are whole. No—I wouldn't have given a fig for him if he'd taken a cent from a man whose claim to give it him is that his mother isn't the wife of his father. I think I should have got on well with Alan Reid—the devil take Gideon Skull, and send him to Copleston ! It would all have gone so well. I should have stayed on, and had a good time, learning triple bob majors and checking the churchwardens' accounts of the seventeenth century, till it was long enough after the funeral to call on my own cousins—any man may call on his own cousins, even if there has been a funeral. I should have got on with Alan Reid. That sort of man is always a splendid fellow when he's at home—out in the world, where fine feelings give a man more weight to carry than thick ones, I'm not so sure. But it's better than fine feeling to stick up like that for his mother's right to his father's name. I should have liked

Mrs. Reid too. A mother that's stuck up for like that must be worth sticking up for And she'd have thought differently then. Fancy a girl like that liking one well enough to flame out *for* one that way! And I've let her go, thinking like that—anybody but myself would take me for a bigger fool than Gideon. Perhaps I am. Perhaps I've been a bigger fool than I know, to have been hanging round this church day after day, till *that* day came. Perhaps the bob major hasn't been the attraction, nor the churchwardens' accounts, nor even old Grimes. Perhaps I shall never see another woman that I'd sooner see in a storm than not at all, excepting Cousin Helen. She's as grand in a storm as she was sweet in a calm. She has no patience, no justice, no reason—her heart's too big for them. I believe if she loved one man, she could kill another; and next to being the man she loved, I think I'd be the man she killed So there they all go, dream after dream. And the best last of all. No, I'm not going to be a fool. Life's too big a thing to let it be twisted out of the bee-line because one has seen a girl twice; and a girl

that thinks one a cad and a cur, and tells one so the second time of seeing. Well, I shan't see her again ; and perhaps it's lucky—I might have turned into a real fool the third time. The question is, what's to be done? It's clear she doesn't know the bottom of this business. Of course the man who stuck up for his mother like that wouldn't shame his sister and her mother too by telling *her* why. Poor fellow ! he must have had a bad time telling his mother, if she needed telling, without letting his sister know that her mother had no right to her wedding ring—not even to her weeds. It's lucky there was nothing in that note I gave her to read to tell her. What's to be done? Let me see. There must be somebody to look after a place like Copleston, and to see that the tenants don't live rent-free. If Alan Reid won't touch the rents, I must, I suppose—any way, as far as receiving goes. Suppose I die without a will. Then heaven knows who my heir-at-law would be. I shouldn't like to bet on Mrs. George Waldron the first having left no cousins. Suppose I make a vow never to marry, and leave Copleston to Alan Reid or

his children, or to Helen Reid and hers if he has none? Then there's the chance of his out-living me, and he's sworn as hard as a man can that he won't take Copleston by any title except the one I can't give him. I wouldn't even trust his children—unless I insure his marrying a woman like one or two I could find him in New York, whose principle is, when anything's given them, to open their mouths very much and their eyes very little Leave it to her then? Well, yes, I suppose so. And her brother wouldn't so much mind being *her* heir-at-law, I suppose But then she might marry If I left it to her to dispose of as she liked, and if she'd take it, in spite of being her brother's sister, she mightn't care to leave it to him and his when the time came. Wives and mothers have notions of their own—and if *that* girl married, *she* wouldn't marry by halves. There's no sense nor justice in making her a machine for passing on our family place to some confounded fellow who'd be no more a Waldron than I'm a Grimes Marry her yourself, and settle matters that way? Yes, of course

mend a thunderstorm by jumping over the moon. If I wanted to hear a pleasant answer from a woman, I wouldn't fish for it by asking Helen Reid to be Mrs. Waldron of Copleston No ; the first thing is to keep myself single, whatever else I can find to do ; and, at any rate, *that's* easy. Nature never makes doubles ; there aren't two Helen Reids Lucky for the world ; two tempers, and two tongues, and two pairs of eyes like hers wouldn't leave much work for fire to do I *was* a fool once : I never murdered Gideon Skull. And it is too late even for murder now.'

CHAPTER IX.

BALTHASAR. How! Thou art Conrad—and thou know'st
not me?

CONRAD. Not I!

BALTHASAR. Not know Balthasar?

CONRAD. Him? Right well

I know Balthasar! Hast thou news of him?

BALTHASAR. Look on Balthasar, Caspar—it is I!

CONRAD. Balthasar!—Thou!—Thou'rt jesting. Were it
he,

Then were I changed: and no whit changed am I,

If I be changed not wholly *Thou art he?*

Then hath the god of blindness given me eyes

To read in thine a soul I never saw,

And not Balthasar's. Whosoe'er thou art,

I do not know thee. Hence, or be my foe.

MOST assuredly it was not an easy thing for Victor Waldron to make up his mind what to do with Copleston in a single day. Yet, if there was one thing he hated more than another, it was indecision; and his favourite scorn was for the man who cannot make up his mind what to do under any given circumstances within any given time. There were

many strata of feeling in him. Uppermost of all came his consciousness that a most unhappy combination of circumstances made him look like a mean traitor in the eyes of a girl whom, to say the least of it, he knew well enough now that he cared for ten times more at a second sight than he had ever before cared for any woman at a hundredth. Her storminess alone suited him; and it gave him a wider and deeper insight into her nature than a hundred peaceful interviews in the belfry could ever have done. Next to this was his man's shame at having the direction of matters taken out of his own hands. Instead of playing football with fortune, fortune had been playing football with him—his resolve to give up his dream of being Waldron of Copleston had been the signal to deliver the place into his hands. And what a signal—the death of one whom his experience of Hillswick talk had made him more than respect, and the unlooked-for legal accident of an intestacy. Next below was the sense of having, though against his own will, committed an actual most cruel wrong—towards strangers it would

have been bad enough : but, to Helen ! Then — much lower — came a very inconsistent thing : he did not believe in fate ; but had not the finger of Providence itself been at work in all this seeming chance in preventing his perverse will from standing in the way of righting an old wrong, and in restoring one who, apart from the dead man's intestacy, was still the just if not the lawful owner, to his own ? Copleston had, after all, been the dream of his boyhood, ever since he had heard from his father the story of his father's father ; and even under the crushing hand of love, such dreams die hard. To what other end had all these things come ? Gideon Skull's secret knowledge, his own acquaintance with Gideon, and their joint and most unlikely presence at Hillswick just when old Harry Reid died ; that strange and almost unaccountable affair of the intestacy ; Alan Reid's character ; and, to crown all, the sudden death of a strong man like Harry Reid just in the nick of time, were all separate and unconnected accidents working together to one obvious end. Perhaps matters had in

truth, and not merely in seeming, been taken out of his hands. Perhaps Alan Reid would have proved unworthy of a trust like Copleston. Perhaps Victor Waldron had not only dreamed in those not far-off days when he justified his desire for Copleston by an ambition to make himself a missionary to the mother country, and to show what could be done by a Republican squire with American light in him, and by the grandson of George Waldron the rebel. It might have been necessary, for so just and so great an end, that he should be saved by stronger hands than his own from the greater treason of falsehood to life and duty for the sake of leave to look into a girl's eyes. Was he not bound to take Copleston, and to throw the responsibility on those wiser eyes and stronger hands? But then, below this, came the lowest depth of all. He knew that he loved Helen Reid as surely as he knew that she hated him.

And, therefore, though his conscious thoughts took every opportunity of accusing themselves of injustice, he did forgive Gideon Skull. It was an old friendship—perhaps too

long, for the history of all save married lives (and of some of these) is the history of divergence and of drifting apart until a time comes when the space between them grows too wide for the bridge of friendship to join them without most perilous stretching. Certainly, Victor had never felt so little sympathy with Gideon as on the evening of the day when old Harry died, and when he had just, for the first time, seen Helen Reid. The cynicism which had once been a pleasant salt had jarred on him; either something had gone out of his life, or something new had entered which did not agree with the old.

So, by the time he was back at the 'George,' where, not to put too strong a strain on old Mr. Skull's hospitality, he was still staying, he was in about as complete a state of indecision as a man can be—so much so that his ideas began to verge on the preposterous, if not on the impossible. Love is more apt to play at jumping over the moon than he fancied when he accused himself of being more foolish than his fellows. His plans turned into romances, and his romances almost

into plans. How would it be if he were to turn to account a slight turn he had for play-acting by following the Reids to London, disguising himself, changing his tailor, and making court to Helen under another name? The notion was absurd enough to amuse him, while he followed it out to the end, and built castles upon it just as though it were by no means absurd. Or suppose he were to go abroad, and let the Reids hear that he was dead? But he did not follow out that romance very far, seeing that it would bring him no nearer Helen. He grew half vexed with himself for castle-building about what could not be done, instead of seriously and decisively setting himself to think out what could be done and ought to be done; but all the same the castles went on building; for they had a sort of sweetness in their very vanity which was new to his taste, and the same lady lived in them all—and, since he could not build for her even a cottage of earth, he might at least spend one hour in building her castles of air. Strange, it seemed to him, that his thoughts and dreams of Helen

Reid took no part of their character from her scorn. I think that when a flower first puts its head out into the world, whether out of heart or meadow, it finds its first draught of air sweet ; let the wind be blowing from the north-east and be sharp with snow, the flower would not go back into the earth again, though it knows that it will be frozen dead in an hour. And the shorter its hour must be, the more freely it may spread out its fancies and dream out its dreams. We may live out ten lives in an hour if we will, and find them at least as sweet as if they were true. So Victor Waldron let things slide for at least an hour, and, sending thought to where he had so often of late been sending Gideon Skull, lived all sorts of wonderful and impossible lives, and knew them to be impossible all the while.

Most assuredly he was not best pleased to be called back to that part of earth called Copleston by Gideon Skull.

‘I thought I should have found you in the steeple,’ said the latter, ‘but old Grimes told me you had left hours ago. Well?’

‘ Well ? ’

‘ I mean, are you really off to-night ? ’

‘ Yes. I shall call and see your uncle and the ladies before I go. I shall go and see some lawyer up in town. ’

The difference between them made itself felt in the air of both, but much more strongly in Victor’s than in Gideon’s. Gideon’s was rather the air of one who feels himself compelled—he knows not why—to accept a difference which he does not share; there was none of Waldron’s bitterness in his words or tone. ‘ If you want a lawyer,’ said he, ‘ go to—— ’

‘ No. I’ll go to one of my own finding. ’

‘ Perhaps you’re right, Waldron. You’ll feel yourself all the more sure. But you may make yourself easy. There isn’t a lawyer in England who won’t tell you that a man’s bastard can’t be his heir-at-law. ’

‘ Are you speaking of Mr. Alan Reid ? ’ asked Victor quickly.

