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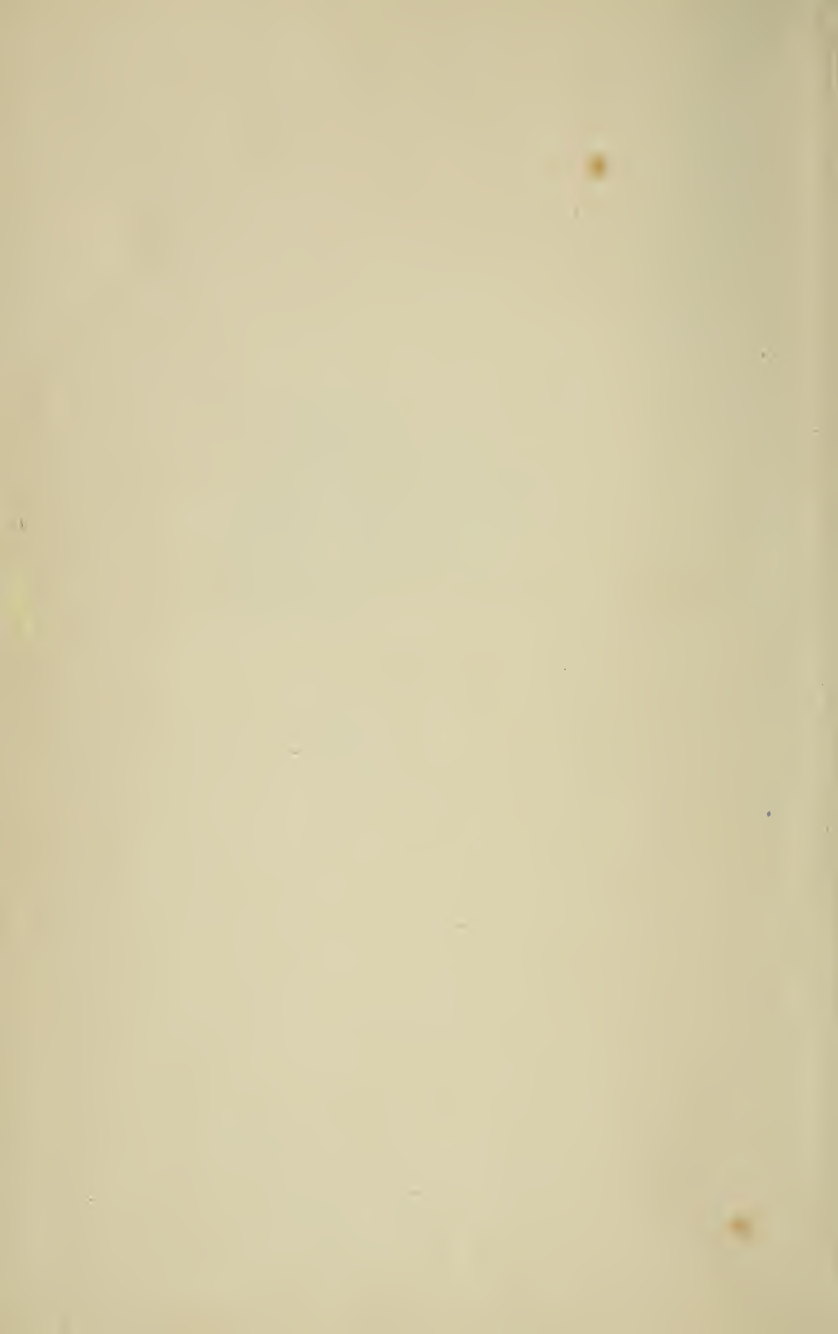
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ROSE AYLMER'S HOME.

VOL. III.



# ROSE AYLMER'S HOME.

“ Die Französer hasssen eine Tragödie ohne Liebe; wir jetzigen Deutschen eine Liebe ohne Tragödie.”—JEAN PAUL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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OF  
THE THIRD VOLUME.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A FRESH TRACK.

Thus through a woman was the secret known.

DRYDEN.

MAHALA BROAD has been in her new place a fortnight. She looks forward with eagerness to a holiday during the ensuing week, and, meanwhile, rejoices in a "Sunday out." Her new acquaintances in the establishment, having been won to partisanship by continued culinary endearments, invite her to various visits and jaunts, and she feels herself the heroine of the day.

Mahala plays her cards with care, for she feels the interest of the game is intensifying ;

so she accepts an invitation to tea, engages two of her fellow-servants to accompany her to the morning service in the snug little church at Old Windsor, and prevents the rejected suitors for her favours feeling any bitterness against her preferences by promises to avail herself of their kindness on future occasions.

A July sun pours his scorching rays upon the long dusty road between Royal Windsor and Old Windsor, and Mahala and her friends toil on under heavy difficulties, to wit, scorching heat, and an amount of showy clothing that would have been burdensome in January. But Mahala has a point to gain, and she never for a moment thinks of turning back.

Many of the residents are absent on seaside visits, so there is ample room in the church; and a polite tradesman, recognising the servants of a profuse establishment, offers them

the seats in his pew, left vacant for the reason aforesaid.

He further enhances this favour by introducing each group to them by name as they enter, for which engaging civility the maid resolves that her young ladies shall buy their next set of dresses at his shop.

“Who be those, if you please, sir?” asked Mahala, as a large party of young people entered, headed by a very pleasing middle-aged couple.

“Mr. and Mrs. Gerald and family, ma’am,” replied the tradesman. “A very fine family, and one that occupies a good deal of the interest of the neighbourhood at present. That very pretty young lady in black is Miss Hilary; she is going to be married to Lord Dungarret—quite romantic, love at first sight, my lord disguised as a Welch harper, &c. The tall elegant young lady is to marry Sir Henry

Armstrong; and the stout plain-looking person is spoken of for Mr. Vansittart they say—she has an enormous fortune. A very interesting family, certainly.”

“Which is to be married first, sir?” asked Mahala, with difficulty concealing her eagerness; for she remembered that Herbert Aylmer was frequently the guest of Mr. Gerald, and that the porter hinted at matrimonial views as his object in frequenting the neighbourhood of Windsor.

“My lord is very eager for the marriage, being quite over head and ears in love; but Miss Hilary does not wish to marry till the twelvemonth after her father's death is turned. But I think my lord will carry his point—he is so very attentive, never a Sunday but he is here in attendance upon her.”

“But he is not here now, sir.”

“Not yet. You see he has a remarkably

fine voice, and he sings in the choir. It looks humble and beautiful to see a lord put on a surplice, and sit between the curate and Noldritt the carpenter to sing the praises of God! They say he has been wildish, but he seems now a very good young man."

Mahala's face flushed to its deepest crimson as she recognised an old friend under a new name. If any doubt had remained on her mind it would soon have been swept away, for the organ struck up and the choir entered—first the singing-boys, then two or three plain-looking men, then the so-called Lord Dun-garret, and then the curate and rector.

"Miss Hilary!" thought Mahala, wholly unconscious that she was holding her prayer-book upside down, and thereby conveying to the now devotional draper the very erroneous impression that she could not read—"Miss Hilary! why, surely that can't be sister to him

as wrote the letter about the fifty pound. I remember him said as his sister had sold her jewels to get money for him to pay the debt. What can that 'ere rogue be after?—him an't got no money, and her an't got none. But there's no doubting that he's after her, for he never takes his eyes away. Oh! him is a bad 'un, him is that!"

Her neighbour plucked gently at her dress, for the general confession had begun, and she was still standing; another eye marked this, and the presence of the cook materially decreased Lord Dungarret's vocal powers.

"Lucky that I am to have a holiday this week!" thought Mahala, as the service went on. "It be high time I should look after Mercy. I was a fool not to go in and see her when I was at the door, but I wanted to get all clear against him before I made a fuss. I'll go up and ask she for her certificate, and



if him's wronged she, this 'un shall know it!"

In good time on Wednesday morning, Mahala took her place in the train for Waterloo, and lost no time in proceeding to Albert Place. She knocked at the door, and when the widow opened, she asked to see the young wife who lodged above.

"She has gone to the country for change of air," was the reply.

"Will she come home soon?" asked Mahala, in some agitation.

"I have not heard of her since she went, and Mr. Jones has written to give up the lodgings. He has behaved very unhandsome, for I was like a mother to her, and I'm sure it isn't her doing to turn me to the right about like this."

"He is a very bad young man—as bad as can be," said Mahala; "he goes by a false name, and him's ekal to any wickedness. I

should not be surprised if him had made away with her!"

"Lor', ma'am, do step in, and talk things over. I've felt terrible hurted and anxious, but I never thought of his doing her harm. How came you to know of his bad ways?"

"Bless you, ma'am, I've knowed he from a child, and him was allays the fair-spokenest round-aboutest creature, and never had done till him had got his own way. He runned away with Mercy; her be my sister, ma'am, my own sister, and I've been like a mother to she, and be the only purtector she had in this part of the world. Oh, ma'am, I do beseech you to help me to find she, for I have a terrible fear that there's harm coming to she, if it haven't comed already!"

"My dear, I would help you if I could, and welcome, but I know nothing. There's a Mr. Barford lives near the 'Elephant,' No. 16,

Castle Terrace; he is a friend of Mr. Jones, and one as never did him any good. He is a man as I wouldn't like to meet on a dark night, and I doubt his telling you anything; but he's like enough to know all about her, and it's worth the trial. I would go with you, but he'd be shyer of speaking before me."

"Well, I will go and try. But him will be out at the office. I had best ask for his wife?"

"Yes, ask for her. She is a fine, impudent, showy woman, as proud as proud can be. Mrs. Jones was always afraid of her. I doubt you'll get nothing out of neither of them, but the chance should be tried."

Mahala started on her difficult errand, torturing her brain for cunning devices by which to gain the desired information from Mrs. Barford. She was not sanguine as to the results of her call, but she had no doubt of the propriety of making it.

Just as she reached the door, the postman ascended the steps. Mahala rang the bell and knocked loudly, then turning to the postman, she said,

“I'll take the letter in. It's a dreadful shame of folks not to have boxes on their doors.”

The man thanked her, and had just reached the door of the next house, when a maid opened to her.

“Mrs. Barford at home?” she asked.

Mrs. Barford was at home, but the maid had evidently no intention of troubling her with Mahala's business, unless she could show reason for so doing.

“Please to say to her that Mrs. Broad is here; that I am a friend of Mrs. Jones, and that I want to speak private to Mrs. Barford on very particular business.”

The girl left the door ajar, secured by the

chain, and was absent some minutes ; then she returned to say that Mrs. Barford would give her audience.

Mahala was prepared for the showy figure and obtrusive bearing of the lady in question, but she felt it necessary to say,

“ Have I the honour of speaking to Mrs. Barford ? ”

“ Yes,” replied that lady ; then added, “ I am the wife of Mr. Barford,” giving the assertion in duplicate, because it was a false one.

“ Mrs. Jones have wrote to me to get her seme things for the baby, but she has not gived me her address, so I have taken the liberty to call on you to ask for it.”

“ Mrs. Jones ! ” said Mrs. Barford meditatively ; “ which Mrs. Jones do you mean ? There’s Mrs. Edward Jones of Clapham, and Mrs. Washington Jones of Harleyford Place,

Kennington, and Mrs. James Jones of the Causeway——”

“I do mean Mrs. Jones of Albert Place, No. 19,” interrupted Mahala.

“Dear me! And is she out of town?”

“Yes, ma'am; and the person who has the house said you would know her address.”

“Perhaps my husband may; if you leave your address with me I can send it to you.”

Mahala took this offer for exactly as much as it was worth, and she gave her address to the old lodging-house which had been her resort on various occasions, and which was a kind of club to her.

She left the house, and, feeling sure that they were watching her, she called a cab, and told it to drive to Blackfriars Bridge. When there she took a 'bus back to Waterloo, and then proceeded to examine the letters she had taken from the postman. How great was her

delight when she found the first was from Mercy herself!

Mercy was in trouble. Away at the seaside, in an out-of-the-way place, far from a doctor, and without one acquaintance, she wrote piteously, entreating Mrs. Barford to persuade her husband to come to her. Her baby was ill, and she did not know what to do for it; she was very unhappy; a weight was on her mind, like that of coming evil, and her money was at an end. Would Mrs. Barford stand her friend, and plead her cause?

Mahala was so overjoyed at the success of her scheme, that for a long time she did not care to open the other letter. When, at last, she did so, she felt she was indeed in luck.

The second letter was from Lord Dungarret. It was written hastily and angrily. He thanked Mr. Barford for the hint he had given him, begged to enclose his card and

*carte de visite*, so that if he had any difficulty in proving the fraud on the fellow who was daring to go by his name, he could gain entrance to his house and strengthen his judgment by comparing the impostor with his full-length portrait. He suggested that "Aylmer should be allowed to develope his plan," and then should be "come down upon;" and he further desired that no blow should be struck till they had got full power over the miscreant. Mahala thought the letter very important, and worthy of full consideration.

"So," she soliloquised, "Mr. Barford be a traitor—he be going to betray Mr. Herbert to Lord Dungarret! Well, I don't say but he deserves it, but only it don't look well in Barford. My lord's letter will be just as useful to me as to him; here's his address in Canada, where he's going next—I have wrote a good few of letters; it 'll be nice to write to



Canada, and to a lord ! I must lose no time in seeing Mercy—if her's married, her's no sister to me ; but if him's wronged her, I'll stand her friend. Her baby had best die ; mine did, and there's no call for she to be better off than I. I shall write and tell missis that I be called to the death-bed of my only sister, and go to her to-night. I can't do nothing till I see her certificate, or know that she has not got one."

So Mahala made out her case to the satisfaction of her employer, and took French leave, to proceed at once to her sister's death-bed.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE THUNDER STORM.

Look ! look ! that vivid flash !  
And instantly follows the rattling thunder,  
As if some cloud crag split asunder,  
    Fell splintering, with a ruinous crash,  
On the earth, which crouches in silence under ;  
    And now a solid wall of rain  
Shuts off the landscape mile by mile ;  
    For a breath's space I see the wood again,  
And ere the next heart-beat the wind-hurl'd pile,  
    That seemed but now a league aloof,  
Bursts rattling o'er the sun-parch'd roof.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

THE afternoon of the Sunday on which Mahala made her first appearance at Old Windsor church was sultry and oppressive in the ex-

treme. All the party at Fair Oaks felt the influence of the close atmosphere more or less, but Lord Dungarret seemed weighed down by it. He had a d<sup>i</sup>strait air, and his languor was so great that he seldom cared to speak. He, Alice, and the Miss Gerald<sup>s</sup> sat upon the lawn, lounging against a mound at the foot of a fine oak; but he started suddenly, exclaiming:

“If we stay here we shall be suffocated outright; the hottest oven in a Turkish bath is cool compared with this!”

The ladies adjourned with him to the river-side, and were there joined by Mrs. Gerald. She proposed singing, and some duets and trios, selected from Handel's and Mendelssohn's Oratorios, were attempted; but the baron declared he had not the power to sing, the oppressive weather took all strength out of him.

Alice felt concerned. Hitherto his spirits had been so gay and elastic—the duration of a grave mood had been very short, and a sad mood she had never seen him in. She watches him anxiously, soon discovering that he did not hear half the remarks that were addressed to him by his courteous hostess, and that some oppression beyond that of the weather was weighing him down.

Mrs. Gerald looked annoyed at his abstraction, and moved away, presently calling Lina to her, sure that Ella's tact would instigate her departure too, the moment that she saw that she was the only hindrance to a *tête-à-tête*.

“The silly fools have some absurd lover's quarrel in hand,” she thought, “and they will not be fit for general society till they have kissed and made friends.”

Lina answered her mother's summons, but her movement did not win the least notice

from the abstracted nobleman ; he continued to watch the rippling stream with intense observation, seeming as if his whole soul was wrapped up in the fate of a straw which he had thrown on the water, and which was slowly verging towards the active part of the stream.

Alice laid her hand on his ; he started as if stung, and snatched it away ; then turning to her, and smiling sweetly, he said,

“ You startled me, darling—forgive my seeming rudeness.”

A long silence ensued ; then Alice began to sing, not grand music, but soft, sweet airs—hymns remembered from her childhood, and simple refrains caught up when and how she knew not. Dungarret moved not, and Ella rose gently and withdrew.

Alice continued to sing, but so softly that her voice did not overpower the low ripple of

the water on the sand. Lord Dungarret still gazed on the stream, but he did not see the boats upon its surface, the swans arching their necks in graceful pride, nor the thickets mirroring themselves in its depths ; he saw a country garden, and a rustic seat, and heard his mother's voice singing the sacred lullabies. All this he saw, but what did he feel ?

Lord Dungarret was not given to mental analysis—it sufficed him that he felt very uncomfortable. Some men, and more women, would have searched for the first beginning of the sense of anomaly between pure childhood, with its readily won affection for good and God, and the maturity which was so far from both, and would have carefully considered the possibility of retracing the steps to the old path ; but our hero was not of such a nature. He never looked back, only forward, and it

was the magic power of Alice's song, riveting his memory to the scenes associated with those airs, that for once compelled the retrospective glance.

"I am really thankful to find you innocently employed," exclaimed a high voice at their side.

Dungarret started, and turned his gaze landwards; and Alice ceased her song, for in Annette's presence who could soothe or be soothed?

"I was afraid that you might be desecrating the Sabbath, as Lina is," she continued; "so as soon as I came in from school I sought out a book to read to you," and she opened a grave-looking volume.

"Don't you find it too hot to read out?" asked Lord Dungarret; "Miss Hilary and I feel almost too much overpowered to think."

“It’s not too hot for duty,” said Annette, and she opened her book, her face crimson with her recent walk in the heat, and large drops standing all over her brow.

She read in a clear loud voice, which she raised from time to time to a grating falsetto, as boats shot by in mid-stream; for she thought that some words of the stirring “appeal to the unconverted” might reach the Sabbath-breakers, and awaken them to a sense of their sinful state.

They sat thus till the dressing-bell rang, and Lord Dungarret moved across the lawn with a much less languid air than he would have done had Annette not startled him out of his dreams.

When they entered the church for the evening service, Lord Dungarret looked nervously for Mahala. But as she was nowhere visible, and the service progressed without



her entering, he began to breathe more freely.

“The sun has set, and the heat is now endurable,” he said to Alice, as they left the church; “do come for a little stroll by the river, I am sorely in need of a quiet chat with you.”

Alice agreed to his wish, and as she placed her hand within his arm, she felt a strong presentiment that she had to bear some painful announcement.

He led her along the towing-path, till they were out of sight of the other loiterers. The heat was still very oppressive; not a breath of air was stirring, and the sky appeared so near the earth, that Nature seemed to gasp for breathing room. They passed a lock, and proceeded some little distance farther, then seated themselves on the high bank to rest before returning.

“Alice, I have a great favour to ask of you, a greater one than I have asked hitherto. I am on the brink of a precipice, and only you can save me.”

Lord Dunganret made this appeal as he threw himself at the girl's feet, looking beseechingly in her pale lovely face.

“Dear Frederic,” she said, “I will do anything for you that is quite right to do. I have seen that something was wrong with you all the afternoon—but you were gay and happy after post time. Tell me how you got the evil tidings, and what they were.”

“I have an evil genius,” he replied despondingly, “and it met me at church this morning. You know, dear Alice, that I have not always been what I ought to be. I have been an aimless man; fancy led to many a folly. Never till now have I come under an influence that could chain me to good. Now I am all right

—nothing can lead me astray now; when once I am married to you, I shall be all that is good and honourable. But the past harasses me; my follies have given a hold to some who are ready enough to use it ruthlessly. To-day I saw in church one who is a spy upon me. You know I have given people to understand that I have gone to Canada—only to-day has that emissary of my foes discovered that I am in England. They may swoop down upon me, and tear me from you any day.”

Alice clasped both his hands.

“Oh! Frederic,” she said, “how terrible! But what can I do?”

“I will tell you, dearest. A friend in power has got me a diplomatic appointment in Holland, the emolument of which will enable me to meet all my liabilities in a couple of years, without touching your income; but if I am seized now, all is at an end! What I

beseech you to do is this—Marry me one day this week, as early in the week as we can arrange ; and let us sail at once for Holland. I can pay the only account that I must necessarily meet, and then, once safe out of the country, in a lucrative position, and with a wife reported to be wealthy, they will trust me readily enough.”

“Frederic, you know my reason for wishing six weeks longer delay.”

“I do, my darling. But were your father here, do you think he would counsel you to risk my whole future to pay him the outward respect of waiting a full year after his death before marrying?”

“Perhaps not. I am not sure. I will do this, Frederic. I will send for Richard Iveson, and if he consents to this step, I will.”

“Oh! Alice ; and will you trust Iveson's judgment rather than mine?”

Alice reflected, then laying her head against her lover's shoulder, she said gently,

“Yes, dear Frederic. Richard lives as in God's sight. He ever acts as to Him. Therefore I have boundless faith in his judgment. Forgive me for trusting it rather than yours? I love you immeasurably more, but I look up to him as to a father.”

Dungarret was about to plead for more independent action, but suddenly a peal of thunder burst over their heads, accompanied by a vivid flash of lightning, which lighted up the lock, and the dark stream, and the flat country around. Dungarret started to his feet.

“Let us go home,” he said, in a tremulous voice; “we shall have an awful storm.”

Alice took his arm, and was surprised to feel that it was trembling.

“You are not alarmed, Frederic; there is surely no danger?” she said.

“I don't know,” he replied ; he might have intended to say more, but the roar of heaven's artillery drowned his voice, and the fast-following lightning caused him to start and shudder again.

“The rain is commencing—we shall have a sharp shower ; let us lean against the wall, under the shelter of these trees ; such rain as this will drench us in five minutes if we proceed.”

He did not oppose her wish, but neither did he answer her. The trees were thick, but not lofty, and she felt no alarm. Another and still louder peal rolled over their heads, and as it died away a faint cry was heard proceeding from some frightened child at one of the neighbouring houses.

“That was Mercy's voice !” exclaimed Dungarret, shuddering more than ever. “Do let us go home, and not mind the rain.”

And the lightning, flashing clear and pale at the moment, showed his face blanched with terror

“I will go home if you so desire it, but the rain is already abating. It was but a cry of fear from a child you heard—who is Mercy?”

“Did I say Mercy? That was the name of a child in our village, who was always afraid of thunder. My mother used to reason with her, but it was of no avail.”

“It seldom is. I remember my nurse explaining to me that it was only those who had done wicked or cruel things that need fear.”

Dungarret started more convulsively than before, for a tremendous peal cut off the remainder of Elsie's speech, and this time the lightning was forked and lurid.

“We will go home and not mind the rain,”

she said, gently. "A storm does affect some people otherwise strong in nerve, I know, and I daresay it has this strange chemical effect on you."

She was leaving the shelter of the trees, but he drew her back.

"Wait till after the next flash," he whispered. "We might be struck in crossing that open space."

Elsie put her arm round him, holding his arm with her other hand.

"I have told you how my nurse used to reason with me," she said, "but my mother's plan was far more effective. She used to put her arms round me, and look calmly up to heaven, while she asked God to protect his children from the danger of the storm."

He glanced at her face by the light of the quick-recurring flashes, and its lofty and yet childlike trust might well have strengthened



him. He clung to her for protection ; for he dreaded to hear that cry again, and the nurse's logic had been so instilled into him from his earliest years, that it still had more of reality to him than Elsie's exalted faith.

Suddenly the rain ceased, and no more peals of thunder were heard—a perfect and oppressive silence prevailed.

“ Let us get home now, Frederic,” Alice exclaimed, gently impelling him forward. “ The air is still too sultry to allow us any hope that the storm is over.”

But Dungarret was unwilling to sally forth. He pointed to the unsheltered margin of the river, which they must traverse for half a mile before their home was gained, and said, falteringly,

“ The lightning will be terrible there.”

“ It will look so ; but you know, dear Frederic, it is really much safer to be in open

ground than under trees. Come, love, you must make an effort to overcome your fear, or we shall be here all night."

