

UNDER
THE
THATCH

ALLEN RAINE

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Alice Brown

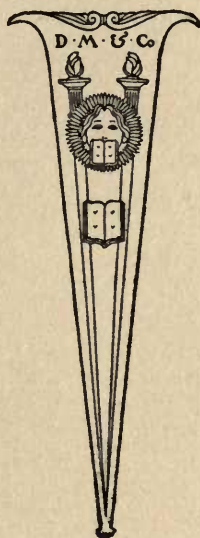
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BY
ALLEN RAINE



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CHAPTER I

THE long summer day was drawing to a close, and the sun was sinking behind the bank of furze and heather which sheltered the vale of Meivon from the West. Behind that bank, half a mile away, the sea stretched its illimitable blue, but on this side of the bank the land sloped gently down to as fair a picture of woodland scenery as ever gladdened the eye of man. Here there was no suggestion of the sea, except perhaps in the crows and seagulls that sometimes rose over that furzy bank and wheeled down to the little river which cut like a steel knife between the two deep woods that clothed the sides of the valley.

At a bend of the stream stood a quaint old structure. Was it mill? was it homestead or hall? This was the question that presented itself to everyone who saw it for the first time. Thatched and gabled and white-washed, the centre of the building low and many windowed, the east and west wings rising to the dignity of three storeys, each under its high gable of straw over which the moss of years had in some places thrown a veil of green, while here and there a streak of more modern thatching made a little variety in its ancient brown tints.

Under the gable facing eastwards was a heavy water-wheel, whose continual clap-clap, together with the rushing and trickling of a streamlet, supplied the answer to the question, What is the quaint old building? At present a mill, no doubt, as witness the cart

laden with bulging sacks which stands at the broad double door; but you feel as you look at it that this was not the object for which the old house was built. Surely out of these long windows fair faces adorned by the high coiffure of olden days have looked out on the courtyard below, where the hunters in scarlet and green had often assembled, while the sound of the winding horn and the baying of the hounds had filled the morning air with their music.

Still, there are the crumbling remains of its encircling wall now ferny and moss-grown. That courtyard is now a broad open green, on which stands a cart or two, as well as Phil the miller's grey mare, whilst across it runs the highroad leading on one side to the little town of Maentrevor, on the other up a steep shady lane to the scattered homesteads on the hillside.

Softly and silently the evening shadows were falling over the landscape; a couple of farm horses, loosed from their work, but still bearing their jingling harness and their slouching riders, passed by the open space in front of the mill, and disappeared into a by-lane. The farm-boys nodded sideways to old Philip the miller, who stood at the mill door, his rugged face beaming with content. His name was Philip Lloyd, but he was familiarly known as "Phil-y-Velin," or "Phil of the Mill"; the name tripped easily off the tongue, and it distinguished him from the many other Lloyds of the neighbourhood.

When the sun had quite disappeared behind the bank in the west, he still looked out over the winding road which led that way, sometimes turning to glance at the long-windowed centre of the building, which connected the east end of the house in which he lived

and ground his corn with the western gable, which had long been shut up, its windows boarded, and its chimneys buried in ivy in the wood which formed the background to this quaint dwelling where the shadows were already growing dark, for a pale round moon rode high in the sky, and while her beams tinged the tops of the trees, and the faces of the whitewashed mill with a faint golden light, they deepened the shadows in the long mysterious glades of the woods.

In the strip of front garden a girl was stooping over a "whintell" basket which was slowly filling with weeds. As she plucked at the obstinate groundsel and plantain she seemed lost in thought, and paid no heed to the fading sunset, or to the golden moon above her, until at last the basket was full. Rising, she lifted it to her hip, and turned to the miller. "No sign of rain yet," she called; "the weeds are as hard to pluck as if they grew in a board."

"Yes, I dare say," said Phil-y-Velin. "What o'clock is it, I wonder? I am waiting for Maychael, you see," a superfluous remark, perhaps, the girl thought, for directing a sweeping glance of indifference towards the road which led to the town, she turned away, and carried her basket of weeds into a cottage, that stood close by, and out through the open door at the back, in a few moments returning with her empty "whintell."

She had cast off her hood in the cottage, thus giving us an opportunity to describe her. Her well-shaped head was crowned with massed coils of light hair, light and colourless as tow, and beautiful only in its luxuriant wealth; her face was strangely colourless too, her white eyelids drooping heavily over her eyes of greyish green, which colour can sometimes be

very expressive, though in Essylt's case it was impossible to tell what their expression might be, for what the heavy lids allowed to be seen was generally veiled by the long light lashes which matched the neutral tone of her hair. The mouth would have been beautiful, with its red lips and small white teeth, were it not for a sarcastic smile which always seemed to hover round the corners, drawing them up almost into a sneer. Not a pretty face perhaps, with its peculiar expression, and want of colouring, but certainly striking, with its light-fringed drooping eyelids. She knelt down to her basket again with that strange supercilious smile which was natural to her when in repose.

"Where is Peggy to-night?" called the old man from his door.

"Gone to the town, a message for Miss Barbara; she'll come back through the wood, I'm thinking," was the reply; and by and by, when the twilight was darkening, it seemed quite appropriate that from the deep recesses of the wood Peggy Jerry should emerge like a witch weighed down by her bundle of fagots. Lined and wrinkled was her face, brown and leathery her bare arms, keen and bright her black eyes under the penthouse of grizzled hair which adorned her forehead.

She scarcely waited to fling down her bundle before she began in a loud voice rating at the girl, who was now deliberately filling her basket for the second time. "So here thou art, thou idle hussy; art not ashamed of thyself to come home before finishing thy work, and Miss Barbara, poor thing, calling thee all over the house?"

The girl went on with her weeding with that inscrutable smile on her lips, and apparently indifferent to Peggy's rebuke. She was about to answer, however,

when she was interrupted by another call from Phil. "The crock's boiling, and I want my supper; don't seem as if Maychael was coming."

Peggy hurried in to lay the simple meal, for she occupied her cottage at a nominal rental, on condition that she should clean the old miller's house, and see to his comforts. This she managed to do at odd intervals in her attendance at Caefrân, the gaunt grey house that stood on the hill above the valley, with its background of ragged pines, and its foreground of neglected lawn, now borrowing momentary beauty from the increasing light of the summer moon.

"There!" she said, arranging the basins and plates, and giving the hearth a final sweep up. "There! I've laid for Michael too, for he's sure to come. Call if you want me," and she returned to the garden, where Essylt was preparing to pick up her basket.

"Hast finished then?" said Peggy, looking over the well-cleared bed; "that's a good job done, whatever." She seemed to have forgotten her grudge against the girl in the little touch of work in the mill, and the pleasure of arranging the old man's cosy hearth.

Suddenly there was a sound of wheels on the road, as a horse and gig came in sight round the bend of the furzy knoll. It drew nearer, and stopped to let one of its occupants alight, while the other drove on towards the hilly road on the right. Peggy went a few steps to meet the approaching figure, while Essylt carried her basket away without a sign of having seen the newly arrived, soon returning, however—for under those sleepy eyelids, and through those strange light lashes she had seen as much, nay, a good deal more than Peggy. After all, that pale face had life behind

it somewhere, for it took a faint tinge of colour, like pink marble, as she returned to the garden, and stood waiting a moment, while the newcomer diverged a little from the path that led to the mill door towards the two women who waited to greet him.

“Hallo! hallo! hallo!” he cried; “working so late. In my deed, you are industrious.” There was cheer and kindly jollity in the voice, that did the heart good to hear.

“I have been weeding,” said Essylt, pointing to the square bed. “Yes, indeed, till my back aches.”

“’Tis too much for thee, lass. Why didst not leave it for me? I have a good hour’s work in me yet, though I have been to Caermadoc to-day, and I have yet to drive a mile the other side of the town to see old Jones Gelligaer before I go to bed.”

“And I have to go to Will Cobbler’s, too, to-night.”

“Well, I’ll go back through the wood,” said the young man, “and drop thee there.”

“Oh, very well, but no need,” said the girl, with a sweep of her eyelashes; “I am used to the wood.”

“Yes, but I’ll come, so wait for me,” said Michael; “but leave the weeding for *me* another night.”

“Oh, let her be,” said Peggy, “*she* won’t do too much, leaving Miss Barbara, poor thing, with her laces and clothes half-ironed, and just because it was six o’clock, if you please—as if that was any reason for leaving off your work, if you haven’t finished it, and them ‘mugles’ on her neck, that Miss Barbara can’t bear to see, *ach-y-fi!*”

“What? those beads,” said the young man, looking at them admiringly; “they are very pretty, I think; but I must go in. Be bound father has given me up by this time,” and he turned away to the mill door, not at

all troubled by the knowledge that Peggy was still haranguing her niece in terms of reproof, for well he knew from old experience that Peggy Jerry's tongue, and her outward appearance, were the only rough things about her. He knew that when they entered the cottage together, Essylt's stool would be pushed to the cosiest side of the hearth, the cleanest corner of the tablecloth would be turned to her, the whitest loaf, the freshest pat of butter—all would be for Essylt, who would accept them calmly, while old Peggy Jerry, happy in her own way, and in her self-effacement would make the logs blaze up, and chat away on the news of the neighbourhood, quite forgetful of the little breeze of indignation that had ruffled her a few moments earlier.

In the mill kitchen the fire was glinting and sparkling where the old miller, drawing up to the table, was reluctantly beginning his supper alone. "Hallo!" said the same pleasant voice that had greeted Peggy and Essylt, and Phil looked up to see a tall, broad-shouldered man, who stooped his head as he entered the low doorway. Phil-y-Velin's son, of course; the same well-knit frame, the finely shaped head, the very counterpart of the miller's own, with its close-cropped dark hair, and its rebellious clump above the forehead, though Michael Lloyd's was untouched by the powder of iron-grey which tinged his father's locks, even as the mill dust powdered his coat; no wonder that his honest face broadened into a smile of welcome as his son entered.

"Thought you weren't coming at all, *machger-i*; there's missing you I'll be when you go back to that old hospital."

"Well, it will only be for a time, you see," said the

younger man, drawing his chair to the table and helping himself to the brown bread and cheese.

“No cawl?” said Phil, ladling another basinful for himself.

“No cawl to-night. We had a bowl apiece at Cwm, the doctor and I; the little boy had the croup there, but he’s much better to-day, so they were having a jolly supper. I tell you what, father, I am looking forward to the time when I can settle down here, and apply the knowledge that I have gained to the good of my old friends in my native valley. What do *you* think? Isn’t it a natural feeling? And yet Dr. Severn argued that my fellow-creatures ought to have the same interest for me anywhere, in the East End, or the slums—anywhere—but you don’t know what *they* are. But,” added the young man, with a laugh, and, oh! how that laugh sparkled in his eyes, and lightened his face, and showed up the white teeth, “I am afraid there’s a terrible alloy of ‘self’ in my nature, for I tell you, father, I could not work *anywhere* as I could here. Money? Oh, money’s not everything, and between you and me, father, I am shocked to see the slap-dash, out-of-date methods that Dr. Rees employs in his practice. ’Tis kill or cure with him, and no mistake.”

Phil-y-Velin looked up over his cawl with a knowing wink. “I can fancy that, my boy,” he said; “but, mind you, Michael, when I come to die, ’tis Dr. Rees I would like to have at my bedside, like my father before me. A good safe old doctor is Dr. Rees. You can watch him, mind you,” he said with a nudge, “and give him a hint, but I would be afraid to trust myself in the hands of you young doctors. I don’t want to be cut up alive that you may find out how the blood runs, or

something of that kind—that's what I hear you do to the poor animals in the hospitals, *ach-y-fi!*”

A shadow fell on the young man's face as he drew his hand over the head of the faithful old sheep-dog who had just laid his muzzle on his knee. “'Tis a devilish thing, father,” he said. “I have done my best to fight against it, and, please God, I will yet have many a tilt at it.”

Phil shook his head, and taking a key from the hook on the dresser, stooped to a barrel that stood in a corner of the roomy kitchen, and drew a jug of ale, from which Michael poured a foaming glass. “Nothing like Peggy's brew,” he said.

“No,” said Phil, smacking his lips, and looking critically through the sparkling glass at the flame of the lamp, which hung down from the rafter. “No one like Peggy for '*cwrw*,' but indeed Essylt is the best for cawl; she ran down from Caefrân to-day to make this for me.”

“And how are they at Caefrân?” said Michael, pushing his chair away from the table, and turning to the blazing logs to light his pipe.

“Oh, all right, as far as I know. We don't see much of the two ladies; but Muster Tom, he's about here most days.”

“Well, a '*mgwin*' before I go,” said Michael, beginning to draw long whiffs from his briar, while Phil reached his short clay from the mantelshelf, and did the same.

“Go! art going so soon?”

“Yes. I mustn't stop long, as the doctor wants me to see old Jones Gelligaer once more to-night. Essylt is going through the wood to Will Cobbler's, and I

may as well go that way too—'tis nearer than the road."

Here Peggy entered with clattering wooden shoes.

"*Ach-y-fi!* there's low your fire is," and she flung a fresh log on the hearth. "I'll clear away your supper now; and if you don't want anything more, Phil, here's your candle. I'll go home to bed, for in my deed I am tired to-night. Essylt has gone to Will Cobbler's with her 'clocs' to be mended, but I'll leave the door on the latch for her."

"And I," said Michael, "will see her safe through the wood."

"Very well, indeed, *machgen i*; there's some nasty tramps about to-day."

"Well, good night, father—see you again to-morrow. We have lots of calls about here just now."

"Yes, 'fluenza,'" said Peggy, shaking her head.

"Good night," called the old man, and Michael was gone.

Peggy finished her work, the mill door was closed, and Phil-y-Velin, taking his candle, went up the creaking stairs to the low-raftered room where he slept. For a few moments longer his light glimmered through the little thatched window, until it suddenly went out, leaving only the full moon to light up the valley.

Under her beams in the soft night air Michael Lloyd with rapid strides was lessening the distance between him and the sombre wood, through which lay the short cut to the town. When he heard the click of the mill door bolts, a shadow had fallen over his face, the broad brow had puckered a little, the clear blue eyes had clouded, the lines of the mouth had hardened, making his face look older and less buoyant than when he entered the mill door. *There*, every care seemed to be

lightened; the high spirits of his boyhood always returned to him with the smell of the meal and the grain, with the sound of the mill stream that trickled slowly under the idle wheel, or rushed with the clap-clap of the grinding. But now, alone under the stars, a brooding weight seemed to have fallen upon his heart and mind. It was eight long years, very long they seemed to him to-night, since he had taken that fatal step which had altered the whole tenor of his life. Until then he had known nothing of care or anxiety. Old Phil, with comfortable means at his disposal, had delighted in smoothing the path of his clever boy, amply rewarded by the youth's ever-increasing success; scholarship after scholarship was gained, examinations passed with ease, and before long the young man's name was becoming known in the medical profession as that of one who was likely to make his mark in the world. His treatise on neuritis had made a very favourable impression upon the faculty, and, as a matter of fact, Michael Lloyd had every prospect of success in the career which he had already begun with so much honour. But, to everyone's astonishment, he elected to return to an out-of-the-way corner of Wales. The doctor, whose practice he had carried on during a year of compulsory absence, owing to a serious illness, was bitterly disappointed at the strange obstinacy with which the young man declined his offer of a partnership.

"No," said Michael Lloyd. "I am grateful to you for your proposal, but the old home calls me, the old life of freedom from restraint fascinates me. Let me tell you, my grandmother was a gipsy; perhaps that accounts for all that is erratic in my nature, at all events we'll put it down to that. I will come when you

want me, or when you have anything interesting to show me, but now you have returned I feel no longer bound to stay in London."

"Strange," said the doctor to a friend next day, "that a man of such ability, and one so deeply interested in science should bury himself alive in the depths of the country. Well, there's no accounting for taste." For none of them knew of the strong ties of love which drew that sturdy Welshman to his simple peasant father, and to the old mill in the valley; above all, nobody knew of the inflexible code of honour which laid its silent stern hand upon him, and compelled him to return to face a duty, and to keep a promise which he had made eight years earlier, and which, alas! had become distasteful to him.

So Michael Lloyd went home, to the delight of his father, and to the agreeable surprise of Dr. Rees, of Maentrevor, who, having saved a modest competency, was desirous of selling his practice in a year or so to a younger and more energetic man.

Much of this had passed through Michael's mind as he traversed the bit of broad road from which the path through the wood diverged. As he walked under the flickering shadows of the trees, which were rustling in the light summer breeze, he looked about him for some sign of the girl whose footsteps he was following, and sure enough, there she was at a turn in the path, standing in the light of the full moon. How pretty she looked there! How graceful the lines of her figure! How patiently she waited, as she had waited for eight years! How cruel, how base would it be were he now to forsake her! Heaven forbid! How could such a mean thought have entered his mind? And with a pang of self-reproach he unconsciously threw more

tenderness than usual into his greeting; not for worlds would he have let her suspect that his feelings towards her had changed.

“Ah, Essylt! hast waited long, *merch-i*?” and taking her basket with one hand, he slipped the other round her waist, and thus they walked together under silver beams that cast a glamour of beauty and romance over every scene.

“Waited long? Not a minute, and a good thing! I have not much patience.”

“There’s pretty thou art looking to-night in the moonlight, and thou hast been very patient with me, *merch-i*, waiting all these years.”

“Oh, that’s different kind of waiting,” and with a little toss of her head, she added, “Don’t think I am in a hurry. I am very happy here with Peggy, and everybody is saying that a girl is a fool to marry too young, so take your time, Maychael, and don’t hurry yourself for me.”

“No, no!” said Michael, with a laugh, “only for my own sake, *merch-i*, and there is no need for us to wait any longer. Hast heard Robert Jones and his wife are going to America in the spring?”

“What of that?” said Essylt.

“Only that they can’t take their house with them, so there it is for us.”

“Robert Jones’s house with its thatched roof, and its old-fashioned door like a church porch! Wouldst live in that, Maychael? *Ach-y-fi*! No, indeed, I wouldn’t like it whatever. No, I would rather live in the old ‘Mill-tail,’ as they call our cottage, than go there.”

“Well, well,” said Michael, “if that is thy feeling about it, we must look for another, because there is

no sense in waiting any longer. There's an ugly new house outside Maentrevor; let us take that; 'twill do for a time till I find a better," Michael's "better" meaning less staringly new, and more mellowed by age.

"Better?" said Essylt. "In my deed I would be quite satisfied with that, nice new slates on the roof, and two windows downstairs, and three up, besides the back windows, 'tis a very nice house. But, Maychael," she said, laying her hand on his arm, "I don't want to be married till the spring; we have waited so long that we can wait a little longer."

He was ashamed of the feeling of relief that her words brought to him, and the knowledge of it made him all the more urgent in his suit. "The spring! that will be full nine months from now; 'tis all nonsense, *lodes*, we had better be married at once, and live in the old mill till the new house is ready."

"No, Maychael; I have waited eight years for *thee*, now thou must wait nine months for *me*. We will be married then—or never," she added.

"Well, there is something in that, certainly," said Michael. Unconsciously his arm slipped down from her waist, and they walked separately along the narrow path, at a turn of which, in the depth of the wood, they came upon a little tarn which lay in silent solitude embossed in the trees; a stream of silver crossed it where the moonbeams caught its ripples.

"Ah! Llyn Dystaw," he said, "how lovely it is to-night!"

"Yes, to-night it *is* pretty well," said Essylt; "but most times 'tis gloomy enough."

"Yes. Dost know the story of it? how the stream that comes down from the mountains, and runs through

our mill was once a fairy, and fell in love with a bold knight, who roamed through these woods in the olden days, but he cared not for her, and rode away to the West. She followed him as far as this, but here she lost her way, and could go no further, so here she remains ever since—a little lonely lake waiting for her woodland lover.”

“There’s nonsense!” said Essylt.

“Yes, but pretty nonsense. Dost not think so, lass? Wouldst like me to tell thee some more of the tales and legends that belong to these old woods?”

“*Ach-y-fi*, no! I would rather not hear anything about fairies or streams or ‘*bwcies*’*—’tis all nonsense. Here’s Will Cobbler’s, and here we part; good night, lad.”

“Oh, stop a bit,” said Michael, “not good night yet, Essylt; make haste with Will, for I will wait for thee, and walk back to the stile into the road.”

“*Twt, twt!* what for?” said Essylt. “Dost think I am afraid? Not I! Go on, Maychael, and see old Jones Gelligaer—’tis late to-night.”

“Not before I’ve seen thee back to the stile,” and, knowing from long experience that it would be easier to turn the mill stream than Michael Lloyd from his purpose, she made no further demur, but hurrying into the shoemaker’s, was out again in a few moments, and ready to turn back to the path through the wood. Once more Michael’s arm was round her waist, and so they walked together, side by side their shadows blended into one—their thoughts, their lives, their hearts divided by a host of different tastes, instincts, and hopes.

There was a kiss at the stile, of course, and Essylt

* Ghosts.

looked very pretty again as she waved a last good night in the moonlight.

As he turned back along the woodland path, Michael gave himself up to the dreams, and doubts, and questionings which so often weighed upon his mind. "Why could he not love this simple girl whom he had once been ready to lose his life for? She was not changed! No, the change was in him; he was not the first man who had married a peasant girl. Was he not of peasant blood himself? and was not Essylt beautiful, and pure, and guileless? Why, oh, why could he not love her as he had once done? What was the gulf that stretched between them?" His heart told him in answer to these questions that a whole world lay between them—the world of thought, of sentiment, of imagination; he knew it all to-night, and seemed to realise it more plainly than he had ever done before; but though he knew that love had fled, and passion was dead, he did not flinch from the prospect. "Dear *anzel!* there are thousands who walk through life with a secret care as companion. What does it matter? only Essylt must *never* know! No, *that* I must see to, and, please God, I will."

CHAPTER II

ON the brow of the hill overlooking the Meivon valley and its gable mill stood a house of grey stone, which had in times past been a place of some importance, as witness the broad road that had once been a carriage-drive sweeping across its front, and ending in a rusty gateway, quite a quarter of a mile away, its wall pillars on each side crumbling to decay.

No carriages now swept through those gates, for what had once been park-land had long been let out in grazing lots to the neighbouring farmers. The drive itself was covered with moss, except just in the centre, where a well-worn path marked the track of the cattle going to and from the fields. Although Caefrân, as the house was called, had lost all claims to importance or grandeur, it was still inhabited by the descendants of the old family who had once owned the estate, and the name—Owen of Caefrân—continued to be held in honour and respect throughout the Meivon valley. Beyond that district it was only a name, for the sister-in-law of the present owner of the place, Mrs. Owen, a widow. (Colonel Ellis Owen had never lived there himself), with her son and daughter, found it hard enough with their small income to make both ends meet without attempting to keep in touch with the outer world.

Fortunately for them a sufficient sum of money had been settled upon Tom, the only son, to pay for his education, and to article him to a lawyer in Maentrevor, and his satisfactory establishment in the little town, with his week-end visits to the old home, helped

much to brighten the lives of his mother and sister, who struggled so hard to keep up appearances and to eke out their small income, thankful only that they were able to keep together, and were allowed by Colonel Owen to live on at Caefrân.

Mrs. Owen having married very early was still young enough to be a companion as well as guardian to her son and daughter, who loved her with a devotion almost amounting to idolatry. Did Tom bring home from the town a glowing account of some beautiful picture he had seen, or some lovely girl he had met, Barbara would raise her brown eyes to his and ask, "As beautiful as mother?"

"Well, very nearly indeed; not quite, of course, for I have never seen anyone as pretty as she is."

"I should think not, indeed, but she's the most trucblesome mother in the world—look at her, Tom," Barbara said one day, when they caught sight of Mrs. Owen approaching from the garden, and starting up, the girl ran to meet the delinquent, who came smiling up the garden path carrying a basket of gooseberries, her hands covered with earth, her skirt turned up and pinned behind her.

"Come in, you naughty woman," Barbara said, unpinning her skirt, and leading the laughing culprit into the house, where Tom stood waiting, and trying to look properly reproving. "Look at her, Tom! see her hands, and her shoes all covered with dirt. Indeed, indeed. I don't know what to do with her; she's like Peggy Jerry herself."

"Nonsense, children!" said Mrs. Owen. "No more of your lectures, but come out, both of you; 'tis such a lovely day, and the weeds are growing so fast. Come out, dears, and we'll dirty our hands together."

“Yes, come on, Barbara,” said Tom. “Mother loves work, and why shouldn’t she, if she likes?”

“Well, of course, if she likes, come, then, and we’ll weed, and she shall look on and eat gooseberries. I cannot bear to see her with her gown pinned up, and those hideous shoes on her pretty feet.”

“Oh, Barbara, dear!” said Mrs. Owen, “what does it matter what we do here? Let us be happy together in our own way, we three; there is no one to be shocked at us. Nobody ever comes here, you know.”

“No, nobody,” said Barbara a little sadly.

“So come along then, we three together,” said Tom, and with an arm round the waist of each, he guided them down the broad alley to the old walled garden, where, truth to tell, both mother and daughter spent many an hour in hard work, helped sometimes by Peggy Jerry, when she could be spared from the household, for the vegetables and fruit were a valuable asset in their small *ménage*.

The work in the garden was a labour of love to them both, although to Barbara, sometimes, the sight of her mother looking tired and earthy brought a pang of haughty pride. How different would her state have been had fortune not turned her back upon their family so persistently; and the rather thin, dark face would suddenly sadden, the eyebrows would pucker, and the short upper lip would take a scornful curve, as she thought how different might have been the fate of Mrs. Owen of Caefrân. And yet how happy they were, those three, when during Tom’s frequent visits they walked the old paths together, or mother and daughter sang duets to Tom’s accompaniments on the piano, which was the only luxury they felt unable to forego.

A deep and close attachment existed between the brother and sister, though to a stranger it might not be apparent, as in their intercourse with each other they were chary of the terms of endearment which they lavished upon their mother, who made the brightness of their lives, and who drew her own happiness from the love of her children.

“Oh, what a lovely day!” said Barbara, tugging at an obstinate weed. “I wonder, Tom, what makes life seem so much more joyous and hopeful on some days than on others? To-day, now, it seems quite enough happiness to live.”

“I don’t know,” said Tom; “but life always seems pretty jolly to me. Look at mother tiring herself to death over that bed of carrots.”

“Yes, she will not rest.”

“Well, as long as she’s happy, dear darling,” said Tom, “it’s all right. Weather, I should think, makes a difference in our feelings, and nobody could be otherwise than cheerful on such a day as this. Who is that coming up the drive?”

“Up the drive?” laughed Barbara, “sounds so grand, Tom. Lady Gwyn Morlais, no doubt, coming to call, or Colonel Ivor Lloyd, of Hafod, coming to tea and tennis—there’s no cake in the house, but that won’t matter, as we are on such friendly terms,” and her little dainty lip curled in scorn, and a haughty look passed over the delicate, clear-cut features.

“Barbara, you’re awfully proud,” said Tom, “and I do believe sometimes you pine for the grandeur and gaieties which Mr. Preece tells me used to make this house quite a hall of revelry in the olden time.”

“Well, I confess that I should have liked a taste of them before they were quite over.”

“I expect we have to thank those revels for our present limited establishment,” said Tom; “Peggy Jerry for cook and housemaid; for gardener, Peggy Jerry—and for a change, Peggy Jerry as laundress.”

“You forget Essylt,” said Barbara, laughingly, and with the passing away of that look of angry pride one saw that her face, although not beautiful, was exceedingly attractive, with its deep brown eyes, and the eager sensitiveness of the mouth; not an inflexion of the voice, not a shade of humour or pathos, but was reflected in that expressive face.

“Forget Essylt?” said Tom; “but she’s not on our regular staff; forget her? No, by jove, I don’t! That young woman’s mysterious ways have been puzzling me a good deal lately.”

“Mysterious?” said Barbara; “there’s nothing very mysterious about those blue beads she wears whatever; they are conspicuous enough. ’Tis Dr. Rees I see driving up. Need we go in?”

“No,” said Tom; “he likes to come in here, and smoke on that bench.”

“Well, here you are,” said a cheery voice, while Barbara stuck her trowel in the ground, and Tom called out an admonishing “Mother!”

Dr. Rees had started from home that morning with the special object of acquainting his friends and patients with his intention of going away for a somewhat prolonged visit to Norway. It would have been very easy to say, “I am going away for a three months’ holiday, for I want a change badly,” but this would have been very unlike Dr. Rees, for being blessed or cursed with an over-tender heart, he never said anything that was likely to offend or give pain if it was possible to avoid it. Therefore, when he returned to

his home in the afternoon, he had left the impression at every house at which he had called that he was only going away for a very short time, and to no greater distance than perhaps the neighbouring county.

“Very glad to see you, Dr. Rees,” said Mrs. Owen, trying to hide her earthy hands under a bundle of wild poppies.

“Well, I was on my way to Hafod, so turned in to see you—thought I should find you in the garden,” at which remark a little flicker of annoyance passed over Barbara’s eyelids, for she always hated the idea that anyone should guess that she and her mother expended any manual labour upon the cultivation of the fruit and vegetables which Peggy Jerry sold regularly in the Maentrevor market.

“Yes; the weeds grow so fast, and we love this old garden, you know.”

“I should think you did, indeed,” said the doctor—“the prettiest garden in the county, especially since that wall has fallen, giving you a view of the valley and the woods. Ah! I see I shan’t be wanted here in a hurry—Mrs. Owen blooming as a girl of twenty, and Miss Barbara looking very fit and well; Tom, here, I see often enough in the town, but, ’pon my word, I must be getting old, you know. Never knew the road up here from the valley was so steep. I always walk up the hills to save poor old ‘Fanny,’ for she’s getting very old too. Think I must get away for a change some day.”

“Yes, do,” said Mrs. Owen. “Oh, dear! how we should miss you, though we never want you professionally.”

“Well, indeed, I have been thinking of going on a little fishing expedition somewhere for a week or a

fortnight." He had, as a matter of fact, just made final arrangements for starting on his tour, but did not hesitate to soften the announcement of his impending absence by thus disguising the truth.

"How jolly!" said Tom; "and who'll take care of your practice while you're away?"

"Oh, that'll be all right; there's this young Dr. Michael Lloyd, you know, staying with me now; he'd see to my patients while I'm gone. He is one of the cleverest men in the profession! For the last year he has been *locum tenens* for Dr. Kirk Severn, the great specialist on nervous disorders, you know. I have a letter from him now in my pocket, speaking in very high terms of Michael Lloyd, and regretting his decision not to accept his offer of partnership."

"Dear me! how unwise of the young man," said Mrs. Owen. "Well, Dr. Severn's loss is our gain; if he settled down here we may think ourselves very lucky."

Barbara shrugged her shoulders. "Well," she said, "all I hope is that none of us here will be ill while you're away."

"Not very likely," said the doctor; "but if you are, you can safely trust yourselves to Michael Lloyd."

"Old Phil-y-Velin's son!" said Barbara, arching her pretty eyebrows.

"And a very nice fellow he is," said Tom. "He supped with Mr. Preece the other night, and he was delighted with him, such an honest, straightforward fellow, Barbara—talked about his old father as if he'd been a king—indeed, there was something very nice about it, you know."

"Oh, I dare say," said the girl, as if tired of the

subject. "Shall we go in, mother? Dr. Rees would like a cup of tea."

"No, no, no, I must go," said the doctor. "I just thought I wouldn't go away without letting you know. Well, good-bye; mind you keep well while I'm away."

"When are you going, sir?" said Tom, helping him into the gig.

"Oh, some day next week," and he drove away down the green velvet drive.

The next day was one of June's brightest and fairest, with a sky of turquoise blue. The breeze, laden with the scent of the sweet peas, came in through the open window, where the Caefrân family were sitting at their simple breakfast. It was time for Tom to be off, but he lingered a moment to look at the newspaper, which he took regularly, and left for his mother's and sister's edification.

"It's getting late, dear," said Mrs. Owen's gentle voice.

"No, mother," said Tom, laying down the engrossing paper. "Plenty of time for a walk round the garden. Do come, both of you; I want to show you a nest high up on the wall, right in the ivy."

"A nest!" and both women were ready at once, and soon peering up at the moss-grown stones, where a feather and a scrap of hay showed that a happy little pair had made a leafy home.

"Three little blue eggs, mother," said Tom, adjusting a ladder, up which Mrs. Owen climbed as lightly and easily as Barbara herself would have done, and from the top of the high wall she peeped into the nest, her eager face dimpling and sparkling with that charm of expression which often made it more beauti-

ful than that of her daughter; the grey eyes so like Tom's; the golden hair which Barbara loved to arrange. The latter was standing below, waiting impatiently for her turn on the ladder. How it happened nobody ever knew, but by some untoward chance the ladder slipped, and Mrs. Owen, grasping at the upper rung, swung round with her back to the wall, and fell heavily to the ground. Both Barbara and Tom rushed forward in time to break her fall somewhat, but not so as to prevent it entirely, for she sank through their arms, and lay white and unconscious on the ground, the sliding ladder falling over them. In a moment Tom had thrust it aside, and with words of passionate love and devotion the boy and girl bent over the prostrate form, and tried to recall colour to the face and life to the motionless limbs.

"Oh, darling mother," sobbed Barbara, "are you hurt? Speak to us, speak to us, mother dearest, or I shall go mad!" she cried wildly.

"Hush, Barbara," said Tom more calmly, though his face, too, was blanched, and his lips trembling. "She has only fainted; she can't be hurt, for I broke her fall. Run and fetch Peggy Jerry, and bring the wicker chair, out," and instantly the girl sped over the ground, while Tom held the beloved head, and pressed the listless hand to his lips.

He was soon comforted by seeing a quiver in the eyelids, and before they had returned with the basket-chair, Mrs. Owen had opened her eyes, and smiled into Tom's woe-begone face; but she moaned a little as Peggy's strong arms lifted her into the chair, and when they had laid her on the old frayed sofa in the dining-room she seemed to lose consciousness again,

and made no answer to Tom's and Barbara's tender appeals.

"Oh, *Mestress anwil!* What have they done to you?" said Peggy, looking reprovngly from one to the other of the two young people, who were already so full of self-reproach.

"I shouldn't have let her get on the ladder," said Tom; "it slipped, and she fell to the ground, but I broke her fall."

"Stop you here," said Peggy, the resourceful and energetic; "stop you here, while I fetch Dr. Rees; he's close by at Tyissa, with Mary the daughter—I'll catch him before he goes." And in a very short time she returned, bringing him with her.

Mrs. Owen was already reviving, and even smiling at the looks of distress on the faces of her son and daughter.

"'Twas only a fall," she said; "I have hurt my back a little."

"Hurt your back," said the doctor, looking at Barbara. "How was that? How did it happen?"

"Only a fall!" interposed Peggy indignantly. "What's this, then, soaking through on to the sofa? Blood, I tell you. *Ach-y-ft!* Stand aside, all of you."

Tom and Barbara, shocked and frightened, obeyed, and Dr. Rees, humouring Peggy, waited, while she gently turned and adjusted the fragile form.

Upon examination it was found that the thin summer garments were torn down the back, and upon enlarging the tear, they discovered a clean-cut wound running down several inches close beside the spine; it had bled a good deal while they carried her in.

"Now, Miss Barbara, you have the sharpest eyes, I expect," said the doctor. "Will you run out to the

orchard, and see amongst the weeds if you can find a little pale blue flower like this," and he took one out from between the leaves of his pocket-book. "I know it grows there, for I have seen it" (which he never had)—"quite at the further corner; 'tis a marvellous healer of wounds." And in a moment Barbara, breathless and pale, was speeding down the tangled paths, and seeking for the flower whose *habitat* was no nearer than the heights of the Appennines.

"Now," said Dr. Rees, "we'll sew it up while she's gone. Go out, Tom, and detain her for ten minutes."

One can live a year in ten minutes, nay, a lifetime of endurance may be experienced in that short space of time, so Tom thought as in the furthest corner of the orchard he found Barbara frantically searching under the trees.

"Oh, Tom," she said, "there is not a blue flower of any kind here. What could Dr. Rees have meant?"

"Possibly he saw it at the end of the paddock. Let us run down there. I have seen something blue growing there." And together they ran through the long grass.

"It can't be this," he said, gathering a bunch of the common eyebright, and taking a furtive look at his watch—five minutes were gone! "See, there's another kind under that further hedge; come along, Barbara," and he sped on across the field, the girl following eagerly.

Again Tom looked at his watch, as they dragged at the flowers.

"But they're waiting," cried Barbara—"waiting, and dear mother in pain."

"Come along, then," he said; and breathless and panting they ran back to find their mother quite con-

scious, and propped up by the cushions which Peggy and the doctor had adjusted for her comfort.

"There," he said; "'tis only a clean cut, not much more than a scratch. Couldn't find the blue flower? Ts—ts! Well, well! I know they used to grow there; but never mind, they won't be wanted now. But the more quiet she is the better, of course, and I expect in a day or two she'll be all right. Come along!" he said in his usual jovial manner, "you mustn't give us these frights again, you know, or I shall be having Tom and Miss Barbara both on the sick list."

"Oh, no," said Barbara; "indeed, we'll be all right now, won't we, Tom?"

"There! I declare she looks quite herself again. Feeling quite comfortable now, aren't you, Mrs. Owen?"

"Yes, quite," said the invalid.

"The cut doesn't hurt you now, does it?"

"No, only a little soreness."

"Come along, then, Tom; let's have a look at the wall. I can't think how this happened." And together they went to the garden, where the ladder was still lying on the ground, the ivy torn away by its fall.

"She was looking at a nest, close between that top branch and the wall."

"Oh, I see," said the doctor, putting on his glasses, and examining the mossy wall more closely. "Here it is, the cause of all the mischief, look here!" and Tom pressed forward and saw a bright sharp knife, which had been hidden by the ivy, with a curved blade for pruning, the handle thrust into a hole between the old bricks, the keen blade projecting some three inches from the wall.

“Oh, I see it all!” said Tom; “we had old John Pant here for a day not long ago, and he lost his knife; here it is, of course, where he must have thrust it himself.”

“Of course,” said the doctor; “and your mother, twisting round, must have slipped down over that sharp point.”

“It was I who lured her out to see the nest,” said Tom. “I’d give worlds if I hadn’t done so.”

“*Twt, twt!* Nonsense! We all know you and your sister would give your lives for her any day. See! it is a clean bright blade—not even a rusty nail; so there’s no danger of blood-poisoning.”

“Blood-poisoning!” said Tom, aghast at the suggestion. “Oh, Lord! I shall never forgive myself.”

“No danger of it, I told you, man,” said the doctor impatiently, turning sharply upon him. “She’ll be all right to-morrow or the next day. Come! We’ll have another look at her before I go,” and they returned to the room, where they found Barbara sitting on a low stool, her cheek laid on one of her mother’s hands, while with the other Mrs. Owen was tenderly stroking the girl’s brown hair.

“Well,” said the doctor, “we’ve found the cause of it all—old John Pant’s knife sticking out of the wall, clear and bright as a needle; no rust there, to do you any harm. I’ll go home now, and make up a little sedative for you, and send it up at once. I should lie still, where you are to-day, if I were you, and not go to bed till to-night, and then be carried up carefully. I’ll come again to-morrow. Good-bye, Mrs. Owen. I leave you in good hands. Miss Barbara and Peggy will take care of you. Tom, you can safely go to your office.”

“I shall not go to-day, sir,” said Tom, “if you will kindly call and explain to Mr. Preece.”

“All right, all right!” the doctor called back. “You are two cowards, both of you,” and he shook his finger at them laughingly as he left.

Barbara followed him into the drive with a few last questions, and Peggy going out for a moment to attend to some household matter, Tom was left alone with the invalid, and seized upon the opportunity to seat himself on Barbara’s stool, and clasping his mother’s two hands, poured out such expressions of love and tender regret as he would have been ashamed for anyone to hear, except the loved being who hitherto was all in all in both his and his sister’s warm impulsive hearts.

When Barbara returned he made room for her with no sign of the strong emotion which had swept over him during her absence. But she knew it all as she took her seat on the stool which he vacated, for there was not much that passed through the minds or hearts of one of these two that was not known and understood by the other; for they had grown up in peculiar isolation, alone in that gaunt house peopled by memories and traditions of the past, compelled by their small means to live in seclusion, which to some people of their age and spirit would have been uncongenial in the extreme, but to these two such was not the case, for Tom found in the small events of a country town, and in the business interests of Mr. Preece’s growing practice, sufficient to occupy his thoughts and time, supplemented by his easy access to the old home, while to Barbara the simple round of household duties, the charm of the hoary woods which surrounded her, the walks over mountain and moor, sometimes varied

by rambles on the wild seashore that lay beyond that furze-covered knoll, so filled her life with pure and simple pleasures that she never pined for a wider circle of acquaintance, nor for the gaieties and frivolities of the world, of which she knew nothing; and besides all these, there was the well-filled library which her grandfather had bequeathed to her in his will, with the request that it should not be sold unless absolutely necessary.

As we have seen, however, there were moments when a chance word or event would arouse the pride which was undoubtedly too strong an element in her character, when the tide of discontent and bitter regrets swept across the placid lake of her existence; but these feelings were only momentary, and were quickly banished by her commonsense. Fortunately for her, she had a well-balanced mind; in fact, Barbara Owen was just a happy, simple Welsh girl, naturally refined, and tolerably well educated.

With pathetic humility and self-reproach she and Tom waited and watched beside their mother's couch, but Peggy Jerry, who generally managed not to be seen beyond the precincts of the kitchen, had, uninvited, installed herself as chief nurse, having donned a white apron for the occasion; and continued to wear an offended and reproving look, as if to remind the young people that she did not yet exonerate them from blame; but they, with an indulgent smile, forgave her air of reproach in consideration of her devotion to them all; for well they knew that in Peggy Jerry's faithful heart, her mistress, and her mistress's son and daughter were her god, and their service was her religion.

CHAPTER III

It was close upon the stroke of midnight by the little clock on the mantelpiece in Mrs. Owen's bedroom, and to Barbara watching beside the old-fashioned bed it seemed as if the hour of doom were about to strike, for a heavy foreboding had fallen upon her heart.

The weather had changed, and the wind blowing up from the south sighed and whispered in the fir wood at the back of the house, while occasional drops of rain tapped threateningly against the casement, and the doors and windows shook in their frames a little. A small fire burned in the grate. Tom, sitting beside it, had fallen into a doze. Barbara felt alone in the world, and full of strange and mysterious fears. Peggy Jerry, who was sitting through the night at the kitchen fire, came occasionally in her stockinged feet to look in at the doorway, and retired again as silently as a ghost.

They had carried the invalid gently up the stairs, and laid her on her own bed, where she had remained quietly, apparently sleeping; but when hour after hour went by, and there was no change in her position or appearance, Barbara had grown uneasy, had listened to the fluttering breath, watched the flushed face closely, and had seen there evidently something that had alarmed her, for she rose, and crossing the hearth, laid her hand gently on Tom's sleeve. She had thought he was asleep, but she was mistaken, and was rather startled when he opened his eyes naturally.

“What is it, Barbara?” he whispered, but she answered him in her usual tone of voice.

“You need not whisper, Tom; she does not hear. Oh, I know there is something wrong with her. Come and see for yourself.”

“Nonsense!” said Tom irritably, for the oppressive silence of the room had told upon his nerves.

“What can be better for her than rest and sleep?”

“But she’s having neither,” said Barbara, and together they bent over the silent form on the bed. The cheeks were very flushed, and the eyes half closed, there was a little restless working of the mouth and forehead, enough to show that hers was not a sleep of rest and recuperation, and a faint moan sometimes issued from the lips.

Every now and then Tom walked up to the bed, and after gazing a moment, silently returned to his chair with a muttered “Darling mother!” and hiding his eyes with his hand. Peggy came in, and gazed silently too, turning away with a shake of her head, and with her apron to her eyes. Barbara took her seat again on the low stool, where she could lay her cheek on her mother’s burning hand, and dry her slow dropping tears, unseen by Tom.

The time passed slowly on, the little clock ticked, and the fire crackled in the grate. One o’clock struck, and Mrs. Owen became more restless, her limbs twitching a little, and the moaning growing more frequent.

Two o’clock! and the whole world seemed waiting, so Barbara thought, though for what she could not tell. She rose aimlessly, and drawing the curtains, looked out at the night sky, over which a heavy cloud was passing, and the rain pattered on the pane.

Suddenly her courage seemed to give way, and slipping down to the ground she rested her head upon Tom's knee, and sobbed bitterly, while he, helpless and miserable, drew his hand over his tumbled hair; but for a few moments only, then she was up again, and ready to dare or to bear anything for the beloved one.

"There! I am better now, Tom, Tom, no more tears; we must send for Dr. Rees. Who will go?"

"Why, I, of course," said Tom, and in less than five minutes he had gone out at the front door. Once in the night air he breathed more freely, and hurrying down the drive he saw that heavy clouds were gathering in the sky, but from between them the brilliant stars shone down upon him, and the solemnity and majesty of the night sky appealed to the soul of the careless youth as nothing had ever done before. A sudden halt had been called in his headlong thoughtless career, a call that touched him home deeper than anything else could have done, for Tom's love for his mother was the keynote of his life. "Surely," he thought, as he caught sight of the glittering stars, "there is a power beyond those shining orbs that keeps them in their path, unmoved by the heavy clouds that pass before them. Surely that Power will guard my angel mother from harm!" And the thought brought comfort to him as he hastened on his way. "'Tis nothing but our nervousness," he thought; "a simple fall and a scratch like that cannot have any serious consequences. Barbara and I are both silly fools! Dr. Rees won't thank me for calling him up at this hour of the night, but I don't care a button for that! Dear mother is *not* all right, so he's got to come."

He hurried down past the mill, and crossing the stile into the wood, took the short cut into the town. Llyn

Dystaw looked black as ink in the shadow of the trees, and as he skirted its sombre brink its loneliness impressed him more than usual, and he was not sorry when he reached the turning, at which point the path led away from the dark wood. He had taken but a few steps in the other direction, however, before he was aware of some movement in the tangled brake behind him, and looking back he was surprised to see a woman emerge from the brushwood, at the curve of the path which he had just left. "Essylt! I'll swear," he said to himself. "Two minutes earlier she would have met me at the corner; another of her mysterious ways," and he quickened his steps, wondering what could have taken the girl out at such an hour, and what could have attracted her to the densest, gloomiest part of the wood.

For a few moments he puzzled over the incident, but the necessity for hurrying on, and the events which followed at Caefrân, soon banished the thought of Essylt and her ways from his mind.

He ran the latter part of the way, every moment seeming to bring some impending danger nearer to him. A ring of the bell at Dr. Rees's door brought him to the window.

"Who is it? What? You, Tom? Good Lord! What's the matter?"

"My mother, sir, she's not so well as she was, and Barbara is getting frightened. Do come up."

"Mrs. Owen worse? *Twt, twt!* 'tis your fancy; but I'll come at once, Tom; go you on, my boy, and I'll pick you up on the road."

Tom waited until he heard the doctor's footsteps on the stairs, and a call at the back door for Sam, then he turned away, and walked so rapidly homewards

that he had reached the old mill before Dr. Rees caught him up.

The rain was beginning to fall heavily, the stars were hidden, and the wind moaned in the trees.

“Stormy night, Tom! Who’d have expected it?” said the doctor as he passed.

“No, indeed,” Tom called after him. “I’ll be there nearly as soon as you,” and vaulting a stile, he ran across a field, and up the sloping park-land which the drive skirted.

Lights were hurrying to and fro in the house when they arrived. Peggy Jerry met them in the hall wringing her hands.

“Oh! come on, come on!” she cried, indignant at the deliberate manner in which the doctor divested himself of his great-coat, and almost dragging him up the stairs. But when he reached the landing he heard a sound in the bedroom which hastened his steps into a run—Barbara’s voice, in tones of tender pity; a groan—a shriek of agony.

He entered the room with Peggy, Tom followed closely.

We must close the door and leave them, for we are not called upon to watch that scene of agony; we may put aside from us the thought of it if we can; no duty compels us to stand beside that bed of suffering, to see the tender frame that we have loved so fondly writhing in pain. Let us banish the thought of it, if we can, as we close the door, and leave it to that boy and girl to bear. It is their baptism of sorrow, their first personal experience of suffering, the inevitable destiny of humanity.

After all, it was only half an hour before Tom opened the door, and crossed the passage into his own

room. He had borne it all unflinchingly, but the terrible ordeal had completely unnerved him, and he bolted himself in to hide the burst of tears that he could no longer restrain, while, in the sick-room the frail form upon the bed, worn and spent with pain, had fallen into a quiet sleep. Barbara, though with trembling hands, had carried out the doctor's directions to his wondering satisfaction.

After that tempestuous half-hour of suffering a dead silence had fallen upon the sick-room. Dr. Rees, looking much harassed, sat in the arm-chair on the hearth, Peggy alone moving about shoeless and noiseless, and so they watched through the long hours.

Barbara, sitting on the low stool once more, and listening to the mysterious "voices of the night" that reached her through the open window, the wind in the trees, the rushing of the rain, felt as though she were someone other than herself. Surely it was not she, Barbara Owen, who had this night lived through an experience more bitter than anything she had ever dreamed of? Was it she, Barbara Owen, who was listening with dry eyes to the melancholy sounds that came in on the night breeze, and with a courage she had never known she possessed? Yes, it was Barbara, the *real* Barbara, forgetful of self, strung up to the highest tension of endurance, asking only that she might help the beloved one. And while the hours passed on in silence, while Dr. Rees dozed and Peggy rocked herself backwards and forwards, with her arms folded up in her apron, and Tom lay worn out upon his bed, the continual cry of the girl's heart was, "Oh, mother, mother darling! so happy we were, Tom, and you, and I, we three together! Oh, God! let it be so again, Tom, and mother, and I together." And when

the pale dawn began to show how the branches were swaying, and the clouds flying by, when the rain ceased, and the wind grew fresher and milder, she rose, and closed the window.

The invalid still slept peacefully, and Peggy, going quietly out, returned with a tray of tea and bread and butter. She had knocked at Tom's door, and he had instantly answered the summons.

"Is she worse?" he asked in a whisper.

"No, better—she's sleeping quiet."

"Thank God!" he said reverently, and followed her into the bedroom. Barbara and he never forgot that meal, it was always a landmark in their lives, for, with the cessation of immediate danger, hope sprang up in their young hearts.

When the little clock on the mantelpiece struck eight, Mrs. Owen opened her eyes, and in a moment her children were with her, and Dr. Rees was ready with the restorative, which Sam had been sent for.

She held out her hand, and Tom and Barbara clasped it between their own. "Mother, darling" was all they said, and she whispered only, "Dear children"—simple words, but how much they expressed to these three, whose souls were so closely entwined! The voice was very weak and trembling, and the doctor held up his finger admonishingly.

"Now, no talking," he said; "you want perfect rest until I return in the afternoon."

"Only this," said Mrs. Owen. "Will it come again—that terrible agony?"

"No, no, 'tis all over. A little convulsive twitching of the nerves. Think no more about it. You'll be all right now; but remember my words—perfect quiet and rest are what you want. Now, Miss Bar-

bara, I can trust her to you till the afternoon, then I will bring Michael Lloyd with me."

Barbara shrank visibly from the idea. "Oh, please, Dr. Rees, do not do that. I could not bear to have a stranger here at such a time. I should hate it." And her sensitive face wore such evident signs of vexation, that Dr. Rees, too good-natured to insist, gave in with a good grace.

"Ah, well, well! if you rather not. But, indeed, d'you know, I think you're unwise, not that there is any occasion, but a second opinion is always satisfactory."

"Oh, no, indeed," said the girl; "we are quite satisfied with yours; aren't we, Tom?"

"Oh, yes, of course," said Tom, but with a little hesitation in his voice. Not that he doubted Dr. Rees, but that he had fallen under the influence of Michael Lloyd's strong personality. However, for the moment they all seemed to have put away from them every anxious care, and to have banished it with the memory of the last night's dark hours.

The rain ceased; the wind went down; the fir branches held out a wealth of diamonds on their dainty finger-tips; the birds sang as if they had been freed from a spell, and the old garden, as if anxious to take its part in its loving greeting to the invalid, sent in through the open window a breeze laden with the perfume of the roses, the lilies, the violets, which she herself had tended so diligently.

"Do you smell the flowers, mother dear?" said Barbara. "They are all sending you their loving messages. We mustn't talk, but *we* don't want words, you, and Tom, and I, do we? any more than the flowers?"

The pale lips smiled, and an answering look of love came into the eyes of the sufferer, a proof, indeed, of Barbara's words.

Peggy came forward too, with not one, but a series of curtseys.

"Mestress *vâch*, are you better? To suffer like that, and Peggy Jerry here not able to bear it for you, *ach-y-fi!* there's a cruel thing."

The grey eyes filled with tears, and Barbara thought it wise to gently suggest a want. "A cup of tea—wouldn't it refresh her now?" and instantly Peggy had flown on the wings of love, happy in the solace of ministering to those whom she had served with such unstinting fidelity.

As he drove away from the house Dr. Rees indulged in a few expletives. "The deuced pride of that girl!" he muttered; "you might think she was Princess of Wales, and she next door to a beggar! If her mother were to die, she'd have to go out and earn her living, *ach-y-fi!* And yet she's a sweet, good girl, too," he thought, his kindness of heart getting the better of his indignation, "and brave, in my deed, she is."

When he entered his surgery he found Michael Lloyd there waiting for news of the Caefrân family, for he had been aroused in the night to make up the soothing draught which Sam had been sent for.

"Never saw such a girl as that Barbara," said the doctor, when he had described the case to his own satisfaction, though not to Michael's; "did exactly what I told her, you know. 'Pon my word, if you'd been there yourself, I don't think you could have helped me more, though she was as white as a sheet, and her hands trembled as if she had the palsy. Tom, poor boy, was no good at all."

“But what was it?” said Michael.

“Oh! bad fit of convulsions, never saw a worse. She’s a sensitive woman, very nervous temperament, and the suddenness of the fall was such a shock that it worked up to this attack.”

“But that wouldn’t cause such terrible agony! I wish I had gone with you, doctor.”

“Well, I never thought there was going to be such a scene; but, there, ’tis well over now. She fell into a heavy sleep at last. I impressed upon them that she must be kept quiet until I see her again this afternoon. I would like you to see her, but they are queer, nervous people, you know, and a stranger might upset them. Miss Barbara is a proud, reserved girl.”

Michael drummed on the table with his fingers, and looked thoughtfully over the box tree outside the surgery window. He was not thinking of himself, or of Barbara, or of Barbara’s pride; but with a strong instinct of the medical man he was longing to satisfy himself as to the truth of Dr. Rees’s diagnosis.

A knock at the door interrupted them, and with the arrival of a fresh case the Caefrân household passed from their thoughts.

Meanwhile, comparative peace had returned to the sick-room. Barbara, though pale, was brave and calm, and Tom’s pleasant face had regained much of its usual cheerfulness; for the invalid was restful, and evidently free from pain, and when Dr. Rees came again in the afternoon he was well pleased with the progress that she had made. He was deeply relieved too to feel that he could absent himself from his practice in the following week, according to his original intentions, without the disturbing feeling that he was deserting a patient in need of his services.

Mrs. Owen, propped up by pillows, was sipping her tea placidly as he entered, Tom and Barbara hovering around her with a hundred little attentions.

“Well done! well done! getting on splendidly,” said the doctor. “We’ll have you down again soon, and out in the garden. Storm quite over, I think. But now, remember, no more climbing up ladders to hunt for birds’ nests,” and he laughed jovially. His words seemed to recall to Mrs. Owen’s mind some distressing thought, for a look of terror passed over her face, and she covered her eyes with her hand, as if to shut out some unwelcome sight.

“Never again! oh, say it will never be again—that terrible pain. I would rather die.”

“Ah, well, well!” said Dr. Rees, “don’t be in a hurry about that; you’re getting well rapidly; lots of work before you yet, with earthy hands and trowel amongst your flowers, you know.”

Barbara, who had paled a little, bent over her mother with words of tender reassurance. “Think no more of it, dear,” she cooed, “’tis all over now, and you will soon be well.”

When Dr. Rees rose to go, she followed him downstairs.

“You will come to-morrow early, though she is better,” she said, and as he deliberated for a moment, “Oh, do come,” she pleaded.

“Afraid I can’t to-morrow,” he said. “I am called to Rhydalban to a very serious case, so you had better get over your fear of Michael Lloyd.”

“Fear!” exclaimed Barbara, drawing herself up proudly.

“Well, he will come to-morrow, but if Mrs. Owen

objects to seeing him, you can tell him so; he won't mind, he's used to invalids' whims, you know."

She clasped her fingers nervously. "I suppose it must be," she said. "Dear mother won't object, neither will Tom; it is I who hate—strangers; and you will be home next day?"

"Oh, of course, of course," and Dr. Rees drove away, once more anathematising Miss Barbara's pride. No one else in the neighbourhood had made any objection to accepting Michael Lloyd as his substitute; even Lady Gwyn Morlais, generally so exclusive, having heard her cousin, a London physician, speak in very high terms of the young man's reputation, had declared herself more than satisfied. "Philip Lloyd's son, you say? Dear me! the old man must be proud of him. I hope you will soon introduce him to us." Barbara alone had shown any disinclination to receive him; "and what does that matter," thought Dr. Rees, "a chit of a girl with her chin in the air, and as poor as a church mouse; but I am very fond of her—nice child"—with a ruminating shake of his head. "How proud of her poor Parry Owen would have been if he had lived."

Sam was quite used to his master's muttered remarks, and paid no more heed to them than he did to the wind which whistled over the moors.

On the next afternoon, when Barbara had stolen a moment from her attendance on the invalid to run down to the dining-room to water the flowers, she heard the crunch of wheels at the door, and immediately afterwards a startled greeting from Peggy, though spoken in a low voice, to impress upon the visitor the importance which she attached to his introduction to the Caerfrân household.

“*Howyr bâch!*” she exclaimed. “Dr. Rees from home, and you coming in his stead, *machgen-i!*”

“Why, Peggy,” said Michael in good broad Welsh, “thou art everywhere; if I went to the moon, I should find thee there, I think.”

“Well, everybody knows I am generally here, whatever,” said Peggy proudly.

“Oh, of course, but I’d forgotten. Where’s Miss Owen? I want to see her.” And Peggy, slipping off her shoes, approached a closed door and knocked humbly.

“Come in,” said a clear girlish voice within, and Michael himself opened the door wide, leaving Peggy rather shocked at his boldness.

Barbara, who had forgotten, if she had ever heard what Michael Lloyd was like, was rather astonished when she saw the man who had just entered. It would not have surprised her to see one of the usual type of Welsh peasant-student, that grasps so eagerly at the chance of learning, and makes such rapid strides in its pursuit, stunted in growth by hard work and privation endured in early youth, a dark studious face, a broad brow, and shoulders a little stooping from much poring over books; a slight halting in the utterance of the English tongue; a little natural humility in the address. But how different was the man crossing the room towards her! Straight and tall, broad-shouldered and breezy in appearance, with perfect ease of manner, as though utterly unconscious of any difference between his social position and that of the girl whom he was addressing; still more entirely free from the aggressive familiarity with which a man or woman of inferior education often attempts to bridge over the gulf which separates him from those more highly cultured than himself.

“How d’you do, Miss Owen? Let me introduce myself. I am Michael Lloyd. I suppose Dr. Rees has prepared you for this sudden visit. I am extremely sorry for the occasion of it.”

Barbara drew herself up and bowed coldly. “Yes,” she said. “He told me you would probably call to-day instead of him, but my mother is so much better that I don’t think there will be any necessity for you to see her.”

“I am very glad to hear that,” said Michael Lloyd, “and if you think she would rather not see me, of course I would not for the world press her to do so; an invalid’s wishes should be strong people’s laws, generally speaking; but——” and once more, as he had done in the surgery, he looked thoughtfully out into the beautiful, old-fashioned garden, on which the window opened. “Dr. Rees has, of course, described the case to me,” he added, turning suddenly towards Barbara, as if he had for the moment forgotten her presence—which, indeed, he had entirely—“but without seeing the patient and the wound, I can, of course, form no opinion of the case.”