‘ Who else ? I didn’t make either the law or the dictionary. I’m hanged if I can make you out, Waldron, these last days. If I was

half the cynic you call me, I should think you wanted to kick down your ladder. After all, it's the way of the world.'

'Don't talk any more of that truck. I'm sick of it. Come!'

'Where?'

'I'm a bad hand at sitting still. I must do something, even if it's nothing. I'm going to the Vicarage, to say good-bye to your aunts and your uncle.'

'Wait a bit. I must have a bit of talk with you.'

'Well, you can have it after. You can drive over with me to the station, if you like, or you can talk while I'm strapping my valise. But I must leave your uncle's soon enough not to frighten your aunts with thinking that I want to be asked to take pot-luck; and it's near four now.'

'I'll go with you, then,' said Gideon. 'Why didn't you tell me,' he asked, as they left the 'George,' 'that you've been talking two hours in the churchyard with Helen Reid?'

'For three reasons. Firstly, I didn't talk to Miss Reid: she talked to me. In the

second place, because it was not for two hours. In the third place, because if I had talked to her for four hours, it wouldn't have signified to another soul. I have had more than enough, these days, of telling everybody everything.'

'I didn't suppose it was two hours, because I heard it from Miss Bolt—so, of course, one must divide it by ten. Say twelve minutes, then. Look here, Waldron. We've knocked about together a good bit, you and I. We've been chums, off and on, out west, when we've had plenty of money and nothing to eat; and down east, when we might have had plenty to eat if we'd only had any money. We've had our rough and our smooth water, and we've had our quarrels too. That's like lots of men. But I've always said of you what I've never been able to say of any man alive—and that is, that we've never done one single thing behind the other's back, and that whenever we've been the closest partners we've been the best friends: and——'

'That's so; and it's your having done something behind my back that's the matter

with me now. I can't forgive that ; so don't ask me. But here we are.'

The Rectory, of which, as well as the parish, the curate was in charge, was much too large for him and his ways, and thus exaggerated his general character by reducing his occupation of it to a sketch in outline of a tenancy. As it happened, the Misses Skull were out visiting, and Mr. Skull would not be in for half-an-hour. So Gideon's talk was simply adjourned from the 'George' to his uncle's library—not much to Victor's satisfaction, for he was in anything but a mood for Gideon.

'You say I've done something behind your back? And I say that you're not doing as you'd be done by. There's something between us, Waldron, that I don't understand. If it was anybody [but you, I should know what to think, but I can't think it of an old chum like you, and I won't, until I am obliged. Let's have it out, and make a clean breast of it, and have done with it, like honest men that may have a bit of a misunderstanding where a girl's in the way, but know how to trust one another through thick and thin.'

‘ Well! You know my quarrel. Go ahead
What’s yours?’

‘ I don’t know your quarrel. But I want
to know if this firm’s dissolved.’

‘ What firm?’

‘ Waldron and Skull.’

‘ Waldron and Skull?’

‘ Yes. If it isn’t, I’ll go through with it.
If not—but it can’t be. If you don’t remem-
ber the name of the firm, I’ll put it another
way. I suppose you remember your first
coming across me out in Texas—and how we
got talking about my native land—confound
her!—and how interested you were when you
found I knew Hillswick and Copleston. Yes,
and even the name of General George. I’ll
tell you now, Waldron, that I liked you, and
I do like you, for though we’re old friends
now, you’ve never done me so much as half
an ill turn: and from the minute I heard how
your family were always clear that General
George had never married Mistress Hannah, I
felt we’d struck oil together. And you thought
the same. I was the inventor: you were the
patentee. We came over here. Was it to get

evidence that Copleston was ours, or was it to flirt in churchyards? Yes or no?’

‘You’re not going the way to get over misunderstandings, I can tell you,’ said Victor, flushing. ‘Yes; we did come over to look for evidence that Copleston was—mine; and it failed.’

‘I said “ours,” Waldron. Remember what the organist said to the bellows-boy, and how the bellows-boy answered him. It’s not like you to quibble, Waldron. Good God! if what you’re driving me to suspect is true, I’ll no more believe in a man’s honour again than I do in a woman’s. Don’t quibble and split straws. Yes, that evidence did fail; thanks to you—because you were afraid of a trumpery bit of paper. It wasn’t you, was it, who knew that little story of the first Mrs. Reid? Who met her on Broadway? Who knew how to convince Alan Reid, late of Copleston, that he hadn’t a legal leg to stand on?’

‘Thank God, it wasn’t I! I no more understand one word you’re saying, Skull——’

‘You admit my service, then. I was

afraid—but no; I wasn't afraid. We've done the thing between us, and we've done it well. It hasn't cost six-and-eightpence to a lawyer. And now—what's my share?'

Victor could only stare at him amazed. It seemed as if the honest, loyal, blundering Briton, Gideon Skull, had been spirited away, and that he was holding converse with some changeling of mature years from the land where nothing is what it seems, and where nothing that glitters is gold. And yet, even now, it was impossible, absolutely impossible, to look at Gideon Skull and take him for any other than the truest and honestest of men. His eyes met Victor's frankly: there was even sorrowful rebuke in them, as if disappointed that his question had been allowed to come from him instead of from Victor. And the look of rebuke deepened as Victor's silence continued, until a deep red flush began to creep over Gideon's cheeks and brow.

'By God, Waldron—if I didn't know you weren't like other men, I should believe you were going to cheat me as a man never cheated man before!'

Waldron sprang to his feet. But Gideon did not stir. Unspeakable sorrow filled his voice as he spoke on.

‘Tell me it isn’t true, man! Tell me you haven’t been using me to do the work that was too nice for your kid gloves to meddle with, only to chuck me over like a worn-out tool that had done its work—don’t let me think that of *you*. Of course it was quite right of you to leave those things to me: let every man keep to his own line. But—well, you were the last man I believed in; and you’ll be the last, too. Do you mean to tell me, Victor Waldron, that you’d have swung me off no less if that strange chance hadn’t made it needless for me to get rid of that register for you? Do you mean——?’

‘Gideon Skull! Do you mean that you—that you think me such an almighty scoundrel as to have meddled with a——’

‘Why, what else did you speak of it for? What else made you so particular as to finding out what would buy old Grimes? If you didn’t do it yourself, why did you leave it to me? One of us must have done it, I suppose.

It isn't doing what's needful to get one's rights that makes a man an almighty scoundrel, Waldron. That belongs to getting one's rights, and not owning how. I got Copleston for you, Victor Waldron; and you know as well as I that I can't unget it for you again. Yes, you've got me in your power. I trusted you so utterly, that I held nothing back; I didn't take one single precaution that I'd have taken against any other friends of mine. I've got you Copleston without costing you a cent or making you do one single uncomfortable thing. I trusted you like my own self; I did for you as I thought you'd have done by me. . . . More fool I.'

'You must be stark, staring, raving mad,' said Victor; 'or you must be making the worst joke—— Do you suppose that I mean to take advantage of a mere legal flaw in a clear moral title by keeping Alan Reid out of Copleston one single needless day? If I did that, call me scoundrel if you please!'

'Do I suppose you mean to keep Copleston? Yes, I do. Do I suppose there's a man on earth who'd give up a place like that,

worth thousands a year, if he could keep it? No, I don't. Do I suppose Alan Reid would, if he'd had the ghost of a leg to stand on? No. Do I suppose you're a greater fool than Alan Reid? Anything but that, anyhow. Do I suppose you talk that rot for the sake of cheating me? Yes, I do. There's nothing else left to think now. . . . And I'd have trusted you'

Nobody, unless he lost his temper, could have doubted the absolute sincerity with which Gideon Skull upbraided his former friend. No mere loss of expected booty could have imitated the pathetic dignity which a genuine sense of ingratitude, treachery, and the loss of a last illusion could alone confer. It was plain enough that, in his simple, straight-going mind, no man on earth ever had entertained, or did or could by any natural possibility entertain, a single motive for action but his own profit or his own pleasure. If Gideon was speaking Greek to Victor, Victor was talking Carthaginian to Gideon. No; even now to charge him with dishonesty was absurd. And to be thus

treated by a trusted friend—a friend from whose natural human treachery and selfishness he had been fool enough to neglect making himself secure—yes : it was hard to bear.

But Victor did not keep his temper ; for him things had become impossible to bear. To be called cheat by a cheat was almost worse than Helen's scornful anger. What had he done, that the opposite poles of the human world, Helen and Gideon, should unite in scorn of him ?

'You are a scoundrel yourself,' he cried out, 'and——'

Gideon Skull neither raised his voice nor stirred. 'You are a damned Yankee thief and liar,' he said, as quietly as if he had only said, 'It is a fine day.'

'Take that !' cried Waldron, sending the curate's brass reading-lamp straight and hard at Gideon's head—'and I only wish it was Copleston !'

Gideon had likely enough had things harder to miss sent at him in his time. He bent his head quietly ; so that the lamp smashed on the floor, and fell at the feet of its

owner, the Reverend Christopher, who was just coming into his quiet room to rest after his parish rounds.

‘ Bless my soul ! ’ said he.

‘ I am sorry I only broke your lamp, ’ said Victor, his temper arranging the order of his words, while he fancied he was making a sufficiently polite apology to the clergyman. ‘ I will get a new one in town. I shall be at the Portland, ’ he said to Gideon, ‘ if you have any message to send me there. Good day, sir, ’ he said to the bewildered curate, and returned to the ‘ George. ’ He knew he was forgetting his manners, but he could not suddenly shift his behaviour after that day’s adventures to fit the requirements of a call upon the Reverend Christopher and the Misses Skull, with Gideon in the room.

‘ Will you be good enough to explain to me the meaning of this, Gideon ? ’ asked Mr. Skull, looking from the lamp to his returned prodigal, and back again.

Gideon shrugged his shoulders. ‘ A piece of horse-play, I suppose. ’

‘And may I ask if it is one of the customs among the natives of America to amuse themselves in gentlemen’s libraries by throwing lamps about and nearly breaking people’s heads with them? In all my experience I never knew of such an event till to-day. Under the circumstances, I can quite understand that my sudden appearance should confuse Mr. Waldron, and prevent his remaining to make a proper apology. He spoke of buying me a new lamp. I must say, I think it is the least, under the circumstances, that he can do.’

‘They are queer fishes, the Americans.’