He reluctantly allowed her to lead him forth. Darkness had cast her mantle over the river, and the path beside it, and they could see but dimly. They had not gone more than a hundred yards from their leafy retreat, when a crash of thunder burst directly over their heads; and while the ringing peal continued the lightning blazed forth, and the world seemed on fire; a hissing sound mingled with the rolling thunder, and the same childish cry of fear which they had heard before came once again, as if from some cottage on the road. Dungarret fell on his knees, hiding his face, and trembling violently; and Elsie stood pallid, and with awed expression, but with the high faith beaming as firmly in her upraised eyes. Well

might they feel awe, for the trees under which they had stood but two minutes ago were struck.

“Come, dearest,” Alice said, “we must hasten now.”

But Dungarret did not move. She was perplexed how to secure a retreat before another burst of thunder; on a moment’s reflection she changed her tactics.

“Fred, dear, I am going to run home. I expect the rain to recommence every minute.”

“Oh! don’t leave me, Elsie,” he groaned.

“Then come with me.”

She gave him her hand to assist his rising; then she pressed forward. As suddenly as the rain had stopped, it now recommenced, pouring as when the string of a shower-bath is pulled. Long before they could reach home they were drenched to the skin. Mrs. Gerald met them in the hall.

“My dear creatures,” she said, “you are like Newfoundland dogs fresh out of the water—you must both go to bed immediately.”

Lord Dungarret looked pale and scared, and Elsie would gladly have still soothed his jarred nerves by her presence. But she could find no reason to assign to Mrs. Gerald for disobeying her direction, so she let Mode lead her off to her room.

With trembling hands Lord Dungarret divested himself of his dripping garments; a footman came with spirit and hot water to his room, and he delayed him as long as he could. But the man retired presently, and as the storm continued, the baron put on dry clothes, and descended to the drawing-room. But the family had all strong nerves, and had retired for the night. He took up his abode on a couch in the drawing-room, and burying his head in cushions, hid alike from the sight

of the lightning, and the hearing of that cry that would accompany the thunder in his excited imagination.

Elsie sat at her window, watching the lightning's play upon the water, and sadly realizing that its sudden searching light had revealed to her a new feature in the character of her lover. It was not the nervous dread that pained her, but an indefinable expression of evil in his agitated countenance. But she committed that anxiety also to the keeping of her Saviour God, and then lay down to rest, secure in His care.

## CHAPTER III.

## SUNDAY IN BOTCHERDALE.

Silent he entered the forgotten room,  
As ghostly forms may be conceived to come,  
With sorrow-shrunken face and hair upright,  
He looked dismay, neglect, despair, affright.

CRABBE.

RICHARD IVESON strode rapidly across the moor on his way from church on that same Sunday evening. Even in Botcherdale the weather was sultry, and the occasional pedestrians he met expressed their greeting in the concise style used in that part of Yorkshire.

“Warm,” says the miner.

“ Ay, varry,” replies the farmer, and each feels he has expressed as much friendliness and good-will as if he had stopped to make a dozen inquiries about his neighbour’s health, and that of his wife, children, and more distant relations.

Richard paces onward, not pausing to gaze on the outspread beauties of Botcherdale, for the heavy atmosphere shuts out all extensive views ; the heath is thick and full of bud, and on sandy places the little mountain pansies display their golden blooms in contrast to the blue spikes of the milk-wort. Iveson sees these, and compresses his lips as if in sudden pain ; then he stoops and gathers some, and places them carefully in an envelope, to send, “ with a brother’s love,” by tomorrow’s southern mail.

As he nears his home, he does not take the path leading direct to it, but the higher one

that leads to Thorny Hall. Arrived there, he knocks at the back entrance, then calls aloud to Barbara ; but, receiving no answer, he opens the door and enters. It is the first time that he has trusted himself there, but duty requires him to learn the state of the building, and order necessary repairs before the shooting season ; and the sense of desolation is so strong upon him to-night, that the scenes where he first devoted his heart and life to her, can scarce increase it.

Barbara had gone to meeting, and staid to gossip at the village, so Richard had his inspection alone and undisturbed. As he stood in the colonel's room, the scenes enacted there returned vividly to his mind. Dr. Samson's visit, the return from the mine, the days and nights of anxiety during the colonel's last illness, and the awful hour of his death. He remembered how the father had loved and



trusted him, and confided to him the care of his daughter; and he asked himself, as if in the presence of the dead, had he guarded her happiness as much as it was possible to do?

Then another vision rose before him, wholly unconnected with the darkening room where he sat and its sad memories. It was a vision of Alice's face, beaming with love, as she sat by Lord Dungarret, its irradiance throwing into deep shade all the looks of beaming kindness and grateful affection which had entranced the senses of the humble lover in every chamber of that old house.

“Yes,” he said, in answer to the challenge of his conscience—“yes, in facilitating her union with one so loved and so loving, I have done my poor best to secure her happiness.”

He knelt by the bed where his old friend had lain a corpse—the suppressed agony

of his heart found vent in bitter groans.

“Alas!” he said, “I thought I had overcome this; I thought I had yielded her up, and that I was content. It would be easy to me to die, for life is an intolerable burden; but only God knows how hard a struggle it is to wish to live, that I may guard and watch over her, and she never know what I do for her sake!”

He took a thin pocket-book from the left side pocket of his waistcoat, and opened it to withdraw a dried geranium flower. It was the blossom of one of those he had first given to Alice, and she had dropped it from her dress on her return from that visit to the Raven's Nest which she had undertaken at his desire. He pressed the blossom to his lips, then laid it reverently back in its place, and returned the pocket-book to its home.

The house felt close and warm, and he

wandered out into the garden. Here he stooped to lift the head of each flower, and take up any intrusive weed; all were sacred in his eyes, for had not she loved them?

His heart was full to overflowing, and the pressure of the heavy atmosphere seemed to draw the blood to his head.

“This is intolerable!” he exclaimed; “I must get on to higher ground.”

And he left the garden, clambered up the wood, stumbling from time to time in the rocky path, now enveloped in darkness, and reached a cleared spot, commanding an extensive view up and down the dale, when there was light to see it by.

Here he threw himself on the sward; he had come for air, but even on the heights no breeze was stirring. Again bitter thoughts thronged upon him, and especially the reiterated question of whether the marriage

with Lord Dungarret was really for the happiness of Alice Hilary.

“Away, tempter!” he cried, as he lifted his throbbing head from the sward where he had in vain hoped to cool it; “thou wouldst persuade me to search for evil in the enthusiastic lover, and endeavour to open her eyes to his past errors. Thou wouldst persuade me that I was doing this out of disinterested care for her, while all the time the foulest worm of self-interest would be at the root of my efforts. I will not listen to these suggestions; God keep me upright, and God bless and prosper Lord Dungarret!”

As he spoke a distant clock tolled out eleven strokes; suddenly every leaf began to quiver in the wood above, while no breeze found its way to Iveson's heated brow. Awhile the leaves quivered as if whispering about coming events, then a sound came as of many waters

in the distance, and a powerful gale set in up the valley, which caused Richard to button his coat and turn homewards.

“Thank God,” he said, “there is air again. The way is hard enough, but, with an open heaven above, I shall have strength to conquer.”

As he descended the wood the moon broke out from behind the now scattering clouds, and its light showed him a dark figure busily engaged upon the moor just beyond. The stature and gait at once revealed Jif Coates. Iveson approached softly, and laying his hand suddenly on his shoulder, said in a low voice,

“This is not the sort of work for you, Jif; I don’t wonder that you look ashamed.”

“I’ve got no heart for aught better, Mr. Iveson,” replied Jif, sullenly; “that there Smith has been my ruin, but my reckoning

day will come. You wait a bit, Joe Smith, and see if Jif Coates doesn't write 'sattled' to your bill in a way you didn't bargain for !”

“ Jif, you are the best miner in the district, and there's no room now to complain of want of work. You could earn your five shillings a day either in the old workings or at the Beechwood vein. Yet your wife and children are ill and dispirited, and you lounge about all day, looking fierce and cruel, and turn your hand to evil for want of good work to give scope to its powers. Be yourself again, Jif Coates, and come back to your work, and burn these poaching nets, they will bring far worse trouble on you than they will on Smith.”

“ I'd liever work than bide with idle hands, Mr. Iveson, my heart oft louns at the thought o' getting t' metal so free as it now is. But

I can't work among t' Botcherdale lads, for they do nowt but run rigs o' me, and call me 'water rat,' and all manner o' bad names. I never meant no harm to young Mr. Hilary, it was only that white-livered lying rascal Smith that made me fond by his talk about furriners. I telled him a piece o' my mind, Mr. Iveson, and, if I live, I'll make him repent yet. Now, he's gied me warning to quit my house, and t' wife fair dazed to think o' flitting. There's nobbut yan house to be got, and it's a poor place, wi' a chamber not big enough to swing a cat in, not half big enough for our good four-post bed. But go we must, whether we lodge in a stable or out on the moor, so I've turned my hand to getting a few ornyments ready for when I give in the key. I've got a string o' grouse eggs as will hang right round t' kitchen, and now I'm gathering a few young birds to stuff and set here and there. Smith

allays says no poacher can outdo him, and he think he can see slap through a stone wall ; but he'll find that Jif Coates is a match for him, though he did swallow his lies about the furriners."

"This won't do, Jif. If you go on like this you'll get into some poaching row, and either commit some deed of violence, or get transported. Now, you and I have known one another from childhood, and I don't think we can, either of us, lay it to our conscience that we have let slip a chance of doing one another a good turn. Do you dig a hole and bury those eggs and young birds, give up the key of your house quietly, and I'll promise you that before the year is out you shall be gamekeeper in the place of Smith. Miss Hilary would have dismissed him before this but for poor Mary ; she will not grieve the family while the girl lies dying."



Coates seized the hand of his friend.

“Mr. Iveson, I didn’t deserve this from you. I was a fond fool to listen to Smith; I ought to have knowed you better than to believe for a minute that you would go against t’ Botcherdale lads. But you’ve made me beholden to you for life—you’ve made me a man again. I’ll away home, and I’ll warrant you Keziah will skrike for joy when I tell her I’m my own man again. But I hope still to have my revenge on Smith.”

“Take my advice and banish Smith from your thoughts. We none of us love him, but we can’t get rid of him. He’ll ruin his son, I fear, unless I can persuade him to emigrate.”

“Well, Mr. Iveson, there are two things which I shall pray God for whenever I say ‘Our Father’—one is, that Smith may get what he deserves; and t’other is, that I may find a way to do you as good a turn as you’ve

done me. God send fire or water only that Jif Coates may show what his heart is up to !”

The two men walked on together, and presently reached Iveson's house. There they parted, Richard to dwell anew on his own bitter self-sacrificing path, and Jif to electrify Keziah with the new hopes held out to him.

A gusty day followed that night of sudden change. Iveson pursued his daily avocations with a sense of renewed power, but without any added cheerfulness. The clouds swept quickly across the heavens, but fresh clouds ever followed, and no place was cleared for the sun to break through. There were no golden patches on the hill-sides, no gliding cloud shadows, no glittering dance of leaves ; grey clouds hurried across a grey sky ; a dead hue seemed spread over moor and pasture,

and all the trees were bent in one direction, and seemed to have no time given them for the recoil. Richard's mind, ever alive to the influence of nature, felt braced to action but deprived of hope.

Tuesday morning's post brought him a letter from Alice, asking his opinion about the propriety of an early marriage, and telling him that Lord Dungarret had evidently much to fear from the machinations of his enemies. Again the suspicion which he had crushed down with so strong a hand the night before rose in his mind—Was Lord Dungarret worthy of her?—was his reform thorough and abiding?—would a union with him be really for the happiness of his idolized Alice?

Richard Iveson was a scholar, and a man of deep thought and experience in the straightforward line of life in which his lot was cast. But living among the Botcherdale miners, or

occasionally seeing polished society, could, by no possibility, make him a man of the world. A reverent faith in love was one of the strongest principles of his nature, just as the principle of self-sacrifice was a leading part of his religion. With these weapons he combated the light of his understanding and the yearnings of his heart. Alice loved, therefore she must find happiness in the devotion to that love; he was sacrificing self, therefore he must be doing God's will.

So Richard Iveson knelt again, to seek strength to perfect his offering; and then he packed a small portmanteau, harnessed his good horse to his dog-cart, and drove down to Swaleford, in time for the afternoon mail.

## CHAPTER IV.

## MERCY'S HISTORY.

I married with the sweetest lass  
 That ever trod on village grass,  
 That ever at her looking-glass  
 Some pleasure took, some natural care ;  
 That ever swept a cottage floor,  
 And worked all day, and ne'er gave o'er  
 Till eve, then watched beside the door  
 Till her good man should meet her there.

JEAN INGELOW.

It is full time that the reader should be clearly informed of all that had befallen Mercy Broad since she left her master's house at the end of August. With all speed she hurried along the fields, avoiding the main road, and

creeping through gaps in the hedges, or climbing walls, so as to reach a part of the highway three miles from Chalkley, without the risk of being recognised by any late-stirring neighbour. She succeeded in her wish, and emerged into the main road, very near a maple hedge, under which a cab was standing.

As she approached, a figure darted from within the cab, and, taking her two hands, kissed her with much tenderness.

“My darling,” he said, “you shall never repent thus trusting me. Come away quickly—till we have left Salisbury we are not safe from pursuit.”

“Mr. Herbert,” replied Mercy, as she resisted his effort to hand her into the cab, “are you quite certain that you are going to marry me? I’ll not go with you unless.”

“I am quite certain. I swear it in God’s

sight. Now, Mercy, get in ; the driver will wonder what we are whispering about?"

Mercy got in, and Herbert placed himself by her side. His ready tact showed him that the girl was frightened, so he took her hand quietly, and chatted to her of pleasant nothings, and Mercy gradually became composed.

It was a long drive to Salisbury, and they scarcely reached the town by daybreak. They repaired at once to the station, but had long to pace up and down before the first train was ready for starting. By the middle of the day they were in London. If Mercy felt scared at her position when alone with Herbert in the midnight flight, she felt much more so with the bustle of London around her. The sleepless night, and the great agitation she had gone through during the last three days, had made her very pale; and now,

as she clung to Herbert, asking despairingly if they should not be lost, she looked the picture of misery.

But the cab stops, and Herbert descends, and leads the girl up a flight of handsome steps. A servant opens the door, and replies to Herbert's question, that Mrs. Barford is at home. Then Herbert presents her to a dashing lady, and Mercy makes a curtsy, between the regulation bob of the rector's school, and the retrograde movement which she had seen the governess practise. The lady seems very haughty, and after looking for some time at Mercy, she desires her to be seated, and calls for refreshment; then she approaches very near to Herbert, nearer, evidently, than is agreeable to him, for he slightly recoils, and says, in a low tone,

“Very pretty, and all that, but not worth the sacrifice.”



“Mrs. Barford, I *love* her !” says Herbert, with emphasis.

“Probably,” she replies, with a shrug of her shoulders ; then adds—“to-day, and perhaps to-morrow. But next year?”

“For ever !” he replies, firmly.

Another shrug of the shoulders. Then she resumes.

“A trip to the Isle of Wight would be the thing.”

Herbert looked annoyed.

“Or if not enough, a *foreign* marriage and tour.”

Herbert looked dangerous.

“An English marriage and a quiet home,” he said, between his teeth ; “only all in the utmost secrecy.”

“You will repent it, and it is uncalled-for,” she said, pertinaciously.

“Would you have me make that innocent

child a—" he paused, for he knew certain facts about the so-called Mrs. Barford which warned him that any strong terms would be unwelcome, and Herbert disliked giving pain, only a degree less than enduring it.

"Never mind what," he replied. "I shall marry her like an honest man. Do you make her comfortable for a fortnight, as you have promised; I will see her daily, if she wishes it; then I shall take her to church. I have all but agreed for the lodgings in Albert Place."

He returned to Mercy's side.

"My darling," he said, "I must leave you. Go to bed very early, and get back the sweet colour in your face. I will come again to-morrow."

"Oh! Mr. Herbert, Mr. Aylmer, I be afraid to be here alone."

"Mercy, dear, you must forget that my

name is Herbert Aylmer. I am now *William Jones*. All my prospects in life will be ruined if my friends find me out, and even in London it is impossible to keep concealed except under an assumed name. My future happiness and prosperity entirely depend upon your concealment of my name. From this time you must only think of me as William Jones—you will be Mercy Jones in a fortnight's time."

"I will do all you tell me, Mr. Her—Jones. It would break my heart to do you any harm. Please trust me, sir."

"I will, darling. Be happy here. Get ample rest, and keep with Mrs. Barford. A fortnight will soon pass away, and then—"

A bright look of joy overspread the waxen features of Mercy at this word. The missing

colour returned to lip, cheek, and even brow, as he kissed her again and again; and he had reached the omnibus stand, and was on his way to the east of London, before that flush of pride and passion had faded away. The girl's docility procured her peace during her stay with the Barfords. Mrs. Barford was jealous of her beauty, still more jealous of the respect in which Herbert held her; and she would have got up endless quarrels, but that Mercy treated her as a great lady, and never answered her bitter insinuations. Again and again she renewed her cruel suggestions, and had actually contrived a false priest, and possessed herself of a church key, where the marriage might be performed in secret, only Herbert's heart was too full of the innocent loveliness of Mercy to contemplate a future change of mind. He was not the man to

bring misery on those he loved, when his own desires could be accomplished without so doing.

Mr. Barford was of his wife's opinion, and that for a twofold reason—his admiration of Mercy was so great, that he was unwilling she should be bound by an indissoluble tie; and with man's quick penetration into the intricacies of female character, he divined that soft and pliable as Mercy was in all other things, her modesty and purity were unassailable. He more than suspected that her strong principle in this respect had brought about Herbert's resolution to marry her, and he felt that the marriage tie would strengthen her integrity, and render her unapproachable under evil usage as well as good; while, if after awhile she found that she was not really a wife, she might become desperate, and, on Herbert's forsak-

ing her, might take up with Mr. Barford.

Mercy little thought of the snares that were spread around her. Had she known them, her faith in Herbert would still have supported her, little as she imagined that the stability which stood against the entreaties of two such powerful counsellors arose from the simple fact that Herbert had no idea of the fickleness of his own nature, and therefore expected to be in love with Mercy all his life.

Thus, while the sportsmen arose and braced their energies to vast assaults on the poor partridges, and Alice mourned in the desolation of separation and bereavement, a hack cab made its way to a church door in the Walworth district, and an elegant young man handed therefrom the bonniest, modestest white-robed bride that had entered that church for many a day. The white muslin for the dress

had cost but a few shillings, and her own hands had fashioned it into a bridal dress; the simple little bonnet was the purchase of Herbert, and was cheap as the dress; but Mercy looked a very angel of beauty and purity. The clergyman shook hands with the bride and bridegroom, and felt much disposed to kiss the former, but he thought his benevolence might be misunderstood.

This was Saturday morning, and Herbert took his bride down to Broadstairs till Monday, for a wedding trip. Her joy and wonder at the sight of the sea, her frantic eagerness for every common shell or piece of wet glistening weed, her childlike happiness in every change and novelty, delighted Herbert, and he was never weary of watching her glad face. Then she would sit silent for awhile, and when he spoke to her would answer, as demurely as of old, "Yes, sir," and "No,

sir," and "As you please, sir;" and when he asked, "Why do you speak like that, my darling?" she would say, "I fear I have been forward; I had quite forgotten that I be a poor girl, and you a great gentleman." Then Herbert would draw her to him, and lay her head on his breast, and whisper, "Nonsense, my Mercy, we are one now; you are as I am—my wife is a true lady."

The holiday over, business recommenced, and Herbert put forth his excellent powers to good effect. Each day, as he opened the little garden gate on his return from the City, the house door opened too; and as he passed the portal, a light figure sprang from behind it, and fond arms were clasped round his neck; and then every word that he spoke was listened to as if it were an oracle from heaven. Then they would sit down to dinner, and a savoury dish would be placed before him,



while Mercy ate some untempting remnant from yesterday's meal, or pretended to have turned hungry an hour ago, or practised any other ruse to leave him as much of the dainty meat as he could possibly eat. But to such little matters he never gave a second thought; he was very happy and comfortable—that was enough for him, and she felt from the bottom of her heart that it was enough for her.

Then, on fine evenings they went out for a walk in Kennington Park, and people turned to look at the handsome couple; and Mercy blushed and said, "Every lady we meet falls in love with you, William;" and he replied, "And what do the gentlemen do, Mercy?" and she blushed again.

Sometimes he took her to the theatre, and then she was radiant with joy; often he took her to churches, where there was first-rate choral music, but she said no voice was equal

to his ; and once he took her to an Oratorio, but she wept so much, and was so wholly overpowered, that it made her quite ill.

The winter came, and Herbert thought no fire burned so brightly as his own ; but the weather was too cold to go out at nights, and Mercy was afraid to walk out alone ; so the colour faded from her cheek, and as the season advanced she met her husband on his return with a quieter greeting, though the soft blue eyes were fuller of love than ever.

The evenings were long, and much as Herbert loved to be listened to with admiration, yet he sometimes wearied for a reciprocity of intelligence. He could teach Mercy a little music, but he could not inspire her with any thirst for knowledge.

She would make the most absurd remarks on historical characters ; and when her husband looked annoyed, she would assume the most

charmingly penitent air; then he would laugh and kiss her, and bring her a thick volume of English history, and bid her read that. On the morrow she would apply herself obediently to the task, and read and read till she got quite puzzled; and her poor little brains were more powerless than ever. In the evening Herbert would find her discouraged and distressed, and as hopelessly ignorant as ever.

Very early in their married life Mrs. Barford had pronounced Mercy a fool, and she reiterated her judgment with added strength when returning home from a little dinner at Albert Place.

“Jones will not get on with that idiot another year,” she said, as she trudged along the well-lighted pavement; “after all the pains he has taken with her, she is half an hour in sorting her cards, and she revokes

as often as not. He looked in a precious rage when he saw what a fool she was making of herself."

"He had no reason to do so. I was the loser, Mercy being my partner, and I was not in a rage."

"No; you are a fool about that doll. I believe, when he is tired of her, you will take her off his hands; but if you do, I will be the death of her!"

"My dear, you forget she is legally married to him; he cannot turn her off."

Mrs. Barford bit her lip; she felt such allusions keenly, and she knew Barford meant her to feel them—it was his way of tightening the bridle. She obeyed the rein by changing the subject, which also was what he meant her to do.

Spring was long in coming, and when it

did come, it did not bring the joy that Mercy had hoped for from it. She was far from well, and could no longer walk gaily hither and thither with Herbert, so he used to walk with her and return home very late, and sadly out of humour. Other days he used to tell her not to prepare dinner for him, as he should dine out; and not unfrequently he would be very late in returning when he had given her no warning, and she would keep his dinner waiting for hours. Then she would weep and grow quite despondent; and though, on his return at midnight, she never ventured to scold or even question him, her pale face and sad eyes uttered mute reproaches, which vexed and angered him as much as fierce invective would have done. His absences increased in number and length, his health suffered from dissipation, and when he went

down to Windsor for change, he had begun to curse his folly for marrying a pretty fool.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE CHAIN GALLS.

Der Wahn ist kurz, die Reu ist lang.

SCHILLER'S *Song of the Bell*.

WHEN Herbert Aylmer left his office on the evening of the Wednesday after Easter, Mr. Barford joined him.

“You have been out of town for a couple of days, so I suppose you are all in haste to see your sweet wife, Jones?”

“I never wish to see my wife again, Barford. I don't wish any evil to her, but I'm weary to death of her simpering face. She's

got a stony look lately, half sulky, half bilious, which is worse far than her Kitty Clover simplicity, though that palls upon one awfully. Mrs. Barford knew me better than I knew myself when she told me I should repent my rash and romantic action."

"Come home with me, and we can talk matters over. The lady and I are going to the Alhambra later in the evening; you had better bear us company."