“Oh, the wound is healing quite nicely,” said Barbara, “and she is ever so much better to-day,” and to Michael it was very evident that Miss Barbara Owen did not intend that he should see the patient, so he adroitly turned the conversation to other subjects before he rose to take his leave—the beautiful garden, the prospect of more fine weather, although it was still showery, the prevalence of influenza in the neighbourhood—to all of which remarks Barbara vouchsafed the shortest and driest answers possible.

“Well,” said Michael, with his hand on the handle of the door, “Dr. Rees will be very glad to hear such a good account of Mrs. Owen; he will be up to-mor-

row about eleven. Good-bye," and she heard his firm step in the hall, while the blood rushed to her head, and she clasped her hands in excitement.

"Oh, what if he could do mother some good, while I have dismissed him so abruptly!" was her thought, and in a second she was in the hall, where Michael Lloyd stopped, surprised at her flurried air.

"It has just struck me," she said, "that perhaps mother *would* like to see you. Could you wait one moment while I ask?" and she flew up the stairs, Michael looking after her with an amused smile.

"It's the new doctor, mother dear!" she exclaimed, "come instead of Dr. Rees, and I have told him you are so much better that he need not come up. Was that right?"

"Well, I should like to have seen him," said Mrs. Owen in a weak voice, that sent Barbara flying down the stairs again, forgetting everything but her strong love for her mother.

"Yes, she would like to see you, please," she said. "I am so glad it's not too late." In her eagerness she smiled, and Michael saw how beautiful she could be; but in a moment he too had forgotten everything in his interest in the case which had struck him as being rather mysterious, judging by Dr. Rees's diagnosis.

As he approached the invalid she looked at him with one swift glance of nervousness, which was succeeded almost instantly by a look of pleased confidence, for Michael Lloyd was holding her hot hand in his own cool, strong palm, and speaking to her in a quiet, though cheerful, tone of voice.

"Well," he said. "It *is* good news that you are getting over your fall so quickly. Dr. Rees has been

telling me all about it. People who go out birds'-nesting must expect a fall sometimes," and he laughed pleasantly, and Barbara was delighted to hear her mother laugh too. Her own manner was still strained and reserved, but the ice melted a little as she observed how the invalid seemed to gain strength from Michael's presence, from the influence of his genial personality, and from the charm of his manner.

Familiar as he was with all current events of the day, it was no wonder that by both mother and daughter, so long denied the pleasure of congenial society, the charm of this man's presence should be felt; a man who seemed to have seen everything, and to have been in touch with people and events, of whose existence they had only learnt through a paragraph in a newspaper, and yet who knew the cottage children by name, and the flowers that grew in field, or bog, or wood, so that nearly an hour had passed before Barbara, with a little start, pulled herself together, and recalled her proud reserve.

But while he had chatted so pleasantly, Michael had also been keenly observant of the hot hands, the puckered eyebrows, the feverish glitter of the eyes—nothing had escaped him. "Well," he said, rising at last, "you are making very good progress, and that 'scratch,' as Dr. Rees calls it, is healing marvellously. He will soon find you downstairs, and out in the garden. I dare say you have a light couch that can easily be carried there."

"Oh, yes," said Barbara; "but surely mother will be able to walk?"

"Oh, dear, yes, as soon as Dr. Rees gives permission. I should wait for that, I think. I am very glad you let me see you. I shall not be quite in the

dark now, if you should happen to want me again. Good-bye," and once more he held the invalid's frail hand in his strong palm.

"I hope you will come and see me again," said Mrs. Owen. "I don't know how it is, but I feel stronger when you are with me."

"I am glad of that," said Michael. "I wish I could pass on a little of my rude health to you."

This time Barbara did not refuse her hand, though it was only a cold and formal "Good-bye" which she accorded him as he left the room.

"Upon my word," thought Michael, as he went down the stairs, "that little icicle would freeze a furnace, but I am greatly mistaken if there is not a store of fire behind that hard, proud manner." And as he drove away his musings also, like Dr. Rees's, had reference to Barbara. "Poor girl, poor girl!" he said in a tone of pity, which was reflected in his face as he went on his rounds.

CHAPTER IV

It was midnight, and the Meivon woods looked black and frowning under the driving clouds which alternately hid and disclosed the face of the moon.

When the sky was at its darkest, and slow drops of rain were beginning to fall, a girl stepped over the stile that opened from the road into the woodland path leading to Llyn Dystaw. The darkness made no difference to her, for she knew every step of the way; she had played there in childhood, had roamed there with her young companions in search of nuts or blackberries; she had often gone there also to look for the mill turkeys that loved to stray under the trees to feed on the acorns with which the ground was strewn; so that Essylt, for it was she who thus braved the threatening storm, was familiar with every glade of the forest, that is to say, on the right of the silent tarn, for towards the left, across its dark bosom the tangled growth of underwood and scrub presented no inducement to make a closer acquaintance with its surroundings. The children were daunted by its dark shadows, its legends of otters and wild cats, and their elders cared not to push their way through the brambles and thickets, when the ill-defined paths led to nothing in particular, except the further recesses of the wood.

Not so the girl who was coming through the wood where we saw her walking with Michael Lloyd a week ago. As the heavy drops grew more frequent she drew her shawl over her head, but further than that

took no notice of the threatening storm. Leaving the path at the curve of the lake, she turned towards another which led at once into the thick undergrowth where she was safe at least from wind and rain.

Heedless of the scrub that obstructed her steps, of the brambles that tore at her shawl, she pushed resolutely forward, and before long, leaving the belt of underwood behind her, was treading a soft carpet of pine needles, where only an occasional drop of rain pattered down through the thick branches overhead.

A girl of more imaginative temperament would have started a hundred times at the mysterious sounds which broke the silence of the wood—would have asked, “Is that the wind?” when a low whisper came up the glade. “Is that the rain hissing down the valley? Is that the cry of some creature in pain? or is it the creaking of the pine branches?” Oh, yes, the air was full of strange sounds to-night, for the sea was not far off, and there was a heavy recurrent boom which told of the swelling tide that the south wind was driving against the cliffs—there was the whistle of the wind over the distant moors, and the trickle of the stream that ran into Llyn Dystaw, and sank there into some underground channel, in search, perhaps, of the gallant horseman who had loved and then ridden away.

But Essylt heard none of these things, or if she did, they made no impression upon her, for she was utterly without sentiment, and therefore without fear, and perhaps without hope, for these two emotions are not far removed from each other, and the heart that sinks into the lowest depths of despondency in its hours of gloom is the one that in its hour of elation soars highest on the wings of hope.

Neither of these extremes ever touched Essylt, however, and to-night she was only conscious of a strong desire to reach the end of her journey before the storm came on. Familiar with the windings of the forest, she hurried over the soft brown carpet. After half an hour's walk she came upon a more defined path, and was rapidly making her way through an oak wood to which the pines had given place. She drew her shawl more closely around her as she reached a little open space, before a solitary thatched cottage—a woodman's cot, evidently, for there stood the glaive, the bill-hook, and the saw; here were the logs, and the branches stacked on one side of the green; on the other a large wood-shed loomed in the darkness; there was a glimmer of light in the window, and Essylt raised the thumb latch without knocking; but that was unnecessary, for a loud barking had already announced her arrival. A word of command from a pleasant voice silenced the dog at once, and the girl entered upon a scene of homely comfort, which should have chased away the look of unrest that marked her face.

A bright fire of wood burned in the grate; before it an old plaid shawl had been spread, upon which a large sheep dog lay curled; within the curve of his paws and bushy tail sat a baby, who, having been restless in his cot, had been taken up by the indulgent mother and placed in Tango's care. Here it cooed and laughed, and spluttered and spread out its little pink toes in the blaze of the fire, as though it were midday instead of a good hour after midnight, and Tango, feeling the responsibility of his charge, had not risen to his feet, but was satisfied to bark from the hearth, and to say as plainly as a growl could speak, "Remember, the baby is in my care!"

"Come in, *merch-i*," said the buxom mother, rising from her stool. "Dear *anwl*! what a sudden storm!" and she took Essylt's shawl and shook off the rain-drops before she placed it over the settle to dry.

"Bensha is carting the fagots to Penarberth to-day."

"Is he sleeping there?" said Essylt.

"No; there is a farm about five miles from here where my cousin is living; he's stopping there to-night.

"See the baby!" she said, pointing with a smile to the pretty picture before the fire. "He missed me from bed, and wouldn't rest any longer, so I brought him here, for I knew you wouldn't be long, *merch-i*."

"No," said Essylt, with a weary look in her face. "Aren't you afraid the dog will bite him?"

"Tango bite the 'bapa'? dear *anwl*, no!"

"Well, 'tis late, and I have to go back through the rain. 'I'll go in,'" and she pointed with her thumb to a low door, whose lintel was crooked, and threshold uneven.

"Yes, yes, go you in," said the woman, "*he's* there," and Essylt pulled the string latch, and opened the door, disclosing for a moment, before she closed it, a tiny room, low raftered and whitewashed; a fire of brushwood threw a cheerful light over a scene that had nothing else to recommend it; an old worm-eaten table stood against the window, on which a candle flared in a tin candle-stick. Before it sat an old man with bent shoulders, who pored over a thick leather-bound book.

So much was revealed in the interval between Essylt's entering and closing the door, and no more.

The woman and the child carried on a conversation

which was evidently interesting to both, Tango sometimes interpolating a remark when the little one clutched at his hair too tightly, or pulled his ears too hard.

Mary Lewis laughed in the fulness of her happiness, and the baby showed its two teeth with ravishing effect. It was too much for Mary's feelings, so she clutched at her child, and hugged it to her heart before restoring it to Tango's embrace, exclaiming, "Was he mother's dear heart, then?" and sitting down on her stool, she flung a fresh fagot on her fire, and while the sparks flew merrily up the chimney she began to sing an old hymn, whose weird and wailing notes did not seem to depress the child; probably it answered to some call in its Celtic nature, for it cooed, and bubbled, and showed its teeth as before, and Tango tapped the floor with his tail approvingly.

It was nearly an hour before the latch of the inner door was raised and Essylt appeared. She looked pale and worn, and closed the door absently, as if her thoughts were occupied with some serious subject.

Mary Lewis drew the dried shawl from the settle, and wrapped it round the girl's shoulders. "How goes it, *merch-i*, in there?" she asked, with a bend of her head towards the rugged old door.

"Oh, all right, I suppose," said Essylt; "but I don't know, in my deed. We have to trust to people's word a good deal in this world, and from what I have seen of it they are not so much to be trusted, after all."

"Oh, there's good and bad in the world, *merch-i*," said Mary, with a smile of content. "A cup of tea now, before you go. See, I have it all ready—bread of my own baking yesterday, and butter from Llain,

the best in the neighbourhood. Come, now, it will strengthen you for your walk back. In my deed, you are a brave girl to push your way through the thickets this time of night."

"Yes, I must be brave," said the girl, sitting down at the hearth, where the baby had dropped asleep, with his head on Tango's chest, who only looked up and wagged his tail, as though he said to Essylt, "Excuse my rising; you see how it is with me."

"Come you now," said Mary Lewis. "Drink you this, nice and hot; a cup of tea never comes amiss."

"No, indeed," said Essylt; "there are worse things than a cup of tea at two o'clock in the morning, *ach-y-fi!*" and she shuddered a little, and finished her tea in silence.

"Well, if you won't stay longer; but there, you've a long way to go, and 'tis a stormy night."

"Oh, I don't mind that," said Essylt. "Good night to you, and thank you kindly," and she passed out into the night, and stood still a few moments until her eyes had become accustomed to the darkness before she entered the outskirts of the wood, where the wind was swaying the bracken a little, and sighing in the trees overhead; but she heard nothing of it as she pressed on unheeding, with her grey shawl over her head.

For some distance she walked on in a dull brooding silence, thrusting the brambles and bindweeds angrily aside, until at last, reaching the broader avenues of the pinewood, she walked less carefully, and as if unable to control her thoughts, she spoke them aloud to the night wind, shuddering a little with another "*Ach-y-fi,*" and drawing her shawl more tightly around her. "Is that proud creature to triumph over

me again, just when I was going to have the chance of triumphing over *her*? And they say there's a just God in heaven, and a Father who watches over us; that is what old Phil says, but, *twt*, no! I can prove *that* is not true," and she ground one little fist into the palm of the other hand, as she pressed on her way towards the thicket lying between her and Llyn Dystaw.

"Poor fool!" she soliloquised again, "to think I don't know! To think I don't know that his feelings are changed, that I don't know his love is dead! Well! so is mine. Eight years ago I was young, and happy, and fond of Michael; now I am twenty-four, Peggy says—*eighty-four* I call it, and I don't care a straw for Michael, and he's sick and tired of me, but," she added fiercely, "he's got to marry me, oh, yes! I've not waited so long to be disappointed at last—surely no, surely no," she added, dropping her chin on her breast, and standing still to look broodingly over the little tarn, whose black surface was reflecting the stars that shone out between the drifting clouds.

"I will ride over that proud Barbara; I *will* be as high as she is, and richer! and then I will say, 'Take off that ribbon from your neck; it does not suit you.'"

She had reached the turn of the lake, which Tom Owen had but that moment passed—he was even now looking back from the path that diverged towards the town; but Essylt did not see him, she was too much engrossed with her own thoughts, and too anxious to reach home before the sun rose. The dawn was not far off, for already in the east a faint light showed the outlines of the wooded hills.

"A very good thing Peggy stopped at Caefrân to-night," she thought, as she crossed the green towards

the old mill, which looked grey and dead in the dim dawn, the ivy round its gable still dripping with the rain, which had only just ceased to fall.

An hour or two before she had left the house little Jane Tyissa had brought a message from Peggy, but she had not been very clear in her account of the accident at Caefrân; Mrs. Owen had fallen down in the garden and fainted, and therefore Peggy would stay the night with her, and Essylt was not to wait up, nor expect her till she saw her.

So when the girl had made Philip Lloyd's supper of *bwdran* and bread and cheese, had stummed up his fire for the night, and, of course, had discussed little Jane's message with him, she retired to her own hearth, and, sitting alone on the settle, had dozed and waited until she had heard the usual familiar sounds that told how the twilight was fading, and the darkness was falling—the last tinkle of the sheep-bell in the Caefrân fields, the last clump of the labourer coming home from his work; the last bark of the dogs at Tyissa; the wind blowing up from the south, and the rain beginning to patter on the roof. And as she watched and listened, she fell into a fit of brooding thought. The expression of her face grew sad and anxious, even mournful; the sarcastic smile was gone, and in its absence one saw that Essylt's face could look beautiful; for although it was cast down and sorrowful, to-night it spoke of human feelings, of pity, of care. And was it fear that blanched her cheek, that caused her to open wide her grey eyes, and look round the dim bare cottage, where nothing but her own shadow moved against the whitewashed walls?

Suddenly the clock struck twelve, and with a start she roused herself. Reaching down an old grey shawl

from the rafters, she went silently out, and crossing the green, entered the wood, as we have seen.

When she returned three hours later, she went up the narrow stairs that led to her little bedroom with slow, dragging footsteps, for she was very tired. But the smile had returned to her lips, that seemed to say to all the world, "Fools! fools all of you!"

As she lay down on her bed she recalled little Jane Tyissa's message. Mrs. Owen fell down in the garden, and fainted! "What was there to faint about, in a fall in the garden? But I dare say Miss Barbara thinks it's a dreadful trouble. Well, it's only fair she should have a taste of *that* too!" and with these thoughts in her mind she fell into a dreamless sleep, from which she was only awakened by a violent shaking of the cottage door. For it was nine o'clock, and to have doors unopened at so late an hour betokened something unusual. So little Jane, when she was sent a second time by Peggy with a message to Essylt, and found no admittance into the cottage, had gone to the wide mill door, and asked one of the miller's men what she should do.

"Why! wake up the lazy crotten," said the man. "I'll rouse her for you." And with all the strength of his big wrist he rattled at the little thumb latch, and awoke Essylt from her heavy sleep.

"Will I go up to help her in the kitchen, indeed? Yes, of course, in the kitchen. Peggy won't let anyone go near the mestress but herself! Well, I'll go. Tell her I'll be up by and by." And after a hurried breakfast she put on her hat, taking it off its nail and putting it on her head with a look of weary discontent. "Work, work, work!" she said to herself, "and I'm so tired; oh, if they only knew!"

At the door she met Philip Lloyd. "Art going, *merch-i?* well, *b't shwër, b't shwër!* go, help them, if you can. Maychael will tell us all about it, I dare say," and away went the girl with a new unrest in her heart.

"Maychael will tell us all about it." Michael Lloyd at Caefrân! The idea had never entered her mind before; she had never realised that one of that healthy family would want a doctor; that it should be Michael calling there on equal terms with that proud Barbara! Oh, it was hateful! Ah, well! if she knew that Essylt was there, and she would take care that he *did* know, he dared not become too friendly with Barbara; at all events she could watch, and with this last thought to solace her, she went up the old mossy drive, and turning round the corner of the house, entered by the back door, to find Peggy pattering about everywhere in her stockinged feet, laying the breakfast, dusting the room, and trying to make everything comfortable and straight for Barbara and Tom, when they should snatch a moment to run down and partake of the breakfast which she had prepared.

"What is the matter?" said Essylt, in a hard, unsympathetic voice, and which Peggy instantly resented.

"What is the matter, indeed?—plenty the matter! Mistress *vâch* fell off the ladder and fainted, and cut her back dreadful."

"Off the ladder! dear *anwël!* What was she doing on a ladder?"

"Oh! go up she did to help Muster Tom about something." Her answer was rather vague, for she thought bird's-nesting would scarcely sound dignified enough for Mrs. Owen, Caefrân.

“Well, well!” said Essylt. “Will I carry that tray upstairs for you?”

“No, no,” said Peggy. “I can manage upstairs very well. Clear you the kitchen, and wash up the breakfast things,” and Essylt smiled as she recognised Peggy’s usual manœuvres to monopolise the honour and pleasure of waiting upon her mistress. It was a great relief to find that Dr. Rees only had attended Mrs. Owen. “He’s coming again this afternoon,” said Peggy, “because, mind you, she’s very ill,” and with bated breath and uplifted finger she began to recount the details of the “dreadful fit,” which had alarmed them all so much.

This time Essylt was properly interested. “And how did Miss Barbara take it?” she asked.

“Take it? *pwr* thing, *vâch!* as white as a sheet she was, and her hands all trembling—but quiet and brave, you wouldn’t know what she felt. But dear *anwl!* to-day you can see it—great brown rings under her eyes, all her pretty colour gone, and her hair quite damp on her forehead; in my deed, last night has made her five years older.”

To this Essylt made no answer; but while she busied herself with the household work, some unwelcome thought seemed again to take possession of her, for the serious, sorrowful look returned to her face, and softened it.

You cannot know all that goes on in a household if your presence is confined entirely to the kitchen. Upstairs the watchers by the sick-bed may be sadly counting the sands of time that are rapidly running out. A new young life may have begun its course of joy and sorrow; a shadowy grey form may have entered, and laying his hand upon the fairest and dear-

est, may have carried him away in the folds of his dark wings. All this may happen upstairs, while downstairs in the comfortable kitchen the fire burns brightly as ever, the kettle sings cheerfully on the hob, and the cat purrs contentedly before the fire.

This was borne in upon Essylt's mind as Peggy pattered in and out at her work, and she made up her mind, with her shrewd smile, that, in spite of Peggy's jealous admonitions, she would take matters into her own hands, and gradually work her way into the sick-room; not to-day, nor to-morrow, perhaps, but before long, she was determined to know for herself what ailed Mrs. Owen, and to *see* what Barbara suffered, what made her look older, and brought the dark rings of care under her eyes. She was at Caefrân, therefore, when Michael Lloyd paid his first call upon the invalid.

"Who d'you think, lass," said Peggy, delighted, "who d'you think has gone up to see the mistress? Why, Michael Lloyd! There's for thee! And as much at home as if he was in the old mill with his father. 'How d'you do, and I'm glad very glad to see you,' said Miss Barbara. 'Welcome, Miss *vâch*, and how d'y do?' says he, and shaking hands up to the elbow they were. Now he's gone upstairs with her, so there!"

Essylt answered not a word, but she flushed an angry red. 'Twas so strange, so unexpected, this new barbed arrow that was poisoning her life. Why had she never thought of it? But there! her eyes were opened now, and she must watch, watch, watch!

As the days went on she carried out her intention of entering the sick-room, and so quiet were her ways, so soft her step, that Mrs. Owen soon became accus-

tomed to her presence, much to Peggy's annoyance, and before long she had made herself quite indispensable to the invalid. As for Barbara, her former disapproval of the girl was entirely lost in her anxiety for her mother's recovery. Essylt no longer wore her blue beads, and was so ready to help, to suggest, and to carry out, that Barbara began to think she had been wrong in her estimate of the girl's character. "But I see what Tom means," she said one day as she saw Essylt silently leave the room, in which she had not been aware of her presence. "She has some strange ways about her, with those veiled eyes, and her soft footsteps like a cat," and her distrust returned, and no wonder, for close to her, under the same roof, was an enemy, who watched her with the secret, implacable hatred that still lives on in the Celtic nature.

There was not much occasion for help in the sick-room, for Mrs. Owen was daily recovering her strength; she was downstairs when Tom came home from his office in the evening, her face brightening up to receive him; and although much of her time was spent on the sofa, much of it also was spent in the garden, where Essylt had found a shady corner for the light wicker couch, and the old happy time seemed to be returning, when Barbara need no longer exclaim or implore in broken-hearted tones, "Mother and Tom and I, how happy we were together!" For it was so again; and all through that leafy June the sunshine seemed to carry with it, into the invalid's system, restored powers of health and energy, and they all began to forget the terrible ordeal through which they had passed—the mysterious paroxysms of agony which the mother, who was dearer to them than their own

lives, had been called upon to endure, while they stood by and watched without power to relieve.

Now the old garden was once more a very paradise of delights, while they walked together between the beds of old-fashioned flowers, the roses! the tulips! the mignonette! the sweet pèas! How redolent of their fragrance was the summer air!

Dr. Rees had started on his holiday tour, and Barbara had learnt of his distant destination without uneasiness.

"It's all right," said Tom. "He's left a better man than himself in his place, which was not a difficult thing to do, I think, fond as I am of the dear old doctor; and should dear mother be ill again, we are quite safe with Michael Lloyd."

"Tom!" said Barbara, with a terrified look in her eyes. "*Should mother be ill again!* how can you suggest such a thing? I could never bear it. Listen, Tom; I firmly believe it would kill me—*kill* me, mind you, to see her suffer again as she once did."

"Yes, I think it would pretty well do for me too," said Tom; "but, Barbara, I have never quite understood why such a simple accident should have caused such terrible suffering. I was talking to Michael Lloyd about it."

"Oh, Tom!" interrupted the girl, shrinking as though he had laid his finger on an open wound. "Why talk about private affairs before strangers? especially to a man who is quite—quite—er, well—not quite in the same class as ourselves."

"By Jove!" said Tom. "I thought you were going to say not quite a gentleman, but you couldn't have made such a mistake as that."

"No, he's certainly *that*," said Barbara; "but, you know, Tom, I can't quite get over the fact that he's old Phil-y-Velin's son."

"Yes, of course, he is, but what of that? And his grandmother was a gipsy, I've heard—but a good, noble woman, who used her wonderful knowledge of herbs for the good of the whole neighbourhood, without charging a penny for it."

"Very unlike a gipsy, I must say," said Barbara; "but so is Michael Lloyd in appearance."

"Yes; he takes after his father—image of him, isn't he?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Barbara, with a little toss of her head. "You seem to hold a brief for your young doctor."

"Not at all," said Tom. "He doesn't require anyone to bolster him up, I can tell you; he's making his way rapidly with rich and poor, high and low, and no wonder! I tell you, Barbara, whatever you may think of him, I like him. He's the jolliest fellow living."

"Well, indeed, Tom," said Barbara, "you are too enthusiastic."

"And you're a deuced deal too proud." He rose hurriedly from the breakfast-table, and passing into the hall, took his hat and gloves from the stand. In a few moments, however, he looked in at the door again, and said, "Am not really cross, you know, Barbara."

"No, no, old boy," she answered with a merry laugh, "I know that," and Tom hurried away down the drive.

He whistled softly to himself, as he had a habit of

doing when his thoughts were busy, either with a knotty legal question, or, as this morning, with a puzzling problem in his own life, and he suddenly burst out with, "I don't care what Barbara says. Mother is *not* what she was before that accident, and I *will* ask Michael Lloyd about it when I have the chance."

CHAPTER V

THE summer was passing away. June in her robes of blue and her chaplet of roses; July with her chequered garments of grey and gold; each in their way had brought their charms to the old garden at Caefrân, and now August had come with its stores of grain and fruit.

Out in the orchard in the shade of the apple trees Barbara was sitting at the tea-table, on which Peggy had just laid a pile of her very best tea-cakes, the honey, the cream from Tyissa; the crowning touch of beauty the old china bowl filled with late roses and musk.

“Dr. Lloyd promised to come and see me again, and he has never come,” Mrs. Owen had said one day; and, as a consequence of this remark, Michael was now sitting at the table under the apple trees, enjoying, with the members of the Caefrân family, the glowing tints of the evening sky, and the balmy air laden with the odour of many flowers; enjoying also the simple fare, and the pleasant social intercourse. He had, in fact, been a rather frequent visitor of late, for “mother” had expressed the wish that it should be so, and that was enough for her children. Barbara had apparently lost her shrinking dislike for him; for, although her manner towards him was still a little formal, that was only the natural outcome of a rather shy and reserved nature. She was innately proud, but she was not innately vulgar, and therefore her natural class prejudice had given way to a feeling of

honest liking for the strong, though refined son of the soil.

As for Mrs. Owen, she was at her best in Michael Lloyd's presence. He amused and interested her with tales of village life, with which his practice brought him into touch, as well as with anecdotes of the outside world. Indeed, she was fast becoming as ardent an admirer of the new doctor as Tom himself. Barbara alone seemed to stand calmly aloof, although there were occasions when a rising flush in the cheeks, a smiling sparkle in the brown eyes, showed the warmth and interest which the quiet manner endeavoured to hide.

"Yes, I was right," thought Michael, as he noted the varying emotions reflected in the girl's sensitive face, how it lighted up when he recounted some incident of humble self-sacrifice, how the eyes flashed with indignation and scorn at some tale of cruelty or meanness. Ah! what a privilege it would be to tell her of all the interests which his greater knowledge of the world, his learning, his scientific studies had opened out to him, what happiness to feel that another eager and sympathising soul entered into his own ideals—and here he would stop with a mental gasp, would pull himself up with an impatient start. What was it to him if the flickering shadows of thought and feeling, the blush of pleasure, the sudden cloud of sorrow continually varied the expression of that beautiful face as the surface of a lake responds to the clouds or sunshine above it? And a cold, dark shadow would fall upon his heart as a vision of Essylt would rise before him, and with a sudden grave remorse he would recall his thoughts in the Meivon woods, "What does it matter? There are hundreds of people in the world with

a secret sorrow in their lives." By and by Peggy came out to clear the table, and sitting there in the gloaming, Mrs. Owen and Barbara chatted and worked, while Tom and Michael smoked with that freedom from restraint which is the chief charm of country life.

The twilight was darkening, and the dew was beginning to fall, when at last they entered the house, through the open French window, where the lamp on the table was shedding a soft light over the old-fashioned sitting-room.

It was the usual custom with the Caefrân family to sing the last hours of the day away, so nobody waited to be asked, but Tom sat down at once, and began his rambling snatches of music, while Mrs. Owen listened, serenely happy, and Barbara occasionally hummed a bar. Michael turned over the contents of a music case, and selecting a piece therefrom, placed it on the piano before Tom. "Eh, yes! 'Memory,'" the latter said. "Come, mother and Barbara," and together they sang words that were doomed to return to their hearts and minds a hundred times in the varying scenes of life.

Through the open window the last faint glow from the west came in and mingled with the soft light of the lamp; the lingering melody, the tender words, all combined to invest the hour with a wistful charm, which was felt by them all—more especially by Michael. Even Tom, the least romantic of the party, said, after the last chord had died away, "Ah! it is beautiful; let us sing it again," and once more the three voices blended in harmony. No wonder that the hours slipped by unnoticed, and it was late when Michael rose with a start, and looked at his watch.

"Dear me! eleven o'clock! I must go at once. I have yet a patient to visit—the old man wouldn't sleep a wink if he didn't see me. Dr. Rees will probably be home before the end of the month. He will be glad to see you looking so well," he said, as he wished Mrs. Owen good night.

"Well, indeed," she said, "you mustn't let his return prevent you coming up to see us often."

"That would be depriving myself of a great pleasure," said Michael, as he held Barbara's hand in his own for a moment in parting; "but, you know, I shall be going away myself when he returns for about three months. Good night, Miss Barbara, and don't let Mrs. Owen stoop over the weeds."

"Ah! I know what mother means," thought the girl as he went out; "his hand feels as if it could help you, and raise you out of a difficulty." But she kept her thought to herself, as she generally did, and that was why people thought Barbara Owen was cold and hard.

As Michael went down the drive alone, the music he had just heard still rang in his ears, and the words—how they haunted him!

"Oh, memory! fond memory!
When all things fail, we turn to thee."

"*Twt, twt!*" he said as the old mill, with its companion cottage, came in sight; "no dreaming for you, Michael, but rather stubborn facts and real life. The dear old dad," he thought as he caught sight of the quaint gable against the rising moon, "fast asleep, no doubt, and Essylt asleep too, I hope," and then a shadow of anxiety fell over his face as he remembered how she had looked when he had last seen her. "Poor girl!" he thought, "she is looking careworn

and harassed, and no wonder! this long waiting must try her patience and love. In my deed, I'll end it all by marrying her at once. What can she mean by 'waiting till the spring'? No, let me take the plunge—let me brave the talk of the gossips, and—let me tell Barbara Owen I am going to marry Essylt of the Mill-tail. She will raise her pretty eyebrows—never mind!

"Will she care? Never mind!! Will I care? Never mind again!!! And with a hard, mirthless laugh, he vaulted the stile into the Meivon woods, which now were silent and lonely and dark, except where the moon threw bars of silver light at intervals on to the path.

So wrapped was he in his own thoughts that he had reached Llyn Dystaw before he realised where he was, and there, collecting his ideas, he was surprised to see, a little in advance of him, a moving grey figure—a woman—a girl, surely Essylt! So sure was he that he called aloud, "Essylt lass!" But there was no answer, and the grey figure disappeared suddenly from the path. He hurried after it, knowing that at the curve of the lake which she was just reaching she must take the turn to the right; there, on the straight and more open glade he would see her more distinctly, and make sure who it was.

When he arrived there, however, there was no one to be seen; and thinking the vision had been a trick of his imagination, he walked on steadily. At all events it was not Essylt who was thus roaming alone like a ghost, when she should be at home and asleep, "and yet," he thought, as he at last left the woods, and emerged to the highroad, "and yet—I could have sworn it was she," and the cold grey cloud fell

heavily upon his heart again—the cloud that threatened to darken his future, and to wrap him every day more closely in its folds.

When he reached Dr. Rees's door he turned, and looking up the deserted street he saw over the chimney tops the round fair moon rising above the outline of the wooded hills which overlooked the Meivon valley. Yes, there was Caefrân marked clear against the night sky, and he entered the prosaic town-dwelling with a sigh, and the words ringing in his ears, "Oh, memory! fond memory! when all things fail, we turn to thee."

Poor Michael! a sigh of sentiment, a song of lingering regret. "What had he to do with such things?" He asked himself the question scornfully, and answered it with a stern decision, "Nothing." To do him justice, his last thoughts were of Essylt, his last resolve was to bring his present false position to an end, to begin by apprising his father of his intentions. "Poor old man!" he thought. "What will he say?" And this was another cause of deep unrest to him; for he loved the sturdy miller, and recalled all he had done for him with the old-fashioned feeling of dutiful gratitude, which is so often found wanting in the rising generation.

When the clear morning light shone in upon him next day, it was characteristic of Michael Lloyd that he sprang up full of eager determination to carry out the course of action upon which he had decided the night before. Yes, at once he would smother his vague hopes and cut off his dawning desires; he would at least have the satisfaction of feeling that he had struck the blow himself, and strangled the first flower of real love that had ever sprung up in his heart. No

one else should interfere, no one would ever hear of the untimely birth, nor of its swift destruction.

Late in the afternoon he left the town behind him, on his way to the old mill, and coming up with Tom Owen, who was going home from his office, they walked together in the same direction.

"Quite unusual to see you on foot," said Tom.

"Yes; I haven't much time for walking—am going to see my father."

"Lucky chance for me."

"How is your mother to-day?"

"Well, very fit, thank you. I think she's wonderful, after what she's suffered. What was it, doctor? I have often thought of asking you, but have never had a good opportunity until to-day. Now do tell me; it seems an extraordinary thing that such a simple accident should have brought on such a terrible attack."

"Not nearly so wonderful as that Mrs. Owen should have recovered so completely—as she seems to have done. To tell you the truth, my opinion of the case was entirely opposed to Dr. Rees's; but he seems to have been right, and I wrong, and I am thankful that it is so. It would be no use bewildering you with medical terms, but in plain words, Tom, I thought she had injured some of the nerves of the back; the wound was very deep, Dr. Rees tells me, and so close to the spine that I cannot see how it can be otherwise. However, facts are stubborn things, and here she is getting strong and well again, and able to sing as she did last night. What a lovely voice she has!"

"Yes," said Tom with pride, "as clear and true as ever. Barbara isn't a patch upon it, in my opinion."

"Oh, quite as beautiful," said Michael, "but not as powerful. That trio has been ringing in my ears ever since. 'When all things fail, we turn to thee,' " and he hummed the air in such a musical voice that Tom looked round at him suddenly.

"Why! you've a fine voice yourself, and you've never sung to us," he said.

"Oh, pretty well," said Michael. "My friends in London thought a good deal of it, and said it was worth cultivating."

"What a shame," said Tom, "that we have never heard it!"

"Oh, never mind, that's a pleasure to come; there was nothing missing in your music last night. I should not have cared to interrupt it. I'll sing to you some day—perhaps," he added, as the thought flashed across him that his singing days were over.

"But what was your opinion of mother's illness?" said Tom, returning to the subject which was often in his thoughts.

"Well, as I tell you," said Michael, "that the injury to the nerves of the spine would cause paroxysms of pain, recurring more and more frequently."

"Good heavens!" said Tom, standing still in the path. "I am thankful you were wrong, any way; you don't know what it would mean to Barbara and me."

"Yes, I do, quite well, and, of course, I would not wish your sister to know that I ever held such an opinion; and I would not have mentioned it to you had I not felt sure that I had been mistaken."

"One for old Dr. Rees, wasn't it?" said Tom.

"Yes, indeed!" said Michael.

They had taken the short cut through the woods,

and had just come in sight of Llyn Dystaw, shining like a sheet of silver under the afternoon sun.

“By and by,” said Tom, “there’s another thing I often thought of asking you. Essylt, you know her, of course!”

“Well, of course,” said Michael; “what of her? You forget I was bred and born under the same roof with her. Of course I know her—no one better.”

“Yes; well now, has it ever struck you that there’s something mysterious or underhand about that girl?”

“Never,” said Michael loyally.

“Something strange and uncanny, I mean—with those heavy eyelids; that isn’t it exactly, but what can she want in these woods at midnight?”

“At midnight! in these woods!” gasped Michael, remembering his vision of the night before. “What do you mean?”

“Well, you know, last week when we supped at old Captain Morris’s how late we stayed. By Jove! I wonder the old fellow did not turn us out; but he’s so hospitable, I believe he would have been all the better pleased if we had stayed an hour longer; as it was, it was twelve o’clock, you know.”

“Yes, it was rather late,” said Michael; “but what about Essylt?”

“Well, I was coming home this way—’twas a very cloudy night, and I was alone, so everything was very still—not a sound to be heard, except the trickling of the stream. Suddenly I heard footsteps coming towards me along the path by the lake, and remembering another little episode of the same kind that I had experienced there a few weeks ago, I hid myself in the bushes and waited, and who should come in sight, d’you think, but Essylt.”

“Essylt!” exclaimed Michael again. “You must be mistaken, my dear fellow. You said it was a cloudy night. What could she want here so late?”

“Indeed, I was not mistaken, though,” said Tom. “She passed quite close to me, for I was still as a mouse; she had a grey shawl over her head; and where d’you think she went? Why! right in there,” and he pointed to the thicket which they were leaving on their right; “stooped under the brambles and thorns as if she were quite accustomed to it, and that was the very spot I saw her emerge from once before, so I don’t think I am far wrong in saying she has some queer ways about her.”

Michael, shocked and astonished, walked on for some time in silence. It was plain to him from Tom’s manner that at least he was convinced of the correctness of his suspicions, and remembering the figure he had seen the night before, he could scarcely doubt that it was Essylt.

“You surprise me more than I call tell you,” he said. “I am sure there must be some simple explanation of it. You mistook something else for a woman’s figure. ’Tisn’t likely that Essylt would be out here at night, a girl alone at such an hour in these dark woods; she would be too timid—not that she is a coward, by any means!”

“Well, it is a strange thing,” said Tom. “One thing I know is that I was not mistaken. I haven’t told Barbara a word about it. She’s a strange girl, you know—my sister Barbara, as straight as a line, and rather hard upon anything underhand. I thought it might make her uncomfortable, because Essylt is very useful to her; they have become great friends of late, since mother’s illness.”

Michael said nothing. What could he say? So he walked on in troubled thought.

Much as he liked Tom Owen's frank and genial company, he was glad when they reached the stile, and he was left there alone to sit a moment with his own thoughts. He never doubted Essylt, but Tom's account of his midnight experience, followed by his own of the night before, had not failed to disturb him somewhat. The girl *he* was going to marry, though only a peasant, must be spotless and above suspicion—not only in his opinion, but in the eyes of the world—*their* little world, of course! He would see her at once; a word would clear up this mystery, and crossing the green he tapped at Peggy's door. It was shut, and there was no answer from within.

While he stood there waiting he heard round the corner the clap clap of the big wheel and the rush of the stream, and knew that they were busy with the grinding at the mill. Before going round to the wide door, however, he looked over the fence to the cottage garden, which stretched—just a strip along the edge of the wood, to the back of the mill itself, where, running down at an angle from the other, was the long garden that Phil himself loved to work in, leaving the weeding alone to Peggy and Essylt. Surely at the further corner there was a stooping blue figure! and going round, through the trees at the back, he let himself in through the familiar little gate. The paths were strewn with the débris of the weeding, so that his footsteps made no sound as he approached the blue figure sitting there in the shade of a currant bush, her hands lying idle on her lap, and her attitude one of deep dejection. Essylt's face was hidden by her white sun-bonnet, for she seemed to be looking

down at the ground or at her own blue gown. She started when Michael came within the range of her vision.

“*Caton Pawb! Maychael!*” she exclaimed. “Wher’st come from this time of day? and walking so soft I didn’t hear thee?”

“No?” said Michael, coming to a standstill in silent surprise—the air of dejection, the lines of care in the face, the traces of tears in the eyes!—yes, for certain Essylt had been crying, and Michael’s heart softened towards her.

“What is it, lass? What is making thee sad?” he asked, taking her hand, and helping her to rise, which she did with an air of cheerfulness, very far removed from the appearance of depression which he thought he had seen in her attitude as he approached. “Come out to the wood with me,” he said, drawing her towards the little gate. “We can talk better there,” and together they crossed the stile, and followed the path to Llyn Dystaw once more, and Essylt laughed and talked with an unnatural gaiety which did not deceive Michael. She was hiding something from him, of that he felt certain, though that the secret held in it anything dishonourable never entered his mind.

“What is it, lass?” he said again; “’tis time thou shouldst learn that no secrets need be kept from me. I have noticed these three months past that thou art not so light-hearted as thou used to be; thou art more pale, and hast a harassed look upon thy face; something is weighing on thy mind. Art sure thou art well, *merch-i?*” He felt very tenderly towards her as he spoke, and had thrown as much sympathy and as little appearance of curiosity as he could into his voice, and was therefore quite unprepared for the

sudden burst of anger with which his words were received.

“What is the matter with me, indeed?” she said. “What is the matter with *thee*, Maychael Lloyd? What has changed thee so sudden? finding fault with me to my face! Perhaps it is that my face does not please thee; indeed, it would be strange if it did all these years, but even then, thou need’st not taunt one with looking pale and haggard.”

“Harassed I said, *merch-i*,” said Michael quietly, “and this burst of temper proves to me that there is something wrong with thee; it is so unjust, so unreasonable, *Essylt*. What is the matter with thee, *lodes*?” They had reached the further curve of the lake, and he continued: “I had something to say to thee; let us turn back here, where we are quite alone, or,” with a sudden inspiration, “can’t we follow the round of the lake? Can’t we push our way through that thicket? Surely there must be a path through the woods beyond it!”

“Through that thicket!” said *Essylt*. “Dear *anwl*! there wouldn’t be a shred of me left. Push our way through the *drysn* when here it is smooth and easy—*ach-y-fi*! not I, indeed! Say what thou hast to say, Maychael, but spare me thy questions.”

“I will ask thee none,” said Michael; “but I will tell thee painly what I am going to do.”

“What?” she said, turning to him with a startled look.

“Well, this—thou art not willing to marry me at once?”

“Not till the spring, Maychael,” she said, a little softness returning to her voice. “Then if thou wishest, I will marry thee.”

“But not till then?”

“No, indeed.”

“And thou wilt not agree to my telling my friends of our betrothal?”

Essylt shook her head.

“Well, ’tis a painful position for me, but I will consent to thy wish, Essylt, in consideration of thy long and patient waiting; but one thing I must insist upon, I must tell my father at once, this very day; on this point I am determined.”

For a moment Essylt turned upon him with a flash of temper in her eyes; she stared at him as if in a dream, and then suddenly, as a flame goes out in a lamp, the life and spirit faded from her face, and with a strange, broken weariness in her voice, she answered, “Do as thou pleasest, Maychael—it will make no difference,” and she walked on as if in a sorrowful, more than a sullen mood.

There was no denying that Michael felt disheartened and miserable. He was bravely resolved to carry out his promise to Essylt, as any honourable man would be, but it seemed to him that she was doing all she could to make his path hard and thorny. He still felt tenderly towards the girl, who had been his playmate and friend, but if any sentiment of romance had lingered hitherto in his feelings towards her, it died out that day, as they walked through the Meivon woods side by side, yet divided as the poles asunder.

CHAPTER VI

PHIL-Y-VELIN had finished his day's work, and was taking a moment's well-earned rest before he closed the mill door.

The clap of the mill wheel had ceased, and the rushing of the stream had changed to a dropping trickle when the square of sunshine on the dusty floor was suddenly darkened by a shadow.

"Hallo, Maychael, *machgen-i!*" said the miller. "I am glad to see thee, in my deed; there's something wrong in my 'counts, that I can't find out; thou'lt help me out with it after tea?"

"Oh, yes! We'll soon put that right," said Michael in a voice which he tried to make as cheerful as usual, but in the ring of it there was something which the old man's quick ear detected.

"What is the matter, my lad? something vexing thee?"

"No, nothing," said Michael, sitting down on the steps of the grain loft.

"Oh, that's right; and how are things going with thee? When is Dr. Rees coming back?"

"Next week, I think."

"Well, indeed, the longer he stops the better for me, since thou sayest thou art going away as soon as he comes home."

"Only for three months."

"That's true; but a great deal can happen in three months."

"That's true, too," said Michael, and then a little

silence fell upon them both, the old man increasingly conscious of something unusual in his son's manner.

"I passed by the mill late last night, father," said the latter, "but all was dark here; you were fast asleep, I expect, for 'twas between eleven and twelve."

"Where hadst been so late, *machgen-i?*"

"Up at Caefrân. We had tea in the orchard, and the music afterwards kept me late."

"Oh! very good, my boy," said Phil, rubbing his hands complacently. "I am always glad for thee to go there; but, in my deed, 'tis a good thing thou didst not knock me up that time of night. I *was* fast asleep, and dreaming. Now I'll tell thee what my dream was about."

"Well, stop a bit," said Michael. "I have something *real* to tell you, father, and I want to get it off my mind, like a boy with a fault to confess."

"Yes, yes, that's it," said Phil. "I knew there was something. Well, what is it?"

"Well, father, you know I am getting on in years. I am twenty-eight. Don't you think it is time for me to get married? I have made up my mind to do so, whatever."

"Ah! ha, ha!" said Phil, his whole attitude changing. "That's right, Maychael, the very thing I wanted thee to do. 'Twill brighten thy life, lad, and cheer thine evenings, and there will be two, instead of one, to come and see old Phil at the mill—perhaps—unless, of course," and here his face fell a little, "unless *she* wouldn't care to see the old miller. Well! never mind, my boy, I could hide in the mill, and hide in the garden, and trouble thee no more than if I lived in America. So long as thou art happy, my boy, that's all I care for."

At these words Michael flushed a deep red, and it took all the strength of his manhood to control his feelings, as he realised his old father's readiness to efface himself for the sake of the son who was about to wound him so sorely. Nevertheless, he felt he must make the plunge, he must tell the bare facts, or break down completely.

"Father," he said, "it is Essylt whom I have chosen for my wife."

There was a moment's dead silence, broken only by the trickle of the stream, and the cawing of the rooks.

At last Michael looked at his father, and saw that his usually ruddy face had paled; he was wiping his forehead with his red cotton handkerchief, and staring blankly at the boarded floor.

"Essylt!" he said at last; "my boy Maychael going to marry Essylt of the Mill-tail! for God's sake, man, is this a joke that thou art telling me? for, in my deed, I say to thee, Maychael, 'tis no joke to me."

"A joke! no, it is the truth, father. Eight years ago, when I was twenty, and she was but a lass of sixteen, I asked her to marry me, and to wait until I had made my way in the world, and was able to keep a wife and a home. For eight years she has waited patiently. These are solid facts, and now the time has come when I must fulfil my promise. What else can I do? You taught me as a boy that he who swears to his own hurt even, as the psalm says, must keep his word."

"Did I teach thee that if a man made a promise to do wrong he was to keep that promise because a woman waited eight years for him to do it? Did I teach thee that? Then the fruit of it is bitter in my mouth. But I *never* did."

To this Michael answered not a word, but looked down at the dusty floor. Phil himself seemed strangely subdued; he was generally hasty and irritable, firing up at any annoyance, but quickly subsiding into good-nature again. To-night his brooding silence affected Michael more than any storming could have done. But he was mistaken if he thought his father was going to take his announcement calmly, for the old man's voice trembled with suppressed passion when at last he broke the silence.

"It depends upon the promise, Maychael. If eight years ago thou offeredst to marry a woman who was unsuited to thee, thou wouldst be a fool, and worse than a fool, to keep that promise to-day, when thine eyes are opened, and thou seest thy mistake."

He had kept his anger in check hitherto, but it burst out now with uncontrollable violence. "Damn thy selfish impudence, to dare to come here, after all my toiling, and saving for thee, to tell me, after all, that thou art going to marry Essylt of the Mill-tail, that for eight years thou hast been fooling thy old father, and courting a girl who is only fit to black thy shoes!"

"Father!" said Michael; but it was impossible to stem the torrent of the old man's wrath.

"Marry her if thou wilt," he continued, "but *I* will never receive her as a daughter, nor own thee as a son—a sleepy, idle *croten*, who would be in rags but for Peggy's charity! *There's* a wife for Maychael Lloyd! the man who has got on so well in London; the man who writes books, and whose name is so often in the doctors' newspapers! *Ach-y-fi!* art mad, man!"

"No," said Michael, "I am not mad, father. I am in my right senses. My duty is clear and plain

before me, and I can see no way of escape from it, without behaving in a dishonourable manner. For eight long years that girl has waited for me, and has been faithful to me. Would you have me break my word to her now? Would you have me cast her off, and say, 'Go thy way, I am tired of thee; thy long waiting counts for nothing, for I have risen higher than thee, and I have changed my mind'? Would that conduct be worthy of Philip Lloyd's son, who has prided himself on never breaking his word or telling a lie?"

"Yes, it would," roared the old man; "it would be more worthy than to say, 'Come, Essylt of the Mill-tail, let us be married. I will keep my word to thee, though my eyes are opened, and I see that thou art not suited to me nor I to thee, that I shall drag myself down in every wise man's opinion, that I will be a miserable man; that I will break the heart of my old father; but never mind! a fig for them all! never mind my old father! let us go and be married, and never mind the rest.' Essylt, indeed!" he cried, bringing his closed fist down with a resounding thump on an empty beer-barrel, while Michael, more affected than he cared to show, got off the steps that he had been standing on and walked up and down the mill floor, his hands clasped behind him, his head thrown back as if to face the brunt of a storm.

"Dost know who she is? Dost know who her father was?"

"Not I, indeed," said Michael, continuing to pace up and down. "I have never asked. We don't often look into the parentage of the stray children who come into village life here; no, I have never inquired, nor thought of such a thing."

“Listen, thou fool, and learn whom thou hast chosen for a wife and to be the mother of thy children. Dost remember Will Porthrhian?”

“I have heard of him, of course,” said Michael wearily, “the man who waylaid and robbed old Dafydd Jones of Dolissa, and left him for dead on the road?”

“Yes, and was transported for it. I tell thee that Essylt was Will Porthrhian’s bastard child—the mother died, and Peggy went to Glamorganshire to fetch the child, for the mother was related to her somehow. Nobody here, except myself and Peggy, knows about this, and we have never let it out, because we thought it might injure the girl; for we were afraid no lad in the village, or in the neighbourhood, would marry her; and now ’tis she, that blackguard’s child, that my son Maychael is to bring to me as a daughter-in-law.”

“Father!” said Michael, seating himself once more on the grain-loft stairs, “is this true? ’Tis dreadful! What shall I do?”

The old man, who had worked himself to a pitch of uncontrollable anger, stopped suddenly—his voice broke, his words came almost in tender pleading. “Listen to me, lad, and let me tell thee my dream last night when thou wert passing the mill. I was dreaming of thee. I thought ’twas thy wedding-day, and the people were flocking up to Llangern Church to see the wedding. There were ribbons and flags flying, and flowers all over the place, and garlands across the road, and thou wentest up to the church, Maychael, bonny and happy, and the people stood upon the hedge to see the bride passing.” As he proceeded, his voice was broken and trembling, and he held out his

hand towards Michael, who stopped in his pacing and clasped the outstretched hand—"and then the bride came, all blushing with happiness and love, and who was it, Maychael, but little Miss from Caefrân." He gulped down a sob, and Michael wrung his hand. "'Twas only a dream, my boy; forgive thy old father's folly."

"'Twas only a dream, father," said Michael in a low voice, that was not as steady as usual, "only a dream; let us try and forget it, and turn to facts. What you have told me is, I suppose, a fact. Essylt does not know it, does she?"

"No, Peggy has never told her; nobody knows it but Peggy and I. Think well what thou art going to do; but one thing I tell thee, that if thou marry Essylt of the Mill-tail, then old Phil-y-Velin must be a stranger to thee. Never, Maychael, while the waves are flowing, never while the trees are growing, will I receive that *crotten* as my daughter. I have said my last word," and rising, he went out hastily, leaving Michael more troubled and disturbed in mind than he had ever been before. What should he do? He had been fully aware of all the disadvantages which a marriage with Essylt would entail before his interview with his father; but now the startling revelations had added tenfold to the difficulties that surrounded his path. What of that? Not all his father's indignation, nor his own bitter regrets, could alter the fact that he was bound to Essylt by every tie of honour.

Here were the firstfruits of his indiscretion. A break with his old father? a coldness, a difference between them—impossible; and hastily following the old man, he turned round the corner of the mill, and entered the cosy living-room, where Phil was already seated at the

table, drumming on it with his fingers, his thoughts anywhere but on the viands before him.

"Father," he said, "I am come in to have tea with you," and he took his usual place at the rough oak table. "To quarrel with you would be misery to me."

"It will be more than that to me, my boy, 'twill be death; but you have my last word," he added, while Michael silently poured out the tea.

Through the window the curve of the Caefrân drive was visible, and happening to look that way the miller exclaimed, "Who is this coming down the hill? 'Tis Muster Tom, running like a mad man," and Michael, snatching his hat, was up in a moment, and out at the door to meet him.

"What is it, Tom? What is it?" he cried.

"My mother!" said Tom breathlessly. "Barbara is frightened to death. Come up, doctor, for God's sake, to help us!"

"Yes, of course, at once," said Michael; "but I must first go to the surgery. You go back; I will ride the mare, and be with you in a quarter of an hour," and Tom hurried back up the drive alone, to find Barbara eagerly waiting for him.

"He's coming at once," he said, and together they waited and watched, endeavouring with soothing and cheering words to encourage the trembling woman, who shrank in nervous dread from the terrible ordeal which she saw before her.

"Oh, must I bear it again, Barbara?" she cried between her sobs; "not that dreadful agony again! Oh, pray God to let me die rather!" But there is no staying the laws of nature; they must take their course, though our hearts faint, and our hands implore.

At last there was the sound of hoofs on the drive, and immediately afterwards a step on the stairs, and Michael entered, and not a moment too soon, for already the tender form was struggling in the grip of the fierce paroxysm of pain, which would have tried to the utmost a strong man's power of endurance, and to a fragile woman's frame was as the torture of the rack, and to those who loved her, and was obliged to look on, a cruel martyrdom.

Once more that terrible scene was enacted, upon which we were formerly compelled to close the door, and from which we are again thankful to turn away.

With steady hand Michael poured out of a small phial a few drops of colourless liquid, which he administered to the sufferer. In a few moments, that to Barbara appeared like an hour, the lines of pain gradually disappeared, and the spent frame fell into that heavy stupor which is the blessed relief, as well as the result, of acute pain. There was nothing more to be done but to leave the recuperating forces of nature to do the rest.

Barbara had borne herself with a courage and fortitude that astonished Michael; but now, worn out with the cruel tension, she turned to Tom, and throwing her arms round his neck, gave way to a passionate burst of tears. With the usual kindly but unmeaning formula of "Don't cry, dear," he clasped his arms round her; but Barbara *did* cry; a torrent of tears came to her relief, and Michael, moved to the heart, went quietly out of the room. Before going, he waved his hand towards Tom, who nodded silently over Barbara's bowed head.

Once again she took her place on the low footstool

by the bedside to wait—to watch. Once more Peggy, in faithful attendance, walked in and out in her stocking feet, while Tom, miserable and restless, ran hastily out to catch the doctor, to question him further about his mother's illness, and to hear once more the inexorable fiat that these paroxysms must return more and more frequently, and at last terminate in her death. Was it any wonder that when Michael was gone, Tom returned to the sick-room with a stricken face, which he endeavoured to hide from Barbara; and thus they watched all through the night.

In the early morning Essylt, summoned by Peggy, appeared. Since Mrs. Owen's first attack she had made herself almost indispensable at Caefrân, apparently pleased to take her share of the household work, so as to leave Barbara at liberty to devote her time entirely to her mother.

What gratification it could have given her to witness the troubled atmosphere which had fallen upon the once peaceful household of Caefrân it would be difficult to say, except that it enabled her to see for herself how the ploughshare of sorrow furrowed the reserved and proud nature of the girl whom she had always looked upon with envy and jealousy; the brow contracted by sorrow, the fading of the pale rose cheek, the dark shadows under the eyes—all these she noted. "'Tis only fair," she thought. "Why should I have all the bitterness, and she only the sweets, I'd like to know, *ach-y-fi!* She's having a taste of the bitter now, whatever."

Even when, at Peggy's suggestion, she carried the refreshing cup of tea to the sick-room, she watched Barbara keenly. Nothing escaped the vigilance of those sleepy eyes, and Barbara would reproach her-

self for the shrinking feeling of distrust of the girl, which she failed entirely to banish.

Not a corner of the old rambling house that Essylt did not make herself acquainted with. She peeped into cupboards, moved cushions and covers which hid the torn and frayed condition of the furniture, and returned to her work as though she had only absented herself to perform some necessary duty. The dress cupboard, in Mrs. Owen's bedroom, she specially approved of, as here she could hide herself whenever she chose. Through a small window in the door she would often watch Barbara's tender devotion to her mother, without a shadow of pity or sympathy, but with a strong feeling that at last the scales of Justice were evenly balanced.

As fate would have it, however, she was not at Caefrân to-day; for, as we have seen, she had stayed at home to weed in the mill garden at Phil-y-Velin's request.

When Michael, having left Tom and Barbara to themselves and to their own sorrow, began his way down the moss-grown drive, he let the bridle drop loosely on Fanny's curb, and fell into a fit of brooding thought, and a host of doubts and perplexities which had kept aloof while he had been engrossed in his attentions to his patient crowded upon his mind.

Tom's disturbing statements, what could they mean? The further revelations made by his father of Essylt's birth and parentage weighed heavily upon his mind too. Was there, after all, something hidden and secret in the girl's life, as those veiled eyes and that mocking smile suggested? Was he called upon to crush his own feelings and to stifle the tenderest sentiments of his heart, in order to marry a girl who was

not only far below him in knowledge and refinement, but was also deceiving him as to the straightforward simplicity of her life and character? Then, alas! too clearly vivid, rose before him a vision of Barbara's open, guileless face—the delicate complexion, the deep brown eyes that looked so truthfully into his. Would that he could stay with her and mitigate as far as human skill would permit the terrible suffering which was in store for both mother and daughter! But at this point, as he had done a hundred times of late, he laid a sudden curb upon his thoughts.

He recalled his promise to Essylt of eight years ago—the promise repeated many times, even so late as yesterday. The cold grey cloud fell over him again, as he realised that for him there was no escape, except by a dishonourable evasion of his duty, and this the whole tenor of his mind revolted at. No, no—away with dreams! He must face the stern, irrevocable facts of life, and here was the old mill with its quaint ivied gables clearly marked against the darkening sky!

Alighting, he hooked his bridle on to the mill door, and turning round the corner, entered the house, where Phil was sitting on the settle smoking and apparently watching the sparks that flew up the chimney. His supper lay before him untouched; but as Michael entered he made a feint of turning to the table.

“Father,” said Michael, sitting down, and drawing the brown loaf towards him, “our tea was a miserable failure. I have not tasted bite nor sup since middle-day, so here I am again in my old place; for, look here,” and he tapped with his finger on the table,

“dark clouds seem gathering round me, and I am hedged in with difficulties. Like the grain that you pour into the mill trough, there seems but one channel through which I must pass. ’Twill grind me to powder, but perhaps, like the meal, I shall come out all right at the other end. Only one thing I see plainly, father, nothing must ever come between you and me. I am going away soon—for three months at least—let things be till I come back as if I had never spoken to you. For three months be the same to me as you have ever been—the best, the most unselfish father in the world, and then, if it *must* be, you will turn away from me, but *I* will never turn away from you, so we cannot be really separated.”

“Well,” said Phil, “take your supper, *machgen-i*. I am willing—for three months. Be the same to me as thou hast always been, a good son and true. God knows how my heart would hunger for thee; but when that time has passed, well! thou hast had my last word about it,” and filling the blue,* which stood on the table beside the brown jug, he pushed it towards Michael.

“What’s the matter at Caefrân?” he asked.

“Oh! ’tis poor Mrs. Owen has had another bad attack of pain. She’s better now; ’tis over for the time; but I fear there’s a terrible trial before them.”

“Dear, dear!” said Phil, “there’s a pity, and thou going away just when thou art wanted!”

“Yes, ’tis part of the grinding, father,” and Michael laughed a hard, mirthless laugh, which

* A kind of cup between a glass and a pint, which although still in vogue in Welsh country districts, is not of standard measure.

sounded so strange and unnatural that Phil looked at him curiously, and as he turned to resume his pipe by the log fire, he sighed, and this was so unusual for Phil that Michael looked at him uneasily, and for the first time in their lives a little cloud settled down between them both, on the old home hearth.