‘I wish you could have managed to take Mrs. Reid’s offer for yourself, Gideon; I do, indeed. I thought, when you proposed it to me at the time, that it was a mistake to select for such an office a complete stranger to the affairs of the family; and I am more than ever of that opinion from what I have seen to-day. One who does not know how to conduct himself as an educated gentleman will be a most objectionable person in Copleston. I object, on principle, to American warming-pans. Warming-pans we used, in my younger

days, to call those who, for a consideration, consented——’

Gideon shrugged his shoulders again. ‘It’s done now, Uncle Christopher. My opinion is that we’re all fools together—yourself, of course, excepted. There was nothing else you could do, and you have nothing to lose. But my opinion is that Mrs. Reid is a lunatic, her son a baby, her daughter a—girl, myself an ass, and the Yankee a—Yankee. Well, it’s only applying generals to particulars, after all. We’re all men and women, and it’s our way. Luckily for Hillswick, it isn’t yours. By the way, could you manage to lend me ten pounds? I’ve had to lend all my spare cash to the warming-pan, to take him to town. You’ll have it back in a day or two.’

‘With pleasure, my dear boy. I’ll write you a cheque; luckily, I paid fifteen pounds into the bank this very day. But I fear you are too ready to take a view of human nature which the ancient Greeks termed cynical, from the Greek word for a dog, and applied to the philosopher Diogenes. Mrs. Reid is a high-principled woman, Gideon: if she be

mistaken, it must be enough for us that she means well. The maternal instinct, Gideon, is a quality which neither you nor I, with all my experience of human nature in its deeper aspects, nor you, with your knowledge of business, can ever expect wholly to feel. It is necessary to be a mother to feel the maternal instinct, Gideon. Doubtless Mrs. Reid's plan for her son will turn out well if it is so ordered, and ill if otherwise. Such things are not in our hands. Her views upon higher matters, such as the cure of the souls of this parish, prove her to be a woman of eminently sensible views . . . After all,' the curate went on, as he filled up the cheque, 'it is no more than seven years before poor Mr. Reid's will operates : and seven years is not long to wait,' added he, who had been waiting for more than forty to be something better than Curate of Copleston. 'There is the cheque, Gideon. —There is only one thing with which I cannot be satisfied. An American who behaves in a library as Mr. Waldron does in mine is not fit to be trusted with Copleston.'

Assuredly the new squire did not appear

to be inheriting golden opinions from the old squire. He had made three enemies in one day, and all three meant danger. For it is dangerous in itself to offend one's rector: it was something more than dangerous for Victor Waldron to have war declared by Helen Reid: and, as to the third of his enemies, Gideon Skull had heard a word slip from his uncle Christopher that might enable him to turn the tables gloriously upon his old friend.

CHAPTER X.

Sound to the charge ! Let steel encounter steel,
Let green earth redden 'neath the armèd heel :
Let legioned corpses call the hawks from far,
Let Greek meet Greek, and prove the tug of war—
Let all Bellona's thunders loose through air—
Let brokers fatten, and let quidnuncs stare.

PAULO majora canamus. What signifies the change of a line of squires in Copleston, when France was losing an Emperor? In what does the gossip of a county town resemble that of History—save, perhaps, in its preference for the false over the true, and for the little over the large? Surely the business of Copleston and Hillswick must at the very least be held of as little consequence to Europe as were the affairs of Europe to Hillswick and Copleston. Did the so-called greatest event that ever took place in any time ever give a minute's real discomfort to a single

human being whom it did not personally concern—whom it did not tend to deprive of his own share of the world's good things? Hills-wick read the papers, of course, and made the proper exclamations over them at the proper times; but nevertheless, the siege of Paris itself was less than nothing to the fact that the poor-rate had been increased a farthing in the pound.

But—in spite of all these things—there were people who, with nothing to lose even were all Europe to be swallowed by an earthquake, took the keenest personal interest in what was going on. The illness of the wind that blows nobody good is a very foolish phrase to those who profit in direct proportion to the illness of the wind. Had there been no such thing as war with his battles and peace with her massacres, the owners of the 'Spraggville Argus' must have invented them or starved. Happily for the 'Spraggville Argus,' there had been no lack of such things for many years, and the papers had gone far towards turning its owners into millionaires, with but little expense for colour.

The principal owner of the 'Argus' was a consistent Quaker from Philadelphia, who verily and honestly believed himself to believe that war is a curse and a sin, in which all must needs share who draw any earthly benefit therefrom. In harmony with his creed, he looked upon those who profited by the invasion of Alsace and Lorraine as the most blinded sinners of the day—but he excepted himself, though, by an admirably devised system of war correspondence, he had gained by it far more than any German statesman; nay, more even than any French army contractor. He shook his head over every fresh telegram of slaughter, but he never grudged what it cost him, when it was a real big thing; and when it was but the affair of a mere scare or skirmish, not worth five cents a word, he shook his head doubly hard. After all, since men must kill one another, it is surely better for them to do so in a fashion that should benefit the Organs of Peace and Civilisation. On the whole, it does not follow that, because Peace-times are better than War-times, it is therefore necessarily better to live in them—

and, were it not that, while War slays his thousands, Peace slays her ten thousands, there could be no doubt about the matter at all. 'Let there be no war,' was the spirit of his unspoken prayers: 'but—if there *must* be war in my time—let it be a big thing.'

This gentleman's chief office was naturally in Spraggville—a western city that six years before had been a group of three or four shanties and a meeting-house called the village of Kattanoga, but had for two years owned a grand opera-house; which implies the previous possession of all the other features, good and evil, which distinguish a great and growing town. Chicago and Milwaukie were said to be growing jealous of Spraggville, *née* Kattanoga—a result with which, so the 'Argus' openly declared every morning of its appearance, the 'Argus' had much to do. It even plumed itself on the presence of the opera-house; for though its owner objected to theatrical entertainments on principle, still the size of the house did not make the size of the sin, and—but his arguments on this score will present themselves and commend them-

selves to most men. Practically, it is more to the purpose that, no sooner had the first trumpet-blast of a great war fluttered all the hawk-cotes in the east and in the west, than the 'Spraggville Argus' was among the very first to open an office in London for the collection and transmission of war news, and for managing and centralising all operations at the seat of war.

In a little back room on the third floor over a shop in Fleet Street sat Mr. Micaiah P. Crowder, the European representative of the 'Spraggville Argus,' and its minister at war. It can hardly be said that he looked the character—but that goes without saying. He was a slim, slight, languid young man of about eight-and-twenty, with exceedingly narrow shoulders, looking all the narrower for his long, black frock-coat; a pale, thin face, and an amazingly wooden look of the profoundest, gravest, and gloomiest melancholy about the mouth and eyes. To make that look, the anxieties and responsibilities of office, a hopeless attachment, and a long-standing dyspepsia must have agreed. He was writing rapidly,

with one eye on the clock and the other on his papers; and opposite him sat his lieutenant, also writing with one eye on his paper and the other on the clock—another young man, but of a broader and more robust build, though resembling his chief, as if it were a peculiarity common to the whole ‘Argus’ staff, in that look of hopeless love combined with indigestion and care.

‘Say,’ said Mr. Crowder presently, taking up a page from a heap of copy which he was apparently condensing or otherwise dealing with editorially, ‘what does “cull-de-sack” mean?’

‘Never studied Latin,’ said the sub-editor, who spoke in jerks, as if he were dictating a telegram. ‘Didn’t, where they raised *me*. That’s Macbean, *I* know,. Warned him they don’t care for Latin in Spraggville. Facts, there. No time, here. Have it out.’

‘I guess it’s French, though—or German.’

‘Then, wire. Let them find it out in Spraggville.’

‘And be come down on for wiring what’s not worth the money!’

‘Have it out. Can’t be much account, anyhow.’

‘And be come down on for letting the “Courier” get a mail’s start! How do you know “cull-de-sack” mayn’t be the spice of the whole thing? He may be a very great scholar, Macbean—but as a war correspondent he is a failure. And I will let him know it, too, when he comes for his pay.’

‘What does he say?’

‘“A staff officer was sent at full gallop for General von Gruben: but that gallant officer had disappeared into a regular cul-de-sac, and communication with him was out of the question.”’

‘Well, Crowder, that does sound a sort of consequence. That Macbean is a regular disappointing man.’

‘I guess it’s French myself. Let’s try the dictionary. . . . Well! if I didn’t think that meant wiring!’

‘What is it?’

‘I’ll put that truck into English—listen here. “It is a very great error to conclude that every German is possessed of courage.

I will give you an example. During the rage of the conflict, an orderly was sent off to call up General Gruben. Those who looked upon every German as a born hero—but those alone—will be surprised to learn that the gallant general had made discretion the better part of valour by hiding from the bursting shells in the bottom of a sack, which happened to be conveniently at hand. What would have been said in America if General Phil Sheridan had been found at Five Forks with his heels stuck out of the mouth of a sack, and his head at the bottom?" That's the style for Spraggville. They'll like that. That Macbean gives me more trouble with his letters than—but he's smart for an Englishman. If he can't write, he does see. And that about the Dutchman in a bag is better than if they'd fired Noter Daym. There—wire that letter, Sims: wire it all. Come in! Wait a bit, Sims—here's a telegram—perhaps there'll be something else to wire.'

Mr. Crowder opened and read the telegram; and, as he read, his face grew, if possible, gloomier than before. He did not

swear audibly, but he chewed his quill savagely, tossed the message over to Mr. Sims, and threw himself back in his chair.

‘I give in,’ said he. ‘There’s my whole scheme of operations thrown up because one Scotchman’s a born fool. Macbean again!’

‘“Macbean to Crowder,”’ read Mr. Sims aloud. ‘“Thrown from horse. Broken leg. In hospital. No use for six weeks. Send out somebody meanwhile.” Knew it,’ said Mr. Sims. ‘That’s Macbean. Who’s to go?’

‘Who’s to go—when there isn’t a man left in this city that knows a sword from a gun? If there’d been another, would I have sent Macbean—a fellow that would have been first-rate to send out with Hannibal, and to write war letters in Greek and Latin, but no more fit to get facts for an American journal than Cicero? I say, Macbean was hired to tell people in good, plain Saxon English what’ll make our citizens buy the “Argus,” not to show off his French and break his bones. I tell you, Sims, if Shakespeare himself came into this bureau with all his plays under his arm, and wanted to go out for the “Argus,” I’d——’

‘Reckon there might be some fellow loafing around that might write Macbean’s letter till he’s well.’

‘Reckon there might be fifty. Put your hand on one. Is it a fact that there’s a soul worth going that isn’t gone?’

‘I could put my hand on one right away, if he’d go.’

‘Reckon him gone, then. What’s his name? Come in!’

‘Talk of the devil,’ said Mr. Sims. ‘That’s the man!’

‘Mr. Gideon Skull?’ said Mr. Crowder, while Mr. Sims went back to his writing; ‘I am glad to see you, sir. By a remarkable coincidence, we were just talking of you.’