"No, thank you, Barford; I'll go and talk over my troubles with Mrs. Barford, but I will go to no wild place. I am going to reform."

"You are? Then you've lost your heart afresh, I bet ten to one!"

"I've lost my heart for the first time. My fancy was touched by the pretty milkmaid, and knowing no deeper passion, I called it love. Some weeks ago I saw the true arbiter



of my fate ; I have dreamt of her ever since, her image has filled my soul. On Monday I had the good luck to get an introduction to her ; I have spent these two days in her company, and last night she gave me her promise. My effort now shall be to become worthy of her.”

Barford gazed on his friend in mute amazement. The ways of self-indulgence and immorality were familiar to him ; but the amalgamation of villany and piety now before his eyes was a new and curious phase of vice, at once startling and instructive.

“ Come home, old boy, Mrs. Barford will admire you hugely in this new state of mind ; you certainly will be the sweetest thing in Bigamists out. Come home, my charmer !”

“ Barford, old fellow, be so very good as to suppress those coarse expressions, they grate cruelly upon a soul possessed wholly by

a sanctifying image of beauty and purity. Now that I belong to Alice, my soul must be clean, my lips free from the contamination of an evil word."

"Very true, very true. Keep clean lips, and it matters little what the hands are!"

Herbert shuddered, but not with the pain of the contrast which his friend's words might have placed startlingly before him. No, he had fully persuaded himself that, being in love, all his actions had become holy. "For," he said, "love is of God, and everyone that loveth knoweth God."

He had gone down to Windsor, lured by the hope of beholding Alice again, but with no definite intention of making himself known to her. It was only when Sir Henry Armstrong accosted him by the name of Lord Dungarret, and it flashed on his mind how Richard Iveson and others had similarly mis-

taken him for that nobleman, that the idea of personating him, to obtain the love of Alice, had dawned on his mind. The idea promised boundless pleasure, and he at once accepted the satanic suggestion. The beauty and purity of Alice awed him, and he believed this to be a sign that all was right in God's sight. Never accustomed to trouble his soul with unwelcome questionings, he bade conscience be silent at once and for ever, and he gave himself up to the fascination of love.

The cruel eyes of Mrs. Barford sparkled as he told his tale.

“ Ah !” she said, “ you would not be advised by me, so now you are in rather an awkward position. If the doll would take to dying, all might be well ; but I dare say she will pull through as safely as all those who are not wanted here are sure to do.”

“ I wish the pretty fool no harm, only that I could undo that rash marriage !”

“ Ah ! that is far easier said than done. But though it can't be undone, it may be ignored. We have friends at Gravesend ; as soon as she and the baby can travel, we must send her there. Change of air will restore her sweet looks, and who can tell but she may take up with a new lover ?”

“ Never !” exclaimed Herbert, despairingly. “ She is weak as water in most things, but true as steel to her wifely honour. There is no hope of her giving an opening for divorce ; and even if she did, the publicity of a trial would as certainly ruin me as it would do to proclaim her my wife !”

“ True. Well, we must keep her in hiding, and ignore the marriage. If even the baby would die, it would be one difficulty out of the way ; but it is sure to live.”

“Poor innocent! I wish no harm to it. Only both mother and child are sadly in my way, and both are fit for heaven.”

“Leave it to me, Mr. Jones, and I’ll see what can be done. Mr. Barford and I will lay our heads together, and talk it over.”

Herbert went home, and up to his wife’s room; but the nurse met him at the door with finger on lips, to sign that the patient was sleeping. So Herbert returned to the sitting-room, stirred up the fire, and sat before it, thinking of Alice. Late in the night he rolled a railway-rug round him, and threw himself on the sofa, where he slept till morning, this having been his usual resting-place since his wife’s confinement.

“Oh! William, where have you been?” Mercy said, when he wished her good-bye

before going to business. "I have been so unhappy about you."

"I have only been boating at Richmond. Don't harass your brains about me, Mercy; you may take for granted that I am all right; but if you expect me to hang about here for ever, you are quite mistaken. I am weary to death of this humdrum life. I think I shall leave these lodgings, and take others at Gravesend, and come down at nights—if anything pressing requires my presence in London, I can get a bed at Barford's."

Mercy began to cry.

"Oh! the good days are gone," she sobbed; "and now you will take me from the sweet home where their memory lives. Oh! William, don't be so cruel!"

"Cruel! How little you know what the word means! But don't fret, I shall not move at present. Make haste and

get well, and you will be as happy as ever."

He left her, but she continued to weep. His kiss had been so cold, his looks so averted, the tones of his voice so harsh. She had small reasoning powers, but sensitive perceptions, and ear, and sight, and touch assured her that his love was dead. On the morrow she was weaker and more feverish, and the doctor prescribed perfect quiet for her. But Mrs. Barford called, and insisted on seeing her, and she said,

"You must have change of air and scene; you have lost your spirits, and so has Mr. Jones. It would be well to go to Gravesend."

"I won't go to Gravesend," said Mercy, sullenly.

Mrs. Barford was amazed.

"Perhaps Mr. Jones may take you to

Broadstairs or Brighton," she said, insinuatingly.

"If he will take me to my aunt near Weston, I will go gladly enough, and I will promise never to breathe his real name to her," Mercy said sadly; "but I won't stir from Albert Place without him."

And Mrs. Barford did not venture to press her, fearing lest her suspicions might be aroused already. Many an eager discussion as to the best plan to be adopted, took place at Mr. Barford's house, while Herbert lingered there hour after hour, and Mercy pleaded with the nurse not to close up her room quite so soon, as she would like to see Mr. Jones when he came in, and he would not be long. And many a night the nurse indulged her by repeated delay; but Mr. Jones returned not, and the bolt was drawn, and the kind-hearted gamp snored for an hour.



or two before Herbert's latch-key was applied to the outer door.

Saturday comes, and the husband has intended to lull all his wife's fears by spending Sunday with her, so he lingers in town, and, late in the evening, proceeds to Albert Place, accompanied, unknown to himself, by Mahala Broad. He bounds up the stairs with half a dozen elastic springs, and entering the room, stoops over Mercy's couch, whispering,

“Cheer up, Mercy, you shall come down to-morrow; the month is up, and you must now put off the invalid.”

Mercy tried to smile, but burst into tears instead.

“What is the matter?” he asked, disappointed and displeased.

“Oh! William, that dear kind Mrs. Brown has left me. She was sent for to a lady who

is taken suddenly ill. I am afraid to be without her, she has been so kind to me, and I miss her so much—so much !”

Herbert was mortified in the extreme. He felt he was making a grand sacrifice to duty in spending a day with Mercy, when his whole heart was elsewhere ; and he expected that she would have been intoxicated with joy at the honour—and here she was too busy bemoaning the loss of her nurse to realize the distinction he was intending to bestow on her.

“ Where has the woman gone ? I will see if I can bribe her to return,” he said, and Mercy did not notice the bitterness with which he spoke, only thanked him eagerly for his kindness. Neither did she notice that he took some things out of his drawers, and left the room, portmanteau in hand. The widow stepped forth to show him the way to

the house where Mrs. Brown was now engaged. At his desire the good body spoke to him; the lady was better, but wished her to remain; and as the time due to Mrs. Jones was past, she had not thought of returning. But Mr. Jones paid her the stipulated two sovereigns on the spot, and added a half-crown, the last piece of money in his pocket, with the request that she would go up to Albert Place for a few hours on the morrow; and to this she consented. Then Herbert turned to the widow.

“You will tell Mrs. Jones that her friend will return to-morrow, and I shall be back on Monday evening,” he said, and before she could ask a question he had disappeared.

He repaired to Mr. Barford’s house, and his friends there made very merry over his account of Mercy’s preference for Mrs. Brown.

“It is natural enough,” Mrs. Barford re-

marked sarcastically ; “ she is her equal by birth and education, and a much more congenial companion than you can be. I only wonder how she has put up with your refinement for all these months !”

Herbert shrugged his shoulders.

“ I shall go to Windsor by the first train to-morrow, to solace myself with a congenial companion,” he said ; “ only having given my last half-crown to my rival, I must borrow some money somewhere.”

“ You must hit on some plan of replenishing your purse, old cove,” said Barford ; “ you say the lady is wealthy ; can't you borrow of her ?”

“ I would rather cut my throat !”

“ Humph ! an unpleasant alternative. When do you propose to make her and hers your own ?”

“ When I can get free of my present tie.”

“What! out and out free?”

“Yes, if possible. Or till we can get Mercy away somewhere, where she can't peach.”

“And in the meanwhile you must have a good sum of money? You can't send Mercy to that place where her aunt is without the chink-chink; you can't give suitable gifts and make frequent visits to the lady without chink-chink—of course I *can* lend, but I am reasonably anxious for security.”

“Of course. I'll hit on some plan in a few days. But you'll lend me a fiver to start with in the morning?”

“Well, this once, because I admire your genius, and do believe you will hit on a plan. Now perch, put your head under wing, or you won't be able to sing pious songs to-morrow. Go to roost, dear child. I am going out on business.”

Herbert went to bed, and slept soundly—that well-trained conscience of his not at all disturbing him; and he hastened down to Windsor by the first train in the morning, and electrified Alice by his sweet music, which she felt to be synonymous with that of the angels in heaven.

Thus Mahala watched the house in Albert Place, and the churches in the neighbourhood, for a worshipper who was busily offering his incense at a distant shrine.

On Monday night he found Mercy ill; she had fretted herself into a feverish attack, and the widow reported how grave the doctor had looked. Herbert looked grave, too, but he was annoyed rather than grieved, and began to suspect that this docile Mercy was going to give him a great deal of trouble. The baby, too, was out of sorts, and cried incessantly, utterly preventing its sick mother from

sleeping, and greatly disturbing the rest of its aristocratic father on the couch below stairs.

It was a trying week, and Herbert was too much worried to leave his talent free to strike out the plan for replenishing his purse, and when on Saturday he applied to Barford for a fresh loan, he met a very grudging acquiescence. This over, he started for the railway station, not caring to see Mercy, against whom he now felt aggrieved. It was on his way thither that he was met by Isabel, and learned, by her repetition of Mahala's question about Albert Place, that Mercy's retreat was discovered. He was in some doubt whether he should return to apprise the Barfords of the danger ; but inclination prompted him to proceed to Windsor, and to that he ever yielded, little imagining in the present instance that he was guiding the bird of prey to his most cherished nest.

Herbert and Barford walked home from business on the Monday night, that they might really arrange a definite flight. The latter suggested that in a short time he should need to take a journey in the service of the house which employed them both, and he proposed to delegate his office to Herbert, that, in executing it, he might kill two birds with one stone.

This point agreed upon, Barford promised to advance the needful for Mercy's journey, and the only obstacle that interfered with the execution of the project was Mercy's illness. On Tuesday, however, they eluded the doctor. Herbert bore her and the baby off in a cab, promising to go with them every step of the way. She was startled on seeing Mrs. Barford at the station, and clung closer to her husband. He hastened to place her in a comfortable carriage, then left her to take the tickets. When



he returned he put the slips of pasteboard in his wife's hand, then, turning to Mrs. Barford, said,

“ You had better get into the carriage and keep my place for me. I must run for a newspaper.”

She did as he desired, receiving a look from him which informed her of all his plans.

The bell rang, the guard hastened to his post, the porters locked the carriages, and Mercy watched in agonizing disquiet for her husband's return. He did not appear till the train was in full motion, then he ran a few steps by the carriage side, cried out, “ I will come down to-morrow,” kissed his hand gracefully, and the train whirled on. Mercy covered her eyes and wept; her fears were awakened, but they stopped far short of the truth. She doubted his coming on the morrow, but she

did not suspect that, with that wave of the hand, he had taken leave of her for ever.

Mrs. Barford made no effort to comfort her. On reaching Weston she called a cab and placed the mother and child therein ; she directed the driver where to go, and then entered herself. They proceeded for many miles, and then the driver stopped beside the bridge, the nearest point to Sea-wall Cottage possible for a carriage to come.

“Can you not take us nearer?” asked Mrs. Barford.

“No, ma'am, it ain't possible. Maybe you'll send some person up for the luggage?”

“Yes, I shall return with you myself, so please to wait.”

The man promised, and Mrs. Barford and Mercy, with the baby and one or two of the light parcels, proceeded along the path to the sea-wall, and then walked side by side upon

the broad causeway afforded by its solid top.

It was low tide, and for half a mile nothing but mud met the eye seawards. Landwards all was on a dead flat, and in front the long stretch of sea-wall, with the cottage nestling under its shelter, and rising one story above it; and then beyond again the little harbour, the Pylle, with its boats, and the church-hill behind it.

The scene oppressed Mercy with a blank feeling of desolation; and it was confirmed upon reaching the cottage and finding it tenantless.

The door was not fastened, and they entered. Mercy at once recognised some ornaments on the chimney-piece, familiar to her memory, having been purchased by her aunt on a visit to Trowbury. Her heart bounded at the sight, and she laid the baby on the table,

building her parcels up round it, and proposed to go and seek some one to bring the luggage.

But the driver had already pressed a man into the service ; and he was seen approaching with the largest box on his shoulder, and the cradle under his arm.

“ You may leave me now, Mrs. Barford,” said Mercy. “ Aunt will come back soon, and I know you want to get back to the station in good time. I be all right among my own people here. You can tell William so, if you do see him before he starts to-morrow.”

So Mrs. Barford left her, and Mercy put her child into the cradle. The cottage seemed poor and inconvenient, but there was a snug homeliness in it, which she had been a stranger to for long. She found fuel, and made up a fire, and presently the door

opened, and a boatman entered, followed by a lad.

“Uncle, don’t you know me?” asked Mercy, as he stared blankly upon her.

“Well, can ’ee be Mercy Broad?”

“Mercy Jones, uncle. I be married near a year.”

“Then you’re all right,” he said, kissing her. “Poor Aunty would ha’ been glad to ha’ knowed that, Mercy. Ye’re welcome here; but where is your husband?”

“He be coming to see me, soon, Uncle. I have been ill, and wanted change of air.”

“Then ’ee’ll get it here, my maid, only it’ll be lonesome when t’ lad and me is out.”

“But I’ve got my babby,” exclaimed Mercy.

“Then ’ee’ll be all right at all times,” said the boatman.

## CHAPTER VI.

## IN EXTREMIS.

While some, whose soul the old serpent long had drawn  
Down, as the worm draws in the wither'd leaf  
And makes it earth, hissed each at other's ears  
What shall not be recorded—women they,  
Women, or what had been those gracious things,  
But now desired the humbling of their best.

TENNYSON'S *Idylls of the King*.

MERCY was unaccustomed to visitors. She scarcely ever received a call in Albert Place, for when the Barfords came they looked in when her husband was at home. Imagine then her utter bewilderment when the

door of the cottage burst open and Mahala entered !

“ Mahla !” Mercy gasped forth, and threw herself into her sister’s arms.

She wept quietly for some time, before it occurred to her that evil might come to her husband from Mahala’s discovery of her retreat. Then she raised her head, and asked,

“ What have you come for, Mahala ?”

“ I be come a-purpose to know if him has married you or wronged you, Mercy. It has cost I a deal of trouble and expense to find you, so don’t keep me from my answer.”

Mercy glanced at the poor dying babe, then at her sister’s stern face.

“ Oh, Mahla,” she said, “ you hadn’t ought to wrong either him or me with such a question. Of course I’m his wife.”

She looked up again, hoping to see the cloud clear from the dark face, for what could make her elder sister so angry as a doubt of her virtue? But the cloud grew denser, and the eye flashed fiercely.

“Of course! I don’t see any of course! Better girls, and dutifuller than you, has been deceived! You allays did reckon yourself a saint, you did, Mercy, and him another, and you won’t believe, even when I tell you, that him’s as black as the very devil himself!”

“No, I won’t believe it. He’s never said a hard word to me, and I won’t hear hard words of him. Never had girl a better husband!” Mercy exclaimed, vehemently, and then burst into a flood of passionate tears.

“Be quiet, child,” said Mahala, authoritatively. “Handsome is that handsome does. You show your marriage certificate to I, and



then I can say I have seen it to those as has their doubts."

Mercy started.

"Oh! where is my workbox?" she said, "that he gave me on my birthday?"

She stood perplexed, her poor brains quite distracted. Then she remembered having put it in her trunk in that hasty packing, and she tore the package open. As she tossed the contents to this side and that, in the eager desire to find the cherished enamel work-box, Mahala drew near, and noted with a curious eye all the contents of the trunk. There were pretty tasteful garments, books of poetry and fiction, toys, such as pocket-books, scent-cases, and personal or drawing-room ornaments; nothing costly, but all denoting indulgent care. Mahala picked up the pocket-book and opened it.

Mercy looked up.

"Do you know whose picture it is?" she said, as she saw her sister examining the portrait enclosed in the pocket-book.

"Yes, it is your husband's."

"Yes. Is it not a good likeness?"

"Pretty good, but I don't mind it much. Is that the certificate?"

She pointed to a loose paper lying among the ribands and kerchiefs, and Mercy turned to look at it; at that moment she abstracted the photograph.

Mercy resumed her search, and presently drew forth the desired box. She opened it, and took out the document so important to her position.

"It looks all right," said Mahala; "but what for did he call hisself Jones?"

"For fear of the old master—of Mr. Aylmer. He did say that his father would cross him out of his will if he was to know."

“Proud hypocrite! He’ll have something to glorify over before long, he will. Ay, he will be proud of his son; and the missis, with her holy sayings, and religion, will praise God, and Miss Isabel and Miss Rose ’ll be proud. They’ll all be proud together when him’s hung for bigamy!”

“Mahla, are you mad?” cried Mercy. “Hang him!—my husband!—my William!—Mr. Herbert! No judge or jury could have the heart! You are surely mad, Mahla!”

Mahala’s cruel eyes glared on the terrified woman.

“No, I ain’t mad,” she said. “You do think to be a fine lady!—you do pride yer-self on being a married wife, and a lawful mother, and you did have no thought for I when I was in disgrace and trouble! What for should you be a lady-wife, and a happy mother, and me——”

“ Oh! Mahla! Mahla! don't grudge at me. Look at my child—she scarcely lives, I have given up hope almost! Oh! my baby, my only treasure, God save you!”

“ And what for should He save your baby any more than mine? My little lad did give one cry and no more. If he had lived I might have been a different woman, but he didn't. God and man have ever been against me, and why not against you? What right has your child to live any more than mine had?”

“ But, Mahla, are you married?”

“ No, I ain't!”

And Mahala looked so fiercely vindictive, that Mercy shrank away in fear.

“ Ay, ay, that's it, my fine madam. You be shocked that I have a child that didn't ought to have, and you be feared that your gown'll touch me, and get some bad infection

off me. But your day is coming, Mistress Aylmer; I saw your husband courting another woman—a born lady, and such a beauty! and with heaps of money—it was only last Sunday—and folks do say he be going to marry her very soon, and no one guesses that he has a wife already. He may marry her if he likes, for I haven't no call to pity fine ladies; but he shall not enjoy her money, for I'll bring that against him will spoil his sport. A day is coming when Mahala Broad will get her revenge on them as has looked down on her!"

Mercy threw herself at her sister's feet.

"Oh! Mahla, spare him! It's me that's guilty. I shouldn't have let him marry me; it wasn't likely that so fine a gentleman could be content with me, such a poor ignorant girl! If I had refused to marry him, as I had ought to, he would now be free to marry the beauti-

ful lady, and be happy. Oh! my husband—my noble, beautiful man!—it's your foolish Mercy has been your ruin!"

"Get up, girl, and don't be a fool! Him's been your ruin, not you that's been his. If you had proper spirit, you'd be for revenge too!"

"No, no. Say and do what you like to me, only don't go against him, Mahla!"

"Get out with you!" cried Mahala, fiercely; and flinging her sister from her, she rushed out of the cottage, and did not look back till she reached Weston.

Mercy arose stunned, less with the fall than with the terrible light that had flashed upon her—that she, loving Herbert with all the devotion of her nature, should be the cause of his sin to God and his ruin before men, seemed so absorbingly horrible to her, that she could not turn her mind from the thought,

but sat on the floor where Mahala had left her, her dilated eyes fixed on the heterogeneous mass of articles thrown from her trunk, but in reality seeing nothing but the image of her husband, scorned and execrated by a hooting mob, and crushing the hearts of all who loved him. How long she might have remained thus no one can tell, had she not been roused by a moan from the little sufferer in the cradle. The lethargy that had crept over it now gave way to successive fits of convulsion, and the mother's despair reached its climax. She flung the door open.

“Oh! come to me some one, for my child is dying!” she cried; but only the sighing wind answered her, and the roar of distant waves.

She shaded her eyes and gazed seaward, but, though the tide was coming, there was no sign of any boat. Should she run to the

Pylle?—it was fully half a mile, and the child might die as she went. She held the poor infant to her breast, but it could not be comforted even there; it gasped, and struggled, and fought, and then the tiny limbs ceased their conflict, the head lay motionless—the troubled soul had fled.

Mercy sat stunned for some time, and still no one came. A new thought seemed to strike her, and she lit a candle, and washed her babe as carefully and lovingly as when it had been her only joy and pride. She was not weeping now; her colourless face was calm, and her eyes radiant with the grand power of self-sacrifice. The wind was rising, and the waves of a spring-tide were coming in, and that frail woman was alone with death, yet she started not, nor trembled, nor was conscious of any fear.

Meanwhile Mahala had reached Weston,



and returned to London by the mid-day train. It was a golden August evening, and the harvesters were busy with their fruitful toil, while ripening fruit hung in rich clusters on the orchard trees. But Mahala saw none of these wayside beauties, nor a dark cloud rising in the east; her eyes were full of a lurid light more dangerous and cruel than the lightning's flash, and her large and full lips were compressed with a stern purpose. She sought the house of Mrs. Barford, and was ushered into her presence. Mrs. Barford looked uneasy, and Mahala thought it was time to speak out plainly.

“Pray, ma'am, what does Mr. Jones intend to do with my sister Mercy when he gets married to yon fine lady at Windsor?”

Mrs. Barford looked somewhat relieved.

“*Do*, Mrs. Broad? Nothing can be *done*.”

“Then will he keep two wives? And will his friends consent to his doing so?”

Mrs. Barford shrugged her shoulders, and remained silent for a few minutes, while she took the moral and intellectual measurement of her tormentor; then she spoke.

“Mrs. Broad, you are a sensible woman, with intellect above your station, that I have learned both from my own observation and the remarks of Mr. Jones. You cannot have moved about in the world without learning that it is a most unusual and unsuitable thing for gentlemen to marry servant-girls. A maid may have a pretty face, but a man soon tires of that, and wishes her anywhere to make room for one in his own station. Now, Mr. Jones feels very kindly to your sister, and if we could persuade her to go to her parents in Australia, and say no word of all that has happened, he will give her three

hundred pounds. This is a good offer, Mrs. Broad, better than is often made to such as her, but she is not one to listen to reason. If I were to tell her that I know of one that would go abroad with her, and marry her on board the ship if she liked, almost as sightly a gentleman as her husband that now is, why, I am sure she would refuse to hear me, and be enraged at what she would call my wickedness. She does anger me by her righteous ways."

Mahala's evil eyes glistened. She believed she could allure Mercy away by persuading her that she would thus save her husband, and then the money.

"If I could persuade Mercy, what reward would be gived to I?" she asked.

"Ah, in that case, Mr. Jones would give one hundred pounds to yōu, and two to Mercy."

“That ’ll do. Her be busy with her sick babe to-day, and safe enough. I will go to her to-morrow and settle things. I’ll call on my way, and if you’ll get me that promise from Mr. Jones in writing, I’ll not be long in doing my part. But it must be signed ‘Herbert Aylmer,’ if you please.”

Mrs. Barford nodded. Then she proceeded to press Mahala to stay all night with her. She knew how her evil face had haunted Herbert, and had strong reasons for wishing to delay her return to Windsor. Mahala divined by her eagerness that she wished to hinder her return, so she became more resolved upon it, and presently succeeded in duping her adversary by a cool falsehood.