CHAPTER VII

DURING the week that followed Mrs. Owen recovered sufficiently to be carried downstairs again, and to lie quietly on her couch, while Barbara moved about with an assumed cheerfulness, which hid completely from her mother the anxious fears that filled her heart.

With untiring care she watched every mood of the invalid, so as to forestall her slightest wish—almost, it seemed, as if her very being were merged in that of the mother she loved so well.

Michael's visits were the one bright spot in the day for Mrs. Owen, and to Barbara too; they were like the gleam of light that falls upon the turmoil of a stormy sea. For in his presence her mother seemed to gather strength, and to regain her vitality in a marvellous degree, so that she dreaded each day to hear the words, "To-morrow I must go." She had forgotten her shrinking fear of the peasant-doctor, or, if she sometimes recalled it, it was with a smile of wonderment.

"What shall we do when Dr. Lloyd is gone? I wish he wouldn't go, Barbara," said Mrs. Owen one morning, when the wind was roaring in the pine trees at the back of the house, for autumn had made a sudden step in advance. "Oh, beg of him to stay."

"How can I do that, mother dear? for I know it is impossible. He would stay if he could, but he has promised to lecture at some hospital in London, and I should think, from the announcement in a medical paper which Tom showed me, that his opinion must be considered of some importance."

“Oh, I’m sure, I’m sure,” said Mrs. Owen; “he’s so clever and so strong, and so sympathetic, Barbara.”

“Yes; I suppose we are no judges of his cleverness, but he’s certainly strong and—very kind; it is about time for his visit.”

Meanwhile, Michael was riding up the drive. A cold east wind had risen, and through the beech wood on the right it blew in threatening gusts, whirling the dead leaves across his path, and swaying the branches until they bent and creaked as he rode beneath them. The sky was blue and clear, and the autumn sun was gilding the fields and trees across the valley as he drew near Caefrán. The gate had swung open with the wind; he looked through it across the garden towards the orchard, and could scarcely realise that but a week had gone by since he had sat there under the rosy-cheeked apples, Barbara close beside him, Mrs. Owen and Tom too, all unconscious of the dark cloud hanging over them. The serene sky above them; the scent of the flowers around them; and afterwards the tender strains of the music! How should they forecast the coming storm? But to-day he felt as if he had come to the parting of the ways, when he must go forward to face the difficulties, and must leave Barbara to bear her troubles alone.

He turned towards the stables, where he was accustomed to put up his horse without waiting for Peggy’s help, and with all the signs of commonplace life around him—the buckets, the manger, the hens clucking in the hayloft; behind and through them all he was conscious of a musical refrain, reproduced by brain and heart. “Oh, memory! when all things fail!” “Tush!” he exclaimed impatiently, as he crossed the yard to the front of the house, and no one would have

guessed that that broad-shouldered man, with the firm step and the resolute manner, had harboured a thought of sentiment. He looked the very embodiment of strength and self-reliance as he entered the old-fashioned room, where Barbara, sitting by her mother's couch, was trying to cheer her with pleasant chat upon the trivial incidents of the neighbourhood.

“Of course, mother dear, we must let Peggy go for an hour or two to see Jane Tyissa; she has the jaundice, they say, and has a bottle of such nasty medicine, that Peggy is longing to taste it. You know she never fails to taste everybody's; and while she's about it, she takes a good dose, and so saves herself the expense of a doctor! Indeed, indeed, mother dear, it is true! Sometimes she goes to two or three sick people in the day, and tastes the medicine at every bedside, and that is how she keeps well, she thinks.”

Mrs. Owen smiled languidly, and Barbara taxed her brain for another subject of sufficient interest to keep the invalid's mind from dwelling on her own sad state.

The constant effort to amuse and to entertain was a severe strain upon her nervous energy, for her lips had to wear a smile while her heart was aching. Nevertheless, it was a labour of love to her, so she knew not how it was sapping her strength away, knew not that every day her delicate face grew more ethereal, her eyes more sadly thoughtful, her mobile lips more ready to tremble with feeling.

But Michael saw it all, and felt that here, if anywhere, his medical skill, his sympathy, his help, were required, and yet here he must not stay, for not only the exigencies of his profession, but a hundred other reasons also, pointed with stern finger to the neces-

sity for leaving Cwm Meivon and Caefrân, where every day, as it passed, made the path of duty more hard to tread.

Mrs. Owen received him with unaffected pleasure; indeed, with such evident dependence upon his help, that what he had to say that day seemed more than ever difficult to him.

"Well," he said, "you know I am going away next week; that I shall be leaving you in good hands, for Dr. Rees says he is probably coming home on Monday—the very day I go."

"Oh! what shall I do?" moaned Mrs. Owen, clasping her hands with a little wail of self-pity; for, as we have seen, she was no heroine. "Oh, Dr. Lloyd, stay with me, I beseech you. What if that terrible pain were to come again? Poor Barbara wouldn't know what to do. Oh, for her sake, stay!"

"For her sake." The words touched him closely; but neither his face nor his voice showed any sign of his having noticed the appeal; neither did Barbara's, and, as a matter of fact, she had not heard the remark.

"Dr. Lloyd will tell me what to do before he goes," she said. "No doubt he will leave directions for Dr. Rees."

"Of course," said Michael; but Mrs. Owen continued to wail, "What shall I do? what shall I do?" and it was only an unexpected visit from Tom that at last turned her thoughts into another channel.

"Well," said Michael at last, "I must really go, as I have several other patients to visit. To-morrow I will see you again, and every day till I leave. Perhaps, Miss Barbara, you wouldn't mind coming with me a little way down the drive. There are one or two

things I would like to tell you, and now that Tom is here, perhaps you can be spared."

"Oh, yes," said Barbara, "Tom is quite as good a nurse as I am," and in a few moments she was walking down the drive with him. The wind was sighing in the branches above them; a brown mist was rising from the west to meet it; the landscape was losing its golden light, and Michael felt as if that brown mist was creeping up over his own life.

"'Tis an east wind," he said; "I must not keep you out long in it."

"Oh! it won't hurt me," said Barbara. "I used to think I was rather delicate, but I find I am very strong. I can bear anything—the hardest thing of all that I could imagine, and that is to see mother suffer, has come upon me, and you see I can bear it," and with a little pitiful smile she looked up at him with such unconscious bravery, that Michael felt his heart torn with compassion for the girl for whom he knew so much sorrow awaited.

"At least I am not a child, Dr. Lloyd, you know that," she said, as she struggled with the high wind, and smoothed down her ruffled hair. "Tell me, then, before you go—I am quite strong to bear it—will mother get well? Must she ever again suffer as she has done?"

The trembling voice, the wistful eyes, made speech for a moment impossible for Michael. He looked at the ground before him, where the yellow leaves were dancing in the wind.

"Tell me," said Barbara; "don't be afraid. I shall not faint nor cry."

"No; you are a brave woman; but it grieves me to have to say what I must. It would be no kindness to

raise your hopes. I do not think your mother will ever be well again."

"Will she suffer more?"

"Yes; those paroxysms will recur. Would to God I could stay here, and at least do what I could for you."

"But she cannot bear much more. This last attack has nearly killed her. Oh! it is cruel—cruel!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands.

"No, she cannot bear much more, nor can you, I fear. Indeed, there *are* dark, mysterious passages in life."

"Yes," said Barbara, "when we have nothing to do but endure. But when you go, you will at least leave me that clear liquid that did her so much good?"

"Yes, that is what I wanted to speak to you about," said Michael. "Next time"—at these words a shudder ran through the girl's frame—"next time—ask Dr. Rees to administer three drops before the paroxysms become severe, and three afterwards. I have had no chance of doing that, but I think after my written instructions he will watch his opportunity."

"Only six drops?" said Barbara.

"Yes; remember it is very strong; half a teaspoonful of that would kill her, so be careful of it, and put the bottle where Peggy cannot get at it."

"Oh, yes," said Barbara, with a little wintry smile; "but you will leave it with me when you go?"

"Yes, I will bring a fresh bottle."

"Thank you, then. Good-bye," she said. "I must go back to mother."

"Good-bye," said Michael, taking her hand. "I would like to feel that you know how hard it is for me to leave you at such a time."

“I know,” she said, and she raised her clear brown eyes to his. They spoke of confidence, perhaps of gratitude, and with these Michael had perforce to be content as he went on his way alone. Reaching the rusty gate he looked back, and saw her running homewards, her brown hair flying in the wind behind her.

“I know,” he said, repeating her words to himself. “No, indeed, she does *not* know.” A few steps further on his way, during which he had evidently followed the same train of thought, he added, “but *I* know.”

In September, when the roads are dry, when the autumn tints are beautifying every tree and hedgerow; when the thorn bushes are crimson with haws, and the scarlet berries of the mountain-ash flame out against the blue sky; when the harvest is lying in golden swathes across the fields, then, neither drive nor ride is so delightful as a brisk walk through the invigorating air; the firm ground under foot; the fleecy clouds overhead; the bright sunshine flooding land and sea. What more can we want if there is peace in the heart?

This was not exactly the case with Michael Lloyd, as he walked over hill and dale to see his patients, during the last few days of his stay at Maentrevor. He was restless and dissatisfied, a state of mind that was strange and unusual to him, for although of late he had come to look upon a marriage with Essylt as a duty, more than a happiness, yet until this summer he had not felt that duty had become a burden to him—a lowering cloud that took the brightness out of life.

Now he walked rather than rode or drove, because the exercise helped to keep him from brooding

thoughts; so Fanny was left munching her hay in the stable, while he tramped for miles round the district.

It was late one evening when he set out to visit a patient who lived in one of the secluded villages which marked the coastline below Maentrevor. His path lay along the seashore, where the great grey waves came tumbling in over the long reaches of sand, and gurgled up between the stones and boulders that bordered the edge of the tide. Beyond that lay a strip of bare grassland, which rose in a gradual slope to the high ridge, behind which lay the wooded hills and dales of the Meivon valley. In his boyhood that walk had possessed great attractions for Michael, and no day seemed complete without a visit to the shore; not a nook nor a cranny in the cliffs that he was not acquainted with; not a rocky scarp that he had not climbed. To-night all the old memories came crowding in upon him; how he had swum from yonder point to the ship that lay rocking in the bay; how Dafi, and Will, and Ben had bathed with him in those foaming breakers; and later on how he had roamed with Essylt in the moonlight across those broad sands, and, carried away by her strange, uncommon beauty, had asked her to marry him, and she had promised out there when the tide was low. How well he recalled it all to-night as he walked under the gathering twilight!

At the further point of the bay the little white village, towards which he was making his way, came in sight. He had already loitered too long while his thoughts took that journey into the past, so he hurried his steps, and before long had reached the little harbour at Porthregyn. The work of the day was over; the boats safely drawn up on the strand; the red glow of the flameless culm fires lighting up the

tiny windows as Michael climbed the uneven path which meandered between the irregularly set cottages. At the door of one of them a knot of women stood. "Dear *anzel!* there's waiting for you we've bin, sir," said one.

"Why so? Is your mother worse?"

"Well, no, indeed; she's much better, whatever. But Mari Maesllan, *pwr* thing, she's living over there by the kiln. I don't know what is the matter with her, but she's losing her breath shocking."

"Oh! we'll go and see if we can find it for her."

"Yes, well, indeed," said the woman, "if you'll cure her as quick as you cured mother, she'll be lucky."

And after a few cheery words to the old woman who sat in the chimney corner, he was ready to go; but at the doorway he was waylaid by the expectant knot of women, some of whom knitted while they talked, for they would not waste time with stockings at two shillings a pair. Each had her own particular ailment to describe, as well as those of her neighbours, with the result that by the time Michael had visited half a dozen cottages—some of them quite half a mile out of the village—it was well on towards midnight before he was free to begin his walk back to Maentrevor.

So long had he been delayed that the tide was fast covering the shingle, obliging him to walk over the sandy tussocks that lay above high-water mark. Here, walking was slow and difficult, so that when he had reached but half-way to the road which branched off to the town of Maentrevor, he realised that the waves would soon be careering wildly over the strand. Coming to a sudden decision, he turned abruptly to the right, and made his way towards the high ridge which

lay between the coast and the Meivon woods. Surely there would be a shorter cut that way than back over the beach to Maentrevor.

Walking steadily upwards, it was not long before he stood upon the summit of the hilly ridge, and here he stood to look around him. Behind him lay the dark broad sea, as yet untouched by the light of the moon rising in the east. Before him, sloping down to the lowlands of the Meivon valley, was a thick wood. He knew it well, the wood on whose further side lay his old father's mill, though it was full two miles away.

It was late, very late, but what mattered it? he thought. There was no one to wait up for him at Dr. Rees's; they were used to late arrivals there, and the view before him was so beautiful in the faint light, that sitting down, with his back to a rocky boulder, he lost count of time.

Across the valley the moon was rising above the wood that sloped down to meet that above which he was sitting. A few dark clouds with silver edgings seemed to float with her from behind the eastern edge of the world; they gathered round her as she rose, but failed to dim her bright effulgent beams, which shone full on Michael's face, and caught the top of the high ridge behind him.

But down below him the woods lay in shadow; the solemn stillness unbroken even by the flutter of a wing; the soft silver haze that filled the valley; the brilliant stars above him already paling in the bright moonlight; the distant roar of the sea; the tiny tinkle of a sheepbell; all combined to charm a mind alive to their beauties, and he fell into one of those fits of brooding thought which had become rather frequent

with him of late. The hour, the scene, was one to lay its dreamy spell upon the senses, and Michael was not averse to surrender himself to the soothing influence, so that it was a full hour after midnight when he at last rose rather abruptly, as if suddenly determined to banish a train of thought which he had indulged in too long, and beginning his way down the slope, he entered a shadowy glade. The ground was covered with a soft carpet of dry leaves, and as he descended towards the valley he stopped sometimes to listen to the solemn silence that reigned around, a silence which it seemed almost a desecration to break by the sound of human footsteps.

When he had proceeded about two miles he thought he must be nearing Cwm Meivon, for surely there was the trickle of the stream, which sank so mysteriously into Llyn Dystaw! Yes, there was the silver gleam of its waters, and at the same moment he was surprised to hear another footfall in the wood, coming towards the same point which he had reached, though at a different angle. Standing still, and hidden by the bushes, he waited, his eyes fixed in the direction from which the footsteps seemed to be approaching, and in the gleam of the moonlight that fell through the opening of the treetops he saw distinctly a woman's figure—a slender girl, dressed in a grey shawl, which she wore over her head like a hood. She had now reached the thicket, and was lost to view, but he still heard her making her way through the obstructing brushwood.

A girl alone in the woods at midnight! And with a sudden flash of memory came the disturbing thought—was it Essylt? Something in the gait and figure certainly resembled her. Was Tom Owen

right, then? What could it mean? And did Essylt haunt these woods at night when the rest of the world was sleeping? All this he must inquire of her next evening, when she had promised to meet him by the lake for the last time before he left the neighbourhood.

After waiting until the sounds of her footsteps had died away, he followed in the same path; and reaching the edge of the thicket, stooped under a bramble-bush, and emerged on the bank of the lake. As he stooped, he slipped upon something hard, and feeling for it, picked up a string of beads—"Essylt's necklace, surely," he thought, as he straightened himself out in the open, expecting to find himself but a few yards behind the grey-shawled figure; but, lo! there was no one to be seen, only the ruffled bosom of the little tarn reflecting the silver moon, and the dark trees that fringed its banks. The familiar path that followed its curve towards the highroad, and the old mill were distinctly visible in the bright moonlight, but not a trace of any living being was to be seen, and, much puzzled, Michael slipped the beads into his pocket, and turned his steps towards Maentrevor, leaving the silent lake behind him, but carrying with him a world of dissatisfaction and unrest.

If he thought that the next night's interview with Essylt would clear up his bewilderment, he was mistaken, for she met his inquiries with a denial of any knowledge of the midnight roamer.

"*Caton Pawb!*" she said. "What would I want in the Meivon woods in the middle of the night? *Achy-fi!*"

"And yet," said Michael, "I thought it must have been thee, Essylt, for, see! I picked up this upon

the path," and he drew from his pocket her string of beads.

Taken off her guard for a moment, her hand flew to her neck, in search of the familiar necklace, an action that made no impression upon him at the time, but afterwards returning to his mind, it forced upon him the conviction that she had been unaware of its absence. "Dear *anwl!* my old necklace," she said; "well, indeed, I gave it to a gipsy girl yesterday, and that's all she cared for it. Give it to me," and, snatching it from his upheld fingers, she flung it into the lake. It disappeared at once, of course, leaving only a few widening circles round the spot where it had sunk.

"There!" she said, with a fierce little laugh, "let the old thing go—*ach-y-fi!* it's been nothing but a bother to me."

"Who could the girl with the grey shawl have been, then?" said Michael, looking straight into her grey eyes.

"How do I know?" she answered. "'Twas thy fancy, I should think—or, perhaps, 'twas the gipsy girl—most like, indeed."

"Perhaps it was," said Michael; but, taking both her hands in his, and stopping on the path, he looked again earnestly into her face, and dropping the familiar "thou," asked, "Are you sure, *Essylt*, that you are not hiding something from me?"

Essylt could open those sleepy eyes of hers sometimes with good effect. She did so now, and returned Michael's gaze of sorrowful doubt with a broad stare of anger. "Hiding something from you?" she said in a voice that trembled with passion. "Why should I be obliged to do that? Must I tell you

where I choose to walk, in the whole breadth of Cwm Meivon? I have never taken a step in these or any other woods with any evil purpose, so watch me, and spy upon me as much as you please—'tis fine work for a strong man to spy upon a poor, weak girl!" Her voice had risen to a shrill note of anger, but she suddenly dropped it into a low, scathing tone, with her eyes half closed, and the strange, mocking smile upon her red lips, she added, "But you, Michael Lloyd—*you*—are *you* sure you are not hiding something from the woman you are going to marry?"

It was well that in the moonlight the flush that flew into Michael's face could not be seen. He was startled, and taken aback by Essylt's probing questions.

"Good forbid!" he said, "that I should spy upon any man or woman, and not for the world would I pry into *your* secret feelings. A man's heart, and a woman's, lie open to God, and to Him only are we accountable for them, and, of course, Essylt," he added lamely, "if you say you were not in the wood, well, you were not, that's all."

"Yes, that's all about it," said Essylt, smiling; "but, remember you, Michael, I am not deceived—'tis only fools who are deceived—and, remember, you, I am not blind."

"I don't know what you are alluding to," said Michael awkwardly; "but as we are parting to-morrow, Essylt, dost not think it foolish to spend our last hour in quarrelling? Come, lass, drop thy angry tones, and I will drop my questions. Come, let us be friends before I go," and together they turned back for a last walk by the lakeside; and the girl, as if regretting her burst of anger, tried her best to soothe

and charm the man for whom she had waited so long, and with this he had to be content—if content it could be called that kept him awake for hours that night, wondering, doubting, fearing, and then reproaching himself for what he thought must be ungenerous suspicions of a simple peasant girl.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Michael left her on the moonlit path, Essylt stood for some time silent and thoughtful. The mocking smile was gone from her lips; lines of care and discontent gathered on her forehead; her whole expression was one of dejection and gloom. She drew nearer the edge of the lake, and stood there, looking down into its depths. Poor Essylt! alone under the night sky, with all her heritage of evil impulses to battle with! Her heart was full of bitter thoughts. Heredity! She had never heard the word—knew nothing of its meaning; had she done so she might have had some clue to the inner workings of her soul, but as it was—untaught, unblest, she knew nothing except that within her there was a surging flood of anger against the whole world, against what she considered the cruel injustice of her fate. Like Ishmael's, her hand was against every man, and thought that every man's hand was against her.

The woods were very still that night; even the owls in the mill ivy seemed asleep; only the little trickle of the stream broke the silence as the forlorn girl drew nearer the edge of the lake. The stars glittered on its surface, the night breeze sighed in the trees that shadowed it. Everything spoke of peace and calm—of the great guiding hand that holds the universe in safety. But Essylt felt none of this, only the rankling sense of anger with her kind, of wrong and injustice meted out to her, while others, Barbara for instance, was blest with friends, with wealth, or so it seemed

to her, with health and happiness; everything had been poured into Barbara's cup, while into hers—what?

So closely had she approached the lake that unconsciously she had stepped into the ripples that broke on the little strand. They wetted her feet, and she started back in horror, but drew near again as if fascinated by the silver glitter on the water. "Cold!" she whispered, "cold and dark," and she shivered as if she felt the cold, and, gathering her grey shawl tighter around her, she moved back slowly, and following the curve of the lake, reached the head of the path down which Michael had disappeared. She looked long into its shadowy glade before she turned homewards, and, coming in sight of the mill cottage, was surprised to see a light in her own window, and entering, was still more so to find Peggy there, sitting alone on the hearth.

"Wher'st been?" she said sharply. "'Tis too late for thee to be out, and I coming in here and finding nobody in the house. Where hast been?"

"To Maentrevor," said Essylt, "to buy tea. 'Twas all finished; I couldn't get my work done to go earlier."

"*Twt*, nonsense! Work not done, indeed; thou art getting slower every day."

Essylt's only answer was a sweep of her light lashes and a toss of her head, as she hung up her shawl on the rafter, and began to lay the supper. "You're out late enough yourself to-night, whatever," she said. "'Tis tea I have for supper. Will you have a cup?"

"I don't mind if I do," said Peggy. "I'm tired enough after tramping two miles to see Gwen Morgan

in her new house. Dear *anwyl!* there's a desert she lives in up there on the mountain-side, so high up, and the wind blowing in from the sea till the hens could scarcely stand in the yard. *Ach-y-fi!* 'tis peaceful and quiet in the woods, and as I was passing I went in to see *pwr Jos, y Bugail*. There's ill he is! He must be very bad, because he had a bottle of medicine so strong as brandy, but in my deed, I believe it will do him good; it warmed me right through, from my head to my toes. I wasn't well at all when I started to-day, but that physic has done me good. I am much better whatever." And under the soothing influence of the cup of tea she grew more amiable, and forgot her annoyance on finding no one to welcome her when she entered her own home.

"Who didst see in the town?" she said.

"No one better than another," said Essylt. "John Jones, Taibâch, coming home from his ship, and Michael coming through the wood—he had been in here to give us *fforwel*—he's going to London to-morrow."

"Yes, *drian bâch,*" said Peggy thoughtfully. She had finished one cup of tea, and was now holding her cup up to the light, and critically examining the arrangement of the leaves at the bottom. "H'm! here's a church whatever," she said, "with a pointed steeple, and here's a bird flying towards it, a crow 'tis, too, that's *Caefrân*, no doubt; here's something round her like a brush, or a man, or perhaps 'tis a bottle—in my deed so 'tis," she said with deep interest, and passing her cup to be refilled.

"There's nonsense you're talking," said Essylt, "as if the old tea-leaves could tell you the future."

"Essylt," said Peggy, "thou wast never given

much sense," and she tapped her forehead significantly, "but thou might'st make use of the little thou hast, *merch-i*. Of course, the tea-leaves don't know the future, but there's powers in the air that do, I'm thinking, and can't they make it plain to us through the tea-leaves?" And having thus shown her superior wisdom, Peggy passed up her cup to be filled for the third time with a very self-satisfied look, but the upturn of the corners of the girl's lips was more pronounced than ever. "Essylt," cried Peggy, as she finished her third cup, "there's got on, has Maychael Lloyd! In my deed his step is like a king's, when he comes into Caefrân passage, and his voice is as fine—finer than Master Tom's, though he's not forgetting his Welsh a bit, oh, no! Maychael Lloyd is too much of a gentleman for that, and listen thou to me, *lodes*,"—and with a series of winks, and knowing jerks of her head, she continued—"see here now, I wouldn't be one bit surprised if some day we had a wedding at Caefrân. Wouldn't it be a grand thing, Essylt, if our Maychael was to marry Miss Barbara, *vach!* There's a handsome couple they look sometimes, when they are standing together, and I am watching them in the corner of my eye! *Diwss anwl!*" she screamed suddenly, as a crash of crockery interrupted her. "The new teapot, thou careless hussy, what art thinking about?" and Essylt stooped to pick up the fragments, and to hide her face, which had become of a deathly pallor. She had listened as patiently as she could until Peggy had reached her climax, and then, in an uncontrollable passion, had flung the teapot on the hearth. "It was an ugly old thing!" she said. "*Ach-y-fi!* I hated it."

"Ugly old thing, indeed! thee hated it. Well, my

lady, it cost four groats, whatever, and thou canst pay for the new one if thee like'st."

"I couldn't help it, Nanti," said Essylt, speaking the truth, and remembering that she had not four groats to spare.

"Well," said Peggy, "thou wert frightened thyself, I can see, for thy face was white as a sheet; indeed, it has a green look on it now, and it has made thee ten years older, lass. Come, sit down on this chair; never thee mind the old teapot, I will buy another to-morrow when I go to Llanberwyn to see my cousin. There is a little shop in the village, and, dear *anwl!* I almost forgot my chief message, and that is, thee must take my place at Caefrân to-morrow—the mestress is much better, but I don't like to leave Miss Barbara alone."

"Oh, I'll go," said Essylt wearily, and Peggy at last took her departure, with endless injunctions concerning the next day's duties. "Take care of the mestress," she called back from the green, "and mind thee, that Miss Barbara's tea is hot; the only thing makes her cross, dear heart, is a cold cup of tea, and small blame to her, *ach-y-fi!*"

"Oh, I'll take care," said Essylt, "her tea shall be hot," and closed and bolted the door. "Yes, her tea shall be hot," she added to herself, "the sun shall not scorch her, and the wind shan't blow on her," and she swept up the débris of the teapot angrily, and went upstairs to bed. The light was soon put out, and the mill and its cottage slept under the moonlight as calmly as if naught but peace and happiness dwelt under its thatched gables.

The larks were singing high above Caefrân next morning, and the September sun was glorifying the

garden, where every bud and blossom held its sparkling drop of dew, as Barbara Owen walked down between the beds of old-fashioned flowers; the gillyflowers, the roses, the musk, the lavender. How she loved them all! How refreshing to breathe the cool breeze after a night of wakeful anxiety!

Her mother was better, brighter than usual, or she would not have dared thus to linger among the flowers. Peggy had gone to a neighbouring village, to see a sick friend, so all the responsibility and care of the invalid rested upon Barbara's young shoulders to-day; but she meant to be brave and wise, and had only come out to gain strength and courage from the brisk autumn air, while Tom took her place in the sick-room. Here, within the four walls that held the object of their love, these two lived—one of them, entirely night and day, the other, though he went to his office and pored over his legal blue papers, continually returning there in thought.

Having walked round the garden, Barbara before re-entering the house stood a moment at the gate, looking down the green drive, and listening to all the jubilant sounds of the autumn morning. How the cocks crowed in the stable yard! How the hens craked their announcement of a new brown egg in the barn! How plainly on the clear air came the sound of Ben y Go's forge on the road to Maentrevor, and the clap of the mill in the valley!

Poor Phil-y-Velin! Were Michael's firm step, his honest blue eyes, and his pleasant voice as much missed in the mill as they were at Caefrân, she wondered, and the strange desire came over her to speak to the old man, not as she generally did, with a careless nod and a formal "Good day," but to tell him face to face,

and heart to heart, that he was not the only sorrowful one under that golden September sun.

A wistful sadness rose in her heart, a tender longing she knew not for what, the natural cravings of youth, for happiness, for love—for romance crushed and banished by the stern realities which had of late entered her life, and as she stood there, outwardly calm and self-possessed, a host of rebellious thoughts ran riot in her heart. How could a heavenly Father, all-loving and all-powerful, let her gentle mother suffer so much? Why was man denied the greatest of all sacraments—vicarious suffering? How gladly would she have taken her mother's place, and sent her out to roam amongst the flowers!

And while the simple girl was losing herself in a maze of puzzled questionings, she was suddenly called to everyday life by the sound of a merry whistle—little Bill Tyissa coming up the drive—a yellow paper in his hand—a telegram, surely! and she ran to meet him, and opened it hurriedly. "Sorry am detained till to-morrow. Rees." Her heart sank, but she thrust the yellow paper into her pocket, thankful to remember that her mother was better than usual, and she turned towards the house to tell Tom of this fresh anxiety.

She had run nearly half-way down the drive, when, turning, she was surprised to see Essylt walking leisurely towards her. As she drew nearer, Barbara reproached herself again for the shrinking dislike which she felt for the girl, who looked paler and older than she generally did, and though her red lips wore the usual mocking smile, her heavy-lidded eyes scarcely showed through her light lashes.

A little disturbed, Barbara hurried to meet her. "What is the matter, Essylt?" she asked.

"Are you knowing that your mother is worse?" said the girl in quiet, even tones. "She's screaming and struggling shocking, *ach-y-fi!* I can't stop there, not I." But Barbara scarcely heard her, for with one cry of "Oh, mother!" she had darted away, had reached the door, had flown up the stairs, meeting Tom on the way, who had passed her, his hands pressed over his eyes.

"I cannot bear it, Barbara, I cannot bear it!" he said, and the girl went on alone, with one prayer for help, as she ran to succour the suffering form on the bed.

She thought there was no one but herself to see that terrible sight, that there was no one to hear the pitiful cries for help, for Tom, she knew, had fled, and she was unaware that Essylt had followed her closely, and was now watching her from the dress cupboard. In her heart had arisen a strange new strength, a courage and calmness, that even in that moment of tension she recognised as an answer to her prayer, and though she felt as if the ordeal was more than she could endure—and live, she hurried to her mother's side, forgetful of everything but the strong flame of love which glowed in her heart, and the eager desire to soothe and to succour. In the strength of that great love she bore it all, that delicate, slender girl! She bore unflinchingly the heartrending cries until at last, in a moment's respite from pain, she heard from the quivering lips the name that had been hers in babyhood, "Oh, Baba—Baba! have pity, and let me go," and as the attack grew more severe, a sense of giant strength

filled Barbara's heart, and she answered in a firm, though tender voice, "Yes, darling, I *will* let you go," and, seeing that another paroxysm was imminent, she seized the phial of clear liquid which Michael had left the night before, and with a firm hand poured half its contents into a cup, and held it to her mother's lips. As if aware that that clear draught held in it the power to ease her pain, the sufferer drank it eagerly, and Barbara replaced the cup upon the table.

A strange calmness had come over her as she watched the sweet face, that had all her life been the dearest to her, lose its look of agony. She saw the lines of pain die out, and leave the marble features to a divine repose, and into the girl's soul a strong wave of upliftment entered, raising her above the bonds of sense and flesh, and standing still, with eyes and hands upraised to heaven, she felt as though her spirit rose in company with that of the gentle being whose form only remained upon the bed before her. For one silent moment she stood transfixed in a heavenly vision, and then in a momentary collapse she sank beside the bed, not fainting or swooning, but kissing the loved face, the lips, the hands.

A solemn silence filled the room. Was it a few moments only, or was it an hour, or was it a lifetime that Barbara knelt there? She never knew, for all feeling seemed to have died out of her, and to have given place to a strange unearthly exaltation—she did not weep, she did not mourn, she only realised with an uplifting gratitude that her mother had escaped from the torturing pain, and that for her henceforth there remained the rest of God, and she felt with rapture that it was her hand that had opened for her mother the gates of paradise.

At last she rose—she must seek for Tom, she must tell him the wonderful news, and she passed out into the garden, where the musk and the roses were still filling the air with their perfume, and the lark was still singing high in the sky.

Out through the fragrant garden, and down through the orchard she passed as if in a dream, so unreal did everything around her seem, so close and so real the spirit world into which her mother had just passed; there was no bitter mourning in the thought, only a tender wonder as she sought for Tom, and found him under the gnarled old apple trees, lying prone upon the ground, his hat drawn over his face; but though he lay so still, his ears were strained to listen, for he heard Barbara's light footstep on the grass, and sat up to await her coming with a face pale and lined, and full of anxious questioning.

“Is she better, Barbara?”

“Yes,” said the girl. “Yes, she is well, Tom, no more pain or sorrow for her.” And then she told the tidings that have stricken so many hearts, and that have left the hearers desolate. Forgetting her own sorrow, she tried to comfort and soothe the man whose first burst of grief shook him as the breaking of a storm.

“Dead? Dear mother dead! 'And you can smile, Barbara. I cannot feel like you; she was so dear to me.”

“And *is*. Surely she's quite as dear in heaven as here, and Tom,” she added, laying her hand tenderly upon his, “listen to me—you did not see what she suffered at last, but I did; it was worse than ever before, and Dr. Lloyd had told me that it would kill her in the end.”

“Oh! it seems so dreadful,” said Tom. “Couldn’t you have given her something to stop it?”

“Yes, and I did. I gave her a teaspoonful of the clear liquid that he had left, and oh! the pain ceased, and her dear face grew calm and beautiful, and she sank back and died—and, Tom, it was my hand that helped her to escape.”

“To escape, Barbara—what do you mean? That the dose you gave her killed her?”

“Killed her? Oh, Tom! no, no, that sounds dreadful. It ended her life, yes, indeed, and I am thankful.”

“Good Lord, Barbara! What have you told me? ’Tis true, I am thankful she has escaped, and I know, dear, you meant to do right—you are stronger and braver than I am; to me this will always be a terrible thought. I wish I could look upon it as you do.”

“But for mother’s dear sake, Tom, we can bear any bitterness.”

“And do you know, Barbara,” he said, “the law would look upon you as a criminal. Oh, Barbara! you might be—be, oh! I don’t know what they might do to you, and then,” he said, “you don’t seem to realise that none but God has a right to put an end to life. And what about the hereafter, Barbara? What if punishment awaits you there?”

“No, no, Tom, you cannot frighten me, and for dear mother’s sake, even *that* I could bear, I think, as long as she was happy.”

“You are a strange girl, Barbara,” said Tom, “but the dearest and best in the world, and this is the dreariest, blackest day of our lives.”

“Yes,” said Barbara, “and the brightest of dear mother’s.”

But Tom was lying on the grass again, his face

buried on his arms, and for some time both were silent, until suddenly he stretched out his hands to his sister. "Don't think me very cowardly," he said, "it has been a dreadful shock to me," and he rose slowly to his feet; "but I am coming with you now; I am wanted, I know, you have nobody but me now."

"No, nobody," said Barbara, and placing her hand in his they passed under the apple trees, and into the garden. "Flowers, we want, Tom, don't we? Will you gather them? the best and plenty."

He nodded, and went down the path alone, and the slender slip of a girl entered the house of death with a spirit strong and brave, with the power that can make of an aching heart a ladder to heaven itself. Just within the front door she met Essylt.

"Oh, Essylt," she cried, "I wish Peggy were here! Dear mother is dead." There was a strange light in the beautiful brown eyes, and though her lips trembled a little, her voice was calm and firm.

"Dead!" exclaimed Essylt, and her eyes opened wide with a stare of real astonishment, for while she had stood in the dress cupboard she had been much annoyed to find that one of the hanging garments prevented her having a full view of Barbara's actions; she had heard the words "Yes, I will let you go"; the pouring out of the liquid, and the sudden quiet that followed, but had scarcely conceived the possibility of what followed. But now the truth dawned upon her; yes, she saw it all, and she could wield as she chose the weapon which the knowledge she had gained had placed in her power, and as she turned away, to obey Barbara's directions, the curious sarcastic smile was on her lips. There had been more than astonishment in the grey-green depths of her eyes, but Barbara

was too absorbed to notice it; there was no sympathy nor sorrow in them, but even this she did not miss, but gave her directions in firm, quiet tones.

“You must go to Tyissa,” she said. “Tell Mali and John, and they will come down to help us.”

The old house was still; only the sounds of the larks and the humming of the bees in the lavender came in through the open door, and a great wave of sorrowful longing flooded the girl’s heart. She went into the parlour and flung herself upon the old frayed couch, and at last broke into a wild torrent of tears.

And when Tom returned, laden with flowers, he found her still sobbing, and now it was his turn to soothe and comfort, and thus together they began to face the future, which, although it held for both of them rich stores of joy and happiness, yet was never able to restore to their cup of life the one precious drop of a mother’s love.

CHAPTER IX

THE weeks that followed slowly and monotonously appeared to Barbara like months or years, when her life, shorn of all its joys, seemed scarcely worth living, and she went about her household duties as if in a dream.

Dr. Rees, deeply regretting his failure to fulfil his promise to Michael Lloyd, to return to Maentrevor on the day of Michael's departure, was genuinely sincere, and he endeavoured by every means in his power to make up to Barbara for his absence upon that critical day. He took all business matters off her shoulders, and scarcely a day passed when he did not drive up to Caefrân on some pretext or other. Before long, however, Barbara, naturally keen-sighted, observed that during his visits he was restless and uneasy, and had evidently something on his mind. "What is it, Dr. Rees?" she said one day when Fanny and the gig had been waiting long at the gate, while he seemed unable to bring his visit to a close. "I know you have something to say; don't be afraid, nothing will ever seem of great importance to me now, I think; I mean nothing too bad to bear. What is it? Is anything wrong with Tom?"

"No, no, child; he's all right, I think—but 'pon my word, now I come to think of it, he's not looking well. But, my dear, we must have a little talk about money matters. I am awfully grieved to have to tell you that your mother's death deprives you of her small income, and now you will only have a mere pittance to live upon—not enough to keep you in clothes."

“’Tis a matter of *no* money, then, that we must talk about,” said Barbara with a brave smile, “and that I don’t care about. I am young, I am strong, I can work—so if that is all, don’t grieve about it. Does Tom know?”

“Yes, poor boy. I told him this morning, but he knew it before, of course; indeed, he is getting to have too old a head upon his young shoulders, but this evening you and he must talk over the subject together, and see whether you approve of my suggestion. You wouldn’t like to leave Cwm Meivon, would you?”

“Leave Cwm Meivon?” said Barbara. “No, that would be the one thing I could not bear.”

“Well, well, that can easily be avoided—we can find a house for you somewhere, for I grieve to say you will have to leave Caefrân, and will have to let it. The rent will be about all you will have to live upon. I wish to speak to you about this now, as Colonel Gurgune, of Trevone, has asked me to take his son abroad for a few months’ change. The boy is delicate, you know, and I can easily get Lloyd to take my place for the short time I shall be away.”

For a moment a perplexed and serious look passed over Barbara’s face. “Leave Caefrân!” she said, “and go to a cottage to live! Well, I am ready, it will make no difference to me, except that I am sorry you are going away again so soon—indeed, I think I shall be glad to get away from here, as it is getting so ruinous and gloomy, and now it is full of sad memories. Yes, I am quite ready to go. Tom and I will settle it all to-night, only where to go, I don’t know; some little cottage up the valley, Dr. Rees, not to Maentrevor. Oh! I could not bear a town.”

“’Tis not much of a town,” said Dr. Rees with an

indulgent smile for his native place; "but, my dear, I have thought of that, and I believe I have found a place that will suit you. Let me keep my secret for a few days until I have made all arrangements. You shall be in Cwm Meivon valley, and under the thatch; you will like that, I know."

"Yes," said Barbara with a little wintry smile. "I don't think even poverty could make me feel at home in a red-brick house with slates on the roof. We have tiles here, of course, but they are brown with age."

"Well, you are a brave girl," said Dr. Rees, much relieved at the quiet manner in which Barbara had taken his news, "and what's more," he added, "I have heard of a probable tenant for Caefrân, or tenants, rather, for I think it will have to be divided into two houses, one consisting of the rooms you have closed, the other those you have lived in. I believe there are two farmers who will take it and the land belonging to it, and pay you a good rent. No one else would take it, I think, without extensive repairs and alterations, which would entail great expense upon you."

"No, indeed, I see that," said Barbara. "You are very kind, Dr. Rees, and you seem to have made very good arrangements for me; it will be all right. I shall be quite content, I suppose," she added with a smile and something like her former sprightliness; "I shall still be Barbara Owen with all her faults and failings. You won't want me to give up my personality, will you?"

"No, indeed, my dear; God forbid!" said the doctor. "We could not spare you."

"Well, let everything else go, I don't care!" She felt as though the whole world were slipping away from her, and as though she were embarking on an un-

known sea without rudder or compass; but still within her she felt a sense of courage and security that helped her to face the future. Her mother was safe from these troubles, nothing could harm her, and, for herself, what did it matter? No one would know how she suffered; no one would know how she missed the companionship of the mother who had been as a sister to her—no one but Tom, and Michael Lloyd, perhaps—she believed he would understand—and with these thoughts in her mind she accompanied Dr. Rees to his gig, and returned to the house alone, her young face full of serious thought.

But time was bringing healing on his wings, was renewing within her the verve and eagerness of youth. All through October's russet days, and November's grey skies, she was unconsciously gathering the treasures that the sea of trouble leaves on its tidal shores, and garnering the harvest of experience with which we are all endowed on our passage through life. Many of the sheaves of that harvest will have been gathered with laughter and song, and if some of them are stained with tears and bitterness let us still treasure them, for they are the only dower with which we are equipped for our entrance upon another life.

Caefrân, under the October sun, looked more dilapidated and gaunt than ever, and when November came it grew still more dark and shadowy, so gloomy indeed that Barbara spent as much of her time as possible in the open air; out in the old barns and stables; away over the hills, and through the woods, and often over the furzy knoll to the sandy shore, where at this season of the year the clouds lay low over the silent sea, and the scene was calculated to rouse the phantoms of unrest that lie asleep in the depths of the

heart, and to awaken the shadowy fears that haunt the hours of loneliness; for here the waves and wind seemed to sing together a requiem over vanished joys and hopes. But none of these things had the power to depress the courageous spirit of the girl, who stood there looking out over the wintry sea, for the springs of life and youth and energy were very strong in Barbara Owen's nature, bubbling up from a well spring of good health and sound common sense, and from a temperament which was always ready to respond to all that was bright and beautiful, turning every grey cloud into gold, and every cold wind into a message of love before she assimilated them into her own sunny nature. No compunctions, no qualms of conscience ever disturbed her concerning the manner of her mother's death; on the contrary, when the longing regret grew unbearable sometimes, a sudden warm glow would rise in her heart in the consoling remembrance that at the last her hand alone had opened for the sufferer the gates of freedom, and she went on her way, though with the inevitable sorrow for the past, yet with a bright outlook upon the future.

Not thus did Tom take the first serious trouble of his life. The grief which his mother's death had brought him before long merged in the disturbing thought of the manner of that death; he would have given worlds to blot out that fateful day in September which had brought so great a change to Barbara and him. He grew more grave and silent, there were lines of care on the fresh young face, and although his manner towards his sister was as tender as ever, even more so perhaps, the memory of the day in the Caefrân orchard seemed always present to him, and the girl felt that whenever they were alone together there was one

subject which he carefully avoided, and this knowledge caused a little cloud to fall between them, which had never existed in the dear old past.

On one of the coldest, greyest days of the month Dr. Rees was making his way slowly up to the green drive, Tom sitting beside him in Sam's place. "'Pon my word, Tom, it's marvellous how things do turn out for the best," said the doctor with a reminding flick to Fanny's fat side. "D'you know, after all, I begin to think this will be a change for the better?"

"Oh, yes," said Tom, "if Barbara does not object I think it will be good for her, and for me too, to get away from Caefrân. She is very bright and brave, but I wonder sometimes how she can be so, the place is getting so dilapidated. I never used to notice how dark and gloomy it was before dear mother's death."

"Oh! it was always gloomy, you know; people always pitied you two young things being shut up there, you know."

"Well, we weren't shut up, and we were very, very happy, happier, I think, than either of us will ever be again."

"Oh, good Lor', Tom," said the doctor, "that's what young people always say when they meet with a great trouble. 'Tis the natural course of events, my boy, for the parents to die before the children. Your mother was very young, but we could ill spare her; but there! as I was saying, everything turns out for the best, and had she lived longer she would have had more agony to bear."

"Was it quite impossible," said Tom, "that she could have recovered?"

"Quite impossible? Well, we can never apply those

words to the work of the Almighty. She *might* have recovered if she had lived long enough to wear out the disease, but Barbara tells me the pain was increasing, so I am sure you would not want her to live on."

Tom looked seriously between Fanny's two ears. "It seems a pity, sir, when life is only to be one long agony, that we cannot end it, and let the sufferer go free."

"Oh, good Lord, Tom! What are you talking about?" he said. "A spark of life must be nursed as long as possible. If we did anything of that kind we should soon be called to account, and in the eye of the law should be considered murderers. No, no, Tom, be thankful that your dear mother died when she did. God alone has the right to extinguish the flame which He has kindled. By Jove, there's a hare, Tom!" he said, rising to his feet in his eagerness, and pointing to a clump of brown ferns, for he was a keen sportsman, and Tom, little less so, looked in the direction in which his finger pointed, and for a moment forgot the subject which haunted him so continually. They were drawing near the top of the drive, and as they approached the garden gate Barbara came out to meet them, a little paler perhaps than when we first saw her, but with an indescribable air of womanliness which had been absent when her life had held nothing but happiness. "I know, I know," she said as the two men stepped out of the gig. "You have settled all about the cottage for me, and to-day you are going to tell me where it is."

"Yes," said Tom, "I do hope you will be satisfied, Barbara; indeed, I think you will. Let us come in. Yes, tea is ready. I am glad I shall have company,"

and they went into the shady parlour which not even Barbara's bright presence could make cheerful.

"And now to business," said Dr. Rees, when they were seated round the table, Barbara enthroned behind the old silver teapot which had been her grandmother's. "Now, can you think of any house in this neighbourhood that would be both suitable and agreeable to you?"

"Suitable and agreeable?" said Barbara musingly. "Well, I don't know; I have been thinking a good deal about the matter lately, and there seems some objection to every house; Berllanoer is too large, the thatched cottage behind Tyissa is too old, Llanpryan is too close to the road, and Pantywenol is haunted—no, indeed, I don't know of one that would be perfect, but I am prepared to go to either, and I've no doubt I shall make myself at home in it."

"Well," said Tom impatiently, hurrying the action of the piece, somewhat to Dr. Rees's annoyance, who had meant to work up gradually to his climax, "what would you think of the mill?"

"And turn out Philip Lloyd?" exclaimed Barbara with wide-open eyes. "Oh! not for the world."

"Of course not," said Tom. "Who would dream of such a thing? Phil would remain in his own quarters. But don't you remember the big west gable where the owls hoot at night, and the bats fly out from the casement?"

"Oh, yes!" said Barbara; "but where the sun shines all day, and where the west wind always brings the smell of the sea and the boats. But, Tom, would he let me live there, and could it be made habitable, d'you think?"

"Well, that's it," said Dr. Rees. "We have just

been speaking to him, and asking him that very question. He is quite willing, but of course it is all subject to your approval, my dear."

"And you would have no doubt what Phil-y-Velin felt about it if you had seen his face," said Tom; "he was simply delighted at the thought of having 'little miss,' as he calls you, under the same roof as himself."

"Well, we've become great friends lately; I often go down and have a chat with him," said Barbara. "He's a dear old man—so sensible, and so sympathetic."

"Yes," said Tom, "so he is. You will be quite apart from him, you know, and Essylt might remain in their cottage as your servant, you know."

"But I shan't want servants."

"Well, you'll find it pretty hard to shake off Peggy Jerry," said Tom.

"Yes, indeed, dear old thing!"

"Oh, we made all sort of plans, I can tell you. Phil says the rooms are well aired and dry—he has seen to that, and so there only remains for you to go down and settle the matter with him."

"But, but," said Barbara, hesitating, "what about his son? Do you think Dr. Lloyd would like such an arrangement?"

"Michael," said Dr. Rees. "He has asked me to look out for a house for him in Maentrevor—indeed, I have my strong suspicion that he is going to be married. I don't know why I think so. He has never told me so, but when I taxed him with it, he only said, 'Well, 'tis time, isn't it?' and if that's the case," said the doctor, helping himself to another piece of toast, "he will be glad for his father to have company so near."

"Perhaps, indeed," said Barbara. "Well, if you two can arrange about the rent for me, I am ready to go in when you like. Caefrân is very lovely now."

"That's right, Barbara," said Tom. "I was very much afraid you'd be too proud to come down to the old mill, but I will say, when it comes to the point, you always act reasonably."

"Proud!" said Barbara, laughing. "I wonder what I should have to be proud of now, Tom. Indeed, you always wronged me in thinking I was proud."

"Well, 'pon my word!" said Dr. Rees. "I wonder, now, if, when you are settled into the mill-gable, you will be proud of *that* too. There is a great deal of oak carving about it. The rooms are all panelled breast-high, I think."

"Well, indeed!" said Barbara. "There seems nothing for me to do but to enter my new dwelling at once."

"Oh, dear, dear! Stop a bit," said the doctor, laughing. "You young people are always impatient. It will take old Phil a month or two to get the place in order for you; but listen you, my dear," and he tapped with his finger on the table to emphasise his words—"you will have very little to live upon when you are there."

"Oh! I don't mind that at all," said Barbara. "Very little will do for Tom and me."

"Yes," said Tom, "and I shall be able to pay you for my board, for what d'you think, Barbara! old Mr. Preece has offered to make me his managing clerk and to give me a salary."

"Oh! Tom! You *are* getting on!" said Barbara. "If it had only happened two months ago!" and a little wistful sadness clouded her face for a moment,

and Tom, comprehending, was silent, looking down at the table with that curious, anxious look on his face which puzzled Barbara so much. It was not grief at the loss of his mother, for the keen edge of that sorrow seemed to be wearing off somewhat. His advancement in his profession was evidently assured, so ways and means could not be troubling him, and yet his round honest face grew thinner every day; there were lines between his eyebrows; he seemed to be wrapped up in his legal duties, reading and working long after office hours; he was developing fast what people called "an old head upon young shoulders."

"And when can I go and see my new house?" Barbara said when she saw them off on the doorstep.

"When you like," said Tom, and as a result of this conversation, the very next day saw Barbara making her way down the drive. When she came in sight of the mill Phil-y-Velin was sitting on the moss-grown wall which had once encircled the courtyard. His back was turned to the slope of the Caefrân drive, in which he was generally much interested, but to-day he sat with his eyes fixed on the west gable of the mill, his solid legs dangling down before him, his hands on his knees. He was lost in thought; sometimes he drew his hand over his grizzly beard; sometimes he took off his hat and ruffled his iron-grey hair.

It was not at all the sort of day which one would choose for an open-air reverie, but Phil had sat there, solid and square and silent, for a full half-hour, when a light step on the road behind him awoke him from his musings. In a moment he was awake and alert, and with a look of pleased surprise on his good-humoured face.

"Miss Barbara! Well, how are you this dull grey

weather? Indeed, it is doing me good to see your bright face, and I knew your step in a minute," he said, rising to take off his hat.

"Well! indeed," said Barbara, "'tis kind of you to say that, Phil, because, you know, 'tis a great pleasure to me to come down here to have a chat with you. I can't think how I lived so long without that pleasure. 'Tis a grey day, and cold enough! But why do you sit out here, instead of in the cosy mill-kitchen?"

"Well! thinking I was, and, somehow or other, when I'm settling my plans, I always like to be out in the air—not even the walls of my old mill around me—but just the sky above me, d'you see, and in my deed I'm glad you came down, because I'm wanting a bit of advice."

"Well! let me sit down by you a bit," said Barbara, taking her seat by his side on the wall, "and perhaps between us and the sky we can come to some wise decision."

She had acted upon a sudden impulse one day as she stood looking down the drive with the homely country sounds around her; she had thought that perhaps the old miller felt his son's absence and missed him, and she had spent many a pleasant half-hour in the quiet old mill-kitchen with Phil since then. Michael had written to her once on hearing of her mother's death—just the ordinary kindly words of sympathy and condolence—a letter any stranger might have written. It had sent a little chill into her heart, so bereaved and sorrowful, for she had had the feeling, when others seemed to mistake her serene patience for indifference, that Michael Lloyd would have known what she felt, for he had known her mother, and what she was to her, and in his letter only two lines written

after the broad strong signature had comforted her in the least. "I feel that these words appear cold and conventional, but you know how I feel for you!" To-day she had come in pursuance of the plan suggested by Dr. Rees and Tom, to make arrangements with Phil-y-Velin. The skies were grey, and Caefrân was damp and dark, and she longed for the sound of a human voice. There was Phil solid and straight and square as ever!

"And what d'you think of Dr. Rees's plan, Phil?" she asked. "Are you willing for me to come and live here in the west gable?"

"Willing? Dear *Caton Pawb*, 'tis proud I am, and glad in my heart, that I've got it here ready for you. And what was I keeping it empty all these years for, d'you think, when so many people have been wanting it, unless it was for a little lady like you to come and live in it? There was Seth the carpenter wanted it for a workshop last year, if you please! And Shaen Pantywenol asked for it for her daughter that was married to Howells of Vaenor, but 'No,' says I; 'I don't want to let it nor to disturb the tenants that are living there now,' " and he laughed till his grey waistcoat shook, "for mind you, Miss *vâch*," he said, "there's a couple of beautiful owls living up there in the point of the gable, and there's swallows and sparrows there somewhere, and jackdaws too!"

"Yes, and bats!" said Barbara. "Well, Phil, don't disturb any of them for me, for I love them, all of them."

"Are you sure now?" said Phil, turning one eye toward her keenly.

"Quite sure."

"Then that settles it all," he said; "for in my deed,

Miss *vâch*, tho' I dare say you'll think me an old fool, 'twas the only thing that was troubling me. You see," he added, taking off his hat and rumpling his hair, as he had a habit of doing when anything moved him, "you see—the owls and the crows and all the other creatures have lived under the thatch together so long, that somehow I couldn't drive them away."

"No, no," said Barbara, "and now you must take me too, under the thatch, and perhaps in time you will be as unwilling to drive me away."

Phil laughed heartily—it seemed a huge joke to him. "And what were you thinking of when I arrived?" asked Barbara at last.

Phil bent his head first on one side, and then on the other, his eyes fixed on the mill all the time.

"Well! 'tis this, you see," he said, "'tis thinking of the past, I am to-day, and picturing this house as it was, before I turned it into a mill—when it was Plas Meivon, where old Madam Hughes lived. Oh! it was a fine place, although the thatch was on it then, you know, the same as now—there was always the thatch on it, from the old time past, when they say a king slept in it, on his way from Milford to the North. I think it was King Henry VII, but I don't know much about history, not I. Well! then, when Madam Hughes died I bought the house and turned the east end of it into a mill, but to-day I can see it as it was, long ago, and, listen you, Miss Barbara, I am going to turn this end back again, to be just like it used to be."

"Oh, Phil, that would be lovely!" said Barbara, gazing up at the gables as intently as the miller did.

"Yes, yes! Look you up there now at that middle point above the mill-door. Well, I remember there

used to be a weather-cock on the top. I can hear his scream now, when the wind turned him round on his pivot. He fell one night in a gale, and I never put him up again, and he's been up on a ledge in the grain loft ever since. He had some gold about him somewhere, and he used to glitter in the sunlight beautiful. Well! I'll put him back in his place."

"Phil!" gasped Barbara. "What else are you going to do?"

"Never mind! Listen now. There is a strong oak door in the other end, and a broad window looking out to the west, but it is all boarded up, as you know—only a little corner left open for Peggy and Essylt to use if they like, in the middle of the house."

"We'll clean up the diamond panes till they are as clear as crystal," said Barbara.

"And we'll have the ceilings whitewashed, and the walls whitewashed too, eh?" said the miller.

"Oh, no! The walls must be coloured yellow, and this panelling of oak must be left as it is. Why, Phil! there is nothing like it in the country!"

"Well, well! Miss *vâch*, I dare say you are right. I won't touch my end of the house, except to put the weather-cock up where it used to be, because I have always lived here. For here, Miss *vâch*, I came when I was married; here my boy was born; and from this door my wife's funeral went, so here I'm going to stay as long as I live."

"Oh, I am glad," said Barbara. "I was afraid you were working up to some great change, Phil."

The old man chuckled with pleasure at her evident relief.

"No, no!" he said, "I am not going away, but listen again to the picture that is quite plain before

my eyes to-day. Over this door there was a big porch, thatched like the roof, and full of swallows' nests—*that* is gone long ago—broken and burnt, I dare say, in the mill-kiln, but there's boards in the shed, and branches in the woods and straw in the barn, and Seth Jenkins, the carpenter, will soon build it for me. Yes, yes! I have done all the thinking, and settled it in my mind—all the outside, you know—as for the inside, well, perhaps a kind little lady who comes down the hill sometimes to see me will help with that."

"Oh, Phil," said Barbara, again clasping her hands, "what delightful work! Why, it will keep me busy for months, for I know what beauties are hidden in the mill-house—to scrape off the whitewash from the old oak panels; to shine up the banisters and the brown beams! Oh, Phil, we'll do it ourselves, with Peggy to help us."

"Yes, and Seth Jenkins," and the miller's face was as full of interest as the girl's.

"Oh, Phil! When can I come?"

"Well, there's lots to be done," said Paul, shaking his head. "'Twill take a month to get it ready."

"But if it's all done before I come, I won't like that at all. I want to work," said Barbara. "Work fills up the time, Phil, and helps you to forget sad things."

"Yes, I know, *merch-i*," said the old man, "so come you when you like, but come in with me now, for I have opened the door where the porch is," and together they entered the old gable.

CHAPTER X

THE sun, like a round ball of fire, was sinking in a grey haze behind the snow-clad bank which lay between the old mill and the west. White and pure and shadowless the landscape lay, hidden under a mantle of snow, which had fallen upon it softly and silently the night before while men slept. A clump of pine trees in the foreground stood black and clearly marked against the sky, while on the left the Meivon woods stretched their brown curves towards the coast. The rooks were circling round the tree-tops, preparatory to settling down for the night, and the wings of the pigeons caught the red glint of the sunlight as they flew home to their cot on the mill-gable.

Barbara was standing at the broad casement window, her back turned to as cosy a scene of homely comfort as could be imagined. The room which she and Phil had renovated, and called out of its sleep of years, had well repaid their labours. The warm yellow colouring of the walls blending harmoniously with the brown oak carving, and the long strip of crimson carpet running the whole length of the polished floor were sufficient in themselves to make a pleasing picture to the eye ; for the rest, the furniture was worn and shabby, but suitable to its surroundings. It was a bright and sunny room in the daylight, but it was at its best in the gloaming, when the glow of the flaming logs made flickering shadows on the walls, and picked out the heavy beams and oak panels with its ruddy light.

Barbara had stood for some time looking out over

the winding road that led round the hill to Maentrevor, where, although the sky was clear, the heavy fall of snow made her doubtful lest Tom should be unable to come as usual to their homely tea-dinner; but here he is in Dr. Rees's gig, the wheels all clogged, and Fanny's coat steaming in the frosty air. She drew back the heavy bolt of the door of the cheerful room which opened out on to the green through the thatched porch.

"Oh, Tom! I'm so glad!" she said. "I was afraid you couldn't come; and I have a brace of partridges for tea that Phil gave us. I said we wouldn't touch them unless he came in and had tea with us, but he declared he wouldn't come within smelling distance of them."

"Good old Phil!" said Tom, divesting himself of his great coat and muffler. "You can't think, Barbara, how picturesque the place looks, as you come in sight of it; the vane is quite a success, too."

"Yes, indeed," said Barbara; "but though it was well greased in its socket, it yet squeals in a high wind."

"Of course it does," said Tom. "I wouldn't give twopence for a weather-cock that *didn't* squeal, and as for this room, it is first-rate."

"Isn't it?" said Barbara, sitting down to the table. "Now come to tea, for here's Peggy with the partridges."

"Hello, Master Tom *bâch!*" said Peggy, as she approached the tea-table; "*ach-y-fi!* you are not going to eat these smelling birds, are you?"

"Wait a bit, and see," said Tom, as he attacked the savoury dish. "And how d'you like this cold weather?" he said, with his mouth full; "regular Christmas, isn't it?"

“Well, we’re getting on pretty well, indeed, and Miss *vâch* is quite contented in this common old place.”