Gideon Skull was nowise changed in look or bearing from when he was visiting his uncle, except that the style of his dress marked the return of the prosperous business man to town. ‘I don’t know that it’s much of a coincidence,’ said he; ‘and if it were, I don’t see why you should call such an everyday thing as a coincidence remarkable. I

saw your board outside, and, naturally enough, feeling thirsty, looked in. The cunning drinks of Spraggville are among my memories. So the "Argus" has set up an office in London, eh? Have you brought over the old prescription, too?'

'Mr. Sims and I,' said Mr. Crowder, 'have been total abstainers for twenty years.'

'Well—so much the worse for me. But that accounts for it, though. I thought I didn't recognise any of the old "Argus" lot, and yet you know me. What were you doing in Spraggville when I was there? I can't call to mind one of the "Argus" staff that had ever been a total abstainer for twenty minutes, out of his bed—and twenty years! Why, you must have begun to abstain, you and Mr. Sims, before you were well weaned. But let me tell you one thing, young men—as I suppose you and Mr. Sims are afflicted with a tendency to get drunk and thrash your wives, you are quite right to take proper precautions against your weaknesses. But, all the same, if the first nine numbers of the "Argus" had been written in milk and water, or on it,

there'd never have been a tenth to be written in anything.'

It was not etiquette on the staff of the 'Spraggville Argus' for a visitor to class an editor and sub-editor together as 'young men,' and to lecture them on the alphabet of journalism. Mr. Crowder put on as much of the air of Jupiter as he could find on the spur of the moment. 'Since I seem to have the advantage of you, sir,' said he, 'I beg to introduce myself to you as Micaiah P. Crowder, principal Eurōpian editor of the "Spraggville Argus." The reason you don't remember me is that during your connection with our journal I was engaged as a Printer's Devil. And I do think, sir, that a man who raised himself from Printer's Devil to principal Eurōpian editor has a right to say that temperance pays, if he's found it pay. Naturally, I speak as an Amurcan. I am aware that in this country a man remains as he was born.'

'Does he? Then all I can say is that the British baby must be a queer sort of article, as a rule. I'm glad to have made your ac-

quaintance, though—yours and Mr. Sims'. Any news?'

'May I ask you if you are at present engaged on any London paper, Mr. Skull?'

'I? No. Do I look as if that's what, according to your theory, I was born to? I'm not going to tell you why I called at this office, because if I were to tell you it was only in the hope of having a drink with Jenkins, or Higgins, or one of the old boys, I couldn't expect you to believe me; and at the same time I can't tell you anything else, because, though I have written for the "Argus" I have a stupid, lingering sort of dislike, the result of early associations, to telling lies. But you can't expect me to find myself in a newspaper office without asking for news. I assure you, I didn't come to steal. Will you take a weed?'

'Mr. Sims and I,' said Mr. Crowder, 'are members of the Committee of Suppression of Tobacco in Spraggville. We object to tobacco on principle, Mr. Skull.'

Gideon lighted a cigar, and took the first three whiffs in thoughtful silence. Food for

his old speculation as to the price of men and women was plainly before him in the persons of these solemn and self-satisfied young men—at least, if he had happened to have any practical interest in investigating the general problem with relation to the cases of it now before him. And even without any practical interest, it is always to the taste of a professed cynic to consider what a practical man would do, especially when debarred from those cheap and easy ways in which a man of the world of forty can come over a would-be man of the world half a generation younger than he. He had certainly not called at the ‘Argus’ to find there a couple of prigs who believed themselves to be directing with their wires the affairs of Europe at war.

‘Look here, Mr. Skull,’ said Mr. Crowder. ‘You have been in Amurca, and you know how, when an Amurcan gets a notion, he puts it down before you right away, for you to take it or leave it—for if you won’t, there’s plenty will. You’re smart, and you’ve seen the biggest war in history, and you know what they like to read in Spraggville. You

won't waste our time over dictionaries, and if you get a fall from a horse, you'll fall on your feet, anyhow. The gentleman who represents the "Argus" at Ver-sayle, outside Pahrus, has disappointed us greatly by breaking his leg just when—as we are informed on special authority—we shall hear in ten days at latest that the whole German army will incur the fate of Lewis Napoleon at Seedann. We happen to know, Mr. Skull, that nobody knows what we know excepting ourselves. Are you prepared to start for the "Argus," in four-and-twenty hours' notice to Versayle? Yes or no?'

'Well—no.'

Had Mr. Crowder been a prime minister receiving a refusal of high promotion, he could not have been more amazed. 'You decline to represent the "Argus" at the centre of this great war?'

'If question of terms'—said Mr. Sims, glancing to his chief from his paper.

'Allow me to say, Mr. Skull, that the offer of representing a great Amurcan journal like the "Spragville Argus" at the seat of war is

one of which, independently of terms, any man may be proud. I have never heard of a refusal before.'

'So proud that, if he was making a hundred pounds a week comfortably at home, and was going to be married in a fortnight or had been married yesterday, he'd give up everything in a minute, and go? I'm not married, nor going to be—but I might have been. Of course, I know that the "Argus" is the most important thing going—every paper's that—and it's an honour, and so on; but when you "come to forty year," perhaps you'll care less for honour and glory when comfort comes in the way. I'm only an Englishman, you know, who's bound to die as he was born.'

'You are making one hundred pounds sterling a week, Mr. Skull? May I ask your business ——'

'Whatever I'm making, I might make ten hundred next, if—but I mustn't tell you fellows what you'd wire off straight to the "Argus:" that would spoil the whole affair. Only, there's a pot more money to be made out of war by staying at home than by going out, if one only

knows how: and your own war was a good school. Between you and me, Mr. Crowder, I couldn't be half the use to the "Argus" that the "Argus" might be to me, if it wasn't, unluckily, the most incorruptible of journals. Anyhow, though I'm not rich enough to buy the "Argus," I'm not poor enough to care for the honour of its salary. Come and dine with me to-morrow. We'll have an early feed at Richmond or somewhere, and get back in time for the theatres. I'll introduce you, as the editor of the "Argus," to the prettiest and nicest woman on our boards, and then we can go to my rooms and talk shop as much as we please.'

'I am much obliged to you, Mr. Skull. But Mr. Sims and I are consistent vegetarians; and we share the conscientious objections of our principal to the theatre.'

'Ah—I see. I suppose, though, Mr. Sims and you amuse yourselves sometimes. May I take the liberty of asking how?'

'We do not amuse ourselves at all, sir. We——'

'Don't you find life a little dull?'

‘The Eurōpian editor of the “Spraggville Argus,” sir, has no time to be dull. He has to watch the affairs of Europe night and day.’

‘Then of course you can’t dine with me to-morrow. But couldn’t you leave the affairs of Europe to themselves for an hour or two?’

‘You do not seem to understand the spirit of Amurcan journalism, Mr. Skull. You do not appear to appreciate the purpose of this great war.’

‘What! isn’t it undertaken by Bismarck and Louis Napoleon to make the “Argus” look smart in Spraggville? What else should it be for? Well—I’m sorry you can’t get away for an hour or two. I feel a natural friendliness to an editor of the old “Argus,” and I should have liked you to meet my friend the Earl of Ovoca; he might be of considerable use to you, having more experience of France and Frenchmen, and their ways of thinking and feeling, than most men. But, of course, as you never eat meat nor drink wine, asking you to dinner would be absurd.’

Gideon, as he smoked on with his usual air of quiet and philosophical indifference to

all things, had no need to look at Mr. Crowder's eyes to see what was passing behind them. The mere fact that the editor did not give an immediate answer showed what his thoughts were, and that the one weak spot had been found in the armour of a young man who from the height of his office chair looked down upon all things but himself and his journal. Yes, it would sound well, even in proudly republican Spraggville, that Micaiah Crowder of the 'Argus' had received a special invitation to meet a British peer; and if the peer turned out—as even an hereditary aristocrat might turn out—to be a thoughtful and earnest man, who could tell but that the chance introduction might ripen into intimacy? And then there was the account, for a letter from 'our correspondent in London,' of the manners and features of the Earl, to show what sort of people in Europe received a plain American journalist among them as one of themselves. It was natural enough that Gideon Skull should make a bid for the society of so distinguished a man as the representative of the 'Spraggville Argus;' but that it should be

reckoned an honour for a real lord to meet him made him feel that his belief in himself was indeed shared by others almost as much as he thought it ought to be.

‘An Earl? Let me see: Duke, Marquis, Earl—comes third. You are aware, Mr. Skull, that we Amurcans, like Mr. Sims and I, don’t make much account of an Earl. I never could understand, myself, that feeling which, it is well known, makes every Englishman look on a lord as if he weren’t made of common clay; and I foresee the day when you will laugh at yourselves, and look upon your lords and your bishops and your law of primogeniture and your hotels and your open stoves as the antediluvian prejudices which they are. But you have travelled enough to learn that we Amurcans are the only nation on earth that have *no* prejudices, Mr. Skull. And as an unprejudiced Amurcan I shall have no objection to meet any earnest and thoughtful Englishman whose public position may enable me to serve the journal I represent the better through any connection with him.’

‘You’ll come, then? All right. I’ll have

no end of potatoes and a dozen of toast-and-water of whatever brand the best may be. I don't know the Lord Ovoca is particularly celebrated for thoughtfulness, but you'll find him a good fellow, and he can give you any amount of news.'

'I wish he could give me a man who would go to Versayle.'

'Perhaps he could do that, even. As you don't care for theatres, say to-morrow, half-past seven, sharp, at the Universal Club. It's a small place, but I can answer for the burgun—— I beg your pardon: I *can't* answer for the toast-and-water, but I dare say they can brew you something. *Au revoir*, then, till then and there.'

'Wonder what Gideon Skull's after now,' said Mr. Sims, rather sulkily. 'Something for nothing didn't use to be his way in Spraggville—nor anywhere else, if all's true I've heard. Wonder what Gideon Skull wants with *you*.'

'It simply shows,' says Mr. Crowder, 'that even in conservative England the representative of a great Amurcan journal is looked

upon as the equal of an Earl. It is a sign of the times. England is learning that in the largest nation of the earth an Earl would *not* be looked on as of much account, side of the director of a great journal. You must take my place to-morrow evening, Sims; send all telegrams by special messenger up to me at the Universal. By the way, Sims, how do people in this country speak to an Earl?’

‘Don’t know,’ said Mr. Sims, curtly. ‘Same clay as we, I suppose. Don’t matter much, anyhow.’