“I be’nt going back to Windsor no more, ma’am. I have friends in the City, and I shall bide with they, and look about the shipping, and get a passage taken for Mercy.

I shall get a friend to send me my things, and then write to the missis that my sister is so bad I can't leave her. A hundred pounds isn't to be had every day."

So Mrs. Barford was satisfied, and proceeded to inform a certain *roué* who had fallen deeply in love with Mercy, that she would sail to Australia with the first outward-bound vessel. It would be easy for him to take a passage with the same captain, pretend to break to her the news of her husband's sudden death, comfort her, and persuade her to become his wife ere they reached Melbourne. All seemed easy, and the conspirators rejoiced.

And Mahala did inquire about vessels for Australia, and heard of one that was to leave England in a few days; and she did engage a passage for the victim. Then she hastened to Paddington Station, not venturing again

to trust herself on the other side of the river, and reached Windsor as the evening shades began to deepen. There she heard news which threatened the destruction of her whole scheme of revenge, which was dearer to her cruel vindictive nature than even two hundred pounds.

## CHAPTER VII.

## DECEPTION.

Foe of mankind ! too bold thy race :  
 Thou runnest at such a reckless pace,  
 Thine own dire work thou surely wilt confound :  
 'Twas but one little drop of sin  
 We saw this morning enter in,  
 And lo ! at eventide the world is drown'd.  
 See here the fruit of wandering eyes,  
 Of worldly longings to be wise,  
 Of passion dwelling on forbidden sweets :  
 Ye lawless glances freely rove ;  
 Ruin below, and wrath above,  
 Are all that now the wildering fancy meets.

KEBLE.

FOR once in his life Herbert Aylmer had not  
 been quite as bad as he seemed. For he had  
 been out of reach of the tidings of his wife's

grief and his child's danger, and so was not guilty of voluntarily turning a deaf ear to their cries.

On reaching London upon the Monday morning, he hastened to Mr. Barford's office, and found there that the journey into Wiltshire, to be undertaken by one or other of the firm, would brook no longer delay. He received a promise from his friend to look after poor Mercy, and let her want for nothing; and he drove to Paddington at once.

He paused at his lodgings to give directions for the forwarding of his letters, little suspecting that the Barfords had withheld his address from the poor forsaken wife.

A few hours sufficed to transact his business in Salisbury, and he then took a gig, and drove across the country, along chalk roads, and over wide downs, till, as evening drew on, he reached Upper Chalkley.



His parents received him with the greatest affection; he could not but notice that the meal spread on the table was of the most scant description; but as his mother and Rose seemed to be eating it with relish, he at once persuaded himself that its plainness was their choice, not necessity, and remained happy in that conviction.

Mr. Aylmer called him aside.

“I want your counsel on a knotty point, my boy,” he said. “The premium on my insurance policy is due, and—and—I cannot lay down the money. Yet it would be a sad pity, as I am now situated, to forfeit the insurance.”

If the Prince of Darkness had stepped *in propria persona* between father and son, and, resigning all claim on the much-trying soul of the one, had offered a dazzling price for that of the other, the temptation could not have

been more patent to the keen instincts of Herbert Aylmer, than it now was. Yet such an adept was he at the art of self-deception, that he lulled conscience at once with his usual opiates.

“Only for a time,” he said; “a few days, weeks at most, and I can return it with interest.”

But few as the moments of conflict had been, the flitting impulses of good and evil had cast their shadows on his expressive countenance, and his father remarked, but misinterpreted them.

“My dear boy!” he exclaimed, grasping his hand, “do not let this confession of mine pain you. My present embarrassment is but temporary; it is entirely caused by Mahala’s peculations, and has nothing in the world to do with—anything else you know about.”

In thus speaking, the fond old man ex-

ceeded truth, for he had invariably paid the premium out of the interest upon his private fortune, which had been recently swept off by Herbert's debts. But Herbert took him at his word, easily persuading himself that he had but relieved his father of an idle sum of money, that brought little in, and was never destined to be of much use to anyone.

So he returned the pressure of that warm frank hand, and replied, with downcast eyes, under whose drooping lids were concealed the last remnants of shame which hardened conscience had spared ; and his father accounted his averted look modesty.

“Give me the policy, my father, and I will be responsible for the periodical payments, until better times. You must sign it over to me, to enable me to do this.”

The old man could not utter a word for some minutes, his emotion was so great. He

clasped the slender form of his son in his arms and pressed him to his heart. When he could speak he said,

“I do not offer you thanks, Herbert ; but when I tell you that your delicate and generous aid gives me such joy that it more than atones for all that I have hitherto suffered, you will understand what my feelings are. Of late a strong impression has settled upon me that I am not long for this world ; and many a night I have lain awake dreading what might come to your mother and Rose, if, in my straits, I let this insurance lapse.”

Again, and for the last time, the flitting shadows crossed the sensitive face of Herbert Aylmer ; then he said, deceiving in the same moment himself and his credulous father,

“Trust my mother and Rose to me, father. I have a foreign appointment promised me—

only continental, not colonial, and there I shall make money fast. Under better auspices your health will soon regain its power, and all will be well. Trust in me and in God, my father, it is so sweet to look up !”

Love and trust beamed from the father’s swimming eyes, and spoke in the tremulous pressure of his hand. He moved towards the door, but his son detained him yet for a few moments.

“May I beg of you not to speak of this little transaction to my mother or the girls,” he said.

A choking sob burst from the old man, and the tears, long repressed, fell unrestrained. Herbert passed his arm round him, for he was tremulous with emotion ; and the father clung to him as a girl does to a mother.

“My noble boy !” he cried, “I never appreciated you until to-day. You shrink from

the praise of your mother and sisters—you would hide your good works, and——”

“I shrink from what I do not deserve, father,” the son interrupted; and the ring of the words was so like the true metal of modesty, that the adept at deception almost believed in himself.

“Enough,” ejaculated Mr. Aylmer, “I will not rob you of your reward. Your noble work shall be done in secret. But one day they shall know all, Herbert; it is only for a time that I will consent to any concealment. I am more than thankful to be spared explanations at present, which might rouse the suspicions of my dear ones as to the distressed condition both of my affairs and my health.” He said these latter clauses in a lower voice, and Herbert contrived not to hear them.

Till late at night the devoted son sat at his mother's side, his arm round her, her

pale face pillowed on his shoulder. He hinted in low whispers at the love that had taken possession of his heart ; said that he would write and explain all soon, but for a time they must keep his hint a secret, and believe in him even should appearances seem against him. He spoke of the purity and truth of Alice's character, but without mentioning her name, and all who heard were impressed with the natural deduction, that one who so loved and valued purity and truth in another, must himself be pure and true. This was the conclusion he came to himself, and the slight discrepancy between words and deeds he passed over as unworthy a thought.

Mr. Aylmer kept his promise of not telling of his son's generosity in detail ; but he spoke so enthusiastically of his nobility of purpose and exalted unselfishness, that he made a

deeper impression upon his wife's mind than the actual promise would have done. So when Herbert took his departure on the morrow, she hung about his neck, blessing him again and again, and proclaiming her pride in him, and her thankfulness that God had made him what he was ; and Rose said, with sparkling eyes, " My noble brother, I am proud of you ;" and the father wrung his hand again and again, as he whispered, " Only for a time, my boy—only for a time. We will have no permanent secrets."

He drove to the station, and took the train to Chippenham, where also he had business to transact. There he was detained for many hours ; but as no letters awaited him at the post-office, he felt quite easy, and spent the night there.

• On Wednesday afternoon he was in Lon-



don again. Barford told him that all was well ; Mrs. Jones had not written since Monday, and then she was fidgety about a slight ailment of the child's, and quite taken up with that. He then recurred to the main point, money, refusing any longer delay, and Herbert quickly satisfied him. A short drive, an interview of ten minutes, and Herbert had upwards of four hundred pounds wherewith to satisfy his creditors.

“Is that all!” exclaimed Barford, when he saw Herbert's exultation over what seemed to him a large sum. “Look you, Jones, it will not do. You can't get rid of Mercy under three hundred, and you owe me more than one hundred. Then there are three sets of lodgings owing for, and if it comes to a chivy, you'll not care to have a whole pack of small debts on your heels. Can't you gull Armstrong out of a loan?”

“To be sure I can—he hinted at offering it some days ago, and I forgot it, for I dared not ask him for a large enough sum, and I did not see my way to this good haul. I will go to him at once.”

Sir Henry had a young brother whom he wanted to get out in the world, and as he heard that Lord Dungarret had received some diplomatic appointment, he thought he might find a place in his office for Harold. This Herbert readily promised, and Sir Henry as readily gave a bank order in exchange for Lord Dungarret's I O U, as he had given empty thanks in exchange for more empty promises. This done, and a letter from Alice perused with rising colour and beaming eyes, and Herbert returns to Barford, the two proceeding together to procure a certain little document, to be made use of at Windsor in the morning. This done, and away to

Windsor, where Richard Iveson had arrived some hours before.

Alice had watched for the post in great anxiety on that Wednesday morning, and it was a sad disappointment to her when no letter came from Richard. There was one from Dungarret, promising to be with her in the evening, but she would take no further step till she heard from Richard. But even as she communed with herself, Richard arrived in person.

Mrs. Gerald was astonished, and not quite pleased; but Richard soothed her by proposing to stay at the hotel, and then the invitation to Fair Oaks came from herself. So, after a little fencing match, in which he acquitted himself well enough, because he was quite indifferent to his adversary, he was established for a two nights' visit.

During this discussion between her cousin

and her friend, Alice had written to Dungarret to advertise him of the arrival, and the favourable opinion that he had whispered regarding the marriage.

The two men drew aside together in the Arbutus walk.

“Lord Dungarret, will you explain to me, as Miss Hilary’s trustee, your reason for desiring so hasty a marriage?” said Iverson.

“My dear fellow, you know already of the debts that my past lavishness has loaded me with. Some are paid, but many still press. Here is a list of my liabilities; they are not heavy for another man, but bad enough for me, trammelled as my estate is.”

“They are very slight, my lord. I dare almost advance you what will clear them, and then you need not so hasten the marriage.”

“But my appointment! I must proceed to Holland this week.”

“Well, but can you not return for your bride?”

“Impossible! Besides, I am subject to certain persecutions, which only the presence of a wife can protect me from.”

“My lord, I require your solemn oath that you are clear from any trammel that should prevent you marrying.”

“Upon my soul I am! All that goes against me in this particular dates years back, and the faults were more those of imprudence than of vice. I am beset by a designing woman, who presses claims upon me, but she has never been such as you could have thought should ask anything from me. Much my senior, and with no character for years before I saw her.”

“You swear solemnly that this is the case?”

“ I swear as in the sight of God ! ”

“ Alice has consented to marry you so suddenly ? ”

“ She said she would marry to-morrow morning, if you gave your sanction. ”

“ Then I shall not withhold it. Are you ready to sign the settlements ? ”

“ Quite ready. I have directed all she has to be settled upon her. Alas ! I have nothing but the jointure on the estate to add. ”

“ That will do. Come in and sign. You and I will go out in the morning, and Alice and Miss Gerald will meet us in our morning walk. You have sent notice to the clergyman ? ”

“ I have. And the licence and ring are in my pocket. ”

Iveson sighed. He was too much occupied with his hard task of binding down his own

will to the sacrifice, to be as clear-sighted as he might have been to Lord Dungarret's speciousness.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## MARRIED.

At length I got unto the gladsome hill,  
Where lay my hope,  
Where lay my heart ; and, climbing still,  
When I had gained the brow and top,  
A lake of brackish waters on the ground  
Was all I found.

GEORGE HERBERT.

ALICE HILARY sat up the greater part of that Wednesday night. First she indited a long and full letter to her brother George. She had not appealed to him for advice and sanction in the present emergency, because she knew his duties to be so arduous, that it was



doubtful if he could be spared to come to her. She had informed him from the first of her engagement with Lord Dungarret. He was extremely reluctant that she should proceed with it, and he wrote, describing his lordship as not only dissipated, but cold-hearted and revengeful. To the first indictment the nobleman owned with many expressions of contrition, and assurances of amendment already begun ; to the second his absolute devotion to Alice gave the denial ; and the third was partially negated by the cordial manner in which he spoke of George. So Alice and Iveson decided that poor George was naturally prejudiced against his old prosecutor, and they bent all their powers to raise him in the good graces of his former companion.

George Hilary, being of a generous nature, was easily convinced that he had been harsh in his judgment, and was then most anxious

to atone for the injustice he had done him, by believing in him to the full extent of, or rather beyond, his powers of credulity. But he would have been more startled than Iveson was at the proposal of the sudden marriage, and would have been more averse to giving his consent to it.

An instinctive persuasion of this had influenced Alice in keeping silence on the subject till the matter was beyond discussion ; but now she felt self-accused of want of confidence in her brother, and wrote to him more fully to atone for this. She dwelt more than she had ever done before to anyone on her great love for Dungarret, and his devotion to her. She had need to dwell on this for her own sake as well as her brother's, for she felt a tremor vibrate through every nerve when she thought of the morrow, which was as instinctive as her impression of her brother's reluctance to

hasten the event. But when she called up to her imagination the delicate tenderness, the fascinating charm, the exquisite voice, and manly beauty of her lover, her fears vanished, and she laughed at herself for her cowardice.

Mr. and Mrs. Gerald were sound asleep when Alice and Ella left the house in the early morning. Iveson and Dungarret had sauntered out an hour before. That hour was a trying one to Lord Dungarret, for he was being questioned more closely than was at all convenient to him, and he could not yet afford to exhibit the slightest blemish in his domino ; so he was obliged to give a distinct plan of his journey, the name of the boat in which the passage from London Bridge to Rotterdam was taken, and the hotel at which he intended to put up on his arrival. The annoyance of this was aggravated by Iveson's

running over the heads of the arrangements as they waited with Alice and Ella for the stroke of eight o'clock.

It was a lovely morning, the sun shone brightly into the little church, casting the shadow of the yew-tree outside upon the group that stood at the altar. Alice knew the tree well, and shuddered as she *felt* rather than *saw* the shadow upon her; but though she somewhat altered her position, the solemn yew insisted on throwing its gloom over Dungalgarret's bride.

The service was conducted quietly, and without interruption. The curate noticed that when the solemn question at the opening of the service was put, the bridegroom became deathly pale, and half-turned to examine the church. But it was quite empty, except for the clerk, who stood, book in hand, a little in the rear. As the service

progressed, he turned once and again, as if he expected some of the parishioners to attend. But to his infinite relief none came.

A carriage from Windsor stood at the door, as they emerged from the church, and the portmanteau of the bride and bridegroom had been placed in it. Once more Richard folded Alice in his arms, once more he invoked a fervent blessing on her head, and then he put her into the carriage, and watched her drive away with her new lord.

The clerk addressed him with a query.

“The bells, sir.”

“Oh! yes, let them ring; it is but due honour for her, and will show that though her marriage has been private, it has not been stolen,” and he put money into the man’s hand.

As he and Ella retraced their steps, the bells burst forth in merry peals; the vagrant breeze carried the joyous sound up the river; the waters carried it down; and over the sunny fields it sped, saluting the ears of many a one who sauntered out into the lovely gardens before the breakfast hour.

“God bless her!—God shield her!” exclaimed Iveson. “Miss Gerald, you believe she will be happy, do you not?”

“I am quite sure of it,” replied Ella, enthusiastically; “they are wrapped up in one another, and both are so handsome, and so charming, that I see no chance of either becoming less in love with the other.”

“Yes, yes—I hope so—I think so. But,” he added, as if involuntarily, “I feel weighed down with an indefinite anxiety—a shuddering

dread is upon me, which I cannot at all account for."

"I can," said Ella, with an arch look; "you think mamma will be angry, and so do I. She meant to have had a very dashing fête at the wedding, and it was vexatious for poor Alice to lose it."

"Do you think so? I fancy Alice would prefer the quieter ceremony. But it is of no use to speculate on her preferences now. God shield her!"

Ella was right. Mrs. Gerald was very angry, and would have poured out her wrath upon Mr. Iveson for aiding and abetting, but that Annette acted as lightning conductor, and drew the whole storm upon herself, by proposing to sing the wedding anthem at family prayers.

"Upon my word, Annette," was the indignant reply, "you become more absurd every

day. I wonder you don't ask your father to read the marriage service, instead of the morning lesson, for the instruction of the servants."

"It would be very instructive for Ella and me," said Annette, solemnly, for she was now engaged to Mr. Vansittart.

Mrs. Gerald gave her a long look, but she did not quail under it, as she used to do before her success in life was assured. The silence continuing, she broke it with amazing temerity.

"I think girls should study the responsibilities of marriage," she said; "I would have it brought in detail before their attention," and she cast her small eyes upward, till only their whites were visible.

"You idiot!" exclaimed Mrs. Gerald. "I should not at all wonder to hear of you lecturing to young people on marriage! If you



will only make yourself sufficiently notorious, you will be a fortune to *Punch*—that air will well become one of his butts.”

“It is well known that you never appreciated my talents, mamma; but Mr. Vansittart sees me with different eyes.”

“Mr. Vansittart sees you through a golden medium; if you had been without fortune, he would have looked upon you just as I do. I never saw a man so innately miserly; he lingers here to save the food elsewhere, not to enjoy your society.”

Annette darted a look of fury on her step-mother.

“I don’t wonder that you are mortified at my being preferred to Lina,” she said; “but I am ashamed of the way you vent your mortification. I shall be driven to act as Alice has done.”

“I wish to goodness you would! It will

save the expense of a fête ; and Mr. Vansittart will like it, for he will escape gifts to the bridesmaids, and servants and carriage-hire ; and I—I shall escape the disgrace of exhibiting a woman as old-looking as myself as my daughter.”

Annette bounced towards the door, but before reaching it she remembered her breakfast, so she turned, grasped a cup of coffee in one hand, covering its top with a plate containing a hot tea-cake ; then she stuck a fork into some slices of ham, which her father had just cut, and skewered them to the cake. Thus laden, she sallied out of the room.

Harrington laughed out, and all the young ones joined. The merriment spread ; Ella, Mr. Gerald, Iveson, and even the indignant step-mother, were drawn into the laugh, and so the anger died out.

After breakfast Mr. Gerald went up to

London, and Iveson sauntered out into the forest. He sought its thickest shade, and there lay among the ferns, now and then amused by the passing of the shy deer, but entirely free from human interruption.

“What a fool I am to spend my time mooning here! Why don't I go up to London, and home by the night-train? I am of no use here, and the pain of my loss is worse here than it will be when I can be working for her.”

All this he said to himself, but the power to put it in practice seemed taken from him.

He wandered hither and thither, through those stately avenues, over stretches of sunny sward, and in dells full of fern and flowering weeds. Instinctively he gave the preference to the open ground later in the day, for a mist had moderated the ardour of the sun's

rays, and the air had become so sultry that it was suffocating under the trees.

At last he came out in the long walk, and proceeded towards Windsor. He strolled along the street, and saw, without perceiving, a group of persons standing beside the market-house. The group consisted of two footmen, a short set woman of remarkably unprepossessing appearance, and the clerk from Old Windsor. They were all regarding him, but Richard did not notice them, until he heard the clerk say,

“That is the very gentleman that acted as father, and gave the bride away.”

And as the man pointed him out, the woman detached herself from the group, and crossed the street towards him.

“Please, sir,” she said, “are you a friend of Lord Dungarret’s, or of the young lady he married this morning?”

“ I am a friend of the lady. Why do you ask ?”

“ Because I have just come from that man’s wife.”

Iveson felt the ground reel under him, but even in his agitation he was jealous of the name of his beloved Alice. He seized Mahala’s arm, and drew her into an hotel hard by, asking for a private room. When the door was shut, he questioned eagerly

“ Are you sure that Lord Dungarret is a married man ?”

“ I know nothing about Lord Dungarret except that he is in Canada. The man you married your friend to is called Herbert Aylmer ; he passes hisself off by all manner o’ names, and he choosed that of Lord Dungarret to look fine to the lady. He married my sister last September, and I have the certificate and his pieter in my pocket.”

“ Show me them,” he gasped.

She drew them from her pocket. He recognized the picture at once.

“ But Sir Henry Armstrong recognized him as Lord Dungarret.”

“ They be very like one another, sir, as like as twin brothers; this is Lord Dungarret's picter,” and she produced the one taken from Mr. Barford's letter.

“ Yes, very like, but a little different, too. How do you know Mr. Aylmer, supposing such to be his name ?”

“ I lived servant with his parents ten years. Him were a boy when I went, and a man when I left. Him did marry my sister, but him's kept it as quiet as death.”

“ I see. You must come with me to London. We must get the help of the police, and give chase.” He rang the bell, and inquired when a train would leave ; the answer was,

“ At ten o'clock, sir.”

“ Then we have half an hour. Bring writing materials.”

“ Please, sir, where be we going after London?”

“ After them to Rotterdam.”

“ And what address will do for a letter to us?”

“ Hôtel de l'Europe, Rotterdam,” he said mechanically, as he wrote the address in his own letter.

“ I will wait for you in the station, sir,” she said.

“ I had rather you stayed with me.”

“ I must send a message, sir. I'll leave the picter and the certificate; they be all my sister has to hold on to, and you may be sure of my coming back for them.”

She vanished as she concluded; and a quarter of an hour afterwards Iveson found

her in the station ; but she had in the meanwhile sent the address, "Hôtel Europe, Rotterdam," along the wires to Upper Chalkley.



## CHAPTER IX.

## A NIGHT AT SEA.

Behind us, dark and awfully,  
There comes a cloud out of the sea,  
That bears the form of a hunted deer,  
With hide of brown and hoofs of black,  
And antlers laid upon his back,  
And fleeing fast and wild with fear,  
As if the hounds were on its track!

LONGFELLOW.

GAILY the brave steamer paddled away in the broad sunshine down the smooth bosom of Father Thames. The bride and bridegroom stood on the deck watching the receding banks, at first thickly peopled with human

habitations and living souls, but soon becoming scant of population, and then losing all traces of the vicinage of a great city; the cornfields and meadows only varied by an occasional town or village.

The indefinite distress of last night had disappeared, and Alice's face was as radiant as the morning. Every look expressed the fullest confidence in the noble-looking man at her side; and Elise, who had met and joined them at Windsor, looked on her new master and mistress with pride and admiration.

In the glowing sweetness of Herbert's expression the keenest observer could detect no sign of ruth, no mixture of shame or regret, mingling with his joy. Each beaming look that fell on his bride was expressive only of love and exultation.

Alice had never been on the sea before,

and she was deeply impressed with the grandeur of the scene, and the sense of solitude when land was out of sight. The bell sounded for dinner, but our travellers petitioned for some refreshments on deck, and the captain consented, out of consideration for the interest of their position—for in the eyes of all they stood confessed as bride and bridegroom, having seen no one, and spoken to no one but each other, all the day.

The deck was now clear, and the two felt themselves alone.

“Are you happy, my own Alice?” Dun-  
garret asked, leaning forward so as to gaze  
into her eyes.

They were fixed on the horizon, and seemed to take in the vast expanse before her. A thoughtful expression, mixed with awe, filled them, and might well impress Herbert with a suspicion that she was grieving, for it is only

the pure in heart that can be thoughtful and happy, and he must long have forgotten the experiences of such.

She answered him, but without withdrawing her gaze on the expanse of waters.

“Quite happy, dear Fred; but I am awed by this scene. We feel alone with God. I know that He continually holds us in life, but among our familiar daily avocations we do not *feel* this; but now I do feel it—now I realize that at a blast of His breath we might perish.”

“Don't be frighened, love; the sea is very calm; we shall have a lovely sunset, and the moon will be splendid at night. But you will go below and get some rest, and so be bright when we reach Rotterdam in the morning. I assure you there is no cause for fear.”