Peggy had never taken kindly to the change from Caefrân to the mill, as it robbed her of the distinction of which she was so proud, namely, her connection with Caefrân, not only with the personal members of the family, but with the traditional importance of the place itself. “Yes, yes,” she said, setting her arms akimbo, preparatory to a chat; “’tis all very well for Miss *vâch* to keep her face as smiling, and as smooth as an angel; but in my deed, I can’t do it in this old tumbledown place, when I bin used to Caefrân all my life.”

“Well, that was tumbledown enough,” said Tom.

“Well, yes, but it was tumble down respectable there. Although Miss *vâch* has been so clever with her curtains and her screens and things, we got the old sacks of corn under the same roof with us, and the old mill growl, growl, growl, all day, *ach-y-fi*, no! ’Tis a quiet, genteel home I am liking, whatever; but, there! so long as you two are content, anything will do for me, but ’tis a rat-eaten old hole,” she added as she left the room.

“Oh! she doesn’t like it at all,” said Barbara; “but, Tom, if only dear mother were here I should be perfectly happy; but there’s always that big ‘if’ which we have to get used to.”

“Yes,” said Tom, and with the new train of thought which Barbara’s words had suggested, the look of care, which he seemed to have cast off on his first arrival, returned, and he grew silent and thoughtful, and she watched him rather uneasily, wishing that she had not spoken so unguardedly.

“Will you help me to put up this holly by and by, Tom?” she asked.

“Well, of course,” he said.

“A bunch over the doors and one over the windows will be enough.”

“And there’s Essylt,” said Peggy, bursting in upon them without ceremony, “as lazy as she can be! I don’t know what’s come to the girl, not I,” and holding out her hands, palms upwards, she crooked her fingers like the claws of a crab. “There, see!” she said, “five fingers on each hand, able to work and not willing—that’s Essylt.”

“Well, she ought to be doing all the work for you now,” said Tom.

“Oh, *per* thing! she’s very good,” said Peggy. “She’s doing all she can for me; but, there! who can keep an old rat-hole tidy?” and Tom, having learnt wisdom from experience, let the matter drop.

“Splendid partridges!” he said, as he crunched a bone between his teeth. “I wonder who shot them?”

“Oh, well! I’ve learnt not to ask that kind of question,” said Barbara.

“By the by,” said Tom, “what d’you think? Mr. Preece’s niece is coming to stay with him. D’you remember her?—that pretty girl who came to see us last year—Mabel Hume?”

“Of course I do. I am so glad,” said Barbara. “’Twill make a change for you. You must bring her up here some day, Tom, and I am sure that she would like to see the old mill.”

“Oh! I am not likely to see her,” said Tom moodily; “besides, I don’t suppose she’d care to come up here.”

“Why not, dear?” said Barbara. “Indeed, you

mustn't look on the dark side of everything, Tom. You are very much changed; you make me, very unhappy sometimes. You must shake off this gloom, or it will grow upon you. Think, what would dear mother tell you to do?"

"Changed!" said Tom, pushing his plate away, and rising from the table; "yes, I know I'm changed—a dark cloud seems hanging over me; I can't shake it off. How you can go about with a calm, serene brow, I can't imagine."

"Why not, Tom? Let us face it out," said Barbara, following him, and linking her arm in his.

"I feel that I dare not look into the past," said Tom. "You know what I mean, Barbara?"

"Yes! let us look straight at the face of the phantom that frightens you. I will look back with you, and with every second of that terrible hour clearly pictured before me, I will tell you that I regret nothing of what I did then; but, on the contrary, I am thankful to remember I opened the door for dear mother's escape from pain. Tom, I did nothing wrong; why do you grieve about it?"

"Child, you don't realise what you have done. Don't you see that you have rendered yourself answerable to justice by your action? You have broken the laws of God and man. I am always in dread lest it should be found out. I picture you taken away, imprisoned, tried, and perhaps——" and here he buried his face in his hands, "and here you are as calm and happy as you were when we roamed the old Caefrân garden together. One thing only I am thankful to remember—no one knows of it but ourselves."

"No, no one, so do set your mind at rest, Tom ;

not that I should care if the whole world knew. Would you have wished me to let dear mother go on suffering ?”

“That is nonsense,” said Tom irritably. “Shall I never make you understand what you have done ? You would care if you found yourself charged with murder.”

“Tom !” exclaimed Barbara, with a shocked face, “what a dreadful idea, and what nonsense !”

“Yes,” said Tom. “I don’t want to frighten you, Barbara ; and, for heaven’s sake, keep your pure, placid mind as long as you can ; but listen to me, there’s another point of view from which I look at it. You’ve ruined your matrimonial prospects ; no man would marry you with such a blot on your name.”

“Matrimonial prospects !” exclaimed the girl, with a merry, silvery laugh. “What grand words, Tom, and what a ridiculous idea !” and she laughed again.

“Well, that difficulty can easily be disposed of,” she said. “I don’t want to marry anybody, and nobody wants to marry me, so that’s all right ; you and I together, Tom, that will quite satisfy me ; and if some day you should marry somebody, she’ll have to love me too, won’t she ?”

The brother and sister had been walking up and down the room, linked arm in arm, but now they stopped and drew near the wide open hearth, on which a fire of logs was burning ; above the ruddy blaze rose the tall mantelpiece of carved oak, which Phil and Barbara had rescued from a shroud of whitewash.

“Such a blaze !” she said, putting out the lamp. “You can smoke in the firelight, Tom, and I can knit. I love the firelight, and we can talk better too.”

Tom lit his pipe, and a silence fell upon them, the silence in which the communing of real friends is more perfect than that of the most eloquent words.

“Yes, as you say, dear,” he said at last, and evidently following his original train of thought, “you will have to put away from you the idea of marriage, and, by Jove, Barbara, some man somewhere will lose the best wife that ever lived.”

Barbara rose to make a curtsey, and turned to a corner of the old room where the piano from Caefrân stood in the flickering shadows. They had not yet sufficiently recovered from their sorrows to sing together as they had done in happier days ; but the music which flowed from her fingers was soft and soothing. The lines disappeared from Tom’s face, and as the evening wore on he lost the strained look of worry, and became more like himself—the light-hearted and merry Tom Owen.

Outside, the night was clear and starry, a soft effulgence in the east heralding the rising moon, which would soon illumine the snowy scene. Later on a knock at the door announced Phil, who seldom let a day pass without a kindly inquiry. “For, in my deed,” he said, as he shook the snow from his shoes under the porch, “’tis better than fifty pounds to me to have you living here so near me. I like to think of it when I can’t sleep in the night because the mill is silent ; then ’tis pleasant to me to remember that little miss is under the thatch with me, and the owls in the gable too.”

“And the bats,” said Barbara, laughing ; “there’s a colony of them up there somewhere, for I have seen them flying out in the summer evenings when I have been passing this way.”

“Well, *per* things, they’re not hurting anyone, so let them be,” said Phil.

“Yes, let them be, indeed; I’ll be good friends with them all.”

“Heard from Michael lately?” asked Tom, when the old man had seated himself on the edge of a chair which Barbara brought him.

“Heard from Maychael? Yes, oh, yes!”

“When’s he coming home?” said Tom.

“I don’t know,” said Phil, and he said no more, which caused Tom to look at him in surprise, for, generally speaking, his son Michael was a subject upon which he loved to dilate—his tricks when a boy, his pranks when a youth, his success as a student—but to-night he was silent, and could not be induced to smoke or to chat.

“Poor old fellow!” said Tom, when he had gone; “there’s something up there, Barbara; evidently he’s not coming home.”

“I suppose not,” and those few quiet words veiled a disappointment which she would have been unwilling to confess even to herself. Almost unconsciously she had pictured that open manly countenance, those clear blue eyes; had heard the firm step, the resonant voice, the words of approbation of her work and Phil’s, when he should enter one evening in the glow of the firelight, and now the knowledge that she must miss all this was hidden behind those simple words, “I suppose not.”

At last the lights were out, the doors were bolted, and the house was left to the silence and darkness of the December night. In the solitude of her own room, when she laid her head on her pillow that night, Barbara unwillingly realised the truth that she had

missed Michael Lloyd's presence out of her life ever since he had said to her in the Caefrân drive, "Do you know how hard it is for me to leave you?" And now the knowledge that he would not return home for Christmas was a disappointment to her.

She thought over Tom's strange fancies, too, and wondered whether there was any real foundation for them, and then his words, "No man would marry you," returned to her mind with a little stab of pain. No! no man would marry her, perhaps, if he knew, and she could never marry any man without telling him; so the only way to evade this difficulty was never to be married at all. Well, nobody wanted to marry her, and she did not want to marry anyone, but she would have liked to have been friends with Michael Lloyd. Yes, how different everything would be if Michael Lloyd and she were friends—only friends; and when she had reached this point she awoke suddenly from her dreams, for surely she heard a sound somewhere in the old empty house, a stealthy footstep, a gliding movement as though someone were passing slowly through the long passage that ran the whole length of the house. She listened eagerly, the blood surging in her veins, her heart throbbing in her ears. Yes, for certain that cautious footfall was crossing the landing, where the bare oak stairs descended to a side door that opened out into the yard and garden.

This was not the first time that she had been startled in the dead of night by these mysterious sounds, a creeping footstep, a trailing garment, a creaking stair, and then a silence. She had kept these fancies to herself, but to-night her nerves were shaken, she feared for Tom. What if it should be he

walking in his sleep? He looked anxious and worried enough for such a climax; and without waiting to consider the matter she rose, and throwing a shawl over her shoulders, made her way, by the faint light of the moon, to the door, and raising the latch—for they were all thumb latches in the mill—she passed out on to the landing, and tried to pierce the gloom of the passage. It was empty, but surely she had seen a dark figure disappear into one of the empty rooms, which had been requisitioned for storing some of the old furniture which Phil had bought long ago with the house? She listened again for the sound that had disturbed her, but all was still as death.

When she reached the lumber-room her heart beat loudly with suspense and excitement, for the door was open, and she felt certain that when she had passed it half an hour earlier it had been closed; and as she entered, she saw, by the faint moonlight, a figure standing motionless at the further end of the room.

“Who is that?” she asked in a firm voice, her courage returning, as she saw it was a woman, and not Tom, as she had feared. Instead of flying from her, the grey figure turned, and approached her rapidly, coming quite close to her with an almost threatening swiftness. Startled, she stood perfectly still, and repeated her question, “Who is it?” when, to her astonishment, the woman lowered the grey garment which had covered her head and shoulders and Essylt’s face appeared in the gloom, the faint light of the moon giving her always colourless features a ghastly pallor; the heavy lids were wide open now, and it seemed to Barbara that those grey-green eyes shone in the darkness with a weird light. “Essylt!” she exclaimed.

“Barbara Owen!” was the girl’s answer; “yes, it is I. What do you want with me?”

“What do you want creeping about the house in the dead of night, Essylt?”

“What is that to you?” said the girl, bringing her face so close to Barbara’s and with such a menacing look in her eyes that the latter took a step backwards in affright; she was trembling with the cold and with the nervous tension of the encounter.

“How dare you!” said Essylt, following her, and Barbara thought that even in that faint light she could see the red of her lips. “How dare you pry upon me, Barbara Owen? This is not Caefrân; you have no right to order me here. I am my own mistress, and I can wear a blue, or a red, or a yellow necklace, as I please. D’you remember that?”

“Of course,” said Barbara; “I don’t care what sort of a necklace you wear; only I don’t want to be frightened at night by stealthy footsteps creeping about the house. Why don’t you finish your work in the daylight, and lie still at night?”

“And why don’t you lie still at night?” said Essylt, in a voice that trembled with passion. “What are you crawling about after me for?”

“I didn’t know it was *you*, although I might have guessed, for I never liked your mysterious ways, Essylt. I could not sleep to-night, and that is how I came to hear your footsteps. You forget yourself strangely to speak to me in that insolent tone. I am sure that Phil would not approve of your roaming about the house like this in the dead of night, when everybody else is in bed.”

“Go back to bed yourself, then,” said Essylt. “Maybe you’ll sleep sounder when I have told you a

few things that you ought to know. To begin with, then, I don't care a pin for you or Phil. Jane Tyissa is his servant now, and that's all right; I am not going to do anything more for him. You have all trodden upon me, and trampled on me long enough. Look at the difference between us, only *why*, I'd like to know. You, pampered and spoilt all your life, and I working hard, shabby, and poor, without schooling. But listen you, Barbara Owen, though no one has taken the trouble to teach me, there are some things which I *do* know, and some you shall know to-night. First, I know of a girl who pretended to nurse her mother tenderly, but who grew tired of her complaining, and could not wait for death to come, but gave her a dose to put an end to her. Do you know that girl, eh?" and as she spoke, her voice grew hoarse with intense passion. Shocked and frightened, Barbara had shrunk still further away from her, but again Essylt followed her, and in a strange, vindictive whisper repeated, "Do you know her?"

Regaining her usual courage, and in a clear, firm voice, Barbara said, "No, I don't know such a dreadful girl."

"Dear *anwol*! you don't, indeed. Well, then, mark you, I *do*; and listen again. I know a girl who has given her heart away before she was asked; perhaps you don't know *her*, Barbara Owen, but I do, and I will tell you one or two more things that perhaps it will be better for you to know. First, the man to whom that girl has given her heart was bound long ago to me, and when he comes home in the spring it will be to marry *me*—Essylt Lewis, and not you, Barbara Owen; and now, perhaps, you will sleep

better for what I have told you, and not roam about to pry after me."

There was a vindictive tone in her voice that astonished Barbara, accustomed as she had been to think of Essylt only as a stolid, unintelligent peasant girl with no great depth of character. No wonder, therefore, that she stood aghast at this revelation of the girl's bitter antagonism.

Outraged, insulted, perishing with cold, she could only answer in a voice that trembled as much as Essylt's did: "You dreadful girl! Why are you filled with such revengeful feelings against me?" But she was not sure that Essylt had even heard her, for with the last words of her invective she had drawn her grey shawl over her head again, and had passed out of the room. Barbara heard the door close behind her, and knew that her tormentor had gone. But though chilled to the bone, her teeth chattering with the cold, she was still unable to follow at once into the passage; for now a real physical fear held her in its grip—fear of the girl who had so often shared her simple home-life with her, but who now seemed changed into a fury, whose eyes gleamed with hatred, and whose whispered words were barbed with cruel suggestion; and dreading to meet her again on the landing, she stood a few moments in the bitter cold.

Barbara heard the north wind driving by the old gable, the hail that beat in gusts against the pane, and in the ivy that clumped its thatch, heard the owl's lonely plaint of the wintry storm, before she finally found courage to seek the shelter of her own room. Oh! for a quiet corner where she could rest her aching head and hide her face, for Essylt's words had not

only wounded her, but had humiliated her deeply. With all her good qualities, her courage, her unselfishness, her guileless simplicity of character, she had a strong vein of pride in her nature, and to feel the inner secrets of her heart laid bare was a keen trial to her, and as she sank back on her bed, Barbara, the brave and practical, felt strangely crushed and beaten. Was it possible, then, that the love she had hidden so carefully had been discovered by Essylt? And could it be that she, Barbara Owen, felt sore and miserable because a man who was almost a stranger to her was attracted by the peasant girl, who was in a manner her servant, and evidently her enemy? And what did she care? Or if she did, who would dare to suspect it? She saw through the latticed window the clouds which swept over the face of the moon; she heard the shrill squeal of the weather-cock as it veered about in the wind, and she pictured the snow-white world lying all around her; and a sense of strange desolation swept over her spirit—a mood that was so unusual to her, and so foreign to her nature, that she cowered under its influence as she had never done before. But it was not long before the courage and nerve which were never very far from her heart returned, and in her clear, level head, the mists seemed to lift, and she thought within herself, “If I did wrong about dear mother’s death, *she* knows it was my deep love for her which enabled me to do it, and God will forgive me if I made a mistake. I am not afraid, and then—that dreadful girl could never have seen any signs that I—that I—liked Michael Lloyd; it is only her fancy, and her strong suspicions, so I can go on hiding it. There are two things disposed of; but—but—it is true that I love him, yes, indeed,

it is true, true, true, but this, again, I can hide, oh, yes! I can hide it all, and, as Tom said, I must never think of marrying, so what does it matter?" And with these words, "what does it matter?" on her lips, she fell asleep. And while the strong clouds chased each other across the sky, and the white owls still "tuh-hooed," from the ivy in the gable, she slept on peacefully.

And where was Essylt? Frozen and chilled as Barbara had been, and thwarted in her intention of leaving the house unseen, she was now bending over the fire in the old mill kitchen; she held her fingers to the glow; broke up the culm fire that never goes out, but is always ready day or night to warm and cheer with its steady light, and hanging the kettle on the chain, made herself a cup of tea, and drawing the rush-stool to the ingle nook she sat there apparently absorbed in busy thought, while she drank the hot and comforting draught.

The meeting with Barbara in the lumber-room seemed to have excited her strangely, for when she had finished her solitary meal she rose to pace up and down the dark kitchen in the red firelight. Her hands were clenched and crossed upon her bosom in the attitude of a prayerful saint, but the words that dropped from her lips sometimes showed they were not prayers which she was muttering; once or twice she moaned as if in pain, and at last turned towards the staircase and dragged her slow steps wearily up to her own room, where, although she lay down in her bed, as Barbara had done, sleep refused to come at her call, and although she watched the black clouds hurrying by, as Barbara had done, they did not suggest thoughts of peace or comfort to her restless heart.

CHAPTER XI

CHRISTMAS had passed, and the new year had come in with a general dispersal of clouds, both real and figurative. Tom seemed decidedly brighter since the advent of Mr. Preece's niece, whose presence in the house seemed to reach him even through the glass door and the long passage which separated the office from the dwelling-house.

Through this glass door he had seen Mr. Preece pass in and out many times in the day for six years without being sufficiently interested to notice that the blue silk with which it was curtained at the back was torn and gaping. Now that tear in the curtain claimed his frequent attention, for through it he could see through the dark passage into a bright little greenhouse, where naturally the flowers required attention, and sometimes, by a rare chance, a little white figure might be seen bending over them, glimpses of which made it difficult for Tom to concentrate his thoughts upon such mundane affairs as legal documents. Nevertheless, the wrinkle between his eyes became less pronounced, his round face grew less serious, and his voice regained a good deal of its old cheery ring.

Time had in a great measure softened the memory of his mother's death, and what he called Barbara's false step was not so continually present to his mind—indeed, he might be said to have forgotten it entirely, except when a chance word recalled it to his memory, and at such times he would fall into a fit of brooding thought, which was quickly dispelled, however, by a chance meeting with the "Angel of the

House," or even a glance at her. He had ceased to frighten himself and Barbara with prognostications of evil, although deep down within his heart there still lurked a feeling of guilt.

To the old mill the new year had not brought with it so much cheer and brightness. The snow had long ago melted away, the daffodils were beginning to peep shyly from their sheathing blades, the clouds broke up and showed the blue sky between their silver edges, and yet the spring held back, and only sprinkled here and there a primrose, here and there a showery gleam, and this chill and variable weather was typical of the state of Barbara's feelings. The cold, dark winter was over, and with the bounding hopes and instincts of youth coursing in her veins she longed for the spring, the season of sunshine and flowers, though over her heart a shadow of disquiet had fallen.

Tom's oft-repeated forebodings had not been without their effect, and though she was perfectly free from that cruellest scourge of the spirit, an uneasy conscience, she had gradually opened her eyes to the fact that she had committed a sin against the laws of human society that would mark her name with an ineradicable stain were the manner of her mother's death laid bare to the eyes of the world—"the cruel hard world," she thought, "which would never understand how I loved her," and she realised with all the clear insight, which was a special trait of her character, that should the opportunity of marriage—the crowning blessing of a woman's life—ever be hers, she must turn from it, must put it away from her firmly. She must live her life alone, for no man she knew, not one of God's creation, would overlook what he as well as Tom would call "her false step"; or was there one

anywhere who would have understood her, would have looked upon her action in the light of reason and love? Perhaps there *had* been one, but he had gone out of her life ; Michael Lloyd was dead to her, he had fallen from the pedestal upon which she had unconsciously placed him, had preferred the love of an ignorant and unrefined peasant girl to hers.

It was a scathing thought to one of such a proud nature as Barbara's, and she had set herself to crush the love that had awakened in her heart even before she was aware of it. "For shame, Barbara!" she cried in the solitude of her own room, alone in the dark night, where none could hear her, save the ear that hears the cry of the sorrowful, and marks the sparrow's fall. "How could I fall so low? Why should I ever have thought he cared for me? Just a flower given to me in the orchard!—just a hand-press!—just the words, 'I would like you to know!' And I, Barbara Owen, have laid myself open to this mortifying sorrow," and she strove, and not unsuccessfully, to overcome her interest in the peasant-doctor. She had banished him from her heart, so she thought, and was treading her folly under foot as she followed the path of her simple life.

There was plenty of hard work to keep her thoughts from brooding regrets, for every corner of the mill gable must be cleaned and swept; the old oak panels must be rubbed up, even the quaint carved beam-ends must be polished, so that the evening often found her healthily tired, and ready to seek her rest in the low-raftered room, above which the owls hooted in the gable point.

All her life she had been accustomed to fall asleep almost as soon as she had laid her head on her pillow,

but of late she had lain awake, sometimes for hours, always with the same thought running through her brain—"It is certain that I must never marry, and therefore it is nothing to me that Michael Lloyd prefers Essylt." A hundred times she went over the same subject in her mind, and always it seemed plain and clear that Fate had arranged affairs in a most satisfactory manner, and she deceived herself with the thought that Michael Lloyd's conduct had made it perfectly easy for her to look upon his action with indifference.

Essylt she seldom saw, for the girl seemed strangely reserved and almost morose, rarely leaving her own cottage except to roam alone through the woods around Llyn Dystaw, and Barbara instinctively avoided any chance meeting with her. Phil she had not seen for several days, which was unusual, for a strange desire for his company had grown upon her of late; there was some unspoken sympathy between them which made Barbara's frequent calls upon the old man's time a delight to him, and a great pleasure to them both. But on this first bright day of March, when the daffodils were out in clumps on the green, and the birds declared from the branches that spring had really come, and the earth was full of rejoicing, she heard the sound of grinding from the mill, and soon after breakfast she passed round to the wide-open door, and entering, found Phil sitting on the steps leading to the grain-loft, where Michael had sat to make his confession. He was looking grave and thoughtful, a hand on each fat knee; much of his florid colour had faded from his face, and there was a dull red light in his eyes as if kindled by a smouldering fire.

"Hallo, Miss *vâch*," he said, as Barbara entered.

“In my deed, there’s glad I am to see you; there’s not a single thing in this old world but what chops and changes like that weather-cock on the gable except you, *merch-i*; your little face is always the same, and your voice is always soothing to my ears. Come, now! here’s some beautiful fresh oatmeal for you just ground; taste it, smell it. That quart is for you, over there on the window. There’ll be *cawl llaeth* for supper to-night, be bound; Peggy knows how to make it,” and he laughed with a little of his former joviality.

“Indeed, there’s kind you are, Phil,” said Barbara; “but, you naughty man, d’you know what day it is? ’Tis the first of March, and you haven’t got a leek in your buttonhole.”

“Well, in my deed, no more I haven’t; I forgot all about it.”

“Why, in London there are more leeks worn to-day than in the country; that’s a shame, isn’t it?”

“Well, we’ve got nothing to remind us of it here, you see,” said Phil gloomily, looking round the mill floor, the wheels, the kiln, as if he expected a reminder from some of them. While he spoke a bit of bright colouring crossed their line of vision through the mill door—Essylt’s red petticoat, and the green and white of a bunch of leeks, which she was carrying in for the *cawl*, not for the glorification of St. David. Her thick clumps of colourless hair, her red lips, her weird beauty, seemed to strike the old man with a cruel sharpness, and he turned his eyes upon the girl with a sudden start. “The devil take her!” he exclaimed, and Barbara opened her eyes at the impetuous tone. She shrank a little too, as the bright picture caught her eye.

"She's only passing to her own home," she said in a deprecating tone of voice.

"Let her pass then," said Phil angrily; "let her pass out of my sight, and out of my life, for I tell you she has brought bitterness and gall to me," and he brought his fist down heavily upon his knee. "Listen you to me, Miss *vâch*," he said, with the fiery gleam in his eyes that altered their expression so much; "listen you to me, and you will understand why she has blasted my life." His voice grew hoarse, and Barbara stood amazed at the change in the old man's face. "My son," he said, "my son Michael! He's nothing to you, but he was everything to me; he *was*, mind you, but he's not *now*, oh, no! Michael Lloyd is no more to me now than any farm lad who brings the corn to be ground."

The rumbling and clapping of the mill filled the air, but Barbara was getting used to it, and Phil heard it not, so he continued undisturbed:

"Perhaps you did not know, *merch-i*, that he was as precious as my two eyes to me."

"Yes," nodded Barbara; "I knew, Phil, as precious as my mother was to me."

"That's it, that's it, but listen you, then. 'After all my love and care for him, after all the money I have spent on him, after all the money that I, and my father before me, and his two uncles, for the matter of that, have toiled to save for him, what d'you think, *merch-i*? he's going to marry Essylt—that common, lazy huzzy!"

It was true, then, and the blood surged up into Barbara's face; but she kept her voice well under control, as she answered quietly. "Is that so, indeed, Phil?"

"Yes," said the old man, "there's gratitude for

you; *there's* a good son coming home from London to comfort his father's last years! I tell you he's coming home in the spring to marry that slut, begging your pardon, Miss *vâch*," he added, taking out his red pocket-handkerchief and drying his heated forehead; "to marry her, mind you, that *croten*, only fit to clean his shoes; but where he's going to take her to live I don't know, not *here*, that's all I can tell you. No, no, Maychael Lloyd shall never more come under this roof."

"But if he loves her?" said Barbara faintly; she scarcely knew her own voice, it was so weak and thin.

"Love her?" said Phil. "Love her, indeed! What do they know about love in these days? *That* was love long ago when I stole my wife away on her wedding-day. 'Twas to Morris Llwyngerwn she was going to be married, but she hated him, and she loved me, and on the day of her wedding—'twas a horse-wedding, you see, and then 'twas the fashion for one of the company to ride away with the bride, and for all the rest to ride after them, for 'twas only a joke, and the bridegroom was always allowed to catch her at last; but 'twas no joke between Nance and me, and Morris Llwyngerwn never caught his bride, for she rode away with me, and we were married at the registrar's office in Caermadoc, and Nance and I led a happy life together in the old mill, until the Lord took her from me, and left me and my little lad to live on together as best we could."

The expression of the old man's face had changed while he had recounted the story, which was well known through the country-side; the sullen angry look had disappeared from his eyes, his florid face had recovered some of its good-humoured expression, and his

firm mouth with its square jaw, which reminded Barbara so much of his son, had fallen into a tender smile as he recalled the memories of long ago, but suddenly the light died out of his face, the angry look returned to his eyes. "Love, indeed!" he said scornfully. "Be bound that's not *your* idea of love, dear heart. No, no, don't tell me; you would know what real love meant."

"But why, then, is he marrying her?" said Barbara. "Surely, Phil *bâch*, he must love her."

"No," thundered the old man as he brought his fist down again on the stair beside him; "if it was *that*, look you, I believe I could find it in my heart to forgive him; but 'tis not that, Miss Barbara. Listen you now while I tell you what a fool my son Maychael Lloyd is, and you will laugh when you hear it, for you must laugh or cry at such folly. Well, then, eight years ago, when he was but a laddy of twenty, he deceived his old father, and went a-courting that lazy huzzy with the hair like tow, and the lips like red sealing-wax, and the white-lidded eyes like the crocodiles. She was but sixteen, and he asked her to marry him, and no need to say, she said 'yes,' and he promised—the fool!—to come back and marry her some day, and she waited, and waited, and now the time has come when he must fulfil his promise, if you please," and he laughed aloud, a grating laugh, but a laugh that had no mirth in it, and, rising excitedly from the grain-loft stairs, and coming up close to Barbara, he laid the case before her, emphasising his points with the hard finger of one hand on the palm of the other. "Now just you think of it, *merch-i*, here's Maychael my son makes a foolish promise—worse than foolish, a wicked promise, because he knew very well 'twould

be hateful to his old father if he knew of his conduct. Well, now, when years have passed, and Dr. Maychael Lloyd is one of the cleverest men in all the London hospitals, when he writes so many letters at the end of his name, and when he is consulted by the biggest doctors sometimes, when his father has laid down his heart for him to walk over; now, at such a time, he's going to throw all his good name away by marrying a common country girl, without learning, without money, without anything but a shock of tow on her head, and a face that has something too strange in it even to look pretty—and just because he promised eight years ago to do this wicked thing. Now was there ever such a fool? Come, dear heart, speak you out your mind, and although once I wouldn't hear a word against my boy, now I won't be angry if you call him a d—— fool."

"Oh, Phil!" said Barbara, "but I couldn't call him *that*—I couldn't say such a word; indeed, I never heard you using such language before."

"No, no, Miss *vâch*, in my deed I don't know what I am saying, and before you too, *ach-y-fi!*"

Barbara looked out through the mill door, where the spring sunshine was picking out the celandines and daisies on the green which Essylt had just crossed; she looked back into Phil's face, where she saw none of the peace and content that it had worn in the past; she hated to add to the old man's annoyance, she hated to speak the words that came up from a sore heart, and her eyes drooped to the mealy floor where she was marking little crosses with the points of her shoes. "But, Phil," she said, in a low voice, "I cannot blame him—a promise is binding upon an honourable man; it was wrong to promise, perhaps, but having done so,

I can't imagine Dr. Michael Lloyd doing anything else but keep his word."

Phil's jaw fell, his face grew purple with resentment, and he fixed his eyes reproachfully upon her.

"Not blame him?"

"No," said Barbara; "I would despise him if he did not keep his word."

Phil gasped, and sat down on the steps again to recover himself. "Not blame him!" he repeated. "You, Miss Barbara—well, on my soul! I see now that I am a dull, blind, stupid old fool, mistaken in everything, deceived on all sides. I thought, I thought that you—well, never mind what I thought. I have awoke from my dreams, and my thoughts—well, well!" and, leaning his elbow on his knee, he drew his red handkerchief over his face as if to hide the working of his features.

It was some time before Barbara ventured to speak.

"Phil," she said at last, touching his big rough hand, "I am so sorry," but he flung her hand away from him and rose to his feet, drawing himself up to his full height, and digging his hands into his coat pockets, he stood up before her—the image of sturdy defiance. "I want no man's pity, and no woman's either; we've had enough of such nonsense. Let the past alone—'tis the first of March to-day, and there's a big *Cynes* coming in from Tyncoed. I must be busy. Good-bye, Miss *vâch*. Take your oatmeal with you, and tell Peggy to make it nice for you."

"Good-bye, Phil," said Barbara, lingering a moment at the doorway, and looking back from the sunshine into the old shadowy mill.

Phil waved his hand and turned to the kiln, where

the oats were fully roasted and ready to be run into the trough below.

She turned towards her own door in the west gable so absorbed in her thoughts that she was unaware of a country gig passing along the road that crossed the green. It stopped opposite the mill, one of its two occupants alighting, and turning towards the wide-open door, where the sound of the grinding and the rushing of water met one like a wall of solid sound; a shadow fell on the floor, and Phil, turning from his work to look for the cause, saw at the doorway a tall, broad-shouldered figure, whose every curve and line was familiar to him.

It was Michael Lloyd entering with his hands to his ears in a half-playful remonstrance. "Hallo, father!" he said, dropping his hands. "How are you? Didn't I tell you that nothing should ever come between you and me? That's one way of looking at things, you see," he said, sitting down on a bench which was generously adorned with his own initials, accompanied by successive dates from the years of his boyhood upwards; but Phil went steadily on with his work, letting the hot oats run through the wooden funnel into the big mill measures.

"Stop the mill a moment, father," said the newcomer, and Phil, acquiescing silently, put the big pin into the notch that stopped the grinding, and a dead silence followed, broken only by the "chicking" of the hens, and the "cheeping" of the sparrows outside. "I have been three days at Maentrevor," said Michael, "and I couldn't go back to London without knowing how you are. Come, you will give me a word of greeting, father; it cannot alter things, you see, whether you do or not."

“Hast come home to marry that robber’s daughter, Maychael Lloyd?”

“No,” said the young man; “that will be next month, father. I came home to see you now.” But before he had ceased speaking Phil had slipped the pin out of its socket; the clumsy old mill went thundering on, and further speech was impossible. He turned his stolid face to his work, and Michael sat dangling his hat between his knees. Once only did he attempt to shake the old man’s stolid obstinacy. “Father,” he said; but Phil dropped a sack with a thud heavy, and paid no more attention to his son’s words than he did to the chickens which pecked in the doorway.

Michael sighed, and sat silent for a few moments, looking round. Every wheel, every beam, every chain, seemed familiar to him, seemed a part of his very being, and the strong man owned to himself that such material things as these could lay a spell upon a spirit, for they reached back to the time when youth and health, and perhaps happiness, were his heritage, and as he rose to his feet and turned slowly towards the wide-open door, he looked again towards Phil; but neither in his face nor in his figure could he see the least sign of relenting. “Good-bye, father,” he shouted, and took a few steps in advance with outstretched hands; but the miller made as if he had not heard him, and turning his back, walked away into the shadowy background.

Disappointed and deeply wounded, Michael went out, and turning his steps further up the green, reached Peggy’s door, which stood wide open to the sunshine, and with the usual “Hallo, anybody at home?” he entered, to find the mistress of the house busily kneading a trough of dough.

“Well in my deed!” she exclaimed, holding up two floury hands. “Maychael Lloyd! Iss it you then, ser?”

“Sir, Peggy? Don’t be ridiculous, woman. Since when have I been ‘sir’ to you?”

“Sit down, then, *machgen-i*,” she said with a nod of her head towards a round-backed chair, which stood by the hearth. “Ser to me! Well, you ought to have been that long ago, only my old tongue is stiff to turn into new ways, and ’tis Maychael you have been to me since the first day I came here to live, when mestress, *pw*r thing, was first married. Dear, dear! there’s quick, time is passing!” and she covered up the dough and washed her arms before seating herself opposite Michael on the three-legged stool. “Yes, as I was saying,” she continued, unceremoniously taking off her apron and putting on a clean one, “’tis Michael you have been to me always, my lad, until the day before yesterday, when I was in Maentrevor, and saw the grand carriage from Havod stopping to speak to you, and there’s saluting you the colonel was, and the ladies full of smiles and blushes, in my deed; there’s proud I was to see it!”

“Nonsense, Peggy,” said Michael; but he blushed a deep red, for the thought of the incident reminded him unpleasantly of the step he was about to take.

“Where’s that *crotten* Essylt now?” said Peggy. “She ought to be here to get you a glass of ginger-beer, *machgen-i*, or would you like a basin of *cawl*? ’Tis just ready, and I’m not ashamed of my *cawl* anywhere, though March is a bad time of the year for it.”

“Not to-day, thank you, Peggy,” said Michael,

“though I know what good *cawl* you make. But where is Essylt?”

“Oh, the Lord knows!” said Peggy. “’Tis very little of her company I’m getting, for between you and me, *machgen-i*, she’s grown very lazy of late; she used to mix the dough always, but never now, and in my deed she was doing it so badly that I would rather knead it myself. Well, then, she used to knit a bit, sitting here by the fire, but never now, oh, dear, no, hands on her lap, face as serious as a judge, eyes fixed on the fire, doing nothing; that’s Essylt, never speaking to me, only sighing as if the cow was dead.”

“What is she grieving about?” said Michael, a strong pity kindling within him at the thought that perhaps the long waiting was telling upon the spirits of the girl, and, nerving himself for the ordeal, he plunged into his subject. “Well, ’tis about Essylt I came to speak to you, Peggy. I may as well tell you in a few words that she and I have agreed to be married next month, and I have come in this morning to ask your consent.”

The effect of his words was startling, for Peggy jumped to her feet with the agility of a girl and stared at Michael silently, while she reached from the dresser shelf close at hand three blue-rimmed basins which stood there, one within the other, and while she reached them let us explain that in Wales, and amongst her class, there exists a traditional manner of receiving an announcement of the matrimonial intentions of any member of the family; even where the marriage may be one which is satisfactory from every point of view, it is incumbent upon the female heads of the two families to receive the first intimation of it with every appearance of disapprobation—more than that, of vio-

lent antagonism. In this case Michael's words seemed to have roused a host of sleeping passions in Peggy's heart, for she flung one basin on the hearth, breaking it into a hundred pieces, and drawing a step nearer to Michael, threw the second defiantly at his feet, and the third, as if losing all control of her feelings, she hurled across the room, crashing it against the further wall, until the floor was littered with broken crockery, and Michael, looking in astonishment at the excited woman, burst out laughing.

"Peggy, woman! What is the matter with thee?" he asked; but Peggy's temper was not to be so easily subdued. She was not sorry to have the opportunity of giving vent to her feelings, which had been somewhat ruffled that morning by an altercation with Essylt. She was always able to weep copiously at funerals, and to rejoice hilariously at weddings, so that her presence was much sought after at both of these functions, and to-day she saw no reason why she should control the expression of her outraged sense of what was fitting.

"What is the matter with me!" she exclaimed in strident tones, which might have been heard across the green, had there been anyone to listen. "Enough is the matter with me. I, an innocent little country woman standing here in my cottage, mixing my dough, and not thinking about anything but the *cawel* bubbling on the fire, and the chickens waiting to be fed, and in come *you*, Maychael Lloyd, a man who has raised himself to be the equal of big London doctors, and of ladies and qualities, driving in carriages, and Colonel Lloyd shaking hands with you as if you were the King, and here you are coming bouncing in upon me suddenly, and saying, 'Peggy Lewis, I want thy leave to marry thy niece Essylt.' Why, she's not suiting thee,

man; she's used to make a curtesy to the gentries, and not to shake hands with them, as you are doing; she has not had any schooling, and she's quite content with me here in the mill cottage. Well, indeed—that's a story, because she's very discontented; but," she interpolated, "she's not dreaming of such a thing as to marry a man so much above her, and here you are coming to upset everything, to break your old father's heart, and to make him angry with me, Peggy Lewis, that have been friends with him so many years—oh, oh!" and, breaking down entirely, she sobbed and cried, with something between a wail and a howl, until only the roaring of the mill prevented Phil's hearing her.

"Hush! hush! woman! Dost want the whole of Cwm Meivon at the door?" said Michael.

"Cwm Meivon!" screamed Peggy. "What do I care for Cwm Meivon; no, nor Maentrevor either. 'Tis only people who do wrong that are afraid of their neighbours. 'Tis you, Maychael Lloyd, are afraid of them, for you know there isn't a man amongst them but would cry 'shame' upon you disturbing a happy home like this. *Caton Pawb!* is there any sense in such a thing? Everybody would be pointing at me and saying, 'There's the woman whose niece married Dr. Maychael Lloyd—she's only fit to clean his house!' and with another noisy burst of sobbing she sat down on the three-legged stool with her elbows on her knees, and, burying her face in her hands, cried, "Oh, *pw'r* Phil *bâch*, who brought up his son like the apple of his eye, and spent all his money in learning him, and was thinking, of course, he would marry a lady like himself, and now, here's the boy turning round and marrying Essylt of the mill cottage!"

"*Tchwt, tchwt*, Peggy!" said Michael, rising to

his feet. "I didn't expect to raise such a storm about my ears. I thought it was right to tell thee, as I see Essylt has never done so."

"Essylt tell me such a thing? No, she wouldn't dare to tell me, the sly huzzy; but I'll tell *her*, when she comes in, what I think of her, and, mark you, Michael Lloyd, I'll never come to your wedding; no, I'll stop at home to comfort poor Phil, because I know this will break his heart," and again she fell to crying aloud, until a farm lad, who was passing on the road, crossed the green and looked in at the open door and asked, with round eyes, "What is the matter?"

"What is the matter?" said Peggy, a little more quietly. "'Tis bad news I've had by the post, Ifan *bâch*, and that's the matter. 'Tis my husband's sister had a daughter, and she's dead quite sudden, and that's enough, Ifan Jones."

"Oh, *b't shwr*," said the lad, meekly turning away, "I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too," said Michael, taking advantage of a lull in the storm. "I am sorry that I can do nothing. Good-bye, Peggy, you have a warm heart, and you are a true friend—two precious things to lose in one morning. *Fforwel* then—you can tell Essylt what I have said."

"Tell Essylt!" the indignant woman called after him. "Not I, I'll carry none of your messages; I'll never turn against my old friend, Phil-y-Velin."

"God bless her!" he muttered as he turned away from the door. "As true as steel, in spite of that fib about her sister-in-law's daughter."

CHAPTER XII

NOT until the next evening did Michael Lloyd turn his steps towards the porch of the west gable. He had felt a strong desire to see Barbara, to speak to her, to hear her voice once more, to tell her himself of the step he was about to take, and, perhaps, because he was conscious of this wish, he had put off his visit until the last evening of his stay at Maentrevor.

There seemed no good reason why he should seek an interview with her at all, and yet, surely, he thought, it would be but an act of ordinary politeness to call upon his father's new tenant, if only to inquire as to her comfort in her new home.

The sun had already set, leaving the pale western sky without a cloud; a crescent moon hung over the clump of dark firs which marked the foreground of the furzy knoll lying between the mill and the coast. At the broad casement window Barbara was standing, her eyes fixed upon the moon with its one bright attendant star. How fleckless that clear blue sky! How deep the shadows in the glades of the Meivon woods, which closed in the scene on the left! How delicious the song of the blackbird in the thicket! How musical the ring of the anvil in the forge down the road! Yes, it was all beautiful, almost to pain; perhaps that was why her dark eyes had a wistfulness that was not habitual to them as she stood there, her face raised to the golden moon.

Michael had been watching her for some moments, unobserved, through the trellis of the porch, before he knocked at the heavy oak door. It was quickly opened

by the girl herself; all sadness had vanished from her face, its serene cheerfulness speaking of no sentiment except that of the ordinary country welcome.

"Well, indeed, Dr. Lloyd!" she exclaimed, "how kind of you to come and see me, for I know your time is short, and how busy you must be. Come in, and which will you have, the firelight or the moonlight?"

There was not a shade of embarrassment in her voice or manner, and when Michael chose the chair by the window she added, "Yes, you choose the moonlight. I, too, was standing there before you came in, and wondering what made Tom so late to-night."

"It is a beautiful evening," said Michael, "and, perhaps, it has tempted him to linger a little on the way home. I did not pass him on the road."

"Perhaps if he comes through the wood he will be here directly."

"I thought," said Michael, "that I would like to know whether you were comfortable here, or whether there was anything you could suggest we could do to make the home more habitable; but, upon my word, I don't think I need ask you that, for you have made it the cosiest and most homelike place I have ever seen."

"Not I alone, indeed," said Barbara. "Your father has been so kind in letting us use some of the old furniture which he had stored away; it suits the place, and saved our money—not that we had any to save!"

"And it does the furniture good to air it." He tried hard to be calm, and as forgetful as Barbara appeared; but for the life of him he could not banish the memory of the Caefrân orchard, the red-cheeked apples, the tea-table under the branches, Barbara's brown eyes, and the little hand that moved about

amongst the tea-things and, above all, the clear voice that sang:

“Oh, memory! fond memory!
When all things fade we turn to thee.”

He remembered, too, how her eyes had drooped before his when parting from her he had said, “I should like you to know,” and she had answered, “I know,” before she had run away.

With an effort he turned from these thoughts and wished for Barbara’s power of will, for he was not deceived, he had seen the sadness in the eyes as she looked up at the evening sky, unconscious of being observed, the sadness so carefully banished at his entrance, and he knew, as surely as though he had read it in black and white, that for her, as well as for himself, the interview was a painful ordeal.

“You are going back to-morrow?” she asked in the blandest of commonplace tones. “Your father will miss you very much.”

“Yes, he will miss me more than usual, I think, because we have parted ‘not friends,’ as the children say.”

“Indeed,” said Barbara seriously. “I am sorry. Poor Phil! Then I am sure he will be unhappy.”

“Yes, he will be very unhappy, and I cannot ease his pain. Miss Barbara, may I ask you to go and see him often? I know it can be no pleasure to you to sit in the meal and dust to talk to a simple old miller; but perhaps the knowledge that you are doing a good action may compensate you.”

“Oh, don’t make that mistake,” said Barbara. “I assure you it is a real pleasure to me to talk to Phil. He and I are great friends, though we do not always

agree in opinion. He seems to understand me, and I understand him."

"I am thankful to hear that, indeed," said Michael.

The twilight was darkening, the moon growing brighter, and under its beams he thought the girl was paler than usual.

"I earnestly entreat you to continue to visit him, in spite of what I am going to tell you."

"Certainly," said Barbara, lifting her eyebrows in feigned surprise.

"I have had a feeling," he said, "that I would like to tell you myself that I am going to be married next month."

"Oh, yes, I had heard that from Phil; well, indeed, I must 'wish you joy,' as they say."

"I am going to marry Essylt," said Michael, ignoring her last words.

"So I have heard."

"Perhaps you will wonder how it came about. Let me explain. I promised to marry her eight years ago, and now the time has come when I am about to keep my word; that is all I want to say—simply that it is an old promise, and nothing new."

"But why tell *me* about it?" said Barbara, tossing her little proud head, and holding up her chin indignantly. "It is no business of mine; in fact, it is a matter of no interest to me."

She had borne up bravely; but now, in the dead silence that followed her last words, her heart was beating loudly in her ears. Michael was silent too, apparently lost in thought, and drumming his fingers softly upon the table beside him.

"I suppose that is so," he said at last in a low voice, as if he were speaking to himself; "of course it

is. What am I to you? It is nothing to you whether I am happy or miserable. I don't know why, but, I wish to tell you myself how things are with me. I believe I hoped you would form a less unfavourable opinion of my action than if you heard it from a stranger."

Barbara made no answer, but looked up again at the slender moon, and the silence that fell upon the old room seemed to throb with unspoken thoughts.

He hesitated—stammered a little in his speech.

"I—I—I suppose, Miss Barbara—Miss Owen, that we shall never meet again alone, and face to face, as we do to-night. I don't know why I don't wish you good-bye, and leave you at once, for I bear your words in mind, 'it is a matter of no interest to me what becomes of you,' but in spite of that——"

"I did not say that exactly," said Barbara, in parenthesis, and drooping her head a little.

"Not quite so cruel, was it? Well, in spite of what you said, I have a strong desire, perhaps a foolish—even a wrong desire, to lay my soul bare before you to-night, to tell you before I go away from you for ever, how much the thought of you has filled my life of late—how deeply the memory of Caefrân with its beautiful mistress—your mother, its flowers, its music, are engraven upon my heart; how strong was my affection for her, for Tom—and for you."

A host of memories rushed in upon Barbara's mind, and clear in her ears rang the words:

"When all things fade, we turn to thee."

A sense of suffocation oppressed her. Was she going to be conquered at last by the feelings that she had so long held in check? No, oh, no, indeed! and un-

consciously she pressed her hand on her throat, for it seemed as if her heart had risen up there to throb. "Oh, no," she said, "don't—don't, you will be sorry afterwards, and I shall," she added. She had risen nervously and drawn nearer to the window, where the moonlight fell upon her face.

"Then I will say no more," said Michael. "I wanted to be sure that you understood me and my motives."

Again a deep silence fell upon them, in which were only to be heard the crackling of the fire and the mournful Welsh hymn Peggy was crooning in the next room.

"Well," said Michael at last, with a determined effort to return to commonplace affairs, "I suppose I had better go, for, as you say, I have much to do," and he held out his hand. "Good-bye, Miss Barbara! You will not refuse to shake hands with me, as my father has done?"

"No," said Barbara; "and there is one thing I, too, wish to say, I think you are doing right."

"Thank you for saying that; it makes things so different for me."

The proud look died out of her face, her eyes drooped, and she was very pale as she placed her hand in his. He grasped it eagerly, and retained it for some moments in his own. Was it imagination, he wondered, or was there a little tremble in her voice—just the wistfulness he had seen in her eyes when he had watched her through the lattice of the porch?

Raising her hand to his lips, he pressed a fervid kiss upon it, before he almost flung it from him, so suddenly, so passionately, that he apologised in hurried, ill-chosen words. "Forgive me—I am—I must

go," he said, and turning to the heavy door he opened it and let himself out into the soft, grey night.

He crossed the green to the highroad, deciding to follow it to Maentrevor, instead of taking the path through the wood. Coming straight from Barbara's presence, he felt a shrinking from the associations of the woodland path, so closely connected in his mind with Essylt's strange wayward nature. To-night he felt that the broad highroad and the furzy knoll would be more congenial than the sombre shadow of the woods.

At a bend in the road where he would lose sight of the valley he turned back for a last look at his old home. The mill, with its moss-grown thatch, and its whitewashed walls, was looking at its best. Above its gabled point the restored weather-cock glittered in the moonlight, and on the green in front of it the dew-drops made diamond spangles. In the broad casement window the firelight danced, and further on in Peggy's and Essylt's cottage a tiny candle flickered under the eaves. The window of Phil's living-room was out of sight round the corner, but from his heaped wood-fire the smoke was curling up, and showing distinctly against the dark bend of the Meivon woods. The mill-wheel was still, and the trickle of the stream scarcely broke the peaceful silence.

A tide of strong emotion surged through Michael's soul as he stood looking back at the familiar scene; a longing for the simple joys of his boyhood, when every desire of his nature found its fulfilment in the free and happy life which he had led in that old mill and its surroundings. A deep regret at the cloud that had fallen between him and his father, and, above all, a bitter rebellion against the fate that made his

parting with Barbara imperative and irrevocable. Dust and ashes, foolish dreams, thwarted desires, surely as the sparks fly upward! He saw the light in Barbara's parlour, and felt that the vivid impression of the scene through which he had just passed, of Barbara's dainty face and figure, her pallor, the tremble of her voice, was engraved upon his heart in lines so deep that neither time nor circumstances could ever erase it.

At last he turned away with a strong determination to banish from his mind the sweet picture, as well as his bitter regrets. The familiar road looked strangely cold and bare in the dim light as it stretched away before him; but what mattered it, he thought, the road of life would be colder, barer, and longer!

It was one of those tender evenings, when the wind lies low, as if wearied with its frolics, when the sunsets begin to linger on into moonlight, as if in anticipation of the joys of spring, when the bats make furtive flittings from the eaves, and the lambs bleat on the hillside, and mists rise gently in the meadows. The anvil had ceased its rhythm when Michael passed the forge; he saw in the distance on the road a shadowy figure, which seemed familiar, and yet strange. Surely it was Essylt, with that sinuous gliding walk, and yet surely not, with that top-heavy appearance, and those flowing garments, beflounced and befrilled!

Yes, as she drew nearer he recognised her, in spite of the hat of exaggerated size, a sweeping feather curling over its brim, the jacket of fashionable town cut, and the high-heeled boots, which entirely spoiled the freedom of her gait. In her peasant dress, her sun-bonnet, and scarlet petticoat, her country-made shoes, guiltless of heels and pinched toes, Essylt was pleasing, if not beautiful, in appearance; but in this incon-

gruous attempt at town fashions she looked simply foolish and uninteresting, and Michael's innate good taste shrank from the sight of her in such unnatural adornments, for he took no time to consider that as his wife it would be expected of her to dress according to her social position.

"*Caton Pawb*, Essylt! Is it thee, lass? Well, in my deed, I didn't know thee at first. Dear *anwyl!* how clothes can alter a woman!"

"'Tis me, whatever," said Essylt, with a little angry toss of her head. "There was a meeting in Bethesda Chapel to-night, and I thought it was time for me to begin wearing these clothes, because I suppose before long you won't like me to be wearing my 'clocs' and my hood and things."

"Well, indeed, I would," said Michael, "only I suppose it wouldn't do—they are far prettier than these nodding feathers and frills; but, there! thou art right, Essylt, it was well to make a beginning, but 'tis a pity, lass, to lose our simple ways."

"Well, indeed, I am tired of the old things already," said Essylt irritably. "*Ach-y-fi*, I hate them! and my back is aching shocking."

"No wonder, with thy heels raised so much higher than thy toes, 'tis no wonder thy back is aching."

"Well, I might have known I couldn't please *you*, Michael, and I'm sorry in my heart I put on the old clothes at all. I'll be glad when I get home to take off these boots, whatever; I must sit and rest a bit," and she turned aside to a fallen tree trunk, and sat by the hedgeside.

In the moonlight her colourless face looked ghastly, and there was a little tremble in her voice, which touched the strong man's heart.

"Yes, go home, Essylt, and take off all these grand

things, and come to meet me in the morning in thy white hood and country gown! Thou wilt never look better in my eyes than when dressed in them. Remember, 'twill be our last meeting before I come home in the spring to marry thee and take thee to that stiff, square house in Maentrevor, which thou art so pleased with, and if *thou* art pleased—well and good.”

“Well, perhaps I will satisfy Peggy by taking off these things, though I failed to please thee by putting them on. She was cross enough this morning, and more like a madwoman than anything else, crying and sobbing, and pointing her finger at me, and saying—oh! all kinds of nasty things, for Peggy has a cruel tongue—the old jade! In my deed, sometimes I feel I could jump into Llyn Dystaw, and put an end to it all; I'd as soon be out of the world as in it.”

“Essylt,” said Michael sternly, “thou art talking nonsense; thou art tired with thy walk, and angered by Peggy's temper. I am sorry in my heart she has worried thee so much; but cheer up, *merch-i*, in another month the old life will be over, and, with God's help, I will bring thee brightness and peace, and make up to thee for the long years of worry and waiting; but never let me hear thee talk that nonsense again about Llyn Dystaw—'tis not pleasant hearing for thy future husband, *merch-i*.”

“Well, go you on, then,” said the girl, “and leave me here to rest a bit.”

“Nay, I will wait with thee, Essylt,” said Michael.

“No, no,” she said impatiently, with a little stamp of the high-heeled boot; “go on, and leave me. I hear a footstep coming.”

“What matter?”

“Go, I tell thee,” she said almost fiercely. “I am

sick of walking and talking; let me be," and with an indulgent shrug of his shoulders Michael turned away, a look of depression settling down upon his usually cheerful face—one of those mysterious fits of despondency that sometimes weigh down the human heart, inexplicable as they are unconquerable, had fallen upon his spirit.

In the topmost branches of the trees that bordered the road there was a sighing and a whispering which seemed scarcely accounted for by the light breeze that was blowing in from the sea. The western sky was still clear, but from the east a bank of heavy clouds was sending its flying legions towards the moon, and to Michael's weary heart there seemed no light in the present, no hope in the future, no God behind those lowering clouds, only a dull foreboding of evil.

Alas, poor human nature! how easily are the bravest and strongest tossed upon the waves of passing circumstances.

In another moment he had come to a standstill, and was hunting vigorously in all his pockets. "Hang it all!" he said. "I have left Dr. Rees's book at the mill—of course, on the little high window outside the door. Well, it will be safe there till I get it!" And looking at his watch he saw that an appointment with a patient made it impossible to return in search of it at once. "Well," he said, resuming his rapid walk, "I must go back later; another tramp through the wood to Cwm Meivon will not hurt me."

He did not love these sylvan glades as he had done in his boyhood and youth; his meetings there with Essylt had robbed the place of its earlier romance, and latterly it was always with a curious distaste that he walked through those once-loved paths, so closely

associated were they with Essylt's presence and her wayward moods. All this was in his mind as he went on his way towards the town.

He was scarcely out of sight before Essylt rose to her feet, turning slowly homewards. Her footsteps dragged a little, perhaps because of the boots, but it could not have been they that caused the puckered forehead and the hard-set lips, which gave the pale face a weird unnatural look of sullen anger.

At the turn of the road she came in sight of the mill, standing under the wood, a picture of rustic peace and comfort, its curves and gables catching the golden light of the moon. In one broad window the firelight glowed, and within a shadow passed and repassed athwart the light. Essylt guessed rightly that it was Barbara, whose restless figure thus moved about in the firelight. With the keen instinct of a suspicious nature she thought: "He's been there, no doubt, to say good-bye, full of pleasant words and tender looks, be sure, and then when he met me he only laughed at me," and her red lips curled themselves into a scornful smile. She drew nearer to the window, not far removed from her own doorway, and as the figure inside approached and receded, so did that on the outside draw nearer and shrink back alternately.

Barbara, all unconscious of being observed, sometimes stopped to watch the broken clouds that were beginning to veil the stars in the eastern sky, her clear-cut features plainly revealed against the shadowy background of the old room. At such times Essylt peered at her curiously, easily hiding herself behind the clumps of ivy that climbed up the walls. An angry, even vindictive look settled on her face, and she clenched her hands fiercely, muttering, as

she turned away to her own door, "No need to ask what she is thinking of; I know, I know too well; let her think, that will be all her share in the matter."

"Well," said Peggy, without raising her eyes from the crock of milk which she was boiling, "hast been to chapel? Jones Bethesda, wasn't it? *Caton Pawb!*" she added, turning to look at the girl, "what's got on thy head, *lodes?* What are those feathers like a 'cock-an-too,' nodding over thine eyes, and, in my deed, the feet looking like the bantam cock in Phil's yard!"

Essylt made no answer, but sitting down wearily, tore off the offending boots and flung them irritably to the opposite corner of the room before she began the ascent of the narrow staircase leading to her bedroom and Peggy's. There was a door at the bottom, and this she closed with a violent bang ere she toiled slowly up to her room. "*Ach!* those old boots!" she said, slipping on her own shoes. "I'm as tired as if I had been walking upon stilts." Hastily and angrily she dragged off her grand jacket, also the flounced skirt and the broad hat, and flinging them with scant ceremony over a chair, she stretched herself upon her bed, and lay there, silent, filled with brooding thoughts, while her sleepless eyes stared out upon the same veiled stars that shone upon Barbara's sad face as she walked up and down the parlour in the fire-light, which threw those leaping shadows over the brown rafters.

At last she grew tired of her monotonous pacing, and curled herself up in a corner of the big red sofa, preparing to wait for Tom. He had promised to be home early, but his promises were not to be so much relied upon now as they had been before the advent of

Mr. Preece's niece. Should she go and meet him through the wood? She longed to do so, to smell the sweet scent of the fir trees, to see the still lake lying placid and silent under the night sky. She longed for the cool air to fan her burning forehead; but she hesitated, and shrank in distaste from the idea of meeting Essylt, for of late she had become nervously afraid of the girl, who, living under the same roof with her, yet was so full of vindictive feelings towards her, and so she avoided all the pleasant walks in the sylvan glades which had once been so familiar to her.

A thump at the door, and Peggy entered, carrying the lamp.

"I would have brought it sooner, Miss *vâch*, but it's waiting I've been to take the last loaf out of the oven, and there's busy I've been all day, and there's Essylt gone to bed, the idle huzzy—tired, I suppose, with her walk to Maentrevor—she's as weak as a rush. I don't know what is the matter with the girls nowadays, not I! There, *merch-i*, I'll bring Mr. Tom's supper in!"

"Peggy," said Barbara, "I feel that I long for a little fresh air; I will take my cloak and walk a little way through the woods to meet Tom."

"Very well, *merch-i*, 'twill do you good," said Peggy; and Barbara, relieved of her fear of meeting Essylt, flung a cloak around her, and went out alone into the wood. How pure it was! How refreshing the air that rippled over the lake, and fanned her aching head! How the wind sighed in the tree-tops, and whispered in the branches! A little mournful, was it? A little sad, that sighing in the trees? She was accustomed to gather only joy and strength from her communings with nature; but to-night she felt

as Michael was feeling at the same moment—as if a foreboding of evil came to her on the night breeze. But, no, she would not believe it! Her sorrow had come to her, she had passed through it two hours ago in the old oak parlour. From henceforth she must be brave, must cast from her all doubts of the future—and all memory of the past.

And as she trod the brittle twigs underfoot, the soothing sounds and sights around her seemed to throw a spell of peace and calmness over her spirits.

The golden moon which the clouds had not yet reached, how beautiful was its image on the surface of the lake! Was that a moor-hen or a water-rat that moved in the rushes! That rustle in the tree-tops! Were the squirrels asleep up there in their cosy nest? That clump of unopened daffodils under the trees! how lovely they would be in a week or two! Yes, come sorrow or joy, the voice of Nature would always find a response in her heart.