‘Well! Take this letter of Macbean’s, and wire as it stands. And—by the way, Sims—it don’t do to let these aristocrats get it into their heads that an Amurcan don’t call them right because he don’t know how—look in at the book-store on your way back and get one of their etiquette-books, or whatever will tell the right names to call a lord. No, Sims: I’m no more a snob than—than you are: but there is nothing a journalist ought not to know.’

‘French excepted,’ said Mr. Sims. ‘And for all your lords, I reckon we’re as far from

getting a man for Macbean's place as ever we were.'

'Spraggville must have become a pleasant place since my time,' thought Gideon to himself, as he walked eastwards, 'if those two young prigs are specimens. I wish Jenkins had been there—a drink would have done his business: and now I've got to put up with a Micaiah P. Crowder for a whole dinner through. I should like to know how that sort of young man feels—no: I don't think I should, though. And yet I shouldn't wonder if, fool as I see he is, and knave as I suppose he is, and for all his weediness, there isn't a woman living who wouldn't throw me over for him any day, if she could see into his pockets and into mine. A man that lives on toast-and-water and doesn't smoke would suit me very well as a guest, if the host didn't want something better. What a world of rascals it is, to be sure! Well—after that canting Yankee blackleg, Waldron, I'm not likely to be done again; and it does seem a sure thing this time. I wonder if Uncle Christopher has got

another three or four pounds at the bank lying idle—I'm hanged if I know a man left in London whom I can raise five pounds of for a week to come. I suppose I was an ass not to make that Spraggville prig pay that much for his earl. It's hard to have a fortune in your grasp and risk losing it for want of a pound or two. No: I wasn't an ass. Even an ass would know that a man making a hundred pounds a week in the City doesn't drop into a strange office to borrow five pounds I must spout my watch, I suppose I *am* an ass, I believe: and there isn't a Yankee greenhorn but what takes me in. I almost wish I could give up caring for anything but money, like other men: but I'm afraid I shall never turn into a codfish—no, not in eighty years. I wish I had no scruples, and could do without life like Micaiah Crowder, or cheat a friend like Victor Waldron. And yet—well, I'd sooner be Ishmael than Isaac, and Esau than Jacob, any day. I wish I'd got a mess of pottage to sell.'

It was certainly not for nothing that Gideon Skull looked as honest as the day. I

doubt, indeed, if there was an honest man than he even in the City of London, which is notoriously the shining light of commercial and all other honesty, set upon its seven hills to instruct the whole world by precept and example. Whittington and Goodchild did not hold their creeds more honestly or follow them more faithfully than Gideon Skull. He had lived his first thirty years without its occurring to him that any man could have any other purpose in life than pleasure, and not even the most glaring instances to the contrary had been able to puzzle him. For he had brains enough to comprehend that, in some cold-blooded natures, the conquest of a scientific problem, or the extraction of a Greek root, or any other gratification of vanity, or mere love of ease and comfort, or even a monomania for being considered respectable, may possess greater charms than those which attracted him and other sane and natural men. As to women, his peculiar experiences of life had led him to believe that a fundamental difference between the sexes leads them to follow pleasure as a path to profit, while men follow profit as

an unfortunately necessary path to pleasure : but, by the time he was thirty, wider experiences had led to a change in his opinion about his fellow-men. He found, or thought he found, in others, and certainly found in himself, that the pursuit of pleasure, as an end, palls at times—but that of profit, never ; and that, apart from pleasure, it is better to be rich than to be poor. This discovery threw a brilliant light upon the ways of the world, and accounted at once for everything he felt or saw : the whole world turned into a great fish-pond, wherein the greatest, that is to say, the strongest and craftiest, fish devoured the rest at pleasure, while the rest imitated their betters so far as their size allowed.

He did not, like many adventurers, believe that men are divided into two classes, honest men and rogues, and that roguery is the best policy until it has served its turn. On the contrary, it seemed to Gideon Skull that all men were of one class, and that to talk of roguery and honesty was to make a distinction without a difference. And this being so, he was unquestionably right in holding that to

forego all his advantages of body and brain for the benefit of those who were no better than himself, and would only use him and laugh at him for his pains, would be more than quixotic folly. His cynicism was by no means the commonplace and stale piece of affectation which it might be imagined. In its way, it was an almost simple-hearted expression of a sincere freedom from cant: it seemed absurd that, when the hearts of men were agreed, they should go through the solemn farce of talking as if, in this matter, it was possible for one man to take another in. He really thought that neither men nor women kept scruples where interest was concerned: and, because he was in the habit of saying openly what he thought everybody knew and never dreamed of denying, he put himself at the disadvantage of being taken for one of those greenhorns who, secretly conscious of simplicity and trustingness, think it fine and man-of-the-world-like to affect the creed which Gideon Skull held most honestly. It was a disadvantage, for, whenever he happened to be in funds, it marked him as a prey for the hawks,

who mostly believe in other men's honesty : but, on the other hand, it often enabled him to turn the tables upon his attackers, and obtained him trusts and confidences which he frequently found useful. He had certainly, and most innocently, imposed upon Victor Waldron, who found the Timonism of Gideon merely a piquant source to comradeship, and set it down as the common protest of a good fellow against his own goodheartedness : the usual hypocrisy of those who are ashamed to seem as good as they are, and hate to wear their hearts on their sleeves. And in Victor, Gideon, for the first time in his life, thought he had found a friend who would not cheat him except under most unlikely pressure : and the fancy grew until, towards him, he forgot the very alphabet of prudence—never to treat a friend as if it were impossible that he should become your enemy. It is hard to feel alone, even in a great pike-pond, at forty years : and by degrees such capacity for friendship as Gideon possessed went out towards Victor. It was a mixed sort of friendship enough : but, so far as it went, it was sound. He did not

put Victor on a much higher platform than himself and all others, but he could not help giving him credit for a sort of self-deception, which made honour and disinterestedness and so forth more than mere words to him. He did not imagine that Victor would really forego any advantage for which he really cared, or be more particular than other men about how he gained it ; but he did think that his friend would require a stronger interest than most men to rouse him to ordinary action. He was even conscious, in Victor's company, of the sort of respectful reticence which worse men than Gideon have been unable to break through before those whom they regard as boys : and certainly he contrived, without any part-acting, to give Waldron a better opinion of him than anybody whom he had ever known.

He would have done any quantity of the dirtiest work, and said nothing, in order that his friend might be able to shut his eyes and fancy his own hands clean. What he expected, fairly enough, to gain by his services in obtaining Copleston for Victor was no trifle to

him, and he firmly believed that it was solely for his own share in the adventure that he had been working; but he would have felt it a real misfortune if Victor, and not himself, had been compelled, by way of last resource, to tamper with registers or do anything unbecoming quixotic professions. That Victor would have done everything that might be needful, however unquixotic, he had no manner of doubt; but still he had a certain sort of satisfaction in playing at honour by deputy. It gave him a certain unselfish pleasure to look forward to Victor's being placed, as squire of Copleston, above the struggle of the fish-pond, and so keeping one spot of earth bright and clean—a seeming realisation of such poets' dreams as common honesty and its kindred virtues. He knew it would be a sham, but he had set his fancy upon setting his particular sham upon the stage, almost as much as upon being paid for his own stage-carpentry. He was nursing and petting his one ewe-lamb of an illusion till at last he well-nigh persuaded himself that Victor was what he wished him to seem to be. He carried him

triumphantly through the affair of Copleston, to find out that his quixotic bubble, instead of being a shade or two cleaner than other men, was three shades blacker than the blackest he had ever known. Not only had he been refused his reward—though that was much—but he felt himself tricked and duped, by the only man whom he had ever trusted, and that Victor Waldron was the only man on earth capable of refusing to pay for dirty work which had been done solely in order that his own hands might be kept white. Meanness in spending was about the only vice from which Gideon had been thus far free; and what he could not comprehend in himself, he never could comprehend in any other man.

Only one sentiment towards Victor was left possible for him, or rather, only one combination of sentiments: contempt, disgust, hatred, and wounded pride. It could not occur to him, any more than to any other sufferer, that he was anything but a cruelly injured man, tricked and betrayed. It was certainly not likely that he would ever be taken in, even by the smartest of Yankees, again; and the world

at large, in its relations to Gideon Skull, was likely enough to suffer from his improved experience of what the best-seeming men really are. That hint of his uncle Christopher's about the existence of a will after all had been by no means thrown away ; and only the passing necessity—thanks to Waldron—of struggling in the pond for his daily food had hindered his following up the clue. But follow it up he most surely would, one of these days.

At last, he reached his immediate destination—a small, dark office, in a City lane, with “ Messrs. Aristides and Sinon ” painted upon the panel. He entered a very small, dusty counting-house, which in no way evidenced the nature of the business carried on there, and asked a solitary, middle-aged clerk if anybody was within. Nobody was within just then, said the clerk, who seemed to know Gideon very well. Mr. Sinon had gone to Birmingham, and Mr. Aristides to the Custom-house. Just then Gideon noticed a stranger to the office, writing, with his back towards him, at a desk in a dark corner. Something

in the stranger's figure struck Gideon Skull ; something in Gideon's voice seemed to strike the stranger, who turned round. Assuredly he was right in holding coincidences to be every-day things. The stranger was Alan Reid.

CHAPTER XI.

What is a flower? A weed that man hath tended.

What is a weed? A flower that God hath sown.

Well for the weed that in the flower hath ended,

Ill for the flower who to the weed hath grown.

And who may tell, among their tangled bowers,

The hand that gave the growth, or set the seeds?

Ah, there be weeds and weeds, as flowers and flowers,

And hearts and hearts, as there be flowers and weeds.

ALAN'S first look was naturally of surprise—especially when Gideon Skull held out his hand in the most friendly fashion.

‘Well,’ said Gideon, ‘the world is small, and the City’s even smaller! Can I do anything for you, here?’ Alan did not take his hand: and he drew it back again. ‘I know,’ he said, gravely and rather proudly, ‘that the sight of me can’t be any pleasure to you. But that makes me feel all the more bound to serve you, if I can.’

‘You are quite wrong,’ said Alan shortly.

‘To meet you is neither a pleasure nor a displeasure to me. I thanked you, once for all, for making me able to do an act of simple right and justice—but you can’t expect me to repeat my thanks every time I happen to meet you. Good-day.’

‘Will you wait a moment, Mr. Reid? As you are so just as not to bear malice—for what was certainly no fault of mine—you won’t mind five minutes’ talk, I suppose? That can’t make matters worse, if it can’t make them better. I can go your way, and we can talk as we go.’

‘I will hear anything you can have to say—except one thing.’

‘What is that?’

‘I will not listen to any offer on the part of Mr. Waldron of Copleston.’

‘H’m! I don’t think you’re likely to have any offer made you in that quarter. Why should you expect such a thing? When a pike eats a trout, he doesn’t offer to disgorge.’