Alice's lips relaxed into a sweet smile, then

a low laugh rippled on the breeze. She clasped her hands on his shoulder, and, looking fondly in his face, she said,

“You mistake me wholly, darling. I am no more afraid of the sea than I am of you.” Her look became graver as she added, “It is a solemn joy to me to feel thus in the hand of God—to realize that I owe my safety every moment to His fatherly care. Were the storm to rage I should feel the same. Surely, Fred, one of the blessings that accrues to us from having had such good and noble parents is, that on our trust in them we build a higher trust in the fatherhood of God, and love Him with a more realizing love.”

“Yes, darling,” replied Herbert, but his eyes shrank from meeting hers, and his voice was less clear and steady than usual—“yes, love, it is sweet to love. ‘Every one that

loveth knoweth God.' Ah ! religion is sweet, very sweet !”

He drew Alice nearer, hastily pressing a fond kiss on her lips ; and a sailor, who was lounging on the other side of the vessel, grinned at the tender demonstration, and then, with characteristic delicacy, turned his back and leant over the side of the vessel, so that when Alice, with glowing cheek, glanced round to see if they were observed, she was comforted by the belief that no eye was upon them but His whose presence was life to her.

And the sun went down gloriously, Alice watching the splendour with tearful eyes, and lifting her heart in praise to God, glistening with the dew of holy emotion ; and Herbert watched the beauty of sea and sky, and of God's higher gift to man—womankind ; and he enjoyed all while he could dwell in it alone,

but when it spoke to him of God he shuddered and turned away.

“We shall have a lovely night,” he said, in his most flute-like tone, to the captain.

The captain pointed to the east, where a black cloud had gathered, and shook his head.

“But that is coming with the wind, and storms rise against it.”

“They often do, sir, but not always. Storms don’t follow rules and orders like soldiers and sailors.”

“Oh! we shall not have bad weather to-night.”

“I wish you may be right, sir,” was the quiet reply.

Above the weather continued calm, but white waves flecked the bosom of the ocean, and made the ship heave and pitch; and poor Alice became deathly pale, and Elise con-

ducted her downstairs. Herbert's last words to her were,

“Don't be alarmed, my darling, it is only a little ground-swell, and there is no danger.”

Her pale lips quivered into a smile as she replied,

“I am ill, but not afraid. God holds me in His hand, and keeps me in perfect peace.”

It seemed truly as if her old dread of the dark waters were suddenly and entirely removed. She had had much anxiety of late—fears for Dungarret, which she would not express even to Richard Iveson, and infinite doubts which she shrank from defining to herself; and these cares had driven her into a closer and more childlike clinging to her heavenly Father, who bore all her burden for her. Thus her faith had ripened into perfect security, and precluded the very possibility of fear.



On came the dark cloud, slowly, but with certain progress; a little longer respite, and then from beneath its wings rushed the gale. Despite the power of steam, the good boat was driven far out of her course, and the sea raged until it became furious. The storm ever increased in its vehemence, and presently forked lightning rent the dark clouds, and the thunder roared in concert with the roar of the waters. Wave succeeded wave, and now they begin to break over the deck and threaten to extinguish the fire.

A humane fellow-passenger, whom frequent travel had inured to maritime dangers, finds Herbert holding on to the side of the vessel, his cheeks pale with agony.

“You had far better go below,” he said kindly; “any wave may wash right over the deck, and it takes a practical sailor to hold

on under such circumstances. Look out, here is one coming now !”

He seized the young man in his vigorous grasp, or his earthly woes would have come to an abrupt termination, and with his life the troubles of Alice, and Iveson, and George Hilary, and his father—all of whom were out in this storm for his sake—would have ended. But that end had not come yet.

The force of the wave tore his nerveless hands from their moorings, as if they had been those of an infant, and he uttered a cry of horror ; his friend's grasp saved him, and he turned a look of speechless gratitude on him.

The good man led him to the staircase, and bid him go down ; and Herbert obeyed, clinging to the banister for support. There were two doors at the bottom of the stair, and he opened the wrong one.

It was the ladies' cabin, and if he had

looked all round he might have seen figures on nearly every shelf, most unromantically engaged, but he saw them not. Opposite the door were two figures that riveted his attention. Alice lay on a couch, robed in a loose dressing-gown; her gold-tinted hair had escaped from its comb, and hung in waving masses about her shoulders. Elise knelt beside her, sobbing violently, and one fair hand of the mistress was resting on the girl's head. But though his eye took all this in, it was the look of faith and love in the pale upturned face of his bride that entered into his soul. The vivid lightning, the pealing thunder, the savage heaving of the vessel, and the water splashing through the boards above, in no degree altered the calm confidence of that look—the lips needed to give no assurance of the fact that the anchor of that soul was fixed within the veil.

“Dear Elise,” she said, “be comforted and trust in God. Jesus was out in such a storm as this, and He was asleep because he had no fear, knowing that His Father’s hand held Him. So our Father holds us, Elise, and Jesus came to assure us of the fact, and to bring us to know our Father, whom we had forgotten. Speak to our Father, Elise, He is near, listening; speak as Jesus taught us to speak—Jesus, our Saviour and Elder Brother.”

“I cannot, miss,” replied Elise, her teeth chattering with terror; “please to pray for me.”

And Alice, holding the girl’s hands in hers, and with the same calm, childlike look up to God, said, “Our Father;” and her clear low voice sounded distinctly amid the roar of the elements, and every groaning sufferer in the little chamber clasped her hands, and joined, as far

as her feeble strength would permit, in the prayer.

All this while Herbert clung to the doorpost as one paralysed. Only when the prayer ended, and a solemn "Amen" issued from every side of the little cabin, he realized that he was trespassing, and reluctantly turned away. With that pure soul by his side, he might have faced danger, but alone it was unendurable.

All night the storm continued; all night Herbert Aylmer felt himself on the threshold of the unseen world, so full of dread to him. It was one of those loud calls to repentance which God sends once and again to all; and he heard, but, alas! did not obey. In the roar of the thunder, and the beating of the waves, he ever and anon believed he heard a cry like that he had heard four nights ago at Windsor; and once, in a lull, he sunk to sleep

for a few moments, and was awoke by the impression that a white-robed figure was sobbing beside him. He started up, exclaiming,

“ My sweet Alice, I will take care of you;” but, to his horror, she lifted her face, and lo, it was Mercy !

The perspiration trickled from his brow. Of his companions in the cabin, some groaned in illness and some snored in sleep ; none guessed what a conflict of anguish was tearing the soul of the bridegroom.

“ Oh ! God, what can I do ?” he exclaimed beneath his breath ; “ how can I appease thine anger ? If I save Mercy’s heart from breaking, Alice must die heartbroken. If I tell my real name and real nature to her, life will be intolerable to her !”

But blind himself as he would, God made it clear to him in that night of agony that his only right course was at once to confess all to

his bride, and let her go free ere her fame were further compromised, and he half resolved to do so.

The morning broke, and still the storm raged. In the ladies' cabin there was peace. Elise slept at last, soothed by her mistress's firm faith; and the sufferers, though they could not sleep, felt a restful confidence in the watchful providence of God. And Alice lay quiet, though very ill; and, fearing that her husband might be suffering, she ever and anon lifted a prayer to God for him. Thus, the conflict between his good angels and his evil tempters lasted along with the storm till well into Friday.

And now the sky clears, and, though the waters still surge madly, the boat is again able to steer on its course. The suffering of the cabin passengers abates, and their fears subside. A few hours more and they enter the mouth of the Maas, and then still water re-

stores the peace, bodily and mental, of the storm-tossed travellers. Elise rises and dresses her mistress, and, as the evening sun gleams over the waters, Alice appears on deck, and espies her husband gazing abstractedly at the low shore opposite.

She lays her hand on his shoulder before he sees her, and he starts, and utters a cry, half expecting that it is Mercy again. But in another moment he laughs at his own nervousness, and, as he gazes in the beautiful face, and reads the high intellect in the eyes of his bride, his half resolution of confession melts into thin air.

“It can't matter much if I wait for a day or two,” he said to himself. “I must bind her faster to me, and then, maybe, she will not leave me, though I own that I have deceived her, and have a wife on her way to Australia.”



So he drugged his soul once more, and the evening's sun saw them enter the Hôtel de l'Europe, at Rotterdam, the fairest bride and bridegroom that the Dutch port had seen for many a day.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE CONGRESS AT ROTTERDAM.

La Fortune se plait à faire de ces coups,  
Tout vainqueur insolent à sa perte travaille,  
Defions nous du sort, et prenons garde à nous.  
Après le gain d'une bataille.

FONTAINE.

THAT Thursday night was one never to be forgotten in many households. At Mahala's desire the telegraphic wires carried a message of dismay to Chalkley Rectory. The Rector, his invalid wife, and little Rose sat round the fire chatting quietly. Rose looked more blooming than she had done for a long time,

for Charlie Maitland and his sisters had been playing croquet all the afternoon at the Rectory; and Charlie had so effectually played into her hands, that he and she together had won the game, though Rose played far less skilfully than the Miss Maitlands.

And Mr. and Mrs. Aylmer were glad in her gladness, and unspeakably comforted because of their idolised son. They sat silent awhile, and then the Rector gently stole his wife's hand, as he whispered:

“God is very good to us after all, my love.”

Her beaming eyes answered him, and a soft blush on Rose's cheek spoke her Amen. Then it was that the servant entered, bearing the letter, with the well-known telegraphic seal.

The Rector turned pale as he opened it, and his voice trembled as he read;

“Mahala Broad to Rev. Mr. Aylmer.—If

you do want to hinder your son from a great crime, go off this moment to the Hôtel Europe, Rotterdam."

"I don't believe it, Henry!" exclaimed the mother. "That woman is fiendish in her malice. We know that Herbert expected a foreign appointment; he has only gone to look after that, you may depend."

"But, bad as Mahala is, she dared not accuse of 'crime' without foundation. I will, at any rate, go up to town, and see what can be done."

He glanced at his watch.

"Half-past ten. If I start at once I can be in time for the midnight train."

"But it is such weather! There must be thunder somewhere—such strange wild gusts come from time to time; and listen now, the rain is coming too!"

"That must not deter me. If this alarm

prove a false one, I shall not regret the personal inconvenience of a rough night's travelling; but if it be true, and I neglect the warning, I shall never forgive myself as long as I live."

Neither Mrs. Aylmer nor Rose could answer this, so they helped to facilitate his departure, and he started in good time for the train. He reached London very early, and wrote to Isabel, desiring her to go down at once to Upper Chalkley, for an inward instinct told him that there was a heavy grief in preparation for them all, and he desired that they should meet it together. He sent his letter by a special messenger, before proceeding to Dover.

Isabel's fears had been lulled by her brother's apparent frankness, and, weary with vain efforts, she had given up all further attempt at tracing Mercy, and had not com-

municated again with the widow. When she received her father's letter, telling her of the fear they were in—that Herbert was in some very bad scrape, and that he was off to Rotterdam—it flashed upon Isabel's mind that the crime had to do with Mercy, and she blamed herself bitterly for having allowed herself to be turned from the search.

“If this alarm be a false one, as my mother hopes,” she said, solemnly, “I vow before God that it shall be a warning to me; and I will leave no stone unturned till I find that poor Mercy—find her I will, if I spend all my savings in seeking her! The aim of my life shall be to find Mercy!”

She little guessed how soon she should find her. The same wires that carried Mahala's message soon vibrated at the desire of Richard Iveson, and this was the message they bore:

“George Hilary, if by any means you can

get away, repair, without loss of time, to the Hôtel de l'Europe, Rotterdam. A villainous deception endangers your sister's peace, her name, and her very life."

And George Hilary turned pale with horror ; but the night mail was gone, and he was compelled to wait till morning before he could start on his errand.

Meanwhile Iveson and Mahala reached London, and the inquiries made by the former regarding the trains and packets decided him to drive at once to the London Docks, and take counsel with friends there. He found an old schoolfellow and correspondent who was captain of a Newcastle collier, and he consulted him as to the best means of reaching Rotterdam in the shortest possible space of time. Captain M'Ghee pushed up his hat, and rubbed his forehead.

"There's rough weather brewing, and no

boat will dare to cross the straits to-night ; besides, the land journey would be over-long for your purpose. Look you, mate, my boat is the fastest craft going, and I was just about to start for Newcastle. I should not mind going out of my way on such a good errand as yours, and for friendship's sake, too. Do you come aboard, and we'll go right off at once. The Rotterdam packet that sailed this morning was not a fast one, and the weather will bother her more than it will us. Only, if I help you to catch the blackguard, you must let me help to drown him."

Iveson grasped his friend's hand ; he could not smile ; his anguish about Alice's danger was too intense, but he answered the captain's sally by saying,

"First catch your hare, and then roast it, captain. Get me the fellow, and then we can decide what to do with him."



Without further discussion they hastened on board.

Iveson's heart bounded as the little steamer puffed out of the pool, but his countenance fell as a new fear struck him.

"I say, captain," he exclaimed, "we shall have no end of worry at Rotterdam. I never once thought of getting a passport."

The captain gave a long whistle.

"No matter for that, mate," he replied; "the storm that is coming on will be passport enough for us. Don't you see we shall be driven into the Maas by stress of weather?"

Iveson's stern features relaxed into a smile.

"How fast the boat goes!" he said to the captain.

"I believe you," was the gratified reply. "You don't often see such a fast steam clipper as she is; she can run down any other collier plying in our waters like fun, and she's a good

sea-boat too, as you'll have cause to know presently."

Iveson watched the progress of the admired clipper with eager solicitude. She was soon out of the river, and then the two passengers learned for the first time what a storm at sea was like.

Mahala's terror exceeded anything she had ever felt before, but it was accompanied by such severe illness, that in time she became insensible. The brave little collier battled nobly with the surging waves, and held on her way, for she could be in no danger for many an hour of being driven on the low Dutch coast.

The fearful night, in which Mahala felt a foretaste of the torments of the lost, in the wild din and lurid lightnings, passed away, and the dawn came and still the storm raged, and the tight boat breasted forward like some

bird of indomitable courage hurrying to a threatened nest. On it steamed, animated by the steady courage and resolution of plain Englishmen, who would face danger in any and every form rather than subject a woman to dishonour.

At last the lightnings cease, and the cloud vanishes, the fury of the waves seems but a trifle when the heavens are at peace. The setting sun paints the sea with the colour of blood as the clipper enters the Maas, and its rays are not wholly withdrawn from the earth ere they reach Rotterdam.

Iveson repairs at once to the Hôtel de l'Europe, and asks for Lord and Lady Dunganret; he is told that they are at supper and cannot be disturbed. He asks which rooms they have, and is shown a handsome suite on the ground-floor.

“I am the lady's guardian,” he said, “and

have come from England express to see her on important matters; you need not announce me."

And forthwith he enters the private sitting-room, where the bride and bridegroom still linger over their dessert.

"Richard!" exclaims Alice, and springs to him. "Is anything wrong with George?"

"No, my darling; I have come on pressing business to Lord Dungarret. I would speak to you alone, my lord."

"Certainly, Mr. Iveson," replied Herbert with a strong effort at indifference of tone, which was not quite a success. "I should have thought our conversation of yesterday morning might have sufficed for some time; but as you please."

He led the way into an adjoining apartment, and politely invited his guest to a seat. Iveson

son did not notice his offer, but, folding his arms sternly, he said,

“Mr. Aylmer, you are unmasked. I know the doubly-shameful secret of your disguise and your previous marriage, and I have travelled night and day to rescue my friend from infamy. For her sake, not yours, I have chosen to say this in private; you deserve no pity.”

Herbert's face was colourless, and at first betrayed strong emotion, but he controlled himself fully as Iveson continued to speak; as he concluded he laughed a light cynical laugh.

“Once more,” he said, “I wonder how often I am to be confused about my own identity. If only that young Aylmer would put himself into my power, I would transport him to another hemisphere, and so put an end

to the constant confusion between him and me. But it certainly is the hardest cut of all that we are to have wives in common."

Iveson was stunned. Was it really possible that Mahala was mistaken, or wilfully deceiving him? He produced the two pictures.

"You need not try to impose on me, sir," he said; "I have here Lord Dungarret's picture, and your own."

"Ah!" said the bridegroom, "you have been lucky. How did you come by Aylmer's *carte*? Mine you could easily procure for one bob; it is the misfortune of the aristocracy that the photographers will never allow of their reserving their own copyright."

Iveson handed to him the likeness that Mahala had stolen from Mercy.

"You cannot deny that to be your likeness, sir?"

“Certainly I cannot, by the same token that I paid Lavis a guinea for carting me. Now, let me have a look at Aylmer’s.”

Iveson handed him the second *carte*, the one that had come from Canada.

“A very good likeness, poor old Aylmer; what a jolly fellow he can be! Where is he now?—and what is he about?”

“The last that I heard of him was that he had married his mother’s housemaid, and was hiding her with ingenious cunning.”

“How like him!—a silly romantic fellow, who would marry a low girl instead of playing an ingenious trick upon her, and then expend ten times the ingenuity, and get into a far more serious scrape by getting rid of her. And this is the fair one you propose me to exchange Lady Dungarret for! Upon my word, I am infinitely obliged to you!”

Iveson rang the bell.

“You take too much trouble, Mr. Iveson. I would have done that for you,” said the bridegroom, who saw that he had puzzled his adversary, and gained heart accordingly.

Richard took out his pocket-book and wrote a few words, then tore out the leaf, folded, and addressed it.

“Permit me,” said Herbert, holding his hand for the billet as the waiter answered the bell.

But Iveson stepped past him and gave the paper to the man, saying,

“Immediate.”

When he was gone, Herbert ventured to take the initiative.

“May I ask who has taken the trouble to play this hoax upon you, Mr. Iveson?”

“A person of the name of Mahala Broad,” was the dry answer; and Richard noticed that



the well-made up countenance fell, but the rejoinder came in dulcet tones.

“Not a romantic name. Is she a beauty? —perhaps she has been a victim of Aylmer’s?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Ah! disinterested kindness! Very beautiful, and *very rare!*”

The serpent dwelt on these last words as if they contained a hidden meaning; but Richard did not perceive it.

A silence ensued, and the bridegroom proposed a return to the saloon. Iveson said he would rather they remained as they were, for he had sent for his travelling companion.

His host looked resigned and acquiesced.

The delay is not long. The door opens, and in glides Mahala.

Herbert was taken by surprise and shuddered, but recovered himself instantly.

“You are a perfect Don Quixote, Iveson,” he said, laughing, “to risk your name and that of this charming lady by travelling without companions.”

Iveson deigned no reply to this inuendo, but, addressing Mahala, he said,

“This person declares himself to be Lord Dungarret. Can you swear to his true name?”

“To be sure, I can!” she replied; and her tone was at once sulky and spiteful. “I do swear that his name be Herbert Aylmer. I have knowed him from a child, and I be certain sure that that is him.”

“Here is a perplexing position for a fellow to be in! A woman comes and solemnly swears that you are not yourself!” exclaimed the so-called Lord Dungarret, petulantly. “Mr. Iveson,” he continued, “you should not lend yourself to such bullying. I solemnly

swear to you that I am what I give myself out to be—that I have no wife but the sweet lady in the next room, and that I have never seen that woman now accusing me during my whole life !”

Richard Iveson, himself truthful as the day, could not imagine it possible that a man and a gentleman could heap lie upon lie thus, and he was just abandoning his cause, convinced against his instinct that it was Lord Dungarret before him, when Mahala’s quick ear caught the sound of voices in the hall, and she glided from the room. Herbert thought that she had taken flight, and, locking that door, he opened the one leading to the saloon.

“Alice,” he said, “I will have no concealments from you. The malicious enemy I told you of has traced me here, and has imposed upon Mr. Iveson a tale of vice, which he evidently believes, but which is unfit for your

ear. This much I may tell you, that he charges me with personating Lord Dungarret for the vilest purposes, and wishes to drag you from me ere I have had time to feel you my own. What his motives are for this blind credulity, I am at no loss to divine; I have seen clearly enough that he grudged me my prize, having destined you for himself. I do not believe that he can deny that he has looked upon me as a rival."

This charge deprived Iveson of the power of utterance. No, he could not deny that charge; but was it, therefore, a crime? Stunned, and utterly bewildered, he looked in Alice's face, and read there full confidence and boundless love for the man whose arm encircled her, and for himself pity and distrust.

Hope spread her wings, and took flight. Not the hope of making her his own—that

had taken flight long ago—but the hope of serving, protecting, and living for her. He might die now—nothing remained for him in life ; his heart was dead already. He hardly noticed that Mahala entered, and with her a reverend old gentleman. He hardly noticed the start of the bridegroom, nor the emotion of the old man, as he threw himself upon his breast, crying,

“ Oh ! my son—oh ! Herbert, repent of your wickedness, and come home with me ! ”

But when Alice fell fainting on the floor, Richard Iveson regained presence of mind. He lifted her to the couch, applied restoratives, and soothed her with a woman’s solicitous care.

Meanwhile the father’s truth overpowered the son’s faint denials, and he stood the image of baffled cunning.

The night was far advanced already, and Iveson carried Alice to her room, and left her to the care of Elise. The poor thing neither wept nor moaned—the iron had entered her soul, and for the time paralysed its power even of suffering.

Herbert implored to see her again, but this she had energy to refuse, and his father bore him off, a weeping, baffled picture of weakness. They sailed for England by the morning's boat, just as George Hilary reached Rotterdam. He heard a simple narrative of all that had occurred from Iveson; thanked him again and again for his prompt efforts, and begged him to stay to assist him in bringing Alice home. But Richard gently refused his invitation. Still mindful of all, he took charge of Mahala in returning, and promised to go with her to seek and comfort Mercy. What time remained to him he would

spend in soothing grief. He felt he had got his own permission from God to cease all struggle for life.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE DEATH OF THE FORSAKEN.

Oh, lady, there are lonely deaths that make  
 The heart that thinks upon them burn and ache—  
 The death of the FORSAKEN! . . . . .  
 Last cometh on the night, the hot bad night,  
 With loss of all—of heat, of dust, of light,  
 And leaves her watching, with a helpless stare,  
 The theme of no one's hope and no one's care.

HON. MRS. NORTON.

WE left Mercy dressing her poor dead baby on the night of that eventful Thursday. She had endured all the anguish her feeble nature was capable of enduring ; she had realised that, with the loss of her husband's love, all joy was banished from her life, and she had grasped



the more intolerable knowledge that she stood between him and God's blessing. She had only power to master one thought at a time, so that of her husband's danger became uppermost, and the intense affection of her nature, bearing fruit in self-sacrifice, precluded all power of judgment as to how much was lawfully in her power to give. God knew her weak nature, and from Him she looked for pardon for all that should be wanting in her sacrifice.

When the babe was dressed in its best frock and cap, the mother laid it in its cradle, and took out her little desk to write. She wrote with a trembling hand, heavy sobs breaking from her quivering lips, and convulsing her colourless face. But neither her thoughts nor her words had any of the egotism of grief in them—they were pure from all taint of self. Her letter ran thus:—

“William, my husband, you are free. I had ought to have known that things would turn out so, but I was a silly maid, and had no thought. What I am going to do, I do for your sake, that you may be free to love and be loved, without God being angry with you. My little pet is dead, so I do her no wrong in taking her with me, and I be content. I shall say my prayers before I go out, and Jesus will receive me, for I look to Him. I put on the gown I was happiest in, and dear Miss Rose’s blue ribbon. I should like her to have the locket that you did give to me.” (She had written “to I,” but erased it and put “me,” humbly desirous to the last to do her husband’s bidding).

The letter was signed, “Your loving and humble Mercy Jones,” and addressed “William Jones, Esq.,” and nothing more.

The letter finished, she took out the simple

white dress that she had worn at her wedding, and put it on. She then tied the ribbon in her flaxen hair, and took the little square glass from its nail near the window, and looked carefully to see that her dress was neat and pretty. And all the time the waves were dashing with a noise like thunder against the sea-wall, and the wind was raging furiously.

She forgot her uncle and cousin altogether, and never wondered that their boat did not return with the rising tide. She did not wonder that the waves were higher than usual, quite up to the wall, though they did not nearly reach it in general ; she noted nothing, observed nothing, for her soul was strung up to a great sacrifice.