As she walked on further and further she found herself growing less perturbed, the aching in her head a little less bitter, and so absorbed was she in her thoughts and dreams that she took no account of her footsteps, and was surprised to find that she had reached the other end of the lake, where the path branches off towards the Maentrevor road. Should she follow the lane? No, for it was evident that Tom was returning by the road, so she turned and began rather hurriedly to retrace her footsteps; but she could not resist, however, a sign of greeting towards the silvery lake. "Sweet scene," she said, "dear stars, dear moon, *you* I shall always have—always!" She heard the trickle of the stream that fed Llyn Dystaw, and called to mind the legend of the maiden who

sought her faithless lover through the forest, and who, at last giving up in despair, sank into the silence and solitude of Llyn Dystaw.

Suddenly her dreams were dispelled by a vision of another girl coming towards her along the narrow pathway. In a moment she recognised Essylt, and an unaccountable dread filled her heart—a feeling which she tried to banish at once. Ashamed of her own cowardice, she walked on with every appearance of unconcern, until she was confronted by Essylt, who stood in the middle of the path, where it happened to be at its narrowest.

“Dear me, Barbara Owen, is it you, indeed? Walking out here by yourself in the night. What do you want here? Are you spying upon me, or did you expect to meet anyone here?” and she stood straight across the path, squaring her elbows a little as if intentionally barring the way.

“Let me pass,” said Barbara, in a firm, calm voice.

“Dear *anwl!* who’s preventing you? You can’t expect to have the path to yourself; but, in my deed, I’m thinking this is a good time for me to tell you a few plain truths. You were in the big parlour walking about when I went to lie down for a bit, and now here you are walking out again by yourself; and what makes you so restless, Miss B.? Do *you* know what it is, I wonder, to have bitter thoughts burning in your heart, until you feel nothing but the night wind will do you good? Do *you* ever think of the day when everyone will know that you are a murderess? And Michael Lloyd shall hear what my two eyes have seen!”

“Let me pass, Essylt,” said Barbara; “out of my way.”

“Oh, ho!” said Essylt, “you don’t like plain truths, it seems.”

“You wicked girl!” said Barbara again, her voice trembling between fear and anger “You wicked girl, let me pass!”

“Did *you* call me a wicked girl? Pass on, then, pass on,” said Essylt, stepping aside a little; “there’s plenty of room.”

Barbara glanced at the narrow strip of the bank left between Essylt’s irate figure and the edge of the lake, and saw that the head must be clear, the footstep steady, that would safely pass by the girl, whose attitude was so threatening, her white face so distorted with passion. Barbara trembled to make the attempt; she held her head high, however, and stepped as firmly and courageously as she could, and would have got safely by had not her close proximity to the angry girl proved too much for the self-control of the latter. Clutching Barbara by the shoulders, she shook her roughly, and with a sudden movement of her arms flung her away from her, not intentionally into the lake, but caring little in her blind passion what became of her enemy. As the clutching hands loosened their grasp Barbara wavered a moment, making a futile grasp at the air, then lost her balance, and sank backwards into the water.

At the same moment Essylt with a loud scream turned away, and with her arms crossed on her bosom—a favourite attitude of hers—ran with swift though unsteady footsteps towards her accustomed covert, and stooping under the brambles, disappeared in the thicket, and had anyone been there to listen through that still night air, they would have heard her wailing

and moaning as she made her way further and further into the wood.

At the very moment of her disappearance a footstep was crunching the twigs in the lane that led from the Maentrevor road—a firm tread that quickened into a run as Essylt's scream disturbed the silence of the night. It was Michael Lloyd, who was walking back in search of the book which he had left on the mill window. He had fallen into a train of brooding thought, from which he was suddenly startled by Essylt's scream. Realising that someone was in pressing need, he hastened on; but when he reached the path by the lake, he found to his surprise that there was no one to be seen, nothing visible but the rippling surface of the water.

CHAPTER XIII

MICHAEL approached the edge of the bank.

"Who is it?" he cried aloud. "Who screamed?"

At that moment he saw a dark object that moved under the branches of the trees, which here bent down to the surface of the lake.

"Oh, help me, help me!" cried a voice, and the branches cracked. "It is I."

Barbara's voice! Merciful heaven, what did it mean?

In a moment he had flung off his coat, and his shoes, and had sprung into the water; his feet reached the gravel bottom, and his head being just above the surface, he was able to see exactly where his presence was required. The tree cracked again ominously and a little cry escaped the struggling girl, who felt that but for the frail branch to which she clung so desperately, she must sink into the cold depths below. She knew how cold it was, and how deep under those trees!

"Hold on, for heaven's sake!" cried Michael, who was now swimming, and within a few yards of her.

In obedience to his directions she clutched more eagerly at the frail branch—it creaked, it bent, and with a cry she sank beneath the water, but Michael had already reached the spot, and diving down to the cold depths, grasped her hair, and raised her to the surface. Perhaps she had fainted or swooned;

she was at all events very still and silent, and made no attempt to clutch at her rescuer, and thus frustrate his efforts to save her, as she might have done had she been conscious.

It took but a few moments for the strong swimmer to reach the shallow water, where he could wade to the bank with ease and safety.

How did all this happen? It was a mystery which he did not wait to fathom, but wrapping his dry coat round his precious burden he hurried along the woodland path.

Barbara was still silent, her long hair hanging in streaming skeins over her shoulders.

Was she dead? Had the shock killed her? The thought was terrifying, and unconsciously he clasped her closer, as if to snatch her from death.

"If I only knew she was alive," he said as he hurried onwards.

"Beloved, say one word—only one word, that I may know you are alive!"

Her face was close to his, she had heard his appeal, and the word of endearment, for in a trembling voice she said, "Michael."

It was only one word, only his name, but in its tones he seemed to hear both love and sorrow—a wistful tenderness which made his heart bound with joy. In answer he only bent his head close to hers and whispered, "Barbara."

They were not much, those two simple words, but in both their hearts they left, after the first throb of happiness, a feeling of guilt and unworthiness, for as Michael had spoken her name, he had tightened his clasp and strained her in a closer embrace.

As they reached the green he asked:

“How did it happen?” and Barbara answered simply, “I went too near the edge of the lake, and overbalanced, and fell in.”

Summoning Peggy, as they passed her door, Michael, who was intimate with every turn of the old house, made his way straight to the large kitchen, where the culm fire was lighting every corner with its ruddy glow.

Peggy was at once in attendance, with endless exclamations of wonder and disapprobation, which Michael cut short with peremptory order.

“Come, come, bring a hot drink and dry clothes at once and get her to bed. Miss Owen was walking too near the edge of the lake, she overbalanced and fell in, and I, coming back to the mill to fetch a book I had left there, was just in time to save her—now you know all, so don’t ask any more questions.”

Barbara was standing in a pool of water, which Peggy had wrung out of her hair; her eyes were drooping, her cheeks flushed, and she bent her head a little, like a child who is ashamed.

Yes, Barbara the proud *was* ashamed, for she felt that in a moment of weakness, in that one word “Michael,” she had betrayed the secret which she had hidden so long, and Michael, seeing the blushing confusion, understood. No need of words between these two, who were on the eve of parting.

“Now go, *machgen-i*,” said Peggy, “and see to yourself. I will mind Miss *vâch*.”

“Yes,” said Michael; “remember dry clothes, a warm bed, and a hot drink at once. Good night, Miss Owen, good-bye,” he said, again stopping at the doorway to take a last look at her.

“Good-bye,” she answered in a low voice, and in a

moment he was gone, closing the latched door behind him.

Hurrying round the corner of the mill he secured the book he had left on the window-sill, and then set off, walking rapidly, sometimes running, towards Maentrevor. He went so quickly that in spite of his wet garments he was in a warm glow when he reached Dr. Rees's house, and he feared no evil effects from his sudden plunge into Llyn Dystaw; but he was full of anxiety concerning Barbara. Such a shock, such a chill! Would it be too much for a tender girl? And he determined that before he could leave the neighbourhood next morning, he must have some certain knowledge of her condition, and as to whether she was ill, feverish perhaps, seriously affected by her sudden immersion! God forbid, for then indeed his path would be beset with difficulties.

He rose early next morning and hurried through the woods towards Llyn Dystaw and the mill. This was his first goal, and as he pressed the latch of Peggy's door he was full of anxious forebodings.

"Miss Barbara, how is she, Peggy? Any the worse for her wetting?"

"Not a bit, *machgen-i*, so she says whatever, but I don't quite believe her," she added with a wink, "because her eyes are red, as if she had been crying. I asked her and she got quite cross with me. 'You are a bother,' says she. 'I tell you I am quite well,'" and Peggy chuckled as if she had enjoyed the reprimand.

"Well, good-bye, Peggy," said Michael, compelled to be satisfied with these bare items of information, although he was hungry for more. "You know I am going away this morning. Where is Essylt?"

“Oh, in bed,” said Peggy, “with her door safe locked upon her, and she won’t answer if I knock my bones through my knuckles.

“Go you, *machgen-i*, and put all thought of Essylt out of your mind, because I don’t want to quarrel with you, nor to see you breaking your father’s heart. She is no good for you.”

“Well, good-bye, Peggy, and if I don’t see her, say good-bye to her for me.” He almost hoped as he turned out to the green that thus it would be, that Essylt would sleep on, and forget to meet him in the wood. This was one feeling of which he was conscious, a disturbing thought which caused him to upbraid himself with disloyalty towards the girl he was about to marry. Another feeling, too, lay deep down in his heart—Barbara’s tears. Were they for him? He tried to crush the thought, and to close his eyes to it, but it was there—alive and strong.

The mill door was closed, the wheel was silent; evidently Philip was still asleep.

“God bless him,” murmured Michael, as he turned towards the wood. *He*, at least, would keep his appointment, but it was with a heavy heart that he trod the pathway which in earlier days he had traversed a hundred times with a light step and a buoyant spirit.

“How was it?” he wondered, “that at that juncture of his life, when he was sacrificing all on the altar of duty, he felt no compensating peace of mind, no elevation of soul, no deep content, but only a heavy weight, a gloomy foreboding and a morbid discontent which chafed and frayed incessantly?”

Well, there was nothing for him but to plod on, blindfolded, towards the goal of self-sacrifice, of self-

renunciation. He walked on in deep thought, until suddenly he was aware of Essylt coming to meet him from the opposite direction.

Peggy had been wrong then—she was already waiting for him.

“Has come, *merch-i!*” he cried. “Peggy thought thou were asleep.”

“Oh, Peggy,” she said, with a hard laugh, “she’s like everybody else, always thinking the worst of me. But what took you there so early, Michael?”

“Well, I wanted to know before I started on my journey how Miss Owen was after her fall into the lake.”

“Fall into the lake!” exclaimed Essylt in unfeigned astonishment, for she had run away so suddenly the night before from the scene of the quarrel with Barbara that she had been quite unaware of the force with which she had thrust the girl away from her.

“In the lake! Wasn’t she drowned, then?”

Every bit of colour left her face; her strange eyes opened wide.

“No,” said Michael, looking uneasily at the weird, uncanny change in her expression. “She *would* have been drowned if I had not happened to arrive here just in time to save her. Just *there*, it was,” he said, pointing to where a clump of alders bent down to the water’s edge.

“And *thou* wast here to save her!” said Essylt. “Well, indeed, that was fortunate for her—and well pleasing to thee, I’m thinking.”

“Yes, indeed, thou are right! It *was* fortunate; it would have been a terrible shadow upon our beautiful Llyn Dystaw if she had been drowned.”

"Well, she's all right, so let her be," said Essylt. "Didst carry her home, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Michael, trying to speak naturally. "Peggy called thee, but thy door was locked, and she could not awake thee—fast asleep, I expect."

"Oh, of course, I was fast asleep," answered Essylt with a sarcastic laugh, "without any thought of pain or trouble, I suppose! Oh, yes, I slept soundly!" and again she laughed, such a weird expression on her face that Michael stared at her with unconcealed astonishment.

"Essylt, *merch-i*, what is the matter?" he asked, taking her hand and supporting her tenderly as she sank down on the bank to rest.

"'Tis tired I am," she said. "Nothing's the matter with me. A bad night I had, and cruel dreams; and then, to hear thee and Peggy saying I was asleep. Asleep, indeed!" and again came that hard, mirthless laugh. "But I am all right now—'tis a little rest I wanted, peace and rest," she said; "that is all I want," and a softer look came into her eyes, the rigid pallor on her features was less pronounced, and there was almost a wistful gentleness in her voice.

"Well, indeed," she added, "if I had fallen into the lake, I would have been very angry if anyone had called me back to life again." She passed her hand wearily over her face and eyes. "'Twas a little faint came over me," she said, rising, though a little unsteadily.

"'Tis at home thou shouldst be, *merch-i*, in bed, with Peggy nursing thee. Come, let me carry thee home," and he approached as if to take her in his arms; but she flung his hand away roughly.

"Nonsense, Michael!" she said. "Carry me,

indeed! I am not a fool or a doll. Come, let us say good-bye; I know thy time is nearly up, and I don't wish to be a drag upon thee."

"Well," said Michael, looking at his watch, "'tis true I must go, *merch-i*. Wilt promise then to take care of thyself? Remember, I am coming home next month to marry thee, Essylt, to try and bring that rest and peace into thy life which thou seem'st to have hitherto missed."

"Rest and peace?" said Essylt. "I don't know where they are to be found, unless at the bottom of this lake!"

"Essylt," cried Michael with indignation and anger in his voice, "this is not the first time that thou hast said these foolish things to me. Thou must drop that nonsense if thou art going to be my wife; 'tis not only nonsense, 'tis wicked, and very disturbing to a man who has plenty of worries and troubles in his life, and expects in the woman he is going to marry at least content and cheerfulness."

His face was much flushed, and his eyes flashed with anger. Essylt had never seen him thus before, never heard those indignant tones.

"I must go," he said again. "For heaven's sake don't let us part in anger." He felt this would be a climax which he had neither courage nor endurance to overcome. "Come, *merch-i*," he added in a gentler voice, for his anger was never long-lived, "cast these moods from thee, be calm, be content," and, drawing her towards him, he pressed a kiss upon her forehead, and, linking her arm within his own, led her towards the lane that branched off to Maentrevor.

"No, indeed," said Essylt, "we won't quarrel at our last meeting, and I will try to be all thou

wishest; but, Michael, don't expect too much from me."

"No, no," he said. "God knows I have no right to expect much from thee. Good-bye, good-bye, I have stayed too long."

"*Fforwel*, Michael, thou hast been very patient with me," and to his astonishment she flung her arms round his neck, and kissed him with more semblance of love and tenderness than she had ever shown towards him before.

He looked back at her several times, and waved his hand, until at last the bend in the road hid him from sight.

Essylt stood, as any other girl would have done, with fluttering handkerchief up, raised to wave farewell to her lover—but no sooner had he disappeared than a strange change came over her face, and the strongest sentiment imprinted upon it was that of relief; the colour ebbed from her cheeks, the light from her eyes, and with a satisfied "There!" she sat down on the mossy bank in an inert heap, too weary, apparently, to do more than remain where she had fallen.

The waters of the lake rippled and gurgled round the edges, a hedge-sparrow piped its little song close beside her, the frogs croaked in the rushes.

Essylt heard none of them, but lay quietly resting under the sun's warm beams. Once she repeated the word "There!" adding, "I have carried it through. I was afraid I would fail."

It was a full hour before she rose at last, and turned her steps towards home. She passed the spot where she and Barbara had met the night before, and, recalling the incident, she smiled, not with that gentler expression which had for a moment lightened her fea-

tures during her interview with Michael, but with the hard, mocking look which was habitual to her.

She waited at the stile till she saw Peggy pass round the mill door, to prepare Phil's breakfast, then she quietly slipped into the house and up the stairs, and, unlocking her bedroom door, stretched herself upon her bed apparently glad of a little further rest.

"Oh, thou art awake at last!" said Peggy, when by and by Essylt came slowly down to the kitchen. "Come, here's thy tea, and listen to all that has happened whilst thou hast been asleep. I knocked hard at thy door, but thou wouldst not answer."

"I did not hear," said the girl. "What has happened?" and she listened with what patience she could to Peggy's meandering account of the accident that had befallen Barbara, and the wonderful providence that had brought Michael Lloyd upon the scene in the very nick of time.

"Wasn't it wonderful, *merch-i*, wasn't it fortunate?"

"Oh, wonderful! And how is she to-day?"

"Oh, all right," said Peggy, "only a little pale," and she said no more, some subtle instinct teaching her that the eyes, red with weeping, need not be mentioned to Essylt.

About a week afterwards, Barbara, who had suffered no ill effects from her adventure, was walking homewards from the shore, where she often roamed alone between the boulders and heaps of sea-wrack. It was two miles away from Cwm Meivon, but that was nothing to her, for she was strong and active as most country girls. She saw the sun sinking towards the west. "It would be tea-time! Tom would be waiting!" and she began her way steadily over the sand-

hills, where a short cut would take her quickly to Llyn Dystaw.

As she walks alone, silent and preoccupied, we see a marked change in her appearance. The corners of the mouth droop a little; between the pencilled eyebrows there is a line of care or sorrow—which is it? Perhaps both, for above the horizon of her life, on which she was wont to see only a clear sky and a golden atmosphere, there had arisen of late a dark cloud, whose shadow followed her persistently, however much she might try to ignore it, and to occupy her thoughts with other things; it was like a great grey bank of fog that rises sometimes beyond the hill-tops, spreading silently but surely, until it has darkened the landscape. With such a shadow hanging over her, Barbara had lived of late, realising for the first time that there was a secret in her life that had to be hidden.

To her proud and straightforward nature this feeling was intolerable—that she, Barbara Owen, should blush or pale at a chance word—should dread to hear what turn a conversation might take; it galled her bitterly. Had an uneasy conscience added its sting to her unrest, she would not have been able to stand against the crushing weight, but there was always within her heart the consciousness that between her and the mother she had loved no cloud of darkness could fall. “*She* knows,” she would say sometimes aloud, “I have trodden and retrodden the weary mill-round of anxiety and doubt—*she* knows, and *I* know, and *God* knows. Why then should I let this miserable thought frighten me? If only I dared to speak about it openly I believe half its terrors would fly away. Tom is unreasonably nervous, and he has infected me

with his fears. I *will* talk about it, I will not have a secret in my life that I must hide. I will begin at once, and see what Phil will say," but when she went round by the mill, and stood at the open door, she saw that this was not the day for laying such a question before him.

Outside there was a rush of the millstream, while inside, every wheel, both great and small, was revolving with its own particular grumble. The miller approached through the noise and the meal-dust, but Barbara stopped her ears, saying, "Not now, Phil—to-morrow, perhaps," and turned away towards the porch in the west gable.

In the parlour, where the sunset light gathered and added glow from the yellow walls, Tom and Mabel Hume were waiting, the latter having, after a good deal of persuasion, consented to accompany him to the mill and have tea with Barbara. "Just in an informal way, you know, so that you may become better acquainted with her. You have only seen her once or twice at Mr. Preece's, and she never seems quite herself there," Tom was saying, and now he was showing her the few objects of interest in the room—the piano that had come from Caefrân—the photograph of his mother which hung over it, a set of delicately carved chessmen; a complete suit of armour that had been dug up in one of the Caefrân fields, and now hung on the wall of the room which was hall and parlour combined.

"Oh, what a curious old thing!" said Miss Hume. "I don't know which looks the most ghostly, this, or that old clock on the other side of the bookcase."

At that moment the said clock began to strike six, its loud resonant tones reverberating through the house. With a startled "Oh!" Mabel moved a little

away from it, and Tom, laughing, said, "It wants to prove to you that it is no ghost, at all events."

"Oh, here she is," and Barbara entered with a little colour in her cheeks, and a bright look put on in the porch when she heard Tom's voice in the parlour.

There was the usual warm embrace between the sister and brother, and then Mabel and Barbara greeted each other with every sign of outward cordiality, though in Barbara's manner there was a shy nervousness, not habitual to her, for, as she entered the room, the ever-present cloud lowered upon her, and the thought flashed into her mind, "What would she think of me, I wonder, if she knew?" and then she tried to cast the feeling aside—to lay herself out for her guest's entertainment.

Peggy brought in the tray, the old silver teapot and the pile of light-cakes.

"I am very glad you have come," said Barbara. "We don't seem to have seen very much of each other, do we? Now I can show you over the whole house, which I think so interesting. Do you like old things?"

"Not much," said Mabel, throwing off her furs. "I like fresh and bright things, and I may add—pretty things."

"Oh, yes," said Barbara, laughing; "but some old things are pretty, you know—this teapot, for instance, and that rose bowl, which belonged to my great-grandmother."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Mabel, "how delicious these cakes are!"

"Yes, Peggy excels in making light-cakes," said Tom, sticking his fork in three at once.

"What! that old woman who brought the tea in—looks like an old witch, doesn't she?"

"Bless her! She's our only servant," said Barbara. Mabel raised her eyebrows, while Tom looked uncomfortable.

"Getting past work, you think, I dare say, but she isn't, I can tell you," he said.

Peggy's appearance seemed to have given Mabel food for thought, for she looked rather serious and preoccupied while she sipped her tea and ate her light-cakes. Her thoughts, whatever they were, condensed themselves into the question, "Have you no other servant but that old woman?"

"None, indeed," said Barbara. "We are quite content without."

"Unless you count Essylt," said Tom, anxious to add to the importance of the household.

"Oh, *she* doesn't count," said Barbara with a little frown.

"Essylt," said Mabel with a sudden awakening of interest—"isn't that the girl Dr. Michael Lloyd was going to marry? What a dreadful thing!"

"Yes," said Barbara, "very shortly, I believe."

She spoke with a steady voice, but as she poured out the tea her hand trembled a little, and the colour which had tinged her face as she entered had faded.

"'Tis one of the most mysterious things I have ever heard of," said Tom, "that a man like Michael Lloyd—a man of such refined tastes, with such a cultured mind, should marry an ignorant, commonplace, peasant girl! It beats me—moreover, one who has something disagreeable and uncanny in her ways. I believe he considers it a point of honour that he should keep a promise made to her when they were boy and girl together, or little more than that, and Michael

Lloyd would trample upon his own heart-strings to keep a promise."

"I should love to see the girl," said Mabel. "Is she pretty?"

"Well," said Tom meditatively, "she has a weird kind of beauty, but her colouring is too much like a face of wax to please me. I do not admire those waxen faces with a tinge of yellow in them, and lips like red sealing-wax. We'll go over the house after tea, and I dare say we'll see her somewhere."

Barbara had been silent while Tom had spoken, silent, with a look of care on her face, for a nervous dread was creeping over her as it always did when Essylt's name was mentioned. Essylt who tried to drown her! Who could send her to a shameful death! The morbid thought was crushing all the brightness and freedom out of her spirit, and threatened to change the whole character of the girl.

When tea was over, and Peggy was clearing away, casting furtive and critical glances at the English lady whom Mr. Tom had chosen for a 'sweetheart,' Barbara led the way up the broad uncarpeted stairs, with their solid banisters of black oak, to the long corridor from which the bare old bedrooms opened out.

"Oh! what a ghostly place," said Mabel as they entered one of the rooms and opened the shutter. The old furniture, shrouded in its sheets and coverings, certainly looked somewhat weird and uncanny in the dim light.

"Oh, but these rooms must have been lovely once," said Barbara. "See the handsome ceilings and the panelled walls. With a large fire and plenty of light they would be beautiful. I often try to imagine how they looked, long ago, with the stately ladies and

gentlemen walking about; the young men and maidens passing up and down the staircase—oh, yes! I can see it plainly in my mind's eye."

"This is the room I like," said Tom, opening another door and throwing back the shutters wide; "it would make a lovely sitting-room, it is so bright and sunny; it looks out on to the green."

Visions of himself and Mabel installed therein, of blazing fires and joyous voices rose before him; but Mabel only shrugged her shoulders and shuddered a little, while Barbara, who loved every nook and corner of the rambling old house, led the way through dark passages and rickety stairs, scarcely noticing in her own enthusiasm that Mabel grew more and more silent and uninterested.

"This, I am sure," she continued, "must have been a little oratory. See! here is the mark in the floor where a reading-desk was fastened; that alcove must have contained the altar. See! here too is the pole upon which curtains ran. Oh! I can see it all so plainly, servants of the household ranged *there*, madam and her guests kneeling *here*. Can't you imagine it?" She turned to Mabel with bright eyes and deep interest, but the pleasure in her face died out as she caught sight of her guest's look of indifference.

"I have not been endowed with your vivid imagination," said the latter; "I must confess that I see only a bare whitewashed room, with one narrow window near the ceiling."

"Yes," said Barbara, laughing, "that is all it certainly is. Let us go," and they began their way down the broad stairs again.

CHAPTER XIV

IN the bright west parlour Mabel seemed more at her ease, and chatted away in her usual self-possessed manner.

“And you mean to tell me that you really like to live in this curious old place?” she said, turning to Barbara.

“Indeed, I do; I love being with all the memories of the past, and the beauties of the present around me.”

“Beauties of the present!” said Mabel, with a doubtful smile.

“Yes, the place, the encircling woods, the mossy thatch, the dear old mill-wheel; it is full of beauty to me; but, of course, if you don’t see it, you don’t.”

“Well, I don’t,” said Mabel, with a little laugh, which expressed a great deal of contempt and amusement.

“You don’t mind, do you?”

Tom looked flushed and distressed, and Barbara, seeing his vexation, felt her own heart kindle with sympathy.

“You see, I have always been used to a town life,” said their guest; “and although Plasturton is not a large town, there is always something going on there. When I came away the Assizes were on, and the people were full of excitement over one of the cases. A man was being tried for killing his little boy.”

“His own little boy? Oh, how dreadful!” said Barbara.

“Yes; the child was very ill, and in dreadful pain. The father, who idolised him, couldn’t bear to see him suffer, he said, so gave him some stuff that sent him off at once, and the man was taken up and tried for murder.”

“I read the account of it in one of the papers,” said Tom, and he looked furtively at Barbara, who was standing by the fire, nervously twisting and untwisting her handkerchief in her hands. She was very pale, and her eyes shone with an unnatural brilliancy.

“Oh! it was an exciting time, I can tell you,” said Mabel; “for everyone felt strongly on one side or the other, some people saying that it was the man’s intense love for his boy that made him act as he did, others thought it was impatience at having to nurse him so long.”

“And what did *you* feel?” said Barbara.

“I? Oh, I never trouble my head much about such horrid affairs. The man was found guilty of manslaughter, and sentenced to ten years’ penal servitude. I think he ought to have been hanged.”

“Poor man!” said Barbara, with white lips and a red spot on each cheek under the bright eyes. Some strong, controlling force seemed to compel her to speak, while Tom stared at her with a dumb protest in his eyes.

“Can’t you feel for him?” continued Barbara; “his darling child, whose least pain was a cruel stab to him, to save whom he would have willingly laid down his life, I expect; he was suffering terribly, you say, therefore, if by giving him a little larger dose of medicine than was prescribed he could end that suffering, can you wonder that he did so? Of course, I am supposing that the child could not recover. What

would you do if your beloved mother was dying, in dreadful agony, and if she begged and prayed of you to relieve her torture, and help her to die, wouldn't you do so if you could?"

"No," said Mabel, "of course not. Would you?"

"Yes," said Barbara, "I would."

"Good gracious! But we have no right to shorten anyone's life!"

"But if she could not possibly recover?"

"How do you know?" said Mabel. "People have recovered from the last gasp and lived for years. Besides, we should make ourselves liable to be taken up, to be hanged, or sent to prison or something."

"Well!" said Barbara, with a sudden change of manner, "let us talk about something else." She glanced from Mabel to Tom, and saw that the latter appeared disturbed and anxious, while Mabel looked aghast.

"I am sorry if I have shocked you," said Barbara, "and that you don't like the old mill. I am afraid you are not taking a very pleasant expression of us away with you."

Mabel, who was searching for her furs, pretended she had not heard the last words.

"Good-bye," she said, shaking hands quietly. "I dare say we should differ upon many subjects if we saw much of each other. At all events," she added, laughing, "I should not like you to be my nurse. I'm afraid you would be sending me off before my time."

"That is nonsense," said Tom, seriously annoyed. "Really, you two girls have got on to the most morbid and lugubrious topics I ever heard. Come, Mabel, let us go," he said. "Mr. Preece will be waiting."

Good-bye, Barbara," and they were gone, but in another moment Tom had returned to clasp his sister in a warm embrace.

"What in the world was the matter with you?" he asked in a low voice.

"Oh, Tom, I don't know, I am so sorry," she said. "Go, go, don't keep Mabel waiting."

When they were really gone, and the big arched door had closed behind them, she sat down to think. This, then, was the outcome of her first attempt to take the world into her confidence. How horrified Mabel had looked! How her expression had changed! Thus would the whole world look upon her with disapprobation—more than that, with aversion. No, she must bury the secret still in her heart, she must hide from everyone the simple action which had brought peace and rest to the mother whom she had loved with such devotion, and had soothed and comforted her in the first hours of her own sorrow; it had seemed an imperative duty to her, but evidently no one else would look upon it in the same light. Was it possible that she had done wrong after all, that she had committed a grave sin—a crime? Perhaps Michael Lloyd would have understood her, she believed he would, and would have forgiven her if the deed called for forgiveness. Would that she had told him everything, and that she had asked for his opinion and advice; but it was too late, he had gone out of her life, and she must learn to walk the rugged path of duty alone. And, oh! dreadful thought, perhaps even *he* would turn against her when Essylt carried out her threat of telling him what "her two eyes had seen."

And thus did Barbara, so brave of soul, so clear of vision, torment herself and allow herself to be terrified

by an imaginary and morbid fancy; it was no wonder that she grew thin, and pale, and careworn.

When it was nearly time for Tom to return she rose and began her simple preparations for their evening meal. She laid down the white cloth, and blazed up the fire, and placed his slippers on the hearth. Poor Tom! was he quite happy? she wondered. Would Mabel's love satisfy his heart? She was a good girl, conscientious, and true, and proper—oh! more proper and well brought up than she and Tom had ever been. What, then, could he wish for more? She could not tell, but she felt that the straight and narrow grooves, and the formal propriety of a conventional English girl's life, would place too much constraint on the impulsive, emotional spirit of a Welshman. "He would be sure to kick over the traces sometimes," she said with a smile. "I believe I would myself." And so lost was she in her own thoughts that she started violently when the latch of the big door was raised and Tom himself entered. His face wore a curious expression, which Barbara, who knew him so well, found it very difficult to understand. There was a good deal of sentimental tragedy, some indignation, but underlying all, a certain alertness and freedom which had been absent from him of late. Barbara ignored that, though she saw it, and addressed herself only to sentimental dejection.

"Don't ask me any questions, Barbara; some other time I'll tell you all."

"Very well, dear," she answered, and turned to pour out his beer; but this did not seem quite what Tom wanted, for he began of his own accord to tell her all, without waiting for some other time, and between the mouthfuls of his bread and cheese he said gloomily:

“Girls are funny things.”

“Yes, indeed,” assented Barbara, recalling the two varieties she had encountered lately, Essylt and Mabel.

“Well, it’s all over,” said Tom, after a little pause.

“All over?”

“Yes, it’s all off, between Mabel and me, I mean.”

“All off? Tom!” gasped Barbara.

“Oh, don’t fret about it, dear,” said Tom, who saw that she had changed colour. “I am not going to break my heart; indeed, there’s no doubt that Mabel has treated me shamefully, but never mind, it’s very evident that she and I were not meant for each other. What d’you think? She wanted me to take Plasyd-derwen!”

“Tom!”

“Yes; and when I told her it was as far beyond my means as if she’d asked for a house in the moon, she said, ‘Well, anyway, I don’t like that tumbledown mill, with its thatch, and its owls, and its ghostly staircases, and, moreover, Tom, I don’t like your sister Barbara, and that’s the plain truth; she and I would never get on together.’ Did you ever hear such a thing, Barbara?” and he moistened his dry lips.

“Oh, I’m afraid I’ve done all the mischief,” said Barbara.

“Well, you *were* indiscreet, no doubt; and then she went on to say that she did not like the ridiculous way in which I always held you up as a pattern, and also said that she wouldn’t like you to identify yourself with that old Peggy, and she went on in a very strange manner, very high and mighty, and domineering, Barbara, and at last she capped it all by saying, ‘Well, if we ever were married, you’d have to choose between Barbara and me.’ ‘Well, by Jove, I choose

Barbara,' I said. I was dreadfully annoyed, and did not care what I said. We had just reached Mr. Preece's door, and all she said was, 'All right, then, 'tis well we understand each other.'"

From this account of his troubles it will be seen that Tom was not likely to break his heart; in fact, he had been ill at ease of late, and had been as often disturbed and worried by Mabel's moods and fancies as Michael Lloyd had been by Essylt's, and it would be little exaggeration to say that the graceful and elegant Mabel had lately become to him somewhat of a white elephant.

With a perfect intuition of this, Barbara thought, "The least said the soonest mended."

"I am so sorry, Tom," was all she said. "I am afraid I have been a good deal the cause of this rupture."

"Oh, never mind," said Tom, trying to look like a martyr. "It's very evident, old girl, that you and I will have to stick to each other till the end of the chapter; but, Barbara," he added, "you'll have to be quiet about that night at Caefrân. *We* know it's all right, but other people will not think so, so keep it all to yourself, dear."

"I will, Tom. I came to that decision while you were out; you can trust me, now. I will keep it all to myself." And this she did, until, as the days and weeks went on, she grew thinner and paler, but showed no diminution of cheerfulness.

Phil seldom came in to see them unless Barbara herself went round to fetch him, when he would follow her in a shamefaced manner, treading very gingerly, and sitting down on the edge of his chair, under which he always placed his hat. It was no use attempting

to draw him into friendly conversation about Michael, for he never volunteered a remark on the matter, and only answered in monosyllables; therefore, Barbara never spoke to him on the subject, but Tom was not so reticent. Indeed, he seldom lost a chance of singing the praises of his friend, whose absence from Maentrevor made a great blank in his life.

Phil's shrewd eye was not slow to notice Barbara's fading looks, and thought that he had a very good clue to the cause.

"Little Miss," he said one evening to Peggy, "is getting thinner and paler every day. What's the matter with her, d'you think? What's the good of two old bodies like you and me, if we cannot cheer a little soul like that?"

"Don't know, indeed," said Peggy; "but there is a cause for everything, and I'm thinking that the doctor who cut that wound will have to come and sew it up."

"What doctor?" said Phil gruffly, knowing full well whom she meant. "Dr. Rees, I suppose."

"Of course," said Peggy, chuckling; "or, if he wasn't at home, Dr. Michael Lloyd might come and do it for him." And as she placed his *carvel* before him, she took the opportunity of giving him a nudge.

"Oh, yes, yes! Philip Lloyd," she continued, "thou knowest well, and so do I, what doctor would cure her."

"What's the good of knowing that, if we can't bring it about? He is going to marry that white cat Essylt."

"White cat!" exclaimed Peggy, losing her temper. "Oh, *jar-i!* I won't have her called names. There is nobody in the world been more provoked by Essylt's ways than me; it was only this morning, if you please, she said, 'I only went to see poor John James

drinking his medicine too,' impudent little huzzy! But don't you call her names, Philip Lloyd, a poor orphan, without a father or mother."

"Well, white dove or white lamb, if it pleases thee better," said Phil grimly. "I don't care white what! if she only'll keep out of my fold."

"Yes, yes! there I'm agreeing with thee; only don't call her names—white cat, indeed!" and she went to the high mantelshelf and began to dust the ornaments, her usual resource when she wanted to work off a spurt of temper. She began with a china dog at one end with a good deal of snorting, and by the time she had reached the black candlesticks in the middle she had cooled down considerably, and was quite ready for a good gossip by the time she had reached the china cottage at the other end.

"Didst see poor John Jones's funeral to-day?"

"Well, of course, I did, and thee at the tail-end of it. Why wouldn't I see it?" Phil was still irritable, but Peggy took no notice.

"Thou wast not there thyself," she said, a little reproof in her voice, for to attend funerals is considered a duty as well as an enjoyment in Wales.

"No," said Phil; "I don't seem to take any pleasure in funerals lately."

"Oh, well!" said Peggy consolingly, "thou wilt be better again when thou hast cast off thy cold—another bowl of *cawl*?"

"No. I don't seem to care for *cawl*, or beer, or anything lately. I'll go to bed, I think," said Phil, with a long-drawn yawn; and bolting Peggy out, he took up his candle and went heavily up the stairs.

But when our friends in the old mill were looking upon life with saddened eyes, outside Nature was

marching buoyantly and steadily onwards, leaving behind her every sign of cold and storm, and holding forth her hands to all that was beautiful and joyous in the future, to the daffodils, and ribes, and gilliflowers, and all the sweet scents of the spring which filled every heart with joyful anticipations—for darkened indeed must be the spirit that does not respond to the greetings of the simple country flowers of spring.

The sweet familiar perfumes, however, failed to bring to Barbara the usual bounding happiness with which she was wont to greet their advent. She gathered them, indeed, the pale primroses, the golden daffodils, but held them wistfully in her hand, and looked out over them with a vague yearning in her eyes.

Her walks were generally over the seashore, and home by the road from Maentrevor. She never turned her steps towards the path by the lake, for in that direction she dreaded an encounter with Essylt. There was not much danger of this, however, had she known it, for now Essylt seldom went beyond the precincts of her home and the mill garden, where she made a pretence of helping Peggy in the setting of it, working under a running fire of her reproofs and expostulations.

“There’s a bad place for the potato bed, now, and those leeks! Dost call them properly sown? They’ll never come to any good.”

She spent many hours of the day in her room, with the door locked upon her, sometimes rising at night to walk by the side of the lake, disappearing into her usual covert in the thicket. Sometimes she returned before morning, at others Peggy knocked in vain at her lady niece’s door, at last turning away indignantly, and giving vent to her anger in a string of the names which she had objected to Phil’s using.

And so the month passed on—the month that was so important to Essylt and to a grave-eyed man in London, who knew that every hour as it sped by was leading him nearer to the time when his fate would be fixed for ever.

Passing one day by a square garden, a familiar scent reached him, and looking up he espied a fine bush of ribes in full bloom. The perfume sent a pang to his heart—a memory of the Caefrân garden, of the orchard, of the apple trees, which must now be in blossom, of a rustic tea-table under the boughs, of a little hand that moved about amongst the tea-things, and the charming brown eyes that looked up at him with a dawning love in their depths, and he turned into the busy street with their words in his mind:

“Oh, memory! fond memory!
When all things fade we turn to thee.”

But neither sentiment nor sorrow, neither fear nor doubt, will retard the foot of Time. On—on he comes, with swift, unerring steps, the past cast behind him for ever, the present trodden under his feet, the mysterious future drawing every moment nearer.

Thus Barbara felt as she sat bending over some bit of feminine work in the old west parlour, and thus Essylt felt too, though she could not have put her thoughts into words. Philip, poor old Philip, would not have allowed that he felt anything at all, so he worked with more energy, and his laugh was louder than usual as the days passed on, and the last week came, before that on which Michael Lloyd was expected to arrive.

At last that week was gone, next day Michael would be there. He had written as usual to bid Essylt meet

him on the woodland path if fine, if not, "I will come to thy cottage, Essylt, and we can make all our arrangements, if Peggy will allow," he had said.

The latter had become less excitable, and seemed quite subdued by the steady march of events, and could only stand by, as it were, with upraised hands and many ejaculations.

"Well, in my deed, I never saw such a thing! Did one ever hear of a girl going to be married without preparing a rag of clothes? No, in my deed! I never saw such a thing, not I! Dost remember, *lodes*, that Michael Lloyd is coming to-morrow? It oughtn't to be anything to thee, but it *is*, I'm afraid, *ach-y-fi!*"

But Essylt went calmly on her way with that inscrutable smile upon her red lips, her light-fringed eyelids half closed over her grey-green eyes.

"Oh, yes, I remember everything," she said. "I am going to bed now, good-night."

"To bed?" said Peggy, "and nothing done! The bread not out of the oven, and the duck John James' widow gave me not feathered!"

But Essylt had already gone up the stairs and had reached her room and, bolting her door, had taken out the key, and after oiling it carefully, had replaced it in the lock. There was a clumsy, crooked-legged table at the window, at which she sat down, drawing out a deep drawer at one end in which she had evidently prepared a supply of writing materials. These she now placed on the table before her.

Writing a letter was no easy task for her; she squared her elbows over the page, and with her head very much on one side, began to write slowly and laboriously, at first halting after almost every word, then more smoothly, till at last her pen flew on more frequently.

The twilight deepened, and still she continued to write. The stars came out, the darkness fell, and she lighted a candle. The big white owl in the gable sailed past the window and cried a protest; still Essylt wrote on, her face working with repressed passion. For a time she stopped to rest, leaning back in her chair and thinking with all the mental power which she possessed, but that was not much. "Yes, I will, I will!" she said, as she took up her pen again.

She heard Peggy go out to pay her last visit to the mill kitchen, she heard her return, and leaving her shoes at the bottom of the stairs, walk up in her stockinged feet; then she heard the more distant sounds in the west gable, where Tom and Barbara were locking up the doors and windows before retiring to rest, the very echo of their footsteps seeming to exasperate the strange girl, for she rose to listen, and trembled as she heard the key turn in the lock of Barbara's room, after which there was a dead silence, broken only by the mysterious sounds of night which seem to haunt every old house. Then she sat down again, and seizing her pen, wrote her name at the bottom of the long letter she had written. When at last it was folded and placed in its envelope, she fetched from her work-box a stick of red sealing-wax, and sealed the letter with a large patch, marking it all over with the imprint of a small key which she took from her pocket; then she addressed it slowly and carefully, and thrust it into her pocket before stretching herself down on her bed, where she fell into a restless, troubled sleep.

At midnight she was still sleeping; for two or three hours longer she lay there, until at last, when the night was at its darkest and stillest, at that hour when the death of one day and the birth of another seems to have sapped the energies of Nature, when the air strikes

cold, and the tide of vitality ebbs low in the human frame, Essylt stirred a little; she awoke, and sitting up hastily, looked round at her candle.

“Not morning! no, past two, it must be!” she said, as she saw how low the light had burned, and rising, she began to dress herself slowly, and as if weary. She felt for her letter in her pocket, and looked once more with suspicion at the broad red seal, then she took from its hook her old grey shawl, and wrapping it over her head and shoulders went to the door and unlocked it, her precautions of the night before enabling her to turn the key with ease and quietness. Going out, she took the key with her, and relocked the door on the outside before she began her way slowly and carefully down the stairs.

Once in Peggy’s kitchen it was easy to unbolt the door and let herself out into the fresh night air. She heard the wind whispering and sighing in the Cwm Meivon woods, she saw the stars that crowded the dark blue sky, she saw the faint outline of the thatched gables of the mill, and for the first time in her life the scene, the sounds impressed her senses, and the picture remained fixed on her mind. She turned her back upon the mill and crossed the stile into the woods. Here she was in her old haunts—no human voice or form to exasperate her; she walked slowly towards the lake, and reaching it, stood still upon the bank, staring down at the glassy surface, on which the myriad stars were reflected like brilliant gems. She stood immovable as a statue, merely muttering under her breath, “Yes, yes, I know! there is peace and rest down there, but I won’t come to you. I mustn’t, I can’t, you are cold and dark, and I am a coward; I never thought I was, but I am, I am, or I wouldn’t go on bearing and suffering, what-

ever; they shall think that I am safe out of it, but I'm not, I'm not, I'm not!" she cried with increasing excitement, and she shook her clenched fist towards the old mill, whose thatched points showed against the stars.

"Good-bye," she said, "good-bye to you all, and if there is a God, may He serve you as you have served me—that's only fair, whatever. Good-bye, Michael," and her voice took on a tone of tenderness. "Thou alone hast been kind to me. Good-bye! *fforwel*."

She walked hurriedly along the path by the water's edge, her face buried in her hands, her shoulders heaving with dry sobs which shook her whole frame, but which were not relieved by tears. Her footsteps staggered unevenly sometimes as she hastened on, until at last, having rounded the lake, she reached the thick undergrowth of the wood, and stooping under the trailing branches disappeared in the dark shadows.

CHAPTER XV

It was the last day of March, bright and blue and sunny. It had been a kindly month on the whole, its blustering storms, over early, coming in like a lion, as they say, and now it was exemplifying the rest of the adage by going out like a lamb. The keen winds were tempered by a brilliant sun, and spring was sprinkling her flowers broadcast over the land. The mill door was wide open, and within Phil was busy with the roasting of a large *cynos* of oats. The farm-servant from Tyissa was sitting on the steps of the grain-loft, while the miller occupied his favourite seat on an upturned barrel beside him. They had discussed the affairs of the country-side, Phil being more chatty than usual in his anxious endeavours to keep the talk away from the Cwm Meivon gossip; but Dafi was no longer to be led off the scent, and asked him bluntly, "Isn't it to-day Dr. Lloyd is coming home from London?"

Phil rose to stir the oats over the kiln, and the hot steam rose like smoke from the roasting corn, filling the mill with fumes. He drew his handkerchief over his heated face.

"I don't know," he replied.

"I heard it was," said Dafi; "but you would know, I suppose, and I heard he was going to marry that girl Essylt. *Dei anwl!* there's a strange thing, eh?"

Phil made no answer as he busied himself between the sacks of corn, and Dafi continued:

"A gentleman like him—'cause he *is* a gentleman, and no mistake—going to marry Peggy Jerry's niece!

Odd thing, isn't it? I am sure you are not liking it, eh?"

"Look here, man," said the miller, trying to keep his temper under control, "'tis wasting the Tyissa oats we've got in hand, we are, this afternoon. I've naught to say about anything else—dost hear?"

"Oh, begging pardon," says Dafi humbly, for Phil was a man of some importance in Cwm Meivon, "only thinking, I was."

"Well! never mind thy thoughts now. Here's little miss coming back from her walk—must be later than we thought," and they both looked out to see Barbara's trim little figure crossing the green, her hands laden with spring flowers.

She went straight to her own west gable. Generally she would call at Phil's cottage and leave half her treasures there, but to-day she shrank from coming in contact with Essylt, whom she had not met since their encounter at the edge of the lake—indeed, Essylt seemed not at all anxious to meet Barbara either. She was seldom to be seen except in the garden behind her cottage, and Barbara had found no difficulty in avoiding a meeting. On entering she found the old rose-bowl, and sat down to arrange the flowers—daffodils, pale blue periwinkles, primroses, the budding sweet-briar—and when she had finished she stood up to admire her arrangements. Suddenly the door opened and Peggy appeared, looking pale with anger and excitement.

"What is the matter?" said Barbara.

"Enough is the matter, Miss *vâch*, for there's Essylt shut up in her room all day! Never a bit of breakfast, never a mouthful of dinner has she had! I have knocked and called at the door till I'm out of breath,

but she won't answer more than the dead. Come you up, Miss *vâch*; she won't dare to refuse you."

"Oh, Peggy," said Barbara, "I can't—indeed I can't. Let her be! I dare say she is busy preparing for—for her wedding."

"Preparing? Not she—not a bit of 'preperascion' have I seen—no more than if she was never going to be married. No, no, Miss *vâch*, she has one of her 'stupet' fits on. Come up with me, I beg of you," and seeing that Peggy was evidently distressed and frightened, Barbara nerved herself to help her, and followed her up the stairs, ashamed to feel that she was trembling with nervousness herself.

"Essylt," called Peggy, thumping the black oak door with her fist. "Dost hear, *lodes*? Open the door, this minute, too!" and again she thumped vigorously, but there was no answer from within.

"Dost hear, Essylt? Open, I tell thee—here's Miss Barbara waiting here. How darest thou keep her standing, thou little villanes!"

"Oh, Peggy, hush," said Barbara. "Don't call her names."

"Names, indeed!" said Peggy, who was every moment waxing more wrathful. "I'll name her, when she comes out," and she knocked again excitedly upon the door.

"Let me try," said Barbara, "or what was the use of my coming up with you?" and she tapped at the door. "Essylt!" she cried, "Peggy is very nervous about you. Won't you come out and set her fears at rest?" and then paused to listen; but there was no answer, no sound except the wind whistling through the keyhole.

"There's no key in the lock," said Peggy, stooping

down and peeping in as well as she could. "She's not here. I can see the table, and the pen and ink on it. Essylt!" she shouted again, "art coming out, or I'll have the door burst open. I will, as sure as my name is Peggy!"

"I don't think she is in the room," said Barbara. "Come downstairs, and let her have her own time."

"But, dear heart," said Peggy, "you don't know, perhaps, to-day Maychael Lloyd is coming home, because, indeed, I—I'm never speaking about it to you, for I am ashamed of such a thing as this wedding. Did you know?" she asked diffidently.

"Yes," said Barbara, "I know, Peggy."

"Was any poor woman ever so bothered as I have been with this girl—sometimes smooth as butter, and then I find she's laughing at me all the time; sometimes won't speak a word to me for days, the impudent little huzzy! What will I say when Maychael Lloyd comes?"

"Perhaps she has gone through the woods to meet him," Barbara suggested; her lips felt dry and parched, and her voice was husky and sounded unnatural, and Peggy looked at her keenly, for her conversation with Phil had only strengthened her impressions concerning Michael's and Barbara's feelings towards each other.

"*Ach-y-fi!*" she said as she reached the bottom stair, "the world is full of troubles, but in my deed, 'tis the follies of it that worry me most. Well! I'll leave the out-door open, and let my lady turn up when she likes. I won't wait tea for her, and you shall have *your* tea in a minute, Miss *vâch*," and she began laying her table with a great clattering of tea-cups, under cover of which Barbara made her escape into the par-

lour, where she sat down at the west window and looked out at the evening sky as she had done a few weeks ago, when Michael Lloyd had come to wish her "good-bye." She sat very still and silent, until at last her eyes drooped to her hands folded upon her lap. It would seem like sacrilege to reveal thoughts that she kept so safely locked within her own heart, so we will leave her there, while the daylight passes and the evening shadows draw on.

Tom came home to his tea, and had to be attended to, Barbara endeavouring to cast off every trace of depression.

"Who do you think has come home, Barbara?" he said at last. "Why! Michael Lloyd!" He stopped to look critically at the spring flowers in the rose-bowl to avoid embarrassing Barbara, whom he felt, rather than saw, was changing colour, from white to red, from red to white. His own experiences of late had made him more alive to other people's troubles, and he had a very shrewd guess as to how things stood between Barbara and Michael.

"Is he?" she said, as naturally as she could. "Was he quite well? Did you speak to him?"

"Yes," said Tom. "Just a few words. Dr. Rees was with him. How lovely these flowers are!" and he rose with a yawn and strolled on to the little porch and round to the green, whence he returned very soon with a serious face. "Have you seen Peggy?" he said. "She is in a regular fix about Essylt, can't find her anywhere. Where can she be, Barbara? Peggy wants me to go up and call her; but if she has resisted Peggy's blandishments, and her prolific vocabulary of abuse, she is not likely to listen to me. Had I better go to the mill and ask Phil's advice?"

“Oh, no; he wouldn’t advise you. You know how he hates Essylt.”

“I had forgotten. I always said there was something mysterious and uncanny about that girl—but really, where can she be?”

“I don’t know,” said Barbara, a little impatiently. “I think Peggy is making a fuss about nothing. Essylt will come when she chooses,” and Tom went out again and came back soon, saying that Peggy had agreed to wait patiently until the girl appeared; but the twilight faded, and the darkness fell, the stars came out, and Peggy stood at her door, continually gazing up at them as if she expected some information from their brilliance. At last, however, she gave up hoping, and reluctantly went to bed, taking care to leave the door ajar; but Essylt never came, and when Peggy came down in the morning, she sought in vain for any sign of the absent girl.

There was no mark on the path, no footstep on the dewy green. Peggy sat down to weep and wring her hands. All her anger against Essylt had disappeared, all her faults were condoned. She was a dear little child without father or mother, and her sobs and wailing filled the cottage and reached Barbara’s ears in the west parlour. Certainly there was no longer peace and calm under the thatch of the old mill. Presently Barbara entered, and Peggy was indignant at her composure. “Oh, Miss *vâch*, you are looking as quiet and happy as if everything was all right. Look at me, losing my only comfort—the prop of my old age!”

“Well, but wait, Peggy, let me ask you! Haven’t you complained many times about Essylt that she has refused to open the door, though you begged and implored her to do so? I don’t believe any harm has come

to her. She has gone to some friend, perhaps, and will come back by and by."

"And perhaps she is lying dead in there by herself. I'll have Benjamin the blacksmith to undo the lock, because I can't sit down here with my face like a smiling dolt, and my poor Essylt roaming about the world. Perhaps she is dead!"

Barbara was quite conscious of the implied rebuke, and inwardly amused at Peggy's simile.

"I am trying to be quiet. It wouldn't do to have us both in wild excitement. Come now! Take your breakfast, and I will go down and fetch the blacksmith," and she passed out to the pearly green, her footsteps making the first marks upon it.

"Oh! I'll come, miss," said Benjamin, gathering his tools together. "I'll soon have the door open. It's one of Essylt's sulky moods, I expect. There's a pity, this nice man Michael Lloyd is going to tie such a clog around his own neck!"

"It's no business of ours," said Barbara. "Peggy is very anxious, so come at once, please."

"No! no! no!" said Benjamin, "'tis no business of mine, but if I was Michael Lloyd I would not raise a finger to find her. Here we are!" he said, as they reached Peggy's door.

"Why, Peggy, woman, what's the matter with thee?" he asked, as she raised a loud wail. "Essylt's only playing some of her little tricks upon thee. She'll be back to-morrow or the next day as fresh as a new-laid egg. Come on! let's see the door!" and they followed him upstairs.

"*Dei anwel!* Here is solidness and strength!" he said. "They don't make these sort of doors nowadays," and with his strong tools he soon prised the

lock, and the door flew open upon its hinges. They all entered, and found no sign of the missing girl, but the bed had been lain upon on the outside, although certainly not slept in since it was made.

"Now take my advice," said Barbara, "and wait patiently till she turns up."

"Supposing she does not turn up?"

"Well! then it will be time enough to decide what we'd better do. 'At present we can only wait.'"

It was late in the afternoon when Barbara heard a calm, resonant voice in Peggy's kitchen. She knew it at once. It was Michael Lloyd's.

"I did not come sooner, Peggy, because I heard Essylt was away," he said. "What's all this fuss thou art making about it? She will come back when she wishes to—nobody wants to force the girl's actions—let her be! She will come back all right, to-morrow or the day after."

"That is all very well for you to say. It won't make much difference to you, I suppose, whether she comes back or not, but to me, bereft of all my comforts—to lose my little Essylt will be the last blow."

"Well! come, give me a cup of tea. Perhaps by the time we have finished, Essylt will have returned," and Peggy waited upon him with many "*ach-y-fi's*" and sighs and groans.

"You will go in and see the little miss and Mr. Tom, won't you?" said Peggy.

"Not to-day. I have to return to Maentrevor," and he made his way out to the green and crossed to the stile, although his footsteps would have turned more naturally to the old porch. Once in the woodland path alone he was overwhelmed by a flood of memories—memories of Essylt—not happy, not en-

dearing—for she seemed to have been born to be a source of trouble and annoyance to him, and yet there had been a night in the long past when she had walked by his side on the shore, when to his boyish and heated imagination she seemed all that was beautiful and guileless.

The afternoon sun was glittering on the ripples of the lake; daffodils were nodding to their shadows on its bosom; the birds sang blithesome in the brake. He would not let his thoughts run into a tender groove. In one direction he would not let memory awake! and he had nearly succeeded in emptying his mind of all conscious thought, when suddenly there flashed before him an idea that seemed to have power to sting him. Essylt's repeated allusions to peace and rest which she thought could be found only under the cool waters of the lake; at once he was alive to all possibilities, and wondered why he had not sooner thought of this explanation of the girl's absence. "Oh, God!" he said, looking down into its still depths. "I could never forgive myself—no, never! never!—it would be too terrible! too tragic! Let me see! What can I do now? I have made a pretty muddle of my life—there's no doubt of *that*, but this tragic end to poor Essylt's life—if it has occurred, and I very much fear it has—will be the crowning point of the blunder. Tom," he thought, "has an old head on young shoulders—perhaps I could not do better than consult him," and, acting upon the spur of the moment, he was soon hurrying along the road to Maentrevor.

"Good Lord! man," said Tom, "what an awful idea! But indeed, you may be right. Fancy your asking my advice, too! Indeed, I feel honoured, Michael. Of course, if the poor girl does not turn up soon you

will have real cause to think she has drowned herself. The natural thing would be to drag the lake at once, to go to Llangraig to get one of the fishermen there to bring up his boat and his grappling-irons, and to send the Tyissa cart for them."

"Is that your advice, then?" said Michael. "'Twill cause a sensation all over the neighbourhood."

"Wait," said Tom. "I have another course to propose. If that fails, we must drag the lake. Did she really say that peace and rest were only to be found there, poor girl? What a life of unrest hers seems to have been, and with so much to make her happy! Strange! very strange! Before we entertain that idea seriously, Michael, let us try this plan first. Do you remember at the dark end of the lake, where I told you I saw her disappear into the brushwood?"

"Do you think she's hiding there, like a fox or a sheep-dog?" said Michael.

"I don't know. Let us go to-night, and search for her there. Something tells me we shall find her. Shall we start at once?" He looked at his watch. "Time to close the office. Come, let us get off on our search."

"Well, no! I think the better plan would be that we should both go back to Cwm Meivon to-night to explain our plans to Peggy, and you would like to tell your sister what we are going to do, and to-morrow, Tom—d'you think you could give me the whole day?"

"Of course! I will explain to Mr. Preece. I shall be at your service all day, old fellow. Awfully grieved I am, Michael, about all this trouble."

"I know," said Michael gloomily. "I thought I was prepared for anything, but certainly I was not prepared for this. Come, let us start!" and they were soon walking together through the woods, both silent

and preoccupied; but when they reached the turn to the lake they both stopped with one accord, and looked towards the thicket which they meant to explore next day. After a long look at it, Michael shook his head.

"I have not much hope of finding any clue there, Tom," he said, "but we've agreed to try it to-morrow morning. I will be ready by nine o'clock.

"All right!" said Tom; "and should we fail, we'll go on to Llangraig and get Will Jones's boat out."

Michael acquiesced.

The next day they met according to appointment. "Now, who's going to be the first to attack this thicket?" said Michael.

"I am," answered Tom, "for I know exactly where I saw Essylt enter it; but upon my word," he added, standing in front of the wall of thorns, "I can't think how she did it! Ah! I have it," he said, groping about on the ground. "Look here, Michael, this briar-bush has grown flat on the ground, see! I lift it up bodily and thus make room for you to pass under it. Come! step in, and I will follow," and in a few moments the two men stood on the other side of the wall of greenery, although for a little longer they had to fight their way through the long rope-like brambles. At last they found themselves in the recesses of the forest. No path of any kind could be seen—the woods were full of song. "Come, sing with me," said the thrush; "Come, dance with us," said the bluebells in the glade; "Come, listen to me, I have a fairy tale to tell you," said the streamlet that gurgled under the leaves, but the two young men hearkened not to them, although they both felt the call of spring. Sometimes they stopped to call aloud, "Essylt! Essylt!" and Tom started at the curious effect of his voice. There was no echo from hill to

hill, but a soft sibilant whisper between the distant tree-trunks.

“Essylt! Essylt! How weird!” said Tom. “I never noticed that effect before.”

“And yet it is very natural,” said Michael. “The sound returns to us from those myriad shining tree-trunks.”

“We are coming to the end of them, then,” said Tom; “for yonder I see the beginning of a fir-wood. I recognise the place now—have been here rook-shooting sometimes, but I have never come from this direction before. I had no idea that these woods reached our lake. See! there is a path, Michael, or at least a faint track.”