‘I thought you were in Mr. Waldron’s confidence.’

‘Yes. I think I know Victor Waldron better than most men.’

‘And you don’t know that he has made offers which I have declined? To do him justice But that score’s closed. As you don’t come from him, say what you please.’

‘Do you mean to tell me,’ asked Gideon, with almost a shadow of surprise in his voice, ‘that Waldron has offered to make terms with you?’

‘Yes.’

‘And that you have refused them?’

‘Who is there who would make terms on the ground that his mother I would as soon Well—what have you to say?’

Gideon was driven to reflect for a moment: for, though his creed accounted for all things, he was not a quick-minded man, and he often required a moment or two for the application of his theory to particular cases. Meanwhile, he set himself to take Alan’s present measure as they walked side by side through one of the busiest and quietest thoroughfares. A change of some sort had certainly come over

the young man, either for the worse or for the better. He looked older, stronger, manlier, graver, as his mother wished—but he looked harder, too : there was impatience and anxiety in his face which he took no care to hide : and the light of his eyes was wholly gone. No, thought Gideon, of course he wouldn't make terms that would commit him to a surrender of his case : nobody would, as long as there was the chance of a leg to stand on. But Waldron's game? Why should he offer terms? If he was afraid of anything, and wanted to buy the Reids off, he'd have made sure of me too—*he* wouldn't have kicked me out like a dog if he'd seen the least chance of wanting me again. He can hardly be such an almighty humbug as to want to build up a character for generosity and chivalry, and all that, by first finding out that terms won't be accepted, and then making them. But then—that's just what he *would* do. He's just the man to cut his mother's throat for sixpence, and spend a halfpenny of it on an onion to cry over at her funeral. . . . 'This is what I have to say, Mr. Reid. If I had known what was

to come of all this, I would have cut off my right hand sooner than have put it into this pie.'

'I have told you, I thank you for what you have done. Pray say no more.'

'Mr. Alan Reid,' said Gideon earnestly, laying his hand lightly on Alan's shoulder, and looking at him straight with the honestest eyes in the world, 'whatever you may say, I know I have to set myself straight with your father's son. Your father—if I had taken his advice—would have made a different sort of fellow of me than I can honestly say I am. I know what is passing in your mind—that I am a poor devil of a rolling stone, who has been doing a Yankee's dirty work for some sort of pay or other. In your place, I should think the same. Well—I am not a poor devil of a rolling stone. If you know Mr. Aristides, he will tell you what my position is now, and what it will be in the City when a few affairs are settled that I am engaged in. It is a mistake to suppose that rolling stones gather no moss in these days—at any rate, the standing snowball gathers no snow. And, so far

from having gained by your loss, I have wasted time, which means money to a business man, and a world of trouble, in helping my friend to regain what you admit to be his rights—I did not know you, you see, and could have no interest in you : while Waldron and I have been comrades for years, and I *did*—h'm—know him. But I am beginning to doubt whether what we did between us was either right or wise—whether it was just, even. It was on quite another ground that we founded our claim : on the supposition that a certain marriage had not taken place, while all the while it stood clearly proved in Hillswick register. The intestacy of your father was a surprise. It seems to me incredible still that a man of landed property, like him, should have died without a will. He could never have intended such a thing.'

Alan was certainly not one of those whose instinct is to mistrust. Unlike Gideon, he had trusted all men, and had never found his trust betrayed ; though it is true that nobody round Copleston was likely to deceive the young squire in such trifling matters as con-

cerned him and them. He certainly bore no malice to Gideon, of whom he had only heard as nothing worse than a *roué* and a great sower of wild oats in his younger days: a character which hurts a man in the estimation of but few of Alan's age. Gideon's account of himself was simple and straightforward enough, and, at the worst, undeserving of special blame. A certain wholly unfounded suspicion of some injustice in his own feelings made Alan say, more warmly than he had yet spoken,—

‘ You did right. You did more than right—for your errand could not have been a pleasant one. Will you oblige me by saying no more?’

‘ It would be a sort of satisfaction to me if you are absolutely convinced that there is no will.’

‘ Should I be here if there were the shadow of a will? Be quite satisfied, since you are good enough to care about the matter, that justice has been done.’

‘ Yes—pretty considerably done. It often happens, when law and justice meet together.

Two of a trade seldom agree, except in trying to do one another. As for my caring about the matter—am not I a Hillswick man? And what ever concerned Copleston that we Hillswick people didn't think concerned ourselves? You Reids were to us what an Earl is to a place I've met with in my travels called Spraggville. I never thought for one instant, when I came over with Waldron, that it was more than a wild-goose chase we were on—that we were just going mare's-nesting for a holiday; how could any man of common sense dream there would be no will? The whole thing was a deplorable affair. *I* never wished to see a Yankee adventurer at Copleston—I don't envy him his experiences among the county people—in the place of your father's son. But let's talk of other things. How are Mrs. Reid and Miss Reid? I hope well? I dare not hope, though, that they ever speak particularly kindly of me.'

'They are quite well. I wish you would understand, once for all, that nobody on earth dreams of blaming you.'

'Ah—you almost persuade me that there

are three good people in the world. I'm afraid, in your place, I should feel very unlike the theoretical Christian towards Gideon Skull—and very like the real one. "Don't put him under the pump" was a christian sentiment, and it was followed christianly. I'm glad to hear they are well. Something has been saved from the wreck, I suppose?'

'Nothing,' said Alan proudly: 'nothing but a few things that belonged to my mother and to me.'

'Good God! I had no notion things were as bad as that! But it can't matter much to you in the long run—your father's son must have plenty of friends to open the world for him—you're not like me, kicked out of doors with hardly a shirt to my back, to take my chance of rolling up or down.'

Gideon was unconsciously gaining upon Alan in that simple, perfectly natural fashion in which he had gained upon Victor Waldron, and upon most men—especially upon those under thirty years of age. We have all found out Tartuffe so completely as to be quite certain that rough humour and its belongings

must needs cover the depths of a nature as shy as it is fine.

‘Things are just as bad as that!’ said Alan. ‘Of course I suppose it won’t, as you say, matter much to me—in the long run. As to friends—yes: I know of one or two who would give me a keeper’s place, and gladly—and if I was alone in the world I’d take one, and ask nothing better; but friendship ought to be two-sided, it seems to me. I shouldn’t thank any friend of mine to come bothering me to get him something to do, for which his only qualification was that he was perfectly unfit for everything that he could get for me, and that I wanted to be paid.’

‘You have gone to nobody for help, then?’

‘No. I have no right to annoy other people with my troubles; and asking favours with nothing to give back for them isn’t much in my line. I must find a way of my own, like you.’

‘My way? Then you’ll soon find out that it will lead you to the discovery that, whatever you want, you must either ask for it

very loudly or else make believe not to want it at all. Pride is the only vice that never pays. Well, I've not been your friend: you can have no scruple about asking me to do anything for you that I can. I may be the very last of the last of the barons—another king-maker, you know—who knows? We men of business come on curious things, now and then; and if by any chance there *were* a will—— Anyhow,' he went on after a moment's pause, 'if there is anything I can do for you, you may count on me; you need have no pride with me. Your father was always very kind to me in auld lang syne, and anything I could do for you wouldn't in the least put you to the unpleasant necessity of being grateful—I should only be paying back a debt, you see. Of course, gratitude is a nuisance and a bore. So, of course, I want to get rid of the feeling as soon as I can.'

'You can do one thing for me,' said Alan. 'You are a successful man, and had as little chance of being so as I. How did *you* manage to succeed? How did *you* begin?'

'You ask me for the secret of success?

Well, that depends on what you call success, you see. I know one man whose secret is to cultivate isms on toast-and-water; no doubt he'll make it pay. I know another—meaning myself—who wouldn't call it success if I became a millionaire on toast-and-water. I don't know that there's any particular secret, except that you mustn't trust a Yankee—that's the one fatal thing. But for you? what do you want to succeed in? That's the first thing.'

'In getting a living without having to beg, borrow, or steal.'

'And you look for it in the City—man alive! You don't mean to say you're looking for that from those good Greek friends of mine!'

Alan coloured a little. He was a little too conscious of not knowing the world, and Gideon's familiarity was not quite so engaging as his candour.

'Why not?' he asked. 'I heard, by accident, that they want somebody who knows something about firearms——'

'My dear boy, they won't want *you*. Don't think of such a thing. Have you never

thought that England is not the only country in the world?’

‘As if I were not thinking of it every hour! But I am not alone, you see.’

‘And meanwhile—— Upon my soul, it is hard. But wait. What’s the use of a war-wind if it blows nothing to men like you? Do I understand that you want an opening of some sort, and would make the most of it, whatever it might be?’

‘Anything I could do I would do.’

‘You have absolutely no engagement that a few months’ absence would risk your losing?’

‘None.’

‘I needn’t ask if you would object to having a sight of war. By Jove, Mr. Reid, it’s lucky I’ve met with you. I can put you in the way of your getting work that you’d enjoy, and that, if you took it, would put the balance of the favour on your side. You’d be put under no more obligation to me than to any stranger who put you in the way of getting what he doesn’t want himself—which, in fact, he’s refused. Did you ever hear of the “Spraggville Argus”?’ But of course you have.’

‘I have not, indeed.’

‘Heaven and earth! Don’t you know that Bismarck’s last thought at night and first every morning is what the “Spraggville Argus” will say? Don’t you know that the “Argus” is the soul of Spraggville, and that Spraggville is the centre of the world—that Spraggville is what Hillswick only believes itself to be? The “Argus” is a great fact, though, all the same. They want a correspondent, in a hurry, at Versailles. Go.’

‘I?’ exclaimed Alan, the light coming back into his eyes—for what man is there, with one spark of nature in him, whose eyes do not brighten at the name of war? And, most of all, what idler, like Alan, while his fellows are fighting within two hundred miles of him, can stay at home and feel he is where he ought to be? ‘There is nothing on earth would suit me better, but——’ His face fell again.

‘But what?’

‘But what can I do for a newspaper? I couldn’t write. I don’t know the language.’

‘I know what they want. They don’t

want French, and they don't want German, and they don't want essays, and they don't want style. They want a man that can use his eyes, and use his ears, and tell them all the little things he sees, as if he was a school-boy writing home. You'll write to Crowder—that's their man here, whom you'll have to see—the jolliest young fellow I ever met with in my life; and he'll put your letters into shape for Spraggville. You've never seen war—all the better; you'll go to it with fresher eyes. Why, you're the very man. Don't you believe me? I've a good mind to start a paper on the spot, just to make my fortune out of you. Why, they'll jump at you. And when you've once set up as roving correspondent, and learned the tricks of the trade—why, there's your career, and one after your own heart, unless I'm wrong.'