She kneels by the bedside, and says the prayers she learned at school, feeling no shadow of doubt that her Lord stooped down

to hear ; then she prayed a new prayer, which she herself had composed—" God bless my husband, God save him !" It was a strange coincidence, that two loving, God-fearing women were praying that same prayer to the accompaniment of the same fearful storm—only the one offered the prayer from the summit of earthly joy, the other from the depths of human despair.

The prayer concluded, Mercy rose and took her babe in her arms. She opened the door, but it required all her strength to close it behind her again. Yet she succeeded in so doing, and locked it likewise. Then she fought her way round the corner of the cottage, and with her disengaged hand groped for the steps in the wall. As she did so a wave broke over the massive masonry, and showered a flood of salt drops on her head, and still the tide was coming on.

Slowly and with great difficulty she mounts, step by step, and reaches the top of the wall. The wind tears her locks from their bands, and flings them wildly about in its fury; it does the same to her white drapery, and the noise and tumult almost deprive her of reason. But she has come forth to purchase freedom for her husband, and she keeps the solemn means before her eyes.

Darkness is around her on every side; the cloud-covered sky shows no trace of moon or stars; the falling rain and powdery spray allow no glimpse of lighthouse or beacon. But she can see a white crest advancing towards her, rising as high as herself; instinct tells her that if it reaches her on the sea-wall it will beat her backwards, so she springs forward to its embrace. A downward plunge, a swirl, a cruel blow, and the fierce wave has hurled her against the rough wall, and her

earthly sorrows are at an end for ever.

As the tide goes out the morning dawns. Upturned boats, uprooted trees, drowned cattle, and other wreck, float out into the Channel with the retiring waves, and amongst the wreck the waters carry is a fair woman, clasping firmly, even in death, a six weeks' infant.

Meanwhile the storm had caught Hamlyn's boat in mid-channel, and though he lowered his sail, and he and his boy applied themselves stoutly to the oars, they could not make head against the gale, so they found they must perforce let themselves be driven to Cardiff. They gained that harbour, and were duly thankful for the shelter it afforded.

When the storm abated plenty of work arose for the sailors. Craft were disabled, and must be towed into dock ; boats were missing that had been torn from their moorings ; sons

and brothers were missing; and none who could steer a boat, and find a boat to steer, need stand idle for want of a job.

So Hamlyn worked about the Cardiff waters, all Friday and Saturday, and on Sunday he returned home with the afternoon tide. He found his cottage locked on the outside; within all was silence, but Mercy's few belongings were scattered hither and thither, and her letter lay on the table. Hamlyn could not read, and his lad had not followed him into the cottage.

“Her have went away, then,” he soliloquised; “and no wonder, it must have been awful dreary for she here;” and he took out bread from the cupboard, and kindled a fire, and put the kettle on to boil.

Then the lad came, and his father bid him read the letter. As he did so a new and terrible light fell on their minds, and they

left the food they had prepared untasted, and hurried down to the Pylle to seek tidings of the lost one.

But at the Pylle no one had seen or heard of her ; and surely she could not have made her way along the sea-wall to Kingston in such a storm ! They repaired thither ; but no—not a soul had seen her there.

Then Hamlyn took to his boat afresh, and sailed up the channel, putting in at each landing-place where he thought the body might have drifted, for he felt little doubt now that the poor ignorant creature had called in the aid of the raging elements to end her life.

Far up the Channel, nearly as high as Bristol, he got tidings of the object of his search. Sunday's tide had stranded her on that shore, and she was lying at an adjacent public-house for identification. He hastened



thither, and had no difficulty in recognising her, though she was sadly bruised and beaten by the waves, and her graceful draperies much torn away. A long shred of her dress had become wound round the child by the action of the water, and that had secured it in its place on the mother's breast, after her arm had lost its power to hold it.

Hamlyn conveyed his dead to his humble home, and the neighbours prepared them for their burial.

On Monday evening Mahala trod the path along the sea-wall, accompanied by Iveson.

They knocked at the cottage door, and then entered. The man and boy sat silently at their evening meal, for a white sheet was spread all over the bed, and over a coffin that lay upon it.

Hamlyn started at the sight of Mahala.

“Come hither, Mahla,” he said, “and I will show thee that which should call thee to repentance for all thy bad deeds.” And he uncovered the coffin, and revealed the waxen forms within, the white cerements covering all the cruel bruises of the rough waves.

Iveson stood mute ; his hands clasped, his eyes dewy with unbidden tears. His own bruised heart gave him the clue whereby to read the mystery before him. Had an enlightened conscience not been placed within his bosom, would not blighted love have driven him to the same presumptuous act?

Mahala was quenched. She spoke not, moved not ; but her cruel heart was not touched, her stifled conscience did not cry out, only her nerves were shocked.

“Her did live or die innocent,” firmly

exclaimed the uncle. "None could look at her face in life, and then see its peaceful look in death, and doubt it. I don't know whether that scoundrel that has drove her to this was her husband or not, but I be sure of this that her believed him so to be."

"Him was her husband," said Mahla. "I do know he."

"And where be him now?"

"Give I the letter, and I will find he."

"Wait," said Iveson, for he had small trust in Mahala, "I will take a copy of the letter, in case, by any accident, that should be destroyed." And he proceeded to act upon this decision.

Mahala looked angry, and Hamlyn, when he saw her look, was glad that the gentleman was so much on the alert.

Once more he gazed on the mother and child, and dropped a tear over the forsaken.

Then he offered Hamlyn any pecuniary help that the present stress of affairs might render necessary. But the independent fisherman needed none. He then turned to leave the house.

“Please, sir, where be you going now?” asked Mahala.

“I am going to Upper Chalkley to break this new horror to that afflicted family.”

“Then I will go to London, sir, and get a writing to prove that this here William Jones is Herbert Aylmer.”

“Do so. For that purpose the copied letter will do as well as the true. The husband has a right to the true letter. Change with me.”

She did not like doing this, but there was a firm tone of command in his voice, which she dared not gainsay, so she gave the letter. Then Mahala left the house, and turned Weston-wards.

“I doubt her is a bad one, sir,” said Hamlyn, as he looked after his niece.

“She has very little feeling, and that is bad, especially in a woman,” was the reply.

“Ay, sir. But robbing her master, and running away, and being bad with men, is worse things than having no feeling.”

“I never saw her till Thursday, and I never wish to see her again. She inspires me with a strong feeling of repugnance; but I knew no evil of her until that you now tell me. The sister was surely different?”

“As different as light from darkness, sir. Ah! Mercy was good and lovesome, her was!”

And as Iveson pressed his hand, he thought he heard a sob from the rough fisherman.

## CHAPTER XII.

## CONSEQUENCES

Now Slander taints with pestilence the gale,  
 And mingling cries assail,  
 The wail of Wo, the groan of grim Despair.  
 Lo, wizard Envy from his serpent eye  
 Darts quick destruction in each baneful glance;  
 Pride smiling stern, and yellow Jealousy,  
 Frowning Disdain, and haggard Hate advance.  
 Behold, amid the dire array,  
 Pale wither'd Care his giant stature rears,  
 And lo! his iron hand prepares  
 To grasp its feeble prey.

BEATTIE.

IT was with a heavy heart that Richard Iveson approached the snug Rectory of Upper Chalkley. He asked for Mr. Aylmer, and

was ushered into his presence. The old man stumbled as he advanced to greet his new friend, and his words of welcome were hurried and incoherent; but Richard ascribed this to the painful associations which must necessarily attach to himself in the Rector's mind, and hastened to fulfil his difficult mission.

“I fear, sir,” he said, “that the intelligence I bring will only cause you renewed sorrow, but it in no degree increases the guilt of your son. His unhappy wife is found.”

“I did not know she was lost,” replied the old man, with a tone of such hopelessness, that it increased Richard's difficulty of proceeding with the sad story.

“She has been lost since Thursday night, the night of the storm,” he said slowly.

Mr. Aylmer looked perplexed. He continued so a few moments, and then a light seemed to break slowly on his mind.

“Was she out in the storm?” he said, and his eager look seemed to entreat for a calming answer.

“She has been living of late with her uncle, in a cottage built on the sea-wall, between Weston and Clevedon. She went out in the storm, and has been missing since, but yesterday they found her.”

The old man covered his face and groaned. Presently he spoke, but his voice came thick, and his words were pronounced with difficulty.

“The visitation of God—say it was the visitation of God.”

“Alas! no. Here is a letter to her husband.”

Mr. Aylmer stretched out his hand for it, without raising his head.

A long pause ensued, then the old man opened the letter.



“Herbert is quite upset,” he said—“crushed and ill, I had better look at this first, and break it gently to him.”

He read the lines, his hand trembling violently, and the quivering of the paper greatly impeding his progress in reading. He finished, then exclaimed :

“Alas ! alas ! who can calculate the amount of misery following on one false step ? Poor misguided child !—poor ignorant child ! how has she consummated her own ruin ! She was a lisping babe when she first came to my school, and she never gave her teachers trouble. A docile child, a loving child ! Oh ! sin, sin, what a fair work hast thou marred !”

“The interment is to take place to-night, sir. I thought perhaps your son might wish to see her once more.”

“No, no. He is not fit for the agitation.

But she is his true wife—she is my daughter. It is due to her that some of us should see her—it will soothe her aunt. I will go.”

He rang the bell, and desired the servant to call Miss Aylmer. Iveson was thankful for this, for he strongly felt that the old man was unfit for the effort he proposed.

Isabel was of the same opinion when she heard all. Her face was blanched, sorrow and humiliation dwelt in her eye, but she said calmly,

“You are right, my father; this is due from one of us, but let me go. I am strong, and the agitation will not hurt me.”

After a little opposition, the father consented to Isabel's plan; and it was thus that she fulfilled her vow, and at last found Mercy.

And the news of the poor girl's fate reached her native village ; and some blamed her, and many cast foul suspicions on her fair name, and all execrated the conduct of her husband. The story reached the Hall, and Sir Henry Maitland forbade all further intercourse with the Rectory, and promised his son all kinds of bribes if he would turn his attentions in some other direction. At first this seemed impossible to Charlie, but a winter in London altered his tastes entirely ; and if it did not secure a nobler character to the future baronet, it did secure him against an alliance with a girl whose brother had been married to two wives at once !

Mr. Aylmer wrote a palliated account to his brother ; but carefully as he softened down the account of Herbert's crimes, the baronet was outraged, and he demanded, as the price of his continued countenance, that Herbert

should be sent to a distant relative in Australia.

Such a step as this was simply impossible to those weak but noble-hearted parents. Herbert was ill and wretched, and was not safe away from them. So each devoted himself or herself to cheer and console the prodigal; and he readily adopted their pity for him, and regarded himself as the afflicted victim of circumstances, rather than as the guilty cause of the wide-spread ruin.

The August sun went down in glory, and the darkness was coming on apace, when Isabel's cab stopped at the Pylle. From thence she must proceed on foot to Seawall Cottage, no very easy task where the fields were intersected by deep ditches, and scarce light enough remained to find the narrow planks by which they must be crossed.

But it was darker still when she emerged from the cottage, making one in the train following poor Mercy to her grave. Boatmen from the Pylle readily came as bearers, and boards were thrown across the ditches so that they could walk two abreast. The torches carried by sailor lads shed light enough on their path, and guided them across the dangerous fields and up the hill to the churchyard gate.

Alas! this poor clay had forfeited the right to rest in consecrated ground. But a grave was prepared, through favour and connivance, in a disused corner, where rubbish and rank weeds had reigned hitherto. In silence the procession made its way. Hamlyn and his lad sobbed once or twice; the rest were awed into quiet by the solemn sadness of the occasion, and by the presence of the dead.

The gate stood open, but no white-robed priest met the mourners, proclaiming "the resurrection and the life;" no hope was held forth to them, that in the "latter day" this poor frail "flesh should see God." A silence, heavy as the Egyptian darkness, rested on the earth—death was there, and sorrow, but faith and hope were hidden or absent.

The little band of friends kneeled round that open grave as the coffin descended into it, and prayers arose, and plentiful tears fell, and the petitions and the griefs went up before God. They held the torches over the grave, that all might look upon the coffin once again; and then earth was thrown in, as in more hopeful funerals, and the attendants missed the accompanying words, "in sure hope of a glorious resurrection to eternal life," and their hearts sank to the depth of despair.

All was over, and they turned away. The

light shone clearly from the beacon on the Flat Holmes ; it had revolved but few times during that strange sad funeral, and many a sailor's eye gazed on it, for the tide was fast flowing, and noble vessels were bearing proudly on their way up the channel ; and the sailors and passengers marked the torch-lighted group on the hill, and accounted it some festive occasion.

Isabel parted from the sorrowing uncle, and stole away alone. She sat awhile in the churchyard, weeping bitterly ; a slight breeze arose, and, as it went and came, it brought the sound of the advancing tide, its roar subdued to a plaintive murmur. Thus the waves alone sang a requiem over Mercy's grave, and the only hope entertained by those who loved her was founded on what religionists call "the uncovenanted mercy of God."

And the summer once more faded into

autumn, and soft rains fell, and caused little weeds to spring on Mercy's grave ; and high winds followed, and drifted heaps of leaves around it ; and the sun shone on it, and the redbreasts began to sing beside it ; and one day the mason came, and put up a simple stone cross over it, upon which was engraven :  
“ With God nothing is impossible.”

Another day an old man came, supported by a fair girl, and they knelt beside the grave, and he prayed for the living, for pardon and renewed grace for the young husband ; and the daughter prayed too, only none knew for whom or what she prayed. And as he left the grave the old man stumbled, and would have fallen but for the succour of the young arm ; and when he reached home he could not speak, and his head was bowed as with shame ; and Isabel whispered to her mother that his acquaintance had turned away on meeting



him without any salute, and that the poor had ceased their signs of reverence.

And when did the young husband visit that secluded grave?—never! He looked dispirited and forlorn; all pitied and soothed him, but it never once occurred to him to say: “I will arise and go to my Father, and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”

Only once did it even seem that he blamed himself. The old man was noting his own feebleness, and Rose said,

“You will be better when the storm has blown over.”

He drew the child’s head on to his breast, and stroked it fondly, for, though it was not spoken among them, each knew that Rose had her full share in the family grief.

“My little pet,” the father said, “the storm

will drive me on to a safer and happier shore ere its fury abates ; but," he added, more cheerfully, "I thank God there will be some provision for your mother and you—something will be secured from the wreck."

Then Herbert threw himself on the floor, and groaned, and tore his hair, and Rose clung about him to comfort him ; and the father resolved to wound the tender heart of his son no more by allusions to his own de-  
cease.

Meanwhile, Mahala proceeded to London, and presented herself at Castle Terrace.

"It be all up, Mr. Barford," she said. "Mr. Herbert Aylmer be overtaken, and swore to ; and Miss Hilary be gone away with her brother. And after all, Mercy's dead. Her's drowned herself."

"Then you've lost your hundred pounds?" said Barford, eagerly.

“And you will give the three hundred back to Mr. Herbert?” retorted Mahala.

“Of course!” he said; then added, “when I have deducted my expenses.”

“Then I had ought to have my expenses,” said Mahala.

“Your expenses! for what?” asked the male rogue.

“Oh! for going after Mercy, and getting the certificate!” answered the female rogue.

“How much?” asked he.

“The same as you,” replied she.

Barford laughed a hard wicked laugh, for he saw the game was equal—self-interest against self-interest—no conscience against no conscience.

“Look here,” he said, after some reflection. “If you will say that you carried the three hundred to Mercy, and she promised to go away for it, you shall have the one hundred,

and I will keep the two hundred ; for Aylmer won't dare to make a row."

" Well, sir, I don't mind," rejoined Mahala ; " but it is me that ought to have the two hundred, and you the one hundred."

" But why should you have the most ?"

" Because I tell the biggest lie !"

And she laughed a harder and more wicked laugh even than Barford's.

" But then I have possession on my side. ' Possession,' you know, ' is nine parts of the law.' "

" Well then, sir, let's share and share alike. I won't bear witness for less than a hundred and fifty ; and I would not do it for that, but that he deserves to be punished for having married her, when other men won't marry other girls."

And so the evil compact was sealed, and the money, truly the price of blood, divided.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## A BLANK.

Suivre jour apres jour sans rêver, sans attendre,  
 Ce que chacun d'eux rêve et nul ne doit me rendre ;  
 Et chaque soir marchant sans but dans mon chemin  
 Me dire ; rien ici, rien là bas, rien demain ?  
 Ma vie est un sépulcre.

LAMARTINE.

DAY after day Alice lay exhausted in body, and without any mental energy, at the Hôtel de l'Europe. It was only when Dr. Samson wrote, urging the return of his enthusiastic apprentice, that she could be induced to think of the future.

“ Let me take you to Cousin Gertrude, my poor Alice,” suggested George.

But Alice shuddered at the thought.

“No, no,” she said; “I can never see Windsor again.”

“Then you must go to Thorny Hall,” he said; and Alice returned no answer.

This was the nearest approach to acquiescence he could hope for, and he laid his plans accordingly.

Once more Alice Hilary becomes the tenant of a steamboat cabin, and realises anew the presence and the care of God. But though her intellect sees that His Providence alone saved her from the fearful danger of living in sin, yet her heart is not yet sufficiently submissive to give thanks for the tearing away of those false hopes.

She had obeyed a strong womanly impulse in refusing to see again the wily charmer who had plotted her ruin, but that was no guarantee that her affections were freed from

his sovereignty. And now, at night upon the sea, she cries, "Help me to endure life!" rather than "Help me to consecrate to thy service the life thou hast saved from pollution!"

George had heard from Iveson the account of Mercy's sad end, but the brother had not thought it advisable to acquaint his sister with the fact that Herbert was now free. He would give her high principles time to assert their sway; he would wait till the agony of the wretch was assuaged, and the heart less inclined to become the traitor, and then she might decide whether she could endure to wed a villain.

A hired carriage conveyed the travellers up the vale of the Botcher; Barbara only had been informed of their intended advent, and the dalesmen they met scarcely vouchsafed a glance of curiosity to the passing vehicle.

At the door of Thorny Hall Alice alighted, and a chill crept over her on missing the ever-ready attendance of her old friend, Richard Iveson.

Then had Alice come back to Botcherdale with a secret intention of looking up the old lover? By no means. She had given no distinct thought to Iveson since the moment that the frightful suspicion that he was conspiring against the character and peace of her supposed husband had been forced on her mind. But he was so associated with Thorny Hall and Botcherdale, that she looked as instinctively for him as for Barbara, and missed him as a wearied traveller might an accustomed well of refreshment.

Perhaps Iveson was ignorant of the expected arrival of the mistress of the Hall. Not so. Barbara's first act on receiving their letter was to bring it to him. He at once



noticed that George warned her to say nothing of their coming. That look of suspicion on her face had been stereotyped in his soul, and he fancied that this hint of George's referred to him. For a moment his lip quivered, while his heart registered a stern resolution that she should not be troubled by him; and then he gave Barbara such help as she needed, and desired his respects to the lady whenever she should arrive.

George ran down to his house to say good-bye in the morning, and Iveson received him cordially; but he was too much hurried to remark the altered appearance of his friend, and he started for Edinburgh without ever even thinking of commending his sister to Iveson's care.

Meanwhile Annette Gerald was acting upon her resolution, taken in the heat of offence at her step-mother's irritating remarks. She

spent that very morning in writing Mr. Vansittart a list of her grievances, and suggesting to him how much expense a private marriage would save. This met his views entirely, and he closed with her proposal. But Annette was not the one to keep a secret.

The sad result of Alice's marriage was soon known to the Gerald's. They kept it as quiet as possible, and though the death of Mercy, and the treatment she had received, became matter of public gossip, yet the episode of the marriage with Alice Hilary, and of Aylmer's adoption of Lord Dungarret's name, was hushed up. But when Annette threw out mysterious hints of a new event that should burst upon Old Windsor one day, Mr. Gerald took the bull by the horns, and required a promise from the clergy that he should have timely intimation of any marriage that they were required to celebrate.

Thus Mr. Vansittart and Annette fumed and fidgeted at the delay of the priest; and as he emerged in his white robes from the vestry, Mr. and Mrs. Gerald entered by the south door, and the ceremony proceeded in a matter-of-fact style, the father taking his rightful place. Mr. Gerald quietly insisted on their returning to breakfast, where they found a few intimate friends assembled. Annette was mortified, for she had missed both the romance of a private, and the display of a public wedding. But Mr. Vansittart was content, for the transaction had been a cheap one.

During the course of breakfast, the letters came in. There was a hasty line from George Hilary, reporting Alice's safe arrival at Thorny Hall, and her continued depression.

"Poor Alice!" said the bride, casting up her small eyes pathetically. "What do you say,

Algernon, of our going to Thorny Hall for a long visit after our little tour? It is a terrible position for Alice, alone and unprotected, the prey of slanderous tongues; and you would get plenty of grouse shooting."

"I have no objection to try it," said the bridegroom.

And though Mrs. Gerald knew that the plan would be odious in Alice's eyes, yet she knew it would look more correct in the eyes of the world, than entire solitude in the near vicinity of the superseded lover.

No warning was given to Miss Hilary, and the weary days passed without leaving any suspicion that a more oppressive *ennui* might be impending.

And the days were weary indeed. The poor girl gazed on the purple moors till her eyes were dazzled, but she never stepped forth to meet their freshness. At first she

momentarily expected her adopted brother, and almost felt his protecting presence. Then she felt uneasy, fearing he was ill, and asked Barbara about him. Then Barbara remembered to give his message, and Alice shivered with spirit cold. Richard's "respects to the lady"—what could it mean? And then, as she wondered, a thought overshadowed her, and she slid from her chair to the ground, and lay shrinking and covered with confusion as the dreadful fear encompassed her; but it must be so—she had lost his respect; he looked upon her as polluted!

Her cheek became paler, her step more slow and languid, her heart more despairing, as her mind accustomed itself to this new horror. She ceased to desire the coming of Richard; she feared now to see him; and at the same time she shrank from every memory of Herbert with pain and indignation.

Wheels grate upon the gravel in the approach, and Alice wonders at the unaccustomed sound. A peal of the hall-door bell makes her start and shudder with an indefinite dread, and in a few moments she is clasped in Annette's ample embrace.

“Algernon and I have come to take care of you, poor forsaken one,” she said; “I knew you were so inexperienced and trusting that I felt sure Mr. Iveson would be perpetually here, and people are so ill-natured. Of course, in due time there would be no objection, but as yet you must feel yourself young Aylmer's wife.”

“That I do not,” gasped Alice, as soon as the vehemence of her friend's speech abated; “and you need have no fears for Mr. Iveson,” she added in a low tone, “for I have never seen him.”

“That was very prudent of you,” rejoined

Annette, patronizingly ; “ he may come occasionally now with perfect propriety. Here is Algernon, love, he has felt so much for you.”

Alice was overpowered, and submitted meekly to her captivity. Annette took all responsibility upon herself, bustled down to the village to procure a maid to assist Barbara, and then steamed on to Iveson’s house to make certain arrangements with him.

“ I suppose Mr. Vansittart can shoot over all these moors ? ” she said.

“ If Miss Hilary gives permission, he certainly can, ” was the quiet reply.

“ If ! Why, you know Mr. Vansittart has come down solely to give his sanction to poor Alice. When her name has been so seriously compromised it is highly necessary that people in assured positions should give her their countenance. She has been very prudent in

not seeing you while alone, but that would not mend her reputation in the past, though it might ensure her against further scandal."

Iveson's lip curled.

"I should indeed be grieved," he said, "if Miss Hilary's character needed that any precaution should be taken against my visits. You may rely on my not compromising her at any time."

"That is very generous of you, but no more than is right. By-the-bye, can you let Mr. Vansittart have the occasional use of your dog-cart?"

Iveson replied in a tone of indifference.

"Yes. He can use it when he will; it is of no use to me at present. You can have the horse up at your stable, if you like."