“Yes, for certain someone has walked this way,” said Michael; “and see!” he said, loosening a bit of grey flannel from a thorn-bush, “isn’t that a bit of Essylt’s shawl?”

“Yes! I’ll swear to it anywhere,” said Tom. “And by Jove! there’s a cottage. Why, of course, the woodman’s!”

“Is it?” said Michael. “I have never been here before—we may learn something there.”

Drawing nearer to the house they were greeted by a furious barking from a large sheep-dog. He stood at the open door, and although he protested loudly he seemed somewhat embarrassed in his actions by the presence of a toddling baby, who steadied his uncertain steps by digging his fingers into the dog’s thick coat.

“Poor fellow! Good dog!” said Michael, approaching a little nearer, but the dog growled fiercely, showing its white teeth and bristling mane.

“There is someone within,” said Tom. “I saw a

shadow move. Hallo!" he cried loudly. A slow step was heard shuffling nearer, and through an open door at the end of the kitchen an old man advanced. In his hand he held a bunch of herbs or weeds, and his dim eyes blinked as he came into the sunshine of the outer room.

"Down, Tango," he said. "He's quite quiet, sir, when we are with him."

"A good house-dog," said Michael. "He would not let us come near the door."

"Oh, no, sir! he knows better than that. When we are away he has to guard the house and the baby. Come in, gentlemen! come in!"

"We won't detain you long," said Michael, as they entered the pleasant kitchen where Tango and the baby had already settled themselves on the hearth. "We have come on a very strange errand. A young girl from Cwm Meivon has been missing for some days, and we thought it possible she might have strayed this way. She is not here, is she?"

"Here?" said the old man. "*Caton Parwb!* No, sir, we are too full here already. This is my daughter and son-in-law's bedroom," and he unlatched the door on the right.

"And a very nice room it is, too!" said Tom, entering without scruple and taking a good look round. "I wouldn't mind sleeping here myself. I suppose you have no room for a lodger?"

"Oh, dear, no!" said the old man. "That little room in here is where I dry my herbs and things. There's a loft above here where I sleep, and that's all the room I have here; but, dear me! about the poor girl. What was her name?"

"Essylt Lewis," said Tom. "A pale girl with very

light hair, and rather drooping eyelids. You haven't seen anyone of that description passing here, have you?"

"Well," said the old man, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, "I may have indeed, about three weeks or a month ago."

"Oh, no! no!—two or three days ago," said Michael.

"I'll ask my daughter when she comes home—she's gone to Bryncelyn to buy butter, but she'll be back directly, I'm thinking."

"Oh! well! we won't wait," said Michael. "We may meet her," and they went out again into the broad sunshine.

"What a large shed!" said Tom, approaching the window of the woodshed. "Full up with fagots, I see!"

"Yes," said the old man, unlocking the lower half of the door, and exhibiting with pride the fagots within that almost burst through the doorway. "Fires for the winter, you see," he said with a pleased laugh.

"Yes," said Tom cheerfully. "You have a fine blaze sometimes, I expect."

"Yes," said the old man. "That is the best of my son-in-law's occupation, you see. He's Colonel Howell's chief woodman, and we are allowed as much *briwyd* as we like."

"Well! good morning!" Tom called back. "You live in a lovely spot."

"I hope we have not detained you too long," said Michael. "Will you inquire of all your friends, if they have seen anything of a young girl such as we have described?"

"Dear *anwyl!* Yes, indeed, sir—but don't you vex too much. She is sure to turn up some day," and they

left the old man tugging his forelock in the dazzling sunshine.

“No success, Tom! What shall we do now! Ah! there’s the woman coming,” and they met the woodman’s wife, carrying a pound of butter on a blue plate. Once more they began their inquiries, but she seemed still less able than her father to give them any information.

“A girl, sir? No, indeed!”

Every question was answered with a stolid “No, indeed!” or “I don’t know. A girl in these woods? Oh! dear *anwl*, no. There’s nobody but us ever coming this way.”

“Did you ever see such a specimen of stolid ignorance?”

“No,” said Michael. “’Tis wonderful how few ideas some people carry in their brains.”

“Well! we must go straight to Llangraig then, and back to Cwm Meivon. I have already ordered the Tyissa cart to await us in case we should require to bring the boat.”

“You have a good business head, Tom,” said Michael.

“’Tis a terrible job and must be got through,” was Tom’s reply.

It was not long before they reached the little fishing-village, and accompanied by two fishermen and the Tyissa cart, on which the boat had been placed, retraced their steps to the lake in the wood. Llyn Dystaw had never looked more beautiful than it did on this lovely spring day. A few fleecy white clouds flecking the blue sky; the soft wind rippling the surface of the water, and making the daffodils which fringed the banks nod to each other. A few of the villagers, at-

tracted to the scene by curiosity, stood about on the banks.

“See to it, Tom,” Michael had said when the little boat’s keel had grated on the shingle. “I do believe I am developing nerves—I feel quite beaten. I think I’ll go back to Dr. Rees’s. Come and tell me the result, Tom.”

“Yes, go! leave it to me,” said the latter.

When Michael was about to leave, he felt a burly arm thrust through his own. “No—thou’lt not go to Dr. Rees’s,” said Phil’s kindly voice. “Thou’lt come home to thine own father, my lad, and whatever thy troubles may be, we’ll share them together under the old mill-thatch,” and Michael could only grasp his father’s hand in silence, and in the old mill-kitchen, as of yore, they sat under the broad chimney, waiting, waiting for what news Tom might bring them. At last a long wail from Peggy startled them both, and they stared at the open doorway until she appeared followed by Tom. She was dangling on her fingers a string of blue beads.

“My little Essylt’s necklace that she wore on her beautiful white neck!” she cried, sitting down and swaying herself backwards and forwards.

“That is all,” said Tom. “There’s nothing else in Llyn Dystaw. They have dragged it through and through.”

“Thank God!” said Michael, and the simple words expressed the deepest gratitude, not only because he had been spared the tragic *dénouement* which he had feared, but also that his beloved lake would still be free from harrowing associations.

“There is no mistaking that necklace!” he continued. “I wonder how it got there?”

“Oh! that’s easy!” said Tom. “Most likely poor Essylt tired of it, and threw it in—possibly it might have slipped off her neck while she stooped to gather a daffodil—oh! a hundred ways. Put it away in your drawer, Peggy, and try and learn the lesson of patience. In His own good time God will make it plain.

“I have paid the men, Michael; the boat has gone back to Cwm Meivon, the villagers have dispersed; everything is calm and beautiful out there. It strikes me we have only to wait patiently for the elucidation of this mystery.”

“Quite right! Quite right!” said Phil.

“I am very hungry, whatever,” said Tom, who knew from experience that the best way to help Peggy was to call upon her for help.

“Hungry—Mr. Tom *bâch!* What have I been thinking about? ‘And you having no food to-day perhaps!’”

“No, indeed! so bring out the best loaf, Peggy.”

“That I will, indeed!” she said, beginning to lay the table, while Phil, looking on, suggested all manner of dainties.

“There’s a pot of stewed sand-eels, which Marged Tyissa brought; and a beautiful cheese I brought from Bryndu; and there’s the new ham, just cut,” and soon Peggy spread upon the table such a meal! such a profusion of country delicacies! and a hearty meal was partaken of, Phil being more like his old genial self, while Michael’s grave face lost much of the worry and anxiety that had marked it since he had returned to Cwm Meivon and to the tragic developments of the last few days.

Tom had disappeared while Peggy’s tea was drawing. “I just went to tell Barbara what had trans-

pired," he said on his return. "I am glad I went. Poor girl! she's so truly sympathetic, you know!"

"Ah! Mr. Tom has his head skewed on right," said the miller. "You didn't think of asking little miss, now, to come in and have tea with us?"

"Oh, no!" said Tom. "She has a bad headache, and has gone to lie down, and begs Peggy to bring her a cup of tea in an hour's time."

"That I will! *Caton Pawb*," said Peggy, and she waxed quite cheerful as she flitted from one to the other without her shoes, and even recovered her cheerfulness so far as to give a very graphic account of the funeral which had taken place the day before. "*Crêpe* and silk on every hat, and black kid gloves for everyone that wanted them. Some more sand-eels, *machgen-i?* You were always fond of them."

After tea they drew round the fire and smoked, and Phil, who had avoided Essylt's name for so long, seemed to give rein to his son, who suggested all sorts of explanations, but when, after a long evening had been spent together in the old confidential communion, Michael at last rose to return to Maentrevor, Phil, standing at the door looking after him, breathed a fervent prayer ere he turned back to the kitchen. "God forgive me for being so glad!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE interest caused by the mysterious disappearance of Essylt Lewis was not of long duration. It made a little ripple on the still lake of rustic life, but the circles grew wider and less marked, and were soon lost in the glassy surface of the smooth waters; and the incident, though it had at first caused an unusual sensation, was soon forgotten in the magnitude and importance of the small events of a country neighbourhood.

There was no one to mourn much for the poor girl, for Peggy's grief was shallow as it was noisy, and though it burst out afresh upon hearing the tidings that an old grey shawl and a shoe had been found on the shore at Llangraig, yet the assurance that this seemed to bring assuaged her grief considerably. Anything was better than the uncertainty which had hitherto shrouded the girl's fate.

"There can be no doubt about this shawl," said Michael, as Peggy held it up for them to see.

"None," said Tom; "for here is the shred that hung on the bushes. I have kept it in my waistcoat pocket ever since, and see! it fits in the rent exactly!"

"That is conclusive," said Michael.

"Oh! give it to me," said Peggy, "and I'll darn it in," and, pleased with this tangible bit of work which she could do for "her darling child," she trotted away to her cottage, forgetting to ask where the piece was found.

As she disappeared Michael shuddered. "Poor

child," he said, "that was a gruesome walk for her, Tom, along the Llangraig shore alone in the dark, and then to the cliffs with that desperate purpose in her mind all the time."

"Yes! but it will take more than a shawl or a shoe to make me believe she did it," said Tom.

There was no one in the whole community to whom Essylt had endeared herself. As for Michael Lloyd, it was very evident that the strange event had caused him much disturbance of spirit, for his face bore traces of deep anxiety and trouble, and it would have been unnatural and inhuman had it been otherwise, for the woman who had disappeared so suddenly from their midst would ere this have been his wife had she lived; besides this, his heart had been filled with strong pity for the restlessness and discontent which seemed to have poisoned her life.

For many years it had been pity alone that he had felt for Essylt, and he had forced himself to be content with this poor substitute for the love which, in another direction, would have grown to such a vigorous plant that it would have filled his soul with happiness. For long years, therefore, the name of "Essylt" had been synonymous in his mind with repression, self-sacrifice, and thwarted desires. Was it any wonder, therefore, that as the days went on, and the simple events of village life ran into their accustomed grooves, that he rejoiced, though with fear and trembling, in his restored freedom? For the lake still glittered in the sunshine and slept under the starlight, the daffodils still nodded in the breeze, the thrushes still sang in the brake, while life held out to him its treasures of hope and happiness. Was it to be wondered at, then, if as May's flowers grew more abundant, and the whole

world seemed to answer to the call of the spring, that the lines in Michael's face grew less pronounced, that his voice regained its old ring of cheer and content, more especially when he came in at the mill-door in the evenings to sit with his father on the old hearth, to smoke the pipe of peace and content, to send up the rings of blue smoke through the broad wattled chimney, where the hams and flitches of bacon hung like brown mummies above their heads, and his steps turned once more quite naturally to the west porch, and scarcely an evening passed without some portion of it having been spent in the companionship of Tom and his sister.

She and Michael both seemed to have buried the memory of the hours when their friendship had strained its bonds and threatened to overflow its banks into a river of love! All this they appeared to forget, but each one knew that in the other's heart, low down beneath the surface, was running a full bright stream of something warmer, stronger, deeper, than this outward intercourse of daily life. They had both, as if by one accord too, dropped the habit that had grown upon them of addressing each other by their Christian names, and "Dr. Lloyd" seemed to come quite easily to Barbara's lips, but it must be confessed that to Michael nothing more formal than "Miss Barbara" was possible. However, they had both got over the first awkwardness, and now there was nothing in their pleasant intercourse to remind them that they had been on the verge of stepping from the broad, high road of ordinary life to the sweet bypaths of love. All the vigorous and generous attributes pertaining to the temperament of a noble man, which had been somewhat crushed and thwarted by his late experience, took their place once more in Michael's nature. The very buoyancy

of his step indicated a happy life and freedom from care.

Barbara, on the contrary, seemed to have developed a variableness which such a close observer of her every mood as Michael Lloyd could not fail to detect. There were moments when, even in the abandonment of a hearty laugh, when her lips were wreathed in smiles, and her brown eyes were humid with merriment, a sudden change would come over her face like the shadow of a cloud on a sunny landscape.

“What,” he wondered, “was the cause of this sudden darkening of the sunshine?”

He considered his words, his actions, and found in them no explanation of this strange phenomenon, and he could only attribute it to the extreme sensitiveness of the girl's nature, and he made up his mind to be still more guarded over his own words, lest he might in any way unintentionally bruise the tender flower of love which he believed had grown in Barbara's heart.

One evening, while Tom sat at the piano and Barbara and Michael stood behind him, their voices blending in the harmony of some of the duets or trios which they loved so much, both turned to the table, where was spread in confusion the music from which they sang. Both sought together amongst the loose sheets, when they suddenly came upon a well-remembered trio, “Oh, Memory.” With one accord they ignored it, and in laying it aside Barbara's fingers touched Michael's for a moment, and he covered the little busy hand with his own broad palm, and held it while he spoke into her eyes the tender feelings which that song and their mutual avoidance of it roused in his heart. A deep blush overspread her face; but even while Michael looked, gazing at it with rapture, it faded away, as the red

light fades when the sun dips down behind the sea, a veiled look came over the eyes, a curve of reserve on the lips; but it was only momentary, and the shadows passed as quickly as the glow had faded.

She continued to sort the music hurriedly.

“Oh, here’s ‘Rise, Cynthia, rise!’ We haven’t sung that for a long time. Shall we try it?” She arranged it before Tom, and their voices blended in the sweet, simple old melody.

“I have always thought,” said Michael, “that in some such simple strain as this a musician might hope to discover the secret of the power of music.”

“’Tis only the harmony,” said Tom.

“It is not so, indeed,” said Michael. “Sing it in unison, and you will find the same charm in it, indescribably illusive, it is true, but ’tis there, Tom—the secret, I mean, the secret why one arrangement of musical notes should appeal to our souls when another should have nothing to say to us.”

“I still hold it is the harmonies that it suggests,” said Tom. “What do you say, Barbara?”

“I don’t know,” she answered dreamily; “but I always feel as if the secret of music lies in the suggestion of something even higher and finer than harmony—something that our natures, as they are at present, cannot comprehend but only feel.”

“Well! we are straying away from poor old ‘Cynthia,’” said Tom. “Shall we have her again, Barbara, with Michael’s ideas as a halo, mind?”

They sang the old air again, with many others to follow, till at last Peggy came in with a reproachful look.

“Little children, d’you know how late it is? I want to shut the mill-door.”

“I’m sleeping there to-night,” said Michael. “I ought to have remembered that I was keeping my father up.” And reluctantly the music was gathered together, and laid aside for another occasion.

“Are you going to be busy to-day?” Michael called out next day from the porch, from which he caught sight of Barbara, a duster in her hand, and wearing a large white apron.

“As you see,” she said, smilingly; “spring-cleaning, or, rather, a summer-cleaning.”

“Will it last all-day?” he said, looking admiringly at the tousled brown hair and the flushed cheeks.

“Oh, yes, and to-morrow too,” said Barbara; “in fact, I’m thoroughly enjoying myself—hard work all day, which I like, and tea in the kitchen with Peggy in the evening.”

“Then I must defer the proposition I was about to make until some other time?”

“Well, what is it?”

“That you should come with me to the Tyissa fields. I have something to show you there; then I thought we might have tea at the farm.”

“I know what you have to show me,” said Barbara; “cowslips! Indeed, I cannot resist them, and a Tyissa tea to finish up with. Oh, yes, I’ll come, certainly. I’ll get on as fast as I can with the cleaning in the morning, and then we can go to Tyissa in the afternoon—while the dust is settling, you know.”

“I don’t know exactly what that means, but it sounds like a splendid arrangement! Can I help you in the morning?”

“Oh, no, indeed! indeed!” said Barbara. “You’d be horribly in the way.”

“May I come to fetch you at three o’clock, then?”

“Yes! that will do splendidly,” she said. “I shall be ready.”

When Michael had withdrawn from the porch she went on with her work, singing as she went, “Rise, Cynthia, rise,” and her brush reached every corner of the old beamed room.

“The ruddy morn on tip toe stands,”

and she ran up a long row of steps to take down a picture.

It will be seen from the above conversation upon what intimate terms of friendship Michael and Barbara stood. Indeed, springtime seemed to be blossoming in their lives, and the slight restraint which Barbara’s sudden little clouds of reticence sometimes threw over them, in reality only enhanced the happiness of their frequent seasons of close companionship.

At three o’clock Barbara was ready, tying on her hat when Michael arrived.

“Ready?” he asked.

“Let me go and ask Peggy to lend me a basket; we must gather some, or else ’twill be no fun.”

“Of course!” said Michael, holding the big porch door open for her, and as they crossed the green together Phil at the mill-door looked after them with a serene expression on his face.

They walked across the green towards the road which led past Caefrân, and on to Tyissa, and began the steep ascent, Phil still watching them with extreme satisfaction; and when at last the turn in the road hid them from his sight, he winked mysteriously, and slapped his leg vigorously.

“Well, there,” he said, turning back from the doorway, “what d’you say to that, eh? Isn’t that a pretty

sight, eh?" But his voice was lost in the sound of the grinding, which was just as well, perhaps, as he returned to his work.

As they passed the Caefrân gates Michael looked anxiously at Barbara's face, fearing lest the sight of the moss-grown avenue might awake sad memories in her heart; but she seemed to have cast from her every thought of sadness, and to have returned to the days of childhood. Michael appeared, too, to have learnt to be a child again.

"This was always the road Tom and I came up to look for cowslips," said Barbara, "and for mushrooms after the hay harvest. Oh, there's the gate!"

"But wait till I run to Tyissa and order tea," said Michael. "I want to share the first view of the field with you."

When he returned they entered the field together.

"There!" said Michael.

"Oh," said Barbara, "I never, never, never saw such a glorious sight! Oh, Dr. Lloyd!"

"'Tis a sea of gold and purple!" said Michael. "I don't think the wild orchids have been so fine for years."

"Oh, let me gather some," and almost with the happy zest of childhood Barbara stooped to the clumps of gold.

When they had gathered the best in one field they passed through the gap into another, and then into another. The basket was full, they no longer stooped to gather the pendulous flowers, their walk changed into a slow saunter, their talk was low, and, we are bound to confess, uninteresting to anyone but themselves. There were long pauses of silence, but the silence was eloquent of unspoken love.

"There's a beautiful sycamore tree, surely planted and grown for our benefit, said Barbara. "See what a lovely shadow it throws on the grass!"

"Let us sit and rest here!"

"Yes, and make cowslip balls! Come!" she said. "Men always have a bit of string in their pockets," and Michael laughingly searched until he had found a piece of the required length; then he held it straight and tight, and watched with amusement while Barbara strung the flowers upon it with a face as full of interest as that of a child.

"Now, another for you! Such a lovely cowslip day would not be complete without a 'tisty tosty'—for me, I mean; of course, we don't expect the learned Dr. Lloyd to be so childish!"

"Oh, wait and see!" said Michael. "Throw me the ball, and see if I don't live as long as you do," and in a few moments they were tossing up the golden balls to the accompaniment of the senseless words always used by Welsh children, possibly others, at this game.

"Tisty tosty, four and forty, how many years shall I live?" and Michael had already tossed and caught his a hundred and twenty times.

"You'll be as old as Methuselah!" laughed Barbara, as they both sat down exhausted; "but, oh, Dr. Lloyd, what has become of my spring-cleaning?"

"Oh, never mind it," said Michael; "but, Barbara," he added, grasping her hand and holding it tightly in his own, "how long is this ridiculous formality to last? I am going to rebel and drop that hideous 'Miss' before your name, and do you drop that odious 'Dr. Lloyd'; there is no sense in it. You know that in the nature of things we are Michael and Barbara to each other, so what is the good of pretending other-

wise. Now, Barbara, answer me!" But looking into her face he saw that sudden change which he dreaded come over it, the eyes were veiled, the sweet mouth was serious, and he saw that some real trouble clutched at her heart; but he still held her hand tightly clasped.

"What is it, Barbara?" he said. "What makes you look like that, as if some terrible shadow had fallen over you? What is it, dear? Tell me, and let me see if I cannot banish it."

"Oh, no!" she said. "Indeed, nothing—nothing is the matter with me."

She struggled a little to free her hand, and seeing that she really desired it, he loosened his grasp, and gently laid it down amongst the cowslips on her lap.

"Has my rebellion offended you? Shall I return to 'Miss Barbara' again?"

"Oh, no! no!" said Barbara. "What can it matter what you call me, or what I call you? That can never make any difference." And the fair face that had paled a little had now become rosy to the roots of her hair.

"Come!" she said, rising suddenly. "We have forgotten everything in these golden delights. What time can it be?"

"Four o'clock," said Michael, looking at his watch; "just right for tea at Tyissa; but how the time has slipped by! I didn't think we'd been here more than an hour. Little Jane will have worn out her 'clocs'* with running about in her preparations if we don't go now," and they began their way back from the sunny fields.

For some time they walked in silence, a little awkwardness had fallen over them.

* Wooden shoes.

“I wish I could feel quite certain that you are not vexed with my rebellion against the ‘Miss.’”

“Indeed, you may be quite content of that,” said Barbara. “‘Dr. Lloyd’ comes quite easily to me, for I hear you called so by all the country people. It seems to be quite natural; you see, we are all quite old acquaintances!”

“Well, yes! old friends, rather! so what can it matter by what names we call each other! I think, between you and me, there need never be misunderstandings about trifles. H’m, h’m, h’m,” said Michael, “that sounds very well; but, Barbara, that is sophistry, and I like plain talk, you see. God knows I have had enough mystery. I will say no more now,” he added, as he saw the delicate brows contract and the eyes fill with tears.

“God forbid, dear, that I should ever do anything to grieve you. If I have, it has been unintentional,” and he held out his brown palm, into which Barbara placed her own.

“Yes, yes, I know.”

“Am I quite forgiven, little Barbara?” he said, still holding her hand, and trying to look into her eyes, which, however, were hidden under their drooping eyelids.

Suddenly she looked up at him with all her usual joyousness restored to her frank brown eyes, and Michael noted all the returning charms. The merry sparkle in the eye, the two pretty dimples on the cheek, and the ravishing smile which always drove his wisest resolutions away.

“Oh, yes, indeed,” she said, “’tis all right—everything’s all right—except, perhaps, the tea at Tyissa; for if the tea is cold and the toast is spoilt, ’twill be our own fault, unless we hurry a little.”

“Yes! we must. Shall I carry your cowslips for you?”

“Oh, no! not for the world,” said Barbara; “it wouldn’t be cowslip-gathering if I didn’t carry them home.”

When they reached Tyissa there were evident signs, even in the farmyard, that company was expected. The little pools of water that had collected here and there in the depressions of the rocky ground had been swept away with a hard broom, to the disappointment of the ducks, who had been accustomed to waddle through them on their way to the big horse-pond at the further end of the yard. The stray straws had been brushed away, too; the pigs were shut into their styes; everything looked clean, and tidy, and unnatural, for the Tyissa people were not of the most orderly, and at the sound of a closing gate there arose a great clattering of tongues and wooden shoes inside the house.

“Here they come,” said Mrs. Jones in an excited whisper, “just as the light-cakes were turned,” and she slipped the last frail delicacy on the pile, buttered and simmering before the fire. She pointed to little Jane’s “clocs,” and the child instantly slipped them off, and substituted for them a well-polished pair of Sunday-go-to-meeting shoes tied with black bows, while her mother turned to the door to welcome her guests, smoothing down her apron, and wiping her face with the corner thereof.

“Well, *dir anwel!* Dr. Lloyd, sir, and Miss Owen; there’s glad I am to see you! Come in, come in! Jane, place two chairs this minute, and dust them, child, Haven’t I told you a hundred times?”

“Dear me, Mrs. Jones,” said Barbara, “you need not dust anything. It always looks spick and span

and shining here," but little Jane had already dusted the two clumsy oak chairs with her new pink pinafore, evidently made out of the same piece as her mother's apron.

"Well, Jane, how is the throat now?" said Dr. Lloyd; "quite well? That's right."

"And how is your father, sir?" said Mrs. Jones. "I suppose he's getting older, like the most of us?"

"Not he!" laughed Michael. "He's as young as ever."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Jones, laying her hand familiarly on his shoulder as she passed behind him to fetch the tea and the light-cakes. "No doubt 'tis having you at home with him again, quite well and happy! because we have all heard, sir, that you have been in a nasty bit of trouble lately! Well! 'all's well that ends well!' and I hope you'll enjoy your tea and light-cakes now, Dr. Lloyd and Miss Owen," and she gabbled away so unceasingly that Michael was saved the trouble of answering her awkward remarks.

"What light-cakes!" said Barbara, endeavouring to change the current of the good woman's thoughts. "I thought Peggy was a good hand at making light-cakes, but yours are thinner and lighter, certainly."

"Oh, Peggy Jerry's light-cakes are very well, but they are not made like mine, Miss *vâch*. I mix them with cream, and put a little brandy in them."

"Oh, dear! then we must be careful how many we eat of them."

"I'm not going to count, however," said Michael, sticking his fork into two or three at once.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Jones, in a musing tone, and *à propos* of nothing. She looked from one to the

other of her two guests and repeated, "Yes, indeed," in the same absent manner.

Michael, with his intimate knowledge of the Welsh peasant woman, knew the symptoms well, and became alarmed at what she might say next, and held up his finger and frowned surreptitiously while Barbara was examining a print of the cow on the golden butter.

Mrs. Jones was devotedly attached to Dr. Lloyd, and would have died rather than have said another word, but she had already blurted out, "There's nice you two do look together; in my deed, you ought always to be." Here she caught sight of Michael's forbidding finger. "*Dir anwl!* there's low those swallows are flying this evening; *dir anwl!* they'll fly in at the window soon; they are building in a row, under the thatch, Miss *vâch.*"

"I must go and see them," said Barbara. "Come, little Jane, show me the nests." She had blushed all over her face, and had wondered what lucky chance had diverted Mrs. Jones's attention from Michael and herself.

"Begging your pardon, sir," said Mrs. Jones, when left alone in the kitchen with Michael, "for saying what I did. I wouldn't for the world, if I thought you wouldn't like it! *Caton pawb!* what business have I with the affairs of leddies and gentriss—but there—never again, sir," and she nudged him and winked. "'Twould frighten little miss, like a bird from a branch; yes—yes, I see."

"There is nothing to see, Mrs. Jones," said Michael.

"No, no, not more than I do see; but look you here, sir," she said, with another nudge, "don't be afraid to ask her——"

“Look here, Mrs. Jones,” said Michael seriously, “we have been good friends since I was a boy, you and I, but if I hear you allude to this subject again, you will offend me.”

Meanwhile Barbara and Jane were standing at a little distance from the house, looking up at the swallows darting in and out of their nests under the broad eaves.

“I suppose we must go,” said Michael, as he appeared in the doorway, followed by Mrs. Jones.

“I suppose we must, indeed,” said Barbara. “I have enjoyed it all so much, your lovely tea and light-cakes, Mrs. Jones, the cowslips, the swallows, and, oh, everything has been delightful! Good-bye! It will be *your* turn next to come and have tea with me at the West Mill.”

“Oh, *anwl!* Miss *vâch*, I am not used to having tea with leddies,” said Mrs. Jones, wiping her face with her apron, for the afternoon was warm. “Perhaps if Dr. Lloyd was there I wouldn’t be ashamed.”

“Oh, I’ll keep you in countenance, if Miss Owen will ask me,” said Michael.

As they went out of the gate they met Shinkin, the good man of the house, who had kept studiously away until he thought his wife’s guests would have finished their meal, when he would go in himself, and feel free to pour his tea into his saucer, to drink it with long-drawn sups, and with an elbow each side of his plate on the table, make small work of a pile of light-cakes which his wife had kept hot for him in the oven.

The sun was setting down beyond the furzy knoll, with its familiar clump of fir trees, as Barbara and Michael came in sight of the peaceful valley to which they were about to descend. It was flooded by a soft

sunset haze; a streak of golden between the trees showed where Llyn Dystaw lay smooth and calm in the nearer foreground, the fields and banks were of an emerald-green; here and there a hawthorn tree stood up, white and bountiful; sheep-bells tinkled from the grey wolds in the Cwm Meivon woods; the cuckoo sang her soft refrain, and there in its setting of dark woods and golden fields, its mossy gables marked out by the sunset shadows, stood the old mill, its glittering vane over all.

Barbara sighed with pleasure. "How lovely it is!" she said. "Oh, Dr. Lloyd, I shall never cease to thank you for finding this happy home for us."

"The old brown roof, the clapping mill, the old miller at the door. Do you love it as I do, then?"

"Yes, indeed," said Barbara. "I have never been so happy as I have been under the thatch."

CHAPTER XVII

ONE day in the following week Michael Lloyd might be seen making his way through the crowded market-place at Maentrevor jostling against a friend or patient at every step. He looked bright and alert as he turned into Tom's office. They were making arrangements for a little fishing expedition next day.

"To-day is too brilliant, I fancy," said Michael; "we shall have a shower to-night. To-morrow the water would be perfect," and opening a large kind of pocket-book they pored over the contents with as much interest as if they had been given five-pound notes instead of the most villainous-looking barbed hooks. Suddenly they were interrupted by Sam's croaky voice.

"Iss a woman in the surgery waiting, sir," he said; "she ask particular for Dr. Rees, and I told her he was not at home."

"All right!" said Michael, "I'll come," and in a few moments he had hung up his hat in the passage and entered the surgery, where a very chubby-cheeked market-woman was seated, an empty basket on her arm. She rose and curtsied as Michael entered, and he looked at her rather curiously, with a feeling that he had seen her before. Surely he had seen those red-apple cheeks, and those bright black eyes, but he could not recall her identity.

"You have finished your marketing early," he said in that genial friendly tone that took so much with the country people. "We don't generally see patients till twelve on market days."

"No, sir, but this is how it is, you see; I am in a

great hurry to get home to-day, so I was determined to empty my basket even if I gave the things at half-price, but indeed got my own price for them, four shillings for my fowls, two shillings for my eggs."

"Well, what can I do for you?" said the doctor. "You don't look as if there were anything much the matter with you."

"Nothing at all, sir, thank the Lord; nothing at all's the matter with me! I don't want no doctoring, and if I did I got a doctor in my own home."

"Indeed!" said Michael; "and who is he, and why do you come to me, then?"

"Well, sir! 'tis like this, you see; he is a herbalist, and he is making his medicines from the plants and herbs that grow in the fields, and *dir anwel!* there's scarcely anything he can't cure, but of course there are *some* cases that can't be cured!"

"Well!" said Michael impatiently, shifting his position.

"Well, sir, there's a poor woman dying in our house. My father has been tending her for many months, and he would have cured her long before this if she had been like other women, but she was so wild, sir, and so fierce, she would never do what she was told, and she did everything she ought not to do."

"Stop! stop! What is the matter with her?" said Michael. "What was her illness?"

The woman lowered her voice a little as she answered.

"Cancer of the breast, sir."

"Ts! ts! ts! Poor thing," said Michael. "Why didn't she come to us sooner?"

"Could you have cured her?" said the woman.

"Cured her? No; but we might have done something for her."

“My father has cured many, and Essylt Lewis could not have done better than to come to him.”

“Essylt Lewis!” exclaimed Michael. “My God! is she alive still, and suffering all this time?” He turned deathly pale and felt as if the small surgery was suffocating him.

“*Dir anwl!* I am sorry, sir,” said the woman. “Indeed, it was Dr. Rees I wanted to see, because I remember you came to ask about poor Essylt! I thought, perhaps, you would be feeling it more than Dr. Rees.”

Michael was still standing at the window looking out.

The aspect of the whole world had changed. Essylt still living! The bond that had been so irksome still upon him! The fetters which he had got to think of as so galling still hanging over him! Must he again bend his neck to the terrible yoke? Impossible! for during those weeks of freedom he had learnt to look upon the past with a clear vision, had seen things in a different light, had wondered his eyes had been closed so long, that he had not seen how quixotic would have been the course of conduct by which he had meant to retrieve the long-past fault. But the girl! poor Essylt! even now suffering, while he was wasting his time in useless thoughts, and losing himself in a labyrinth of puzzling doubts. “What a brute I am!” he muttered, turning to the woman. “Let us start. Which way do you go?”

“There is only one way, sir; down to the shore and from there to Llangraig, then up by the cartroad to our house; but poor Essylt Lewis used to come by a short cut through the woods.”

“Essylt Lewis still alive, and in your cottage!” said

Michael again, as they left the house. "We thought she was drowned, for her shawl was found on the beach at Llangraig."

"Yes! indeed, sir, and that's a wonderful thing; *anwl! anwl*, how your faults find you out! 'Twas a dreadful windy night, and 'twas a Saturday night, and I had forgotten to go to Llangraig to fetch my husband's new shoes. All of a sudden I remembered, and I ran all the way through the wind. Poor Essylt was asleep in the wood-shed, and my father promised to watch over her. Her shawl was hanging in the passage, and I snatched it from the peg and threw it over my head. If she had been well, I would not have ventured to do it for the world. When I got to Llangraig the wind was dreadful, and when I was running across the beach it dragged Essylt's shawl from my shoulders and it flew like a great big bird into the sea. Oh, *anwl!* I was frightened, but I thought she would never find it out, and there! if they didn't find it washed up on the shore! I knew it was hers, as soon as I heard of it."

"Tell me all about it," said Michael. "First of all, why did you put on that stolid look and tell me a downright lie when I asked you if the girl was with you?"

"Yes! I did, sir. I had given the poor girl my faithful promise never to let out to anyone that she was with me. D'you think I would break my word to a dying woman? *dir anwl!* no! nor father either."

"And now you have come to fetch me, does she know?"

"Know? *Tâd anwl!* no! she'd have a fit if she knew; but this is how it was, you see, sir—we saw she was dying, and we were afraid we would have trouble about

the 'sutificate' to bury her, if no doctor had been to see her."

"And how long was the poor thing a patient of your father's, and how has she managed to hide her illness for so long, and what was her object in doing so?"

"Well, you see, sir, she has such a proud, wild temper, that she could not bear anyone to pity her; she was expecting always my father would cure her, and so he would have, if she had behaved herself like other people; but she was so fierce and so angry to some people, and hated some with such a bitter anger, that I believe it was eating her heart out. There was one girl in particular whom she hated. Oh! I never saw such hatred. That will be cause of death at last. She came to us one night; she had been running through the woods like a wild thing, and when I opened the door she had fallen down on the doorstep. She was in terrible pain, she had burst a vein in her breast, and it had been bleeding all the way as she ran. She couldn't speak from weakness for some time. My father attended to her, and she soon came to, and was as fierce as ever.

"'Make haste,' she said, 'make haste—you must give me something that will stop this bleeding; I must get back to Llyn Dystaw in the morning. After that, I don't care what happens.'

"'Llyn Dystaw?' said my father. 'Why, it is as much as your life is worth, my girl.'

"'Come, make haste, give me something to strengthen me; you've cheated me all these long months saying you were going to cure me.'

"'I have never cheated you,' said my father. 'I've always told you that I could never cure you, unless

you could behave yourself like a reasonable woman. How came you to be in that state? Haven't I told you to keep your arm in a sling?"

"A sling, indeed; not I," she said, "I could never have given that Barbara such a good shake, if my arm had been in a sling. I met her face to face by the lake; we had a few words, oh! how I hate her! and she looked so proud and calm as if nothing I said made any difference to her. I lost my temper suddenly, and I seized her two arms and shook her as if she had been a rat. I would like to have shaken her life out of her, but suddenly I felt a dreadful pain; I pushed her away from me with all my strength, and I thought I had killed myself, the pain was so dreadful, so I ran for my life through the brambles and trees all the way here. Now you've got to patch me up, for I must go back and say good-bye to Michael Lloyd to-morrow morning."

Michael groaned as he remembered how ghastly she had looked at times—that last morning.

"Poor soul," he said, "poor soul! Well, go on!"

"Well, my father tried his best to dissuade her from attempting such a thing, but oh! *dir anwl!* she wouldn't listen, and got wild with excitement and spoke very unkind to poor father, who had done so much for her. 'Do as I tell you, man,' she said, 'or else I will tell the whole world what a liar and a fraud you are.' Then she changed her tone and begged him in such a piteous voice, 'Oh . . . do your best for me, a poor girl who has been cruelly used by everybody. Only to-morrow I want to keep up, then I don't care what becomes of me!' So my father did all he could for her. He mended the broken vein with the black web of the mountains that he gathers from the face of

the grass before the dawn. I gave her some breakfast, but little could she eat, poor thing, and I went with her part of the way. I shall never forget that walk, the beautiful sky and the stars and the dawn coming up in the east, and that miserable soul by my side! Oh! I did long to comfort her, but I know now, poor thing, there is no peace for her this side of the grave, because the misery is in herself. She didn't talk a word, only say 'Go back, go back,' and at last, when the briars got too thick and the trees too close, I *did* go back, because Colonel Powell can't bear paths made through his boundaries which keep the poachers out. Well, there isn't much more to tell, until one day, about six weeks ago, she suddenly arrived again. Oh, she was much worse—could scarcely crawl to the door; she begged and implored for a room to die. 'That's all I ask, put me in the wood-shed,' she said; 'I will be quite content, only hide me with the *briwyd*'; and that's what I did."

"The wood-shed! Oh! poor Essylt!" said Michael.

"Well, doctor, what could I do? There was not a spare foot of room in the cottage, so we cleared out the end of this wood-shed, and you shall see for yourself the nice little bedroom she has there. 'Tis cool and airy, and I have done all I can for her."

"But she wasn't in the wood-shed the day Mr. Owen and I came to look for her?" said Michael.

"Yes! she was," said the woman, a sparkle of satisfaction in her eye. "When we go out, you see, we pile the *briwyd* up over the window and bring it chockful to the door, so that no one could guess what a nice little room there is inside, so come you and see," she said; "and of course it will be a sad little room for you, for I can see you loved her very much."

Michael flushed to the roots of his hair as he felt how mistaken the woman was.

“I hope she won’t have passed away,” she said; “that would be a terrible thing for us, as well as for you.”

Michael was silent, for in his heart of hearts he knew he would have given all he possessed to escape the painful interview which he knew awaited him.

“She was always expecting to get well, though my father told her a score of times that she would not—that she never could, unless she altered her ways. At last she gave it up and believed. That time when she came to us and fell on the doorstep—from that time forward, she knew there was no getting well for her, and that when she came next it would be only to die.

“Here we are now, here’s our house,” and the little market-woman’s eyes brightened as they came in sight of the woodman’s cottage. Yes, there it was, looking even more picturesque when approached from the Llangraig side of the wood—one end of it hidden beneath the ivy which reached to the very chimney-top; the other half embowered in creeping roses. Here too was the large black shed across the yard which had looked such a rustic and natural adjunct to a woodman’s cottage, when Tom and he had first visited the place, but whose blackness and sombreness now bore a suggestive gloom to Michael.

“Wait one minute,” said the little woman, when they reached the yard, “while I fetch a letter which she told me to give to you, sir. Now remember, I have given it. Oh, *anxel!* I couldn’t fail to do that for the world, so often have I promised and sworn to her, poor girl, to deliver it to you alone, so here it is, sir,” and she handed to Michael a letter in a blue

envelope with a large red seal. "It's all about that girl she hates so much, to show you she is a false and wicked girl and a murderess. *Pærr* thing! of course, it's only imagination, sir, but don't you contradict her, or she'll have a fit."

"I will not, I will not," said Michael, placing the letter in his pocket. "Come, let us go in and see her."

The upper half of the wood-shed door was already open, the small branches in the shed apparently filling the aperture entirely.

The woodman's wife, having opened the lower half, soon began deftly to throw aside some of the fagots, and thus with very little exertion made an opening to the further end. Through this she passed, and Michael easily followed though he had to stoop his tall head a little. The window, although open, was still blocked up by a bundle of small branches which made a delicate screen without darkening the interior too much.

The room was large and airy; the walls of black boards covered with bright-coloured prints and almanacks. In the corner stood a small iron bedstead, upon it the pale form of a girl, so wasted and worn that for a moment Michael doubted the evidence of his senses. This emaciated skeleton, *Essylt*? These listless hands, *Essylt's*? Accustomed as he was to witness the ravages of sickness and disease, he was startled to see such a complete wreck of what had once been a fine woman. They had hushed their footsteps a little in entering, but they need not have done so, for *Essylt* was in a heavy trance-like sleep, and only the slight movement of a frill at the neck showed that she was still alive.

“She won’t hear you,” said the woodman’s wife; “she is like this often the last few days.”

She drew forward a rough stool upon which Michael sat down, and, whilst he gazed upon the features of the girl whose life had been so closely interwoven with his own, quietly went out of the room. The strong pity which for so many years had taken the place of love in his heart swelled up again within him, and while she lay there still and silent he almost felt that he wished he could snatch her from the jaws of death.

The whole place seemed strangely quiet, for it was noon, and the birds were all silent. He was glad that the woman had left them entirely alone, and inadvertently he drew from his pocket the strange-looking letter which had just been given him and proceeded to examine it. Yes! there was Essylt’s scrawling handwriting, with many capitals where they need not have been, the lines sloping up towards the right-hand corner of the envelope. “To Dr. Michael Lloyd. I, Essylt Lewis, send this letter to let him know the truth about Barbara Owen, because she is a wicked, dreadful creature and a murderess.”

He turned it over and looked at the seal, the large red seal all covered with marks of the little key. The bright red sealing-wax reminded him of the scarlet thread of Essylt’s lips, her curious complexion, her light colourless hair, and the strange grey-green eyes that were hid under the heavy white eyelids—and the memory was distinctly unpleasant. Better, far better, the calm white face that lay on the bed beside him! Suddenly there was a flicker of the eyelids and he hurriedly replaced the blue better in his pocket.

Gradually the heavy lids were raised, disclosing the

eyes; they gazed before her for a few moments with a vacant expression, then looked round the quaint little bedroom, but evidently saw nothing of the man who sat there so silently, so patiently. The lips moved a little too, and she began to speak incoherently and jerkily.

At this moment the woodman's wife re-entered, and Michael felt that it was time for the man to be merged in the doctor. Gently he laid his hand on the flickering pulse, and tenderly but firmly he called, "Essylt, lass!" but there was no rational response, only the senseless babble of a fevered brain. Over and over again he tried to rouse her from her lethargy, calling her by name, and with many tender terms of endearment.

"Well, I am thankful at least that she does not seem to be in much pain."

"Oh," said the woman, shaking her head sorrowfully; "her pains are over, sir, and now this medicine is giving her quietness and peace to die," and she drew from the shelf a bottle of some stuff which was evidently of a vegetable nature.

"What is that?" said Michael, taking the bottle and examining it nervously, and with the usual contempt of a medical practitioner who regards everything outside the groove of his own experience as suspicious and dangerous. He took out the cork and smelt it, poured a little on his finger and tasted it, at last returning it to the woman with grave disapprobation.

"You should have come to us weeks ago, and we might have done something to soothe the poor girl's pain."

“Could you have done more for her than my father has done? Can you now give her a more peaceful death?”

“I should be sorry to interfere now,” said Michael; “it is too late,” and he laid his fingers once more upon the pulse.

“She sees you, she knows you,” whispered his companion, and he saw that it was so. For a moment the light of reason shone in Essylt’s eyes, and her lips parted.

“Maychael!” she said, “you have found me, but you cannot keep me.” Her voice dropped, and Michael saw it was too late to reason with her, so he restrained the questions which rose to his lips, and merely passed his arm under her shoulders and bent his head towards hers, while he spoke the tenderest, the most soothing words he could. Suddenly, with a marvellous accession of the vitality which had helped her to bear up so long, she raised herself into a sitting posture, and looking fixedly at the woodman’s wife said, “The letter?”

“I have given it to him, my dear,” said the woman, and Michael hastened to satisfy her further by taking the blue envelope out of his pocket.

“Here it is, Essylt, *vâch*,” he said, holding it before her fast-closing eyes, and for a moment a faint look of satisfaction spread over the wasted features. Suddenly she weighed more heavily on Michael’s arm, and he knew that the restless spirit had flown. He laid her gently down, and the woman, with her apron to her eyes, went slowly out through the door of the shed and left Michael alone with the dead. She turned to the path along which she expected to meet her husband returning from his work; he soon appeared, leading the

toddling baby by the hand, Tango, staid and important, keeping guard on the other side of the child.

"What's the matter?" said the woodman, seeing his wife's flushed face. "Is she dead?"

"Yes, poor thing; go you straight home, Ben, and fasten Tango to the kitchen table, and don't go near the shed until the doctor will come in to you. I think he is liking to be quiet a bit, because, do you know, Ben, I believe that story we heard about him going to marry her is true. I am going up to fetch Mari Penarthen to help me to lay her out. I will soon be home."

Half an hour later Michael entered the kitchen.

"How are you, sir," said Ben. "I know who you are—my wife has been telling me. Dr. Lloyd, of Cwm Meivon, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Michael. "I am glad you have returned. I want to settle a few things with you before I go; first to thank you for so kindly sheltering that poor girl, Essylt Lewis, and for nursing her with such care and kindness. I am used to sick rooms, and I've never seen a cleaner or more dainty room than your wood-shed."

"No, no, sir. My father-in-law's herbs keep it pure and sweet. I don't know has my wife told you or not that the poor girl made us promise that she should not be moved from here till she was taken to her grave."

"That is exactly what I was going to propose, if you have no objection; I will pay you well for all your trouble and kindness, so far as money can pay for these things."

"'Twill be no trouble at all, sir; and also I must tell you she wished that nobody but me should see about the funeral, so you had better leave it all to me, sir.

‘And where would you like to be buried, Essylt *vâch?*’ says I. ‘What do I care where you bury me,’ she said, quite fierce-like; ‘only not at Cwm Meivon.’”

“I think I understand her feelings,” said Michael; “poor Essylt, her wishes shall be attended to,” and as he went home through the wood he was thankful that Essylt’s wishes thus expressed made the painful duties that fall upon the bereaved less trying to him than they would otherwise have been. As he followed the tangled path, through which he and Tom had made their way a short time before, every briar, every obstructing root, seemed to remind him of the girl who had so often trodden this path alone under the stars. *There* was the bush upon which Tom had picked a shred of her shawl, and as he made his way further and further into the thicket he had a strange feeling that the restless spirit of that unhappy girl was leading him along the difficult path—and he was glad when he at last emerged from the close-pressing brushwood and found himself on the banks of the little lake which glanced and rippled in the afternoon sun with its constant yet ever-changing beauty.

‘As he walked along the woodland path he remembered the letter which the woman had given him, and, taking it out of his pocket once again, he turned it over and over with a strange reluctance to open it and make himself acquainted with its contents. Why should he do so? Why perpetuate poor Essylt’s bitter railings against Barbara, for this, he felt sure, was the whole gist of the letter. He knew them so well—those bitter, acrimonious words—and his loyalty to Barbara made him shrink from the perusal of them. Should he tear it up and throw it in the lake? No! that would appear like disrespect to Essylt’s last wishes, and he

had reached the stile before he decided how to act in the matter. At the last moment he came to a decision, and wondered he had not thought of that solution of the difficulty before. He would keep the letter—he would lock it up safely, and at some future time when all these harrowing events had been softened by Time, *then* he would read it—it would have lost its sting, and a dim sort of feeling passed through his mind that Essylt had already dropped those bitter feelings of hatred in the awakening to a higher life, and as he crossed the green towards the west porch he had already decided to put away from him all thought of the letter until a future occasion.

The following week was a time of fresh upheaval in Michael's life. The news of Essylt's discovery and her death caused great excitement, and her funeral, which took place in a few days, was the largest ever known in the neighbourhood. People crowded from hill and dale to the quiet woodman's cottage, and followed the simple cortège with tearful eyes, and joined in the funeral hymns with sobbing voices.

Conspicuous amongst them was a brilliant red cart from Tyissa, in which Peggy sat swaying backwards and forwards, a black-edged handkerchief to her eyes. All Essylt's peculiarities were forgotten, and only her sad fate and mysterious nature were remembered. "Poor thing," they said, "there was something wrong always," as if a thread of the wrong colour had got into the weaving and was showing itself continually in the pattern, and as they caught a glimpse of Michael and Tom in the mourning carriage they added, "Dr. Lloyd, poor fellow, has gone through a hard time, too."

In this they were quite right, as the lines in Mi-

chael's face showed. He seemed to have aged a good many years, and the lightness and buoyancy that had been his, when he and Barbara had gathered cowslips in the Tyissa fields, seemed to him like the golden haze of a long-past childhood.

CHAPTER XVIII

MAENTREVOR, in fine weather, was a delightful country town, when the sun shone straight down on the roofs of the houses, which cast their fantastic shadows on the uneven and picturesque streets, and tempted the women members of the household to bring their knitting to the doorstep and to shout greetings to one another, or to make remarks on the doings of their neighbours; but in wet weather it was always called "a dismal hole," and it must be confessed that the epithet was not inappropriate, for the surrounding country pressed in so closely upon it, that in some places it might almost be said to be looking down over the roofs of the houses. The town itself was no different to other country towns—the large square houses of the better classes mixed up with the usual hideous five-windowed dwellings of those of humbler degree, three windows on the first floor, and one on each side of the door, making as unlovely a tenement as it is possible to imagine. About five o'clock in the evening the cows, of which every family, rich or poor, strove to keep one or two, used to come home to be milked, the maid-of-all-work or the boy fetching them from their pasturage, where, in all probability, they had found them grazing near the gate, expectant of the welcome summons. Then "Mari" or "Dye" had but to push the gate open, and the cows, after invariably snatching a last mouthful or two of the sweet grass before they passed through, in order to chew it meditatively on the road, sauntered homewards at their own sweet will, and

the boy or girl, as the case might be, would take the opportunity for a chat with any of their friends whom they might meet on the way, knowing well that "Trwdi" or "Katti" would trudge solemnly homewards as casually and as leisurely as they did themselves. A stranger staying at one of the two respectable hotels in the town, watching the meanderings of the patient creatures as they came up the street, would sometimes observe them stopping suddenly, just in front of the "bus" which trundled out of the yard to the station two or three times in the day, and would wonder to see the "busman" make an obliging curve in his route, and "Trwdi" turn leisurely towards one of the five-windowed houses. There was no gate or archway by which she could penetrate the solid phalanx of houses and reach the cowhouse at the back, but she would go solemnly onwards and walk straight in at the front door (usually left obligingly open) and through the passage into the back yard.

Both Mr. Preece and Dr. Rees lived in the main street of Maentrevor—indeed, the whole of the town might be said to consist of but one irregular street of about a mile in length. Their houses were only about a dozen doors apart, consequently there were frequent interchanges of short visits between their inmates. Mr. Preece himself would often saunter up to Dr. Rees's doorstep, and after an hour or two spent in his cosy room, in amicable gossip, would return to his own office, or vice versa, Dr. Rees or Michael Lloyd would stroll up to Mr. Preece's to discuss some new item of interest in local news. In neither house was there often seen the flutter of a petticoat except on business, but just now such, however, was not the case, for Mabel Hume had come once more to enliven the

house of her uncle, and Mr. Preece made her visit the occasion (and, it may be, also the excuse) for sundry little hospitable functions.

Some few days after the events narrated in the last chapter, Michael, feeling rather depressed and having no appointment with a patient for the time being, suddenly bethought himself of his omission to call formally on Mabel Hume. He was not addicted to calling, for he held five o'clock tea, with its attendant tittle-tattle of gossip, as an abomination to be avoided, but to-day he was inclined to seek society rather than to avoid it. He accordingly walked down to Mr. Preece's house and inquired of the trim little Welsh maid who answered his ring as to whether Miss Hume was at home.

"Iss, sir, please to walk in." He did so, and being ushered into the parlour found Mabel alone.

"Oh! Dr. Lloyd, I am so glad you have come. I thought you were never coming," she said, using her fine eyes to their full effect, for this was a habit that she always practised, the more especially when her batteries could be turned on such a "coming man" as Dr. Michael Lloyd.

"I am afraid I have been long in calling, but my time, you see, is not my own," said Michael, smiling.

"No! no! I know that—but do sit down."

Michael did as he was bade, and when Mabel would have rung for the lamp, he interposed, saying, "Is not this firelight more soothing than the lamplight, Miss Hume?"

Mabel acquiesced: "Very well, then, we will have tea here in the gloaming—sounds quite romantic, doesn't it? I don't suppose that anyone else will call to-day as it is getting late," and rising from the sofa

on which she had been sitting she poured out the tea whilst Michael gazed moodily into the fire.

“You are *distract*, Dr. Lloyd,” said his hostess.

“Yes! I am, to-day. I fear you will think me but dull company. By the by! Have you seen Mr. Owen lately?”

“No!” answered Mabel, raising her long lashes and darting a quick look at her interrogator, who, however, seemed quite unaware of her regard.

“He is a good fellow,” said Michael, “and devoted to his sister.”

“Yes! so I understand—but what a strange girl she is! I have only met her once—at the musty old mill which they occupy. How anyone could live there I cannot imagine. Ugh! the bats and the owls that Miss Owen tells me roost in the ivy! and I am sure the place must be full of spiders!” and Mabel shuddered ostentatiously.

Michael smiled. “But that is the very charm of it all. You know it is also my home.”

“Your home, Dr. Lloyd?”

“Yes, and my dear old father lives there still. He is the best father in the world. You must have seen him at one time or another—Philip Lloyd—the miller, you know.”

“Philip Lloyd your father! Oh! yes, I remember now—I did hear that his son had gone in for medicine.” Mabel did not add that she also knew the whole story of his subsequent success in his profession, and the terrible risk he had run of ruining his career by his wishing to marry Essylt Lewis, for by this time the whole country-side was revelling in the gossip. Oh, no! She was far too astute for that, and already she had formed hopes that in time her own fate might be

linked with that of the man who now sat with her. Poor Tom—she had already forgotten him—but why should we pity Tom Owen? for if he had married Mabel his tender heart would soon have been wrung by the fickle, shallow girl.

“And so you don’t like the old mill?” said Michael.

“Oh! I dare say it’s all right for those who like that kind of abiding place—but *I* don’t.”

“And Miss Owen?” He could not help adding this query, for his heart longed for some sympathy, and even to hear Barbara’s name was some consolation to him.

“Well! I like Miss Owen very well—but is she not too eerie? She has such strange ideas!”

“Strange? Eerie? Quite the contrary, I should say. Barba—Miss Owen—strikes me as possessing a particularly well-balanced mind, and she regards her friends and neighbours with a kindly sympathy that I wish some of us could imitate more closely. No! Miss Hume! I did not mean that rudely,” said Michael, as he perceived a look of quick resentment pass over Mabel’s face. “I fear I am but a poor hand at expressing my thoughts in correct language. What I meant was that Miss Owen’s nature is an exceptionally sweet one—due, in a great measure, I have no doubt, to the influence of her mother—she died a short while ago, you know! Her death was a particularly distressing and painful one, and was a great shock to both Tom and his sister. I have never been able to account for the sudden collapse of Mrs. Owen. I knew that her death was but a matter of a few weeks, but I hardly thought it would be quite so soon. Barbara, assisted by dear old Peggy Jerry, nursed her mother devotedly, and when the end came she quite broke down. Indeed,

Tom was but little better—he, being a mere man, I suppose, took matters more philosophically, but Miss Owen for a time was quite inconsolable. I hope you will forgive my apparent enthusiasm, but—but, I was deeply interested in the case, you see—as I had never seen one of quite a similar kind before.” Mabel smiled.

“Now,” said Michael, “as we are in talkative mood, what do you notice as ‘eerie’ in Miss Owen’s conduct?”

“Oh! her conduct, I am sure, is irreproachable”—Michael inclined his head gravely—“but some of her ideas on one’s duty towards one’s neighbours, for example, are, to say the least of them, quixotic——”

“Quixotic—how? But look here, Miss Hume—I have always held aloof from gossip, and here I am discussing the affairs of my neighbours as keenly as any lady, who, if rumour be true, cultivates the art to perfection. Am I unjust?”

Michael spoke in this strain, hoping to divert the argument from a line which he considered rather unjustifiable, the more particularly as the subject of their talk was one in whom he was so deeply interested; but he had to deal with one now who was versed in all the artless guiles of womankind, so, artfully as the hook was hidden, she did not take the bait.

“Very well, Dr. Lloyd—let us leave Miss Owen’s conduct out of the question, but I should much like to have your opinion, as a medical man, on one view at least that she holds. I am quite at variance with it. I should not very much like to be a friend or relative of Miss Owen’s, or one so near and dear to her that her devotion became a perfect idolatry, as you tell me this was the way in which she loved her mother.”

“Not like to be her nearest and dearest friend? Why, Miss Hume, the person who could attain such a pinnacle in Miss Owen’s esteem would indeed be lucky. She is——” Michael rose to his feet and looked out on to the little street, where the shadows of the sun were slowly moving over the garish houses on the opposite side, and bit his lip, realising how, again, his thoughts had forced themselves to utterance, and that he had said more than he ought to have done.

Miss Hume looked at him curiously, a half-wistful expression in her eyes. “So *this* was Michael Lloyd’s secret!” she thought. “This is what has made him so preoccupied to-day!”

“Pshaw!” said Michael, returning to the fireplace again. “Miss Owen would, I feel sure, not thank me for championing her, seeing that she needs no champion; but tell me,” he continued, “since you are determined to pursue the subject—why would you not care to be dear to her?”

“Because if I were ill I should fear her.”

“Fear her? Why, Barbara Owen would not willingly injure anything or anyone. I have seen her pick up a butterfly that had a broken wing and cry softly to herself as she placed it gently on a bush in the sun, realising how helpless she was to assist it. And as for injuring anyone she cared for—or, indeed, *anyone* for that matter—she would rather injure herself.”

“That may be so, Dr. Lloyd—but such are not the opinions she uttered to me.”

“And what were they, pray?” said her listener, smiling, for he thought that as he could not divert her from the subject, he might as well allow her to go on without interruption.

“Well! She said that if anyone very near and dear to her were in great, great agony, and if she could do nothing to relieve that agony, and if she were convinced that no human science could spare that friend from dreadful pain, sooner than see her live on in such a state she would, unhesitatingly, assist her to die. Does *that* reconcile you, now, to your estimate of Miss Owen’s character?”

“Absolutely, Miss Hume!” said Michael. “And now I really must be going, as I have to see a patient this evening who lives some distance out in the country, and I had several things to prepare before starting. Good-bye, Miss Hume! and I expect that when you have known and seen more of Miss Owen you will think quite as highly of her as I do, for I can assure you,” he added gravely, “that you have quite misunderstood her. No! please don’t trouble to ring, I can let myself out quite easily,” and with a smile and a bow he was gone, leaving Mabel to the reflection that if she were to realise her hopes of cultivating more of Michael Lloyd’s acquaintance, she was not going the right way about it by attempting to beat down the barrier that a strong man’s chivalry had placed between her and the girl towards whom she evinced such apparently unfriendly feelings. She sat down once more, and for some time gazed pensively into the glowing fire, then sighed heavily and rang for a light to be brought in. Meanwhile, Michael walked back to Dr. Rees’s house in a perturbed state of mind. He took out his latchkey and opened the door abstractedly, and, on going into the consulting-room, sat down heavily in an easy chair and leant his head on his hand wearily. Mabel’s words had set him thinking deeply, and he soon rose and paced with quick steps up and

down the little room. "I could have sworn when I last saw Barbara that she loved me! Her dear eyes told me as much, but why could she not give me one little gleam of hope, for she, too, must know how I love her?" and in the strange complexity of a human brain a possibility was foreshadowed.