'Whether I go or not,' said Alan, suddenly stopping and holding out his hand cordially, 'you have done a just thing, and you are now doing a friendly one—and I *am* grateful.'

Gideon took his hand, but he shrugged his shoulders; he had his own notions of what

‘grateful’ means, and Alan’s words put him unpleasantly in mind of the sort of thing that Waldron would have said under the like circumstances. ‘Nonsense,’ he said; ‘I’m not the dog in the manger, that’s all. It’s Crowder who ought to be grateful. If I’d wanted to go myself, I wouldn’t have given it up for you, you may be quite sure. If I could find that will—but that’s another thing. Look here. I believe they talk about your starting in four-and-twenty hours, but that’s rubbish, of course; they can wait a day. I’ll drop a line to Crowder to say I’ve found him a paragon, and you shall dine with me at the Universal to-morrow, and meet him, and settle business together. He’s coming, so you can’t fail to see him there. Meanwhile, consider yourself Special Correspondent of the “Spraggville Argus” at the Seat of War.’

Alan had not been childish enough to wince at the prospect of being patronised by Gideon Skull. He was proud enough to be thoroughly, and even defiantly, accepting all the circumstances of his changed condition, and, as he thought about the matter while walking home-

wards, felt that the accident of this chance meeting seemed likely to turn out providential, and he did not think so the less because the prospect attracted him more by its nature than by its pay. He certainly wanted money something more than badly; but if he had still been Squire of Copleston, and such an offer had been made to him, he would most likely have taken it, and gone merely for the excitement of the thing. Trying to force the end of his unpractised wedge into the rock of London was wearing out his hopes and his patience, while he had no reserve fund of vanity or ambition on which to draw; and now Gideon had opened before him the view of a new and stirring life which gave him scope for his energies, and left him but little time to think of Bertha and of all that life might have been with her for its centre.

He reached home at last—that is to say, the house between the river and the Strand where his mother and Helen lodged with him—and went into their parlour with much more of the air of Alan Reid of the old times than

he had carried out of doors. One piece of hypocrisy he had been trying very hard indeed to learn—that of assuming an indoor cheerfulness as a chief part of his duty towards the two women who had been thrown upon him so entirely. It was the more needful, for he could not but feel that, when put to the actual test of living as they now had to live, neither his mother nor Helen had quite fulfilled her promise of patience and courage. He did not blame them, for it was far too natural; he could only blame himself for having hitherto so completely failed in giving them any fair prospect of better times. But even his temper, which was as sweet as his father's had been, found it difficult to bear his mother's unconcealed belief that he was doing less than he might easily be doing. She was always talking and acting as if he needed some spur or other to do wonders, when no wonders were wanted, and when he was hunting high and low for the secret of how a man with neither experience nor training can get strangers to employ him in anything which thousands of others could do well. Most assuredly, were

it not for being obliged to leave his mother and sister utterly alone and unprotected, he would not have thought twice about following his great-uncle's example and going out to some colony as shepherd or mounted policeman. He would, had he been alone, have felt by no means ashamed of a dragoon's uniform, and thought himself quite capable of making an admirable sergeant-major. But he could not make his mother see how little she knew the world, or even, for that matter, knew her own son. He could not help feeling it hard that, while he was wearing himself out and sacrificing the only lines of life for which he found himself fitted, in the hope of some day being able to earn a living for the mother and sister whom alone he had to care for, he should be made to feel that his not being well on in the road to the woolsack was looked upon as a proof of want of energy. Helen also troubled him in another way. But at any rate he had good news for both of them now.

‘I've come to the turning in the lane at last!’ said he. ‘At least, I think so, unless everything goes wrong.’

‘At last!’ said Mrs. Reid. ‘But I knew it could not be long.’

‘You have heard from Hillswick?’ asked Helen.

‘You mustn’t mind being left alone for a little while. It won’t be as if I were going to the other side of the world. Unless I am reckoning tremendously without my host, within a week I shall be at Versailles.’

His mother looked at him anxiously; but already her disappointment had come. What road, such as she wanted him to find, could lead through Versailles? Her inmost heart had repented of her design long ago, and was burning every day to sweep away all this needless wear and trouble. But the more she longed to sweep it off, the more resolute she was to get on. Nothing but final and full success could compensate for even the beginning of the trouble; everything would have been sheer waste otherwise, and she would have to admit that Alan might well be weak as his mother’s instead of as his father’s son if she yielded to the temptation of breaking down in her design for his good before it had

well begun. She longed for some proof of his strength even less for his own sake than for the excuse it would give her for relieving him of the burden ; but she could find no excuse for it hitherto. He must learn strength and wisdom enough to thank her with his whole heart for withholding his inheritance from him, so that he might become its master instead of its slave. It seemed to her that he was proving to the utmost all that she had most feared to find in him, and was the most resolute to mend—the tendency to drift through foul weather even as he had drifted through fair, and a submissive acceptance of circumstances without finding therein a spur to make him triumph over them : a fineness of feeling which is a graceful ornament for all who have no need of it, but is as useful in any struggle as a girl's skin to a prize-fighter.

‘At Versailles?’ asked Helen. ‘At the siege?’

‘Yes. I'm not going to give you twenty guesses. You wouldn't guess in twenty times twenty that the gods above have suddenly dis-

covered that I was born to literature. I expect to-morrow I shall be called on to paint a picture, or compose an opera, or to build a cathedral. Now, then—take care not to open your eyes too wide. Within twenty-four hours, I expect to be Correspondent for the—what's the name?—for the something or other “Argus” at the Seat of War. Ragville—Snagville—never mind the place: I know it's an “Argus,” and is in America, and ends in “ville.” I'd rather be going as a fighting man than as a writing man, but if it wasn't for leaving you all by yourselves—well, I can't help being glad to go, and I suppose I shall find out somehow or other what to do.'

‘Alan,’ said Mrs. Reid quietly, ‘you cannot possibly think of going?’

‘Why not, mother? I shall be fairly paid, I suppose—and more than I shall earn, I feel pretty sure. Why should I not go? You know how things are going with us—it is not a question of choosing any more, it seems to me.’

‘What sort of a career do you suppose you will find in writing letters for a newspaper?’

What made you think of such a thing? And we must think a little of what we are.'

'Was I not saying so? What are we but people with our way to make and our bread to win?'

'We are not that only, Alan. We are people who *have* been, and who may be again. Alan, I wish—I wish I could see in you a little more of the spirit that made Warren Hastings never forget that he must some day be Hastings of Daylesford. You owe it to yourself and those who may come after you to set Copleston before you, no longer merely as an accident to be enjoyed, but as a prize to be fought for and won—or if not Copleston, at least its equal. To become a newspaper reporter is not the way.'

'Nobody will ever come after me. . . . I don't understand you, mother. I have to try my best to get some sort of a home for Helen and you. What more can any of us look for? Those great successes come of themselves, I fancy—except perhaps to different sorts of men than I am. I don't suppose that newspaper work is much in my line; but I don't

see exactly what is in my line, in this country. I can't turn tutor——'

'I would not have you if you could, Alan.'

'I have put the notion of emigrating on one side—at least, for as long as I can—and now comes this chance, and you ask me to throw it away. I can't do that, mother.'

It was a foremost part of Mrs. Reid's plan for Alan that he should be driven by force and need into having a will of his own; and she ought therefore to have welcomed the first sign he gave of having one. But it was at other people's expense, and certainly not at her own, that she wished Alan to develop a will, and even then in no direction that did not please her.

'What made you think of such a thing?' she asked again.

'I am afraid you will like the source of it as little as I did at first. I heard of the place from Gideon Skull—of all men in the world.'

'Gideon Skull!'

Helen started. There seemed a fate about the name of Gideon Skull. She had heard it

for the first time while listening to her father's death-bell. It was his visit to her brother which had been the signal of their ruin. Victor Waldron was her enemy: but he seemed infinitely less mysterious and therefore less ominous than Gideon Skull. And now, by what seemed as much a matter of chance as all the rest, he was crossing their path and directing their lives again.

‘Yes,’ said Alan, ‘Gideon Skull. And he seems by no means a bad sort of fellow, after all. Those wild oats of his, whatever they were, must be a pretty old story now, and I should be sorry if every folly I did before I was one-and-twenty were to hang round my neck like a rope till I was as old as Gideon Skull. I met him by chance—if it was chance—and had some talk with him, and I’m convinced that he had no more to do with the matter than any honest man must have had to do. Of course he couldn’t sit down and let a wrong go on—but any way he has gone out of his way to be friendly; I can understand that he would like to do something for me—— No; don’t be afraid; I haven’t been asking

anybody to do a single thing, mother. Only, I can't pretend to be above wanting, and Gideon Skull's offer was made freely—it was his own idea. Any way, whether we like it not, this *must* be. I'm going to dine with him to-morrow, to meet the editor or whatever he's called, and then——'

His mother's cold silence, when he thought he had at last done something to please her, froze him. His pride was as great as hers in some things, but it was quite of another kind; and her ambition for him was utterly outside his comprehension, much more beyond his sympathy.

'Can you tell me, Nelly, what she does expect of me?' he asked Helen, when he was presently alone with her. 'I know it is hard on her—this life of ours—but if she could only guess what London means! I know I'm right in taking this offer. If it wasn't for her, I should know I'm wrong in not taking anything.'

'No—I don't understand her. Sometimes I fancy she doesn't realise we are poor. Still—yes, I do understand her better than you.'

She can't bear to see you fighting for crumbs in the crowd when you ought to be——'

'When I ought to be just what I am, Nell,' said Alan: 'just a London sparrow like the rest, and nothing more. Nell—I wish you wouldn't keep harping on that string.'

'But I must. *I* have never learned the justice of your losing Copleston. You tell me it was just and right—so I believe you think so. But——'

'I know it, Nell. And the mother knows it too. You once told me you wouldn't speak of it again.'

'Well—I suppose, then, so it must be. I won't speak of it again. What were we saying? That she can't bear to see you fighting for crumbs in the crowd, and it pains her, and wounds her—and me. Oh, Alan, don't think we don't see! Don't I know you? Don't I know you'd work your life out at what you hated, if you thought it right—and if you thought it would make you forget—things—a little? Yes: *I* know what makes you so eager to go where there's fighting, and where nothing will remind you—I won't speak of it

again. But I know what ought to have been, and what ought to be, right or wrong—and I hate whatever has become between you and her. And you take it all as if—as if—sometimes I feel almost ready to hate *you*. No—don't preach to me. I know that I'm not good; I'm not just; I want Bertha Meyrick for my sister. And I *do* understand mamma. *She* doesn't know what has taken the heart out of you, and made you as eager to be a newspaper reporter as if going to France would bring you nearer to her.'