"Thank you—you are so kind. And will you order corn and hay for Miss Hilary?"

"For Miss Hilary!"



“Well, for her guests; it is the same thing.”

“So it appears. I will do as you wish.”

So Mr. Vansittart shot over the wide moors, and quarrelled with the keeper, and dismissed him in Miss Hilary's name; and then applied to Richard Iveson for a new keeper, and our friend Jif Coates was duly installed. And Annette stalked over the moors with a hammer slung across her shoulders, and a leather bag fastened round her waist; and she thus secured an amazing appetite for the grouse daily provided by her husband's gun. She even drove Iveson's horse to the most striking points in the dale, where she made sketches glaringly out of perspective, and most inharmonious in colouring; and managed thoroughly to enjoy herself, although she was a little lonely.

And all this time Alice was alone in heart,

and her soul was weary of life, and she prayed to die. And Richard offered up the same prayer; and if any one had watched him closely, they would have seen signs of an answer. Silver hairs appeared here and there among his dark locks; the expression of deep sadness never left his countenance, and he needed often to pause as he traversed the hilly roads, the aching in his limbs was so overpowering. Yet, weary as he was each night, long before he retired to rest, sleep refused to visit his weary eyes in the night watches. His cup was full of bitterness, and each day's draught seemed in no degree to lessen its measure. He could have borne her loss—he had borne it, but the loss of her trust was killing him.

“I could live if I could still protect her,” he said, “but there is nothing to protect her from. The poverty which once threatened

her is vanquished for ever ; she can never be friendless while George lives, and if she will not protect herself against Aylmer, none other can protect her. I am alone and useless, take now my life from me !”

Nancy would suggest his taking his gun out a bit ; but he shook his head—its weight would be burdensome to him. Then she predicted that the stout lady would throw down his horse, and he had better drive it himself ; but he had no heart to make any effort.

Nancy turned out a true prophet. When November came, with its chill heavy atmosphere, and both Richard and Alice were more hopelessly dispirited than ever, Mrs. Vansittart took a drive on the moors, and coming down a steep hill without seeing its full danger, because of the fog, down fell the good horse, broke both its knees, and smashed the dog-

cart and her own face. She must now stay in till the cuts were healed; and, in the meanwhile, Mr. Vansittart grew very weary of solitude, and they declared it to be impossible that they should take further charge of Alice, although it did economise their board and lodging.

And so it happened that December found Thorny Hall once more deserted; the presence of the pale hopeless Alice in no degree lessening its desolation.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE FLOOD-GATES ARE OPENED.

Two hands upon the breast.  
 And labour's done ;  
 Two pale feet crossed in rest—  
 The race is won ;  
 Two eyes with coinweights shut.  
 And all tears cease ;  
 Two lips when grief is mute.  
 Anger at peace ;  
 So pray we oftentimes, mourning our lot :  
 God, in His kindness, answereth not.

DINAH MULOCH.

THE rains fall unremittingly day after day, and the miners repair to their work with sacks over their shoulders, and have often to wade half leg deep through bog and brooklet ; and

as they encounter one another they remark, "damp," and intend no irony.

The cottage wives complain that they cannot keep their houses clean, "for t' bairns will paddle in and out, and fetch in t' muck;" and the cattle repair to the shelter of the leafless trees in vain.

For three days the rain has continued, and humanity pines for sunshine.

Alice sits in her room more dispirited than ever; but she has been weeping, and that is a better sign. Half an hour ago Barbara came in, and disturbed her as she sat by the fire.

"I want to cinder up t' hearth," she said, and Alice mechanically moved away.

"It's dowlie weather," she remarked, when she had raised a cloud of dust, and jingled the fire-irons till the harsh echoes rang again; "but they say it's lucky for a burial. How-

ever, Hannah Smith 'll flight t' rain for spoiling her new black, I'll apod."

"Hannah Smith!" exclaimed Alice. "Is Mary dead, then?"

"Ay! to be sure. That's why they're burying on her."

Barbara left the room, and Alice leaned her head against the window-frame and wept.

"Happy Polly," she said, "you have gone to God and to your mother—for you sadness and sighing have fled away."

And the rain poured down, and the pretty waterfall at the back of the house, which could seldom even trickle in the summer weather, poured down a plenteous cascade, and Alice listened to the sound of the water and the rain, and thanked Nature for weeping with her.

Barbara came back with tea, and tried a little more conversation.

“There’s such a big watter in t’ Botcher,” she said; “and our lile back is over t’ hip-pings. Smith comed by a piece back on his lile hopie, and he was nigh washed away.”

Alice asked,

“What is a ‘lile hopie,’ Barbara?”

“A galloway, a pony, Miss Alice. One wad think you had been brought up in Germany, not to know what a hopie is.”

“And is there enough water in our brook to make the ford difficult for a pony?” said the girl, in astonishment.

“Ay! for sure; and it’s come down a good bit more since. I’m fearing it may do some mischief in t’ mines.”

“I suppose the men will take care of themselves—they are not unaccustomed to heavy rains.”

“Ay, ay, ye may trust Botcherdale lads for



fending for theirselves. Eh, what a watter is coming out o' t' wood!"

"Yes, is it not beautiful? How it would improve the view if it would flow on like that always! I suppose it is not likely to overflow the rocky barrier between it and us?"

"Nay, honey, that's not likely; it's deep t'other side them rocks, you know, and will hodd a vast o' watter. If they was to brozen, it would come fast enough; but they're grit, and as strong as iron."

She drew down the blind, and begged her mistress to come and take her tea.

And Iveson sat alone by his fireside, listening to the water dropping from the eaves, and left his tea untasted.

Steadily the rain poured on, and the floods rolled down the valley, sweeping away banks and dam-stakes, and doing more and more damage as their power increased.

Iveson had gone to his bed-room, but he lingered at the window, listening to the roar of the flooded beck. Presently a voice from below called to him, and he opened the window. Jif Coates stood in the garden, careless of the drenching rain.

“Could ye come along wi’ me, Mr. Iveson? I doubt that ’ere Smith’s up to mischief. Keziah missed yan o’ the kine just about darkening, and she slipped on her pattens and went away beyond Beechwood, for she feared she might ha’ rambled away, and got into t’ bogs. And when she was there she thought she’d gang a bit further, and so got croppen right up to t’ Scar, and there she fond t’ kye. And there she spied Smith, and he was doing summut at t’ rock atween t’ lile beck, that runs down by White Fell, and t’ other that gangs by Thorny Hall; and Keziah says he’d like a boring rod in his hand. It

was latish when she got home, and I've comed right away, for Smith suld be looked after. He's a'most a devil, is Smith, and he's ranty mad both again you and the lady, for giving him the sack."

Iveson made no reply, but donned his heavy shoes and mackintosh, and joined Jif. Then he put his questions.

"What could Smith have in his evil mind, Jif, that he should bore those grit rocks?"

"Why, don't ye see, master! Them becks is nowt in dry weather, but just now they're full o' watter, and if he blasts a bit o' rock up nigh hand t' Scar, t' watter o' both becks 'll run into one, and be down on t' Hall in a jiffy!"

"Surely he cannot have conceived so devilish a plot!"

"What! Smith can't! Nay, master, ye're

out o't there. There's nowt over bad for Smith, so it be again you, or me, or the lady. He'll stop at nowt, Smith won't."

"Look you, Jif. If it be so, we may hear the blast any moment. Do you go up to the Scar, and I will go and warn Miss Hilary. No! On second thoughts, you shall go to the Hall, and I to the Scar."

"Nay, master. We'll gang together. Company is lightsome, particular when Smith's i' t' way."

They strode on rapidly; but when they reached the Scar no one was there, but the waters had risen, and each brook had become a surging stream.

They found a boring-rod lying on the wet ground, and carried it away with them; beyond that they found nothing.

Alice Hilary slept, lulled by the sound of the waters. She neither felt fear nor hope,

and she had no preference for one kind of weather over another.

Suddenly she was aroused by a sound like thunder, which shook the house, and made the glass fall from some of the casements. She sprang to the window. The moon was shining through the fast fleeting clouds, and by its light she saw the water pouring through a large chasm in the grit rocks, and a thick smoke was hovering around it.

A man stood on the near rocks, and cried out—

“ Joe Smith’s bill’s not yet sattled ; t’ rest o’ t’ brass ’ll come after a bit !”

The torrent poured down with immense force, and Alice stood in awe-stricken amazement. There was no wall between the rocks and the garden, and the rockery and the few remaining flower-beds were all under water. On rushed the stream, beating violently against

the corner of the old mansion, and still Alice seemed rooted to the spot. At last it did occur to her to dress herself ; and she had finished doing so, and was again standing in speechless horror at the sight of the flood, when the old house trembled to its foundations, and the corner against which the waters were beating, fell with a loud crash.

Then Alice remembered that she was not alone in the house ; and that, though life was valueless to her, it might not be so to Barbara, and she went in search of her.

But the bed-room occupied by the old woman was empty, and Alice called upon her name in vain. She rushed down the principal staircase, but as she descended she stepped into the water. She stood and called for Barbara, but no answer came.

Then she tried the back-staircase, and this time an answer did come to her call.

“I’m here, Miss Alice,” said the shrill voice — “in the butler’s pantry. I was afeard o’ losing t’ plate, so I comed down to fetch it, and t’ watter comes so strong against t’ door, that I can’t get it open.”

“Throw down the plate, and give all your strength to opening the door,” was the counsel of the mistress.

The old woman followed this advice, for she presently appeared, wading knee-deep in water. Alice helped her up-stairs, and they went together to the colonel’s room, which was on the safest side of the house. Barbara threw open the window, and shrieked for aid, raising the cry that seemed to her the most startling, “Fire! thieves! fire!”

“Alice, Alice, where are you?” cried a familiar voice; at the sound of which Alice bounded into the corridor, and would then have recoiled as instinctively, but that Richard

Iveson wrapped his mackintosh round her, and led her in silence to her own room.

The door and window were both open, and taking her in his arms, he carried her safely down a ladder fixed outside, which Jif was holding firmly. He did not pause till he had placed her beyond the reach of the water.

“Promise to stay here till I come back?” he whispered, his breath fanning her cheek.

“I will do what you tell me; but you should not have risked your life for me—mine is valueless now!”

He paused to look in her pale face.

“My poor child!” he said, tenderly, “does your life indeed seem valueless because of his loss?”

A piercing shriek from Barbara reminded him that she was still in peril, and he ascended the ladder again to bring her down.



He did not carry her, only placed her on the ladder, and held her wrist from above; when Jif had landed her he began to descend. Again came the noise like thunder, and by the moonlight, now brighter because of the clearer heavens, he could see a large body of water descending; he hastened down the ladder without waiting for Jif's return to hold it, but ere he had made half a dozen steps, the torrent came and swept it down, and him with it.

He heard the roar of the water as he was borne along, and he heard Alice cry,

“Richard! my brother! my first friend!”  
and then he knew no more.

Jif Coates saw him fall, but when Alice turned to appeal to him for help, he was gone. With admirable presence of mind he clambered over rocks to where his knowledge of the ground told him the water would carry

his friend, and clinging to a stout ash sapling, he prepared to spring forward at the right moment. On came the flood with its burden, a strong hand seizes the end of the ladder as it grates against the rock, and with well-skilled force it draws the drowning man to land. But where to take him? The flood has cut off all approach to his own house for the present, and there is none other nearer than the village! So he calls to Barbara and Miss Hilary, and taking his insensible friend in his arms, they proceed altogether to Botcherton.

The wife of the farmer who occupied the only house of any size in the village received them gladly. With all speed she made up her best bed for the sufferer, and sent her son for the doctor. Her husband was from home.

Iveson was respected by all, and loved by

most in that neighbourhood, and Mrs. Sweeting would not hear of going to bed while he remained insensible. Barbara was liberal in her offers of attendance, but Alice knew she had gone through as much already as she had strength for, and desired her to go to bed with all speed.

She and Mrs Sweeting remained with Iveson, and heard with thankfulness the doctor pronounce his ailment a slight one. A bruise or two about the body, and the one on the head, causing the slight concussion of the brain from which he was now suffering, were all the difficulties of the case.

## CHAPTER XV.

## NEW LIFE.

Two hands to work address  
    Aye for His praise ;  
Two feet that never rest  
    Walking His ways ;  
Two eyes that look above,  
    Through all their tears ;  
Two lips still breathing love,  
    Not wrath, nor fears ;  
So pray we afterwards, low on our knees,  
Pardon those erring prayers ! Father hear these !

DINAH MULOCH.

THE winter sun rose upon the watchers in the farmhouse, calling the mistress forth to her daily avocations, and leaving Alice to tend

the sick man alone. She had leisure now to note the changes that had come over her friend, and she did so with tearful eyes. She could not count the silver hairs on his temples, nor the lines in his pale thin face; and the contour of his well-developed forehead seemed too clearly defined for one where flesh still modified the outline.

“What suffering it has caused him to recoil from me!” she thought. “Ah! if I had known I might have written, or tried some means to allay his grief, instead of wrapping myself up in bitterness!”

As these thoughts passed through her mind, she bent down her head to kiss the hand lying helpless on the coverlet—helpless, but not insensible! The little commotion caused by Mrs. Sweeting leaving the room had roused from the sleep induced by the slight concussion, and, though he still kept his eyes closed,

he was fully aware who was beside him, and his weary mind was busy with reflection.

“My call has come,” he thought; “I felt I should not be long required to endure life, and this shock will prove my summons. What a tender mercy it is that I am to have her with me at the last, and see that, if I have lost her trust, I have not lost her affection! God bless you, my sister!” he said, as he felt her lips on his hand.

“I am so thankful you are sensible again, Richard,” she said; “I am so sorry to see you so altered. I am sure you must have suffered terribly, as I also have done.”

“My poor child,” he said, tenderly, “is your heart past healing?” He continued to speak with evident effort. “Alice, I have but a short time to live, and when we meet above you will know that my eye has been single, so I will not restrain myself from

speaking faithfully to you now, for fear of your imputing an interested motive. Your father gave you to me in charge on his death-bed, and I should be ill-prepared to give account of my stewardship to him did I not entreat you, for your own sake, and out of reverence to his memory, to tear the image of Aylmer from your heart."

"His image has never dwelt there!" whispered Alice; "I loved, I worshipped a being whom I believed to be true and noble, as he was beautiful and polished. When the mask was torn from him I was widowed, for what I loved had vanished. My heart rebelled against the stroke; I pined after my dream, but never after the reality that remained. That night I refused to see him, and I have reiterated my refusal since."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Iveson. "Then I shall leave you without anxiety. Now that

Thorny Hall is uninhabitable, you will surely join George at Edinburgh. Can you not do so at once?"

"Oh! Richard, would you send me away from you while you are ill, and feel yourself in danger? I must stay and nurse you till you are all right again—I should be so frightfully anxious away!"

"I am grateful for your kindness, Alice, but I doubt myself—I have difficulties to struggle with that you cannot understand. I should be safer without you."

"And happier?" said Alice, her lips quivering, and the tears filling her eyes.

"Happier because safer," was the reply; but he looked up as he spoke, and caught the expression of agony in her face—he clasped her hand. "My little sister," he said—"my darling, I have wounded you. This may be the last time we can speak freely together,



so I will be quite open with you. From the moment that I first saw you, I loved you — worshipped you ; at first I worshipped afar off, then circumstances brought me nearer, and I worshipped no less reverently ; and ever in my heart a hope burned that, some day, I might venture to speak to you of love. But you were the first to speak of love to me, only it was to confess your love to another. Then began the battle in which my life is going down. I fought day and night, and won many a victory, but only to fight again on the morrow. But my soul was kept clean ; my heart rebelled, but I turned a deaf ear to its murmurs ; I never yielded, and I thought the last blow was struck when I gave you to him at God's altar. But no ; then came the alarm ; and the chase, and our contest on that fearful night ; and then, when he accused me to you, and I read in your eyes

the death of your faith in me, then the sun of my life went down. Never till then did I pray for death, and that prayer has never been long away from my lips since. I could not bear to come near you and see your distrust, and so I stayed away ; and Mrs. Vansittart thanked me for so doing—for, she said, my coming to you would compromise your name. I could have smitten her to the ground for hinting that aught could compromise the fair name of my ideal of purity and beauty ; but I was too crushed to rebel. And now, my darling, sweet as it is to me to have you beside me, I shall send you away ; Mrs. Vansittart will account you compromised if you stay, and all my care of you would be wasted if I acted selfishly by you at the last. Then I should deserve your distrust ; now, if you go away, you will regain your old faith in me—at least, I shall please myself by hoping so.”

Alice sank on her knees by the bed, pressing his hand to her lips, and raining down hot tears upon it.

“Oh! Richard,” she sobbed, “you are far more noble than I—I would that my father had lived to know all this. But your love is not thrown away. Ungrateful though I must have seemed, my reserve arose from the dread that you blamed and despised me, not from unfaith in you. I longed for you, Richard, and the days were weary because you came not. Oh! let me stay with you now!—surely despair must pass away with our full reconciliation. You have been brave unto death for me; surely it is easier to live than to die for me?”

She ceased speaking, and her face remained hidden. A silence ensued—a silence so profound, that every heart-beat of the two might have been counted. At last, Iveson pressed

his other hand to his head, to still its intolerable throbbing, and nerving his quivering frame to the meeting of his sentence, truly that of life or death, his pale lips uttered a few short words—

“Can you love me, Alice, as you would him had he been true?”

And she said,

“I can love you with my whole heart, all my life long.”

Then he raised himself, and cast his arms about her; the blood rushed to his head, and he fell back blinded, and once more insensible.

The doctor was dissatisfied with his patient, and Alice blamed herself sorely for encouraging him to converse so eagerly. She took the post of head-nurse, and kept all as quiet as possible for several days, never allowing him to speak more than a few words at a

time. Mrs. Sweeting pitied her extremely, and mourned that Christmas was coming on so drearily for the poor stricken creature; but Alice did not pity herself. The sunshine of hope beamed on her life again, and though there were still threatening clouds subduing the noonday brightness, she trusted in God that they would presently melt away.

While Alice was active in her service as a sick-nurse, Jif was doing his *devoir* as a man of business; and she was greatly astonished to receive a visit from the first solicitor at Swaleford, to take her deposition concerning the conduct of Joseph Smith on that night of the flood.

Iveson was so far recovered by that time as to be fit to take his share in the discussion; and when Alice urged that they should be silent on the whole affair, and leave Smith unmolested, he negatived her proposal.

“He is a dangerous man, and the neighbourhood will be the safer without him,” he said; so the charge was brought, and the statement drawn up in legal form.

Alice sorely dreaded being called as a witness, but that proved unnecessary. Smith was so proud of his vengeance, that he boasted of it to all and sundry, and acknowledged his offence to the judge with dry exultation. He was considerably amazed when he received a sentence of seven years in a penal colony!

Then Richard was well enough to go back to his own house, and Alice proposed to remain as lodger with Mrs. Sweeting; but he did not like this plan, and would have persuaded her to go to Edinburgh, had not Lady Draycott interposed, with a pressing invitation that she should spend the weeks intervening before her marriage at Dale Park, and she

eagerly seized upon the chance of remaining near her betrothed.

Thus Christmas came upon our friends more cheerily than they expected ; and Alice relieved her grateful heart by large thank-offerings, which made the Botcherdale poor very happy, descending upon them in the shape of thick blankets and warm flannels, and plenty of roast beef. .

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE FULFILMENT OF THE PROPHECY.

No more a woman, not yet quite a stone.

COWLEY.

AND Christmas preparations were being made in London again.

Mahala Broad has given large orders for Christmas beef and groceries, and expects a handsome gratuity from each tradesman whom she patronises, for she is again a cook in a large London establishment. She is out for a holiday once more, and she chooses to spend it at the Baker Street Bazaar, where



the beasts fatted for Christmas festivities are exhibited.

She reaches the ground unnecessarily early, and looks carefully at each butcher as he arrives. Surely her Familiar has whispered her that Crompton will be there, for her eye presently singles him out among a group of countrymen.

Once more her swarthy complexion assumes the lurid crimson which characterises her blush ; her evil eyes soften in their expression, and, as she moves cautiously towards him, her lip quivers slightly.

Snow is beginning to fall, and the cold wind hurries it like loose feathers along the broad dry pavement ; the men move to seek shelter, and Crompton is left alone.

Mahala steals to his elbow, and touching him timidly, she whispers,

“ I be the mother of your child, Crompton,

and I have now two hundred and fifty pounds."

The man recoiled from her. He swore a deep oath.

"You have been my ruin," he said, turning his bloated face upon her; "I be in debt and miserable. Folks turns their back on me, all because of your sending me the child. I do find no peace but in drink, but I ain't come to taking up with such as you!"

Mahala felt his recoil, she saw his look of bitter aversion, she noted the full weight of every one of his hard words, but she pleaded still.

"I was not half a bad maid when you did first keep company with I, Crompton; and if you do marry I, I shall be an honest woman again. I'll give up drink and bad ways, and work hard, and I've got two hundred and fifty pounds."

He raised his hand to strike her ; he was half-intoxicated and wholly infuriated.

“ You was bad from being a child,” he cried. “ You be a she-devil, uglier than the swine and worse than a common——”

He paused without uttering the word, for her look of fury and revenge daunted him, as her words had done on a former occasion.

She laughed loud and long, pointed at him, and said,

“ He’s got you now, the devil has ! I did see him standing there and trying to have you, but him couldn’t while I held on to you, but him’s got you now, and you’ll take no more women’s good names. Never mind the snow, you’ll find it warm enough after a bit !”

He heard her mocking tones when he could no longer see her malicious face for the dancing snow-flakes that blinded his eyes, but

a cold shudder came over him, and he turned into a gin-shop to get wherewith to fan the flames of his courage. When he returned to the show the beasts were ranged in goodly order, but Mahala's face was nowhere visible.

Had he been clairvoyant, he might have seen her purchasing a long large needle and a thimble, for each of which articles she paid one halfpenny. But he did not see her, and he would not have been much wiser if he had.

Mr. Scraggs had retired from business, and taken to agriculture, and he had come to London to see the show, and had treated his daughter and Miss Green to a first visit to the metropolis; so they were all at the bazaar. Miss Green had a lover in attendance. That Miss Scraggs was without a cavalier, might have been taken as a proof that she was

still wearing the green willow ; but such was not the case—a fascinating hair-dresser having fallen in love with her three hundred pounds, and being eager in his addresses to her for their sake.

Crompton saw the group, and the recognition did not increase his calm ; on the contrary, it necessitated another glass of gin to keep out the cold.

He would not stay there to be tormented on every side, and chilled to death by the falling snow into the bargain ; neither would he slink away as if beaten from the ground ; so he bought a beast, careless whether it was likely to suit his customers in retail, and the drover's boy accompanied him off the ground to drive the beast to the station.

But first they must pass through a narrow way, fenced on either side with hurdles, and in sight of all the lookers-on. Crompton

hated this, but as it had to be, the sooner it was over the better.

He walked hastily forward, the weary beast coming more slowly behind. As it neared an empty pen, a woman climbed the rail, and touched its flank, and in a moment the animal rushed madly forward, roaring furiously. Crompton turned, saw the beast close upon him, and tried to leap the rail, but he did not spring high enough to clear the top, and, as he descended, the beast caught him on his horns and tossed him in the air.

A dozen men hurried to the rescue, but the beast kept them at bay; then rushing upon Crompton again, he tossed him afresh, and the blood trickled from his wounds on the newly-fallen snow, as Mahala had prophesied in her curse.

Once more he rises in the air—once more the light of this earth shines in his eyes.

With preternatural clearness he sees each one in the crowd of horror-stricken faces ; and he sees one grinning in savage malice—a woman's face—hers who should have been his wife ! This he sees in the twinkle of an eye ; but he sees no more. He falls upon his head this time, and is from henceforth insensible to pleasure or to pain !

All this time Mahala stood still, fascinated by the horrible scene. The beast rushed on, goring one and another ; then a shot was heard, and the animal fell. Mahala saw many men gather round it, but she moved not ; she was longing, yet fearing, to join another group gathered round another ghastly object.