"What did Mabel Hume insinuate?" he continued, speaking to himself. "'I believe that if they were dying, she would give them a dose to send them off quickly.' Surely *that* cannot be the reason for the strange change in Barbara's manner towards me! Surely it cannot be that! Not that! Oh, God! Not that!"

A wild look had come into his eyes, his lips twitched convulsively, and he moistened them with his tongue. "Rot!" he said with a half laugh; "a girl's ill-natured chatter! But it must be stopped, for it may hurt her—my Barbara." He uttered the name he loved so well with a tender cadence—"I will, I must cast the idea from me." Still the thought returned with strange persistence, and he rang the bell impatiently. He told the old housekeeper who attended his summons, "Madlen, I am going to see old Shacki Pentraeth—I hear he is very ill. You know how he hates doctors. Well! I am going to brave his anger and see if I cannot make the old man's last hours a little more peaceful, whether he is willing or not, for I fear he is going, Madlen, he is going. If anyone calls, say that I shall be home about ten."

"Won't you have any dinner, ser? I've some *cawl**, ser, and a nice piece of *bakwn*,† and it will do you good, ser. You are on your feet all day, for you won't use the trap, and Fanny getting so fat and lazy too!"

* Leek broth. † Bacon.

said Madlen with the licence of old domestics, her beady black eyes gleaming with concern.

“Not now! Madlen *bâch*,” said Michael, patting her withered old cheek; “but you can keep me a good basinful by the time I come back. The air is quite frosty this evening, and you bet that I will do justice to your good care when I return,” and he passed out briskly. Madlen watched his tall figure as he walked down the street.

“God bless him!” she said. “We are lucky to have him here, if only for a few weeks at a time. Fancy his going all the way to see old Shacki, and without being sent for, too! I *wouldn't* attend the old *soppen!* * Well! well! there are some good people in the world after all.”

Night was falling fast when Phil reached the path near the lake, for his perturbed old spirit had urged him to take a walk. When he left the old mill there was a keenness in the air that to those who did not study the weather betokened frost, but as he gazed up at the sky ere starting into the wood, Phil shook his head. “*This* won't last long,” he muttered, and that his prognostication was true was evidenced by the fact that now, scarce half an hour afterwards, the whole face of nature seemed to have changed; there was an ominous shivering of leaves in the trees; black clouds hastened over the face of the moon, casting a depressing gloom over the scene. A heavy fit of depression weighed upon Philip. Man is a creature of moods, and Philip was very human. The highly strung courage which had hitherto upheld him seemed to have deserted him; life seemed a blank, honour was a dream, conscience a chimera; there can be no God behind those

* A bundle of straw—an epithet of contempt.

dark clouds; and he walked on a little further with his chin sunk on the top button of his waistcoat. As he thus mused he reached the shores of the lake itself, and gazed steadfastly into its depths, not noticing that the wind-storm in the trees had ceased as suddenly as it had commenced, but a bright gleam in the water arrested his attention. He lifted his head slowly and gazed up at the swaying tree-tops. There, just above him was a rift in the thick clouds, and a bright star shone softly and pityingly down upon him. The whole current of his thoughts was changed! His heart expanded and he flung his arms wide open, raising them towards Heaven as he sank slowly to his knees. For a moment the old man seemed not to breathe, then his shoulders heaved, and, with the tears running down his wrinkled face, now illumined by the silver moon, which had glided out of her cloud-mantle, he cried, "Oh, God! forgive me my doubting fears." He heard a firm, manly footstep behind him, and turned a face radiant with joy. It was Michael.

"Father—dear old dad! What are you doing here?"

And he lifted the old man to his feet.

"I only came for a walk, Michael, my boy—and sad thoughts fell upon me," and he looked deprecatingly at his son.

"Come, come, dad! you must not fret, for you *are* fretting, I know."

"Not now, my boy, not now!" and this was the only explanation he gave to Michael, who respected him too much ever to intrude unasked into his confidence.

"Come, father, let us take a walk together. I am going to see old Shacki Pentraeth, who I hear is very ill. He does not live so very far from here, and as I

see the night is clearing, it will do us both a world of good."

Phil shook his head. "No! Maychael, my boy. I am too old to walk far. Go you, my boy, and I will find my way home. Come in on your way back, will you? It will not be much out of your way, and we can have a *mægin* * together once more."

"Right you are, father! I will come; but, look here! I shall accompany you till you are out of the wood. It is very dark under those trees, you know, and you might miss your way."

"Miss my way! I knew every pathway through these woods before ever you were thought of, lad. No, no! Go you on, and I shall expect you soon."

"Very well!" said Michael, knowing well how futile it was to attempt to change the old man's mind once it was made up.

"Good-bye, then! I shan't be very long."

The old man nodded, and turned slowly back along the well-known path towards the mill, whilst Michael, with long, swinging stride, proceeded briskly on his kindly errand of succour to the needy. Where his path turned towards the left, in the direction of the shore, along which he had to proceed for some distance before reaching Pentraeth, he turned and looked backwards, but owing to the uncertain light, could perceive no trace of his father. "Poor old fellow—there is something troubling him, too—I wonder if I could find out what it is? I expect he is still thinking of that dream of his regarding myself and Barbara. Ah, Barbara, my darling—I, too, would to God that it would come true, but its consummation appears as far off as ever." Musing thus, he reached the edge of the wood,

* Smoke.

and went down the path which pursued its irregular course over the carpet of green mossy grass that stretched towards and fringed on the seashore. The moon now shone brightly again, and Michael could see the white edges of the waves, as they broke murmuringly on the yellow sand.

How peaceful it all was! But here, although not detracting in any marked degree from the universal calm and quiet—although their sinister influence was somehow felt by Michael Lloyd—just where sea and sky joined, the clouds lay low upon the silent waters, sombre, dark, and gloomy, and some distance away was the outline of a bold headland, at the base of which, though not yet within sight, nestled the cottage where old Shacki lived. Michael, after resting a moment to take in the beauty of the scene around him, for his temperament was such as always responded to Nature's moods, once more proceeded on his way. He had covered a good part of the intervening distance, when he espied a solitary figure walking across the stones that lay between the shore and the grass. As he came nearer, Michael saw that he evidently was an old man, with spindle shanks and crooked shoulders, stooping so often to pick up something that he was soon abreast of him. "You would find the hard sands easier to walk upon, my friend—those cobble-stones are very troublesome." The old man straightened himself a little, and looked at Michael with faded grey eyes from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"No doubt! No doubt!" he said; "but on the sands I would not find what I am looking for," and Michael saw that in one hand he carried a bundle of herbs. "This, you see," he continued, holding up a trailing plant with thick leaves and succulent stem, "this plant

grows here plentifully, but the one I am seeking for is far more rare—but I must find it somewhere, if I have to walk to Cefn Idris for it.”

“Must you, indeed?” said Michael. “Well! I think we have a spell of fine weather before us, so you will have plenty of time to look for it.”

“Dear *anwyl!* no,” said the old man. “To-night is the full moon, and I must make hay while the moon shines, you see,” and he smiled at his own little joke, and looked again at Michael with those dim, far-away eyes.

“Ah! I see,” said Michael. “You are a herbalist, I suppose!”

“Yes! I spend my life, as my father and my grandfather did before me, in searching for the blessed herbs that God has given for the healing of man, but man is too proud to stoop to the ground to find His cures.”

“And have you cured many people?” said Michael.

“Oh, yes!” said the herbalist, straightening himself once more, while a gleam of pleasure transfigured the old face. “Oh, yes!” he said. “God has rewarded my life of toil by granting me the happiness of healing many. Of course, if the decree has gone forth, I cannot heal. If God says, ‘Come, then,’ man must go, but ’tisn’t *every* disease that means death. Oh, no! It has been ordained that the very worst diseases shall yield to His gentle herbs.”

“Well,” said Michael, “I am glad you find such satisfaction in your work. I am a healer too, in a humble way—I am a doctor.”

“A doctor!” said the old man. “Oh, then you’ll despise old Rhysin, I dare say—but listen you to me, my lad. May God bless your work, as he has blessed mine; but listen you again, *machgen-i*, and, believe me

—the secret of healing is to be found in the herbs of the field.”

“Well—I must be going!” said Michael; “the next time I come down to this neighbourhood we must have a further talk,” and he hurried on his way towards the little white cottage under the cliffs. On his arrival he perceived that the place was all in darkness. He knocked several times, but got no answer, so in spite of what he had said to Madlen he determined not to enter uninvited, and walked back again before the tide came in to the very same spot where he had met the old man. He was still there, though a little further up the strand, peering between the grass-grown hummocks, too intent upon his search to notice Michael, who passed him quite closely. As Michael drew abreast of him, he could not forbear from calling out, “What, still here!” The old man, without turning round, replied: “Yes, *machgen-i!* still here.” Michael looked at his watch in the moonlight and saw that he would have to hurry if he was to reach the mill before his father went to bed, so he turned abruptly and walked towards the high ridge which lay between the coast and the Meivon woods—and retracing his steps through the wood, passed Llyn Dystaw, and soon afterwards the old mill came to view bathed in a flood of silver light, the moon’s rays striking full upon its gables and silhouetting the whole building sharply against the sky. A light was shining in the window of the room occupied by old Phil, and Michael, knocking at the door, entered to find his father sitting in his favourite chair in the corner of the old-fashioned fireplace. “Ah! *machgen-i!* Is’t thou? Come in and sit down.*”

“Only for a few minutes, father. It’s late, and I

must be getting back to Maentrevor. Just one smoke, then," as he noticed a shade as of disappointment passing over Phil's face.

"When is Dr. Rees coming back, Maychael?"

"Next month, early. He seems to have been enjoying himself greatly, and in a letter I had from him yesterday morning he says that the change and rest have done him good, and that his patient is also much better," answered Michael, puffing at his old briar.

"Well, then, I suppose you will soon be going back to London, my boy, and your old father will be lonely again!"

"Lonely? Oh, no! You *used* to be lonely, I know, but now you have Miss Owen and Tom here in the mill with you—you are all right, eh?"

"Yes! I s'pose so—but, *machgen-i*, after all's said and done, 'tis one's own blood one clings to. Not but that Miss Barbara and Master Tom are good, very good, to me."

"And you to them, too, father."

They continued talking together for some time longer, till Michael rose, saying he must be going, and taking his hat and stick from the settle where he had laid them down on entering, said, "Good night, father, and don't you go wandering out all alone to Llyn Dystaw at night again."

"No, no, my boy!"

"That's right—*Nos dawch!*"* and Michael left the room. The old clock on the wall ticked solemnly, the heavy pendulum on its long chain swinging slowly backwards and forwards; the culm fire glowed steadily, and old Phil-y-Velin still sat in his chair gazing abstractedly into the fire; outside, the owls hooted weirdly

*Good night.

as they flitted silently to and fro, and it was quite an hour after Michael had gone before Phil, lighting the candle which Peggy had placed ready for him on the dresser, went slowly up the creaking old oak stairs that led from the kitchen to his bedroom, treading as softly as he could, fearing lest he should disturb Barbara and Tom, although they slept in an entirely different wing of the old building.

CHAPTER XIX

As Michael left the mill he had to pass the west gable, and, to his surprise, he perceived Barbara standing in the moonlight, which shone down upon her pale face. She started violently as she saw him, and in a moment he realised where his duty lay. Was it right that this pure girl should be kept in ignorance of the misconception that had been placed upon the sentiments that she had expressed to Mabel? for that it was a misconception he had not a single doubt. Was it right that she should be exposed to the risk attendant upon these words being passed from mouth to mouth, and thereby becoming grossly exaggerated? No! no!

Stopping, he raised his cap, saying, "Good evening, Miss Barbara. I see you are enjoying the glorious night."

Barbara raised her eyes to his, and Michael saw that there were the marks of tears on her cheek, and a great tender pity rose within him, and a fierce, almost uncontrollable longing to take her in his arms and to kiss those tear-marks away.

"Yes," she said, "I was enjoying the evening air, and thinking."

"Thinking? I trust your thoughts were not unhappy; but perhaps——" noticing that her eyes were slowly filling, and her lips beginning to tremble, "I mean—I must not ask—I have not the right, and I beg your pardon for my stupid remark."

A wan little smile flitted over Barbara's face as she

replied, "You have said nothing for which you need ask my pardon, Dr. Lloyd. My thoughts were both sad and happy ones. I was thinking of my darling mother. I miss her so much, and yet—and yet—I am so glad that she is happy and free from pain now, at all events."

"Yes, she is free from pain; and look here, Miss Barbara, my thoughts to-night are sad, too, and I want to tell them to you, for they concern you nearly."

"Me? Concern me?" said Barbara, and she flushed a little. "Surely, Dr. Lloyd, I ought to feel grateful," and again that wistful smile broke the proud, immobile curve of her lips.

"Well, I don't think you need be gratified," said Michael, ruefully. "For my own part I think it is only right that I should speak of them to you—but is Tom inside?"

"No! I really only came to the door to see if there was any sign of him, and the lovely moon laid her spell upon me, and kept me here longer than I had intended. Tom has gone to see Mr. Preece, who sent for him about an hour ago."

"Perhaps it is as well," said Michael. "Look here, as he has not yet returned, will you come a little way through the wood with me? He can only come by that road, and if we don't meet him soon I will bring you safely back again."

"It is rather late," answered the girl; "but as the night is so glorious, I will come just a very little way, but I must first fetch a shawl to throw over my head," and she went into the house.

In a few minutes she returned, the diaphanous, cloudy material which she had designated a shawl

making her look more fragile and ethereal than before, and they walked along the little narrow pathway across the green that led to the edge of the wood.

As they entered the leafy glade the road widened, and Michael, who had pondered as to how he should broach the subject that so occupied his mind, turned to his companion, and said suddenly, "Miss Barbara! I have been rather troubled lately, relative to that little bottle of medicine I gave you to administer to your mother during those dreadful paroxysms of pain that she endured towards the end. I trust you destroyed its contents, for it was very powerful, and it would be a dangerous thing if left lying about, and if found by anyone who was not forewarned as to its qualities. Now, as you know, old Peggy Jerry loves to taste every kind of medicine that is prescribed for friends of hers who may be ill, believing as she does that the more the different kinds of medicines she takes, the more unlikely she is to contract the illness they are supposed to be efficacious for. I therefore want to put temptation out of the way, but it is quite possible, of course, that the bottle may be lying at the bottom of some trunk or other at the mill, amongst the many other little odds and ends you must have brought with you from Caefrân. If you do not mind—that is to say—if you cannot remember throwing it away, would you oblige me by doing so at the earliest possible moment?"

Whilst Michael was speaking, Barbara felt as if every drop of blood had receded from her face, leaving it cold as death itself, but she gradually regained her equanimity, and as Michael ceased, she suddenly stood still, and, laying her hand on his arm, said, "Dr. Lloyd?"

"Yes," answered Michael, surprised at the reflection of her voice.

"I have something to tell you. After I have told you, I wonder what you will think of me? I have not got that bottle. I did not bring it with me to the old mill, for when we left Caefrân, there was very little left in it."

"Very little, Miss Barbara, but how could that be? There was sufficient in that bottle for a dozen doses. I only gave your poor mother one dose myself from it, and I believe she had only one bad paroxysm afterwards."

"Oh, dear, no! but I did not give her any more of the medicine till the last awful pain came on."

"Well, then, you only gave her one more dose. In such case, what became of the rest of the contents of the bottle, if, as you say, there was very little of it left?"

"That last dose I gave her was a teaspoonful of the medicine," said Barbara, slowly, her eyes fixed steadfastly upon Michael's face, watching the effect of her words.

"*You gave her a teaspoonful of that medicine in one dose!* Surely you cannot mean what you say! Do you know what the consequence of such an action would be? No! you cannot know—for if you did——"

"Well, Dr. Lloyd, supposing I did know—what then?"

"You would have deliberately killed your mother," replied Michael.

"I was perfectly aware of the consequences of what I was doing, and God knows that what I did, I did for the best, and I am so glad, oh, so glad, that I did it—for I gave her that peace which the world cannot give,

Dr. Lloyd, and I am sure that if my darling mother is looking down on us now, and can hear what I am saying, she knows the motive that prompted my action, aye, and blesses me for it too!"

Barbara spoke with intense emotion, but Michael did not answer. This revelation had come as a "bolt from the blue." His heart felt as if it would burst from his body—he felt a choking sensation in his throat, and lifted his hand mechanically to his collar.

"Good God!" was all he could say—"Good God!"

"Yes; God *was* good to me and to my mother too, for He showed me how to open those glorious portals for her, and how to spare her dear body from any more of that dreadful agony, and *that*, you doctors, with all your vaunted skill, cannot do."

Barbara's words burst vehemently from her lips. They rushed forth as a streamlet bubbles and tumbles into the cool fresh air from the breasts of the hill that gave it birth. Suddenly she stopped speaking, and, as if by common impulse, both she and Michael stood still. The great woods around them were silent—the calm moon gleamed down pityingly between the tree-tops as if commiserating with the hearts so torn with conflicting emotions. In the solemn hush around it seemed as if something was going to happen—to break the tension so intense. Not a sound disturbed the eternal silence of the night save the whispering of the fir trees around them, as if they were telling one another in hushed tones of the mental agony these two were enduring. Suddenly, in the distance, a nightingale burst into song—the clear notes issuing from its little throat with a sweetness indescribable. Barbara started and looked at Michael, who was standing with bowed head. As if drawn by a magnet, his eyes met hers,

and as in a flash of lightning she realised what she had said, and how by her own words she had confessed to a deed for which in the cold, pitiless eyes of the world there was no extenuation. *She was a murderess!* Essylt was right! She had taken a life that God only had the right to dispose of, and now, and now—oh God!—the thought was intolerable—she had lost Michael for ever—aye, so long as they both should live he would regard her as one unclean—as one whose hands were red with the blood of one near and dear to her. Her mind was benumbed, and, with a little moan, she turned suddenly away, and retraced her steps towards the mill. She had not gone far, however, before she felt a hand laid quietly on her arm. She knew whose it was, and withdrew her arm from that gentle touch—in itself almost a caress.

“Dr. Lloyd,” she said, proudly and calmly, although within her breast a very tornado of passion lay, “please leave me to myself; I am close home and need no assistance.”

Michael made no reply, but Barbara felt rather than saw that he respected her wish then, as always. She stumbled on blindly, scarce seeing the pathway before her, and in a few moments reached the mill. She fumbled for the handle of the door and opened it, but before entering turned once more to look back at the man she loved so well. She could not see him, for he was on his knees in the wood praying to his Creator, with all the fervour of a strong man whose faith is unshaken, to show him some light in the darkness with which his spirit was surrounded.

Barbara’s first impulse was to regain her room. She was shivering with a bitter cold, but it was the coldness as of death, not of nature, that gripped her heart

with its icy fingers. The next moment she burned with indignation; her pride, which she thought was dead, was wounded to the quick. Why? For behind it lay the cruel thought that what she had said, what she had done, was true—that she could deny nothing. She had passed through a tornado of suffering already, but this was more than she could bear! and she threw herself on her little white bed, listening and yet not hearing the owls hooting in the gable outside her window. How long she lay there she knew not, but she started up in affright when she heard the outer door open, and Tom's cheery voice call, "Barbara! where are you, old girl?"

"I am coming down now, dear," she managed to answer, her voice sounding to her as if far away, and she groped her way downstairs slowly and heavily.

"Why, Barbara, surely not off to bed, were you? Why, it is only eleven now—by Jove, it's nearly twelve!" said Tom, looking at his watch. "But what's the matter? You look as if you were only half awake."

"I am quite awake, dear—I wish to God I were not," was her reply, which to Tom was perfectly enigmatical.

"Come here, dear, and sit on the settle and warm yourself," and he took her cold hand in his and pressed it lovingly.

"I will give you your supper first, Tom, and then, dear, I want to have a little talk with you."

"All right, but don't keep me up too long, there's a dear. The drive in the moonlight has made me sleepy," and he yawned ostentatiously.

Whilst Tom was discussing his supper, Barbara sat with her eyes fixed on the glowing culm fire. Had she done rightly? she wondered. Was there a chance that

her mother would have lived on with them, had she (Barbara) not so impulsively given her that soothing draught, which caused her pure spirit to glide so easily and smoothly from its bitter pain to the peace beyond?

No! Try as she would, the thought would recur; that what she had done was right. Right! yes; but what would other people say about her action? What would Michael say? and with this last thought the conviction thrust itself upon her that by her own action—her own words—she had to-night put away from her all hopes of future happiness and joy.

“Well, dear, I am ready; what is it you want to tell me?” said Tom, as, rising from the table, he came and sat in the corner of the old oak settle near the fire, groping on the mantelpiece for his pipe and tobacco.

“Tom, dear, I saw Dr. Lloyd about an hour ago. He had been to see his father, and I was standing at the door in the moonlight, watching for your return.”

“Yes! And what then?” said Tom, a quizzical smile breaking over his face. “Was he such an ogre that he frightened you by his sudden appearance round the corner?”

“No, dear! He did not frighten me. He stopped and spoke to me, and I walked a little way with him to meet you. It was I startled him, not he, me.”

“You are not so very terrifying in looks, either,” said Master Tom, cocking his head on one side and gazing at his sister.

“No, dear, I don’t mean that. I—I frightened him in another way. He—he asked me to destroy the contents of the little bottle of medicine he gave me to ease dear mother’s pain; you remember it, no doubt?”

Tom was now all alertness, and gazed meditatively into the fire.

“Yes, dear?” he said slowly, and bent forward and stroked her hand encouragingly.

“Well! I told him I had not got it—and—and—oh! Tom, darling, I suppose he will mention it to you sooner or later. I told him that I gave a teaspoonful of the sedative to darling mother when she was in such dreadful pain. At the time I could not bear it, Tom, I could not, indeed; but now I see what I have done—I have killed our own sweet mother, when perhaps she might have recovered. Tom, dear, I did it all for the best; I could not bear to see her suffer, but what shall I do?—what shall I do?” and the broken-hearted girl went down on her knees and laid her head on his lap, sobbing convulsively.

Tom said not a word; his lips were hard set, his face wore a strained and harassed look, strange in one so young; there was a dead silence, broken only by the sound of Barbara’s muffled crying. His pipe had gone out, but he still held it mechanically between his lips. He was thinking deeply.

Well! Now Michael knew it! and God help them all! A great tenderness for Barbara rose within him. She, his dear little sister, who had throughout the whole of her life adored their mother, as indeed he himself had, with a passionate devotion, almost amounting to idolatry. What had it led her to? In her innocence of heart she had done that which a man, more dispassionately as he is wont to review the consequence of a rash action, would have shrunk from doing, and yet he—Tom—could not blame her. In her great love she had given her mother relief from agony. That was the sum total of her wrongdoing, and he and Michael Lloyd, between them, must shelter her, if possible, from the effects of that wrongdoing.

He caught his breath sharply, a dry sob arose in his throat, and a great tear splashed heavily on Barbara's hair.

She put her hand out, and he laid his own large one over it, caressingly, protectingly.

"Barbara, darling!" he said in a low voice, "listen to me. Why did you tell Michael? Don't you *know*"—and here his voice rose slightly—"that his prejudices, as a doctor, are stronger than those of most people, and that you have placed him in a most painful, a most awful, position? Oh, why did you not come to *me* first, and ask my opinion before confiding so recklessly in Michael? Poor fellow, he is staunch as steel, but what view he will take of the matter I know not."

Barbara raised her head and looked at Tom earnestly, and in those glorious eyes, now brimming over with tears, Tom read the unspoken answer to this question.

"God help you—and him!" was all he said. "Look here, Barbara, I am going to Maentrevor to see him. I must see him, and at once, too. I will send Peggy in to keep you company. I shall not be gone much over an hour, and in all probability I will bring Michael back with me, if he has not gone out again into the country," and he rose, gently lifting her to her feet.

Barbara was still crying softly, and as Tom put his arms round her, she clung convulsively to him.

"Oh, Tom, dear, don't leave me here to-night alone! I could not bear it—indeed, I could not."

"Nonsense, Barbara," he answered. "This matter has to be faced out—and at once; but God only knows what the issue will be. Michael is level-headed and strong, and I know he will advise us what to do.

Peggy, too, has plenty of sense, and between us, dear, we will do what is best. You may depend upon *that* at all events," and he tried to smile cheerfully, but it was only a parody for a smile that came.

"Barbara, darling! Let us kneel here once together and ask for help from One whose pitying eye is upon us now." They both sank to their knees, and whilst the culm fire glowed steadily on, the old clock ticked in the corner, the owls "tu-whoood" softly in the gables, and the placid moon cast her silvery beams on the diamond-framed window, the prayers of two stricken souls ascended to God.

After some moments they rose to their feet, and Tom, putting his arms round his sister, said: "I feel better now, dear, and I have an inward conviction that there must be some horrible mistake somewhere, and that God—yes, and darling mother too, will help us and show us some way out."

"There is no mistake, Tom, dear. There is no mistake," and with another little sob Barbara sat down on the settle.

"Well! remain here, dear, and Peggy will be with you in a very few minutes. Good-bye for the present, and God bless you and guard you!" He kissed her fervently and went swiftly and silently out.

How long Barbara sat there alone she knew not, but she was awakened from her sad and bitter self-reproach by a low knock at the door, followed by a well-known "ahem!" and before she could collect her thoughts sufficiently to invite entrance, the door opened and Peggy appeared, clad in the most weird-looking costume it is possible to imagine. From her waist downwards she wore a black-and-red flannel petticoat, much frayed at the edges; in places, strips of it were

hanging down, one indeed trailing on the ground as she walked; round her shoulders she had thrown an old coat which had once belonged to Phil-y-Velin, its original dark hue quite obliterated by the dust from the corn-bins which seemed to have settled permanently in the woof of the cloth. On her head was a red woollen nightcap with a white frill; on her feet were what had once been stockings, but from which now the half of her feet protruded unblushingly, and the whole made up a never-to-be-forgotten picture. Barbara could hardly help laughing through her tears as she beckoned to the old woman to come and sit beside her.

“Well, *merch-i*—and what’s the matter? Indeed, indeed, there’s frightened I was when Master Tom called me. I thought it was a *bwci** trying to play a trick on old Peggy whatever, when I heard the knock at the door.”

“I am so sorry, Peggy *vâch*, that you should be disturbed at this hour of the night, but Tom has gone to Maentrevor to see Dr. Lloyd, and I was lonely all by myself,”

“*Wrth cwrs*,† Miss *vâch*—and who should you call but old Peggy, eh? Tell me that,” and she sat down on a low three-legged stool in front of the fire. “But what’s the matter? Is Master Tom ill, or are you?” and she peered up anxiously into Barbara’s face.

“I am ill, Peggy—no, not as you mean,” as the old woman rose to her feet as hastily as she could; “ill in mind, I mean, not body.”

“Then why do you send for Dr. Lloyd? Never heard tell that he could mend souls as well as bodies,” said Peggy shrewdly.

* Ghost. † Of course.

"I did not send for him, Peggy. Tom said he must go and fetch him here at once."

"Fetch him here! Goodness gracious——"

"Yes! Fetch him here. Oh, Peggy, Peggy, I am in great trouble," and to the old woman's consternation she burst into a paroxysm of weeping.

"*Dir anwël! Dir anwël!* What is it, then? Come, tell old Peggy all about it, *merch-i*. Is it the 'room-atis' or something like that? Yes! that's it, after all the standing about in the cold you been. I can soon mend *that*, I can tell you. Griffy Saer had it bad last winter, and Dr. Rees gave him something that mend him in no time. I got some in my room which I took from Griffy's bottle, and I will go and fetch it."

She was turning towards the door, when Barbara stopped her, saying, "No, Peggy, not that."

"Then do tell me, Miss *vâch*, and don't 'ee cry. Be bound we will soon get you all right again." Peggy's dim old eyes were gazing wistfully, lovingly at Barbara, and something impelled her—what she knew not—to tell the whole tale to those sympathetic ears.

"Peggy, Peggy! This is what is the matter with me. You know how dearly I loved my mother, and how I could not bear to see her in pain at any time?"

"Iss, *merch-i*, I remember. When you were both *bappas** so high," and she held her hand close to the floor, "if mestress scratched her finger you and Master Tom use to cry bitter. You use to turn round and hold the mestrees' hand out to me and say, 'Iss there any blood, Peggy?' And I use to say 'Yes, Miss *vâch*,' and then you use to ask if it was 'led blood,' and if I said 'Yes' again, oh, how you both cry, awful,

* Babies.

and how mestress and I would laff!" and Peggy chuckled to herself.

"Well, Peggy," continued Barbara, "when darling mother was taken so ill, I used to sit and pray—oh, how I prayed, that she would be spared from much pain, and then those awful fits came on"—Peggy nodded vehemently—"and Dr. Lloyd brought me that bottle of medicine to give her only when the pain was unbearable"—Peggy nodded again—"and then—and then—I saw that nothing would ever cure her, and—and—I gave her a lot out of the bottle at once, Peggy, and—she died. And, oh! I felt so glad that I was the means of stopping her pain, and of letting her go to God, who was calling her—when the doctors could do her no good. And, now, after all these months, I see how wrong and wicked I have been, and how I ought to have let God work His own will on her, and ought not to have interfered with His work; and, perhaps, if I had been brave enough, darling mother would have got over those dreadful attacks, and I should not have been the cause of her death."

Poor Barbara by this time was in a pitiful state of collapse, and sobbing as if her heart would break. Peggy got safely up from her stool again, and sat on the settle beside her.

"*Merch vâch-i!* My dear mestress and God both know now that you did not mean to kill her—and look here, Miss *vâch*. Are you certain sure that what you gave the mestress did kill her? No, Miss *vâch*. It is no use telling me. You would never have done that, I know. My little gel! and is this why your cheeks have grown so white this long time? Oh! if old Peggy knew, you should not be so miserable."

"But, Peggy darling," and here Barbara put her

arms round the old woman's neck and sobbed unrestrainedly," "I *did* kill her—yes, and meant to kill her, too."

"Hush! Miss *vâch*. What you did, you did for the best, and God will not blame you for that. Look you! I will make you a nice cup of tea now, and you will drink it like a good little gel. It will do you a world of good, and don't you vex," and Peggy made as if to rise.

"No, Peggy *vâch*—it would choke me. Not vex? What do you mean? Wouldn't *you* vex if you had done what I have?"

"Well, then! let me stum the fire. It iss going down, and you will get cold, and old Peggy and you will sit together till Master Tom and Maychael Lloyd come back," and managing to free herself gently from Barbara's detaining grasp, Peggy inserted the small bent poker in the little round hole that glowed so brightly at the top of the culm fire, and turned it round and round meditatively.

"Come you now, and sit quiet for a minit, while I go and find my *clocs*. I won't be a minit, no, indeed, miss," and unheeding Barbara's expostulations she shuffled out of the room, soon returning and sitting down again at Barbara's side. "Well, *merch-i!* Let's sing '*Yn y dyfroedd.*' It will do us both good—eh! Miss *vâch?*"

"Oh! Peggy, I can't sing."

"Well, then! I can, and I will, too," and Barbara nestled once more into Peggy's protecting arms, whilst the latter in thin quavering tones began that grandest of old Welsh hymns. The rhythm rose and fell with a pathos indescribable, and as the last line died away into silence Peggy looked at the sweet face resting on

her shoulder, and perceived that the old melody had lulled Barbara to sleep. The long lashes lay on the curved cheeks, and in the flickering light of the fire Peggy saw that the tears were still welling from underneath them, showing that even Nature's sweet restorer was unable fully to enact its accustomed rôle and to bring absolute forgetfulness to the tired spirit.

The fire burned slowly down and the old clock ticked solemnly on, and Peggy still moved not, but with her old withered cheek laid against Barbara's hair, she too gradually slipped into slumber. She heard not, therefore, the firm steps that walked up to the doorway just as the pale dawn appeared in the east, nor did she hear the latch quietly lifted. Tom and Michael, for it was they, stopped instinctively on the threshold, and the former tiptoed across to the fireplace, beckoning to his companion to do likewise, and they stood for some moments gazing at the picture before them. Michael passed his hand furtively across his eyes and then whispered, "We must not let them sleep here any more, Tom. It is getting quite chilly." Tom nodded, and laid his hand gently on Peggy's sleeve. She opened her eyes, and for a moment, not recognising the intruders, instinctively drew Barbara into a closer embrace, as if to shield her from some unknown danger; then, as the realisation of her surroundings returned to her, she lifted a warning finger, saying in a low voice, "Hisht, *machgen-i*, let her sleep on. She will be calmer when she awakes."

"No, no," said Michael, "we must talk with her—and now. Has she told you anything, Peggy?"

"*Wrth cwrs*," said Peggy in an indignant tone of voice, "she has told me everything. Who else could she tell but me, eh?"

Michael smiled indulgently and pointed to Barbara, who stirred uneasily. She opened her eyes wonderingly; then, as Michael moved slightly forward, recollection returned to her, and her eyes grew dark and troubled, and a little moan issued from her lips, and a shiver passed through her frame.

"Look you, Master Tom, and you too, Maychael Lloyd—if you think you iss come to worry Miss *vâch* again now, after you bin away all this time, you iss wrong, see! *Dirwss anwl!* There's old Bensha, my cock, crying for iss brekwas"—as a defiant clarion note resounded through the morning air. "In my deed, I'm thinkin' we all want brekwas. *Beth yw'r gloch,*"* continued Peggy, relapsing into her mother-tongue, as she sometimes did when excitement prohibited her from speaking English.

"I see we shall get nothing done while Peggy is in this mood," said Tom to Michael. "I suppose we had better do what she desires, for we shall not have any peace otherwise."

"Oh, all right, but I really think Miss Barbara should go to bed now. She will never be able to stand the strain much longer, unless we can do something for her," answered Michael, *sotto voce*.

Peggy's quick ears caught the portent of the muttered words, and turning to Michael said, "*Ach-y-ft,* Maychael Lloyd, I was think that mayself, but you was always 'sassy.' You iss not everybody no more nor me."

Michael shrugged his shoulders, saying, "Let us go out, Tom, while Peggy takes your sister up to bed."

As they opened the door the cold morning air struck sharply on their cheeks, for there was a suspicion of

* "What o'clock is it?"

frost in the air. Under the eaves the sparrows were twittering briskly to one another, and the tops of the trees were illumined by a faint, very faint, pink glow, that gradually eliminated the bright eyes of the stars above them. Their eyelids were heavy with sleep, for the Goddess had not closed their eyes during the past night, and now, as they gazed at the awakening glory of the dawn, a silence profound fell upon them. A rabbit hopped out of the leafy glades of the wood, and scurried hastily across the green sward close to where the two men were standing. Then, as if ashamed of her fear, peeped out again, and realising that they meant her no harm, started feeding on the sweet grass now bending its blades heavy with dewdrops as in adoration to the rising glory.

A heavy sigh from Tom broke the silence, and Michael turned and saw the big tears slowly coursing down his cheeks. Tom pointed silently to the sun now just visible over the tree-tops, and murmured huskily, while dashing his hand across his eyes, "I would to God, Michael, that that were a good omen for us!"

"Perhaps it is, Tom, old fellow. Buck up, and look this horrible matter full in the face as I am trying to do. Tom, old man," and here his voice took a tender ring, "do you know that this calamity is as awful to me as it is to you? Do you know that I would give up all hopes of advancement in this world to make your sister Barbara my wife? Wait a moment, Tom," as he observed his companion's look of inquiry. "You are wondering how this can be, for you know I was but recently engaged to marry Essylt Lewis—that poor girl who now sleeps in the little churchyard by the sea. Well, it *is* true that I was engaged to her—aye, and would have fulfilled my promise probably by this time

—but Tom, I was miserable. Yes! You must hear it all, and then, perhaps, your condemnation will not be so great. Nearly nine years ago I thought I loved her—whether she loved or not, God only knows. At all events, she said she did—but, alas! in a little while I found out that what at first I had thought of as love on my part was nothing but a foolish youth's calf-love; but through all these years, Tom, I never told her that my feelings for her had changed, for I still think Essylt loved me in her own way, and then, Tom, when, as I thought, it was too late, I met and loved Barbara.”

“Did you ever tell this to my sister?” asked Tom.

“No, I have not, for it would not have been an honourable thing for me to do. Then Providence intervened, and the way was made clear for me once more, for, as you know, poor Essylt died, and although I felt her death keenly—for we had always been the best of friends, and my feelings of comradeship for her had never died out entirely, although the desire to marry her had long since departed—I used to wonder, Tom, at those strange caprices of her. One moment happy and playful and light as a kitten, at another petulant and passionate to a degree. I see it *all* now, but I cannot understand how she hid all signs of that dread disease from us.”

“But if you had *married* her, Michael?”

“As I was saying, Providence intervened in the most wonderful manner, and prevented a consummation of our engagement. Poor Essylt's sufferings were ended, and, God forgive me, I felt an immense relief to think that there was nothing to prevent my speaking to Barbara; but Tom, old fellow, you know the dear old hymn, ‘God moves in a mysterious way’? Well, it

was never more exemplified to me than it is now. I hoped and believed that Barbara loved me, and I was building, oh, such castles in Spain, and now—and now the cup is dashed from my lips over again.”

Tom held out his hand, and Michael grasped it, and the two young men, so heavily burdened with a common grief, knew that each fully sympathised with and understood the other.

“Ah! here comes your father,” said Tom, and Michael turned to greet old Phil who, with a look of pleased surprise, came round the corner of the building.

“Ah! I thought I knew your voice; but what are you doing here so early, *machgen-i?* Nobody ill, is there?”—his rugged weather-seamed old face assuming an air of anxiety. “Not Miss *vâch*, is it?”

“Well, she *is* ill, father, but not physically—only mentally. Father, we are all in great trouble, and as, sooner or later, it will trouble you too, I think I had better tell you now. Have you had breakfast yet?”

“No, my boy, I was wondering where Peggy had got to, for she had not put anything ready for me this morning, but the fire was burning all right in the kitchen, so I popped the kettle on to boil and came out to smell the fir trees, for they smell sweeter in the morning than at any other time. Ah! but you young fellows don’t know what you miss when you lie in bed in the mornings”—and he shook his head reprovably. “Drat the beast!” he said, throwing a pebble at the rabbit, which with a contemptuous flick of her little white-tipped tail vanished into the brushwood. “She is here every morning, and always nibbles the grass with one eye on the doorway, to see if it is safe for

her to get at my winter cabbages. But what is it, my boy? Be bound there's some way out of your trouble."

Michael and Tom smiled wearily, and the former said, "Peggy is in there," pointing to the door just behind them, "with Miss Owen. She is getting breakfast ready for us, so come in and have yours at the same time, if Tom does not mind."

"Of course not," said Tom. "Your father knows how glad we always are to see him." Then, followed by Michael and Phil, the former with his arm thrown over his father's shoulder, they went into the house, whilst as soon as the door had closed behind them, a pair of bright eyes, over which two long ears protruded inquiringly, peeped out from the friendly cover of the brushwood, and a little soft-furred quadruped thought she would go and see whether the frost had impaired the taste of the miller's cabbages.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN the three men entered the old-fashioned room, half hall, and half dining-room, they found Peggy bustling about preparing the breakfast, and this fact, combined with the sight of the snow-white tablecloth and the sound of the kettle boiling on the "hob," served in part to dissipate the gloom that had fallen upon them.

"Where is Miss Barbara, Peggy?" asked Tom. "In bed?"

"Iss, *wrth cwrs!* what else you think, I should like to know, after all you big men fritenin' the poor child out of her senses? *Ach-y-ft*—for shame! But there—I s'pose you did not know better. And iss Phil-y-Velin goin' to have brekwas with the quality too? *Dir anxel!* and in his old 'cot' too. 'Here, you, come with me this minit, and I will give you your Sunday one," and in spite of Phil's deprecating look she pushed him out of the room in front of her.

"Peggy seems determined to do her best to make us forget our trouble, at all events," said Michael.

"Yes," said Tom. "What we should do without her I cannot imagine."

"And she too is of the same opinion, I fancy; but all old servants are privileged."

In a short time Peggy and Phil returned, the latter looking an incongruous figure in his Sunday-go-to-meeting coat and corduroy trousers.

"Come on, then," said Tom, "let's begin"; and they drew their chairs up to the table.

Whilst Peggy brought in the new-laid eggs and the fresh bread and butter, together with the cold boiled bacon, and poured out the tea for them, supplementing it with a generous supply of thick cream, Tom turned apologetically to Michael, saying, "This is hardly fit fare for a big London doctor, is it, Michael?—but if you come to Rome, you must do as the Romans do, eh?"

"Nonsense, man! Why, this is good enough for a king; and, besides, you forget, Tom, that I was bred and born here, and that many's the day I have had to drink my tea without milk for being a naughty boy, eh, father?" and he nudged the old man playfully. The latter smiled cheerily.

"That's right, Maychael, remind your old father of all his cruelty in the old days—ah! the dear old days! In my deed, Maychael, I'm thinking how proud your poor mother would have been to have seen you now," and Phil drew his sleeve across his eyes. His words broke the spell of comparative calm and cheerfulness that had fallen upon them, and Tom's face clouded over, whilst Michael looked grave again, for Phil's words had brought back to their recollection another whose place was empty. Peggy, hovering near, gave Phil's elbow an admonishing nudge, causing him to splutter over the contents of the cup which he was just lifting to his lips and to cough violently, and he looked up in time to encounter a threatening gleam in her eye and a fist clinched at him behind the young men's backs.

"Maychael Lloyd, I want you to come upstairs and see Miss Barbara when you have finished brekwas," said Peggy in an undertone, but not so low but that Tom's quick ears caught the remark.

“What’s the matter, Peggy?” he asked quickly.

“Nothing to vex about, *machgen-i*, but I want Michael Lloyd to try and make Miss *vâch* to stay in bed to-day. Her head is aching, and no wonder too, after all the cryin’ she bin doin’,” and Tom nodded in acquiescence, not perceiving the cautious wink with which the old woman favoured Michael, and which the latter acknowledged with a nod of intelligence.

“I *can’t* eat this morning,” said Tom, who for some time had been merely crumbling a piece of bread. “I feel as if every mouthful I take will choke me,” and he arose from the table and walked to the latticed window, on which he drummed listlessly with his fingers.

“I must say my appetite is not up to much, either,” said Michael, pushing away his plate; “but I will have another cup of Peggy’s excellent tea if I may.”

“Well, I mis say iss rather odd,” ejaculated Peggy. “Here iss all the good things wasted. *Ach-y-fi!* It’s too bad!” and she snorted indignantly, for nothing so much perturbs the innate hospitality of the Welsh peasantry as a failure on the part of those who are partaking of their good cheer to do justice to it. She was, however, a little mollified at observing that Phil’s appetite was in no way impaired by his companions’ delinquency, and when his plate was held out for more bacon she quite recovered her accustomed good humour.

“Well din, Phil *bâch!* You iss a man anyhow! Not like them fine gentries,” and she jerked her thumb contemptuously backwards in the direction of Michael and Tom, who were conversing quietly and seriously in the recess in the window.

“Well, Tom,” said the former, when Phil had fin-

ished his breakfast, "after all, I will leave you to explain matters to my father, and with your permission I will just run upstairs and see if I can relieve Miss Barbara's mind by a little judicious advice, for I expect her headache is caused more by worry than anything else."

"All right," answered Tom, and Michael, followed by Peggy, went out of the room. They went up the old narrow winding staircase of black oak, and arriving outside Barbara's door, the latter knocked quietly, and without waiting for an answer, walked straight in, saying, "Here's Maychael Lloyd come to see you, Miss *vâch*. You won't be cross with old Peggy for fetching him, will you?" for she noticed a petulant frown momentarily flitting across Barbara's face. She was lying on the bed with the coverlet thrown over her, and smiled faintly as Michael walked up to her and took her hot hand in his own firm, cool palm.

"Now what's the matter, Miss Barbara? Peggy tells me you have a bad headache, and that I am to persuade you to stay in bed all day," looking at the faithful old woman standing at the foot of the bed gazing anxiously at her young mistress.

"Well, yes, Dr. Lloyd; it is true that I have a headache—but certainly should not have thought of sending for you for such a trivial matter. Peggy must take the blame for that. I did not know she had gone to fetch you, but now you are here, I should be very glad if you would look at this," and beckoning to Peggy to assist her she undid her blouse at the neck, the while blushing a rosy red, and disclosed to view, near her right shoulder, a red lump of about the size of a shilling in circumference. It looked irritated and sore, and evinced signs of recent suppura-

tion. "I am not nervous about it," she continued, "but Peggy has been uneasy about it for a day or two, and I rather suspect that is really why she wanted you to come up, and that the slight headache I am suffering from is only an excuse, so perhaps you will be able to calm her fears now."

"How long have you had this lump?" queried Michael, bending over the fragile form and gently pressing the angry-looking spot.

"About two weeks, I think. I was out walking in the wood, not far from Llyn Dystaw, and in trying to reach some red berries I had to stand on tiptoe, and overbalanced myself and fell right into a thorn-bush. When I came home, my shoulder felt quite sore, and it has been so ever since, and this lump appeared next morning, so I suppose a thorn has been left in my shoulder."

"Ah! there's the mischief," Michael said, as Barbara winced a little. He took a small magnifying-glass out of his pocket, and bent more closely over her.

"You are quite right. It is a thorn, and an ugly one, too. Now, if you will be a brave girl, I will soon have that gentleman out. Peggy, fetch me a basin of hot water, please."

When the latter had left the room, Barbara turned quickly to Michael, saying, "Dr. Lloyd, tell me, what do you think of me after what I told you last night? Do you still regard me as the wilful murderess of my darling mother?" and she gazed pitifully at him.

"God forbid, Miss Barbara, that I should take upon myself to judge any of my fellow-creatures; but listen. After I have taken this thorn out of your shoulder, you are to be a good girl and try and sleep a little;

then, when you awake, you shall come downstairs and have a talk with us all, and we will see what is best to be done."

"What can be done?" said Barbara. "Why, nothing can be done. I have told you the truth, and God help me to bear my burden!" and the poor girl, turning her face to the pillow, sobbed bitterly.

Michael was deeply moved. It always hurt him to see a woman in distress, but when, as in this case, the woman was one he loved so dearly, and to save whom from an hour's pain and sorrow he would cheerfully make any sacrifice, his breast heaved, and his breath came quickly and unevenly.

At this moment Peggy returned with the hot water, and observing her young mistress in such a state of collapse, said indignantly, "Maychael Lloyd—for shame! to make my little gel cry so! What have you bin sayin' to her, eh? tell me that," and she glared fiercely at him.

Barbara raised her head, saying, "I was to blame, Peggy, and not Dr. Lloyd. Let him go on with his work now."

Peggy, sniffing unbelievably, handed Michael the hot water.

"There!" he said after a few minutes, "I think that will do for the present. When I return to the surgery I will send you some antiseptic wool, and some soothing oil, to apply to the wound. Here is your friend, or rather, your enemy. I trust I did not hurt you very much."

"No, thank you, Dr. Lloyd; I hardly felt your hand at all," answered Barbara.

"I am glad of that—as it was a nasty little place. It is a good thing I saw it to-day, or your arm might

have become very painful. I will go down now, and if I were you, I should stay in bed for an hour or two. Then keep your arm in a sling, if you *must* get up to-day.

"Yes, I must; you know I must," said Barbara.

"Oh, well, in such case I had better run back to Maentrevor at once to get some wool for your arm."

"Oh, please don't go till I come down—my arm will be quite all right," and Michael smiled indulgently as he left the bedroom.

When he returned to the living-room he found Tom and Phil, sitting on the settle by the fire, engaged in a heated discussion.

"I tell 'ee, Master Tom," the latter was saying, "that you are doing Miss *vâch* a great wrong in believing what you do believe. The poor little gel is wearing her heart out, grieving after her poor mother, and I tell you again and again"—and he thumped his big fist vigorously on his knee—"that she did *not* kill Mrs. Owen, and I would not believe it if an angel from heaven came down and told me so—so there! You shall see, my lad—you shall see." He puffed vigorously at his black clay pipe, whilst his lips and jaw set more determinedly than ever. "Oh, drat the boy!" he continued, as a lanky youth passed the window leading a horse and cart; "he won't have any corn to-day, at all events."

"Nonsense, father," interposed Michael; "why spoil business, and offend your neighbours at the same time, by refusing to grind their corn when they send it to you?"

"Nonsense yourself, Maychael Lloyd. You mind your own business, and I'll mind mine," was the miller's uncompromising answer, as he stumped angrily out of

the room, his solid legs looking more aggressive than ever.

Michael smiled. "This affair seems to have worried my father as much as it has us, Tom."

"Yes, that is so; but he was always very fond of Barbara."

"Indeed he was," replied Michael, as the remembrance of Phil's dream returned vividly to his mind, and he sighed heavily.

For some moments no word was spoken, Tom breaking the silence by saying, "I think I will go and see how Barbara is." He was proceeding leisurely out of the room, when a loud scream from upstairs resounded through the house. In a moment Michael was on his feet and making for the door, but Tom reached it before him, and the two men bounded up the rickety stairs. Arriving breathless outside Barbara's room they waited for an instant, and heard her sobbing as if her heart would break.

"May I come in?" said Tom, at last, knocking at the door vigorously. It was opened by Peggy Jerry, who gazed in a bewildered fashion at the two young men.

"What's the matter?" said Michael.

"The matter? Oh, come in, come in; and Miss Barbara will tell you. Oh, Master Tom, Master Tom, and you, too, Maychael Lloyd, God is good, God is good!" and to their utter astonishment Peggy threw her shawl over her head and subsided into a chair that stood outside the bedroom door, crying till her shoulders shook. Observing that they could get no satisfaction out of her for the present, Tom and Michael entered the room, and were advancing towards Barbara, when suddenly Michael uttered an exclamation.

tion, and stepping quickly to the bedside, lifted the girl's arm, at the same time pointing to the clenched hand, from between the fingers of which protruded a small glass phial. With his other hand he gently disengaged it from her grasp, and looked at it earnestly.

"God in Heaven!" he muttered. "This is the very bottle; and nearly full too!" He took the cork out and smelt it carefully. "Yes, it is the same—why, what is the meaning of it?"

At this moment Peggy came into the room, disengaging her head from the folds of the apron, and hearing his last remark, said, "It means, Maychael Lloyd, that God has shown us a way out of all our trouble, and that it's all a mistake—all a mistake! Oh, it is won'ful, it is won'ful!"

"What's a mistake, and what's wonderful, woman?"

"Woman, yourself, Maychael Lloyd, and don't you dare to——"

Here Barbara, who had hitherto not spoken a word, but had lain with her face buried in the pillow, raised her head, saying, "It means, Dr. Lloyd, that through the mercy of God, in administering to my darling mother what I thought was the sedative you prescribed for her, I made a mistake and gave her some comparatively harmless medicine that poor Essylt had kept in the little chest of drawers in her room. I suppose it was something old Rhysin had given her, for Peggy found it there one day when Essylt was out and took it away, intending, perhaps," and here Barbara smiled faintly, "to sample it later on. You know how fond she is of doing that sort of thing. She tells me that she heard dear mother moaning at the commencement of that last awful paroxysm, and running in to do what she could to assist, put the little bottle on the mantel-

piece next to the one you gave me. They were both very much alike, as you will notice. In a short while she went out again, and in the flurry and excitement must have taken the wrong bottle with her, and then—and then, dear mother's pain becoming worse I went to the mantelpiece and picking up, as I thought, the one that you had given me, I returned to the bedside, and as I could not endure any longer the sight of my darling writhing in inexpressible agony, I thought that the greatest kindness I could do to her would be to save her from any more pain; and remembering how you had told me that I was to be careful in administering the medicine, and that a teaspoonful was a fatal dose, I gave her that quantity, and then—and then, that great angel came, and I saw by the sweet peace that settled on her dear face that she had gone."

Here Barbara again broke down, and Tom, who had been listening to her explanation in silence, now broke in with "But you did not kill her, Barbara, darling."

"No, Master Tom, she did not," answered Peggy; "and when you and Miss *vâch* wass leave Caefrân, I went round the dear old house and brought everything away with me that I could, and some small things that I found in my dear mestress's room I put in my pocket—you can see for yourself"—and she turned out the contents of the large linen pocket that, in common with most Welsh women, she wore round her waist over her outer petticoat. The contents were in truth a varied assortment: a long black and purple wooden needle-case, a lump of beeswax, several thimbles, some fragments of biscuits, a small round pin-cushion with a frilled edging, about the size of a crown piece, and many other articles too numerous to mention. "I wass look through my pocket before you wass come up,

tryin', I wass, to make Miss *vâch* here, laff, like she use to do when I wass let her put her hand in my pocket when she wass a *bappa*, and I found that bottle in it. 'Ach-y-fi! says I, here iss something of poor Essylt's, and then Miss *vâch* wass snatch the thing out of my hand and scream awful loud, and tell me what it wass, and——"

"Yes! yes! I understand now," said Tom; "but what became of *the* bottle, Barbara?"

"I suppose I left it in the room," answered the poor girl between her sobs. "Anyway, I never saw it again."

"Well, whatever it was," said Michael, "it was probably only a concoction of the old herbalist's making, and would not be injurious to your mother, I should think."

"No, no! I wass see Rhysin after poor Essylt wass die, and he wass tell me that she wass have from him some little oil to put on her poor brist, so I s'pose that wass it, whatever," said Peggy. "Rhysin wass a very clever man, too."

"Oh, I dare say, I dare say. I met him once on the beach at night-time," and Michael narrated the circumstances to his listeners.

"Well, *b'tswr, b'tswr*, whatever you may say against him, and *wrth cwrs*, you doctors would not like him or his works, his little bottle has been the thing that has made us all happy again, whatever," and Peggy sniffed deprecatingly.

"God forbid that I should speak slightly of any man who is trying to do good, however little I may believe in his methods," said Michael; "but I am not so sure that his motives *are* good; anyway, you had

better let me keep this bottle," he continued. "It has been the innocent cause of much trouble to all of us, and I will take very good care that it does not work any more harm, at all events."

Barbara nodded, and said: "Now, Dr. Lloyd, I think that you and Tom had better go downstairs again, and Peggy will help me to get up."

"No, no; I must beg of you to remain quiet to-day at least, as I want to send you something to soothe that arm of yours. And besides, you have now, thank God, nothing to grieve over," and there was such a sincere ring in his voice that Peggy looked sharply and quizzically at him.

"Very well," said Barbara obediently; "but anyway, allow me to thank you before you go, Dr. Lloyd, for all your sympathy to me during the past dreadful time, for I now know that you meant all in kindness, although at the time I dare say I misunderstood you. I will obey your wish and stay in bed to-day, and Peggy shall look after me, won't you, Peggy?"

"*Wrth cwrs*, Miss *vâch*; and I should like to know who else is fit to look after you, whatever."

"Thank you, Miss Barbara. Good-bye for the present, then. I will look in again to-night, if I may, just to see how your arm is progressing," and Michael went out, leaving Barbara in doubt as to whether he had thanked her for expressing her gratitude for his sympathy, or for obeying his behest that she should rest her mind and body after the troublous time she had so lately experienced.

Tom and Michael went downstairs and found Phil sitting on the "skew," and looking as black as thunder.

“Well, and have you two big boobies been upstairs fritenin’ my little gel agen?” was his prefatory remark.

“No, indeed—it was she who frightened us,” said Tom; “but look here, Phil, your belief in her innocence has been more than justified, for it was all a big mistake on our parts,” and he told him all the wonderful events that had happened during their absence from the room.

Before he had finished, Phil was on his feet gazing from one to the other of the young men with a complacent smile.

“You fools, you fools!” was all he could say for a moment, with a note of scornful pity in his voice. “And you are, I hope, proper ashamed of yourselves. You two fine gentlemen, who think that you know everything, and were so willing to condemn my little girl without finding out all about it first. Well, just you come up with me, both of you, to see Miss Barbara, and you are both to beg her pardon—before me—and Peggy too,” he added as an afterthought.

“Look here, father,” said Michael, “Miss Owen wants to go to sleep now. She has hurt her arm rather badly, and I want her to have a good day’s rest. To-night we will beg her pardon as much as you like—but now, she must have a little peace and quiet.”

“All right—all right—if that’s the case, I agree; but, mind you, Maychael, my boy, you and Master Tom there have both to beg her pardon as soon as she comes downstairs again—you big gabies, you!”

“Oh, very well, father; we will, of course, do all that we can to make up for our want of belief, as you insist on it.”

“Where is that boy with the corn?” said old Phil

suddenly, getting up from his seat and looking out of the window."

"Why, you sent him away long ago," said Michael, "and against my advice."

"Against your advice, indeed! And who are you, I should like to know, who dares to give advice to Phil-y-Velin on *his* business? You have poked your nose into some very sad business lately, Maychael Lloyd, and you see how wrong you have been. It iss not for me, a father, to say that I am glad my son is wrong, but I do say so now, thank God, thank God!" and the old man, drawing his sleeve across his eyes, went out of the room.

"Well, Tom, old fellow, I am going into Maentre-vor now, to send up some liniment for Miss Barbara's arm. Will you come with me, or will you remain here? If I were you, I think I should try and have a little sleep. I am going to have a nap myself when I get back, before I start on my rounds again. I think we both require a little rest as well as you sister—eh?"

"Yes, I shall lie down here on the settle and try and have a snooze," said Tom, suiting the action to the word and stretching his long limbs contentedly before the fire. "By the by, when does Dr. Rees return?"

"In about a fortnight, I think," replied Michael, "and I shall not be sorry, too, for I want to get back to town as soon as I can. I think that as events have turned out, I shall reconsider that offer of a partnership after all."

Tom did not say anything in reply to this announcement; knowing, as he did, how deeply Michael loved Barbara, he thought it best to let affairs take their natural course.

“Well, good-bye for the present, old chap. Will you come back here to-night, and see us all again? Oh! you might just drop in to Preece’s, and plead headache or any other reason you like for my non-attendance at office to-day, will you?”

“Yes, certainly, and I shall try, if possible, to look in to-night, as I promised Miss Owen that I would come and attend to her arm once more, but if I am not here before ten, don’t wait up for me, as I may not be able to finish my rounds before that time,” and Michael closed the door behind him, and stepped out briskly towards the wood.

What a contrast his present frame of mind was to what it had been when he had last trodden that same road, a few hours before! He had not proceeded far on his way through the wood when he heard a trap coming towards him. Something familiar in the hoof-beats attracted his attention, and a look of surprise crossed his face. The vehicle soon came in sight, and Michael stepped off the springy turf on to the roadway. Yes, he was right, and it was old Fanny coming along at her usual leisurely pace. But who was driving? Not Dr. Rees, surely!

“Ah, Lloyd, here you are,” said a cheery voice. “’Pon my word, you are a sly dog. Lemme see now, who lives with old Phil at the mill, eh?”

“Good gracious, doctor—is it really you? I thought you were still enjoying yourself in Rome, or some other place. Why in the world did you not write and say you were returning?”

“Well, my dear fellow, the fact is that at the tail-end of last week I found myself in the neighbourhood of Lisbon, and being heartily sick and tired of foreign towns—for I have been gadding about, haven’t

I?—I determined on bringing my patient, who is as tired of travelling as I am, home, without saying a word to anyone except his people of my intention. A P. & O. boat—the *Monastic*, to be exact—came up the river the night after we arrived in the City of Smells, and without debating the matter any more we sent our kit aboard, much to the regret, I feel sure, of a dirty, black-browed villain of a head-waiter in the hotel we had booked rooms in, for I feel sure he had formed the design of examining our luggage at his leisure. However, a handful of pesetas furnished some consolation to his wounded feelings, and here I am. But don't stand in the middle of the road, man, jump up! By Jove, it is good to be behind old Fanny again!" and he flicked that intelligent quadruped with the whip, much to her indignation, as evinced by a surprised squeal and a simultaneous uplifting of her quarters. "Soho! there, old girl—Soho! steady, steady!"