Alan hardened again — his sister, also, seemed to have no mercy upon him; and in this mood she scarcely seemed to him the Helen of old, upon whose patience and courage he would once have counted more absolutely than upon his own. Surely the change he had been long observing in her, and to which he had been trying to blind himself, could not come from a mean and desperate regret for the outward things of the old life? Surely Helen's spirit could not have broken down at the first trial? It would have been natural enough, though, in any other girl; then, why

should it be unnatural in her? A girl is but a girl, after all, he thought; and then, though his belief in his sister Helen shrank, he brought himself to accept her for what she was, and to blame her no more. He was man enough, and strong enough too, in his own and his father's way, to find nothing to blame in weakness of any kind, so long as the weakness was a woman's, and therefore womanly.

But, if he could have read her heart, he would not have wondered—he would have feared.

No sort of selfishness had the remotest part in her regrets for the loss of Copleston. If it had not been for Alan, she would have been immeasurably proud to show how well she could bear ruin; she would have borne it so easily, indeed, as to have but little reason for pride. Knowing nothing of love herself, she took the most romantic and highflown views of its rights and duties, especially of its rights, and would have mixed a good deal of scorn with her affection for her brother if he had let the possession of Copleston come between him and Bertha. But that the loss of

Copleston should have come between him and her, she could only imagine in the dimmest fashion ; and she knew nothing of the stain upon his name and upon his mother's which, in Alan's mind, came between him and Bertha more than the loss of a hundred Coplestons. For that matter, even if she had known it, his ideas would have seemed morbid in the extreme. What would she have cared about the birth of a lover ? It would be no fault of his if his shield had been covered out of sight with bends sinister. Guessing little and knowing nothing, she could only see that Alan was breaking himself to pieces in a double battle for self-conquest and daily bread ; that she and his mother, instead of being his helpers, were his burdens, and that he would end by drifting into the state of a plodding drudge, who has deliberately cut himself off from hope, and whose whole life is contained between the hours of rising and lying down. Her love for him did not blind her to his indifference to any sort of career for its own sake—girl though she was, she loved him all the better for the things that his mother wished, in her

wisdom, to root up from him. Of course she over-coloured everything desperately, and, by putting herself in his place, multiplied all his own feelings, strong as they were, by at least ten, and sharpened them into swords. She translated his chronic numbness of life into a fever, and his resolute endurance into poignant suffering. A lover who has lost her whom he loves must surely live in a wasting fever, according to every recognised rule; and if it was a sense of right or honour that had lost him to her, the fever must surely be doubled by the effort to keep it down. If she had been rebelling against one least single thing for her own sake, she would have been safe: she would soon have cut off her right hand and plucked out her right eye, and conquered herself far more triumphantly than he could ever hope to do. But is not unselfishness so great and rare a virtue as to cover all the sins that we can dream of committing—for the sake of others? In what comes to a girl like Helen hand in hand with unselfishness, or rather as the natural fruit of that bewildering blossom, how can she even suspect poison and

wrong? For Alan she could hate, rebel, dream and brood over the possible chances of giving him back his life at any cost to herself, and wait—not patiently, though with but little hope—for whatever opportunity might deliver his enemy into her hands. In selfishness there must needs be safety of some sort, and she had none.

But, as yet, she could only brood and dream impatient dreams, watching over Alan, and seeing in him all that her nature made her see. No wonder that she was drifting beyond the reach of his knowledge, and even beyond her own. Even could he have read her through and through, he would have comprehended nothing. Brother and sister, under the influence of Mrs. Reid's wisdom and providence-making, were drifting as far apart as if, instead of having had but one life between them, they had grown up at opposite ends of the world. Her part of the burden was to wake every morning to a daily growing sense of the need of doing all things for Alan, and with this grew the sense of her hopelessness of ever being able to do one least

thing. What could she do, a mere weak girl, with her hands tied on all sides, without weapon, or strength, or knowledge, to remove the mountain? Some demon or other must have been strangely remiss, when there was a heart so eager for work, to give her nothing to do. Or else some good spirit must have been mad enough to amuse himself with guarding Mrs. Reid's work from harm to Helen.

She could have told, and never asked herself, why; but some instinct had seized at once upon the name of Gideon Skull. Perhaps it was only that, since her declaration of war against Waldron in Hillswick churchyard, her dreams and her desires had proved so barren as to catch at straws. It seemed so small a thing that Gideon Skull should have crossed the path of their lives again only for such a trifle as to give Alan a place on a newspaper. Men whose coming means death and ruin and mystery do not appear unless destiny has real need of them. She had never seen the man's face, or heard his voice, and so had been driven to make a portrait of him

more in accordance with his name than with reality ; and her mother's story of his youth and of his marvellous rise was in itself of a nature to strike the fancy of a girl who was ignorant of the mere alphabet of the world. He must, in strength of purpose and passion, be a man of a very different mould from that of her father, or of Alan, or of Doctor Bolt, or of any man whom she had ever known. He could not, after all, be the mere respectable tradesman, whatever less or more he might be. Her hands, groping about after a fulcrum, might have fallen upon his name, because there was no other ; but, whether by accident or instinct, or presentiment, it was certainly on his name that they fell.

‘ What sort of a man is this Gideon Skull ? ’ she asked, rather abruptly.

‘ Oh, he seems a good sort of fellow enough,’ said Alan, ‘ whatever he may have been in his time. Plenty of good fellows haven't set out with being saints, you know. But you know what my mother thinks about things, and you know what Hillswick is—a place where nobody can look over a hedge

without being sentenced straight off for horse-stealing. Depend upon it, the devil isn't half as black as he's painted, Nell, and in Hillswick not one quarter. At any rate, he's shown himself a good fellow to me.' Which may be taken as the key of Alan's change of opinion concerning Gideon. He could not owe the value of a straw to any man without repaying it, and he was driven to repay the gift in his heart, since he had no other way.

'But, I mean, what does he look like?' asked Helen.

'That's what a girl means, is it, by what sort of a man? I can't tell you much about his eyes and complexion, but he's got plenty of chest and shoulders; and as to height, we're about the same. I should say he'd ride thirteen stone.'

'Alan, I should like to see him'

'You want to see him?'

'Yes—really I do.'

'No, Nelly. You're not likely to see him—and—well, I have no sort of objection or prejudice about him myself, but—well, a man doesn't bring everybody home. Fancy the

mother letting any human being from Hills-
wick see us as we are! What do you want to
see him for, Nelly? *You* wouldn't care to
know him; he is a good fellow, but, after all,
there's good and good, you know.'

'You know it is nothing of that sort, Alan.
I don't care to know him—but I want to see
him, that's all, if it's only out of curiosity. It's
a long time since I've let myself have a whim
—and—Alan, I fancy that I can tell better
than you can, somehow, if 'he is really a
friend. You don't look at men's faces; I
do.'

'Nonsense, Nell—as if a man doesn't know
a man better than a woman can! We don't
humbug one another. What but friendliness
can there be in this affair? Come—it's not
like you to be suspicious, Nelly. I'm not likely
to be intimate with him or with anybody else,
if that's what you mean.'

'I don't mean that—I mean——'

'Nelly,' said Alan very gravely, 'if you
think you will learn anything by seeing
Gideon Skull—remember your promise to
me.'

‘Then—Gideon Skull *does* know?’

‘Nelly!’

‘What did I say? I only asked you——’

‘You asked me a question. Dear Nelly, haven’t you found out that when I say I can answer *no* question, I mean what I say? Do you suppose I like secrets for their own sake—and secrets from you?—that I would have the least from you, except to keep you from harm?’

‘And that is why you don’t want me even to see Gideon Skull? Do you think——’

‘That I will get out of him what you will not tell me,’ she was going to say; but the simplest of all reasons held her tongue.

‘I think neither the mother nor you would care to know him—that’s all; perhaps, if ever I come to know him better, I shall know that better, too. Don’t be afraid, Nelly; I’m not likely to come to any harm—only, as far as I’m concerned, I must take him as I find him, and I think I know a straightforward man when I see one. . . . There; I’ll go out for an hour, and get hold

of some of the papers: it won't do to let the "Argus" people find out how little I know.'

He left her with, for the first time, something definite for her thoughts to gather round. Clearly Gideon Skull was in the secret of what had happened, whatever it might be. Perhaps, whether he were friend or foe, there might be no objection on his part to her knowledge—and how could she dream of acting so long as she knew nothing? It was tantalising that this man should be in the world, nay, in the same city, and yet as far out of her reach as if he were a thousand miles away.

Was there no help for it? Most assuredly there could be none while living as she and her mother lived now: there would be less than none if Alan went away. No—without knowledge, there could be no dream of action: and there would be no chance of knowledge unless she could gain it from this man. Even that was a forlorn hope: but there was none better.

Not that her thoughts were unmixed with other matters. This was at the root of them all: but she was also bitterly troubled by her more every-day share in the burden under which Alan had been trying to put his shoulders. They had not yet reached the point of absolute need, thanks to some arrangements that Mrs. Reid had been able to make—neither she nor Alan knew exactly how—about some small property of her own: but the point was nearing, and she was trying to find out, by taking much thought, how to put her own shoulder to the wheel. Of that, also, she had to think alone, for her mother would not listen to any such suggestion; and as to Alan—the idea of his sister's working while he had a finger left him would have been simply inconceivable to him. The oldest possible fashioned views as to a woman's rights had prevailed at Copleston, and certainly did not include the right of working for herself, or for a man, while there was a whole man left in the world. And, like Alan, she could think of nothing that she was fit for. She could not profess to teach—she had only the commonest

accomplishments, such as may be picked up by a girl who has been brought up in a country house, lived an out-of-door life, and never been to school: she could not even go out for an American newspaper to the seat of war. Hopelessly she seemed cut off from every mission but that of putting all the strength and wit she had into working for Alan and Bertha against the world. And—so fate would have it—she might just as well sit down and tell herself that she had no mission on earth but to dream of becoming a Queen.

‘A gentleman, miss, to see Mr. Reid,’ said the one servant of the house.

‘To see my brother? He is just gone out.’

‘Shall I say so, miss? Here’s his card.’

‘Yes.’ She looked, with no curiosity, at the card. ‘No—wait—you had better ask him in here—if he has any message for my brother, he can leave it with me——’

She turned nearly as hot and as cold at once as Fatima when she turned the key of the secret chamber in her hands. Even so

Helen handled the card. There may be such things as chance, but no chance could have given magic to her will, and, as if in direct and instant answer to it, brought her face to face with Gideon Skull.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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