While she thus stood in uncertainty, she felt a touch upon her shoulder, and an authoritative voice commanded her to follow. She turned and saw a policeman.

“What do you want me for?” she asked, her face becoming pallid as she spoke.

“To answer for what you did to the beast.”

“I didn't do nothing.”

“I bid you come, not dispute, mistress. If you don't come at once, I shall put on the handcuffs.”

So Mahala followed in consternation.

There were witnesses who had overheard her threats; others who saw her go to the shop and buy the thimble and needle which she had used, the one to pierce and goad on the beast, the other to drive the goad home. It was a clear enough case, and she was committed for trial at the assizes.

Among the people who had rushed to the rescue was Lord Dungarret, and Mahala heard his name as she was taken into court. She asked the policeman if she could speak



with him ; and Lord Dungarret, now regarding the cookmaid as a notable character, cheerfully granted an audience.

“ Please, my lord,” said the prisoner, “ will you speak to the mayor to let me off, because I have done a good turn to you.”

“ What good turn have you done me ?” asked the astonished nobleman.

“ I did make Mr. Herbert Aylmer give up calling hisself by your name,” was the reply.

“ I am sure I am greatly obliged to you. It’s just possible he might do as much credit to my name as I could myself, but I don’t need assistance from him in soiling it. Can you favour me with his address at present, my friend ?”

“ Him’s living with his father at Upper Chalkley, near Trowbury, in Wiltshire.”

“ Thank you. I wish I could be of any service to you ; but I fear the worshipful the

Lord Mayor will not accept my mediation."

Lord Dungarret moved gracefully away.

"I hope Mr. Herbert's in for it. It wouldn't be fair that he should get off scot-free, when I be carried to prison, for just putting a needle into a beast!"

And Christmas came to Upper Chalkley once again, and reigned supreme in poor men's cottages, and at the Rectory and the Hall; Mr. Aylmer tried to be cheerful, but his lips would not articulate the word "merry" in the conventional greeting. He looked very ill, twenty years older than he had done two years ago, and his sermon on Christmas Day was scarcely articulate.

Rose sallied forth in the afternoon to see a sick woman, and she met a strange man sauntering about in the village. He had a disagreeable squint, and Rose shrank instinctively

as he addressed her, but his manner was extremely respectful.

“If you please, Miss Aylmer, will you tell me if your brother is at home?”

“He is; but he is ill with headache to-day. If you will call to-morrow, he will be happy to see you.”

“Thank you, miss; I will wait till to-morrow,” and he disappeared.

Had Christmas Day not fallen upon a Sunday, he might not have been so obliging; but this did not then strike Rose. But an indefinable uneasiness was in her mind. She had at last lost all faith in her brother, though her love for him was in no degree diminished, and she returned by a different path to the Rectory, meeting their gaunt maid-of-all-work at the door, who had been out for a walk and a gossip in honour of Christmas.

The girl looked scared.

“Miss Rose,” she said, as soon as the two were inside the house, “I be fair dazed with a man I did see in the village. Him did ask I if Mr. Herbert was at home, and when him would rise in the morning; and I said him did lie long, for him did sleep bad, and that was how it was. What for can he want to know about Mr. Herbert rising?”

Rose had followed Sarah into her little room close to the kitchen, and saw her put her gaudy shawl and bonnet into her box, and she ripened her own plan accordingly.

“Herbert, dear, I am afraid there is some one after you. A strange man has been catechising both Sarah and me about your movements in the early morning.”

She did not ask if he had given any legal hold to any one to apprehend him, for she dreaded tempting him to falsehood.

Herbert turned pale, for he remembered

the I O U given to Sir Henry Armstrong with Lord Dungarret's name attached, and he divined the fact that these gentlemen had met, and resolved to punish the forger.

"It's debt," said Herbert; and no light shone in Rose's eyes, for she knew that in their present state it was as impossible to defray a large debt as to restore life that has passed away.

"You must go away in disguise, Herbert," Rose said. "You are not much taller than Sarah, and you can wear her clothes. The man has seen her, and if he sees you in her clothes in the gloaming, he will never distinguish between you."

"A capital plan! but I must have money."

"I will give you all I have; alas! it is not much. But where will you go to?"

"Don't ask me. You will be questioned, and must not know."

“Yes, yes, you are right. But tell me where to address in a week, and I will send you some money.”

“Address to ‘David Rice, Cross Keys, Thirsk.’ But how will you get money?”

“I will not tell you—that is my secret. I suppose you will live in humble lodgings, and be able to get on on ten shillings a week?”

“Yes, that will do.”

Rose dressed him in Sarah's clothes—that worthy being engaged in receiving a Scripture lesson from her mistress; and then, locking the box, she lifted the grating off the pipe by the kitchen sink, and dropped the key down.

Herbert was a first-rate actor, and if Rose's heart had been less heavy she would have laughed at his perfect imitation of Sarah's gait. He passed out into the yard, and along the village road; and meeting the man de-

scribed by his sister, he dropped an awkward curtsey, the very duplicate of the one with which Sarah had emphasised her good night to her questioner ; and the man was unsuspecting of any trick, and went to bed early, in order to be alert in the morning for the work he had in hand.

And Rose excused her brother's attendance at evening church by the account of his headache ; and though both father and mother longed to attend upon the sick son, neither was able to climb the stairs to his room in the roof to tender their services. They were at breakfast on the morrow when the policeman came to serve the warrant for his apprehension.

Rose gained as much time as possible, by pretending that he must dress before he could descend ; then she feigned much astonishment that she had found his room empty, and

it was noon before the emissary of the law realised that his prey had really given him the slip. Then he left the Rectory, to resort to other measures for finding the criminal.

Rose hastened to tell her father that the policeman had gone, and that she had good hopes Herbert was in safety. But the old man heard her not; the long-threatening paralysis had come in its worst form, and the living of Upper Chalkley was vacant.



## CHAPTER XVII.

## RETRIBUTION.

Lo! anointed by Heaven with the vials of wrath,  
Behold, where he flies on his desolate path!  
Now in darkness and billows he sweeps from my sight:  
Rise! rise! ye wild tempest, and cover his flight.

CAMPBELL.

HERBERT walked rapidly along the road for a short distance, and then struck across the country, reaching a railway station two stages north of Trowbury, in time for an evening third-class train. He travelled by this until he came to a village which he knew was within a couple of miles of the Midland line. Traversing that distance on foot, he waited

for the train for Bristol, thus doubling on his pursuers.

By this time he had decided on his rôle. He would personate a German, the wife of a music-master, travelling to meet him at Newcastle, and do all as cheaply as possible. He found that his beauty attracted more notice than was expedient, so he adopted a squint and a thick veil, and disguising his beautiful voice with a guttural twang, he mentally declared he hardly knew himself. Another instance of the truth of the old saying, that "Many a true word is spoken in jest."

He took his passage by steamboat to Liverpool, and from thence by another steamer to Lancaster; then he proceeded on foot inland, travelling by easy stages, for he was very far from strong. When he reached Thirsk, he found a parcel awaiting him at the "Cross Keys."

“Are you David Rice?” asked the landlady, sarcastically.

“No, madam, Daveed Rice is the husband of me,” replied the stranger, slowly, and with a guttural accent.

The landlady handed her the parcel, and invited her to sit down in the bar. The stranger seemed timid, and the brisk barmaid pitied her for her solitude. Men came in, first one and then another, and called for “a glass of mild,” and lit their pipes, and glanced at the foreigner.

“You’ve travelled a goodish way, mistress, I reckon; will ye take anything?” said the barmaid, after serving the other visitors; and as she spoke she leaned her elbow on the screen, and looked curiously in Herbert’s face.

“I will one glass beer,” replied the foreigner, slowly. “I am much fatigued but, and will a bed-room ask.”

“Oh! to be sure,” rejoined the smart barmaid, handing the brimming glass; and then calling, “Missis, missis, the young woman wants a bed.”

The men regarded the stranger curiously, and then applied to their newspapers.

“Queerish folks them miners,” said a bluff farmer; “who wad ha’ thought o’ brozening t’ rocks, and turning t’ watter power onto a lone woman’s house, ’cause she’d given him t’ sack.”

“Curous, master, isn’t it?” said the shoemaker by his side. “My wife’s cousin’s aunt live in them parts, and she went and seed where t’ watter had comed down, and made a ruin o’ t’ house, jist like t’ old abbey nigh-hand there.”

“Well, I never! It’s a’most as bad as firing ricks. And so poor Miss Hilry’s druv out o’ house and home this Kissamus?”

“Ay, it’s a bad job for her. Have you heard the story, mistress? Maybe you can’t read English?”

Herbert caught at the newspaper.

“I have got one dictionar in my things,” he said; “and I willingly read the English for improvement. This story, so interesting, will be helpful to my progress.”

The men winked at one another, and ceded her the paper; and she soon heard the welcome announcement that her bed was ready.

So Herbert locks his door, and then eagerly devours the news in the journal. It was a *Swaleford Gazette* of a week old, and contained the triumphant confession of Joseph Smith. The editor made his own remarks on the subject, lauding the intrepidity of Mr. Iveson, and prophesying for him the lady’s hand as a reward.

“Never while I live!” exclaimed Herbert, under his breath; “I will see her, and claim her as my wife in God’s sight. I know the existence of the first marriage nullifies the second; but she will not know that. I had always great personal influence with her, and I will now exert it. She shall not refuse me!”

He opened his parcel, and started to find that it contained a hundred pounds. How had Rose procured such a sum? How had she dared to inclose it in a dirty, vulgar-looking parcel, and entrust it to the railway? Yet how cleverly it was done!—how much more risk would have been incurred by bank orders or registered letters!

He went out in the morning and bought a suit of clothes, the least vulgar he could get ready-made, and a pair of pistols. Then he paid his bill, and testified immense curiosity

about the water accident which he had read the account of. He thus contrived to get full directions for reaching Botcherdale, and set out for that goal.

And how had Rose raised that wondrous sum of money? She had written at once to Alice Hilary, and told her of Herbert's distress, and that he could only find safety in leaving the country. She had frankly owned the poverty to which the family was reduced, and had asked help from her for the man who had so ruthlessly plotted to sacrifice her to his self-indulgence.

And Alice resolved to relieve his need; yet she was more determined than ever to take no step without Richard's concurrence. But Richard was the last to thwart her where no harm could be done, and only a slight loss suffered; so an order for a hundred pounds was at once forwarded to Rose, with a kind

note, expressing much concern for them all, and offering further help to Herbert should he adopt some honest calling in a foreign land. The note concluded by recording the writer's strong determination never again to see or directly communicate with Herbert.

But Rose forwarded the money without note or comment; she was afraid lest the parcel might be opened, and might betray Herbert to his enemies. So he neither learned the sentiments of Alice Hilary, nor the sorrow in which his home was plunged.

Herbert pressed onwards towards Botcherdale on foot, ripening his plan of attack as he went. It took two days' constant walking to bring him to Botcherton, and he determined to reconnoitre the ground in his feminine attire first.

He made his way to the ruined house, and saw that preparations for thorough repair



were already begun. He learned from a woman, at a shop where he bought some provisions, that Miss Hilary was about to become the wife of Mr. Iveson; that they were to live in Iveson's house till the Hall was ready; and that all, small and great, within the circle of their acquaintance, wished them well from the bottom of their hearts.

He hung about the roads near Dale Park, still dressed as a woman, and at last he saw Alice come forth. But Lord and Lady Draycott were in the carriage with her, and he would not attempt anything in their presence.

Iveson did not feel so fully assured of Aylmer's emigration as Alice did; but he kept his doubts to himself, not to make her uneasy. But they would recur again and again to his mind, so at last he determined to confide in Jif.

“Jif,” he said, “I have a kind of presentiment that Aylmer will try to see Miss Hilary, and prevent her marriage with me. If she wished to see him, I would not for a moment oppose her doing so; but she has an intolerable shrinking from it, and I am sure it would cause her great pain. So I want you to be on the look-out for a fair slender man, with a light beard and a beautiful voice, and to prevent his troubling Miss Hilary.”

“I’ll do my best, master,” he replied; and he was as good as his word.

Herbert had slept for two nights at the little public-house in the village of Botcherton, and he was again preparing to haunt the precincts of Dale Park, when Jif met him. Jif saw at a glance that he was a stranger, but he was fully deceived as to his sex.

“Fine day, mistress,” he said, on meeting him.

“Highly fine,” replied Herbert, and passed on.

Jif turned and followed him, and Herbert’s quick ear informed him of the fact; he walked more slowly, that Jif might pass.

Jif presently came alongside, but did not pass. Soon he began a conversation.

“It’s lonesome for a foreigner in these parts, particularly a woman-body, mistress.”

“Yes, sir, very; but the English are kind and friendly, and I have no fear.”

“Have you travelled all the way alone, mistress?—or is your husband in the neighbourhood?”

“I am with myself only, sir. My husband is not far—I go seek him.”

“Is he a tall thin man, with a light beard and musician-like voice?” asked Jif; then added, looking narrowly at Herbert, “such a

one as your brother might be, mistress, or you yourself, barring the beard?"

Herbert flinched.

"No," he said; "my husband is stout and dark. Why do you want the fair man?"

Jif was posed with this counter-question, for he must not give the reason for his search for the stranger.

"Oh!" he said, evasively, "maybe there are folks wanting a bit o' money on him," and the chance arrow hit the mark.

Herbert asked if that were the right way over into Estcliffdale, and Jif replied,

"Nay, mistress, ye're out o' t' road altogether. Ye mun gang slap back, through t' village, and away westwards," and so the stranger took her leave.

Herbert returned to the little public-house for his bundle, and furnished himself with a

bottle of brandy; then he bought cheese, bread, and salt at the general shop, and tying the parcel on his umbrella, trudged off westwards. He travelled thus a couple of miles, and then hid in a wood till the evening drew on; then he retraced his steps till he reached a steep road leading up on to the moors, where he had seen lead-carts descending in the morning. He kept on this road, guided by the deep ruts indicative of the transit of metal cargoes, and gained the open moor.

Still following the beaten road, he soon came in sight of the fires of the smelting-house; but he gave that a wide berth, for he knew that the workmen would muster thickly there. On he went, till the undulating moors were bounded by another valley, and, from the character of this dale and its stream, he felt sure that it was the Garthdale of Alice's story. He did not seek long before he found

the disused level, and entered the mine as she had done.

When he reached the chamber, he wondered at her accounts of the stillness of the mine. Now echoes resounded on every side, for the lead was being worked both in the main vein and down a sumph a little to the right, and waggons of ore, now drawn by machinery, were constantly passing along the main level.

A few moments of careful observation, and Herbert saw his course clear; he could slip along to the "old men's workings" as soon as the next string of waggons should have passed; and once there, he would be all the safer from interruption, because of the great activity around him. If only he could get food, he could lie *perdu* as long as he pleased, and entirely baffle the pursuit of the police, at the same time keeping watch upon the movements of Alice.

His plan succeeded to perfection. He could steal a portion of the miner's dinner, and found that the rats got the entire blame of the theft; and he could hear the miners' conversation, and so gather the news of the neighbourhood.

Had such a manner of life been forced upon him for long, it would doubtless have been intolerably tedious to him; but on the second day of his sojourn in "the old men's workings," he gathered information that secured him against *ennui*.

"Jif Coates says there's like to be a stranger hanging about to prevent the wedding; so, mates, if you see a prying sort of a fellow hanging about, bring him off here, and we'll lodge him in t' watterhole—Mr. Hilary's premises there has been to let for a long time."

"Ay, Mike Pedley, we'll recommend them

lodgings to him ; they're beautiful and warm this cold weather. It'll be lonesome for him on t' wedding day, for we mun all tak holiday."

"Ay, sure, we mun have a lark that day. We'll gie the lady a salute after our own fashion, as soon as they fire a gun fra t' churchyard to let us know that they've gone into t' church. T' lile lads and lasses have made grand heaps o' rubbish, and if t' frost hodds we'll have such bonfires as shall make Guy Fawkes ashamed of hissel', to say nowt o' our own salute."

"A day's larking's good for folks," exclaimed a fresh voice. "I've wrought for months here without ever a holiday but Sundays, and I'm fair tired on't. But she's a good lady, and he's a good master, and I'll shout hurrah when they's wed—that I will, with all my heart. I'll work late hours to-day, and my lad'll



work t' night hours, and we'll have a fine spree to-morn !”

The meal was over, and with it the conversation ceased, and the mattocks recommenced their regular strokes, accompanied by the monotonous grunting of the workmen.

Herbert scrambled down into the water-hole ; here he found he could hear the sounds even more clearly than when above, and so he struck a light and loaded his pistols and listened, and prepared himself for the worst. He would not be seen by her in his undignified disguise, so he clothed himself in the new suit he had bought at Thirsk. Thus dressed, and with his pistols ready, he waited till he should hear the night-workers departing for their holiday, and then he would follow to the church, and shoot Iveson in the hey-day of his happiness.

Carefully he noted each sound ; the night

passed slowly, but his watch did not abate in vigilance. The morning came, but, instead of the night labourers departing, fresh voices were heard, and Herbert believed that all the miners were assembled together. Still the mattocks continued their strokes, and there was also the grating sound of finer tools, and Herbert waited impatiently for the signal to be given which should relieve him of their vicinity and set him free.

“That was t’ gun nigh hand t’ mine mouth; now, lads, awa’ wi’ ye—I’ll be with ye afore ye get to t’ chamber.”

It was Pedley’s voice, and Herbert could hear them all hastening away; and then Pedley’s footsteps followed in pursuit.

“Now,” he thought, “my hour of vengeance has come. Woe to you, Richard Iveson, for your hours are numbered!”

But as he thus thought, a noise like thunder

deafened him, the whole mine seemed to rock and reel, a stifling mist gathered round him, and he felt himself falling amid rocks which crashed on every side. The choking smoke, the heavy fall, the deafening roar, deprived him of all sensation for a time; but consciousness returned, and showed him his terrible position.

Wedged between two masses of rock, he was unable to move; all around was pitch darkness, and the only sound that met his ears was the trickling of water. He shuddered terribly as he realized his fate. The "miner's salute" had been a more than usually extensive blasting, and the detached rock had immured him in the Waterhole, while it cut off the outlet of the little spring. The water was over his feet now, and it would only take a certain number of hours to rise to his lips. To him death was awful—and such a death!

Conscience, silenced so long, had time to make itself heard now—time to lay bare the secrets of a false life. There was time enough to examine the undeviating selfishness of four-and-twenty years—the falsehood, the cruelty, the desolation which that selfishness had brought in its train; there was time for attrition, for grief that such a course had brought on such an end—even for contrition, that the loving redeeming God had been so offended by his own creature; there was time for the cry of repentance, for the prayer of faith, but was the time so used? No man knows—no man can ever know on this side death.

The broad valley was flooded with sunshine, the trees and plants were all glittering with diamonds, the village bells rang joy peals, and rich and poor prayed for a blessing on two thankful happy beings; and the evil nature that had crossed their path, and threatened

to blight their happiness, was immured in darkness, awaiting the slow stroke of death.

The bride and bridegroom left the village for the north, for they were to pass their honeymoon on the warm western coast of Scotland, amid scenes dear to Richard Iveson by holiday memories. And the sun went down, to rise again radiant with blessing on the pure in heart, but to shine no more on the the sight of the betrayer.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## HOME.

Whoever lives true life will love true love.

MRS. BARRETT BROWNING.

SPRING breathes again over the Yorkshire moors and the Wiltshire downs, and again the Lent lilies nod in the breeze, and revived nature prepares to celebrate the feast of the resurrection.

But no beam of brightness enters the condemned cell where Mahala Broad awaits the solemn hour of her execution. Her countenance was fierce and stolid as she entered the

prison, and it will be fierce and stolid as she leaves it. To all exhortations to repentance she replies—"God and man has always gone against I ; it was natural that I should go against others. It is unjust to punish I."

And tears fall abundantly in the parish of Upper Chalkley, for a broken-hearted widow and an orphan girl leave their home for a stranger's hearth. The widow's heart is crushed, not by God's solemn visitation in quenching the light of her eyes with a stroke, to relight it in a better and happier land, but by the falsehood and dishonour of an idolised son, whose ruthless cruelty has even filched the insurance money meant to secure her remaining days from want ! They go forth ; Rose to become a teacher in Madame Eucrinaz's school, and her mother to gain an asylum there, in consideration of unremitting stocking-mending.

And the Lent lilies tremble in the breeze, and bend and nod over Mercy's grave, where pious hands placed them months ago.

And Richard Iveson knows at length the peace and rest of home. He still labours diligently ; his watchful eye overlooking all the branches of labour on that flourishing estate ; his clear judgment ever acting for the best, his evenly-balanced mind rendering justice to all. Then he returns home, and his heart beats no less tumultuously than it did of yore, when Alice meets him ; and the love and duty which he ever reads in her eyes render them continually more lovely in his sight. The days pass like hours, the weeks like days, and the months like weeks, while his soul suns itself in her love.

And she is even more blessed than blessing. The wild fever of her love to Herbert seems in retrospect but a mad delirium ; while heart,



and soul and intellect, offer united homage to him who is now her head. It is her turn to tremble now, for as she watches him go forth she thinks the happiness of his return too great almost to hope for; and she cannot go about her womanly occupations till she has committed her beloved one to the care of the Keeper of Israel.

\* \* \* \* \*

And all this time she little imagines that Herbert lies a corpse in her rich mine, and that her idolised husband passes by him, or over him, once each week.

She does not even learn this when a further excavation brings the skeleton to light. Richard suspects the fact, and by careful comparison of the time of his disappearance, he believes that this is Herbert; but he sees no good that can accrue to Alice, or to Aylmer's friends, from identification; so he

buried the remains quietly, and breathed no word of the matter to his sweet wife.

\* \* \* \* \*

And children grew up round Iveson's home — boys, manly and upright as their father, and girls, radiant in their mother's beauty ; and thus the man was blessed who feared the Lord.

\* \* \* \* \*

Madame Eucrinaz has grey hair instead of black now, and Rose Aylmer wears deep mourning. The holidays have commenced, and the two governesses have watched the last of the boarders depart, and remain alone. Rose feels very sad, for she remembers her old holidays, and the joy of going to her bright home ; and now she has no home to go to, and no one to come to her, for her weary mother has recently entered on her rest, and

Isabel is abroad with the family in which she is governess.

Madame Eucrinaz fixes her piercing eyes on Rose, and reads her thoughts as clearly as if they were traced on her brow.

“Take courage, my child,” she says, as she presses her hand on her shoulder, “the darkness is past, and the dawn is breaking. I have not chosen to tell you before, any more than I have chosen to tell my pupils, that my school is closed for ever. I could not bear the leave-takings, love, but from you I shall have no leave-taking. You are to me as a daughter. We will go to Heidelberg and stay near Isabel, and when I am called away, as I feel I soon shall be, you and she can remain together. You have longed to travel once again; now smile and look happy, for you are going to do so.”

And Rose did smile, and try to be cheerful.

The summer passes at Heidelberg, and visitors throng the romantic city, and Isabel and Rose meet many travellers, and are introduced by name to some, and with some pass as Madame Eucrinaz's daughters. And George Hilary comes there for change, for he has as great a practice as Dr. Samson now, and he is overworked, and needs a holiday.

“Oh! of course,” says the reader, “George falls in love with Rose!”

“Guess again, dear reader, one guess more.”

“With Isabel?” says the reader.

“Yes, that is it; he falls in love with Isabel, supposing her to be Mademoiselle Eucrinaz, and is very much astonished, and a little disappointed, to find she is the sister of ‘that rascal Herbert;’ but he marries her, nevertheless.”

So a happy home is built up for the re-

formed prodigal; and when the summons that Madame Eucrinaz has long expected comes, there is a warm place ready at Isabel's hearth for Rose, where she lingers till still better days dawn, and she also "finds rest in the house of her husband!"

THE END.











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