Michael climbed up into the gig beside Dr. Rees, who turned the mare's head in the direction of Maentrevor.

"And how have all my patients been getting on? Killed many, eh?"

"Well, no—not quite so bad as that," said Michael, laughing; "but I have a lot to tell you, so if you will put me up, I will stop at your house again to-night, and we can talk things over quietly. Then to-morrow I can shift my things to 'The Plough,' where I shall be quite comfortable, I dare say, until I return to town early next week."

"Stuff and nonsense, man! No town life for you yet. I want you to stay with me for some time, and as a matter of fact, Lloyd, that brings to my mind

something I have long wished to talk over with you—but don't let's discuss business now, we can leave all that till to-night. Old Preece nearly had a fit when he saw me. By the by, I see he has his niece staying with him, and Madlen, wicked old gossip, has already imparted the news to me, in confidence, that it is common report that Tom Owen is hanging his hat up there—is it so?"

"Not that I know of," answered Michael. "They used to be fairly thick at one time, and not so long ago, too, but matters seem to have cooled down somewhat of late."

This conversation gave Michael the opening he desired, and during the drive to Maentrevor he unburdened himself fully to his old friend, and told him of his love for Barbara, of her apparently strange conduct at times, of Miss Hume's suspicions, well confirmed as they were; and of Barbara's confession to himself, and the subsequent wonderful happenings by which her conduct had been so amply vindicated.

"Good God!" said his listener, who during Michael's narrative had not uttered a word: "How you great blundering idiots could have thought for one moment that Barbara Owen could do such a thing in cold blood, I cannot imagine; and yet I suppose you could not help yourselves, after all. Well, the saying is trite, but nevertheless true, that 'All's well that ends well'; and look here, Master Michael Lloyd, I am going to dress Barbara's shoulder to-night. You see, I have come back to work, and I can get into harness at once, eh? But joking apart, Lloyd, you had better take life easily for to-day at least, for you look quite tired and worn out, and a rest would not come amiss, eh? So that's settled."

“But—all has not ended well,” said Michael ruefully, at which remark Dr. Rees laughed and winked knowingly, but made no other response. They had now reached the only street of importance that Maentrevor boasted, and as they passed Mr. Preece’s house they saw Mabel Hume standing in the doorway, buttoning her gloves. She bowed to the two gentlemen as they drove past, and Michael, turning to his companion, said, “I must confess that I have no great liking for Miss Hume. She was the cause, as you now know, of those terrible suspicions in my mind relative to Miss Owen.”

“Ah! but you must not judge her too harshly. You must remember that she was justified in her thoughts, more or less, although, woman-like, she gave utterance to them more freely than she should have done; besides, you must not forget, Lloyd, that you too harboured the same suspicions till Providence interposed and helped you all so marvellously, Ah! I thought so!” Dr. Rees muttered as a smartly groomed young fellow passed them with a careless salute. “I fancy Master Tom is well out of *that* wood, at all events.”

“Young Pegram, the brewer’s son—wasn’t it? Oh, yes! *now* I see why Miss Hume is out so early. I thought it was unusual for her to take the morning air at this hour.”

“Well, here we are,” said Dr. Rees as they turned into the stable yard. “Let us go in—the air is quite nippy, I do declare.” He opened a side door and they went into the house.

On the next day Michael, at breakfast-time, as Dr. Rees seemed desirous of taking his own rounds, bethought himself of the hut in the wood, and determined on taking a walk out towards the lake and perhaps ex-

ploring the surrounding thicket, but as he reached the turning in the path that brought him in sight of the pool, he perceived a figure standing at its edge that caused his heart to leap in a strange manner. He had recognised Barbara at once, and his professional instincts immediately came uppermost as he remembered her injured arm. He went towards her, his footfalls making hardly any sound on the soft springy turf. As he drew near he purposely stepped on to a rotten twig that lay across his path, and the sharp crack it gave, as it broke beneath his foot, caused Barbara to turn round and see him. The blood rushed to her face, and the next moment again receded, blanching her cheek as before, for some instinct warned her that this was a moment fraught with possibilities.

“Good morning, Miss Barbara, and how is the shoulder? I hardly think it was prudent of you to irritate it by walking so soon after the thorn was extracted.”

“Oh, *you* evidently don't take much interest in it, Dr. Lloyd, for you promised to come and see it last night.”

“And so I should have done, had not Dr. Rees given me to understand that as you were in reality his patient it was his duty to attend to you. I hope he came in good time.”

“Oh, yes! He came and told me I could go out to-day, so long as I kept my arm in a sling. Dear old man, I am glad he is back!”

“Yes, I suppose you are, although perhaps your remark is not very complimentary to me—but I know what you meant,” Michael said hastily, observing the flush mounting again to her brow.

“And I suppose that now you will be leaving us

and returning to busy London again—or will you remain here a little longer?”

The tone in which she spoke was conventional, but Michael detected, or thought he did, some slight inflexion of anxiety underlying the stereotyped remarks.

“Well, it all depends,” he said.

“On what, Dr. Lloyd?”

“Miss Owen—Barbara, you know on what my movements depend, surely!”

“I know, Dr. Lloyd?” and if Michael had had full possession of his feelings at that moment, something would have warned him to desist from a course that was already presaging disaster to his aspirations, but he went on with his pleading regardless of consequences.

“Yes, I think you know—I love you, Barbara, with all my heart and soul. Sometimes you have seemed to be not indifferent to me—sometimes you are reserved, and cold and chilly as death itself. Why is it—what is it? Am I not good enough for you? Have I ever by look or deed offended you? I do not think so—at least I have tried to avoid doing so, and all I know is that to gain your love I would sacrifice anything——”

“Anything, Dr. Lloyd?”

“Yes, anything.”

“What about your profession—your ideas concerning the sanctity of preserving human life at any cost, although that same preservation may cause the poor sufferer agony interminable and intolerable? Do you remember my views on this subject, and do you remember what you thought of the action contemplated with regard to my own darling mother when she lay on her bed of pain? I thought I had eased her of that pain

for ever, and told you frankly and openly of it. What *then* was your action?—suspicion, doubt, and all immense relief; then, when you found that, after all, by the mercy of God, I was not a murderess, you come to me and tell me you love me! No, Dr. Lloyd, this proposal of yours does your *profession* credit, but your love, had it been true love, would have evinced itself by supporting the woman you now profess affection for, not by doubting her good intent. Dr. Lloyd, I may be poor now, but at one time our family was high in the world—aye, and proud—and, thank God, some of that pride still exists in me, and I ask you to be so good as not to repeat the mistake you have made to-day!”

Barbara's head was lifted high as she faced Michael in sublime hauteur. He was dumfounded, and could merely bow his head beneath the stinging lash of her tongue. At her concluding words, however, his manhood asserted itself, and raising his head as proudly as Barbara had done, he replied with great dignity, “I regret, Miss Owen, that I have unwittingly offended you—I, who should have remembered the gulf that stands between old Phil-y-Velin's son and Miss Owen of Caefrân, and in extenuation I can only ask you, as man and woman, and not in our relative positions, to remember that whatever you may believe, I love you more than my poor lips can ever express.” He spoke straightforwardly, and continued: “I see I have pained you, so I will leave you here—please have no fear that I shall ever offend again.” His head had been uncovered during their conversation, and he now turned slowly away, and had retraced his steps a few paces when he heard a soft voice say, “Dr. Lloyd!”

“Yes, Miss Owen.”

“Will you please wait a moment?” He obeyed, wondering a little.

“Dr. Lloyd, I trust you will not for one single moment consider that I think of any disparity in our social positions, for you are my equal in everything; but I merely called you back to draw your attention to one thing. Here”—and she pointed to the lake—“you once rescued me from death, and, believe me, when I say that Barbara Owen can never forget that service.” She held out her hand to Michael, who took it in both of his.

“I do not wish you to refer to that, at all events,” he said humbly. “I was not much out of my depth, and there was no danger in it for me.”

“That fact has nothing to do with the matter, Dr. Lloyd; for all you knew to the contrary the water was very deep, and, besides, it was icy cold,” and Barbara shuddered.

“Yes, it certainly was cold, and who would think to look at it now, so clear and beautiful, that you were once struggling in its cold bosom? Well, Miss Barbara—that reminds me,” and he put his hand in his pocket; “I have something else for Llyn Dystaw to-day,” and he held up the little bottle she remembered so well.

“It has caused you a lot of pain, but I now put it out of its power to work any more evil,” and he threw it into the pool, and they both watched it sinking, which they were easily enabled to do by the limpid clearness of the water.

“I will not intrude on you any more,” continued Michael. “To-morrow I shall be coming over to the mill to say ‘good-bye’ to my father, but I will not

trouble you, as to-day has blunted my hopes and my ambitions for the future, and they are buried as deeply as that bottle lies on the bed of Llyn Dystaw."

"Don't say that, Dr. Lloyd. Your hopes and ambitions must remain as high and as strong as they ever were." Barbara could not quite control the trembling of her voice as she hurriedly continued, "And so you are really going away again? Well, I wish you all success, and please say that we are still friends." Michael saw with dismay that the tears came to her eyes as she held out her hand, which he took and pressed gently. Barbara walked quickly away, Michael looking after her till the trees hid her from his sight; then he too turned and left Llyn Dystaw. No birds were singing now! no sun was shining for him! but as he went he raised his cap once more, saying reverently, "Well, God bless her! God bless her! Aye, and God bless me, too, for I sadly want His comfort now!"

CHAPTER XXI

BEFORE Barbara reached the old mill, she heard the groaning crank of the mill-wheel, and coming within sight of the little door with its lower half on the latch, she observed further signs of the activity within by the thick clouds of white dust that floated out through the upper portion. She walked slowly and listlessly towards it, her feet feeling as if they were weighed down with leaden soles, and she experienced a lumpy sensation in the throat, not solely attributable to the dust-cloud within which she was soon enveloped. Peering in through the door she beheld a shadowy figure moving backwards and forwards and recognised Phil. She leaned a little forward over the door, calling "Phil, Philip Lloyd!" but the clank, clank of the machinery, with its relentless clamour, drowned the sound of her voice, and realising the futility of attempting to make the miller hear, she turned away and walked towards the corner of the building. She had stopped to gaze at the old mill-wheel on her left hand as it revolved ponderously, the water falling over its "steps" in silvery cascades, when suddenly, and without any warning, it stopped turning, and Philip came out of the mill.

"Oh, 'tis you, is it, Miss *vâch*. I saw a shadow between me and the sun, and I thought somebody was there."

"I am always casting shadows, I fear, Phil," said Barbara. "Wherever I go, whatever I do, I always

seem to cast a gloom—and I used not to be like that too,” she added, a little wistfully.

“*Twt, twt!* You must not talk like that, Miss *vâch*. If it was Jones Gelligaer now, it would be different. Deed to goodness, if he stood at my door with the sun behind his back I should have to light a candle to see my way about,” replied Phil, referring to the man whose huge bulk was a source of never-ending delight to the school-children of the neighbourhood; “but as for you, Miss *vâch*, the sun could shine through you, you are getting so thin, and looking so pale.”

“I fear I am disturbing you in your work, Phil.”

“You disturb me, Miss. No, no! I was only grind two *winchin* * for Nell yr Hafod, and I have finish now, so come you here and sit down, and let us talk a bit.” The kindly tones sank deeply into Barbara’s heart, and with a sudden pang she remembered her recent coldness to the son of the man whose kindly sympathy showed itself in his every word. She sat down on a little bench by the whitewashed wall, Philip having first carefully dusted it with his red cotton handkerchief.

He sat down beside her, saying, “And where have you been this morning, Miss *vâch*?”

“I have been out for a walk, Phil, towards Llyn Dystaw. I had intended going a bit further, but met Mi—your son—by the pool, and we stopped there a little while. He tells me that he is going back to London now that Dr. Rees has returned.”

“Yes, I know; but, Miss *vâch*, there’s sorry I am! I am getting old now, and my time on earth is not

* Literally “Winchesters,” *i. e.*, bushel, so-called because it is said they were first used in that city.

long, and I was hoping that he would not go away any more—no never,” and the old man looked piteously at Barbara, his eyes suspiciously bright.

She laid her hand on Phil's arm, and some uncontrollable impulse bade her say, “And *I* am sorry, too, Phil.”

“Are you, Miss *vâch*. If Maychael only knew that you were sorry, in my deed I am sure he would not go,” and Phil's voice trembled with emotion. “Miss Barbara, it is not for me to say anything, perhaps, and you may be angry with old Phil for telling you—but I cannot help it. My boy—Maychael—loves the very ground you tread upon, but I don't think he will ever tell you so, for he is proud, is Maychael, and he would not like to have ‘No’ said to him. I too am proud, and I know that when a man and a girl love one another and there is any difference in their position in life, that difference often stands in the way of happiness, but I don't hold with that kind of thing myself, not I. My dear wife's parents thought that Philip Lloyd was not good enough for their daughter, but *we* thought different, and in spite of all, we got married on the sly, and then it was too late for them to stop us. Our love for one another never grew less, but remained strong until God saw fit to take her away, and then there was only me and Maychael left. He was always a good boy, and did not give much trouble. He was very cleveir, and I wanted him to be a preacher—but 'twas no good, for he was always getting hold of the chickens, or dogs or cats belonging to the neighbours, and wrapping up their legs in his hankerchers, which he was tearing to pieces to make bandages for them; so he had to be a doctor, and he was to go to London to walk up and down the

'spitals, and mixed with all the gentries, and then he use to come home sometimes to see his old father, an' he was asked often and often to go up to the grand houses, but he never forgot his old father, not he; then you know all about that wicked gel Essylt Lewis, who came between us with her sly eyes and tow hair, and who kept him to his foolish promise, made when he was only a lad. When he told me about it all, it nearly broke my old heart, and I wanted him to give her up, but he wouldn't, and then there was the only quarrel we ever had—but God chose again, and took Essylt away. *Pwr* thing! I must not say anything against her, now that she is dead, but in my deed, Miss *vâch*, there's glad I was. Then, after the time when Mrs. Owen was taken bad, poor thing, up at Caefrán, and my boy was come to see her, I was often and often see in his eyes whenever he speak of you that he loved you, and you, because you are a big leddy, will not have anything to say to him. I think you love him, too, for old Phil is not blind, and if he was not Phil-y-Velin's son you would marry him. If Maychael goes away again, the next time he comes back will be when I am dead. If Maychael speaks to you, will you say him 'Yes'?—for that will keep him here for always. Miss *vâch*, don't break my boy's heart, and mine too, by saying 'No' if you love him." It is impossible to describe the pathetic cadence of the old man's words, or the piteous, anxious look with which he regarded Barbara.

After a long pause, she rose to her feet. "Phil, I am sorry, very sorry, to have to tell you that this morning your son asked me to marry him, and I was obliged to say 'No' to him."

The old man got slowly up from his seat. "*Pwr*

fellow! poor Maychael! I am sorry for him!" was all he said, and the sublime unselfishness in not referring to his own disappointment touched Barbara deeply, and she determined upon telling Phil all her feelings in regard to Michael.

"Phil, I love Michael," she said simply, and Phil gazed wonderingly at her.

"What! you love Maychael, and yet you say 'No' to him? What does it all mean, Miss *vâch*? He is going away—and yet you say you love him! I can't understand it at all."

"Yes! I suppose he is going away, but I have not sent him, Phil."

"Oh, yes, you have. If you only said 'stay,' Maychael would stop all right."

"Yes! Yes! I suppose he would—but I will explain everything to you. Let us sit down again. You know what a terrible time I have gone through lately, and how shocked and horrified everyone here was when I told them what I thought I had done? Well, Michael is a doctor, and I suppose his professional instincts are uppermost in his mind. He loves me, I know, but he loves his profession more, and his pride in it is such that it overshadows his love for me; for when I so sorely needed a comforting and helping hand over the rough rocks of trouble, he, too, thought badly of me, for I could see by his manner that he did so, and if he failed me then at that supreme test, it augurs very ill for our future happiness if ever we were married."

"I don't know much about his professional 'stincts, Miss *vâch*, but I do know that all his pride and love is in you; and look you here now, you have just told me that you love him, whatever!"

"Yes, I have, and I meant it too."

"Then that settles it. You little know my boy if you think his pride is going to drive away his love. Miss *vâch*, I am only a poor old miller, but my boy is a gentleman—I suppose he takes after his mother's people, for I was always a rough old chap at best."

"Perhaps, so, Phil, but you are one of God's gentlemen; but why are you so anxious for me to marry Michael?"

"Because he loves you and you love him, and I know you would be happy together."

"Is that all, Phil?"

"No, not all, Miss *vâch*. I will say the truth. If you say 'Yes' to Maychael he would stay in Maentrevor, and then it would make me happy, too, to see you both sometimes, for I could not expect such fine leddies and gentries to come often and see poor old Phil-y-Velin."

Barbara's only reply was to lay her hand on Phil's shoulder, and turn his face towards hers. She looked at him long and steadily, and the old man returned her gaze as earnestly.

"Well, Phil, it is no use talking over it any more; Michael knows his answer, and he will take it as final. I must be going on now." The old man did not attempt to detain her as she rose, only he sighed heavily, and Barbara, glancing back over her shoulder after she had walked a few steps, saw the bent old figure walking heavily towards the mill. She would have been rather surprised, however, if she had heard Phil muttering to himself, as he put his hand over the lower half of the door in order to lift the latch, "Well, perhaps after all, Maychael will stop at Maentrevor."

When Barbara reached the portion of the building in which she lived, to her surprise she found Tom

sitting on the settle awaiting her. "Good gracious, Tom, you are home early to-day, are you not? I fear lunch is not ready yet."

"I don't think I am earlier than usual, old girl. It is nearly one o'clock."

"Is it as late as that? I have been having a chat with Phil, and the time slipped by."

"Come here, dear," said her brother, drawing her to him. "Let me look at you. You are not looking well. How is your arm to-day? Has anything upset you? You must not grieve any longer, little Barbara, for now all the clouds have passed away from us."

"Oh, my arm is nearly well now, but I know what you mean, dear, and . . . and I am really quite well," answered Barbara; "but, of course, it takes time to realise that everything is all right again."

"Takes time? Nonsense! I feel happier and brighter than I have done for a long time past. But I was forgetting—what do you think, dear? Dr. Rees came to see Mr. Preece this morning, and informed him that he intends retiring, and hopes that Michael Lloyd will buy his practice. I know it is true, for Preece told me so himself."

"Dr Rees retiring! Oh, I *am* sorry! We shall miss the dear old man so much."

"Oh, no, you won't, for he is in hopes of buying the house he has rented for so long. You bet he could not live anywhere than in Maentrevor. Oh! here comes Peggy. What have you got for me to eat, Peggy Jerry, you old sinner? I have just been telling Miss Barbara that Dr. Rees is thinking of giving up practising."

"*Dir anwl*, sir, iss that so? Well, well, who'll look after us now, I wonder, when we are ill?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, Peggy," said Barbara.

"Haven't I just told you that Dr. Rees hopes Michael will take his place?" interrupted Tom.

"Maychael Lloyd?" said Peggy.

"Yes, Maychael Lloyd," answered Tom, imitating her tone of voice. "I suppose he can afford it by now."

"Well, if he can't, old Phil-y-Velin has a big stockin' somewhere, I know."

"Ah, Peggy, I always suspected that you had an eye on Phil, but I must say I thought your affection was not 'cupboard love,'" was Tom's laughing rejoinder.

"Me wantin' Philip Lloyd! *Ach-y-fi!* I would not take him if he was hung with 'dimons'—so there"; but, nevertheless, Peggy simpered and giggled like a girl of sixteen, at which Tom leaned back on the settle and roared with laughter till the tears came to his eyes.

Barbara could not help smiling too, as Tom's mirth was so infectious, but she suddenly became grave, and said, "But I don't think, Tom, that Dr. Lloyd would care to buy Dr. Rees's practice."

"Why not, pray? It is a good one. By the by, I met Michael just outside the town as I was coming out, and he looked quite glum; I expect he is sorry that his work here is at an end, as he thinks. But you have not yet said why you think he would not stay here."

"Oh! I have no special reason for thinking so, except that I should think that a young man who has been accustomed to the busy life of London would not care to spend his days in such a quiet, out-of-the-way place as Maentrevor," said Barbara lamely. "I

think we had better take lunch now, for if we gossip any longer the *bwdran** will be quite cold."

Peggy, standing near the door, screwed up her face and favoured Tom with a slow and solemn wink, who, at this extraordinary facial contortion, raised a blandly innocent countenance, causing her to bounce out of the room with a snort of disgust, making some remark to herself about "thick-heads."

"What's the matter with Peggy, Tom, that she left so suddenly?" asked Barbara.

"I can't make out," replied that young gentleman. "She looked to me as if she was going to have a fit."

"A fit! Oh, Tom, surely not!" and his sister half rose in her seat."

"No, no; I am only fooling," and Barbara sat down again relieved.

"This *bwdran* is very good on a cold day like to-day. Any more going, dear?" and he pushed his basin towards Barbara.

"Yes, plenty, of course."

The meal finished, Tom looked at his watch again. "I have just time for a smoke before I start back. I say, Barbara, won't you come in with me to the town? The walk will do you good."

"No, not to-day. I think I will go as far as the seashore."

"Lucky girl! I only wish I could come too—but I can't, so there is no use in wishing, is there?"

"No, I suppose not. Will you be late in coming home to-night?"

"Not that I know of, old girl; and I may bring Michael Lloyd back to tea with me. If he does not buy Rees's practice, I expect he will soon be leaving us for

* Oatmeal broth

London again, and he is such a sterling good fellow and has been so good to us lately, that I want to see as much of him as possible before he goes."

"All right, dear," answered Barbara, moving away so that Tom's sharp eyes should not see the tell-tale colour that suddenly wrapped her cheek in its embrace.

"Oh, Tom, dear," she said suddenly, "I fear I shall not be back to tea, after all. Poor old Betty Powell is rather bad, I am afraid, and I shall take her some few things and stop and have a cup of tea with her, I think. She is so lonely, poor old thing, and she is always so glad when anyone comes to see her. As you know, she lives on the way to the shore, close to it, so I can kill two birds with one stone. The moon is nearly at the full now, so I shall be quite all right, and I shall go and see Peggy first, and on to the shore afterwards, as I always think the sea is so lovely by moonlight; but you can bring Dr. Lloyd back to tea with you, even if I am not here. He will be company for you if I should be a little late."

"All right, then," said Tom, "that's settled. Good-bye dear, I must be off," and with a hurried kiss he left her.

When Peggy had cleared away, Barbara took her hat and cloak from the peg behind the door, where she always hung them, and started off on her walk, carrying a basket containing some few things for the poor old woman she intended visiting. She soon found herself on the further side of the wood and within sight of the sea, and after proceeding a little distance along a path that ran parallel with the shore, came to a whitewashed cottage with thatched roof nestling in a hollow, and within a stone's throw of the beach. Barbara pressed the thumb-latch of the door, and with

a "Hallo! are you there, Betty?" walked into the *pen-issa*, or living-room. An old woman was sitting upon a settle near the fire. She looked ill and frail, but smiled brightly as she recognised her visitor. On the stone hearth was a small three-legged stool, whilst in the small space between the end of the settle and the wall, a large tabby-cat lay in a basket nursing her two kittens, and the whole of the interior of the cottage was clean and tidy.

Betty tried to rise as Barbara entered, but the latter laid her hand on her shoulder to gently restrain her.

"No, no, Betty *vâch*, don't you get up. I have come to have a little chat with you, and perhaps you will let me make myself a cup of tea by and by.

"Iss, iss, Miss Owen. *vâch*—there's proud I'll be."

"And how are you to-day, Betty? Are you feeling any better?"

"Well, Miss, I am not quite so painful to-day. But last night I could not sleep much. My poor brist was sending such awful pains through me all the time, but it is better now."

"I wish I could persuade you to let Dr. Rees see it, Betty. He is such a clever man, and there is Dr. Lloyd, too, who is staying at Maentrevor now. I am sure that between them they could ease you of some of that agony you bear so patiently."

"No, no, Miss *vâch*; they could not do me any good, and I am having a *real* doctor now."

"Who's that, Betty?"

"A very clevailr man—Old Rhysin Pengraig."

"Rhysin Pengraig, the herbalist; but he is not a doctor at all."

"Well! he can cure the cansair, whatever. There's lots and lots of people who would be dead long ago if

Rhysin had not attended to them. Let me see. There's Nanny Job and John-y-Bobby, and Will Tattws, and—and——" then seeing a look of incredulity passing over Barbara's face, Betty stretched her hand out with an imploring gesture. "Please don't say anything against Rhysin's cure, Miss Barbara, *anwyl*, for if you do so, then you will be taking my last hope from me." At this moment, and before Barbara could make any reply to this touching and most pitiful appeal, the poor woman leaned back in her seat, and a low moan issued from her pallid lips.

"What is it, Betty *vâch*? Another attack? What can I do for you?"

"Nothing, Miss, nothing. It's only that the leaves are dry now, and I must wait till Rhysin comes again to change them."

"Let me see, at all events," and in spite of her feeble protestations, Barbara undid her shawl that was crossed over Betty's shoulders and disclosed to view a breast so abnormal in size, even under its covering of leaves, that Barbara could well imagine what it must look like without them, and strong girl though she was, she could not repress a little shudder.

"Don't 'ee look at it, *merch-i*. It iss very nasty, I know. Perhaps you think I can't be cured, but old Rhysin do say that God *can* cure, and *will* do so too, if He wants to, and that it is by the herbs of the field that He will cure the cansair, and not by the medicines and cruel knife of the doctors. Oh, no!"

"Let me bathe it for you, Betty dear, if you won't let me do anything else. The kettle is boiling, and nice warm water would soothe your poor breast, I am sure."

"Oh, well, Miss, *anwyl*, you iss very good to me,

indeed, but water must not touch the cansair—I mean water by itself—so Rhysin do say, but I would be awful glad if you would just pour a little warm water with the leaves of the marsh-mallow soaked in it, over the sore place. It is wonderful good, he says, and I can do that as much as I like; but I cannot do it myself much now, as I am too old to get up much, but Esther Jones, she do come in sometimes to help me go to bed and to get up, and she do bathe it for me then.”

Barbara, although sceptical as to the efficacy of the treatment, complied with her request, and, shortly after the pungent decoction had been applied to the sufferer, she had the satisfaction of hearing her say, “There! I’m much easier now, and thank you kindly, Miss.”

“You ought to have someone here with you all day, Betty.” The old woman smiled deprecatingly, but Barbara mentally resolved on paying someone out of her own slender purse to act as nurse.

“There! you are more comfortable now, I know, and I’ll soon make a nice cup of tea for us both.”

“I’m afraid, Miss, that the tea is nearly all gone!”

“Never mind, there’s plenty here,” and Barbara, going to the rush chair, on which she had placed the basket, produced half a dozen eggs, a bottle of milk, several pounds of sugar, and a packet of tea.

“I thought you might find these useful, Betty, so I brought them. We have more in the house than we know what to do with just now.”

“Indeed, Miss, there’s good you are to me,” said Betty, ignoring the little fib, but her old eyes filled with unshed tears. The nature of the Welsh peasantry is a curious admixture of pride and humility. Had

Barbara given the slightest hint that she had brought the goods out of charity, the old woman's pride would have been up in arms in a moment, but when they were presented with a "white lie," everything was plain sailing, and the gift was accepted with a quiet dignity that to a stranger would appear almost ludicrous had he not been aware of this side of the Celtic character. Such a phase is by no means unusual amongst the Welsh lower classes. Poor as the proverbial church mouse, as a general rule, they are as proud as Lucifer, and would rather starve than seem to accept any gift out of "charity." To them the very word itself savoured of the "House," and enforced life in *that* (although in comparison to the wretched cottages in which they usually lived it was luxury) was deemed the greatest disgrace that could befall them. Perhaps such a feeling is praiseworthy after all, for home *is* home, however humble it be. Some years ago the writer knew a dissolute old vagabond who, sooner than be admitted to the "House" for a night, preferred to obtain friendly assistance in the shape of a leg-up and topple head foremost into a crate of straw. Such pride was not infrequently met with, as I have said, and Betty in her own way was as proud as anyone.

"Well, here we are—everything quite ready except the toast, which I will soon make. I will now put the teapot to stand a little, and then we will have tea."

The toast was soon ready, and Betty and Barbara had tea together, the latter chatting cheerily and retailing all the news of the neighbourhood which she knew the poor old woman would in all probability not have heard, owing to her isolated situation and dread-

ful illness. By the time the meal was finished Betty was quite cheerful, and sitting on a low stool in front of the fire, Barbara succeeded in eliciting from her tales of her long bygone youth; reminiscences of this kind always interested her, and she instinctively recognised that the more Betty's thoughts were diverted from her illness the better it would be for her.

"Good gracious! it is getting quite late," she said, when some considerable time had been passed in this manner. "How quickly the time goes when the talk is interesting! Well, Betty *vâch*, I must be going now."

"Oh, stay a little while longer, Miss; the road through the wood will be all in darkness now, and if you wait a little bit more, the moon will come up, and you will be able to find your way back much more easily."

"Yes, that's true," acquiesced her visitor, who guessed that under the circumstances the hours of darkness were fraught with terror for the lonely woman. "Well, I will wait and keep you company a little longer, at all events." Betty expressed her pleasure, and the two strangely consorted companions chatted on and on till Barbara, glancing up at the little four-paned window, saw a silver beam cast obliquely across it, and knew that now, indeed, it was time for her to be thinking of starting.

"Come to the window, Betty—I will help you to walk—and look at the moon, it is lovely," and, suiting the action to the word, she put her arm behind Betty's back and lifted her gently to her feet, and thus supporting her, they walked to the little window. The scene was indeed a lovely one. In front of them was a green carpet that stretched to the shore about fifty

yards away; to their left was a high hill, up and across which ran numerous sheep-paths plainly discernible in the moonlight, which now covered sea and shore as with a mantle of silver. The moon had just risen over the hill, and shed a glory impossible to describe over everything. The gentle murmur of the sea, as it broke in silvery waves on the sands, came faintly to their ears through the closed window. On the left of the shore, in the shadow of the cliff, and looking as if it were but a fragment cleft from the parent hill by some mighty upheaval of Nature, stood the "sheep rock," as it was called, looking black and sombre, but it only served to accentuate the supreme brilliancy of every other object the more. The beauty of the scene was indescribable, and for a time neither Barbara nor Betty spoke a word. At length the latter broke the silence:

"Who would think, Miss, when we look at God's great, beautiful world, so calm and peaceful as it is now, that there was so much pain and sorrow in it?"

Barbara drew the frail body closer to her in an involuntary movement of protection. She looked at the old woman's face and saw the big tears slowly trickling down the furrowed cheeks, and her own heart swelled within her.

"Yes, that is so, Betty *vâch*; but, thank God, the pain and misery down here will not last long, and beyond those bright stars, peeping and winking at us over there across the sea, and beyond, far beyond, that beautiful moon, there is a land where pain and suffering shall be no more, and where we shall all meet again some day, and perhaps look back and wonder at our small, small lives, so full of trouble and woe in this world, and be surprised that we ever cared so much

about staying here, when there is so much more joy and peace in that other land."

"Yes, Miss—that's what the preachers tell us; but why, if God is kind and loving and good, does He put us here only to be unhappy and have all this trouble, and then—and then, take us away to the great peace you speak of over there?"

"Betty, such questions cannot be answered by us; we can only trust and believe. Don't you remember the old hymn, 'Through the night of doubt and sorrow, marching to the promised land'? Believe, Betty, only believe, and you shall see," said Barbara, gently stroking the wan cheek leaning against her shoulder.

"Well, I do try, *b't swer*—but it is hard, it is hard! Never mind, something tells me I shall know before long."

"What do you mean, Betty?"

"Well, Miss *vâch*, I mean that Rhysin *must* cure me soon, or leave me alone to die, for I cannot bear this great pain very much longer. Oh! I only ask for a little peace before I die," and the poor soul sobbed bitterly.

"Hush, Betty, you must not speak like that," said Barbara, whose own tears were now falling fast.

"I fear I have stayed too long and tired you, but now I will put you back on the settle and stum the fire and light the lamp, and I will send Matty Penrhôs to look after you for a few nights till you are better."

"Oh, no, Miss, please don't. I can do quite well by myself."

"You cannot; and, look here, Betty, I want you to promise me that if Dr. Rees or Dr. Lloyd come and see you, you will let them examine the sore place. Will you do that for me?"

“Yes, Miss; if you like they can come and look at it, but, mind you, they shall not touch it. Old Rhysin is a funny old man, and would take offence if he thought anyone was interferin’ with his work; and, to tell you the truth, Miss, I am a bit afraid that he would leave me, and then I should have no hope of getting better,” and the poor woman began to cry softly again.

“There, there, Betty, I promise you that they shall not touch it, if you are not willing for them to do so; but I am sure that they can tell you what to do to keep it clean and sweet, for God never meant His remedies to be used in an uncleanly and dirty manner—if those *are* His remedies,” added Barbara, *sotto voce*. “Well, good-bye, once more, Betty, and keep your heart up.”

“I will try, indeed, Miss *vâch*; but it is very hard to do so—and thank you over and over again for all your kindness to me and for your sweet company to-day.”

Barbara nodded and smiled encouragingly at her, and saying, “I will come again soon,” left the cottage. When she had closed the door behind her, she went over the grass, which was now bathed in the moonlight, down towards the seashore, and walked towards the “sheep-rock.” In the shadow of that mighty cliff she stood, watching the waves breaking lazily upon the sands. She had stood thus for some time motionless, when she was roused from her reverie by a sound as of some loose fragments of rock falling upon the shingle at her feet. Startled, she looked up, and there on a point of the rock just above her head, and silhouetted against the sky, she saw a small animal. For some moments she did not know what it was, but as it turned

its head a little away from her she recognised the sharp snout of a fox, which had apparently wandered down from the hills above. She knew that these foxes were plentiful in the neighbourhood, for she had often heard them barking at night when she lay awake, but she had never been so close to one before. She was not frightened, but certainly felt an uncanny, eerie feeling creeping over her. Laughing at her timidity, she bent down to pick up a pebble to throw at it, but when she rose again to an erect position, it had gone without warning and without sound. Just at that moment she saw two men walking arm-in-arm across the beach in her direction, and recognising them as Tom and Michael, went towards them. On perceiving her they raised a shout of recognition, and extricating his arm, one of them ran to meet her. When he came closer she saw that it was her brother, and it must be confessed that she was slightly disappointed.

“Hallo! Babs,” for so he sometimes called her, “where have you been? Here have Lloyd and I been waiting for you up at the mill for ever so long. You said you would be back soon.”

“Oh, no! I didn’t, dear. I told you I was going to see old Betty, and that I should not be back to tea. Is that not so?”

“Well, perhaps so. But we were really beginning to be anxious about you, dear. Michael and I called at Betty’s cottage, but she told us you had left her some time ago. Then we determined on coming down here to have a look round, as we thought it possible you might have been tempted to take a stroll on the sands by moonlight.”

“And so I was. Never mind! you have found me all right.”

"Ah, Miss Owen," said a grave voice, as Michael reached them, "I am glad we have found you."

"I am always quite safe on the shore, Dr. Lloyd, thank you."

"Oh! I dare say; but you might get startled at some time or another. We just saw one of those cliff-foxes scuttling across the shore."

"Yes? He was quite close to me a little while ago, but I don't think he saw me, and if he did, he would have been just as frightened as I, and perhaps more so," laughed Barbara.

"Well, let's go home now, at all events," interrupted Tom. "It is getting quite late. What do you say, Lloyd?"

"For my part I like the peace and quiet of the seashore, but I am quite at your disposal."

"I must get home, for as I told you at tea-time, Michael, I have promised old Preece to get that conveyance drafted to-night, but first I shall have to go back to the office to fetch some papers that I have forgotten; I fear it means an all-night job though, but that comes of staying away yesterday."

"You don't regret it, do you?" said Michael.

"By Jove!—not I."

"Look here, Tom," interposed Barbara. "I want Dr. Lloyd to see old Betty professionally, if he will be so kind. She is very ill indeed, and he may be able to ease her pain a little." Turning to Michael, she added, "She is suffering from cancer, I fear."

"How strange it is that this dreadful disease seems to be claiming a larger percentage of victims than heretofore!" answered Michael.

"Yes—you doctors are nonplussed, I imagine," said Tom, "but—oh, all right, Babs, dear, I will go

direct to Maentrevor from here, and if Michael will see you home, I shall be at the mill as soon as you are."

"Very well," said his sister; "but perhaps Dr. Lloyd would prefer that you came with us?"

"If I may be allowed to answer for myself, I beg to endorse Tom's plan, for Tom will enjoy his supper all the more for knowing that he has not to face a stiff walk afterwards; that's to say, if you won't mind waiting outside the cottage while I see Betty Powell, Miss Barbara."

"Not at all," answered the girl.

"Well, good-bye, then," said Tom. "I'm off, and I bet I shall be home before you two are. Only don't keep me waiting for my supper too long, that's all."

Michael smiled, and Barbara answered in a non-committal tone. "You have nothing to bet with, Tom, or I should feel inclined to take that bet."

"*Better* not," said that irrepressible youth, and he started running across the beach, whilst Barbara and Michael proceeded slowly towards Betty's cottage.

"Does no other doctor attend Betty?" said the latter.

"No qualified doctor, but old Rhysin Pengraig applies some of his herbal remedies to the wound."

Michael stopped, "Rhysin, the herbalist! Oh, then, I don't see that I can do much good; and, besides, I do not care to——"

"I see what you mean," said his companion slowly; "although this poor soul is in dreadful agony, and although you may be able to relieve that agony, you will not collaborate with anyone in attempting that relief, unless that 'anyone' is a brother-professional. Oh,

you doctors, you doctors—to what heights can you rise, and to what depths can you fall! Cannot you see that these herbalists *may* have discovered some great secret which enables them to cure that dread disease of cancer? I don't say that they have done so—but is not every alleged remedy worth investigating? 'No,' you say, because your professional bigotry obstructs what may be your professional advancement, to say nothing of the possibility of you, as a skilled man, being able to apply your knowledge (where ignorance fails, of necessity) for the purpose of relieving a poor sufferer. You thereby abuse the highest privilege of your calling, and coldly, heartlessly withdraw, sheltering yourselves in smug content behind the paltry word 'professional,' nourishing and hugging to your bosoms the knowledge that you have fulfilled every demand of 'professional' etiquette."

Whilst Barbara was speaking, Michael had been listening intently. When she began his eyes had been fixed on the sand which he had been stirring uneasily with his foot, but as her bitter, scornful words ceased, he raised his head.

"I thank you, Miss Owen," he said, "for your words—the more so as I see plainly how true and forcible they are, and they make me regard things in a different light now. I see, too, that this is the second time you have rebuked me, with just cause, although on the previous occasion I was more obtuse. I will now see Betty, and do my best for her."

Michael spoke very quietly, and as he stopped speaking Barbara looked straight at him. He returned her gaze just as earnestly, and then a little grateful smile crossed her face, for she realised what a struggle it must have been to this man's pride to

acknowledge himself wrong in the most dearly cherished ideals of his medical creed. They now walked on towards the cottage, and Michael knocked at the door, and with a low "Excuse me; I won't be long," left Barbara in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XXII

FOR some time after Michael had gone into the little cottage, Barbara walked up and down in the moonlight. Her mind torn with conflicting emotions, she realised now that the knowledge of Michael's love for her was the sweetest of all human joys. Why, oh, why had she not realised this sooner? Now it was too late, and by her own cold and heartless words she had driven away from her all hope of future happiness, and had cast away that love, to gain which any girl might have been proud. Was it now too late? Yes! it was; for she knew that Michael, too, had pride, and would never ask her again, unless she gave him the opportunity, which her heart told her instinctively he would take if he had the chance, and *her* pride would never, never allow her to make that opportunity. For what would he think of her then? Would he not consider her as a capricious girl who had no stability of character, and who did not know her own mind from one moment to another? Of course he would, there was no doubt about it. So preoccupied was she with her thoughts that she did not perceive a figure approaching her over the grass, and she stopped and looked up with a start as a voice said, "*Nos da*"* In front of her was an old man wearing a shabby dark overcoat, so worn in places that even in the uncertain light provided by the moon the threadbare patches could be seen. She guessed who it was that spoke to her, and said, "Is it thou, Rhysin?"

* Good evening.

“Yes, it is old Rhysin, and who are you?”

“I am Miss Owen, who used to live at Caefrân.”

“Oh, I know now, Miss,” and he pulled at his grizzled forelock submissively.

“You are going to see old Betty Powell, are you not?” continued Barbara. “She is very bad to-night.”

“Yes, she is bad,” said the old man; “I suppose you have been in to see her too?”

“Yes, I have; and I am very much afraid that she is not going to last very long.”

“Perhaps not! perhaps not—that is as God wills; but what are you walking up and down about here for?” and he looked sharply at Barbara, who, resenting the tone in which he spoke, flushed slightly.

“Betty has another visitor. I don’t think you can go in and see her for a few minutes; but you won’t be kept waiting long.”

“Oh, old Rhysin can wait. He has waited a long time, and can wait a little more, Miss.”

“I hear you have some patients at Maentrevor now,” said Barbara.

“Oh, yes, oh, yes! There are some poor people who have come down there for me to cure them. They have all got ‘the cansair,’ but most of them have gone back cured. Then, when they have gone, they forget all about poor old Rhysin; but never mind, never mind, I shall be rewarded some day.”

The cant and sincerity with which this last speech was intermixed filled Barbara for the moment with surprise, and she could not help saying, “But if you really have cured people of cancer, a disease which all the doctors in the world have hitherto failed to cure, you need do no work for the rest of your days,

Rhysin, for you could command a high price for your cure. But can you prove any cures?"

He looked craftily at her.

"Come you here, Miss," and he looked round him cautiously. "Look at these! You can see them plainly enough in the moonlight." He produced from his pocket some half a dozen photographs which were wrapped in a piece of newspaper, and showed signs of considerable wear and tear; they were none too clean, and the subject of the portraiture was none too inviting, depicting, as it did, hideous sores of every description. Rhysin appeared rather hurt when Barbara turned away with a little shudder of disgust, for wrapped up as he was in his "profession" of healing, the old herbalist could not understand other people not being as interested in his alleged cures as he was himself. "I have plenty more of these at home," he said, "and letters plenty, too, all telling me of the great cures that I have made."

At this moment the latch of the cottage door behind them clicked, as it was lifted from within, and Michael came out into the fresh night air. His face looked even graver than usual, and as he came towards Barbara he did not at first notice that she was not alone, until she said, "Here is Rhysin Pengraig, who arrived just after you had gone into the cottage, Dr. Lloyd, but I asked him not to go in to see Betty, as she was engaged. How do you find her now?"

Michael turned towards Rhysin, who was regarding him with no friendly looks. "She is about as bad as she can be," he said; "and look here, Rhysin Thomas, I am not one who interferes with any man's business as a rule, but if you apply any more of your ointment, or whatever it may be, to that poor woman in there,

I will not be responsible for what the consequences may be."

"Responsible? Who asked you to be responsible, I should like to know?" was the old man's uncompromising reply. "*She* did not ask you, did she?" and he jerked his thumb backwards in the direction of the cottage.

"No, she did not ask me; but I am thankful, very thankful, that I have seen her. Why, man, even supposing that you have, as you claim, discovered the secret of curing what is perhaps the most dread of known diseases, her bodily strength is not sufficient to stand your treatment."

"Oh, I have nothing to do with bodily strength," said the old herbalist, speaking rapidly in the vernacular, into which in his growing excitement he had unconsciously passed. This, however, made no difference to either of his listeners, both of whom understood Welsh perfectly. "All I know is that this little bottle that I have here," and from his trousers pocket he produced a tiny phial secured apparently round a button by a string, "holds something that can cure what all you doctors *cannot* cure. Shall I tell you how I found it out? My father and my grandfather before me were well skilled in herb-dealing, for they thought, as I do, that for every disease that God sent to us He must also have provided some remedy, and where more likely than in His own pure herbs of the field? The animals, when they are sick, know what grasses and leaves to eat, and why should not men do so too? No, they are too proud in their own conceit, and think they can learn everything from books, but they can't—they can't? Well, as I was saying. Neither my father nor my grandfather, though they were both very clever in

their own way, and could find cures for most illnesses, could find a cure for cansair. That was left for me to do, and I'll tell you how I did it. I used to go out every moonlight night and find some little leaves, which I used to put on the wound of a patient whom I knew was suffering from cansair, who had called me in to attend him after you big doctors had tried two or three cruel operations—as if the knife would ever cure a disease whose roots are right deep down in the blood! Where is your common sense? And then, after an hour or two of waiting, I would go and look at the little leaves, but I would find them all dried up and dead, and I knew that the cansair was still master; but one night God blessed my hard work, and directed me to a little leaf, which after lying on the wound for some hours was as fresh and green as the minute I had put it on. I tried more of the leaves to make sure, and left them all night, and in the morning they had not changed a little bit, and I knew then I had found something stronger than the cansair, and that I had beaten it. I made an ointment and a liniment out of it, and I *cured* that man, aye, and I have cured many since. Now, what do you say to that, Dr. Lloyd? It is I who am responsible, and not you, and I am responsible not to man, but to God,” and the old man smiled triumphantly.

“Listen to me, Rhysin,” said Michael, very gravely. “I have not got time to talk to you much to-night, but I want you to take to heart all my words, and to think over them seriously. That poor woman in the cottage is very, very near her end. Whether you have, unconsciously, perhaps, been the means of aggravating and hastening that end, I know not, but as a medical man I don't think she has long to live. Do you

hear *that*, man?" he ejaculated fiercely, and pointing to the cottage whence came a low cry as of a poor animal in pain. "I am not one to judge my fellow-creature's motives. Your motives may be good, and your so-called cure may be effective in *your own opinion*; but as a man I cannot allow the last few hours that remain to a poor soul on this earth to be hours of torture inexpressible, without protesting in some form or another. Now, Rhysin Thomas, the way is open to you, *if you believe that you can still cure Betty Powell, to go in there,*" and he pointed to the cottage door, "and I will not try to prevent you, nor follow you in; but if you *do* go in (*and Betty will die to-night if you apply any more of your stuff to her breast*), I shall hold you responsible, indeed, and shall know what to do afterwards. Don't misunderstand me, and don't think I am speaking out of jealousy and from ignorance of your methods of 'cure'; but I am talking simply as man to man, and not as doctor to quack. Choose."

Michael spoke with intense emotion, and turning to Barbara, said, "Come, Miss Owen, I fear I have kept you here a long time after all, and poor Tom will be wondering what has become of us, and will say that his supper has become cold after all our assurance and promises."

They left old Rhysin without vouchsafing him another word, and proceeded some little distance in silence. When they had gone twenty or thirty yards, Michael turned to look back. "Ah! I thought so," he said, indicating a figure walking along the sand almost parallel with, but a little behind them, which Barbara recognised as that of the herbalist. "That, Miss Owen, is proof positive to my mind as to how

much *honesty* there is in that gentleman's convictions."

Barbara made no reply. She was thinking deeply, thinking how greatly she had wronged this man who was now walking by her side in apparent unconcern, thinking how she had attributed his apparent want of faith in her when she had made that awful disclosure to him relative to Mrs. Owen, to the fact that his profession was *first*—his humanity second. His interview with Rhysin, on what was almost the threshold of Betty's death, had shown her how full to lovingkindness and truth he *really* was, and how it was only the conviction of the herbalist's insincerity of action that had made Michael speak to him as he did, and she felt an inward conviction, why she knew not, unless it was his innate honesty that forced itself upon her, that had poor suffering Betty shown any signs, however small, of getting better, that Michael Lloyd would have rejoiced, for the sake of humanity, apart from any possible benefit to himself, that there was hope, however small, for cancer patients.

"What a dreadful old man!" she said at last. "Did you see his last malevolent glance at you, Dr. Lloyd, as you turned away? I really thought he would have struck you, if he dared."

"No, I did not notice; but, poor old fellow, I don't think he is quite 'all there,' and I dare say he was in hopes of getting something out of Betty before she died, for I have heard it said that the majority of his patients make him a present of money. He is cute enough not to bring himself within the meshes of the law by making any fixed charges, but I dare say he conveys to them in some way or other that he expects to be remunerated for his trouble. But I must not be

too harsh on him. I may be wrong altogether in my estimate of him and his works; but of this I am glad, that poor old Betty's last moments can be made easier by morphia, at all events; for I fear it will have to come to that in a day or two's time, if not sooner."

"People may say, for Rhysin has the reputation of being a vindictive story teller, that your motives were different, Dr. Lloyd."

"Ah, yes; 'professional jealousy' is what I may be blamed for, I suppose. Well, local opinion upon that point will not have such unhappy results for me as on a former occasion, Miss Barbara, or, if it had, I should not care much, for I should have done my duty."

Here was Barbara's opportunity to make amends, and she was not short to take advantage of it. They had now penetrated into the Cwm Meivon woods, and Llyn Dystaw could be seen shimmering under the light of the moon through the trees some little distance ahead of them.

"Dr. Lloyd, I want to retract what I said to you yesterday. I made a great mistake in accusing you of want of sympathy, and of subordinating every other human feeling to your professional instinct. I—I hope I am making myself intelligible," she added hurriedly, and Michael replied in a low voice: "Perfectly, Miss Owen."

By this time they had reached the edge of the little pool. Its surface was smooth as it had ever been; there was no sound around them save when an occasional leaf fluttered down to their feet, or sometimes fell into the water, where it twisted and twirled about for no apparent reason, till it drifted across to the other side and lodged amongst many of its fellows near the sedgy bank; around them at intervals the owls

hooted weirdly, otherwise the great woods were plunged in a silence profound. Barbara thought she could hear her own heart-beats, and wondered if her companion could not hear them too. Michael sighed heavily, and she thought in the dim light that she could see him set his jaw more determinedly than ever.

"Well, I am glad you understand my motives now, at all events," was all he said. "I should have hated to have been obliged to go back to London, knowing that I had left behind in your heart unkind thoughts for me."

"You need never have feared *that*," she replied softly; "and I want—I want to ask if you will forgive me."

"Forgive you? I have nothing to forgive, Miss Barbara. Why are you crying! What makes you cry, Barbara, dear?" using her Christian name unconsciously as he took her hand.

"Is it my fault? Have I hurt you?" as she winced a little under the strong pressure of his fingers.

"No, that was nothing," and she smiled through her tears. "I was thinking what a pity it is that you have to go back to London now, as your dear old father will miss you so surely; and he is getting old, you know," she added lamely.

"Yes, he is getting old, it is true; but what can I do? Rees wants me to buy his practice—but I could not, I could not."

"Why could you not, Dr. Lloyd?"

"Because, because——Oh! hang it all! I suppose I must tell you again, although I had not meant to have done so; because I could not bear to be near you, and seeing you continually, and loving you as I do, and knowing all the time that you did not care for me.

It may sound weak, it may sound foolish, but that's the true reason I cannot stay at Maentrevor."

A flood of emotion swept over Barbara, recognising as she did that this man at her side, with his strong individuality, was incapable of attributing her confession of mistaken judgment in him to any other reason than that of a desire not to appear unjust in his eyes. Whether it was the eerie beauty of the woods, or whether it was because some hidden call of nature in her that bade her enlighten him the more, Barbara never knew, but she said softly:

"Dr. Lloyd, if I made a mistake in judging your character, may I not also have misjudged my own?"

Michael turned swiftly towards her: "Barbara, what do you mean?" Then, seeing her turn her head away, continued, "Is it possible that you mean that you love me after all?"

Barbara did not answer, and something in her silence compelled Michael to say, "Ah! no! that would alter every aspect of life, and such happiness is not for me."

Still Barbara did not speak, and Michael continued:

"This only hurts us both, Miss Barbara. Shall we go on? It is getting quite late."

They walked slowly on, and soon emerged from the wood, and there in front of them was the old mill-house with the moon shedding silver light on its pointed gables. Michael turned towards his companion and saw that she was still crying softly. In a moment the floodtide of knowledge flowed over him, and stepping quickly to her side he put his two arms around her.

"Barbara, darling! Tell me for pity's sake, if what my heart-beats tell me is true, that my dear old father is not the only one! that you, too, are grieving

at my coming departure, and—and that you love me, or am I thinking another mistake?”

“No, you are making no mistake this time. Must you go away, Michael, or will you stay and accept Dr. Rees’s offer to sell you his practice for your father’s sake and for mine?” whispered the girl, in so low a tone that Michael had to bend his head down till his cheek lay on her hair.

“My Barbara!” was all he could say in reply, and for a few moments no further word was spoken, till Barbara, gently disengaging herself from her lover’s arms, pointed to the mill. Michael perceived that the door was open, and that a figure, which he recognised as that of Tom, was standing looking towards the wood. He was evidently on the lookout for them, and they emerged hand-in-hand from the shadows of the trees into the full light of the moon. Barbara tried to disengage her hand from Michael’s, but he merely placed it within his arm, and they soon crossed the grassy sward and came to the house, Tom greeting them with, “What in the world have you two been doing? Really, Barbara, I shall have to send Peggy with you as chaperon. Dr. Rees has come over to supper, and I have asked Phil to join us too.”

He looked quizzically at them, and Michael said, “Tom, old fellow, it is entirely my fault. I was kept in old Betty Powell’s cottage longer than I had intended—Oh, hang it! let’s go in,” and he laughed happily, and whilst the two young men went into the cosy parlour-kitchen, Barbara ran upstairs to her own room.

“Ah, here you are, Lloyd! I came home with this rascal Tom, in hopes that I might persuade you to reconsider your decision of yesterday evening,” said

Dr. Rees from his seat on the settle next to Phil-y-Velin.

“Well, sir, I have been thinking over the matter since I last saw you, and I am quite prepared to make you an offer, if you really wish it.”

Phil and Dr. Rees jumped up from their seats, and looked eagerly at him.

“Yes, indeed, I mean what I say; the circumstances of the past hour or two have made a great difference in my intentions. Miss Owen—Barbara has promised to marry me, that is if Tom will give her to me.”

It was now Phil’s turn to become excited.

“Wh—a—a—t! Miss *vâch* going to marry my Maychael! Oh! then my dream has come true after all. Oh! it is too good, and—and——” and the old man rushed forward and grasped Michael’s two hands in his own, and wrung them violently, while the tears ran down his old cheeks unchecked.

“It is true, father, thank God!”

“Well, I’ll be ——” was all Tom could say for the moment, whilst a broad smile of delight crossed his face. “That’s what made you so late, was it? Michael, old fellow, I *am* glad. Well, I’ll be——”

The doctor could only rub his hands together delightedly.

“Hsht’, Master Tom,” said Peggy, entering the room; “the Bible says, ‘swear not at all,’ and I know you were going to.”

“Here, Peggy, let’s have a jig,” and the astonished and indignant old woman found herself caught up by Tom’s strong young arm and swung round and round the room several times, till at length he deposited her, blowing and wheezing, on the settle. “Our Barbara

is going to marry Michael Lloyd, so there!" he continued.

"Oh, *diwess anwl*, there's glad I am!" and Peggy's watertap was turned on again, and she cried bitterly.

"You old fool!" said Phil; "what iss you cryin' for?"

"I am not cryin', Phil Lloyd, that's the way I laff," was Peggy's rejoinder, wiping her eyes with her apron, and by the time Barbara came downstairs her wrinkled old face was wreathed in smiles to such an extent that Tom whispered to her, "I believe you'll be trying for Phil soon, or is it Dr. Rees, Peggy?"

"*Phwt!*" was Peggy's amiable rejoinder to her tormentor, shaking her fist at him.

It was a happy party that gathered round the old oak board in the mill that evening, and when the meal was finished and the jug was replenished with the foaming ale, Tom, the doctor, and Phil drew near the fire with their pipes and looked round for Michael to join them, but he and Barbara had slipped out into the bright moonlight again.

"*F'anwyllyd?*" he said, as his arm stole around her. "You have long known what suffering was, and I too have known it, although perhaps not in the same way as you have; but it is all over now, thank God! 'Art happy, my Barbara?"

"Happy, Michael?" she whispered. "Yes, I am indeed happy."

"And, oh, Barbara, I have heard of such a dear old house, all ivy-grown and creeper-clad, where two people I know can live so happily together. Not very far from Maentrevor, either. Its roof is not tiled, Barbara, its rooms are not new, and perhaps one of these

two people I speak of would prefer something newer and grander."

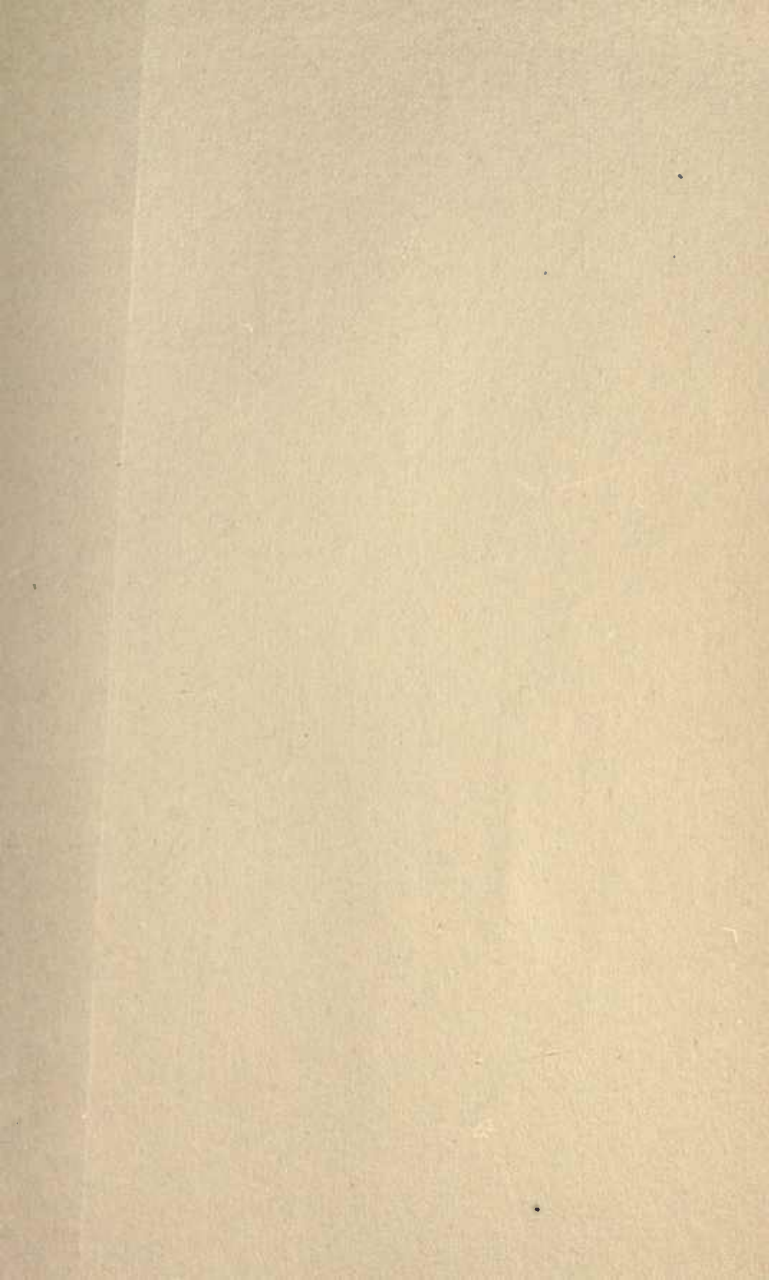
"Where is it, Michael?"

He turned her round and pointed to the mill. "There, *f'anwylyd*. Does it suit thee? Here, where we have known sorrow and joy. What dost thou say?"

"I say as you say, Michael. Here let us live, if your father is willing; but what about Tom?"

"Oh, Tom is like Peggy, only moves with the furniture!" and smiling happily, he led her indoors, whilst the pale moon beamed placidly down; the night wind sighed softly in the pine trees, and a pair of owls flitted silently back to their nest "Under the Thatch."

THE END



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